Differential Object Marking in P’orhépecha. Case Splits and Case Alternations

1. Introduction

Across languages, it is quite common that some patients/themes in object function occur without overt marking while others must be marked. This phenomenon, known as **Differential Object Marking** (DOM) (Bossong 1985, 1991; Comrie 1989:128, Aissen 2003; Croft 2003:132, 166, 167, among others), has been attributed, mainly, to semantic or pragmatic properties of the NPs.

This work looks into the properties of DOM in P’orhépecha or Tarascan, a Mesoamerican language isolate, which exhibits a morphological case system following a nominative-accusative alignment. While DOM in P’orhépecha has been related to animacy, definiteness and individuation, I will present novel data which clarify the conditions that account for DOM in P’orhépecha, especially regarding the correlation between case-marking and the definiteness dimension. In contrast to previous studies, I will show that P’orhépecha exhibits **case splits** (i.e., some NPs must be case-marked) based on intrinsic properties of the NPs (animacy, lexical/syntactic definiteness and plural marking), and that only when **case alternation** is possible (basically, with singular inanimate objects), the case marking may have an effect in the interpretation of the NPs (cf. Malchukov & Hoop 2007, de Swart 2007:188; Heusinger 2011).

While in P’orhépecha the case alternation seems to follow a definiteness scale, I will give evidence that, contrary to what might be expected, the objects with generic sense may be marked, whereas those with definite readings or specific indefinite readings may or may not be case-marked. The analysis of the P’orhépecha data allows us to make the following proposals that attest to the abovementioned behavior: a) in P’orhépecha, case
marking is used as a device to restrict the denotation of those NPs that allow for case alteration; b) the case marker may, and in some cases has to, be avoided in NPs that would otherwise require it, when textual information (given in the linguistic context) and/or extra-linguistic information (coming from the context of utterance or shared knowledge) guarantees, in an unambiguous way, the intended referential interpretation of the NP.

The text is organized as follows. In Section 2, the DOM phenomenon and the semantic dimensions that have been linked to it are outlined. In Section 3, general information about P’orhépecha is given along with some previous proposals about DOM in this language. In Section 4, the factors that trigger case splits are discussed. Also, some diachronic data relevant to explain the obligatory marking are considered. In Section 5, the effects of presence vs. absence of case marking in the NPs that allow for the alternation are analyzed. Lastly, in Section 6, the conclusions of the present research are presented.

2. Differential Object Marking

Differential Object Marking (DOM) is present when certain patient/theme NPs exhibit overt marking and others do not, or receive a different marking (Bossong 1985, 1991; Aissen 2003; Comrie 1989:128; Croft 2003:132, 166, 167; Haspelmath 2005; Malchukov and de Swart 2009). The majority of studies concerning DOM coincide in acknowledging a strong correlation between case marking and the syntactic/pragmatic properties of the object (patient/theme), most typically its prominence on the Animacy and Definiteness Scales. The objects that occupy the highest positions on these scales (whether in one or both, depending on the language) tend to present case marking, while those that occupy low positions tend to lack it (cf. Silverstein 1976; Bossong 1991, 1985; Naes 2004; Comrie 1989: 128; Croft 2003: 166-75; Haspelmath 2005; Malchukov 2008; Kittila and Malchukov
This phenomenon is widely discussed by Aissen (2003), who argues that if an object can be case marked, those higher ranked on the Animacy or Definiteness Scales can also be case marked. The scales put forward by the author are shown in (1):

(1) Definiteness and Animacy Scales (Aissen 2003)
   Animacy scale: Human> Animate> Inanimate
   Definiteness scale: Personal Pronoun> Proper Name> Definite NP> Indefinite
   Specific NP > Non-specific NP

DOM has been commonly related to the necessity of differentiating subject from object (distinguishing function), whether in global terms — in circumstances of a possible ambiguity between subject and object — or in a local sense — markedness reversal (cf. Aissen 2003, Malchukov 2008, Malchukov & de Swart 2009; Song 2001: 156-167, de Swart 2006; Gerner 2007). The underlying idea of markedness reversal is that, given that while the prototypical subject is animate and definite, the prototypical object is inanimate and indefinite, thus the deviations from this norm (e.g. definite human patients) tend to receive overt marking (Silverstein 1976; Comrie 1989:128; Aissen 2003). That is, the prominent objects on the scales (with properties typical of the subject, thus semantically marked) are non-prototypical objects and present overt marking, in contrast to the non-prominent or prototypical objects (which are semantically unmarked). Aissen (2003), whose proposal is contained within the framework of the Optimality Theory, proposes a Harmonic Alignment between the Grammatical Functions Scale (S > O) and the Prominence Scales. With this harmonic alignment, in conjunction with the Iconicity Principle (between morphological marking and semantic marked configurations) and the Economy Principle (penalizing the overt marking), she attempts to explain the crosslinguistic variations exhibited in DOM systems (cf. Comrie 1989).
The two-dimensional DOM systems, where both animacy and definiteness intervene, tend to be complex systems where, according to Aissen (2003: 460, 469), one of the dimensions or scales predominates. This author points out that in these systems, the ranking of scales that trigger marking is language specific, given that, in terms of prominence, there is equivalence, for example, between a non-specific human and a definite inanimate. Therefore, it is possible to make only general predictions, for example, if the definite inanimates (semantically marked in the definiteness scale) exhibit marking, all the definites will be case-marked.

Aissen’s consideration of the animacy and definiteness as equivalent dimensions in the determination of DOM has been questioned. De Swart (2007:137, 181, 182) points out that, while the definiteness-based marking may be linked to prominence, the definiteness per se, unlike animacy, does not play a role in the differentiation between agent (subject) and patient (object). Likewise, de Swart (2007: 179, 180) and de Swart and Hoop (2007) argue that animacy (a inherent feature of NPs) and definiteness (referential properties of NPs) belong to different phenomena and, as a consequence, do not behave in a parallel way in two-dimensional systems, the norm being that animacy takes priority over definiteness/specificity.

