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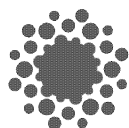
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Abstract:

This volume is a collection of 19 essays on linguistics honoring Judith Aissen. It includes papers on general and theoretical linguistics, syntax, optimality theory and Mayan languages.

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Edited by
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INDIVIDUATION IN RUSSIAN AND SPANISH DIFFERENTIAL OBJECT MARKING

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Russian and Spanish both have processes of differential object marking which respond to the same parameters—animacy, definiteness/referentiality. These parameters, broadly speaking, involve individuation, the extent to which the referent is conventionally or in context presented as an individual with multiple properties that might be relevant. Individuation is not limited to the reference of the noun phrase but extends upwards to the semantics of the predicate and event the sense of the predication in context, whether individuating or existential.

1. Introduction

Many languages use more than one case or case equivalent to mark direct objects. Taking as my point of departure Judith Aissen’s study of differential object marking—a favorite of students and instructor alike—I want to return to the question of how speakers make choices between differential object markers and, in the process, point to some similarities between differential object marking in Russian and Spanish.

2. Differential object marking in Russian: animate accusative

Russian has two contrary processes of differential object marking, both of which, paradoxically, use the genitive case. In one process, animate nouns whose syntactic case is accusative substitute genitive forms for the accusative, subject to morphological restrictions. Substitutions are marked in boldface in the partial sketch of morphology in Table 1.

Table 1: *Russian nominal morphology (partial)*

declension / noun	gloss	NOM SG	ACC SG	GEN SG	NOM PL	ACC PL	GEN PL
DI / INAN MSC	‘table’	stol	stol	stola	stoly	stoly	stolov
DI / AN MSC	‘bull’	byk	byka	byka	byki	bykov	bykov
DII / INAN FEM	‘map’	karta	kartu	karty	karty	karty	kart
DII / AN FEM	‘wife’	žena	ženu	ženy	ženy	žen	žen
DII / AN MSC	‘Alyosha’	Aleša	Alešu	Aleši	Aleši	Aleš	Aleš

In the singular, masculine nouns of Declension I use the same form for the nominative and accusative if they are inanimate (*vižu stol*_{NOM=ACC.SG} ‘I see a/the table’), but animate nouns use the genitive form for the accusative (*vižu byka*_{ACC=GEN.SG} ‘I see a/the bull’). Nouns of Declension II have distinct nominative and accusative forms in the singular. Animate nouns of this declension

do not use the genitive for the accusative, whether feminine (*žena*_{NOM.SG} ‘wife’, *vižu ženu*_{ACC.SG} ‘I see wife’, not **vižu ženy*_{GEN.SG}) or masculine (*Aleša*_{NOM.SG}, *vižu Alešu*_{ACC.SG} ‘I see Alyosha’, not **vižu Aleši*_{GEN.SG}). In the plural, animate nouns of all declensions and genders use the genitive form for the accusative (*vižu bykov*_{ACC=GEN.PL} ‘I see bulls’, *vižu žen*_{ACC=GEN.PL}, ‘I see wives’, *vižu Aleš*_{ACC=GEN.PL} ‘I see the Alyoshas’). Thus the use of the “the animate accusative” (prompting the convenient notation “ACC=GEN”) is sensitive to gender, number, and declension class; it is a morphological substitution of genitive morphemes for accusative.

In the second process of differential object marking, Russian often uses the genitive instead of the accusative for direct objects of negated verbs, as in *ja ne pomnju imeni*_{GEN.SG} ‘I don’t remember a/the name’. The process is a syntactic case substitution.¹ The two processes differ in the extent to which there is variation. There is no longer much variation in the animate accusative. Almost all nouns are blindly consistent: a noun uses the animate accusative or it does not, in all contexts, depending on whether the noun is lexically considered animate. For example, the noun *morskie kon’ki* ‘seahorses’ uses the animate form in all contexts, even for lifeless carcasses in a curiosity shop:

- (1) Očen’ postepenno babočki stali **vytesnjat’ sušenyx morskix kon’kov**_{ACC=GEN.PL}.²
 ‘Very gradually butterflies began **to crowd out dried seahorses**.’

‘Seahorse’ is typical of the vast majority of nouns: usage is completely conventionalized.

Only a dozen or so nouns show variation; these refer to lower-order animals (plural (*morskie*) *gubki* ‘(sea) sponges’) or abstract categories (plural *osoby* ‘persons’). Let us look for a moment at the variation, such as it is. For plural ‘sponges’ the animate accusative (genitive form) is used if the noun refers to living beings in their natural habitat ((2)) or in discussions of their biological status of sponges ((3)):

- (2) V načale 1900 g. Èlias Stadiatos s gruppoy drugix grečeskix nyrjal’ščikov **lovil morskix gubok**_{ACC=GEN.PL} u poberež’ja nebol’šogo skalistogo ostrova Andikitira...³
 ‘Early in 1900 Elias Stadiatos, with a group of other Greek divers, **was hunting sponges** on the shore of the small rugged island of Antikythera...’
- (3) **Gubok**_{ACC=GEN.PL} **izučajut** nemnogie zoologi.⁴
 ‘Few zoologists **study sponges**.’

¹ The genitive of negation spreads throughout a noun phrase, as in *Nikakogo*_{GEN.SG} *sud’i*_{GEN.SG} *my tam ne našli* ‘no judge did we find there’, where both adjective and noun are genitive. Animacy is different. There are animate masculine nouns in Declension II. They do not express animacy themselves (the noun is unambiguously accusative), but an adjective does (*vižu milogo*_{ACC=GEN.SG} *Alešu*_{ACC.SG} ‘I see kind Alesha’), leading to a situation in which the two constituents of a single noun phrase use different morphologies to express one case. Accordingly, the animate accusative is a morphological substitution (which Comrie 1989 calls a “genitive-like accusative”), the genitive of negation, a syntactic substitution of one case for another.

