

A Study of DOM in Asturian ('Dialectu Vaqueiru')

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Abstract

The present paper explores Differential Object Marking in a variety of Asturian (Western Iberian Romance) spoken in western Asturias (northwestern Spain). This ancestral form of speech stands out from Central Asturian and especially from Standard Spanish. For a number of reasons, ranging from profound changes in pronunciation, vocabulary, morphology and information structure to slight but very relevant effects on syntax. The main goal of this study is to examine the special marking of direct objects in order to find out what triggers the distribution of Differential Object Marking in this variety. To this aim, this paper will examine, from a variationist perspective, the influence of a number of semantic and discourse-pragmatic parameters on the marking of direct objects in this Western Asturian language as well as in Standard Spanish¹ and Central Asturian (which is generally considered the normative variety of Asturian). The results obtained from this comparison will allow us to outline the differences between these three varieties in terms of object marking, shedding more light on the origin and function of Differential Object Marking in Spanish.

Keywords

Asturian language – Vaqueiru dialect – Differential Object Marking – information structure – topicality – distinguishing function

¹ Although Standard (European) Spanish originated in, and has come to be based on, the Castilian dialect more than any other variety, I will use the term 'Standard Spanish' throughout the paper for the sake of neutrality.

1 Introduction

This paper is organized as follows: the introductory section provides a brief description of the most distinctive grammatical features of a Western Asturian dialect referred to hereafter as *Vaqueiru*.² Section 2 introduces the grammatical operation commonly known as 'Differential Object Marking' (henceforth DOM) and offers a review of the different approaches used until now to explain its variation in Spanish. Section 3 includes a comparative analysis of Standard Spanish, Central Asturian and the Vaqueiru dialect in terms of special marking on direct objects, taking into consideration the influence that semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties have on the distribution of DOM in these languages. Section 4 offers a summary of the results obtained and attempts to gauge which are the most important factors in determining DOM. The role that the distinctive pragmatic features displayed by the Vaqueiru dialect plays in the marking of its direct objects is also discussed in this section. Finally, the concluding section includes an evaluation of the major findings of my work in comparison with previous approaches to this particular issue.

1.1 *Linguistic Description*

The Vaqueiru dialect has a number of grammatical properties that distinguish it from both Standard Spanish and other Western Iberian Romance languages (i.e. (Standard) Asturian,³ Galician and European Portuguese). Its most distinctive property is that, unlike Standard Spanish – a proclitic language that never allows enclisis with finite verbs – and other Western Iberian Romance languages, which generally restrict enclisis to specific contexts involving main clauses, in Vaqueiru, enclisis and proclisis are in complementary distribution in both matrix and embedded contexts, with proclisis occurring after a displaced interrogative / exclamative pronoun or a positive / negative polarity marker and enclisis elsewhere. This means that postverbal clitic placement

2 Although I am aware of the differences existing between the speech forms of the numerous communities to which the ethnic group, *Vaqueiros de Alzada*, located within the municipalities of Allande, Cudillero, Salas, Tineo and Valdés, belongs, I have decided to use the term *Vaqueiru* for the sake of clarity. The name *Vaqueiru* 'cowherd' (*vaquero* in Standard Spanish) is a descriptive term derived from the Spanish word for 'cow', *vaca*. It refers to these people's main activity, which has always involved cattle breeding in these rough, isolated mountain villages.

3 There is some discussion regarding the status of Asturian as language or dialect. While it does not have the co-official status that other regional languages in Spain such as Basque, Catalan or Galician enjoy, Asturian is normally considered a language distinct from Spanish (Barnes, 2013: 12).

occurs in a fair number of embedded clauses in this dialect,⁴ unlike Standard Spanish and Central Asturian where proclisis appears to be the norm (Corral Esteban, 2015):

- (1) ¡Quiera Dios [que viera-*lu* na fiesta]!⁵
 want.SUB⁶.3SG:S God that see.SUB.3SG:S-3SG:DO at+the party
 'I wish I would see him at the party.' (lit. 'God wants that I see it at the party.')
- (2) Sei-[que llevába-*lu* él]
 know.PRES.1SG:S-that carry.PAST.3SG:S-3SG:DO 3SG:S
 'I'm sure he was carrying it with him.' / 'He was certainly carrying it with him.' (lit. 'I know that he was carrying it with him.')
- (3) Pare-me [que Manolín garróu-*lu* anuéite]
 it.seems.to.me that Manuel take.PAST.3SG:S-3SG:DO yesterday
 'I think that Manuel took it yesterday.' (lit. 'It seems to me that Manuel took it yesterday.')

Likewise, another important characteristic exhibited by this variety of Asturian is its rigid information structure, which is worth mentioning due to its relevance for the ensuing discussion. The Vaqueiru dialect exhibits a relatively

4 In this respect, Asturian clitics behave like clitics in Old and Medieval Romance languages (Meyer-Lübke (1974); Rivero (1986), D'Andrés Díaz (1993, 1997); among others). It is also of note that other (modern) Western Iberian languages, such as Galician and Portuguese also generally exhibit preverbal clitic placement in embedded clauses.

5 All the examples used in this paper come from two primary sources, namely from published studies and from consultations with my relatives, native speakers of the Vaqueiru dialect living in Masenga and El Sellón (Villayón). I wish to express my gratitude to them for kindly sharing their knowledge of these languages with me. I am also very grateful to my anonymous consultants for helping me with the Central Asturian examples. Needless to say, all errors remain my sole responsibility. The examples provided by my Vaqueiru consultants have been mainly taken from naturally occurring, spontaneous speech (most of them overheard). Others have been constructed and checked by a representative sample of seven elderly native speakers. Finally, other examples have been elicited through questionnaires. Regarding the spelling system in the examples of the two Asturian dialects used in this paper, I follow the standard orthography regulated by the Academia de la Llingua Asturiana (2000, 2001, 2005), with the modifications necessary to transcribe the distinctive phonemes of the Vaqueiru dialect.

6 Present Simple Tense in Subjunctive Mood.

fixed syntax in terms of word order, and a rigid topic / focus structure⁷ (Corral Esteban, 2015). Unlike Standard Spanish and Central Asturian, Vaqueiru is restricted in that contrastive focus must generally occupy a postverbal position. Therefore, it indicates a marked focus, firstly, by assigning it to a clause-final position and, secondly, by means of a special intonation whereby the focalized element receives prosodic prominence through a special focal accent. Thus, this variety places all the focal constituents in a postverbal position with the exception of some inherently focal elements, such as interrogative and exclamative pronouns or positive and negative polarity items, which occur in clause-initial position:

(4) A: Güi que rumpí-te Pacu la focuina
 hear.PAST.1SG:S that break.PAST-2SG:IO Paco the sickle
 'I heard that Paco broke your scythe.'

B: Non, rumpíu-me-la Manolín
 No break.PAST.3SG:IO-3SG:DO Manuel
 'No, it was Manuel that broke it.'

Of particular note is the close relationship between these two different grammatical features, namely the enclisis / proclisis alternation and the topic / focus structure. The different positioning of clitics in Vaqueiru may be linked to the interplay between its distinctive phonological, syntactic and pragmatic properties, which do not only include the attraction that an inherently focused preverbal element (e.g. interrogative and exclamative pronouns and positive and negative polarity markers) appears to exert over the clitic, and the central role played by the verb, which functions as a reference point for the clitic placement system, but also the special restriction imposed on the narrow focus of the sentence, which generally occurs in a postverbal position.

7 Lambrecht (1994:5)'s theory of information distinguishes two main categories, namely presupposition, what a speaker assumes a hearer already knows, and assertion, what the hearer is expected to know as a result of hearing the utterance. This distinction underlies the concepts of 'topic', what the proposition is about, and 'focus', what is said about the topic (Lambrecht, 1994:127) in this paper.

2 Differential Object Marking

The term ‘Differential Object Marking’ (henceforth DOM) (Bossong, 1985) – also known as ‘Prepositional Direct Complement’ (Pensado, 1995) or ‘Prepositional Accusative’ (Laca, 1995) in Romance linguistics – refers to a variation in the encoding of direct objects whereby sometimes they receive overt special marking and at other times lie unmarked, a fact that is illustrated by comparing the following examples (5), (6) and (7) in Standard Spanish:

- (5) Pablo llevó a su hermana al colegio
 Pablo take.PAST.3SG:S DOM his sister to+the school
 ‘Pablo took his sister to school.’
- (6) Pablo llevó la mochila al colegio
 Pablo take.PAST.3SG:S the backpack to+the school
 ‘Pablo took the backpack to school.’
- (7) Pablo llevó (a) unos niños al colegio
 Pablo take.PAST.3SG:S (DOM) some children to+the school
 ‘Pablo took some children to school.’

It is superficially obvious that there is a minimal syntactic difference between sentences (5) and (6): there is a marker *a* preceding the second argument in (5) but not in (6). These examples reveal that Standard Spanish employs differential marking on some, but not all, direct objects. Despite being a notoriously complex phenomenon, in Spanish, DOM is considered to *a*-mark animate specific direct objects (e.g. *a su hermana* in (5)), while inanimate objects are unmarked (e.g. *la mochila* in (6)). Regarding animate indefinite objects (e.g. *unos niños* in (7)) it is possible to find examples with or without a mark. The use of overt special marking in these cases appears to be optional, although it is commonly believed that the difference between DOM animate and non-DOM animate indefinite objects appears to be attributed to the degree of specificity, with *a unos niños* being considered more specific than *unos niños*.

