Dative-marked Accusatives in Spanish and Ethio-Semitic

Over twenty years ago, Jaeggli (1982, 1986) examined the dual object marking system of Argentinian Spanish, noting that often when an object NP occurs with a coindexed clitic, it must be preceded by a dative marker. An example appears in (1). Jaeggli proposed that the dative marker is required to assign dative case to the object because its coreferential clitic absorbs the accusative case of the verb. This view was soon challenged by Suñer (1988) challenged this view, showing that the correlation between the presence of the dative marker and the presence of the clitic is not absolute. Suñer showed instead that the absence/presence of the dative marker depends largely on whether or not the object is animate while the absence/presence of the object clitic is sensitive to the definiteness hierarchy. Suñer even showed that there are cases such as in (2), which allow the dative marker, but do not require an object clitic. Thus, it would appear the two systems are completely independent object marking systems, and this is now the standard understanding of the facts. Indeed, further work has shown that even Suñer’s view is not fine-grained enough to fully capture the distribution of these markers (see, e.g., Bollero 2007).

In this talk, however, I present data from two Ethio-Semitic language, Tigre and Tigrinya, which beg us to revisit these conclusions. In these languages, one finds dual object marking systems strikingly similar to the Spanish case. An example is seen in (3). Both languages employ a system of clitics that double objects and suffix to the verb. Their presence/absence is sensitive to the definiteness hierarchy, as seen in (4). Both languages also employ a dative marker, morphologically the same as the preposition meaning ‘to,’ which may mark accusative objects. Unlike in Spanish, it is sensitive to the definiteness rather than animacy hierarchy, and is optional in most cases. Its distribution is summarized in (5).

The fact that such similar dual object marking systems occur in completely unrelated languages invites us to reconsider the conclusion that they are completely independent systems. Rather, I argue for a return to the Jaegglian view, demonstrating that Suñer’s objections to it were based upon the assumption of a strong correlation between feature values (syntactic case) and morphological spell-out (morphological case). However, this assumption is not necessarily warranted as work within the distributed morphology framework has shown. I argue for the view that semantic hierarchies such as those for definiteness and animacy can be seen as conditions on spell-out. In that case, we can maintain the Jaegglian view that the need for the dative marker in clitic doubling contexts is driven by a need for the NP to receive case, adding only that the presence/absence of the marker is determined not only by case requirements, but also by spell-out conditions that incorporate semantic hierarchies. Given this view, we do not predict that there should be an absolute correlation between clitic doubling and dative marking. However, we do predict a loose correlation within a language that has the two systems. Furthermore, we predict to see the two systems co-occurring across languages, the central fact this talk has demonstrated.
(1) La llamaron a ella. \textit{Argentinian Spanish}

3FSO 3P-call DAT her

'They called her.' (Suner 1988 = (4a))

(2) No (*lo) oyeron a ningún ladrón

not 3MSO 3P-heard DAT any thief

'They didn't hear any thieves.'

(3) a. ənəra Ḫeṣko-ho Ḫassan \textit{Tigre}

I DAT H. bit.1S-3MSO

'I bit Hassan.'

b. elsa ni-kasa qotila-tto \textit{Tigrinya}

Elsa DAT-Kasa killed.3FS-3MSO

‘Elsa killed Kasa.’ (Weldeyesus 2004 = (5d))

(4) Object clitic distribution in Tigre and Tigrinya:

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(5) Dative marker distribution in Tigre and Tigrinya:

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\textbf{References}


