

# Object Marking of Motion Verbs in Dominican Spanish<sup>1,2</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper explores some variability of the lexical item *a* in Dominican Spanish, particularly within the context of goal-directed motion verbs. Because differential object marker *a* is homophonous with prepositional *a*, the context in which this variability arises suggests that *a* here may be better analyzed as a dative preposition. However, changes in the differential object marking system in Dominican Spanish are well documented (Lunn, 2002), so this variation might also indicate a progression of this change. This study investigates whether cases of *a* + motion verb, which some speakers of Dominican Spanish have rated as equally grammatical with and without the *a* marker, are better analyzed as dative prepositions, or whether this phenomenon should be considered part of the ongoing changes in differential object marking in Caribbean Spanishes more broadly. Work with native speakers of this dialect through elicitation and surveys indicates that, even in the context of motion verbs, speakers continue to draw on the semantic features traditionally associated with differential object marking. Therefore, the cases of *a* being highly variable in motion verb constructions presented here are best analyzed as further evidence of the ongoing change in the object marking system of Dominican Spanish.

## 1.0 Introduction: Differential Object Marking in Dominican Spanish

The phenomenon of Differential Object Marking (henceforth DOM, as coined by Bossong, 1985), is the variable structural realization of some kind of morphosyntactic marking of the direct object of a verb. In many analyses of this phenomenon, the triggering factor in the appearance of the object marker is hypothesized to relate to certain semantic features of the object. In particular, the animacy, specificity, and definiteness of the object NP are argued to be highly salient conditioning features for this phenomenon cross-linguistically (Aissen, 2003).

Variationist sociolinguistic studies of Spanish spoken in the Caribbean islands have demonstrated ongoing changes in the DOM systems of these dialects. Alfaraz (2011), for example, has argued that Cuban Spanish seems to be losing the marker, but that speakers still use it before highly definite NPs. Lunn (2002) and Bullock and Toribio (2009) have argued that Dominican Spanish is also losing the object marker wholesale. This paper presents an additional type of unusual variability with DOM *a*:

- (1) *Una estación sigue (a) la otra*<sup>3</sup>  
One station follows (DOM) the other  
'One station follows the other'

- (2) *Un adjetivo precede (a) un nombre*  
 An adjective precedes (DOM) a noun  
 ‘An adjective precedes a noun’

Native speakers of Dominican Spanish introspecting about these sentences in isolated contexts found both the *a*-marked and unmarked versions of these sentences to be entirely equivalent. These intuitions do not fit well with most formal accounts, which propose that the semantic triggers for DOM are regular and reliable. While variationist work on this phenomenon does predict variability in the use of *a*, this research seems to suggest that speakers might be able to report a preference for the marked or unmarked version of a sentence. The reported absence of any preference for one or the other variant in these cases is thus puzzling from either perspective. It is true that these are speakers of a dialect of Spanish that is posited to be undergoing change in its DOM system (Lunn, 2002; Bullock and Toribio, 2009). Typically, research on DOM focuses on relatively simple transitive sentences, such as *Rodrigo conoce a Mauricio* (with *a*-marking due to the animacy of the direct object *Mauricio*) or *Rodrigo conoce el lugar* (without *a*-marking due to the inanimacy of the direct object *el lugar*). However, *seguir* and *preceder* in examples (1-2) are not of this sort, as they are goal/direction-oriented motion verbs—the sort of verb that one might expect to appear, canonically, with a dative preposition, which in Spanish is also *a*.

This paper investigates whether the variable *a* which appears with motion verbs like those in (1) and (2) is better analyzed as a dative preposition, or whether this phenomenon should be considered part of the ongoing changes in DOM in Caribbean Spanish more broadly. To do this, this study uses both a survey method to generate a range of grammaticality judgments by a number of speakers of this dialect, as well as in-person elicitation sessions with Dominican Spanish speakers, conducted in order to better investigate whether the traditional semantic features of differential object marking seem to be implicitly relevant in grammaticality judgments about sentences in these two contexts. If native speakers of Do-

minican Spanish seem to rely on the typical semantic features of DOM in their intuitions about variability in *a*-marking with motion verbs, it may be reasonable to consider this evidence of ongoing language variation and change. If, however, native speakers do not draw on these semantic features in their intuitions about these sorts of sentences, but do have semantic feature-driven intuitions about *a* with non-motion verbs, a formal approach which separates the objects of motion verbs from the subset of direct objects that can receive the accusative object marker would better account for the data.