The apparent lack of uniformity exhibited by DOM in Spanish, mostly caused by the enormous variance shown by its speakers regarding the use of this grammatical device,⁸ complicates any attempt to find a general principle that could explain its original source and function. Despite the existence of many detailed studies on this issue in Standard Spanish, the vast majority of

8 Due to geographical, social or stylistic reasons, Spanish speakers worldwide tend to have different opinions about the grammaticality of certain expressions.

researchers working on it only appear to agree that there are semantic and pragmatic conditions that correlate with DOM and that none of these conditions is enough to account for DOM by itself.

Likewise, this issue has not, to the best of my knowledge, been studied sufficiently in Asturian (Prieto, 2010). This may be due to the fact that, although there are a fair number of studies on Central Asturian, the enormous geographical and social variation among speakers across the Asturian region, some of them more influenced by Standard Spanish than others, complicates the task of describing the distribution of DOM in this language variety.

Finally, regarding Vaqueiru, the dearth of literature on this particular dialect and the fact that nowadays it is very difficult to find speakers who are not influenced by Standard Spanish makes a thorough description of this linguistic feature very difficult. It is for this reason that the object marking exhibited by an ancestral language like Vaqueiru, a dialect that has been spoken for ages in an isolated area with hardly any influence of Standard Spanish until recently, seems so interesting. My analysis attempts to fill the vacuum surrounding this issue as well as making an important contribution to the historical point of view. The findings obtained from my study appear to confirm the important correlation put forth by Iemmolo (2010) between the role of topicality and DOM, which appears to explain why only a subset of direct objects receives *a*-marking, and to confirm the assumption that the main function of DOM is to distinguish between different arguments (e.g. between the agents and patients). These findings could thus shed more light on the original function and source of DOM in Spanish and help to clarify whether its distribution could have been triggered by a single factor or, rather, by a combination of parameters.

3 Factors Determining DOM

It is a fact that, throughout its history, Spanish has increased the use of the overt special marking on direct objects⁹ and, although the presence or absence of the accusative *a* has been relatively successfully addressed by numerous scholars from various perspectives, there is to date no consensus concerning the trigger determining the distribution of this particular grammatical phenomenon.

Consequently, there has always been considerable debate surrounding the contexts in which DOM occurs and the factors that correlate with DOM in

9 See Folgar (1993) and von Heusinger and Kaiser (2005) for more information on the evolution of DOM in Spanish.

Spanish. Firstly, a great number of studies (e.g. Bossong, 1985, 1991, 1998; Comrie, 1989; Melis, 1995; Pensado, 1995; Torrego, 1999; Aissen, 2003; Leonetti, 2004; Naess, 2004; Laca, 2006; García, 2007; de Swart and de Hoop, 2007; among others) evoke the notion of semantic salience or prominence in one way or another and appear to agree on the assumption that the presence or absence of the marker *a* is due to the combination of different semantic features of the referents of the noun phrases filling the role of direct object, such as animacy, definiteness, and specificity. Along the same lines, other linguists (e.g. Pottier, 1968; Fernández Ramírez, 1986; Weissenrieder, 1991; Kliffer, 1995; Pensado, 1995; Delbecque, 1999; Torrego, 1999; Company, 2002; Laca, 2006; and von Heusinger and Kaiser, 2007, 2011; Lamiroy, 2013; among others) also highlight the important role played by the lexical semantics of the predicate in determining DOM. Finally, other scholars (e.g. Laca, 1995; Torrego, 1999; Escandell-Vidal, 2009; Iemmolo, 2010; and Dalrymple and Nikolaeva, 2011), favour a pragmatic parameter, namely topicality, as the major factor triggering DOM. Despite the obvious differences in terms of the grammatical perspective adopted by these approaches, their views are complementary rather than exclusive, as there is a close relationship between the different factors at study.

The ensuing section will include a comparative analysis of Standard (European) Modern Spanish (ss), Central Asturian (CAst) and Vaqueiru (Vaqu) in order to establish what semantic, syntactic and pragmatic features show a tendency to mark the direct object with *a*. The distribution of DOM will therefore be examined by analyzing a number of examples including direct objects with distinct properties in the three linguistic varieties,¹⁰ allowing us to uncover the most important factors. The different factors I have used in this analysis can be divided into four groups, namely: 1) factors that refer to the internal semantic properties of the direct object, such as animacy, definiteness, specificity, referentiality, and anaphoricity; 2) factors that refer to the inherent semantic properties of the predicate and the conditions imposed by these properties on direct objects, such as affectedness and animacy requirement, the two of which are subsumed by the concept 'verbal semantics'; 3) a factor that refers to a syntactic property of the predicate, that is verbal conjugation; and 4) finally the pragmatic factor of topicality.

10 I am aware that the corpus used to examine the effect of DOM with respect to each parameter is too small (especially obvious, although understandable, in the case of Vaqueiru) to determine a categorical statement as to whether a direct object must carry DOM. Furthermore, the fact that I have chosen the most representative examples in every case by no means implies that most, if not all, parameters are susceptible of having examples that do not correspond to the general trend.

3.1 *Animacy*

Based on the universal view that languages generally make a distinction between animate and inanimate entities and between human and non-human participants (Aissen, 2003), animacy is very commonly perceived as a crucial factor in determining the presence of DOM. Following Aissen (2003)'s footsteps, I will test this factor in accordance with the Animacy Scale: human > animate non-human > inanimate:

(8) Standard Spanish

- a. Quiero mucho a este hombre
 love.PRES.1SG:S much DOM this man
 'I love this man very much.'

Central Asturian

- b. Quiero muncho a esti home
 love.PRES.1SG:S much DOM this man
 'I love this man very much.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Quieru muito esti home
 love.PRES.1SG:S much this man
 'I love this man very much.'

(9) Standard Spanish

- a. Quiero mucho a este ternero
 love.PRES.1SG:S much DOM this calf
 'I love this calf very much.'

Central Asturian

- b. Quiero muncho (a)¹¹ esti xato
 love.PRES.1SG:S much (DOM) this calf
 'I love this calf very much.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Quieru muito esti xatu
 love.PRES.1SG:S much this calf
 'I love this calf very much.'

¹¹ The speakers consulted show a preference for the presence of DOM in this case.

(10) Standard Spanish

- a. Quiero este caldero para los cerdos
 want.PRES.1SG:S this cooking.pot for the pigs
 'I want this cooking pot for the pigs.'

Central Asturian

- b. Quiero esti calderu pa los gochos
 want.PRES.1SG:S this cooking.pot for the pigs
 'I want this cooking pot for the pigs.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Quieru (e)'sti caldeiru pa lus gochus
 want.PRES.1SG:S this cooking.pot for the pigs
 'I want this cooking pot for the pigs.'

These examples reveal that, whereas animacy is a very important factor accounting for the distribution of DOM in Standard Spanish and even Central Asturian, it does not appear to play any role in Vaqueiru. Thus, whereas in Standard Spanish and Central Asturian there is a strong tendency to *a*-mark animate (specific) direct objects, in Vaqueiru both animate and inanimate direct objects appear to remain unmarked. In addition to personal pronouns,¹² which always carry *a*-marking in all varieties of Spanish, proper names are seemingly the only exception in Vaqueiru, since animate objects realized syntactically through proper names can also be *a*-marked:

(11) Standard Spanish

- a. Vi a Juan y (a) Domingo en
 see.PAST.1SG:S DOM Juan and (DOM) Domingo in
 el prado
 the field
 'I saw Juan and Domingo in the field.'

¹² For the sake of brevity and simplicity, no example involving indefinite pronouns such as *nadie* 'nobody', *todos* 'all, everybody', *alguien* 'someone', or *ninguno* 'none', whose complex behaviour makes them special with respect to other indefinites in Spanish, has been considered. Regarding the use of DOM with these pronouns in Vaqueiru, although I have noticed that they generally carry *a*-marking (e.g. *Vi a todos en misa* 'I saw everybody at mass'), I have also observed some examples involving these pronouns without the presence of DOM: *Nun atopéi naide na corte* 'I found nobody in the stable', *Simón tien todus na yerba* 'Simón has got everybody (working) on the grass', etc.

Central Asturian

- b. Vi a Xuan ya Domingo nel prau
see.PAST.1SG:S DOM Juan and Domingo in+the field
'I saw Juan and Domingo in the field.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Vi (a) Xuan ya Domingu nel prau
see.PAST.1SG:S (DOM)Juan and Domingo in+the field
'I saw Juan and Domingo in the field.'

The optionality shown by (11c) seems very striking since human proper names appear to have been marked with DOM in Spanish from an early stage. Although it is difficult to account for this variability with respect to the presence of the marker *a* preceding animate proper names, this situation could reflect the gradual increase in the use of DOM for proper names that took place through the development of Spanish, implying that this grammatical phenomenon is likely to be more common in the more modern varieties like Standard Spanish than in an ancestral dialect spoken in the isolated *brañas*¹³ of Western Asturias.