2.1 The definiteness scale

DEFINITENESS may be characterized, following Gundel et al. (1993) and Johanson (2006), as a notional category with semantic-pragmatic functions concerning the restriction/identification of the set of possible referents of an NP. The implementation of this category entails information about the way in which the speaker intends a nominal expression to be interpreted. Johanson (2006) points out that the referential possibilities of the NPs, which contribute to the transmission of the speaker’s intention, are determined in
the discourse due to both linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts (speech situation and/or shared knowledge). The Definiteness Scale on which this work is based is shown in (2):

(2) Definiteness Scale (cf. Aissen 2003)
Definite > Indefinite Specific > Indefinite Non-specific

Based on the postulates of the aforementioned authors, the referential categories that the Definiteness Scale encompasses may be understood as follows. **DEFINITE**: The referent of the NP is presented as identifiable (familiar/accesible to the listener). It is presupposed that the listener is able to recognize the particular and unique entity(ies) the NP is referring to, whether because of something mentioned earlier (discursive information) or because of another type of available information (extra-linguistic). Unlike definite NPs, the indefinite ones typically introduce participants that have not been previously mentioned and that are not identifiable by the listener. **SPECIFIC INDEFINITE**: The NP refers to a particular entity. The speaker attempts to cause the listener to build a mental representation of the designated individual item.  

**NON-SPECIFIC INDEFINITE**: The referent of the description may be any member of the class of entities designated by the NP; it is, therefore, arbitrary or non-particular.

The category of indefinite may encompass, as manifested by Enç (1991) for Turkish, the partitive phrases of the type ‘one of the X’, where the choice of referent is restricted to a familiar-discourse set. The **PARTITIVE INDEFINITE** is considered a type of specific by Aissen (cf. Farkas 1984, 2002). However, just as Farkas (2002), Kornflit and

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1 In the studies about specificity (see Farkas 1994, 2002; von Heusinger 2011), a distinction has been established between epistemic specificity (the speaker has a particular referent in mind) and scopal specificity (where the fixed value of the referent stems from the interpretation of the indefinite NP due to the existencial closing at text level —out of the scope of an operator— that is, presents a wide scope). In both cases, the referent is particular (its value is fixed), which allows them to be grouped, as proposed by von Heusinger (2011), under the function of “referential anchoring”. For the purposes of the present study, following Aissen (2003), both types of specificity mentioned above are acknowledged simply as indefinite specific NPs, given that this distinction does not alter the central argument of this research regarding the relation between case marking and NP readings.
von Heusinger (2009), and von Heusinger (2011) argue, the partitive indefinites do not necessarily meet the condition of the specific indefinites, since the former can have both specific and non-specific readings. However, based on the Definiteness Scale in (2), this work assumes, following Enç (1991) and Aissen (2003), that, in a broad sense, the label Indefinite Specific may include the partitives ——regardless of whether they denote a particular entity (specific reading) or not (non-specific reading)— since their referents are not arbitrary at all as they are restricted to a particular set (cf. Gundel et al. 1993: 282).

3. **P’orhépecha and previous proposals about case marking in the language**

P’orhépecha or Tarascan is a language isolate spoken by around 100,000 people in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, a region that belongs to the Mesoamerican linguistic area. P’orhépechan communities are located in three main areas: Lake Pátzcuaro, the *Sierra or Meseta Tarasca* and the *Cañada de los Once Pueblos*. Even though the P’orhépechan communities exhibit dialectal variations, there is a high degree of intelligibility among the P’orhépecha speakers.

P’orhépecha is a wholly suffixing, agglutinative language that presents mainly a dependent-marking pattern. The language exhibits a morphological case system following a nominative-accusative alignment type. The order of the constituents is pragmatically determined and does not convey any grammatical information (Capistrán 2000). This language lacks pronominal verbal suffixes and it is only in the indicative that it shows a contrast between –*ka* 1/2 person subject vs. –*ti* third person subject. The case system lacks

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2In terms of Kornflid and von Heusinger (2009:18) while definiteness and specificity are basic semantic operations, partitvity is a composite operation: a subset operation (referring to a given set) and a selection operation (definite or indefinite, specific or non-specific).
a formal distinction between accusative and dative, a common phenomenon in languages that show DOM (see Blansitt 1984; Bossong 1991; Malchukov 2008; Comrie 1989:128; Croft 2003:132, 166,167; von Heusinger and Kornfeld 2005). The nominative is unmarked, while the suffix –ni occurs with the object in monotransitive constructions and with both objects in ditransitive constructions (the behavior properties of the objects in the ditransitives exhibit an Primary Object/Secondary Object pattern (see Capistrán 2015)).

(3) a. sapí  eshé-s-Ø-ti  anátapu-ni
   boy  see-PRF-PRS-3IND  tree-OBJT
   ‘The child saw the tree.’

   b. tumpí  ewá-s-Ø-ti  tsúntsú-ni  marikwa-ni
   boy  take.away-PRF-PRS-3IND  pot-OBJT  girl-OBJT
   ‘The boy took the pot away from the girl.’

As can be seen in (3) this language lacks definite articles. The elements that may function as determiners of NP are the demonstratives, as i ‘this’ ts ‘iimá ‘those’, the forms ma ‘one’ and már ‘some’ with indefinite value and possessives such as xuchíi ‘my’ chiíi ‘your’. The NPs, apart from case, may present the plural inflection –icha/-echa; for instance, tsúntsú ‘pot’, tsúntsúicha ‘pots’.

The different studies of the P’orhépecha language (Foster 1969:71; Friederich 1984; Monzón 1997; Nava 1997; Chamoreau 1999; Villavicencio 2002, 2006; Vázquez Rojas 2010) point out that there is a possibility that certain DOs (objects with patient/theme function) are presented without the –ni case marker, but that dialectal variants may exist.³

³ The data on which this paper is based are the result of fieldwork carried out with speakers of the lake communities of Puácuaro and Santa Fe, as well as of a revision of written material from reliable sources with texts from various communities. The examples taken from these written sources were analyzed with the help of native consultants who corroborated its correction and provided their translations. All examples provided in this work have been transcribed phonologically. The following orthographic conventions require explanation: ï is a high central vowel that is represented as i when stressed; C’ indicates aspirated consonant; rh corresponds to a retroflex approximate.
However, there is a consensus that the marking of the patient/theme is obligatory in objects that exhibit plural inflection –icha/–echa, in all definite objects, and in the indefinites referring to human or animates.