² <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/pilgram.txt>, accessed 3.18.2010.

³ <http://myrt.ru/news/inter/699-antikiterskijj-mekhanizm-drevnijj-kompjuter.html>.

⁴ http://5ka.su/ref/biology/0_object79649.html.

In contrast, the inanimate accusative (identical to the nominative) is used when the sponges are removed from their habitat and are manipulated as objects by human agents:

- (4) S drevnejšix vremen ženščiny **ispol'zovali morskije gubki**_{ACC=NOM.PL} dlja predotvraščeniija beremennosti.⁵
 'From ancient times women have **used sponges** to prevent pregnancy.'
- (5) V kačestve suvenira možno **priobresti prirodnye morskije gubki**_{ACC=NOM.PL}.⁶
 'It's possible **to acquire natural sea sponges** as souvenirs.'

Usage, then, depends on the sense of the verb as the action affects the object 'sponges'.

A more interesting noun is *mikrob* 'microbe', which shows variation as object of the infinitive *najti* 'to find'. Once dubious examples are eliminated from a Google search,⁷ the two variants occur with equal frequency: 20xx inanimate *najti mikroby*_{NOM=ACC.PL}, 18xx animate *najti mikrobov*_{ACC=GEN.PL}. Inanimate *mikroby* is used in examples like these:

- (6) **Najti mikroby**_{NOM=ACC.PL} s vysokim soderžaniem proteina, sposobnye potrebljat' uglevodorody, ne tak už legko.⁸
 'It's not so easy **to find microbes** with a high protein content capable of breaking down hydrocarbons.'
- (7) V nej [lente] neredko možno **najti mikroby**_{NOM=ACC.PL} stolbnjaka.⁹
 'In it [adhesive tape] not infrequently it is possible **to find tetanus microbes**.'

Both (6) and (7) comment on the possible event of discovery; the communicative focus is on the possible existence of the event. Specific kinds of microbes are mentioned, but not in order to contrast one type with another. In contrast, the animate form *mikrobov*_{ACC=GEN.PL} is used when the discovery of microbes is presupposed as conceivable and the communicative focus is on one component of the event opposed to possible alternatives: the condition for discovery in (8) (existence occurs even in a clean house, despite expectations to the contrary) or the specific type of microbe (opposed to other hypothetical varieties) in (9):

- (8) Daže v samom čistom dome možno **najti mikrobov**_{ACC=GEN.PL}.¹⁰
 'Even in the cleanest of houses it is possible **to find microbes**.'
- (9) ... ved' emu ne udalos' **najti mikrobov**_{ACC=GEN.PL}, vzyvajuščix bešenstvo, poskol'ku èto virusy, otkrytye namnogo pozže.¹¹
 '... he [Pasteur] wasn't successful **in finding the microbes** that trigger madness, inasmuch as the cause is viruses, which were discovered much later.'

⁵ <http://www.lor.inventech.ru/gyn/gyn0240.shtml>.

⁶ <http://turist.by/turkey/bodrum>.

⁷ Search by Google (English) using Cyrillic (2.6.2010). Russian sites, more than English, repeat other sites; I eliminated duplications and metaphorical uses of the noun.

⁸ <http://www.himi.oglib.ru/bgl/913/477.html>, accessed 2.6.2010.

⁹ <http://www.mash.oglib.ru/bgl/5758/268.html>, accessed 2.6.2010.

¹⁰ <http://www.sleepcomfort.ru/sovet.php>, accessed 2.6.2010.

¹¹ <http://www.consilium-medicum.com/media/article/11428>, accessed 2.6.2010.

In brief summary of the Russian animate accusative: almost all nouns obey a rigid rule, such that a given noun uses the animate accusative if the noun in general refers to animate beings, regardless of whether the entity is actually alive in a specific context. Only a small number of nouns still show variation. For some ('sponges') variation depends on the sense of the collocation of verb and noun: manipulating a living being vs. inanimate object. With a very few nouns ('microbe') variation is correlated with a discourse concern, existentiality vs. differentiation. What's left of variation in the expression of animacy—there used to be more in at earlier stages of development—shows that there can be differences in the degree of freedom of usage (or conversely, the degree of conventionalization).

3. Differential object marking in Russian: genitive of negation

Let us turn now to the genitive of negation, another kind of differential object marking in Russian. In this process the object of a transitive negated verb may in principle appear in either the accusative or the genitive. A dozen or so factors have been noted which are correlated with the choice of case, among them (listed in the order favoring accusative \geq favoring genitive): proper \geq common, animate (personal) \geq inanimate (non-personal), singular \geq plural, declension II singular (the *žena* type, with unambiguous accusative singular) \geq other singular declensions, count \geq abstract, implicit definiteness (specificity) \geq indefiniteness (non-specificity), perfective \geq imperfective aspect, irrealis \geq realis mood, assertion \geq interrogative.¹² The first half dozen factors relate to the degree of individuation of the noun, that is, the extent to which the referent is understood as an individual distinct from other tokens or as a token of a class of entities distinct from other classes. The more individuated the referent of the noun, the less likely it is to appear in the genitive when the verb is negated (Timberlake 1975).