Although it is frequently noted in descriptive Spanish grammars that proper names only carry *a* when they refer to humans, it is sometimes possible to find examples of proper names denoting inanimate concepts, especially toponyms, carrying *a*-marking:

(12) Standard Spanish

- a. Visité Gijón el año pasado
visit.PAST.1SG:S Gijón the year last
'I visited Gijón last year.'

Central Asturian

- | | | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-------|------|------|-------|
| b. | Visité | Xixón | (e)l | año | pasáu |
| | visit.PAST.1SG:S | Xixón | the | year | last |
| | 'I visited Gijón last year.' | | | | |

Vaqueiru

- c. Visitéi Xixón (e)l año pasáu
 visit.PAST.1SG:S Xixón the year last
 'I visited Gijón last year.'

13 A Vaqueiru term traditionally used to refer to the villages inhabited by these people, which consist of huts made of stone and thatch set up in high pasture land.

(13) Standard Spanish

- a. Quiere mucho a Asturias
 love.PRES.3SG:S much DOM Asturias
 'He loves Asturias very much.'

Central Asturian

- b. Quier muncho (a) Asturias
 love.PRES.3SG:S much (DOM) Asturias
 'He loves Asturias very much.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Quier muitu Asturias
 love.PRES.3SG:S much Asturias
 'He loves Asturias very much.'

Examples (13a and b) shows how it is possible to see how direct objects represented by proper names denoting inanimate entities can also carry *a*-marking in Standard Spanish and can even be possible in Central Asturian. It is generally assumed that Standard Spanish has a tendency to *a*-mark human direct object proper names, while *a*-marking with a non-human direct object shows variance and with an inanimate direct object it is generally considered ungrammatical. This situation does not appear to occur in Vaqueiru, since the use of DOM with proper names is much more restricted than in Central Asturian and, especially, Standard Spanish. This is particularly the case if the proper name denotes an inanimate concept, since this kind of object never carries *a*-marking in Vaqueiru, as evidenced from (13c).

3.2 *Definiteness*

It is generally understood from the typological literature regarding DOM that the more individuated a direct object, the more likely it is to be overtly marked. The dimensions along which individuation is assessed include – and are perhaps limited to – animacy and definiteness, so it is widely assumed that DOM is determined entirely, or significantly, by these two dimensions in many languages. I have adopted the Definiteness Scale used by Croft (1988), Comrie (1989) and Aissen (2003): Personal pronoun > Proper name > Definite NP > Indefinite NP.¹⁴

14 The only difference with respect to their scale is that I have omitted the choice among specific and non-specific indefinite noun phrases, since I would prefer to examine the distinction the parameters definiteness and specificity separately.

Regarding the parameter of definiteness, it is necessary to make a distinction between personal pronouns and proper names, on the one hand, and other less definite referents, on the other. Personal pronouns always receive differential marking in the three varieties under consideration:

(14) Standard Spanish

- a. El cura me confesó a mí
 the priest 1SG:DO confess.PAST.3SG:S DOM 1SG:DO
 ayer
 yesterday
 'The priest confessed me yesterday.'

Central Asturian

- b. El cura confesó-me a mín
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S-1SG:DO DOM 1SG:DO
 ayeri
 yesterday
 'The priest confessed me yesterday.'

Vaqueiru

- c. El cura confesóu-me a mín
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S-1SG:DO DOM 1SG:DO
 anuéite
 yesterday
 'The priest confessed me yesterday.'

As was noted with respect to the criterion of animacy, the use of DOM with animate proper names in Vaqueiru shows a greater variance than in Standard Spanish and Central Asturian, where it always receives differential marking:

(15) Standard Spanish

- a. El cura confesó a Manolín ayer
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S DOM Manuel yesterday
 'The priest confessed Manuel yesterday.'

Central Asturian

- b. El cura confesó a Manolín ayeri
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S DOM Manuel yesterday
 'The priest confessed Manuel yesterday.'

Vaqueiru

- c. El cura confesó (a) Manolín anuéite
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S (DOM) Manuel yesterday
 'The priest confessed Manuel yesterday.'

Unlike Standard Spanish and Central Asturian, Vaqueiru does not *a*-mark other less referential definite direct objects distinctively:

(16) Standard Spanish

- a. El cura confesó al niño ayer
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the child yesterday
 'The priest confessed the child yesterday.'

Central Asturian

- b. El cura confesó al gúahe ayeri
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the child yesterday
 'The priest confessed the child yesterday.'

Vaqueiru

- c. El cura confesó (e)l nenu anuéite
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S the child yesterday
 'The priest confessed the child yesterday.'

The three varieties also behave differently as regards the marking of (specific) indefinite objects. Thus, while in Standard Spanish the presence of DOM is obligatory and in Central Asturian it is optional, Vaqueiru does not *a*-mark direct objects in this context either:

(17) Standard Spanish

- a. El cura confesó a un hombre
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S DOM a man
 ayer
 yesterday
 'The priest confessed a man yesterday.'

Central Asturian

- b. El cura confesó (a) un home
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S (DOM) un man
 ayeri
 yesterday
 'The priest confessed a man yesterday.'

Vaqueiru

- c. El cura confesóu (u)'n home
 the priest confess.PAST.3SG:S a man
 anuéite
 yesterday
 'The priest confessed a man yesterday.'

3.3 *Specificity*

A well-known necessary condition for *a*-marking in Spanish is that direct objects should be specific. I use the concept of specificity to refer to entities that are identifiable in the mind of the speaker, although they may not exist in the real world. I will adopt a Specificity Scale that proceeds along the Definiteness Scale in such a way that it differentiates between specific and non-specific indefinite direct objects. Specific direct objects are marked differently in the three varieties under study: in Standard Spanish DOM it is mandatory – unless the determiner is used as a numeral –, in Central Asturian it is optional, and in Vaqueiru it is ungrammatical or, at least, sounds stilted:

(18) Standard Spanish

- a. Está buscando a una mujer que
 be.PRES.3SG:S search.GER DOM a woman that
 vende queso
 sell.PRES.3SG:S cheese
 'He is looking for a woman who sells cheese.'

Central Asturian

- b. Ta buscando (a) una muyer que
 be.PRES.3SG:S search.GER DOM a woman that
 viende quesu
 sell.PRES.3SG:S cheese
 'He is looking for a woman who sells cheese.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Ta buscandu una mucyer que
 be.PRES.3SG:S search.GER a woman that
 viende quesu
 sell.PRES.3SG:S cheese
 'He is looking for a woman who sells cheese.'

(19) Standard Spanish

- a. Está buscando a una buena mujer
 be.PRES.3SG:S search.GER DOM a good woman
 que le haga feliz
 that 3SG:DO make.SUB.3SG:S happy
 'He is looking for a good woman who makes him happy.'

Central Asturian

- b. Ta buscando (a) una bona muyer
 be.PRES.3SG:S search.GER DOM a good woman
 que lu faiga feliz
 that 3SG:DO make.SUB.3SG:S happy
 'He is looking for a good woman who makes him happy.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Ta buscandu una bona mucyer
 be.PRES.3SG:S search.GER a good woman
 que fáiga-lu feliz
 that make.SUB.3SG:S-3SG:DO happy
 'He is looking for a good woman who makes him happy.'

On the one hand, it is of interest that Vaqueiru does not establish a difference between specific and non-specific objects regarding their object marking. Thus, unlike Standard Spanish and Central Asturian, neither specific nor non-specific indefinite direct objects are *a*-marked. On the other hand, the presence of the subjunctive in a relative clause is related to contexts where the referent cannot be identified. This assumption appears to be confirmed in examples (18–19)¹⁵ – including indicative and subjunctive mood respectively –, since the direct object in (18) has a specific interpretation and is *a*-marked in Standard Spanish and commonly in Central Asturian, while the direct object in (19) has the opposite properties and lies unmarked. This can be accounted for by the fact that an indefinite object has a non-specific interpretation when it accompanies an intensional predicate such as *buscar* 'search', *necesitar* 'need' or *querer* 'want' and there is a modal component, such as the subjunctive mood, which indicates referential opacity of the direct object.

3.4 Referentiality

Referentiality is a parameter that makes a distinction between a referential expression, which refers to a particular person in the world of discourse, and a

¹⁵ Example (17) could also be included in this section.

non-referential one, which refers to no particular person 'on stage'.¹⁶ The following example illustrates that, unlike Vaqueiru, Standard Spanish and Central Asturian show a strong tendency to exhibit DOM with referential direct objects:¹⁷

(20) Standard Spanish

- a. Un lobo atacó al hijo hace poco
 a wolf attack.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the son ago little
 'A wolf attacked his son recently.'

Central Asturian

- b. Un llobu atacó al fiu fai pocu
 a wolf attack.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the son ago little
 'A wolf attacked his son recently.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Un llobu atacóu ¹⁸el ficyu fai poucu
 a wolf attack.PAST.3SG:S the son ago little
 'A wolf attacked his son recently.'