Villavicencio (2006) sustains that the interrelation of the Animacy, Definiteness and Individuation dimensions explains the DOM in modern P’orhépecha. Chart I summarises the proposal put forward by this author:

Chart I. Distribution of the objective marking in the 20th century (Villavicencio 2006:237)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marked Objects –ni</th>
<th>Unmarked objects –Ø (singular NPs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all humans</td>
<td>indefinite inanimates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definite or individuated animates</td>
<td>generic animates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definite or individuated inanimates</td>
<td>generic or mass inanimates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Chart I, the inanimate NPs are case marked if their referents are definite or individuated, but are left unmarked if they denote an indefinite singular entity. On the other hand, mass nouns and singular nominals with a generic sense, referring either to animates or inanimates, are unmarked. Given this distribution, Villavicencio suggests that –ni is an individuation mechanism whose presence is required by definite or individuated NPs. For this author, all plural NPs are individuated (Villavicencio 2006: 230, 233).4

Villavicencio’s statements are supported by the marking in sentences like (4a) vis à vis the possibility of marking omission in (4b), where the presence vs. the absence of –ni determines the definite vs. the generic reading of the NP.

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4 The author uses the term ‘individuated’ to refer to the nominals that indicate individual and countable entities as opposed to mass and generic ones. According to her analysis, number inflection and the objective case are individuation mechanisms in P’orhépecha.
While Vázquez Rojas (2010) in general agrees with Villavicencio regarding the presence/absence of marking in P’orhépecha, she draws attention to the fact that the indefinite NPs with inanimate referents can or cannot exhibit case marking. However, the author does not provide evidence about the type of contrast that this alternation may entail. In (5) some sentences that exhibit this alternation are shown:

(5) a. para=ksi xarhaku-pirin-ka k’eri ma pósa=ksi=nha
for=1/3PL dig-COND-SBJV big one well=3PL=EV
‘..in order to dig a well in that place.’ [so that they dig a large well] (maría,3,7 Villavicencio 2006:228)

b. no néma t’imáta-sín=Ø-ti ma kandéla-ni
no someone light-HAB-PRS-3IND one candle-OBJT
‘No one lights a candle.’(San Lukasí 8 (16))

Vázquez Rojas claims that the obligatoriness of the marking of plural NPs is due to the fact that, in P’orhépecha, these are always projections of DPs and, therefore, can only denote individual plural entities and not just properties (i.e., sets of entities).^5

In a previous work, I have given evidence that the studies mentioned above do not give a full account of the factors that determine DOM in P’orhépecha nor of the relation between case marking and referential interpretation of NPs. The analysis that I present in the

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^5 The author explains this case marking based on the structural configuration of the NPs. The analysis is founded on the distinction between determiner phrases DP (with explicit or non-overt determiners) that assign case to its complements, and unmarked nominal phrases NP that are licensed in argumental position via incorporation. Even though the author sustains asserts that in P’orhépecha unmarked NPs must be adjacent to the verb, as the reader may see in the examples that will be presented, there are cases of unmarked objects not adjacent to the verb.
following sections is based on the typological proposals put forward by de Swart (2007), de Swart and Hoop (2007), and Hoop and Malchukov (2007), and includes data that has had not been previously discussed (many of them coming from narrative) but that have (allowed for a clarification of) contributed to clarify how DOM works in P’orhépecha.

4. Case splits. Obligatory case marking

In this section, the factors that determine case splits in P’orhépecha are analyzed. I will discuss NPs that must be case marked, so case marking cannot influence the interpretation of the NP (cf. de Hoop & Malchukov 2007, and de Swart 2007:186, regarding “split case alternations”). Following the ideas by de Swart (2007), de Swart and Hoop (2007), and Klein and de Swart (2010), I will show that, under these circumstances, the inherent and/or grammatical features of the NPs are the ones that trigger the case marking. In P’orhépecha, the properties of NPs that trigger the objective case marker –ni can be divided into three kinds: 1) inherent features (animacy); 2) lexical/syntactic definiteness (presence of determiners); c) grammatical properties (plural inflection).

4.1 Animacy

In P’orhépecha, the singular objects that are prominent on the animacy scale (humans and animates) must be case marked, except animates with a generic or collective sense.

Therefore, all NPs with human or animate referents, whether indefinite or with a definite reading, must present case marking:

(6) a. *ché-ra-s-∅-ti marikwa*(-ni)/ma marikwa*(-ni)*
get.scared-CAUS-PRF-PRS-3IND girl-OBJT/one girl-OBJT
‘S/he scared the girl/a girl.’
b.  

\[
\text{b. } \text{eshé-nt’a-s-∅-ti} \quad \text{akwítsi*(-ni)/ma} \quad \text{akwítsi*(-ni)}
\]

see-ITR-PRF-PRS-3IND  snake-OBJT/one  snake-OBJT

‘S/he found the snake/ a snake.’

Given that -\textit{ni} is obligatory with this type of NP, its occurrence cannot be related to the
definite or indefinite interpretation of the NPs. The contrast between definite (bare nouns)
and indefinite is established by the occurrence of the indefinite determiner \textit{ma}. The
indefinite NPs in (6) may have a specific or non-specific reading. \textit{P’orhépecha} confirms the
postulate by de Swart (2007: 137, 176-182) and de Swart and Hoop (2007), that states that
in languages with two-dimensional DOM, the inherent features of the nominal (animacy)
take priority over definiteness/specificity. \textit{Then, under such circumstances}, the definiteness
dimension does not have any role regarding case assignment.

\subsection*{4.2 Lexical Definiteness}

In languages like \textit{P’orhépecha}, which lack definite articles, the NPs with a definite reading
may be of two types: a) bare \textit{nominals}, or b) NPs with demonstratives or possessive forms.
As pointed out by de Swart (2007:185-188) and Klein and de Swart (2010), it is important
to distinguish between these types of NPs given that in the second case, definiteness is
provided by a lexical element. These authors sustain that if definiteness is due to a lexical
item, e.g., a demostrative, it can trigger the occurrence of the case marker, but the case
marking itself does not determine the definite reading, nor can it modify the referential
value of the NP.