## 2.0 DOM in Spanish: Multiple Approaches

As previously mentioned, *a* has two separate lexical entries in Spanish. One *a* is the head of a prepositional phrase, roughly equivalent to English ‘to’, ‘by’, ‘at’, or ‘for’:

- (3) *Fueron a la tienda*  
 Went-3PL to the store  
 ‘They went to the store’
- (4) *Se hace a mano*  
 Is do by hand  
 ‘It is done by hand’
- (5) *Te llamo a las tres*  
 To.you call-1SG at the three  
 ‘I call you at three’
- (6) *Se puede comprarlo a cien pesos*  
 Is can buy.it for one hundred pesos  
 ‘It can be bought for 100 pesos’

This usage differs syntactically from the DOM *a*, in that the former is obligatory as it is the head of a phrase. Instead, the appearance of DOM *a* is traditionally argued to be conditioned by the semantic features of the direct object. The most commonly cited feature in analyses of *a*-marking is the animacy of the DO. The prescriptive term for this phenomenon, “personal *a*,” suggests that animacy can be overtly identified as an important factor in *a*-marking. Consider the following two sentences:

(7) *Vastra besó a Jenny*  
 Vastra kissed DOM Jenny  
 ‘Vastra kissed Jenny’

(8) *Vastra besó el espejo*  
 Vastra kissed the mirror  
 ‘Vastra kissed the mirror’

In most varieties of Spanish, animate direct objects are prescriptively expected to be *a*-marked. So, sentence (7) occurs with *a* due to the animacy of *Jenny* (the name of a human woman), whereas the direct object in sentence (8), *el espejo* ‘the mirror,’ is not animate, and therefore does not have to occur with the DOM. Animate objects are often considered prescriptively ungrammatical when they are not marked, such as sentence (9), and are also ungrammatical per the judgments of Dominican Spanish speakers:

(9) *Alberto besó \*(a) María*  
 Alberto kissed (DOM) María  
 ‘Alberto kissed María’

Most work on this topic agrees that, while animacy is a necessary factor, it is not a sufficient explanation for *a*-marking. For example, Bleam (2005) considers animacy from the perspective of semantic type, and presents an analysis of the relationship between the semantic type of the direct object and the realization (or not) of the differential object marker *a* in Spanish. Bleam argues that the optionality of *a*-marking of certain objects in Spanish is a reflection of the fact that “indefinite nominals can be either weak or strong” (p. 16). The author presents several examples, including (10):

(10) *Juan vio (a) dos hombres*  
 Juan saw (DOM) two men  
 ‘Juan saw two men’

(Bleam, 2005, p. 16)

If (10) were to be uttered without *a*, Bleam claims this would be reflective of a narrow scope, existential interpretation—“weak”, or property-denoting, similar to the case of bare plurals that she

provides (p. 10). Uttered with *a*, the nominal receives a “strong,” or individual-denoting (i.e., ‘specific’ interpretation). This account parallels more functional work, as she further notes that animacy is a necessary condition of *a*-marking, but not a sufficient one, since this analysis allows for certain (semantic) conditions under which animate DOs need not be marked.

Another well-documented trigger of DOM cross-linguistically is specificity, defined by Tippets (2011) as “whether the referred entity is specific, unique and known to the speaker or not” (p. 101), and clearly related to Bleam’s differentiation between weak (nonspecific) and strong (specific) interpretations of indefinites. Bleam’s work provides a formal semantic account of the kind of intuitively formulated distinction that Tippets draws. The inherent variability in this phenomenon is yet more evident when one considers some of these triggers. See, for example, sentences (11) and (12):

(11) *Busco una chica que tenga ganas de trabajar*  
 Look.for-1SG a girl that has desire of work  
 ‘I’m looking for a girl who wants to work’

(12) *Busco a una chica que tenga ganas de trabajar*  
 Look.for-1SG DOM a girl that has desire of work  
 ‘I’m looking for a girl who wants to work’

(11) differs from (12) in that the latter drives a more specific reading of the direct object: the speaker is after not just any girl who wants to work, but rather a particular girl who can be identified by her desire for a job. Both options are perfectly grammatical; the difference is that the presence or absence of the *a* reflects a different kind of semantic reading—a specific indefinite (Fodor & Sag, 1982; Diesing, 1992), rather than a weak indefinite reading (Milsark, 1977), just as Bleam discusses.

While inanimate objects are *a*-marked with much less frequency (cf. Balasch, 2011), they may also be seen (prescriptively) as more flexible with regard to *a*-marking, depending on whether the traditional semantic features are emphasized. This becomes apparent when considering the role of another semantic feature that is commonly argued to trigger *a*-marking—definiteness:

(13) *Teresa vio a las casas*  
 Teresa saw DOM the houses  
 ‘Teresa saw the houses’

(14) *Teresa vio las casas*  
 Teresa saw the houses  
 ‘Teresa saw the houses’

The *a*-marked sentence (13) involves an unambiguously definite reading of *las casas* ‘the houses,’ as one would expect given the definite article. However, because Spanish nominals used in a generic sense prefer to be accompanied by a definite article, the lack of *a*-marking in (14) lessens the force of the definite reading. Although Tippets (2011) defines definiteness as “a property of the NP...[which incorporates]...specificity” (p. 101), other work argues that definiteness and specificity are in fact separate features (Von Heusinger, 2002). Furthermore, while in (13) the speaker might be referring to a set of houses pre-defined in the discursive-pragmatic ground, in (14) the houses might be a general, indefinite set of houses that Teresa passes by, for instance, on her drive to work. In (14), the unmarked DP *las casas* ‘the houses’ can introduce a new or only schematically present discourse referent, whereas in (13), the presence of the *a* tends to require that the referent already be in the common ground. Again, both options were rated as grammatical per my consultants.