Individuation can be extended to transitive predicates, as in the typology in Table 2:

Table 2: *Existentiality / individuation of the verb, Russian genitive of negation (Ueda 1993)*

lexical group	verbs	ACC / total (%ACC)
existential	<i>imet'</i> 'have', <i>znat'</i> 'know', <i>videt'</i> 'see', <i>deržat'</i> 'hold, keep', <i>najti</i> 'find', <i>dopustit'</i> 'permit', <i>polučit'</i> 'receive', <i>pisat'</i> 'write'	14 / 122 (11.5%)
neutral	<i>peremenit'</i> 'exchange', <i>ljubit'</i> 'maintain affection for', <i>osmotret'</i> 'examine', <i>brosit'</i> 'change position by throwing', <i>vdet'</i> 'direct through opening in needle', <i>unesti</i> 'carry away'	41 / 90 (45.1%)
individuating	<i>sčitat'</i> 'consider', <i>naznačit'</i> 'appoint, designate', <i>oglušit'</i> 'cause to go deaf', <i>izvit'</i> 'wind'	9 / 18 (50%)

At one extreme are predicates like *sčitat'* 'consider', *naznačit'* 'appoint, designate', *nazvat'* 'name', whose objects are effectively subjects; these predicates presume an individual which already has a set of known properties and they add an additional property to the individual, stated in the form of an predicative adjective or noun in the instrumental case. Similar are causatives of states such as *oglušit'* 'cause to go deaf', *izvit'* 'cause to become winding in shape', which change one accidental property of an established individual with independent properties. Such

¹² Summarized in Timberlake 1975, documented in Mustajoki 1985.

predicates can be termed individuating. At the opposite extreme, *imet'* 'have' reports on the presence of an attributive (non-referential) entity (or absence, under negation). *Imet'* is a strong existential and almost always takes a genitive object when negated. Similarly though not as virulently existential are verbs like *znat'* 'know' or *videt'* 'see', which report the presence or absence of an entity in someone's cognitive or perceptual sphere ('I know/see *x*' = '*x* exists in my sphere of knowledge/perception'). 'Know' and 'see', then, are weakly existential. Verbs reporting change in the location of the patient (*donesti* 'carry up to', *vdet'* 'place into, as a thread into a needle') are intermediate. The frequency of the genitive for objects of negated verbs follows the hierarchy from existential verbs (most frequent genitive), through neutral to individuating verbs (least frequent genitive). Thus the concept of "individuation" can be generalized from the level of the argument to the semantics of the predicate.

An analogous concept is relevant at the level of discourse. The perfective verb *soxranit'* 'preserve', when negated, can take either the genitive (as in (10–11), immediately below) or the accusative (as in (12–13), further below):

- (10) Nu a to, čto vy **ne soxranili dokumentov**_{GEN.PL} o pokupke i daže ne pomnite, gde pokupali, èto uže, izvinite, vaši problemy.¹³
 'Well, and the fact that you **haven't preserved documents** proving purchase and you can't even remember where you made the purchase, that, excuse me, is your problem.'
- (11) Situacija usugubljaetsja ešče i tem, čto pri pokupke ètogo avto ja **ne soxranil dokumentov**_{GEN.PL}, podtverždajuščix ego stoimost'.¹⁴
 'The situation is further compounded by the fact that in buying that auto I **did not preserve documents** proving its cost.'

The genitive in (10–11) is consistent with a focus on the non-existence of documents at the present time and the consequences of that non-existence.

- (12) Vo vremja vojny vse, kto vyxodil iz plena i **ne soxranil dokumenty**_{NOM=ACC.PL}, rasstrelivali.¹⁵
 'During the war all those who left captivity and **did not preserve documents** were shot.'
- (13) K tomu že bank **ne soxranil dokumenty**_{NOM=ACC.PL} po operacijam 2002 goda, kotorye po zakonu podležat xraneniju v tečenie pjati let.
 'In addition the bank **did not preserve documents** for its operations in 2002, which by law are supposed to be kept for a period of five years.'

In contrast, the accusative of (12–13) differentiates something in the predication. In (12), those POWs who are defined by the lack of documents suffered a fate different from those who had documents; in (13), the non-preservation of documents did not occur in the actual world though it could have occurred in another possible world (indeed, a world mandated by law). Thus with

¹³ <http://forum.navitel.su/>, accessed 3.14.10.

¹⁴ <http://www.forum.skoda-club.ru/viewtopic.php?t=27590>, accessed 3.14.10.

¹⁵ <http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/ws/en/complaint!default.jspa?messageID=1345193&complaintThreadID=11026> accessed 3.14.10.

this collocation of object noun and verb, the choice of case is correlated with a difference in existentiality vs. differentiation, or individuation, on the level of discourse.

Generalizing, the choice of genitive and accusative under negation signals a distinction of existentiality vs. individuation (differentiation), potentially on different layers: the object (proper vs. common, animate vs. inanimate, etc.), the predicate in its relation to the object (existential vs. individuating), or discourse (existentiality vs. differentiation).

4. Differential object marking in Spanish

Let us take this idea of layering and apply it to the process of marking objects of transitive verbs in Spanish with the preposition *a*.¹⁶ As of course is familiar, the use of *a* is very likely with nouns referring to human beings, a little less regular with nouns referring to animals, and exceptional with inanimate nouns. And is also well-known, for a given degree of animacy, use of *a* is more likely to the extent the noun is definite. In short, the *a* of Spanish is a marker of individuation, though animacy outranks referential individuation.

Here I want to take another look at two contexts that have been discussed in the literature on Spanish *a*. The first is objects of verbs with modal content like *aguardar* ‘await’ or *buscar* ‘seek’. Bello (1977:§893) noted long ago that *aguardar a un criado* ‘await a servant’ is used “cuando el que le aguarda piensa determinadamente en uno” (when the person who is waiting is thinking specifically of a certain one) while *aguardar un criado* is appropriate “cuando para el que le aguarda es indifferente el individuo” (when, for the person who is waiting, it is indifferent which individual). Bello cites a further minimal pair:

- (14) Fueron **a buscar a un médico** experimentado, que **gozaba** de una grande reputación.
 ‘They went to **look for an experienced doctor**, who **enjoyed** a great reputation.’
- (15) Fueron **a buscar un médico extranjero** que **conociera** las enfermedades del país.
 ‘They went to **look for a foreign doctor** who **would know** the country’s diseases.’