16 Although it is generally acknowledged that specificity and referentiality are two closely related concepts, it is possible to find examples that prove that referentiality does not necessarily entails specificity and vice versa (Birner and Ward, 1998: 80; Kratzer, 1998: 67; among others). Here I use the concept of referentiality to distinguish between definite noun phrases.

17 The context for this example would be as follows:

- E.g. A: ¿Uiste algu de Pepín?
 hear.PAST.2SG:S something of Pepe
 'Do you know anything about Pepín? (lit. 'Did you hear anything about Pepe?')
 Fai muitu qui nun lu veu
 ago much that not 3SG:DO see.PRES.1SG:S
 'It has been a long time since I last saw him.'
- B: Sentí que pasóu-cyi algu
 feel.PAST.1SG:S that happen.PAST.3SG:S-3SG:IO something
 cunu llobu
 with+a wolf
 'I felt that he had a problem with a wolf' (lit. 'I felt that something had happened to him with a wolf')

18 Some native consultants chose to use DOM in this example, perhaps to avoid a possible ambiguity between subject and object.

Regarding non-referential expressions,¹⁹ the three varieties continue to show the same pattern as for referential objects, so non-referential objects receive DOM in Standard Spanish and Central Asturian but are not *a*-marked in Vaqueiru:

(21) Standard Spanish

- a. El lobo nunca atacó al hombre
 the wolf never attack.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the man
 por aquí
 around here
 ‘The wolf never attacked the man around here.’

Central Asturian

- b. El llobu nunca atacó el home
 the wolf never attack.PAST.3SG:S the man
 pequí
 around+here
 ‘The wolf never attacked the man around here.’

Vaqueiru

- c. El llobu na vida atacóu el home
 the wolf in+the life attack.PAST.3SG:S the man
 preiqué
 around.here
 ‘The wolf never attacked the man around here.’

3.5 *Anaphoricity*

Inspired by the ideas of Melis (1995) and Laca (2006),²⁰ I consider it relevant to mention the strong diachronic tendency of Spanish to mark personal pronouns²¹ over any other nominal phrases. Thus, with respect to anaphoricity, we can see that there is no Spanish variety and no context where a direct object realized through a personal pronoun without an *a*-marker could be grammatical:

19 Non-specific expressions (19) can also be viewed as being non-referential because they do not pick out any particular referent in the world.

20 The same idea is stressed in Lamiroy (2013) where DOM is shown to exist in French, but only with personal pronouns in the causative construction.

21 See also example (14).

(22) Standard Spanish

- a. La saqué a ella a bailar en
 3SG:DO ask.PAST.1SG:S DOM 3SG:DO to dance.INF in
 la fiesta
 the party
 'I led her onto the dance floor at the party.'

Central Asturian

- b. Saqué-la a ella a bailar na
 ask.PAST.1SG:3-3SG:DO DOM 3SG:DO to dance.INF in+the
 fiesta
 party
 'I led her onto the dance floor at the party.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Saqué-i-la a ella a bailar na
 ask.PAST.1SG:3-3SG:DO DOM 3SG:DO to dance.INF in+the
 fiesta
 party
 'I led her onto the dance floor at the party.'

Recall that there is, however, a difference regarding object marking in cases where the direct object is not realized syntactically through a personal pronoun. Thus, in broad terms, while Standard Spanish and Central Asturian tend to mark specific objects distinctively, in Vaqueiru only objects in the form of proper names appear to accept *a*-marking:

(23) Standard Spanish

- a. Estuvo halagando a Joaquina toda la noche
 be.PAST.3SG:S flatter.GER DOM Joaquina all the night
 'He was flattering Joaquina all night.'

Central Asturian

- b. Tubo falagando a Xuaca tola nueche
 be.PAST.3SG:S flatter.GER DOM Joaquina all+the night
 'He was flattering Joaquina all night.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Tubo falagandu (a) Xuaca tola nuéite
 be.PAST.3SG:S flatter.GER (DOM) Joaquina all+the night
 'He was flattering Joaquina all night.'

(24) Standard Spanish

- a. Estuvo halagando a la chica toda la noche
 be.PAST.3SG:S flatter.GER DOM the girl all the night
 'He was flattering the girl all night.'

Central Asturian

- b. Tubo falagando a la moza tola nueche
 be.PAST.3SG:S flatter.GER DOM the girl all+the night
 'He was flattering the girl all night.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Tubo falagandu la moza tola nuéite
 be.PAST.3SG:S flatter.GER the girl all+the night
 'He was flattering the girl all night.'

3.6 *Verbal Semantics*

The relationship between the DOM system and different verb classes has not gone unnoticed ever since Bello (1847), Pottier (1968) and Fernández Ramírez (1986). These works, which contain important evidence with respect to the differences between verbs in terms of the distribution of DOM in Spanish, subsequently inspired a number of authors, such as Pensado (1995), Delbecque (1999), Weissenrieder (1991), Kliffer (1995), Torrego (1999), Company (2002), Laca (2006), García (2007), and von Heusinger and Kaiser (2007, 2011), who have shown more recently that, in addition to the combination of semantic and discourse-pragmatic features, the diachronic development of DOM in Spanish may also have been influenced by the meaning of the predicate. The concept of verbal semantics is generally considered to include two main properties:²² the aforementioned animacy requirement made by the predicate on the object and the affectedness²³ of the object.

3.6.1 Animacy Restriction

Different classes of verbs can be established on the basis of whether they impose any restriction on the animacy of their object or not. Thus, there are verbs

22 I am only considering the semantic factors commonly referred to as animacy requirement imposed by the predicate on the direct object and semantic affectedness of the direct object and therefore discarding others such as telicity, agentivity, and event quantification, owing to the difficulty that I encountered when gathering examples against which to test these factors. Regarding the effects of secondary predication on the use of DOM, see example (31).

23 This concept reveals a contrast between affected objects, which somehow suffer the event denoted by the predicate, and effected objects, which can be created or not, but their existence is not affected by the situation (Lehmann, 1991:21).

such as *matar* 'kill' or *herir* 'wound, injure', which always require animate objects, as well as verbs like *besar* 'kiss' or *querer* 'love', which have no restriction with respect to animacy and therefore may, to a greater or lesser extent, admit both animate and inanimate objects, and, finally, verbs such as *conocer* 'know' and, especially, *tener* 'have got'²⁴, which tend to favour inanimate objects. In a verb like *matar* 'kill', which prototypically selects animate direct objects, DOM is therefore more likely to apply, while a verb like *tener* 'have got' is more likely to lack the *a*-marking for many speakers:

(25) Standard Spanish

- a. Voy a matar a ese hombre
go.PRES.1SG:S to kill.INF DOM that man
'I am going to kill that man.'

Central Asturian

- b. Boi matar a esi home
go.PRES.1SG:S kill.INF DOM that man
'I am going to kill that man.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Bóu matar esi home
go.PRES.1SG:S kill.INF that man
'I am going to kill that man.'

(26) Standard Spanish

- a. Besó a su hija en la mejilla
kiss.PAST.3SG:S DOM her daughter on the cheek
'She kissed her daughter on the cheek.'

Central Asturian

- b. Besó a la so fia nel carriellu
kiss.PAST.3SG:S DOM the her daughter on+the cheek
'She kissed her daughter on the cheek.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Besóu la súa ficya na carina
kiss.PAST.3SG:S the her daughter on+the face
'She kissed her daughter on the cheek.'

24 See example (31).

(27) Standard Spanish

- a. Conozco a tu abuelo muy bien
 know.PRES.1SG:S DOM your grandfather very well
 'I know your grandfather very well.'

Central Asturian

- b. Conozo al to güelu mucho bien
 know.PRES.1SG:S DOM+theyour grandfather much well
 'I know your grandfather very well.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Conozo el tóu buelu muito bien
 know.PRES.1SG:S the your grandfather much well
 'I know your grandfather very well.'

Although some examples revealing the influence of animacy restriction on Spanish occur in the literature on the subject (von Heusinger and Kaiser, 2011: 612), it does not seem to be relevant in Vaqueiru since none of the direct objects in the examples given above have an *a*-marking. Central Asturian appears to behave like Standard Spanish in this respect.

3.6.2 Affectedness

The influence of the agent and the event on the patient, commonly referred to as affectedness, has also been proposed as a factor triggering DOM in Spanish. Affectedness was one of the key parameters of Hopper and Thompson's (1980) Transitivity Scale and a central notion for defining direct objecthood (Anderson, 1971; Dowty, 1991; Fillmore, 1968; Jackendoff, 1990; among others). It is suggested in the literature on the subject that affectedness should be understood as a change brought about in the patient by the action expressed by the predicate and should include two dimensions: the domain it applies to (existence, location, sensation) and the degree to which it applies (total, partial, minimal). Some scholars, such as Pottier (1968), Pensado (1995), Torrego (1999), Naess (2004, 2007), and von Heusinger and Kaiser (2007), highlight the importance of affectedness in DOM distribution.

According to the indexing approach represented by Hopper and Thompson (1980) and Naess (2004, 2007), which assumes that the function of DOM is to highlight highly individuated objects (i.e. animate and definite) as they are found in prototypical transitive clauses, direct objects high on the prominence scales tend to get DOM more often than objects that are low on those scales.