Several accounts have argued that the semantic features at play in differential object marking—including animacy—are best understood as scales. Aissen (2003) is well-known for operationalizing this idea from a functional perspective by arguing that “the higher in prominence a direct object, the more likely it is to be overtly case marked,” and proposes an animacy scale of “Human>Animate>Inanimate,” where DOs ranked higher on this scale are more likely to be overtly case-marked (p. 2). This is an oversimplification of Aissen’s framework, though, as she also incorporates features like definiteness into a prominence scale meant to be considered in tandem with the animacy scale she proposes, depending on the particular rules of the language (Aissen, 2003, pp. 2-3).

Sociolinguistic corpus studies support a similar notion (Schwenter, 2011). For example, Balasch (2011)’s corpus study on DOM in Venezuelan and Peninsular Spanish argues that “DO animacy and definiteness do not necessarily trigger the use of accusative *a*, as has often been claimed... [and] the anecdotal examples or intuitive judgments justifying these rules are not necessarily corroborated in natural language” (p. 114). See, for example, sentence (15):

(15) *Sí, notaba en falta Ø mi padre y mi madre*<sup>4</sup>  
 yes noticed-1SG in lack Ø my father and my mother  
 ‘Yes, I missed my father and my mother’  
 (Balasch, 2011, p. 114)

This sentence shows a case in which a human animate direct object—in other words, a case that by most accounts should most strongly favor the appearance of DOM—does not receive *a*-marking. Balasch’s analysis refers again to the notion of some sort of “scale” influencing the appearance (or not) of DOM in Spanish (p. 116), but splits her analysis of the DOs in both corpora into “animate” and “inanimate” conditions. Her results indicate a much higher rate of DOM with animate DOs in general, and that definiteness and co-reference of the DO most significantly influence the presence or absence of *a* (p. 123).

Another example of work in this vein is Alfaraz (2011). Like Balasch (2011), Alfaraz noted that semantic factors influencing DOM in Spanish are “general tendencies...that can vary according to discourse-pragmatic factors” (p. 214). Alfaraz (2011) looks at change in Cuban Spanish across real and apparent times by comparing data from speech recorded in two time periods, across three age groups. Specifically, the author compared speakers between the ages of 30-50 recorded from 1968-69 with speakers between the ages of 30-43 recorded in 1995-98; this latter group was also compared with speakers between the ages of 62-77 recorded in 1995-98. Alfaraz found that (among other social and linguistic factors) definiteness had the strongest influence on the appearance of the object marker. Personal pronouns and proper nouns also highly preferred the

presence of DOM (although this was not categorical), and indefinite specific and nonspecific NPs tended to select for absences of DOM (p. 227). Significantly more instances of *a*-marking (in expected syntactic positions) were found when comparing the 1990s recordings to the 1960s recordings, but similar rates were found for the same cohort across both time periods (the 30-50 year-olds of the 1960s who were the 62-77 year-olds in the 1990s) (p. 231). Alfaraz further notes that this cross-generational loss of the DOM was constrained by the definiteness factor, with “rates of marking sharply increasing as the definiteness of the NP increased” (p. 229).

Other sociolinguistic work, such as Bullock and Toribio (2009) and Lunn (2002), has noted that the varieties of Spanish spoken in the Caribbean, particularly in the Dominican Republic, may be undergoing changes in their *a*-marking system similar to the patterning Alfaraz (2011) found for Cuban Spanish. Lunn (2002)’s research found cases in Dominican Spanish in which the DOM was missing, “even in cases where its absence could produce genuine confusion” (p. 69), noting examples in which an expected *a* does not appear even in writing. In short, she argues that “Dominicans may be beginning to perceive *a* as a superfluous element whose semantic contribution is opaque” (p. 71).

The present study contributes to this literature in two ways: (1) further documenting the apparent increasing variability of DOM in Dominican Spanish, and (2) investigating whether variability in the use of *a* is affected by verb type. Compared to work which considers the semantics of the direct object in triggering DOM, there has been much less focus on the role of verb type in this phenomenon. Heusinger and Kaiser (2007) is one exception to this tendency, but their work looks at how a given verb’s preference for selecting animate objects affects the chances that a given verb will take an *a*-marked object, rather than as true variation (i.e., speakers using *a* and the null variant in the same sentential context). Overall, this paper contributes to the growing exploration of the potential for combining insights from formally-based perspectives as well as quantitative, variationist analyses of linguistic variation above the level of phonology.

### 3.0 Data Collection and Analysis

#### 3.1.0 Grammaticality Judgment Surveys: Background and Methods

Survey results were collected via Qualtrics, an online survey platform. The survey was designed to elicit broad judgments from speakers of Dominican Spanish about the acceptability of the presence or absence of DOM in various kinds of sentences. As Chelliah and De Reuse (2010) note, the possibility of inconsistent responses when doing elicitation work of this sort requires getting a number of speaker judgments, as it increases the power of any statistical tests performed on the data. While online surveys allow researchers to generate many intuitions at once, there is no way to tell whether the participants to whom the survey was sent are the ones actually responding. There is also no way for the researcher to check whether the participant interpreted the sentence in the way intended by the researcher. Given the structure of this project, however, the ability to reach many participants from a particular dialect group so quickly and remotely outweighed the drawbacks.