The variant with *a*, seen in (14), has a specific indefinite reading (‘a known individual’), and the verb of the subsequent relative clause is realis (*gozaba* in (14)). In the variant lacking *a* in (15) the noun has a non-specific, or attributive, reading: that is, “the speaker wishes to assert something about whatever or whoever fits that description.”¹⁷ Since the referent is hypothetical, the verb of the subsequent descriptive relative clause is subjunctive (*conociera* in (15)). Following Bello, we derive a three-way contrast: *buscar al médico que V_{INDC}* ‘to search for the doctor who...’ (definite referent, indicative dependent clause) / *buscar a un médico que V_{INDC}* ‘to search for a certain doctor who...’ (indefinite specific referent, indicative dependent clause) / *buscar un médico que V_{SBJV}* ‘to search for a (any) doctor who...’ (attributive indefinite referent, subjunctive dependent clause). Tacitly, the fourth combination *buscar a un médico que V_{SBJV}* is precluded. This paradigm has been codified in subsequent discussions.¹⁸

At first glance some examples on the internet support this description:

¹⁶ Thanks to Elkin Gutiérrez for consultation on Spanish.

¹⁷ Donnellan 1966.

¹⁸ For example, García and van Putte 1995.

- (16) No resistió más y **buscó a una mujer** llamada Lilith Lanou.¹⁹
 ‘He could resist no longer and **sought a woman** named L. L.’
- (17) A la hora de casarse, Bush **buscó una mujer que fuera** lo más diferente posible que su madre: cálida, no fría; tímida, no energética; doméstica, no política.
 ‘When it came time to marry, Bush **sought a woman who would be** as different as possible from his mother: passionate, not cold; timid, not energetic; domestic, not political.’

In (16), with *a*, a specific woman is sought; in (17), without *a*, the future president sought to marry someone, indifferent who, as long as it is someone who “fits that description.” This pair fits Bello’s analysis.

In actuality, usage on the web is not so cleanly divided between specific indefinite and non-specific (attributive) indefinite. All four variants—with or without *a*, with subjunctive or indicative in the relative clause—occur on the web (in the genre of personals). The results, shown in Table 3, are twice surprising. First, the canonical combination of *busco a una mujer que sabe* _{INDC}..., with *a* and indicative, is in fact rare. ((16) is one of the few examples I’ve found.) In this genre of text, *busco a una mujer que sepa* _{SBJV} ..., in which *a* is followed by a relative clause with the subjunctive, is quite frequent; given the genre of text, the desired object is attributive in reference, and yet it is preceded by *a*.

Table 3: Google search for *buscar (a) mujer que...*

<i>busco a una mujer que sabe</i> _{INDC} ...	‘I seek a woman who knows...’	5
<i>busco a una mujer que sepa</i> _{SBJV} ...	‘I seek a woman who would know...’	375,000
<i>busco una mujer que sabe</i> _{INDC} ...	‘I seek a woman who knows...’	482,000
<i>busco una mujer que sepa</i> _{SBJV} ...	‘I seek a woman who would know...’	41,300

Accessed Feb 20, 2010 (Google, Spanish language)

Second, in a relative clause subordinate to *busco una mujer* (without *a*), the subjunctive is actually less frequent than the indicative. In short, the paradigm codified in the literature is not confirmed by contemporary usage on the internet.

As a second construction, let us consider the use of *a* with inanimate objects of verbs of association (*modificar* ‘modify’, *acompañar* ‘accompany’, *sustituir* ‘substitute’), positioning (*preceder* ‘precede’, *seguir* ‘follow’ [Bello 1977:§897]), and definition (*identificar* ‘identify’, *especificar* ‘specify’, *llamar* ‘name’, *considerar* ‘consider’, *designar* ‘designate’, *definir* ‘define’, *caracterizar* ‘characterize’).²⁰ These verbs all predicate a relationship between an inanimate object and a locus of orientation; the object is sometimes marked with *a*. Following the lead of Weissenrieder (1991), I looked at how *caracterizar* ‘to characterize’ is used in Luján’s treatise on adjectives. I found 9 tokens of forms of *caracterizar* (two of them conjoined

¹⁹ Accessed 10.02.2006. When I originally accessed this and the next example (17), I failed to record the URLs; they are no longer on the web.

²⁰ Weissenrieder 1991:147, with citations of earlier literature.

with another verb). In three instances the object occurred with *a*; the subject was an abstract property construed as a characteristic of the object, as in:

- (18) la entonación ‘entre comas’ que **caracteriza a las cláusulas apositivas...** (Lujan 1980:122)
 ‘the “between-commas” intonation **which characterizes appositive clauses...**’

Similar are: *componentes... que caracterizan y distinguen a estos dos tipos* (Lujan 1980:38–39) ‘components... which characterize and distinguish these two types’; *varias características importantes que caracterizan a la cláusula apositiva* ‘various characteristics which characterize the appositive clause’ (Lujan 1980:77). In contrast, there were six tokens without *a*, five of which involved an agent (or an analytic framework metonymic of an agent) that formulates or provides a characterization, as in:

- (19) Un análisis adecuado debe **caracterizar esta relación** de hiponimia. (Lujan 1980:38)
 ‘A satisfactory analysis should **characterize this relation** of hyponymy.’

Thus in the usage of Luján’s treatise, there is a sharp division between two senses of *caracterizar*: an agent providing a characterization (no *a*) as opposed to an abstract property that states a characteristic property (with *a*).