\footnote{In Santa Fe and other communities, \textit{ma} may be in a post nominal position. Whatever the order is, the indefinite determiner, unlike the demonstratives (see 4.2) cannot be case marked. On the distribution of the case mark in the NP, see Villavicencio (2006) and Capistrán (2002).}
In P’orhépecha all NPs with demonstrative determiners as well as demonstratives with pronominal function require the occurrence of the case marker.\(^7\) The demonstrative, unlike other determiners (see note 6), must present objective case inflection, as can be observed in (7a, b).\(^8\)

(7)  
\begin{align*}
a. & \quad \text{atá}-\text{a-}tì & \quad \text{imà}*(-\text{ni}) & \quad \text{tumpí}*(-\text{ni})/\text{kúchi}*(-\text{ni})/\text{chkari}*(-\text{ni}) \\
& \quad \text{strike-FUT-3IND} & \quad \text{that-OBJT} & \quad \text{boy-OBJT/pig-OBJT/stick-OBJT} \\
& \quad \text{‘S/he will strike that boy/pig/stick.’} \\
b. & \quad \text{xuá}-\text{s-}\emptyset-\text{ti} & \quad \text{inté}*(-\text{ni}) & \quad \text{tumína}*(-\text{ni}) \\
& \quad \text{bring-PRF-PRS-3IND} & \quad \text{this-OBJT} & \quad \text{money-OBJT} \\
& \quad \text{‘S/he brought this money.’} \\
c. & \quad \text{eshé-}\emptyset & \quad \text{i*(-ni)} \\
& \quad \text{see-IMP} & \quad \text{this-OBJT} \\
& \quad \text{‘look at this.’} \\
\end{align*}

The examples in (7) show that the demonstratives trigger the occurrence of \(-\text{ni}\), irrespective of animacy.\(^9\) However, this does not necessarily imply that all NPs with a definite reading present marking regardless of animacy, as has been proposed for this language. What can actually be stated is that the presence of certain lexical elements that indicate definiteness triggers a case marking split, that is, the case marker is obligatory

\(^7\)The language lacks pronominal forms for 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) person objects. The pronominal forms for 1\(^{\text{st}}\) and 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) person objects are obligatorily case marked by \(-\text{ni}\).  
\(^8\)In Santa Fe, as well as in other communities, I have registered the possibility that in sentences with mass nouns, as in (8b), the case marker only occurs in the demonstrative. On this pattern in the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) century, see 4.4.  
\(^9\)The same behavior is presented in NPs with possessive determiners —which cannot have case inflection—, or with possessive pronouns: \text{eshéstí xuchiítí tsínitsu}*(-\text{ni}) ‘s/he saw my pot’ \text{eshéstí xuchiítí}*(-\text{ni}) ‘s/he saw mine’. However, unlike demonstratives, whose occurrence always entails case marking (see footnote 9), the occurrence of possessive determiners with mass nouns presents the possibility of alternation: \text{inchárant aati} [\text{iméerí trigu-}\text{ni}] ‘he will get in his wheat’ (San Lukáší 3 (17)), \text{ximpóka=ni no xatsíska nání énka=ni patsáaka [xuchiítí semiya]}‘because I have nowhere to keep (lit. will put away) my seed(s)’ (San Lukáší 12 (17)). Because more data is needed on factors that license the optionality of the case marker in these kinds of NPs, they will not be considered in this paper.
whatever the animacy of the referent (on a similar case in Hebrew see de Swart (2007:187)).

4.3 Plural NPs

In P’orhépecha, the plural NPs must be case marked regardless of the features of their referents; therefore, neither the animacy nor the definiteness/specificity are relevant factors accounting for the case marking of plural NPs. This can be clearly observed in the examples in (8):

(8)  

a.  
\[pyá-a-s-Ø-ka=ni\]  
\[k’wanintikwa-echa*(-ni)\]  
buy-DISTR-PRF-PRS-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ  
shawl-PL-OBJT  
‘I bought (the) shawls.’

b.  
\[Pédru \ û-a-s-Ø-ti\]  
\[ts’imá \ táa-echa*(-ni)\]  
Pedro  do/make- DISTR-PRF-PRS-3IND  
those  house-PL-OBJT  
‘Pedro made those houses.’

c.  
\[xupá-nt’a-a-sha-p-ti\]  
\[máru \ tsúntsu-icha*(-ni)\]  
wash-ITR-DISTR-PROG-PST-3IND  
some  pot-PL-OBJT  
‘S/he was washing some pots.’

As mentioned before, the occurrence of \(-ni\) in plural NPs has been attributed to the fact that, in P’orhépecha, such NPs are necessarily individuated (Villavicencio 2006; Vazquez Rojas 2010). However, this is not exact. The individuation in all sentences in (8) depends on the occurrence of the distributive marker \(–a\) in the verb (cf. Capistrán 2014).

The latter is made evident in the contrast between the sentences (9a) and (9b).

(9)  

a.  
\[Xwánu \ xupí-a-sín-ti\]  
\[kurúcha-echa-ni\]  
Juan  grab-DISTR-HAB-PRS-3IND  
fish-PL-OBJT  
answélo  ximpó  
hook  POSP  
‘Juan catches fish with a hook.’
b. **Xwánu warhó-sín-Ø-ti k’werépu-icha-ni**
Juan fish-HAB-PRS-3IND charal-PL-OBJT
‘Juan fishes charales (small fish).’

In (9a), given that fish are caught one by one with a hook, the object ‘fish’ is seen as a collection of entities (individuated), which is why the distributive marking is obligatory. In contrast, in (9b) the verb does not present –a, and the object ‘charales’ is seen as a unit or a non-individuated cluster. In this case, the distributive is not admitted, since *warhóni* is used to fish with a net, in such a way that many fish are caught at the same time. In both sentences, in spite of the fact that the reading of the plural NPs is generic, the objects have to be case marked despite the individuation that triggers the occurrence of –a.

It can be concluded then that, in P’orhépecha, the plural inflection is a grammatical feature that triggers case marking in an obligatory way, regardless of the animacy, individuation or definiteness/specificity (on a similar phenomenon in the Huo language see Epps 2008; Klein and de Swart 2007). Therefore, P’orhépecha is added to the list of languages with DOM that present a case marking split determined by grammatical properties (see de Swart and Hoop 2007; Kornfilt and Heusinger 2009).

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**4.4 Case splits antecedents. The objective case marker in 16th century P’orhépecha**

In this section, I will consider some aspects of DOM in 16th century P’orhépecha, which clarify the current **obligatoriness** of the -ni case marker.