Participants were contacted via the researcher’s social networks and invited to participate with a link to the online survey. Thirty-three individuals were invited to participate; 21 total participants responded. After providing electronic consent, and completing a brief training period familiarizing them with the task, participants moved on to the actual survey. In the survey, participants were presented with 48 ‘content’ sentences, which tested the central research question. Twelve ‘filler’ sentences which did not feature DOM and were more plainly grammatical or ungrammatical, were also included in the test materials, in order to prevent participants from guessing the true purpose of the experiment. Participants saw one sentence per page, and then were asked to rate, on a 5-point Likert scale, how acceptable the sentence was, with 1 being “It sounds terrible/I’d never use it or hear anyone else use it”, and 5 being “It sounds fine/I might say it or hear someone else say it”. Text boxes were also presented along with the sentences in order for participants to describe or explain their judgments, but were fully optional<sup>5</sup>.

The content sentences were set up to control for the potential effects of the animacy, definiteness, and specificity of the direct object. Twenty-four sentences contained non-motion transitive verbs and 24 sentences contained motion verbs. Within each of these categories, stimuli were constructed with direct objects that varied along the dimensions of specific/non-specific and definite/indefinite, resulting in subcategories for specific definite objects, specific indefinite objects, and non-specific definite objects<sup>6</sup>. A further subcategory of animacy was included in each of these categories. Each subcategory of stimuli included three levels of animacy for direct objects: human animates, animal animates, and inanimates, per Aissen (2003). In each of these subcategories of sentences, there was a marked (*a*-full) and unmarked (*a*-less) version. A list of all sentences and a breakdown of the subcategories can be found in Appendix A, while a list of the filler sentences can be found in Appendix B. The categorization of types of sentences tested in the survey is illustrated in the table below.

### 3.1.2 Grammaticality Judgment Surveys: Results

The means of ratings on sentences were first compared across the group of motion sentences and non-motion sentences. To test whether this difference was significant, a one-way, between-subjects ANOVA was conducted. There was a significant effect of the verb type (i.e., motion or non-motion) on the overall ratings of the speakers ( $F(1,190)=6.487, p>.02$ ). However, these results only indicate that respondents gave on-average higher (i.e., more acceptable) ratings for non-motion sentences than for motion sentences—they do not indicate whether *a*-marking within these groups had any effect. Therefore, follow-up tests were conducted to separately investigate the role of the DO semantic features on grammaticality ratings in each of the different verb-type groups. For these follow-up tests, a split was made by verb-type group, and a one-way, three-factor (Animacy, Specificity, and Definiteness) ANOVA was conducted for each group (motion verbs and non-motion verbs).

For non-motion verbs, the three-way interaction was not significant ( $F(2,96)=.024, p=.976$ ), nor were

the two-way interactions of Definiteness x Specificity ( $F(1,96)=0.24, p=.877$ ), or Animacy x Definiteness ( $F(2,96)=.312, p=.733$ ). The interaction of Animacy x Specificity just reached significance ( $F(2,96)=3.098, p=.050$ ), so a follow-up one-way, two-factor ANOVA was conducted testing the interaction between these two factors collapsed over Definiteness. The two-way interaction here was significant ( $F(2,96)=3.233, p>.05$ ), so a final follow-up test was conducted to test the simple effect of Animacy collapsed over the other two semantic feature groups. Animacy was selected for the follow-up test because it was present in the significant two-way interactions for both verb type groups. At this level, however, the effect of Animacy was not significant ( $F(2,93)=1.460, p=.237$ ).

	Human Animate	Animal Animate	Inanimate
Specific definite	2	2	2
Specific indefinite	2	2	2
Nonspecific definite	2	2	2
Nonspecific indefinite	2	2	2

**Table 1. Number of sentences per cell**

For motion verbs, the three-way interaction was again not significant ( $F(2,96)=2.53, p=.181$ ). The two-way interactions between Definiteness x Specificity and Animacy x Specificity were not significant either ( $F(1,96)=1.035, p=.312$ ;  $F(2,96)=2.460, p=.092$ ). However, the interaction between Animacy x Definiteness was significant ( $F(2,96)=4.827, p>.02$ ). So, a one-way, two-factor ANOVA comparing results for Animacy and Definiteness, collapsed over Specificity, was conducted. The two-way interaction was significant ( $F(2,96)=4.483, p>.02$ ), so a final follow-up test was conducted to test the simple effect of Animacy (given, as stated above, that it was relevant in significant two-way interactions for both verb groups). Just as for the non-motion verb group, the effect of Animacy at this level was also not significant ( $F(2,93)=.006, p=.994$ ).

These results indicate that the usual semantic features governing DOM were probably at play for

speakers giving grammaticality judgments in both the motion verb condition and the non-motion verb condition. Although the exact features differed across the two verb-type groups (animacy and definiteness for motion verbs, and animacy and specificity for non-motion verbs), all cases in which significant effects were reported relate to canonical DOM features. This suggests that, at least for the respondents of this survey, verb type (motion vs. non-motion) does not affect interpretation of grammaticality of DOM in various contexts.