Only one example (the ninth of this small sample) did not fit this pattern:

- (20) Precedido por un artículo, el adjetivo pronominal con un nombre propio **caracteriza el estilo de la lengua escrita** (Lujan 1980:85)
 ‘Preceded by an article, the pronominal adjective with a proper noun **is characteristic of the style of written language...**’

(20) has an abstract characteristic as subject and so at first blush is semantically analogous to (18), but unlike (18), (20) does not have *a* preceding the object. For this reason, the phrases *caracteriza el estilo* and *caracteriza al estilo* ‘characterizes the style’ appeared to be worth further investigation. A Google search for these phrases revealed real variation (Table 4):

Table 4: Google search for “caracteriza {el/al} estilo”

phrase	raw number of tokens
<i>caracteriza el estilo</i>	152,000
<i>caracteriza al estilo</i>	356,000
<i>que caracteriza el estilo</i>	375,000
<i>que caracteriza al estilo</i>	292,000

Accessed Feb 20, 2010 (Google, Spanish language)

It is puzzling that the number of tokens of *que caracteriza el estilo* with *que* exceeds the number of tokens of that phrase without *que*. Be that as it may, the two variants, with or without *a*, occur with frequencies on the roughly same order of magnitude.

Because the number of tokens is prohibitively large, I contented myself with the exploratory measure of extracting the first 50 tokens of *caracteriza el estilo* and the first 50 of *caracteriza al estilo* that appeared in the search.²¹ I first counted types of subjects, divided into: relativizing *que*, interrogative *qué*, indefinite *algo* ‘something’, SVO order (*piedras rústicas y lajas caracterizan el estilo local* ‘rustic stone and flagstone characterize the local style’), or VOS order (*caracteriza al estilo de Bécquer cierta vaguedad* ‘what characterizes Bécquer’s style is a certain vagueness’), as tabulated in Table 5.

Table 5: *Distribution of “a” in “caracteriza {el/al} estilo,” by subject*

<i>subject</i>	<i>xx tokens without a</i> (% of tokens without a)	<i>xx tokens with a</i> (% of tokens with a)
relative <i>que</i>	41 (82%)	44 (88%)
interrogative <i>qué</i>	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
indefinite <i>algo</i>	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
noun, SVO	6 (12%)	0 (0%)
noun, VOS	1 (2%)	2 (4%)

The numbers don’t reveal much. As it happens, the subject of *caracteriza {el/al} estilo* is almost always the relativizer *que* in both variants, which tells us nothing about what conditions *a*. Two minor points: SVO order prevents *a* and interrogative *qué* elicits *a*, as in *¿Qué caracteriza al estilo de vida adolescente actual?*²²

Another thought was that perhaps the degree of individuation might influence usage. But in all cases the noun *estilo* is definite. Could the possessor affect usage? Table 6 records the behavior of *estilo*: possessed by a proper noun, modified by adjectives describing cultural movements (*berlinés* ‘Berlin’, *mudéjar* ‘Muslim’), possessed by a common noun, or without possessor (and including tokens with a descriptive adjective such as *distintivo* ‘distinctive’).

Table 6: *Distribution of “a” in “caracteriza {el/al} estilo,” by possessor noun*

<i>estilo modified by...</i>	<i>xx tokens without a</i> (% of tokens without a)	<i>xx tokens with a</i> (% of tokens with a)
proper noun possessor	20 (40%)	18 (36%)
adjective of specific culture	9 (18%)	12 (24%)
common noun possessor	17 (34%)	15 (30%)
no possessor / descriptive adjective	4 (8%)	5 (10%)

A proper noun possessor (*el estilo decadente de Rachilde* ‘the decadent style of Rachilde’, *al estilo pictórico de Miguel Angel* ‘the visual style of Miguel Angel’) is slightly more frequent than a common noun possessor, but that is true of sentences with or without *a*, so the possessor tells us nothing about which contexts favor or disfavor *a*. Thus these two tangible parameters—

²¹ Excluding duplications and excluding tokens that could not be accessed or manipulated on the first page reached (including Google Book pages). I almost eliminated the seven examples with human subjects (six with *el estilo*, one with *al estilo*) and replaced them the next examples in the search.

²² http://www.dircom.udel.edu.pe/index.php?t=2010/febrero/397_04.

subject, possessor/modifier as possible measure of individuation—have dominant patterns that occur both with and without *a*, and accordingly tell us nothing about the use of *a* or its absence.

Another methodological tactic is to stare at the examples and see if there is a difference in the sense of the sentences with and without *a*. This approach seems promising, at least if we select the most explicit examples and extrapolate from them. A simple example of *caracteriza el estilo* is (21), where the possessor (celebrities) and their distinct style are taken for granted. The new information is the property (shoulder bags) associated with this style.

- (21) Si hay algo **que caracteriza el estilo de las celebrities** de todo el mundo es su gusto por llevar un buen bolso colgado del brazo. Esta es la lista de los más buscados del invierno.²³

‘If there is anything that **is characteristic of the style of celebrities** throughout the world it is the predilection for carrying a shoulder bag. Here is a list of the most sought after this winter.’

As noted earlier in Table 6, the order SVO (where S = characteristic property, O = style) favors omitting *a*, possibly because this order is used to introduce a property that had not previously been named, like Oolong tea in (22) in a description of a tea house:

- (22) El té Oolong, servido en pequeñas teteras, **caracteriza el estilo** de esta casa de té.²⁴
‘Oolong tea, served in small teapots, **is characteristic of the style** of this tea house.’

In (23), the collocation is modified by *precisamente*, which focuses on the degree of fit of the property (here, the conceptualism of Góngora) with a given style (Baroque):

- (23) Su mayor error fue confundir impersonalidad con objetividad. **Lo que caracteriza el estilo de Wyler es precisamente** la objetividad.²⁵

‘His main fault was to confuse impersonality with objectivity. That which characterizes the style of Wyler is precisely objectivity.’

