Differential Object Marking, partitivity and specificity in Turkish

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Previous literature on Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Turkish has associated it with partitivity (Enç 1991) or with specificity (Erguvanlı 1984, Dede 1986, Kornfilt 1997). In this paper we present original data from a grammaticality judgement task of partitive constructions with and without direct object marking. The results clearly indicate that (i) partitive constructions without case marking are acceptable (contra Enç) and that (ii) case marking indicates a wide scope specific reading. The results confirm the assumption that DOM is orthogonal to partitivity and that DOM signals specificity, rather than partitivity.

Turkish exhibits Differential Object Marking (DOM), i.e. indefinite direct objects are optionally marked with accusative case. The function of DOM in Turkish is controversial. Enç (1991) assumes that DOM marks partitivity, i.e. that the case-marked indefinite refers to an element of an already established set. Enç further assumes that specificity can be reduced to partitivity. Alternative approaches have proposed that DOM signals specific indefinites, which can be cross-classified with partitive indefinites (Erguvanlı 1984, Dede 1986, Kornfilt 1997, Aydemir 2004, von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2005, among others). While there are clear semantic arguments that partitivity must be cross-classified with specificity, see (1) and (2) below, which are explicit partitives and allow for (i) a non-specific and (ii) a specific reading, the question is still unsolved how the morphological accusative marking of partitives interacts with different types of specificity.

We therefore conducted a grammaticality judgment task of pairs of sentences, of which the first was a transitive sentence with a partitive direct object and the second one a clear context for (i) a non-specific interpretation of the direct object or for (ii) a specific interpretation of the direct object. We created 8 items for transparent contexts where we would expect epistemic specific contrasts, cf (3), and 8 items for scopal contexts, where we expected contrast in scopal specificity, cf (4). To these 16 test items we added 24 fillers, which were partly grammatical, incoherent or ungrammatical. We distributed the test items onto four lists in such a way that the lists were balanced with respect to case marking of partitive indefinites in the direct object position and the non-specific vs. specific continuation. On a web-based questionnaire we asked participants to rate the pairs of sentences on a scale (1 very bad to 6 very good) according to the naturalness of the continuation of the second sentence given the first one. 80 native speakers of Turkish between ages 17 and 67 (mean age: 28) who had grown up with a high school (11) or university (69) education have participated in our study.

Figure 1 presents the results of the grammaticality judgements for each of the four conditions. The data show: (i) explicit partitives in direct object position without case ('no DOM') are as acceptable as those with case (contra Enç). (ii) In scopal contexts, DOM clearly signals scopal specificity, i.e. case-marked direct objects are rated as better in specific contexts than in non-specific contexts, and unmarked direct objects are rated as better in non-specific contexts than in specific ones. This interaction of DOM and specificity is significant (b = -0.86, SE = 0.21, t = -3.72). (iii) In epistemic contexts, case marking does not signal specificity, which is surprising given the assumptions in the literature, but confirms earlier findings in von Heusinger & Bamyacı (2017), who report a grammaticality judgement experiment with *non-partitive* indefinites that shows that DOM acts only as a specificity marker in scopal and intensional contexts, but not in transparent or epistemic ones.

To summarize, the results of the grammaticality judgement task clearly show that case marking is independent of partitivity and that case marking signals wide scope specific

readings. This is additional evidence for the view that DOM in Turkish expresses a particular kind of specificity, namely scopal specificity.

(1)   John wants to marry one of Steve's sisters. (i) He doesn't care which. (ii) It is Ann.

(2)   One of Steve's sisters cheated on the exam. (i) We have to find out which. (ii) It is Ann.

(3)   **Epistemic contexts**
        Jüri üyeleri sporculardan bir yüzücü(-yü) tebrik etti.
        'The jury members congratulated a swimmer of the athletes.'
        i)   Hangi yüzücü olduğuna dair hiçbir fikrim yok.
              'I have no idea which swimmer it was.'
        ii)   Bu yüzücü Britta Steffen'di.
              'This swimmer was Britta Steffen.'

(4)   **Scopal contexts**
        Bütün profesörler mezunlardan bir öğrenci(-yi) tebrik etti.
        'All professors congratulated one student of the graduates.'
        i)   Göksel Berke'yi, Sumru Gaye'yi, Ziya Barış'ı.
              'Göksel congratulated Berke, Sumru congratulated Gaye, Ziya congratulated Barış.'
        ii)   Bu öğrenci Damla'ydı.
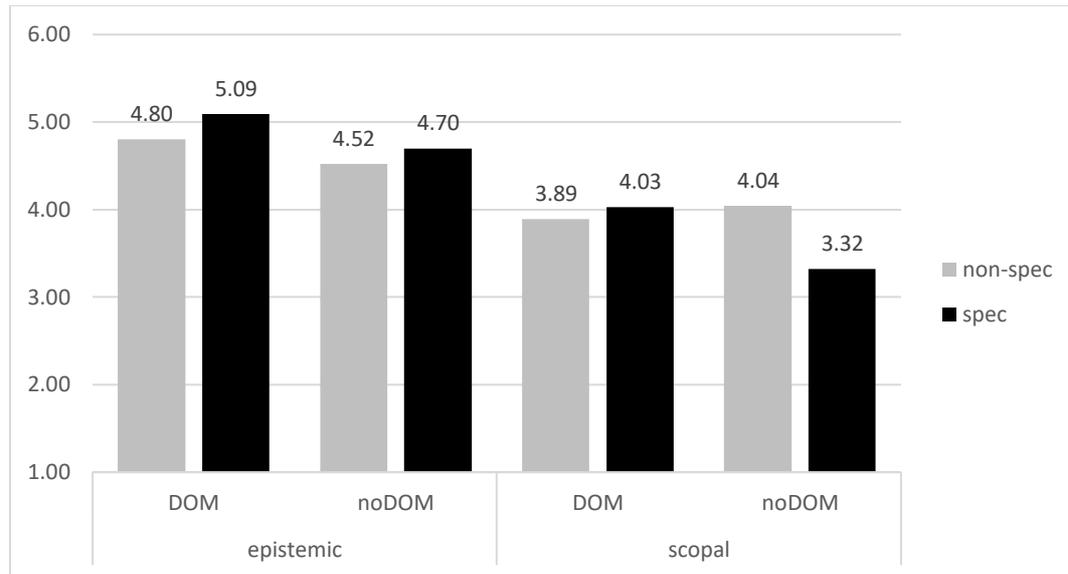   'This student was Damla.'

Figure 1: Mean preference for specific readings across DOM and semantic-pragmatic contexts

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