

AT THE CROSSROADS  
OF DEFINITENESS, SPECIFICITY, AND ANIMACY –  
THE LOCAL PATTERNS OF DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING  
IN THE AROMANIAN VARIETIES

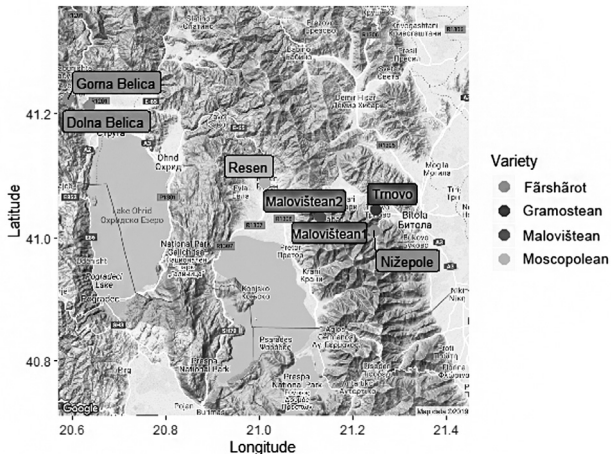
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In this article, we want to discuss the extent of grammaticalisation and the spatial distribution of Differential Object Marking (henceforth *DOM*) in various Aromanian varieties located in the regions of Ohrid / Struga, Resen, and Bitola in the South West of the Republic of North Macedonia. The varieties in question together with their traditional dialectal grouping can be seen in Figure 1:



*Figure 1.* The local varieties considered in the study

Differential Object Marking is a phenomenon where different marking patterns can be observed with direct object due to semantic characteristics of the direct object, e.g. animateness, definiteness, and/or specificity (Bossong 1991; Aissen 2003: 435; Onea and Hole 2017). Such differences in the marking patterns have been observed in numerous languages of the world (e.g., Slavic varieties like Czech, Polish, Russian, BCMS among others, Hebrew, Turkish, Spanish, spoken Portuguese as well as Romanian just to mention a few). In the case of the Dacoromanian varieties, the grammaticalization process and spread of DOM patterns have been observed since the 16<sup>th</sup> century — over six centuries after the assumed segregation of Dacoromanian and Aromanian (Ciobanu 2001; Dimitrescu 1973: 43; Rosetti 1962: 534; Onu 1959). In the Aromanian varieties, however, such patterns have often been considered either absent (Atanasov 2002: 80; Narumov and Chelysheva 2001: 646; Caragiu-Marioțeanu 1975: 237; Kramer 1991; Capidan 1932) or not systematic (Manzini and Savoia 2018). Only Marković (2007) has mentioned the existence of such marking patterns in the varieties of Ohrid / Struga in North Macedonia and Sobolev (2008: 115) and Bara et al. (2005: 43–44) in the case of Kranea / Turia in Greece as well as Asenova and Aleksova (2012), however, without going into detail on the extent or the distribution of the marking pattern, while Koneski (1965: 106), Koneski et al. (1966: 6–7) have argued that the existence of such patterns in the local Macedonian varieties must be due to contact with Aromanian, but without specifying the patterns in the latter. Thus, many questions on the actual DOM patterns and their distribution in the Aromanian varieties are still to be answered.

A recent study based on data collected through interviews with a questionnaire designed to elicit DOM, semi-directed interviews as well as grammaticality judgement tests (with at least two speakers per location except Gorna Belica as we did not find another native speaker from the location) confirms Marković's observation in the case of the Aromanian varieties in North Macedonia and shows that in some local varieties of Aromanian, DOM has indeed reached a relatively stable distribution as Figure 2 shows — however, with different semantic criteria for the DOM patterns in the individual varieties:

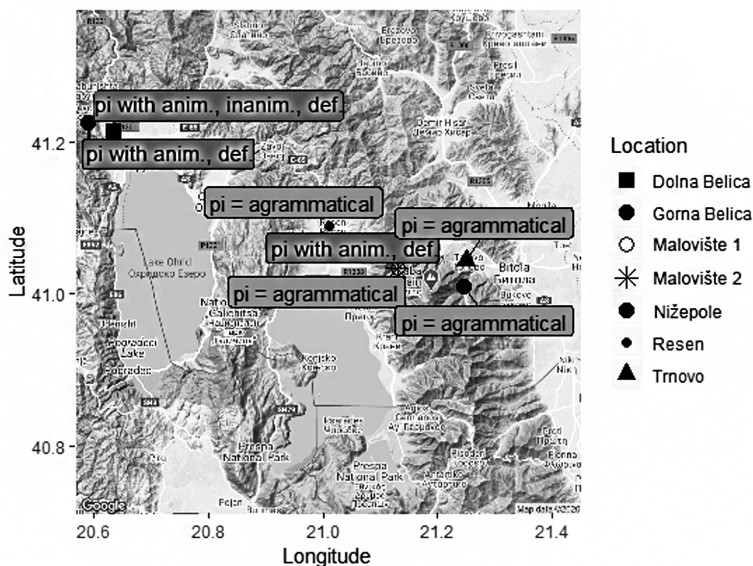


Figure 2. The spatial distribution of pi-marking in the Aromanian varieties studied