These examples lacking *a* are assertions of existence: given a known style, let us describe it by establishing the existence of one or more associated properties.

Sentences with *al estilo* have a different function. When *a* is used, it differentiates one style from others; the properties that are named differentiate this style from others:

- (24) Definitivamente el estilo es "Funk", este proviene de la mezcla del Jazz (de aquí sus acordes), Soul y Rock & Roll, algo **que caracteriza al estilo** es el uso de acordes de 4 o mas sonidos moviendose muy ritmicamente al igual que el bajo en "Slap"...²⁶
‘Definitely the style is "Funk", it comes from the mixture of Jazz (whence its chords),

²³ <http://www.cienporcienmujer.com/moda/los-bolsos-favoritos-de-las-famosas-36303.htm>.

²⁴ <http://beijing.runweb.com/page-910-lang-ES-2V-page,Cultura-china-de-te.html>.

²⁵ http://www.archivodeprensa.edu.uy/r_monegal/bibliografia/prensa/artpren/film/cine_04.htm.

²⁶ <http://www.hispasonic.com/comunidad/acordes-con-septima-estilo-jazz-t193917.html>.

Soul, and Rock & Roll, something **which characterizes the style** is the use of chords of 4 or more notes moving very rhythmically as with “Slap” bass...’

Here one musical style (Funk) is differentiated from others; a specific musical technique is said to be its distinctive property. In (25) the contemporary state of affairs is differentiated from the prior state of world health; multiple distinctive features are listed:

- (25) Los malos hábitos de alimentación y la vida sedentaria **que caracteriza al estilo de vida actual** son los principales responsables de la alta incidencia de sobrepeso, obesidad, resistencia a la insulina y Diabetes que está afectando a la población mundial.²⁷
 ‘Bad dietary habits and sedentary life **which is characteristic of the contemporary lifestyle** are the main factors responsible for the high incidence of excess weight, obesity, insulin resistance and diabetes which affect the world’s population.’

A minimal pair occurs on one site in a discussion of journalistic styles ((26)):

- (26) Características generales...
 Los dos rasgos esenciales **que caracterizan el estilo periodístico** son: su uso utilitario y su propósito de comunicación.

...

Propiamente hablando, no hay un único estilo periodístico, sino tres modalidades distintas, cada una de las cuales puede ser considerada como un estilo periodístico diferenciado de los otros:

- El estilo informativo
- El estilo de sollicitación de opinión
- El estilo ameno

6.8.1.1 El estilo informativo

...

La tercera condición... consiste en ofrecer al lector un resumen completo de los elementos básicos que están presentes en el suceso que se pretende describir y que se muestra en el primer párrafo... La técnica de la pirámide invertida **caracteriza al estilo informativo**.²⁸

‘General Features ...

There are two essential features that **characterize journalistic style**: utility and purpose of communication.

...

Strictly speaking, there is no single style of journalism, but rather three different modes, each of which can be considered distinct from the others:

- reporting style
- opinion style

²⁷ <http://www.diabetesaldia.com/Default.aspx?SecId=300>.

²⁸ http://www.umce.cl/~cipumce/publicaciones/cuadernos/facultad_de_historia/metodologia/cuaderno_09/redaccion_informativa_tipos_de_redaccion.htm.

entertaining style

6.8.1.1 The reporting style

...

The third condition... is to offer the reader a complete overview of the basic elements that are present in the event which is described and recorded in the first paragraph... The inverted-pyramid technique **characterizes the reporting style.**'

The first token of *caracteriza*, in which the object lacks *a*, provides a general characterization of journalism (given that we are talking about journalism, let us provide some *características generales*). The second part of (26) provides a typology of three styles and a statement of the property that differentiates “reporting style” (with *a*) from the other two styles.

To summarize, the variation in the sentences cited above relates to existentiality vs. differentiation (individuation) on the discourse level. *Caracterizar el estilo* establishes the existence of a property associated with a known and presumably unique entity, while *caracterizar al estilo* differentiates one style from others which might be under discussion, and names the distinctive properties. That is to say, with inanimate objects of verbs of relation (association, position, definition), the choice of *a* is not purely a function of the reference of the noun, but is correlated with different discourse concerns.

5. Individuation in general

Let me end the discussion by mentioning two general issues. The discussion above suggests that, in the usage of any construction, some possibilities are more fixed (or conventionalized), some open to fluid discourse operations. Recall that, in Russian, almost all nouns that (typically, by convention) refer to living beings take the animate accusative even when they refer to the carcasses of once living beings. Conventionalization might help us understand how it is that changes such as the expression of animacy are perpetuated over time. Evidently usage that was experimental or variable at one stage gets conventionalized and prompts or allows further extensions of variable usage. As I suggested in Timberlake 1999, “Change proceeds in a cyclical fashion. Each new phase of innovation relies on the conventionalization of the previous innovation.” I confess I am not at all sure how to represent the difference between conventionalized as opposed to fluid grammar. One familiar possibility is to list as many distinct factors as possible that seem to be involved and describe variation in terms of these factors; on the order of a dozen were recorded for the Russian genitive of negation (Timberlake 1975) and Spanish *a* (notably Isenberg 1968). One can then create a branching tree of possibilities (as in Isenberg and, with a different theoretical background, Aissen 2003). With a branching tree one could try to weight the variables and calculate the contribution of each, as in the variable rules developed by Cedegren and Sankoff (1974). Variable rules seem admirably suited to describing variation within texts or in a community, but variable rules describe a probability, a contribution of each variable. A speaker, in choosing a form in a given linguistic and extralinguistic context, has to somehow weigh factors and arrive at a binary decision; it won't help a speaker to know that the genitive of negation in Russian or the *a* in Spanish has a likelihood of .53 for a certain constellation of features; a choice must be made.

