Inalienability and Differential Object Marking: interconnected phenomena?
Wendy Diepgrond, University of Basel/Leiden University

Differential Object Marking (DOM) is a very well-known phenomenon for the Romance languages and for many other language families. DOM consists of the marking of the direct object; in Italian dialects usually with the preposition *a*. If this marking takes place or not, usually depends on the level of animacy and/or definiteness of the direct object, although there are studies who also take into consideration the importance of the verb that is used in the sentence, or the use of dislocation of the direct object (i.a. Iemmolo 2010; von Heusinger & Kaiser 2011).

Inalienability, on the other hand, is widely discussed for other language families which could have an overt marker to indicate that a word is inalienable. When a word is inalienable, this means that there is a bond between speaker and the word that cannot be broken (easily). It is not something that the speaker literally possesses, it is a more abstract concept of having a close connection to something or someone. Inalienable words are, for example, kinship terms (so, family members) and body parts, but also more abstract words like 'voice', 'soul' or 'shadow' (i.a. Chappell & McGregor 1996). Italian dialects do not possess of an (in)alienability marker, but they do treat certain semantic classes of words differently, which are in fact considered inalienable for many other languages in the world. This is most obvious in possessive constructions, where for example body parts are only preceded by a definite article, leaving out the possessive pronoun which is usually needed. For kinship terms it is the other way around: Those are solely preceded or followed by the possessive pronoun, leaving out the definite article (i.a. D'Alessandro & Migliori 2017).

Usually, DOM and inalienability are treated as separate phenomena. There is, however, one semantic class of words that is of high importance for both: kinship terms. In fact, family members are often DOM-marked in Italian dialects. And as said above, for many languages around the globe, kinship terms are considered inalienable. In this research, I aimed to investigate other semantic classes of words that are usually considered inalienable, to understand whether they receive DOM-marking, just like kinship terms. The following semantic classes were taken into consideration: kinship terms, body parts, the word for 'house' (which also translates to 'home' in Italian dialects), deities and toponyms. Only for some of these categories, the level of animacy and definiteness are high, and therefore they are more likely to receive marking (like for kinship terms); for others, this does not go up (like for toponyms). Some examples of DOM-marking for a couple of these semantic categories were already found in literature (i.a. Rohlfs 1984; Fiorentino 2003), but the examples were never explicitly connected to the phenomenon of inalienability.

For this research, an online (written) questionnaire was created, in which the participants carried out a translation task from Standard Italian to the dialect they speak, and an image description task. The translation task included 23 sentences in which the direct object consisted of one of the semantic categories above; for example, 'Cristo' or 'il diavolo' for deities, 'Frosinone' for toponyms and 'la gamba' for body parts. 95 participants filled out the questionnaire; all participants are from Central-Southern Italy – specifically, from the region of Lazio or from the province of Perugia or Pescara – and speak one of the dialects from that linguistic area. Sometimes, multiple participants came from the same towns.

It was found that all of the investigated semantic categories received DOM-marking in the translation task, in other words, there were found sentences in which the categories – kinship terms, body parts, 'house', deities and toponyms – were indeed DOM-marked by multiple speakers (see table 1 below). One comparison in particular showed how animacy and definiteness cannot, on their own, account for the DOM-marking that took place:

(1) *Francesca cerc-a er telefono.*
     Francesca   look.for-PRS.3SG   the   phone
     'Francesca looks for the phone.'

(2) *Issu   au   comprat   **a**   a   casa.*
    they   have   bought   **DOM**   the   house
    'They have bought the house.'

(3) *Flavia   uenn-ə   **a**   la   casa.*
    Flavia   sell-PRS.3SG   **DOM**   the   house
    'Flavia sells the house.'

The first example is one of the many in which the direct object 'the phone' does not receive DOM-marking. In fact, this direct object was never marked by any of the speakers. Examples 2 and 3 show how two speakers from, in these cases, Fiamignano (Rieti) and Isola del Liri (Frosinone) DOM-mark the direct object 'the house'. Interestingly, both 'the phone' and 'the house' are definite, inanimate direct objects. Since 'the house' could be considered either a building or an abstract concept, the animacy level is low: just as low as for 'the phone'. However, 'the phone' never received DOM-marking, while 'the house' did, in multiple occasions. Could this perhaps be explained by the inalienable status of the word 'house'? Further research should point out whether inalienability could be of importance for DOM, besides animacy and definiteness as the main triggers.

DOM	Body Parts	Toponyms	Kinship Terms	Casa	Deities
Viterbo	Never	Never	Never	Never	Never
Rieti	Almost Never	Almost Never	Never	Sometimes	Almost Never
Roma	Almost Never	Almost Never	Almost Never	Never	Almost Never
Frosinone	Never	Uncommon	Uncommon	Uncommon	Common
Latina	Never	Almost Never	Common	Never	Sometimes
Perugia	Almost Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Never	Sometimes
Pescara	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Never	Uncommon

0% Never
1-5% Almost Never
6-15% Uncommon
16-25% Sometimes
26-45% Common

Table 1. Results of the translation task.

References

Chappell, H., & McGregor, W. (1996). Prolegomena to a theory of inalienability. *The grammar of inalienability: A typological perspective on body part terms and the part-whole relation*, 3-30.

D'Alessandro, R., & Migliori, L. (2017). Sui possessivi (enclitici) nelle varietà italo-romanze meridionali non estreme.

Fiorentino, G. (2003). Prepositional objects in Neapolitan. *Empirical approaches to language typology*, 117-152.

Iemmolo, G. (2010). Topicality and differential object marking: Evidence from Romance and beyond. *Studies in Language, 34*(2), 239-272.

Rohlfs, G. (1984). *Von Rom zur Romania : Aspekte und Probleme romanischer Sprachgeschichte* (Tübinger Beitrage zur Linguistik ; 226. 811544974). Tübingen: Narr.

von Heusinger, K., & Kaiser, G.A. (2011). Affectedness and Differential Object Marking in Spanish. *Morphology, 21*(3-4), 593-617.