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Differential Object Marking in Ossetic: A corpus-based analysis

Differential Object Marking (DOM) describes the phenomenon of marking direct objects in accordance with definiteness, animacy or information structure – or a combination of these. DOM patterns in different languages do not only differ with regard to conditioning factors but also morphologically, using case, adpositions or particles.
Ossetic uses opposite case marking to differ between animacy and definiteness (cf. Bagaev 1965; Belyaev 2010; Bossong 1985):

(1) direct object	{+animate} and/or {+definite}	→ Genitive	(*-y* | *-i*)
	{-animate} and/or {-definite}	→ Nominative	(*-ø*)

This allows us to group direct objects into four patterns: 1. {-animate, -definite}, 2. {+animate, -definite}, 3. {-animate, +definite} and 4. {+animate, +definite}. Based on the case opposition described in (1), direct objects matching the first pattern are unmarked, objects matching pattern 2 and 3 can be marked by both cases and those matching pattern 4 are always marked. A corpus-based[1] analysis shows that proper names of human referents and pronouns (long and short form) in object position always stand in the genitive (cf. (2)), while animate non-human referents are usually unmarked but can also be marked (cf. (3) & (4)). Hereby, "the choice does not seem to depend on definiteness" (Belyaev 2010: 313). With a few exceptions, inanimate objects are always unmarked.

(2) Iron Ossetic

Ivetæ	*sk'ola-jy*	*duar-mæ*	*a-uyd-ta*	***Alan***	***æmæ***	***Arkadij-y.***
pn	school-gen	door-ALL	PV-see.PST-3SG.PST	PN	CONJ	PN-GEN

"Iveta saw **Alan and Arkadij** out of the school's door."

(3) Iron Ossetic

Qoban-y	*qæd-y*	*Qanyqua-ty*	*Qajsyn*	*a-mard-ta*	***biræğ.***
Koban-GEN	forest-INES	PN-GEN.PL	PN	PV-kill.pst-3SG.PST	wolf

"Qajsyn from the Qanyqua's killed **a wolf** in the forest of Koban."

(4) Digor Ossetic

[...]	*robas*	*is-xiz-tæj*	*bælas-i*	*sær-mæ*	*æma*	*mæst-æj*	*mard-ta*	***xælæn-tti.***
	fox	pv-climb.PST-3SG.PST	tree-GEN	head-ALL	CONJ	anger-ABL	kill.PST-3SG.PST	crow.PL-GEN.PL

"The fox climbed to the treetop and killed **the crows** out of anger."

In this talk I will present the patterns found in a corpus-based analysis and discuss whether word order, verbal inflection, semantic roles or other factors play a role in the distribution of DOM.

References

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[1] Data taken from the Ossetic National Corpus (ONC) and Digor Ossetic Corpus (ODC).