Diachronically a branching tree of features suggests that languages check off nodes one by one in discrete fashion. In fact, change in usage proceeds gradually for any given node; more than one node change at the same time, though some nodes change earlier than others. At any stage, for a given combination of features, there will be competition between the two forms of the construction, with or without *a*. For example, García (1993) examined the use of *a* over four centuries from *El Cid* (end of the twelfth century) through two versions of *Cavallero Zifar* (early thirteenth, late fourteenth) to Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (c. 1600), as repeated in Table 7.

Table 7: “*a*” with animate direct objects in four Old Spanish texts (García 1993:39)

	El Cid (c. 1200)	Cavallero Z (early 13th c.)	Cavallero Z (late 14th c.)	Don Quixote (c. 1600)
definite singular	50%	65%	72%	90%
indefinite singular	20%	20%	43%	57%
definite plural	16%	6%	37%	67%
indefinite plural	17%	0%	12%	23%

The change does not occur by first generalizing *a* for one feature or feature combination, such as definite singular, before moving to the next cell or feature combination. In a similar fashion, certain verbs (*matar* ‘kill’) are more likely to take *a* than other verbs (*tomar* ‘take’), but it is not the case that any one verb (such as *matar*) generalized *a* completely before the next verb began to use *a* (von Heusinger 2008). Rather, the same hierarchical factors remain active over the long period of gradual extension of the use of *a* over time.

To describe this kind of scenario, we might avoid the usual approach, which is to construct a single rule for picking the expression of a concept—for example, a single rule telling us when to use *a*, when not, for direct objects. Instead, we might treat the two possibilities—direct object marked by no preposition and direct object marked by *a*—as separate constructions²⁹ and then ask when it is appropriate to use each. True, when usage is highly conventionalized, one of the other construction will predominate or exclude the other; thus in modern Spanish, the construction with *a* is used obligatorily with definite human direct objects. Much usage is parceled out in complementary fashion between the two constructions, a fact which can give the impression that a single rule chooses one or the other expression of objects of a transitive verb. But at every historical stage there are contexts or configurations where both constructions can be used. In such instances of variation (“optional usage”), if we posit two constructions, then we can perhaps understand how they would both be possible but be used with different, vague, discourse overtones like existentiality vs. differentiation. García (1993:43–44) states the problem well:

What ultimately determines the presence of *a* is an overall judgment of focus-worthiness based on the entire reference-in-context complex. The diachronic question is, of course, how the overall judgment of focus-worthiness could become more and more lenient, since we find *a* spreading, over time, into more referential types/contexts.

²⁹ “Trafarety” (templates), as they were called in Živov & Timberlake 1997.

Leaving aside the question of whether focus-worthiness is the right concept to determine the use of *a* (I would prefer existentiality vs. individuation/differentiation), García's comments points to the question of variable usage and gradual change: how to state at any synchronic stage that use of *a* is more or less likely for some combination of features and how to state a gradual change over time in the degree of preference for one or another variant. This degree of "leniency" could be called the problem of calibration: the parameters of grammar do not really change (e.g., *a* is consistently favored by proper, definite, personal, singular nouns) but the usage does change, and does so in an incremental fashion. My best guess is that we need to fine-tune statements of usage to reflect degrees of insistence on the vague discourse consideration. For example, in *El Cid*, *a* is generally not used in discussions of marrying off the two definite daughters of Cid, but *a* is used when there is a contrast in the sentence; as *a* expands over time, the condition for using *a* will become, well, more lenient. Whether that is a fruitful approach to the problem of calibration remains to be seen. I only want to suggest that, even if we describe usage in terms of competing constructions, it will be a challenge to calibrate the choice between variants.

A second issue is the broad question of what motivates differential object marking. Questions of this sort are very familiar to Slavists, who, under the aegis of Roman Jakobson (notably Jakobson 1936), have looked for the *Gesamtbedeutung* of morphological forms, that is, an abstract, global semantic parameter that would characterize every use of the form in every context. For example, one might suggest, as Jakobson did, that the genitive case indicates a restriction on the participation of an entity in the predication. This abstract characterization motivates the genitive of negation well, since negation excludes the object from participation; to describe contemporary Russian, where there is variation between accusative and genitive for objects of negated verbs, one could say that genitive means the object is *thoroughly* excluded.

Spanish *a* has spawned a number of similar global interpretations:³⁰ *a* avoids ambiguity with the subject; *a* marks animacy, or definiteness, or a combination of the two features, which is to say, individuation; *a* marks high transitivity, or kinesis (or individuation plus kinesis (Kliffner 1995)); *a* marks focus-worthiness (García 1993) or topicality, especially marked by a pleonastic pronoun (Melis 1995); *a* is used to the extent the object is subject-like; *a* is used to the extent the object is atypical (Laca 1995). Each of these proposed principles has a certain justification, but each has imperfections.

It is worth making explicit that similar considerations have been at play in the historical development of animacy in Russian and in Spanish. The parameters that elicit the expression of animacy—a high degree of animacy, a high degree of referential uniqueness—have affected the development of both processes. The parameters involved in animacy are the inverse of the parameters involved in the Russian genitive of negation. The genitive of negation is inhibited by exactly those factors which promote marking of animacy: animacy and referential uniqueness inhibit the genitive of negation but favor marking animacy. In the genitive of negation, there is no real question of ambiguity of subject and object. This fact suggests that whatever is at play in these processes is more abstract than the functionalist need to avoid ambiguity.