The next three examples (28–30) include three different predicates, namely: 1) *matar* ‘kill’ (1st. class), which requires an animate object that suffers a total effect by means of the action expressed by the predicate, 2) *encontrar* ‘find’ and *buscar* ‘search for’ (2nd. class), whose objects are only partially affected, and *tener* ‘have got’ (3rd. class), whose degree of affectation is minimal:

a. Juan mató a su vecino con una navaja
 Juan kill.PAST.3SG:S DOM his neighbour with a
 pocket.knife
 'Juan killed his neighbour with a pocket knife.'

b. Xuan mató al so vecín cuna
 Juan kill.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the his neighbour with+a
 navaya
 pocket.knife
 'Juan killed his neighbour with a pocket knife.'

c. Xuan matou el sóu vecín cuna
 Juan kill.PAST.3SG:S the his neighbour with+a
 navacya
 pocket.knife
 ‘Juan killed his neighbour with a pocket knife.’

a. Gerardo encontró a su hermano en la cuadra
Gerardo find.PAST.3SG:S DOM his brother in the stable
'Gerardo found his brother in the stable.'

Central Asturian

- b. Gerardo atopó al so hermanu na corte
 Gerardo find.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the his brother in+the stable
 'Gerardo found his brother in the stable.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Gerardo atopóu el sóu harmanu na corte
 Gerardo find.PAST.3SG:S the his brother in+the stable
 'Gerardo found his brother in the stable.'

(30) Standard Spanish

- a. Domingo estuvo buscando a su vecino
 Domingo be.PAST.3SG:S search.GER DOM his neighbour
 por el monte
 in the mountain
 'Domingo was looking for his neighbour in the mountain.'

Central Asturian

- b. Domingo tubo buscando al so vecín
 Domingo be.PAST.3SG:S search.GER DOM+the his neighbour
 pel monte
 in+the mountain
 'Domingo was looking for his neighbour in the mountain.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Domingo tubo buscandu el sóu vecín
 Domingo be.PAST.3SG:S search.GER DOM his neighbour
 pul monte
 in+the mountain
 'Domingo was looking for his neighbour in the mountain.'

(31) Standard Spanish

- a. Benigna tiene al marido enfermo hoy
 Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S DOM+the husband ill today
 'Benigna has her husband ill today.'

Central Asturian

- b. Benina tien al mariu enfermu güey
 Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S DOM+the husband ill today
 'Benigna has her husband ill today.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Benina tien el mariu enfermu güey
Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S the husband ill today
'Benigna has her husband ill today.'²⁵

Apparently, none of these examples supports the assumption that the semantic property of predicates is relevant for the distribution of the DOM system in Vaqueiru. However, before discarding the influence of affectedness on the distribution of DOM, we should investigate the effect that the combination of these two semantic parameters – namely affectedness and animacy requirement – might have on the DOM system. To this end, firstly, I have taken two examples including the predicates *herir* 'wound, injure' and *querer* 'love', which always select animate objects, the difference between them lying in the degree of affectedness on the object:

(32) Standard Spanish

- a. Ese hombre hirió a su vecino con un
that man wound.PAST.3SG:S DOM his neighbour with a
palo
stick
'That man wounded his neighbour with a stick.'

25 I have chosen an example of *tener* 'have got' followed by a secondary predication structure because it allows us to observe a difference in the use of DOM between Vaqueiru, on the one hand, and Central Asturian and Spanish, on the other. Otherwise, no such difference exists:

E.g. Standard Spanish

- a. Benigna tiene un buen marido
Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S a good husband
'Benigna has a good husband.'

Central Asturian

- b. Benina tien un bon mariu
Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S a good husband
'Benigna has a good husband.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Benina tien un bon mariu
Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S a good husband
'Benigna has a good husband.'

Central Asturian

- b. Esi home firió al so vecín cunu
 that man wound.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the his neighbour with+a
 palu
 stick
 'That man wounded his neighbour with a stick.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Esi home mancáu el so vecín cunu
 that man wound.PAST.3SG:S the his neighbour with+a
 palu
 stick
 'That man wounded his neighbour with a stick.'

(33) Standard Spanish

- a. Ese niño quiere mucho a su padre
 that boy love.PRES.3SG:S much DOM his father
 'That boy loves his father very much.'

Central Asturian

- b. Esi gúaḥe quier munchoal so padre
 that boy love.PRES.3SG:S much DOM+the his father
 'That boy loves his father very much.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Esi párbulo quier muitu el sóu pai
 that boy love.PRES.3SG:S much the his father
 'That boy loves his father very much.'

Secondly, I have included two other examples containing the predicates *quemar* 'burn' and *tener* 'have got', which are claimed to require prototypically inanimate objects. Again, the difference between these predicates lies in the degree of affectedness on the object:

(34) Standard Spanish

- a. ¿Quemáste a este niño con el mechero?
 burn.PAST.2SG:S DOM this boy with the lighter
 'Did you burn this boy with the lighter?'

Central Asturian

- b. ¿Quemáste a esti guaḥe col chisqueru?
 burn.PAST.2SG:S DOM this boy with+the lighter
 'Did you burn this boy with the lighter?'

Vaqueiru

- c. ¿Queimáste esti nenu cul chisqueru?
 burn.PAST.2SG:S this boy with+the lighter
 'Did you burn this boy with the lighter?'

(35) Standard Spanish

- a. Benigna tiene a la hija en casa hoy
 Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S DOM the daughter in home today
 'Benigna has her daughter at home today.'

Central Asturian

- b. Benina tien a la fia en casa güey
 Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S DOM the daughter in home today
 'Benigna has her daughter at home today.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Benina tien la ficya en casa güey
 Benigna have.PRES.3SG:S the daughter in home today
 'Benigna has her daughter at home today.'

Once the combination of animacy requirement and affectedness has been examined and, without negating the evidence found by former studies showing that these factors do affect the DOM system in Spanish, our data show that there is no influence of verbal semantics on the distribution of DOM in Vaqueiru.

3.7 *Verbal Conjugation*

Once the relationship between DOM and the semantic properties of the referents and verbs have been examined, it may also be appropriate to test another option to explain the variance shown, especially, by proper names. This further option involves the effect of the verbal conjugation or, more specifically, the way that the verb changes to show grammatical information regarding person:

(36) Standard Spanish

- a. ¿Viste a Elena en La Campona?
 see.PAST.2SG:S DOM Elena at the Campona
 'Did you see Elena at The Campona?'

Central Asturian

- b. ¿Vísti a Lena na Campona?
 see.PAST.2SG:S DOM Elena at+the Campona
 'Did you see Elena at The Campona?'

Vaqueiru

- c. ¿Vísti (a) Lena na Campona?
 see.PAST.2SG:S (DOM) Elena at+the Campona
 'Did you see Elena at The Campona?'

(37) Standard Spanish

- a. Juan vio a Elena en La Campona
 Juan see.PAST.3SG:S DOM Elena at the Campona
 'Juan saw Helen at The Campona.'

Central Asturian

- b. Xuan vió a Lena na Campona
 Juan see.PAST.3SG:S DOM Elena at+the Campona
 'Juan saw Helen at The Campona.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Xuan vióu (a) Lena na Campona
 Juan see.PAST.3SG:S (DOM) Elena at+the Campona
 'Juan saw Elena at The Campona.'

Although my consultants find both examples (36c) and (37c), in their two versions, namely with and without DOM, grammatically correct²⁶, and it is extremely hard for them to decide if the examples sound more natural with or without overt special marking, they seem to show a stronger preference for *a*-marking in (37c) than in (36c). Further evidence for this is that when they were requested to examine the presence or absence of DOM in each example but changing the person of the verb, they appeared to favour the presence of the

26 As discussed in reference to example (11c), the presence of the marker *a* preceding animate proper names in Vaqueiru could be due to the influence of Standard Spanish.

a-marker with the third person singular form such as *vi(ó)u* 's/he saw'. Nevertheless, the fact that they did not appear to show any reluctance to use it with the first person forms *ví* 'I saw' and *viémos* 'we saw', the second person forms *vísti* 'you saw' and *viéstis* 'you all saw', and the third person plural form *viénun* 'they saw' seems to indicate that the influence of this parameter on the use of DOM in this variety is not particularly relevant.

3.8 Topicality

Pragmatic devices such as topicalization and focalization, which affect the positioning of constituents within the sentence, obviously relate information structure to syntax. The idea that the information status of the direct object referent may have been the source of DOM systems has been repeatedly proposed in Romance linguistics (Niculescu, 1959; Rohlf, 1971; among others). On the one hand, it is a well-known fact that only the referents that possess topical properties are likely to accept dislocation (Lambrecht, 1994: 182; Foley, 2007: 443) and, in effect, independently of its semantic properties, DOM is always obligatory when the direct object is dislocated. In accordance with this assumption, some authors, such as Laca (1995), Pensado (1995), Torrego (1999), Escandell-Vidal (2009) and Iemmolo (2010), argue that it is possible to note an interesting correlation between topicalization and DOM, detected through the dislocation of the direct object at the left or right edge of the sentence, as is illustrated in the following examples in Standard Spanish:

- (38) a. Todos vieron (a) ese perro tumbado
 everybody see.PAST.3PL:S (DOM) that dog lying
 'Everybody saw that dog lying (on the ground).'
- b. *Ese perro , todos lo vieron tumbado
 that dog , everybody 3SG:DO see.PAST.3PL:S lying
 'That dog, everybody saw it lying (on the ground).'
- c. A ese perro , todos lo vieron
 DOM that dog , everybody 3SG:DO see.PAST.3PL:S
 tumbado
 lying
 'That dog, everybody saw it lying (on the ground).'