The distribution of –ni in objects with patient/theme function was much more restricted in 16th century P’orhépecha. As pointed out by Villavicencio (2006: 198), according to colonial grammars (Gilberti [1558], 1987:24; Lagunas [1574], 1983:33) only the pronouns (1st and 2nd person), the nominals (nouns and adjectives) referent to rational beings and the demonstratives admitted the case inflection –ni.
Villavicencio (2006: 198-237) comments that in the corpus of the 16th century that she gathered, the marking of patient/theme mainly occurred with human referents (if the NPs presented demonstratives, both they and the noun were marked), and occasionally, with definite inanimates if the NP exhibited a demonstrative (in which case, the marking was confined to the demonstrative). Conversely, NPs without determiners referring to animate or inanimate entities, though with a definite reading, were unmarked. That is, the definite interpretation of such NPs (semantic definiteness) did not trigger case marking. These facts make it quite reasonable to suppose that while objective marking was restricted to humans, the case inflectional property of the demonstratives (as opposed to other determiners like the indefinite –*ma* and the possessives) triggered the marking of these lexically definite NPs with non-human referents, a pattern that, precisely, becomes obligatory in today’s P’orhépecha.\(^{10}\) Likewise, the extension of the marking on the animacy scale seems to account for the current pattern in which NPs with human or animate referents must be case marked regardless of their definite or indefinite interpretations.

In addition, the consideration of diachronic factors (cf. Bickel and Witzlack 2008) suggests a grammatical motivation to account for the obligatoriness of the case marker in plural NPs present in modern P’orhépecha. As Villavicencio indicates, in the 16\(^{th}\) century case marking of objects with patient/theme function was restricted to those with human referents which were the only ones that admitted plural inflection (nevertheless, the distributive morpheme –*a*, used to indicate a collection of entities, was not restricted to

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\(^{10}\) We do not have clear data on the marking of indefinite NPs with human referents in the 16th century. Villavicencio mentions that the absence of case marking in pronominal forms as *néma* ‘someone’ in the 16\(^{th}\) century, is due to the fact that it is highly indefinite. This is why she proposes that indefinite human objects were unmarked. However, the author does not provide any examples on indefinite NPs with *ma* and human nominals that confirm her statement. Besides, we have to note that the pronoun *néma* was not case marked even when its function was that of a dative, which can be explained by the fact that formerly it could not be case inflected, as it is nowadays.
human referents). Therefore, all objects exhibiting plural inflection referred to humans, and thus were case marked. It can be presumed that the extension of the case marking to the non-human patient/theme occurred parallel to the expansion of the plural inflection. This fact seems to explain the marking of all plural NPs, establishing the following generalization: the inflection of an object for number entails its inflection for case. Thus, the plural morphology is consolidated as a morphosyntactic feature that triggers case marking, and then eliminates any type of DOM with this type of NP.

5. Case alternation. DOM and the Definiteness Dimension

In the previous section the NPs that must be marked in P’orhépecha have been presented. For these cases it has been proposed that the intrinsic features of these NPs — animacy, lexical definiteness, and plural inflection — are the ones that trigger case marking, and the presence of the case marker per se is not a determining factor of the referential reading of the NPs.

This section focuses on the analysis of singular NPs lacking definite determiners, basically with inanimate referents, which permit case alternation in P’orhépecha (“fluid case alternation” in the terminology of Malchukov and Hoop (2007)). Therefore, in these NPs the presence/absence of –ni may result in different interpretations of the NPs. The analysis carried out shows that the morphological case is a device to delimit the reference of these NPs, in such a way that DOM is related to the definiteness dimension (on the use

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11 Villavicencio (2006: 230, 231) points out that in the 16th century, apart from the humans, animates can present number inflection, but only when they occurred in subject function. Therefore, number inflection, restricted to humans and animates (prototypical agents), was a property sensitive to the distinction of the grammatical functions of subject or object.
of case morphology to mark definiteness/specificity in Hindi and Kannada, see de Swart 2007:174-175, 189; de Swart and Hoop 2007, and in Turkish and other Altaic langages see Heusinger 2001; Kornilft and Heusinger 2009). Nonetheless, I will show that the presence of textual information (from the linguistic context) and/or extra-linguistic information (from the situational context or from shared knowledge), is a factor that may affect case marking, since it allows the listener to assign the intended referential value to an NP.

The behavior mentioned above reveals that P’orhëpecha presents constructions where pragmatic factors, mainly inferences that play a role in determining the discourse-status of an NP and its referential interpretation, are directly correlated to case marking alternation. It is important to distinguish at text level the so-called identity inferences between an NP and an entity that was previously evoked in the discourse from those that do not imply such identity. In the latter case, there is no previous explicit mention of the NP’s referent; Birner 2006 (based on Prince 1992) recognizes these as “inferrables” (pragmatic inference in the sense of Huang (2014:237). According to Birner, inferrables are entities that are related, based on our knowledge of the world, with an element mentioned or evoked in the discourse (trigger). That is, between the trigger and the inferrable there is a connection that is not explicit in the discourse, but that is inferred due to shared knowledge. The element overtly mentioned, given the prior shared knowledge, licenses the mentioning of the inferrable as a familiar entity, even when it has not been explicitly introduced in the discourse. The studies by Birner (2006, 2013), among others, have shown that inferrables
tend to behave linguistically, as do entities previously evoked in the discourse, as discourse-old information.\textsuperscript{12}

5.1. Nouns with generic, collective or mass sense

As I have previously mentioned, in P’orhépecha, bare nouns with generic, collective or mass sense, are not case marked when their referent is non-human.\textsuperscript{13}

(10) a. \texttt{énka no arhá-am-ka kurhinta}  
\texttt{ka ni itsíma-ni sháni bín}  
\texttt{ka} \texttt{ni} \texttt{itsíma-ni} \texttt{sháni} \texttt{bín}  
and \texttt{ni} \texttt{drink-NF} \texttt{so.much} \texttt{wine}  
‘The one who did not eat bread nor drink so much wine.’ (San Lukası 7 (33))

b. \texttt{t’ú=ri nó=ri káma-sín-Ø-Ø=ri}  
\texttt{2SG=2SG.SBJ no=2SG.SBJ} \texttt{have/carry.with-HAB-PRS-INT=2SG.SBJ}  
\texttt{itsútakwa} \texttt{?}  
\texttt{cigarette}  
‘Do you have (a) cigarette(s) ?’ (miringua.94)

c. \texttt{káma-síram-p-ti ampákiti ganádu}  
\texttt{have/carry.with-HAB.PST-PST-3IND} \texttt{good} \texttt{cattle}  
‘He had good cattle.’ (toru.60)

The abstract nouns also occur without –\textit{ni}, as in (11a), as well as those singular nouns which do not have a collective or mass value, but that may occur without –\textit{ni} and present generic readings, as in (11b).