In early work on the genitive of negation (Timberlake 1975), I suggested that individuation is a concept that generalizes over many of the more specific factors involved in the

³⁰ Reviewed with clarity in Pensado 1995.

choice between accusative and genitive. Individuation answers the question that is implicit in Comrie's 1979 cross-linguistic demonstration that differential object marking marks definite objects in some languages (Uzbek, Persian) and animacy in others (Russian, Spanish). The parallelism between the two parameters, and the fact that they are mutually supportive (as in Spanish), suggests that the two considerations form a "natural class." In what sense? Individuation: animate beings are conventionally understood as individuals more readily than inanimate entities; referentially unique entities are individuated from others in a class. In the same vein it is perhaps instructive to think of the "animacy hierarchy" as it applies to the expression of number cross-linguistically (Corbett 2008) as an individuation hierarchy, since it includes distinctions such as pronouns vs. nouns, proper vs. common, and count vs. mass; these are all distinctions of individuation rather than animacy in the strict sense.³¹

That said, the concept of individuation needs refinement. Evidently individuation is relevant not just at the level of nouns; the concept extends to verbs and ultimately to discourse, when it might better be called differentiation. And it is important to say that the opposite of individuation is existentiality. Existentiality means that the concern of the discourse is with establishing the existence of something (a situation or entity) as opposed to its absence. Existentiality is opposed to individuation, which means concern with differentiation of something (situation or entity) from alternatives deemed relevant.

Why existentiality and individuation (or differentiation)? I would suggest that the distinction is one of the fundamental things we do with language. Language can be used to address the question of whether a situation or entity exists; that is existentiality. Or language can presume existence and then differentiate possibilities: this entity as opposed to others, this property of an entity as opposed to another property, this possible event as opposed to other alternative worlds, and so on. An independent illustration of this difference comes from Jacalteco (Craig 1977). Sentences that assert possession (a form of existentiality) normally have an overt existential marker *ay* of suspicious etymology (27):

- (27) ay-xa cawing w-unin
 exist-already two my-child
 'I already have two children.'

The existential marker disappears when one constituent is emphasized ((28)):

- (28) cawang-xa w-unin
 two-already my-child
 'I already have *two* children!'

In (28) the number of actual children is contrasted with other possible quantities, and when that happens, the proposition has "shifted from a statement of existence to the presupposition of existence" (Craig 1977:22). That is to say, (27) is existential, while (28), by virtue of its concern with alternate possible quantities, is differential.

³¹ As implicitly in Silverstein 1976, explicitly in Comrie 1989:186, 194–95.

Why should the difference between existentiality and differentiation be relevant to objects in particular?³² Individuated entities have an existence independent of the specific proposition. There are other things one could say about them in addition to how they are affected in the given proposition. Their long-term interest to the speaker is not limited to the simple question of existence or non-existence. In describing the scene of the mother's death in an autobiography, the speaker says *ja ne pomnju Andrijušu*_{ACC.SG} 'I do not remember Andryusha'—with accusative, not genitive of negation. Were the author to use the genitive here, it would suggest she lacks any memory of her half-brother Andrey, which of course is not the case—he exists and is a permanent part of her world knowledge. What she is negating here is memory of a quite restricted property, whether he was present on the occasion of the mother's death. The restriction of the failure of memory to one property, among many properties that are known and could be relevant of the highly individuated proper animate noun Andrey, is the reason why the accusative, not the genitive, is used for this object of a negated verb used. When the object entity has multiple properties that are known and possibly relevant, or when the event is one of several possible scenarios that could be envisioned, the given proposition is only one of the properties one might think of in connection with the entity. Because the referent has an independent existence, the operation of pinning a property on the entity is indirect, incomplete, accidental and not essential. In contrast, the genitive of negation would in fact be used when reference is attributive and the question is whether anything at all is remembered: *ja ne pomnju morja*_{GEN.SG} 'I don't remember the sea (= there being any sea).'

Reverse this reasoning and we have the diachronic motivation for adapting the dative preposition to become the marker of animate direct objects in Spanish: the attribution of properties approaches but does not encompass the whole informational relevance of the patient, in analogy to the way in which moving something towards a goal or beneficiary merely adds something to that goal or beneficiary but is not essential to its definition.³³ The autonomy of animate patients contrasts with the absence of autonomy characteristic of mass objects that are conventionally associated with a certain predicate, as is true of, say, *tea* and *drink*. Such undifferentiated objects and contourless actions of the type *drink tea* often lead to quasi-incorporation of the object and partial or significant detransitivization of an otherwise transitive verb (many examples are cited in Hopper and Thompson 1980:257–59). There is a gradation from thoroughly internal patients without autonomous referential properties to neutral patients to autonomous patients, who are to an extent above the fray and who are not exhaustively defined by a given proposition.³⁴ Differential object marking is used to mark one or the other end point of this scale: either indefinite objects (or incorporated objects) are marked as internal (by incorporation and detransitivization—or the genitive case if the verb is negated in Russian) or

³² As possible motivations for animacy, Comrie (1989:198–99) mentions but criticizes “topic-worthiness” and “salience” (said to be “essentially the same thing” as individuation) on the grounds they will lead to circularity. It may be too rigid to think of individuation strictly in terms of nominal reference. Individuation and its opposite, existentiality, are fundamental ways of conceptualizing events and entities. What we see in differential object marking is conventionalization of typical patterns of usage: animates are more likely to be individuated, etc. Inevitably there will be circularity.

³³ Laca 1995:74–77.

³⁴ Laca (1995) restates individuation as “autonomía referencial” (autonomous reference).

individuated objects (animate, definite) are given special morphological marking because they have value and interest to the speaker beyond the given proposition. I would suggest, then, that differential object marking and individuation have to do not so much with the external, real-world properties of objects as with their (conventional) significance in the speaker's world. This concern can be relevant at the level of the object itself or the collocation of verb and patient or the level of discourse.

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