Case Marking and Semantic Incorporation in Tarascan

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Tarascan (isolate, Western Mexico) has been described as showing Differential Object Marking According to some accounts (Chamoreau, 2003, Villavicencio, 2006), direct objects receive the accusative maker *–ni* only if they are definite or animate, or if they have human reference. In (1), the accusative marker is obligatory under the presence of a demonstrative, while in (2), where the object is an indefinite noun phrase, *-ni* is optional. In (3), where the marker is not present, the object is number neutral: although it does not have plural morphology, it can be interpreted as an indefinite plural. This contrasts with (4), where the morphological plural triggers the obligatory presence of the case marker.

(1) Micaela kaka-h-ti **imá tsúntsu-*(ni)**
M. see-PERF-3IND DEM pot-OBJ
'Micaela broke this pot'

(2) Micaela kaka-h-ti **ma eroksï-(ni)**
M. break-PERF-3IND one pan-OBJ
'Micaela broke a pan'

(3) María ú-h-ti **k'urhunda**
M. make-PERF-3IND tamal
'María cooked tamales'

(4) Jí ú-s-ka-ni máru **tsuntsu-icha-*(ni)**
I made-PERF-1IND-1SUJ some pot-pl-OBJ
'I made some (of the) pots'

In this paper I argue that what has been called "Differential Object Marking" in Tarascan is actually the manifestation of the fact that only full-fledged Determiner Phrases are marked for case, while constituents that lack a determiner layer are not. Case is a feature of Determiner Phrases only (Danon 2006).

Within this view, I argue, based on the Tarascan data, that in fact all direct objects receive overt case. Constituents that are not marked for case are not arguments in the first place, but Noun Phrases or Numeral Phrases interpreted as modifiers, thus syntactically and semantically (though not necessarily morphologically) incorporated (van Geenhoven 1998).

Regarding interpretive properties, I show that if a constituent is case-marked then it is interpreted as definite, because a filled D^0 enables an *e* or $<e <e,t>>$ type interpretation (de Hoop 1996). Non-case marked constituents in Tarascan can be either NPs or even Numeral Phrases (NrP) but they never display a D projection. They result thus in an $<e,t>$ type interpretation and do not function as arguments of the predicate. This approach has the implication that plural noun phrases, which are obligatorily marked for case when they occur in object position, always project a determiner layer.

This approach gives a unified account of the distribution of object case markers in Tarascan, by recognizing that the decisive factor behind the occurrence of *–ni* is the presence of absence of a determiner projection.

References: **Aissen**, 2003. Differential Object Marking: Iconicity vs. Economy. *NLLT* 21, 435-483; **Capistrán**, 2002. Marcación de caso objetivo en la frase nominal p'orhépecha. *Memorias del VI Encuentro Internacional de Lingüística en el Noroeste* ; **Chamoreau**, 1999. Le marquage différentiel de l'objet en purépecha. *La Linguistique*, 35:2, 99-114; **Danon**, 2006: Caseless nominals and the projection of DP. *NLLT* 24, 4; **von Heusinger, & Kornfilt**, 2005: The case of the direct object in Turkish: Semantics, Syntax and Morphology. *Turkic Languages* 9, 3-44; **van Geenhoven**, 1998. *Semantic incorporation and indefinite descriptions*. CSLI.