As can be seen in Figure 2, DOM patterns are observed in the local varieties of Gorna Belica and Dolna Belica, while it is considered completely ungrammatical by native speakers in Nižepole, Resen, and Trnovo. Both patterns could be observed in the village of Malovište — as one speaker used it systematically and did not accept any example without DOM, while there was not a single instance of DOM in the speech of the other speaker. In all varieties, the speakers showed a clear tendency towards either predominant presence or complete absence and evaluated examples with the opposite pattern — absence or presence depending on the pattern of the speaker observed during the tasks — as completely ungrammatical and said that they had never heard the opposite pattern (except one speaker who is a language activist and mentioned that he had heard it in other local varieties). The speakers that use DOM seem to follow the animacy and/or specificity / definiteness scales known from typological studies (Arkadiev 2016: 10; Asenova 2012: 5; Croft 2002; Comrie 1979; Silverstein 1976) — but surprisingly, not to the same degree. DOM is mainly used with animates (proper names, common nouns

for humans and animals) and personal pronouns as direct objects in Gorna Belica (example 1), while in the variety of Dolna Belica it could be observed also with inanimate direct objects — but only if they were definite / specific (example 3). In the majority of the other varieties around Bitola, the DOM patterns were not observed — and were not accepted by the speakers either (examples 4 and 5):

- (1) *u= vidzuj pi fitfor-lu.*  
 3SG.ACC see.1SG.PST DOM boy(M)-DEF.SG  
 ‘I saw the boy.’ (Aromanian from Gorna Belica, own data)
- (2) *\*u= mutresku tora Haris.*  
 3SG.ACC see.1SG.PRS now Haris(M)-DEF.SG  
 ‘I see Haris now.’ (a made-up example for the grammaticality judgement test)
- (3) *li= ved pi lemni-le.*  
 ACC.PL see.1SG.PRS DOM tree(N)-DEF.PL  
 ‘I see the trees.’ (Aromanian from Dolna Belica, own data)
- (4) *daska-lu intreb-a fitfior-lu.*  
 teacher(M)-DEF.PL ask-3SG.PRS boy(M)-DEF.SG  
 ‘The teacher asks the boy.’ (Aromanian from Trnovo, own data)
- (5) *tini me intreb-i mini.*  
 you.NOM/ACC.SG I.ACC ask-2SG.PRS I.NOM/ACC  
 ‘You ask me.’ (Aromanian from Trnovo, own data)

The distribution and extent of grammaticalization in the Aromanian varieties of the region is indeed striking. On the one hand, the dialectal classification of the varieties does not completely explain the distribution we observe in the local varieties — as there are clear DOM patterns in the Fărshărot varieties of Gorna Belica and Dolna Belica, but not in the Fărshărot variety of Nižepole — and in the speech of some of the speakers of the Malovištean dialect, but not in all of them.

On the other hand, the distribution of DOM in the Aromanian varieties seems to mirror to a certain degree the distribution of DOM in the local Macedonian varieties, which can be observed in the varieties of Ohrid and Struga, but not really in the varieties of Resen and Bitola (Koneski 1987; Topolińska 1995; Vidoeski 2005; Marković 2007; Bužarovska 2017):

- (6) *go= vid-ov na Taki.*  
 he.ACC see-1SG.PST DOM Taki(M)  
 ‘I saw Taki.’ (Macedonian, Bužarovska 2017: 68)

Since the pattern has not been attested / discussed neither in historical documents — e.g. in Daniil of Moscopole’s Tetraglosson dictionary<sup>1</sup> (Niculescu 1959: 68) — and is not found in all the Fărshărot varieties, one has to assume that DOM must be a quite recent phenomena in the varieties.

Traditionally, the emergence of DOM in certain Aromanian varieties has been assumed to be due to language contact with Dacoromanian — primarily through the presence of Romanian schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century until their closure after the Balkan Wars, 1912–1913 (P. Papahagi 1905: 25; T. Papahagi 1963: 1010; Rosetti 1962: 535, Asenova and Aleksova 2008: 5; Tamminen 2004: 214). However, the pattern is most grammaticalized in the region around Ohrid / Struga where Romanian schools were open only a couple of years (Romanski 1925: 79), while they are not observed in the varieties around Bitola where the Dacoromanian presence was much stronger as Romanian schools were open over many decades. Thus, this explanation does not really seem convincing.

Language-internal factors like the loss of nominal inflection — as suggested by Bužarovska (2020: 87) in the case of peripheric South Slavic varieties — do not seem to be capable to completely explain the distribution of DOM in the Aromanian varieties of the region either as not all the varieties which show DOM have lost their nominal inflection, nor do all the speakers of the varieties that have abolished their case system produce/accept any DOM patterns.

Hence, both — exclusively language-external as well as exclusively language-internal theories for the emergence of the patterns — seem to fail to explain the spatial distribution of the feature in the Aromanian varieties we observed in our data. Therefore, we argue that more linguistic research in the case of the Aromanian varieties is needed and that a synchronic/diachronic corpus of the Aromanian varieties of Albania, Greece, and North Macedonia currently under construction (Winistörfer et al. 2023) might be able to shed new light on the remaining questions.

<sup>1</sup> Our research in the text confirmed Niculescu’s observations as we did not encounter a single instance of DOM in Kristophson’s (1974) critical edition — not even with nouns for human beings and pronouns.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC — accusative case; DEF — definite; M — masculine; N — neuter;  
 NOM — nominative case; PL — plural; PRS — present tense; PST — past  
 tense; SG — singular.

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