(11) a. \texttt{chiiti xántsp’iri pínantikwa xatsí-s-Ø-ti ya}  
\texttt{2SG.POSS servant peace have-PRF-PRS-3IND} \texttt{already}  
‘Your servant is at peace.’ (San Lukası 2 (29))

\textsuperscript{12} Concerning the distinction between “forward inferrable” or “elaborating inferrable” (discourse-old and hearer-old) and “backward inferrable” or “bridging inferrable” (discourse-old and hearer-new) see Birner (2006, 2013).

\textsuperscript{13} Nouns like \texttt{t’atsîni} ‘bean’, \texttt{paré} ‘cactus’, \texttt{tiriapu} ‘corn’, \texttt{tsakápu} ‘stone’, \texttt{xáasî} ‘field bean’, \texttt{ichúskuta} ‘tortilla’, \texttt{tsítsíki} ‘flower’, \texttt{itsútakwa} ‘cigarette’ and, in general, the names of flowers and fruit are employed in singular to denote unindividuated groups or masses.
The objects in (10 and 11) do not denote particular entities; they occupy a lower position in a Referential Scale (cf. Davison 1984; Lazard 1984: 370), and occur without case marker. When this type of NP presents –ni, the case marker contributes to the delimitation of its denotation, that is, it restricts the reference of the NP regarding the set of possible referents. This generates NPs that have a definite reading denoting a particular entity that the speaker presupposes is identifiable by the listener, as shown in (12):

\[(12) \quad \begin{align*} 
\text{a.} & \quad p'ikü-s-Ø-ka=ni \\ & \quad \text{pull.off-PRF-PRS-}1/2\text{IND}=1\text{SG.SBJ} \\ & \quad \text{‘I cut flowers/a flower.’} \\
\text{b.} & \quad xuchá ahå-s-Ø-ka \\ & \quad \text{ingest-PRF-PRS-}1/2\text{IND} \\ & \quad \text{‘We ate fish/ the fish.’}
\end{align*} \]

In (12a, b) the referent of the case-marked nouns is a particular individuated entity. However, not all singular NPs with individuated referents require case marking, nor does the case marker necessarily entail individuation (cf. Villavicencio 2006). See examples (13) and (14).

\[(13) \quad \begin{align*} 
\text{a.} & \quad pyá-s-Ø-ka=ni \\ & \quad \text{buy-PRF-PRS-}1/2\text{IND}=1\text{SG} \\ & \quad \text{‘I bought three liters of milk.’}
\end{align*} \]
b. ñéka=ni xí ýúmu-ichu-kwa kurhínta
when=1SG 1SG five-CLF-NMLZ bread

k’epéku-Ø-p-ka
distribute-PRF-PST-SBJV
‘When I distributed five loaves of bread.’ (San Markusï 19 (8))

(14) a. itsíma-s-Ø-ti (sáni) itsúkwa/(yamíntu) itsúkwa-ni
drink-PRF-PRF-3IND (a.little) milk/ (all) milk-OBJT
‘S/he drank (a little ) milk/(all) the milk.’

b. xuchá weká-sín-Ø-ka tumína(-ni)
1PL want-HAB-PRS-1/2IND money(OBJT)
‘We want money/the money.’

In (13) the nouns ‘milk’ and ‘bread’ are individuated by the presence of numerals, but the
NPs ‘three liters of milk’ and ‘five loaves of bread’ do not present –ni. In (14 a, b) the case-
marked NPs denote a particular subset of milk and money, respectively, subsets that are not
necessarily individuated. The same happens in the following examples where the
occurrence of –ni also generates definite NPs with an identifiable referent.

(15) a. no néma séré-nt’a-sín-Ø-ti shukúparhakwa
no someone tear-ITR-HAB-PRS-3IND clothing

ximpáni-ni para imá-ni ximpó
new-OBJT for that-OBJT POSP

takisí ú-ni shukúparhakwa tamápu-ni
rag do/make-NF clothing old-OBJT
patch
‘No one tears a piece from a new garment to patch an old garment.’
(San Lukasï 5(36))

b. k’wiripu-echa siempretí wëna-sín-Ø-ti ampákiti
person-PL always begin-HAB-PRS-3IND good

bínu kê-ts’i-ts-p'ni…., peru t’ú
wine descend-top-CAUS-APPL-INDF.OB-NF but 2SG
Peoples serve (the) good wine at the beginning, but you saved the best wine for last.’ (San Juanu 2 (10))

In (15) the case-marked NPs denote a particular subset of clothing, (15a), and wine, (15b), that is identifiable for the hearer: the new/old clothes that one person has (15a), and the best wine that belongs to the listener (15b).

My hypothesis that the presence of –ni restricts the set of possible referents accounts for the examples seen until now. At the same time, it explains other constructions where the occurrence of –ni also exhibits a restrictive function (based on shared knowledge) that excludes any other subset of entities of the class designated by the noun head (cf. Levy 2002). This can be seen in the following examples:

(16) b. Xwánu  atáram’t’a-sǐn-∅-ti  serbesa  k’améri-(ni)  
Juan  sell-HAB-PRS-3IND  beer  bitter-OBJT  
‘Juan sells bitter beer/the bitter beer.’

a. Pátskwaru  arhá-s-p-ka=ni  
Pátzcuaro  ingest-PRF-PST-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ

kurúcha  urápi(-ni)  
fish  white(-OBJT)  
‘I ate white fish/ the white fish in Pátzcuaro.’

In (16), the NPs ‘bitter beer’ and ‘white fish’ have a generic interpretation if unmarked. However, these NPs admit the occurrence of –ni even though no reference is made to a particular entity. Therefore, the interpretation of (16a) with -ni, is that Juan sells, among the different kinds of beers that exist (for example in a market), only the particular type of bitter ale; that is, from the universe of accessible beers, only the one that is bitter. In (16b), the occurrence of the case marker indicates that the speaker ate, either a particular white
fish (identified by the interlocutors) or that, out of the many kinds of fish that exist in Pátzcuaro, he only ate the white kind of fish; that is, from the accessible universe of fish, the one kind that is white. In (17) a construction similar to those in (16) is shown where the NPs ‘old wine’ and ‘new wine’ do not refer to particular subsets of wine, but are also case-marked.\(^{14}\)

\[(17)\] \[\text{imá} \quad \text{énka} \quad p’\text{inté-h-Ø-ka} \quad \text{urápi} \quad \text{tamápu-ni}\]

\[
\begin{array}{llll}
\text{that} & \text{REL} & \text{get.used.to-HAB-PRS-SBJV} & \text{pulque} \\
\text{arhá-ni,} & \text{no} & \text{wéka-sín-Ø-ti} & \text{arhá-ni} \\
\text{ingest-NF,} & \text{no} & \text{want-HAB-PRS-3IND} & \text{ingest-NF} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[\text{pulque} \quad \text{old-OBJT} \quad \text{urápi} \quad \text{tamápu-ni} \]

\[\text{ximpáni-ni} \quad \text{new-OBJT}\]

‘He who drinks old wine, does not desire new wine.’ (San Lukasí 5 (36))

According to the natives speakers consulted, in constructions of contrast like (17), the case marker in the NPs is mandatory. This can be explained by the fact that (17) can be paraphrased as ‘the person who only drinks from the old wine (from the universe of wine types), does not want to drink the new one’.