In Standard Spanish all the objects that move to a dislocated position, whether preposed or postposed, appear to accept DOM. This correlation between topicalization and DOM, which confirms the hypothesis that DOM in Spanish arose from the topicalization of direct objects (Pensado, 1995), is especially blatant

in Vaqueiru, as evidenced from the comparison of unmarked contexts (39c), where direct objects lie unmarked, and dislocated constructions (40c), where DOM is compulsory:

(39) Standard Spanish

- a. De vez en cuando veo a su hijo
 of time in when see.PRES.1SG:S DOM his son
 'I sometimes see his son.'

Central Asturian

- b. Dacuando veo al so fíu
 occasionally see.PRES.1SG:S DOM+the his son
 'I sometimes see his son.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Dacuando veu el sóu fícyu
 occasionally see.PRES.1SG:S the his son
 'I sometimes see his son.'

(40) Standard Spanish

- a. A su hijo , lo/le²⁷ veo todos los días
 DOM his son , 3SG:DO see.PRES.1SG:S all the days
 'His son, I see him every day.'

Central Asturian

- b. Al so fíu , veo-lu tolos díes
 DOM+the his son , see.PRES.1SG:S-3SG:DO all+the days
 'His son, I see him every day.'

Vaqueiru

- c. Al sóu fícyu , véu-lu tolos díes
 DOM+the his son , see.PRES.1SG:S-3SG:DO all+the days
 'His son, I see him every day.'

27 The Asturian dialects do not exhibit 'leísmo' – a dialectal phenomenon involving the use of the indirect object pronoun *le* instead of the (standard) masculine direct object pronoun *lu*, especially when the direct object refers to a male person -, which is an option in Standard Spanish with animate specific objects.

As can be observed in (40), the pragmatic device of dislocation – a topic-marking construction – seems to favour DOM in the three language varieties under study.

On the other hand, in an attempt to delve deeper into the correlation between topicality and DOM in Vaqueiru, it seems necessary to examine the pragmatic properties of referents in order to check if topical and focal objects are marked distinctively in this language. This variety provides consistent evidence that focal objects do not generally exhibit DOM:

(41)

A:

¿Áu

tá

el

tóu

harmanu?

where

be.PRES.3SG:S

the

your

brother

'Where is your brother?'

Unda

nun

vinu

(a)

cumer

yet

not

come.PAST.3SG:S

(to)

eat.INF

'He didn't come to eat yet.'

B:

Subi(ó)u

céu

a

La

Campona

ya

toi

go.up.PAST.3SG:S

early

to

the

Campona

and

be.PRES.1SG:S

seguru

que

si

,

el

míu

harmanu

,vióu

Lena

sure

that

if

,

the

my

brother

,see.PAST.3SG:S

Elena

allí

tará

falando

cun

ella

there

be.FUT.3SG:S

talk.GER

with

3SG:PO

'He went up on The Campona early and I am sure that if, my brother, saw Elena there, he will be talking to her.'

[...]

,

el

míu

harmanu

vióu

Lena

allí

[...]

[...]

,

the

my

brother

see.PAST.3SG:S

Elena

there

[...]

'[...], my brother, he saw Elena there [...]

TOPIC

FOCUS

In (41), the subject *el míu harmanu* functions as the topic of the utterance and occurs in a preverbal dislocated position. Likewise, the direct object *Lena*, which functions as the focus in this context, does not carry DOM. This situation appears to indicate that, when objects function as foci appearing after the main topic, it is not necessary to mark them distinctively, possibly because of their unmarked (prototypical) status. This pattern is thus consistent with the situation predicted by Givón (1983), who argues that subjects are likely to be topics, while objects tend to correlate with focal positions.

Although topical objects in Vaqueiru occur preferably in a left-detached position (e.g. left dislocation triggered by topicalization, as in (40)), they may

and, consequently, compete for agency. The absence of differential marking might lead to greater ambiguity since the expression *Vi(ó)u el mío harmanu Lena* could have two different interpretations: a) *El mío harmanu vi(ó)u Lena*²⁸ 'My brother saw Helen' or b) *Lena vi(ó)u el mío harmanu* 'Helen saw my brother'. In principle, the first option would be more natural since the canonical word order in this variety corresponds to verb + subject + object²⁹, but the fact that a constituent can move to any postverbal position for pragmatic purposes means that the latter option could also be a possibility and, consequently, an additional strategy such as grammatical marking may be required in order for the correct interpretation of the grammatical relations.³⁰ My native consultants therefore appear to favour DOM especially in cases where the order of constituents is altered, a fact that could add more ambiguity to the construction leading to confusion in terms of the understanding of the communicative event. In summary, word order does not appear to be sufficient to bring about a clear distinction between agent and patient in cases where role distribution is not evident, hence the use of DOM is required to avoid structural ambiguity.

This necessity for clarification has caused some authors like Díez (1844), Brauns (1909), Hills (1920), Ramsey (1956), Solé and Solé (1977), Butt (1988), Croft (1988), Comrie (1989), Aissen (2003), and Iemmolo (2010) among others, to postulate that the distribution of DOM is a functional device with a

28 Recall however that we found, throughout this paper, examples in Vaqueiru, such as (11c), (15c), and (23c), where a direct object realized by a proper name can appear with or without an *a*-marker. In principle, it would seem plausible to account for this variation by assuming that, as in other varieties, because of contact with Standard Spanish, there is currently a growing tendency to *a*-mark animate proper names in Vaqueiru.

29 This order would normally appear in a sentence-focus construction where the entire clause is focused, that is, everything is asserted and there is no presupposition. These sentences may start a story or a conversation and respond to the question *Qué pasóu?* 'What happened?':

E.g. A: ¿Qué pasóu?
what happen.PAST.3SG:S
'What happened?'

B: Vi(ó)u Xuan al mío harmanu anuéite
see.PAST.3SG:S Juan DOM+the my brother yesterday
'Juan saw my brother yesterday.'

30 When asked about a possible variant of example (42) showing vso order, my consultants seem to agree on the use of DOM for the sake of clarification:

E.g. Vi(ó)u a Lena el mío harmanu
see.PAST.3SG:S DOM Elena the my brother
na Campona anuéite [...]
at+the Campona yesterday [...]
'My brother saw Elena at The Campona yesterday [...].'

distinguishing function, namely that it is a procedure used to disambiguate the object from the subject in contexts where the object has prototypical subject properties (Keenan, 1976). An *a*-marked direct object is not a prototypical member of this group since it has the potential properties of subjects, such as agency, animacy, topicality, active intervention in the event, etc. Consequently, the competition of agentivity between the participants in the event, that is, the need to make the subject and object distinctive when the object has subject-like properties seems to play a crucial role in the marking of postverbal objects. Examples like (40), (41) and (42) therefore appear to show that both ideas – the role of the topicality factor and the distinguishing function of DOM – can thus be connected if we could claim that the disambiguating / distinguishing function is only at work when there are two potential agents in a sentence.

However, a comparison between examples (41) and (42) could also reveal that the need for DOM to signal that the relevant direct objects are atypical in that they are topical could also be understood as a way to enhance the contrast between topical and non-topical elements – rather than to distinguish between subjects and objects with similar referential properties-, which would be consistent with Dalrymple and Nikolaeva's (2011) claim that marked objects in DOM languages are often topical, while unmarked objects are non-topical and, consequently, this grammatical phenomenon serve to highlight similarities between subjects (commonly functioning as the primary topic) and topical objects (the secondary topic) as opposed to focal objects (the focus).

Sentences with both a subject and an object NP are extremely rare in natural discourse. This, along with the fact that participants tend to occur in the form of clitics or dislocated NPs once they are introduced to the discourse, makes it very difficult to find examples that allow a comparison between topical and focal objects in terms of the behaviour they exhibit with respect to the use of DOM. A further instance of an object functioning as a secondary topic could be illustrated by the following example:

- (43) A: ¿Uiste algu de Pepín?
 hear.PAST.2SG:S something of Pepe
 'Do you know anything about Pepín?' (lit. 'Did you hear anything
 about Pepe?')
- Fai muito qui nun lu veu
 ago much that not 3SG:DO see.PRES.1SG:S
 'It has been a long time since I last saw him.'

B: Sentí que pasóu-cyi algu
 feel.PAST.1SG:S tha happen.PAST.3SG:S-3SG:IO something
 cunu llobu
 with+a wolf
 'I felt that he had a problem with a wolf.' (lit. 'I felt that something
 had happened to him with a wolf.')

