

The mismatch of differential object marking and definiteness in Romanian

Klaus von Heusinger & Sofiana Chiriacescu

Abstract

Differential Object Marking (or *pe*-marking) in Romanian is obligatory with definite expressions, but optional with indefinite noun phrases. However, in contrast to their unmarked counterparts, DOM marked indefinites are situated higher on the referentiality scale, as they are specific and have wide scope readings and because they are more discourse prominent. In the realm of definite NPs, Romanian has an independent syntactic rule that blocks the use of *pe* together with the definite article if the direct object NP is not further modified. This constraint leads to two alternative uses: *pe*-marking and the omission of the definite article or the use of the definite article and the omission of *pe*. The two forms lead to a mismatch with a more general rule. On the one hand, the form with *pe*, but not the one with the definite article, violates the constraint that definite noun phrases must have a definite article. On the other hand, the form with the definite article violates the general constraint that *pe*-marking is obligatory with definite expressions. To investigate the constraints that determine this alternation, we designed a web-based experiment, the findings of which revealed two patterns: (i) that marked definite direct objects are referentially more persistent in the following discourse and (ii) that marked direct objects show a preference to become topics two or three sentences after being introduced in the discourse. We will discuss the implications of these findings for the semantics and pragmatics of definite NPs in Romanian.