The different sentences presented in this section show that, while –ni restricts the denotation of the NPs where it occurs, the result of the case marking is not necessarily a definite reading that makes reference to a particular and individuated entity.

Based on these data I sustain that in order to account for DOM in P’orhépecha, it is crucial to consider the function of the case marker as a morphological resource to delimit the denotation of the NP. The alternation of –ni in the case of indefinite NPs further validates corroborates this proposal, as will be shown in the next section.

\(^{14}\)The NPs with case marker in (16) and (17) could be considered according to the classification of Donnellan (1966/1971), as attributive definites (they denote any entity that meets the property indicated by the nominal). However, they entail a reading that is not expected in this type of NP.
5.2 Indefinite inanimate NPs

In P’orhépecha, singular NPs with the indefinite determiner *ma*, when referring to inanimates present case marking alternation: the absence vs. the presence of marking is related to different readings of the NPs. I will argue that these NPs present case marking as a device to restrict the set of accessible referents. This behavior accounts for the fact that if the intended reference of the NP is non-specific (its referent can be any entity of the set that the nominal denotes) it cannot be marked. The following are examples that present this kind of NP.

(18) a. *ximá-nka eshé-Ø-p-ka ma kánarhikwa*
   there-REL SEE-PRF-PST-SBJV one mask
   *síránta teyákata-eri*
   paper thick-GEN
   ‘Where he saw a paper mask.’ (Panchu.25)

   b. *néma kwanita-s-p-ti ma t’arhánikwa*
   someone lend-PRF-PST-3IND one overcoat
   ‘Someone lent him an overcoat.’ (xurhijkirhiska.163)

c. *pák=rí ú-a-ka ma táa*
   in.order.to=2SG.SBJ do/make-FUT-1/2IND one house
   ‘…in order for you to make a house.’ (María juata.41)

In the examples in (19), the NPs are case marked and do not admit a non-specific reading.

(19) a. *María tsírí-nt’a-sha-p-ti ma kamísa-ni*
   Maria sew-ITR-PROG-PST-3IND one shirt-OBJT
   ‘Maria is mending a shirt (specific)/ one of the shirts (partitive).’

   b. *xuchíiti wátsí wéka-sín-Ø-ti*
   1SG.POSS son/daughter.1SG.PSR querer-HAB-PSR-3IND
   *ma tirhít’akwa charhápiti-ni*
   one handbag red-OBJT
   ‘My daughter wants a red handbag (specific)/one of the red handbags /one of the handbags, the red one’ (partitive).’
The occurrence of the case marker in (19) entails a restriction of the set of possible referents: it induces either a specific reading (the speaker refers to a particular entity) or a partitive reading, that is, the referent of the NP is a member of a particular subset that is supposed to be identifiable by the listener. In this way, (19b) admits a reading where the speaker makes reference to a red handbag in particular, as well as a partitive reading. In the last case, a particular set of handbags is presupposed (handbags in different colors), and it is stated that the girl wants one of the red handbags (non-specific partitive), or that of this set of handbags, she wants the red one (specific partitive).^{15}

In sentences like those in (20), the native speakers consulted showed a preference for a specific reading of the indefinite NPs:

(20) a) pyá-a-ka=ni ma táa-ni buy-FUT-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ one house-OBJT
    ‘I will buy a house.’

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^{15} As well as in these NPs, those whose head is ampé ‘something, thing’, generally do not take case marker, but may present it resulting in the restriction of the NP denotation.

(i) pyá-s-∅-ka=ni yámintu ampé(-ni)
    buy-PRF-PRS-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ all (some)thing(-OBJT)
    ‘I bought everything/one thing out of everything (there was).’

(ii) xuchá p’orhépecha no mák’ueni arhi-sín-∅-ka
    1PL p’orhépechas no similar say-HAB-PRS-1/2IND
    yá purisí yámintuampé-ni
    everywhere all (some)thing-OBJT
    ‘We P’orhépechas do not name things the same way everywhere [ each one of the things we name in P’orhépecha ]’ (p’urhépecha jimpó II. 118)
Chéncho ú-s-p-tí ma káts'ikwa-ni
Chencho do/make-PRF-PST-3IND one hat-OBJT
ka intsî-kurhi-s-∅-ti María-ni
and give-MLD-PRF-PRS-3IND María-OBJT
‘Chencho made a hat and gave it to María as a gift.’

In contrast to the sentences in (20), the NPs in (21) only admit a partitive reading.

(21) a. [At the town’s exit there are many trees.]
Táta Matéo chapá-a-tí=na ma k’éri p’ukúri-ni
Don Mateo cut-FUT-3IND=EV one big pine-OBJT
‘(They say that) Don Mateo is going to cut down a big pine tree.’
(ji jorhénguarhiaka. 405)

b. [Don Ramón is going to buy a blanket.]
eráku-Ø ma sési xásî karóni-ni, táta Ramoni
choose-IMP one fine type blanket-OBJT, Don Ramon
‘Choose a nice blanket, Don Ramón.’ (ji jorhénguarhiaka. 221)

c. [You are going into the kitchen...]
ka kaká-a-ka=ri ma tsúntsu-ni
and break-FUT-1/2IND=2SG.SBJ one pot-OBJT
‘...and you will break a pot.’

In the discursive contexts in which the sentences in (21) occur, the case marker restricts the referent of the NP to any entity from a particular subset previously mentioned — (21a) one of the pine trees (that there is) at the town’s exit—, or from a subset inferred from what has already been said and shared knowledge—(21b) ‘one of the blankets that he will see in the store’, (21c) ‘one of the pots that are in the kitchen’—.  