C: Un llobu atacóu al home³¹ a poucu
 a wolf attack.PAST.3SG:S DOM+the man ago little
 'A wolf attacked the man recently.'
 MAIN SECONDARY
 TOPIC TOPIC

This example lends itself to be analyzed in both of the two approaches described above. On the one hand, following the discriminatory approach, the fact that the object *el home* is *a*-marked can be accounted for by arguing that it has the typical semantic and pragmatic properties of a subject (e.g. animate, definite, specific, and topical) and, as the subject *un llobu* is indefinite and therefore a non-prototypical subject, it is necessary to reflect the marked status of the object – definiteness and animacy are marked properties for objects (Aissen, 2003: 438) – in order to distinguish the two arguments. On the other hand, in line with Dalrymple and Nikolaeva's (2011) account of DOM, the object *el home* receives explicit grammatical marking because it functions as a secondary topic, and not as a focus – the function of DOM is to highlight similarities between topical elements.

In any case, whether we understand DOM as a way to differentiate between subject and object in cases where the role distribution is not clear or a way to highlight similarities between subjects and topical objects, as topics tend to be grammatically marked no matter what their grammatical function (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva, 2011: 167), it seems clear, then, that topicality appears to play an

31 Some native speakers, however, think that this example may sound more natural if a third person singular clitic is attached to the verb, which would entail treating the constituent *al home* as a vocative functioning as a dislocated topic, separated from the other clausal constituents by an intonation break:

E.g. Un llobu atacóu-lu , al home , fai
 a wolf attack.PAST.3SG:S-3SG:DO , DOM+the man , ago
 poucu
 little
 'A wolf attacked him, the poor man, recently.'

important role in the assignment of DOM – as well as other related morpho-syntactic phenomena such as clitic doubling or, in Spanish, ‘leísmo’.

4 Summary

Now that we have examined the behaviour of DOM, we can summarize the differences between Standard Spanish, Central Asturian and Vaqueiru in terms of the presence or absence of the marker *a* in direct objects as follows:

TABLE 1 Behaviour of DOM with respect to pragmatic and semantic features

	<div><div>+DOM</div><div>←————→</div><div>-DOM</div></div>
ANIMACY:	<div>human animate ←———— non-human animate —————→ inanimate</div>
DEFINITENESS:	<div><div>Vaqu</div>definite NP ←————→ indefinite NP<div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
SPECIFICITY:	<div><div>Vaqu</div>specific indefinite NP ←————→ non-specific indefinite NP<div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
REFERENTIALITY:	<div><div>Vaqu</div>+ referential ←————→ - referential<div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
ANAPHORICITY:	<div>personal pronoun ←———— proper name —————→ NP<div>Vaqu</div><div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
ANIMACY REQ. on O:	<div>predicate requiring an animate O ↔ predicate requiring an inanimate O<div>Vaqu</div><div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
AFFECTEDNESS of O:	<div>+ affected ←————→ - affected<div>Vaqu</div><div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
VERBAL CONJUGATION:	<div>3rd. person ←———— 1st. person —————→ 2nd. person<div>Vaqu</div><div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>
TOPICALITY:	<div>+ topical ←————→ - topical<div>Vaqu</div><div>CAst</div><div>SS</div></div>

I have marked the transition points in each parameter for Standard Spanish, Central Asturian and Vaqueiru respectively – in order to clarify where they are positioned in each linguistic variety. Thus, for each variety, while categories situated to the right of the line marking transition point do not generally exhibit DOM, those appearing to the left of the cut-off point are likely to show this special morphological marking. Although it is not easy to determine the

correct transition point because of the geographical, social and personal variability in the use of this grammatical device within each language and the difficulty in producing grammaticality judgements by speakers³², this comparative analysis represents an attempt to show where the DOM cut-off point may be located in each variety.

Interestingly, my findings reveal that the use of DOM in Vaqueiru is similar to Old Spanish (García and van Putte, 1995; Melis, 1995; Pensado, 1995; Laca, 2006; Aissen, 2003; and Escandell-Vidal, 2009), since only topicalized objects (40c), personal pronouns (14c and 22c) and, very commonly, human proper names (11c, 15c, 23c, 36c, 37c and 42) are obligatorily marked by the object marker *a*.³³ Regarding the other parameters, the use of DOM in Vaqueiru does not seem to be influenced by animacy (8c – 13c), definiteness (16c and 17c), specificity (18c and 19c), referentiality (20c and 21c), animacy requirement on the object (25c, 26c, 27c, 32c, 33c, 34c, and 35c), or affectedness of the object (28c – 35c), since objects are generally not *a*-marked.

Central Asturian and Standard Spanish are much more similar. They reflect the historic evolution of DOM that leads to the increasing presence of DOM with direct objects along all the hierarchies. In Standard Spanish, except for the animacy (8a – 13a) and specificity (18a and 19a) scales, where the evolution of the influence of this device is still in its infancy, all other criteria favour the use of DOM. The cut-off point for DOM on these scales is now somewhere in the slots for inanimate objects and non-specific indefinite NPs. Note, however, that, for some speakers, DOM has come to affect even the elements marked the lowest in every parameter, namely, definiteness (17a and 19a), referentiality (21a), anaphoricity (24a), animacy requirement on the object (27a, 34a, and 35a), affectedness of the object (31a, 34, and 35a). Finally, in Standard Spanish DOM becomes obligatory with all dislocated objects (38a and c, 39a, and 40a) and both topical and focal objects are generally *a*-marked in modern Standard Spanish.

DOM in Central Asturian is somewhat more restrained since its use not only depends on the parameters of animacy (8b – 13b) and specificity (18b and 19b), but also on the factor of definiteness (16b and 17b). As my data show, the elements with the lowest features in each of these parameters have not yet been affected by this grammatical device. We could assume, therefore, that the transition point for DOM in these hierarchies is now somewhere in the slots for non-human animates, non-specific indefinite NPs, and indefinite NPs. The

32 This fact is especially significant in Central Asturian (9b, 13b, 17b, and 18b) and Vaqueiru (11c, 15c, 20c, 23c, 36c, and 37c) when compared to Standard Spanish (38a), which may imply the current instability shown by the former Asturian varieties, mainly due to the increasing influence that Standard Spanish is currently having on their DOM systems.

33 A small number of native consultants also made use of DOM with kinship terms, especially in the examples (20c), (26c), (29c), (33c), and (39c).

parameters that do not appear to influence DOM in Central Asturian are referentiality (20b and 21b), anaphoricity (24b), animacy requirement on the object (27b, 34b, and 35b) and affectedness of the object (31b, 34b, and 35b), since objects are *α*-marked regardless of the variability they show in terms of these semantic and pragmatic properties. Finally, this variety behaves analogously as Standard Spanish with respect to the influence of topicality on the use of DOM (39b and 40b).

As is illustrated in Table 2 there is a crucial difference in the object marking between the three varieties of Spanish. The chart indicates which factors are the most important in triggering DOM:

TABLE 2 Factors determining DOM in Standard Spanish, Central Asturian and Vaqueiru

DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING	SPANISH	ASTURIAN	VAQUEIRU
Animacy	✓	✓	X
Definiteness	X	✓	X
Specificity	✓	✓	X
Referentiality	X	X	X
Anaphoricity	X	X	✓
Topicality	X	X	✓
Verbal semantics:	X	X	X
Animacy requirement of the predicate on the DO	*X	X	X
Affectedness of the DO	*X	X	X
Verbal conjugation	X	X	X

Standard Spanish, Central Asturian, and Vaqueiru all exhibit DOM, but in the latter its presence is much less significant and it is used under different conditions. Vaqueiru mainly differs from Standard Spanish and Central Asturian in that only two parameters, namely anaphoricity and topicality appear to determine its presence. Central Asturian seems to represent an intermediary stage between Standard Modern Spanish and Vaqueiru since, although DOM appears to occur in Central Asturian in exactly the same contexts as in Standard Spanish, we observe a greater variation regarding the factors of animacy, definiteness, and specificity. This is indicative that its DOM system could have behaved in a manner similar to Vaqueiru at an earlier stage. Finally, it stands to reason that the two Asturian varieties had a different degree of contact with Standard Modern Spanish. As a consequence, the influence they underwent with respect to the DOM pattern also affected them to a different extent. This in turn allows us

to observe traces of the evolutionary development that this grammatical domain has undergone in the history of the Spanish language.³⁴

My comparative findings suggest that, very early on, only dislocated objects, which are highly topical, object personal pronouns and, to a great extent, object animate proper names, which are highly anaphorical as well as topical, carried obligatory DOM in the three language varieties under study. This in turn suggests, on the one hand, that the distribution of DOM in Spanish cannot be accounted for by a single parameter and, on the other, topicality, independently of whether it is manifested syntactically through dislocation or not³⁵, is crucial for DOM.