### 3.2.0 Elicitations: Background and Methods

While survey-based judgment elicitation provide a strong starting point for understanding whether there is variability in motion-type sentences, it is not necessarily the best method for determining the source of this variability, because it is not possible to follow-up with speakers in detail about their intuitions. In order to further investigate whether the variability in *a*-marking for sentences with motion verbs is connected to the phenomenon of differential object marking, I conducted several in-person linguistic elicitation sessions with native speakers of Dominican Spanish.

Elicitation sessions were conducted with two different speakers. Sandra (pseudonym), a 33-year-old female native speaker of Dominican Spanish, was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and is a fluent L1 Spanish speaker. However, she moved to the United States at age 15 and completed both high school and university in English. Because she currently resides in the US, she may use English more frequently in her daily life. However, much of her social network is Spanish-speaking (with the majority of her network speaking Mexican and Central American varieties, although there are Dominican Spanish speakers in her network as well), so she remains in frequent contact with other Spanish speakers and uses the language on a daily basis.

My second consultant was Jorge, a 27-year-old native speaker of Dominican Spanish, and a cousin of Sandra. Jorge was also born and raised in the Dominican Republic. He first moved to the US at age 12, and then returned to the Dominican Republic after one year. At age 15, he returned again to the US,

this time to stay permanently and complete his high school and university education in English. Jorge appears to be more balanced in his command of both languages, at least in that both his Spanish and English phonology sound (to the author) equally native-like, although he reports using both languages to similar degrees in his everyday life.

I worked with both consultants primarily in Spanish, although I occasionally resorted to English to better develop a hypothetical context for a sentence (Chellilah & De Reuse, 2010). With both speakers, I first explained the type of judgment I wanted to elicit by providing them with some of the training sentences used in the survey. The sessions then proceeded somewhat organically—based on questions Sandra had about my work, I immediately proceeded to eliciting her judgments about motion-type sentences. However, with Jorge, we began by establishing his judgments with respect to non-motion-type sentences. Both speakers ultimately gave judgments on all the sentences in both the motion and non-motion categories.

### 3.2.2 Elicitations: Results

Sandra's judgments about sentences with motion verbs were surprisingly uniform. For all examples presented, she rated both *a*-marked and non-*a*-marked sentences in all categories as equally grammatical. However, she did sometimes express a preference one way or another:

(16) *El venado escapó (a)/(e)l cazador*<sup>7</sup>  
The deer escaped DOM-the hunter  
'The deer escaped the hunter'

(17) *La profesora ahuyentó (a) las dudas de su estudiante*  
The professor banished (DOM) the doubts of her student  
'The professor banished the doubts of her student'

(18) *Sara está siguiendo (a) aves migratorias*  
Sara is following (DOM) birds migratory  
'Sara is following migratory birds'

In sentence (16), Sandra indicated that she preferred the marked form of the sentence. This is consistent with the notion that traditional DOM influences are at play in these sentences, given the ani-

mate human quality of the direct object. Similarly, she indicated a preference for the unmarked versions of (17) and (18). In (17), this might be explained again by appealing to the inanimate character of the direct object. In (18), although the object is animate, it is not human, and furthermore it appears without a definite article and is not inherently specific—all evidence that could reasonably indicate a sense of the typical DOM-triggering features.

Sandra's judgments for non-motion verbs were more unusual. She also rated most non-motion sentences as equally permissible in both marked and unmarked forms—in some cases with no change in the semantics. The cases in which she did identify some sort of difference are presented here:

(19) *Roberto cerró (\*a) la puerta del balcón*  
 Roberto closed (\*DOM) the door of.the balcony  
 'Roberto closed the balcony door'

(20) *La jardinera cuida (\*a) las plantas*  
 The gardener cares.for (\*DOM) the plants  
 'The gardener takes care of the plants'

(21) *Manuel hace (\*a) amigos en Tucson*  
 Manuel makes (\*DOM) friends in Tucson  
 'Manuel makes friends in Tucson'

(22) *Yo quiero encontrar (\*a) pantalones adecuados*  
 I want to.find (\*DOM) pants adequate  
 'I want to find adequate pants'

In each of these cases, Sandra identified the *a*-marked variant as definitely "bad" or "incorrect," as expected given the generally low use of *a*-marking with inanimate objects. Again, she did not explicitly identify reasons other than her sense of prescriptive norms as the bases for these judgments, despite repeated attempts to encourage further introspection using so-called traditional DOM semantic features.

Jorge's judgments about non-motion sentences appear to be fairly normative. He tended to prefer *a*-marking with human animate direct objects:

(23) *Jenny y Carlos robaron (#a) un hombre*  
 Jenny and Carlos robbed (#DOM) a man

'Jenny and Carlos robbed a man'

