Although Spanish is the most famous Romance language to have Differential Object Marking (DOM), namely the use of preposition ad for marking certain types of objects (animate/referential), this type of DOM is actually widely attested throughout Romance in its history and geography (Rollins (1971)), and while attempts have been made to unify Romance DOM in reconstructing proto-Romanic (Sornicola (1997, 1998)), less attention has been paid to the microparametric variation between different Romance varieties. In this paper I propose a comparative analysis of Romance DOM which seeks to deepen our understanding of Spanish DOM and Case theory.

Medieval Romance shows that ad is used mainly with individual human/animate objects which show tendencies of referentiality and individuality (Nocentini (1985), Sornicola (1998, 1999)), and ad is even obligatory with strong (tonic) pronominal objects (Sornicola (1998:422)) which entails three parameters for Romance DOM: animacy, referentiality and pronominal. In Romance dialects, Spanish DOM is primarily determined by animacy (1a) whereas in other dialects referentiality/definiteness is a prerequisite (1b):

1a) busca un empleado que usa la computadora

'I am looking for an employee (hypothetical) who might know how to use the computer.' (Zamboni (1994:790))

1b) han snatch-PERF PART AD one girl

'They have snatched a girl (indefinite)' (Savoldan in Lemmolo (2007:348))

Furthermore, in almost all Romance varieties DOM is only obligatory with personal pronouns (cf Nocentini (1992:220)):

2a) no vi ti visi ti

NEG PRO.2SG see-PRET.1SG AD PRO.2SG

'I did not see you.' (Sicilian, in Guaraldo (2000:90))

2b) ami o ele

have-PRES.3PL snatch-PERF PART AD one girl

'I love him.' (Portuguese, in Roegiest (1979:19))

2c) te mi

see-PRET.3SG AD me

'He saw me.' (Spanish, in Luca (1995:66))

Finally, Spanish DOM has developed one step further in that ad also marks inanimate objects with animate associations (cf Company-Company (2004)):

3) se va a procurar a tocar mucho a Beethoven?

REFL.PRO go-PRES.3SG AD try-INF play much AD Beethoven

"... is one going to try to play Beethoven a lot?" (Laca (1995:62))

Romance DOM may hence be arranged hierarchically in terms of features (cf Aissen (2002)): ad is obligatory with pronouns (1a-pronominal), strongly associated with human/animate objects (2) of which referentiality (2-3) is retained as a secondary factor from Medieval Romance. Spanish has generalized DOM to all human/animate objects (ex. 1a) and even beyond (ex. 3 cf Henniger and Kaiser (2005)), which may be seen as 'structural simplification' (reduction in feature syncretisms) (Roberts and Roussou (2003:200)), since while in Spanish ad is used with all human/animate objects (i-human/animate), in other varieties ad is used with objects that are human/animate and referential/definite (h-human/animate), (i-D).

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