5 Language Contact

The link between Vaqueiru and Old Spanish, an early form of the Spanish language spoken from the 10th. century until roughly the beginning of the 15th. century, may not be so surprising, as the enforced replacement of Asturian with Spanish (i.e. the Castilian variety) as the official language of administration in the region of Asturias did not begin until the 14th. century.³⁶ Since this moment the development of the Asturian language has run parallel to that of Spanish, to the point that Asturian has become very similar to Spanish, showing relevant distinctive properties mostly in terms of lexis and pronunciation. Nevertheless, despite the imposition of Castilian as the official language and of the higher social strata, Asturian was maintained in spoken registers, especially in the most rural and remote areas of the region, where a great number of different autochthonous Asturian dialects gradually arose ranging from those being more influenced by Spanish to those which showed only a minimal influence. Within the second group we can classify the Vaqueiru dialect, which has been able to retain most of its distinctiveness until very recently thanks to their almost complete cultural isolation.

The reasons for this isolation were manifold. One important reason was the deep-rooted segregation suffered by the Vaqueiros de Alzada from the *xaldos* or 'settled farmers living in the neighbouring villages', the clergy and local

34 I acknowledge that the fact that synchronic comparison between language varieties may reflect the diachronic evolution in one and the same language (Spanish in this case) may not receive general acceptance. This is the main hypothesis argued for by Carlier, De Mulder and Lamiroy (2012).

35 The conversation in Vaqueiru illustrated in page 23, for example, includes an example (42) showing a topicalized object, *a Lena*, which is neither preposed nor postposed.

36 According to Metzeltin (2001), there is written evidence of a clear difference between Asturian and Castilian in all aspects of grammar as early as the 13th. century.

authorities. As consequences of this discrimination were illiteracy, endogamy, absence of social relations outside their environment, the stigmatization of the local linguistic variety as a deviation from the norm, etc., which continued well into the 1950s. It was quite some time before this time that, owing to a strong population growth and the widespread poverty – especially after the Spanish Civil War –, adult male members of this ethnic group had to leave their families behind and emigrate either to other Vaqueiru communities or as far as Madrid or Barcelona, the two biggest urban centres, in search of employment. This was for years practically the only link of this community with the outside world. The influence of the contact was, however, minimal, as the migrants only returned home for a few days in summer – some being even less fortunate – only being able to communicate with their wives and parents by mail for the remainder of the year. Also of note is the geographical location of the Vaqueiros de Alzada, namely the remote and otherwise inaccessible mountain regions of Western Asturias. Another reason was the special attachment this ethnic group had to their ancient customs and traditional lifestyle like cattle breeding and semi-nomadism, which kept them busy all day herding their cattle from one highland pasture or *braña* to another according to season, with no time to build relationships with other groups of people. Finally, it is worthy highlighting the extremely slow introduction of technology in this community. Only from the late 1970s onwards, powered machinery such as tractors, and much later harvesters, etc., helped to do the work formerly performed by people and animals, massively increased farm output and dramatically changed the way these people lived, allowing them to give up semi-nomadism and to devote more time to family life and social relationships. The first cars were firstly introduced in the early 1980s by a second wave of migrants, this time married adults who were already fully settled in the city life and used to bring their families with them to spend their summer holidays in the *brañas*. The introduction of car was undoubtedly crucial to create a wider cultural openness in this community, as it allowed its members to know areas beyond the neighbouring villages.

Although it is still possible today to find people in this ethnic group who has no television or radio at home and that even those who can use these means of communication tend to choose the TV and radio stations that pay more attention to local issues, predominantly broadcasting in a local Asturian or even Galician linguistic variety, the linguistic situation has changed considerably. There are very few proficient speakers of the Vaqueiru variety who do not show any influence from Spanish nowadays and those who are left are elderly people aged 80 or older. The majority of the population in this small rural area now speaks a mixed variety of language and, despite the considerable efforts that are being currently made throughout Asturias to preserve and revitalize the local varieties of the regional language, there appears to be a growing desire on the part of the

speakers, especially youngsters, to distance themselves from the rural world and its characteristic speech, which is still stigmatized by urban speakers. Thus, the current situation resembles that of the other rural areas in Asturias where the prolonged contact between Spanish and Asturian has led to several degrees of linguistic interference manifested by the coexistence of Asturian features with the corresponding Spanish ones in the language variety spoken.

More specifically, the distinct historical development of Central Asturian and Vaqueiru may account for the difference between these varieties in terms of the use of DOM: while Central Asturian gradually developed a full DOM system in contact with Spanish, Vaqueiru did not until relatively recently, probably because of its isolation.

Finally, it is interesting to note the distinct development of object marking in a Western Iberian Romance languages, namely Asturian, Galician or Portuguese. The evolution of DOM in Old Portuguese was, analogously as in Vaqueiru, very similar to Old Spanish. After the Middle Ages, its use considerably increased and, unexpectedly, from the 18th. century on it decreased so much that today it is very limited, becoming totally absent in the spoken language (Delille, 1970; Schäfer-Prieß, 2002). By contrast, the use of DOM in Asturian has always shown a continuous increase, parallel to that of Standard Spanish. This difference may be accounted for by arguing that, whereas the emergence of an own national and linguistic identity in Portugal in the 18th. century favoured linguistic divergence (Döhla, 2014), the relative weakness of nationalism in the region of Asturias may have paved the way for linguistic convergence in terms of the evolution of DOM in these two neighbour languages.

6 Conclusion

Many studies have linked the historical evolution of DOM in Spanish with the source of the *a*-marker³⁷, that is the information status of the direct object referent, and the original function of the construction under study, namely to differentiate subjects from objects, but the conditions that determine the use of DOM (as well as clitic doubling) are in the process of evolution and it is, therefore, very difficult to gauge cut and dried conditions for *a*-marking in Spanish. Despite the asystematic nature of DOM in modern-day Standard Spanish, one possible generalization is that DOM is currently based on semantic and pragmatic factors combined with individual variation in the discourse.

37 Latin constructions where the preposition *ad* serves to introduce an 'as-for' topic are considered the source of the differential object marker *a* (Pensado, 1995: 201; Iemmolo, 2010: 259-260).

We could, thus, argue, as does Laca (1995, 2006), that DOM was firstly used – maybe owing to its similarity with the dative³⁸ – to mark highly topical objects and to differentiate these objects from subjects. From that point on, *a*-marking in Spanish gradually extended downwards along the Anaphoricity, Topicality, Animacy, Definiteness, Specificity, and Referentiality Scales³⁹ downwards. Finally, in present-day Spanish, the DOM system lost its initial link with information structure in the on-going grammaticalization process of *a*, and DOM is currently mainly regulated by other semantic and pragmatic factors, rather than by topicality, such as animacy, definiteness, specificity or referentiality, which is unsurprising given that topical objects are usually animate, definite, specific and referential.

In this paper, I have presented data on the Asturian dialect referred to as Vaqueiru in support of the important correlation put forth by Iemmolo (2010) between the role of topicality and DOM. In Vaqueiru, with its incipient DOM, the origin of the phenomenon may be linked to discourse properties since all dislocated objects, which constitute the primary topic of the clause, are marked with the preposition *a*. Besides these dislocated elements, only anaphorical postverbal objects, namely personal pronouns and, especially today, proper names, are marked differently. The fact that objects presenting highly topical properties (e.g. proper names and specific definite animate nouns) coincide in postverbal position with subjects functioning as foci or marked topics also seems to trigger DOM. DOM may have been thus used to mark properties that are unusual for objects, such as topicality, and to distinguish participants' syntactic functions. In other words, DOM may have reflected the marked status of certain direct objects and serves as a distinguishing device, as it takes place when it is necessary to mark direct objects that are most in need of being distinguished from subjects.

Finally, although this finding requires further investigation, more evidence for the relationship between topicality and DOM may be provided by the fact that topical direct objects appear to be more likely to receive DOM than their focal counterparts in Vaqueiru. This fact could also be used to support Dalrymple and Nikolaeva's (2011) view that DOM functions as an indicator of topicality that actually marks similarities rather than differences between subjects and topical objects. In sum, regardless of whether the function of DOM was to distinguish between arguments of a predicate or to highlight the similarities between them, topicality is likely to have been the most relevant factor in its emergence and development.

38 According to Iemmolo (2010: 262), the use of the same marker for datives and overtly marked direct objects is well attested cross-linguistically.

39 According to studies referenced in section 3.6, DOM also seems to have proceeded along the scales indicating the lexical semantics of the verb.

My comparative data suggest a symmetrical scenario where two closely-related linguistic systems, namely those of Vaqueiru and Standard Spanish, originally had a DOM system that was conditioned by the same pragmatic factor. However, as information structure in Standard Spanish become more flexible over time, the DOM system followed a different development, becoming dependent on semantic properties of the referents alone. Regarding the distinction between the two Asturian dialects, Central Asturian has been more strongly influenced by Standard Spanish, whereas Vaqueiru has had hardly any contact with Standard Spanish until recent times. Finally, regarding the direction that the grammaticalization of DOM can take (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva (2011: 211), although Vaqueiru is a language where DOM is at an incipient stage and appears to be still regulated by information structure (i.e. topicality, as only pronouns and dislocated elements are obligatorily *a*-marked), the effects of semantic properties on its use and distribution could already be present, as evidenced by marked objects syntactically realized through proper names (and sporadically also kinship terms), which shows that this phenomenon is spreading to non-topicalized objects provided they have semantic features typical of topics, thereby retaining a connection to information-structure role.

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