Jorge describe the marked variant of sentence (23) as having a reading in which Jenny and Carlos robbed a whole, entire person, and the unmarked variant as having the more semantically expected reading (that they robbed something from a man—his wallet, or his cell phone perhaps). This would be consistent with the notion that the animate argument of *robar* 'rob' is a Source, not the direct object at all, and probably prepositionally marked. Instead, the direct object is the Theme (the thing stolen), and may be unmarked when present, but can also be dropped, as with the verb 'rob' in English. Jorge also vehemently rejected the *a*-marked version of (17), just as Sandra did. He also disliked *a*-marked variants of some sentences with inanimate objects, such as in (14), (15), and (18) above, which again makes sense given the general tendency to not mark inanimate objects. Although Jorge was not always able to describe what factors drove his judgments, he identified several cases in which both marked and unmarked variants sounded "equally grammatical," but that the presence of the marker could drive a more specific reading. This is an interesting point to contrast with Lunn (2002)'s assertion that Dominican Spanish speakers do not see *a* as driving semantic differences. Jorge's explicit reliance on specificity as a driving feature of DOM marking is illustrated in example (24):

(24) *La universidad penalizó (a) los estudiantes*  
 The university penalized (DOM) the students  
 'The university penalized the students'

In (24), Jorge argued that the absence of the marker suggested the university would penalize the entire student body, while the presence of the marker told him it was "a specific group of students" receiving the punishment. Jorge was very consistent in his use of specificity (whether or not he used this word to describe it) as a conditioning feature for *a*-marking. Similarly, Jorge relied on intuitions about discourse newness in describing how *a*-marking could drive semantic differences in example (25):

- (25) *Marta quiere (a) ese hombre*  
 Marta loves (DOM) that man  
 ‘Marta loves that man’

For (25), Jorge noted that in his own speech, he would use *a* if the man in question was new to the discourse. He maintained this distinction even after follow-up questions about specificity and definiteness were asked to elicit more intuitions about this sentence. Although “discourse newness” is not one of the canonical triggers for DOM in Spanish, Balasch (2011) accounts for it by coding for anaphoric and cataphoric reference (pp. 114, 117). One possibility is that the “newness” makes the DP stand out such that it can be counted as another example of the specificity condition. Another explanation, appealing to Bleam (2005), is that the sentence requires an <e>-type DP because the *a* is present. Therefore, the demonstrative ‘this’ gets an explicit-deixis interpretation, identifying the referent (necessary for type <e> DPs). When a demonstrative is used in its explicitly deictic function, it is typically to identify a new discourse entity. In other words, the use of the demonstrative is leading to an intuition that the DP is new to the discourse.

For motion-type sentences, Jorge expressed intuitions similar to Sandra’s, in that for most cases, both marked and unmarked variants were acceptable. However, Jorge frequently asserted preferences for one version or the other, and in many cases he explicitly cited intuitions that appeared to be manifestations of the canonical DOM triggers, to explain his judgments. Consider the following:

- (26) *Eugenia guió (a) un estudiante nuevo hasta la salida*  
 Eugenia guided (DOM) a student new towards the exit  
 ‘Eugenia guided a new student towards the exit’

In (26), Jorge agreed that while both versions of the sentence seemed fine to him, the *a*-marked version appeared to indicate that it was a particular (specific) student that Eugenia already knew. The unmarked version of the sentence suggested to Jorge that the student could be any new student.

#### 4.0 Conclusion

Based on the survey and elicitation data analyzed here, there is no substantial evidence to support the hypothesis that *a* in the context of goal-oriented motion verbs should be re-analyzed as a dative preposition. Given previous research on DOM in Dominican Spanish, such as Bullock and Toribio (2009), and Lunn (2002), it is better to attribute this unusual pattern of variation in *a*-marking to the overall loss of the differential object marker in this dialect.

The survey results revealed that the canonical semantic features of DOM seemed to be at play for grammaticality judgments for both motion and non-motion verbs. There are many improvements that could be made to the design and execution of the survey that may provide more insightful data, in future analyses. For instance, a closer attention to formal analyses of specificity and definiteness would benefit the development of test sentences, such as including items with quantifiers to create cases which are more clearly (non-)specific or (in)definite (cf. Diesing, 1992). An overall closer attention to theta role relationships, and control for verb-object lexicalized expressions forming complex predicates (e.g. *hacer amigos* ‘to make friends’ in one test item) which are canonically expressed without *a*-marking (Balasch, 2011) would also improve this study. Furthermore, in order to validate these kinds of surveys as tools which actually get at the kinds of distinctions of interest here, it would be worthwhile to administer both a greater number of test items, as well as having speakers of a dialect which is not reported to be undergoing changes in its DOM system respond to the survey as a basis of comparison to the results to the judgments given by Dominican Spanish speakers.

Still, given the evidence, the results from the elicitation sessions are somewhat more revealing than the survey results. Sandra’s judgments about *a* in sentences with motion verbs lacked an intuitive reliance on typical DOM features, and in all cases, the *a* was completely optional. Her judgments for *a* in non-motion sentences are atypical in that, even in very traditional DOM-oriented sentences, she does not appeal to the traditional DOM-triggering features. Work by de Souza et al. (2012), suggests that mastery of an L2 can affect the judgments a speaker

gives about their L1—given Sandra’s extensive L2 networks, this might explain these findings. Jorge’s intuitions differed from Sandra’s in that he frequently and overtly drew on some of the semantic features most typically associated with DOM, suggesting that the *a* + motion verb construction is not a viable reanalysis, at least for his idiolect. Instead, Sandra and Jorge’s judgments fit better with the hypothesis that the motion sentences and non-motion sentences both involve DOM, and that DOM is undergoing a general change in Dominican (and possibly other Caribbean dialects of) Spanish. Like the surveys, there were various flaws in the elicitation sessions that may have colored the data. The fact that in Jorge’s case, the elicitation began with the canonical/traditional DOM sentences may have primed him to think in terms of these types of conditioning factors, and perhaps was thus more ready to see such effects in the motion verb sentences. Because Sandra was presented with the sentences in the reverse order (i.e., motion verbs first, and non-motion verbs second), no priming of that sort would have occurred. But, given that these elicitation sessions occurred over the course of different days, it is not clear how strong this potential priming effect would have been. Additionally, the consultants’ appeal to prescriptive norms might be of note in considering the usefulness of the data from the elicitation settings. Although I repeatedly attempted to clarify for the consultants that descriptions of prescriptive judgments were not the goal of the elicitation sessions, the consultants frequently brought them up anyway. Cornips and Poletto (2005) note that reliance on prescriptive norms can make native speaker intuitions about these sorts of phenomena unreliable. Particularly in situations where stigmatized dialects are in contact with prestige dialects, the responses or intuitions they give can “shift from the subordinate towards the superordinate in an irregular and unsystematic manner (Labov, 1972, p. 21).” Given the overall negative social perception of Dominican Spanish among Spanish speakers (Büdenbender, 2009), this sort of contact situation could apply to my consultants. When researchers ask for native speaker intuitions about the kinds of phenomena which have prescriptive rules attached to them, better techniques need to

be developed for getting speakers to consider their actual speech, rather than prescriptive norms. These techniques should include working with speakers over a longer course of time in order to adequately train them to give the sort of intuitions that linguists are interested, among other strategies.

Despite some of the flaws in the data collection, this study shows that reanalysis of *a* in the context of motion verbs as a dative preposition is untenable. Instead, these findings present further evidence for the ongoing changes in the DOM system in Dominican Spanish, and suggest, following Lunn (2002), that the dialect may be losing the marker wholesale. This study also contributes to a growing interest in merging the insights of formally driven approaches to variation with quantitatively based paradigms.

### Notes

1. I wish to thank Drs. Heidi Harley, Simin Karimi, and Ana Maria Carvalho for their many thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this paper. All remaining flaws are, of course, my own. I also thank SZV, BSE for her ongoing support.
2. IRB Exemption was granted for this project on 9/11/14.
3. I am extremely grateful to Jorge and Sandra Tejada (names changed to protect anonymity) for generously spending several hours with me in deep conversation about this problem. All examples in this paper have been discussed with them.
4. Readers of this paper have noted that this verb ‘*notar en falta*’ for ‘to miss’ is rather unusual. For these Dominican Spanish consultants, a similar sentence with a different verb, such as ‘I missed my mother and father’ (‘[Yo] *extrañaba* [a] *mi madre* y [a] *mi padre*’), seems acceptable in both the marked and unmarked versions, but both consultants for this paper prefer the marked version. It is also possible that the role of ‘*notar en falta*’ as a psych predicate is causing some unusual behavior here.
5. Indeed, no participant ended up using these text boxes.
6. By non-specific definite I mean noun phrases marked for definiteness (article) that are not necessarily definite semantically. Because Spanish nominals tend to be accompanied by a definite article, it was challenging to come up with objects that could read as naturalistic without the definite article. So, although some

sentences may seem unusual, native speakers vetted them all as grammatically possible sentences.

7. My consultants did not note a semantic difference between the marked and unmarked versions of this sentence.

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## Appendix A: Qualtrics survey and elicitation session example sentences

### Non-motion-type DOM sentences

#### Specific definite

1. Marta quiere a ese hombre. (Marta loves DOM that man). – *Human Animate*
2. Marta quiere ese hombre. (Marta loves that man). – *Human Animate*
3. Elena acarició al perro de Tomás. (Elena pet DOM.the dog of Tomás). – *Animal Animate*
4. Elena acarició el perro de Tomás. (Elena pet the dog of Tomás). – *Animal Animate*
5. Roberto cerró a la puerta del balcón. (Roberto shut DOM the door). – *Inanimate*
6. Roberto cerró la puerta del balcón. (Roberto shut the door). – *Inanimate*

#### Specific indefinite

7. Jenny y Carlos robaron a un hombre. (Jenny and Carlos robbed DOM a man). – *Human Animate*
8. Jenny y Carlos robaron un hombre. (Jenny and Carlos robbed a man). – *Human Animate*
9. Nicolás vio a un leoncito ayer en el zoológico. (Nicolás saw DOM a little lion yesterday at the zoo). – *Animal Animate*
10. Nicolás vio un leoncito ayer en el zoológico. (Nicolás saw a little lion yesterday at the zoo). – *Animal Ani-*

*mate*

11. A mi hijo no le gusta comer a las zanahorias. (My son does not like eating DOM carrots). – *Inanimate*
12. A mi hijo no le gusta comer las zanahorias. (My son does not like eating carrots). – *Inanimate*

*Non-specific definite*

13. La universidad penalizó a los estudiantes. (The university penalized DOM the students). – *Human Animate*
14. La universidad penalizó los estudiantes. (The university penalized the students). – *Human Animate*
15. Mantenga a los perros en una correa. (Keep DOM dogs on a leash). – *Animal Animate*
16. Mantenga los perros en una correa. (Keep dogs on a leash). – *Animal Animate*
17. La jardinera cuida a las plantas. (The gardener takes care of DOM the plants). – *Inanimate*
18. La jardinera cuida las plantas. (The gardener takes care of the plants). – *Inanimate*

*Non-specific indefinite*

19. Manuel tiene a amigos en Tucson. (Manuel has DOM friends in Tucson). – *Human Animate*
20. Manuel tiene amigos en Tucson. (Manuel has friends in Tucson). – *Human Animate*
21. El cambio climático está eradicando a algunas poblaciones de rinoceronte. (Climate change is eradicating DOM some populations of rhinoceros). – *Animal Animate*
22. El cambio climático está eradicando algunas poblaciones de rinoceronte. (Climate change is eradicating some populations of rhinoceros). – *Animal Animate*
23. He logrado encontrar un trabajo. (I've managed to find DOM work). – *Inanimate*
24. He logrado encontrar trabajo. (I've managed to find work). – *Inanimate*

**Motion-type DOM sentences**

*Specific definite*

1. El venado escapó al cazador. (The deer escaped DOM the hunter). – *Human Animate*
2. El venado escapó del cazador. (The deer escaped from the hunter). – *Human Animate*
3. El granjero corrió a las ovejas del campo. (The farmer ran/chased DOM the sheep from the pasture). – *Animal Animate*
4. El granjero corrió las ovejas del campo. (The farmer ran/chased the sheep from the pasture). – *Animal Animate*

*mate*

5. La profesora ahuyentó a las dudas de su estudiante. (The professor banished DOM the doubts of her student). – *Inanimate*
6. La profesora ahuyentó las dudas de su estudiante. (The professor banished the doubts of her student). – *Inanimate*

*Specific indefinite*

7. Eugenia guió a un estudiante nuevo por las pasillas. (Eugenia guided DOM a new student through the hallways). – *Human Animate*
8. Eugenia guió un estudiante nuevo por las pasillas. (Eugenia guided a new student through the hallways). – *Human Animate*
9. El cazador siguió a un conejo. (The hunter followed a rabbit). – *Animal Animate*
10. El cazador siguió un conejo. (The hunter followed a rabbit). – *Animal Animate*
11. Martín siempre lleva a galletas para el almuerzo. (Martin always brings DOM cookies for lunch). – *Inanimate*
12. Martín siempre lleva galletas para el almuerzo. (Martin always brings DOM cookies for lunch). – *Inanimate*

*Non-specific definite*

13. El gobierno persiguió a los manifestantes. (The government pursued DOM the protestors). – *Human Animate*
14. El gobierno persiguió los manifestantes. (The government pursued the protestors). – *Human Animate*
15. Los tigres preceden a los leones en el desfile. (The tigers precede DOM the lions in the parade). – *Animal Animate*
16. Los tigres preceden los leones en el desfile. (The tigers precede the lions in the parade). – *Animal Animate*
17. Una estación sigue a la otra. (One station follows DOM the other). – *Inanimate*
18. Una estación sigue la otra. (One station follows the other). – *Inanimate*

*Non-specific indefinite*

19. Las banderas nacionales siempre anteceden a dignitarios en la procesión. (National flags always antecede/come before DOM dignitaries in the procession). – *Human Animate*
20. Las banderas nacionales siempre anteceden dignitarios en la procesión. (National flags always

antecede/come before DOM dignitaries in the procession). – *Human Animate*

21. Sara está siguiendo a aves migratorias. (Sara is following DOM migratory birds). – *Animal Animate*
22. Sara está siguiendo aves migratorias. (Sara is following migratory birds). – *Animal Animate*
23. El primer jugador avanza a varias piezas. (The first player advances DOM several pieces). – *Inanimate*
24. El primer jugador avanza varias piezas. (The first player advances several pieces). – *Inanimate*

### **Appendix B: Filler sentences for Qualtrics survey**

1. Las buenas historias no tienen final. (Good stories have no ending).
2. Este viernes regresamos a Los Ángeles. (This Friday we return to Los Angeles).
3. Ya empezaron el concierto. (They already started the concert).
4. El Ministerio de la Educación realizó la construcción de diez escuelas nuevas. (The Minister of Education carried out the construction of 10 new schools).
5. Hoy la presidenta anunciará la renuncia del vicepresidente. (Today the president will announce the renouncement of the vice president).
6. Un plato típico de la República Dominicana ganó un premio en el concurso culinario. (A traditional dish from the Dominican Republic won a prize in the culinary competition).
7. \*Ella podríamos llegar con tiempo. (She we could arrive with time to spare).
8. \*Yo no escribir las letras. (I do not to write the letters).
9. \*Conocer cómo hacer una torta está muy difícil. (To know how to make a cake is very difficult).
10. \*Aquella profesora me dio no tarea. (That professor gave me no homework).
11. \*Está mucho nieve hoy. (There is much snow today).
12. \*El taza está muy sucia. (The cup is very dirty).