Recognizing the partitive function of –ni is the key to understanding the appearance of the case marker in narrative contexts where it is evident that indefinite NPs cannot entail specific readings. As in (21b, c), the examples in (22) show that textual information and

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16 Note that the subset that the NPs refer to in (21b, c) is inferrable, therefore, it can be considered discourse-old information that accounts for the partitive reading of the NPs (cf. Birner 2006).
shared knowledge permit enable the recognition of a subset (inferrable) that delimits the reference of the NP.

(22) a. [The witch was buried on the left side of the cemetery, and the priest did not allow her a traditional cross.]
\[imá-ni=tk’u=ksi\] \[ma\] \[xatsiku-ku-s-p-ti\]
that-OBJT=DEL=1/3PL.SBJ one put-3APPL-PRF-PST-3IND

\textit{ma k’éri tsakápu-ni}
one big stone-OBJT
‘Only a big stone was placed on her grave.’ (xurhijkirhiska.171)

b. [Arriving home they saw a coyote dragging a torn shirt. They went in and found him dead …]
\[ka\] \[erá-ch’a-ku-s-p-ti=ksi\]
and see-neck-loc.EXT-PRF-PST-3IND=1/2PL.SBJ

\textit{ma k’éri katsách’akukata-ni}
one big bite.on.neck-OBJT
‘..and they saw a big bite on his neck ’. (xurhijkirhiska.161)

c. \textit{noné tiná-sín-∅-ti ma kandéla-ni}
no.one light-HAB-PRS-3IND one candle-OBJT
‘No one lights a candle [to put under the bed ].’ (San Lukasī (8)16)

d. [It is said that he looked at the sky and…]
\[eshé-s-p-ti=na\] \[ma\] \[xaniku-ku-ni\] \[imá-ka\]
see-PRF-PST-3IND=EV one cloud-OBJT that-REL
\[xurhiáta-ni\] \[ó-narhi-ku-∅-p-ka\]
sun-OBJT cover-face-LOC.EXP-PRF-PTS-SBJV
‘….he saw a cloud which covered the sun [and the sky became dark as if it were going to rain].’ (Juata.43)

According to the native speakers who reviewed these narrations, in (22a), the presence of –\textit{ni} conveys the reading: ‘of the stones that there were in the graveyard, one big or the big one’. The occurrence of the case marker in (22b), indicates that they saw, of the many bites the dead man had (which is inferred by the fact that the coyote was dragging a torn shirt) one on his neck. Likewise, in (22c) ‘under the bed’ allows the location of the event in a
house, in such a way that native speakers provide the following translation: ‘no one lights one of the candles at home to put under the bed’. Finally, in (22d) –ni also produces a partitive reading: of the clouds there were in the sky, he saw one that covered the sun.  

While in P’orhépecha the non-specific NPs are never case-marked, it is not the case that specific or partitive NPs have to be case marked. For instance, the NPs in (23) present include relative clauses giving information that the speaker has a particular referent in mind that contain information regarding a particular entity the speaker has in mind. However, these NPs lack case marking, contrary to what would be expected.

(23) a. nirá-sín-∅-ka=ksìni arhi-chi-ni ma kwéntu
    go-HAB-PRS-1/2IND=2PL.OBJ tell-1/2APPL-NF one story
    imá-ki=ts ůni xuchánts ůni pasári-∅-p-ka
    that-REL=1PL.OBJ 1PL.OBJ happen-1/2APPL-PRF-PST-SBJV
    ‘I am going to tell you a story about what happened to us.’ (cheranaspti.83)

b. pyá-kurhi-∅-ka=ni ma rebósu
    buy-MDL-REFL-FUT-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ one shawl
    énki=ni gustári-∅-ka
    REL=1SG.SBJ like-PRF-PRS-SBJV
    ‘I am going to buy myself a shawl that I liked.’

c. xirhína-sha∅-ka=ni ma karóni
    look.for-PROG-PRS-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ one blanket
    énki=ni ishú xurá-k ’u-∅-p-ka
    REL=2SG.SBJ here leave-PRF-PST-SBJV
    ‘I am looking for a blanket that I left here.’

In (23), the referential restriction conveyed by the relative clauses explains the occurrence of unmarked NPs with a specific interpretation. In these instances, the case marking entails

17 In a previous work, I suggested that the occurrence of –ni in sentences as in (23d) was due to the fact that relative clauses delimit the possible referents. However, a deeper investigation has allowed me to recognize the partitive value of these constructions.
would bring about a specific-partitive reading: from a given subset, a particular entity. In P’orhépecha there is an evident contrast between unmarked NPs with a specific reading and the same NPs with –ni and a specific partitive reading. The examples in (24) illustrate this fact.

(24) a. Lúpi kaká-s-∅-ti ma tsúntsu/ma tsúntsu-ni
Lupe break-PRF-PRS-3IND one pot/one pot-OBJT
énki=rini Pédru íntsku-∅-p-ka
REL=1SG.OBJ Pedro give-PRF-PST-SBJV
‘Lupe broke a pot that Pedro gave me.’
‘Lupe broke one of the pots that Pedro gave me/ one of my pots, the one Pedro gave me.’

b. eshé-a-ka=ri ma tyénda/ma tyénda-ni
see-FUT-1/2IND=2SG.SBJ one store/one store-OBJT
ximá-nki=ksi atárant’a-∅-ti shukúparhakwa
there-REL=1/3PL.SBJ sell-HAB-PRS-3IND clothing
‘You will see a store where they sell clothing.’
‘You will see a store (of the ones on the street/shopping center),where they sell clothing.’

c. Xwána arhi-nt’a-sha-∅-ti ma kwéntu/ma kwéntu-ni
Juana say-ITR-PROG-PRS-3IND one story/one story-OBJT
imá-nki Rulfo kará-∅-∅-ka
that-REL Rulfo write-PRF-PRS-SBJV
‘Juana is reading a story that Rulfo wrote.’
‘Juana is reading a story (among the ones in a book) that Rulfo wrote (the one that Rulfo wrote.’

The occurrence of the case marker in (24) produces a semantic contrast that may occur in constructions lacking relative clauses, when the information provided by the utterance allows for the inference that the speaker has a particular entity in mind. This is common in sentences in the first person, as in (25).

(25) a. káma-sha-∅-ka=ni xukári
have/carry-PROG-PRS-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ on.the.body
ma rebósu urápití/ ma rebósu urápití-ni
one shawl white/one shawl white-OBJT
‘I am wearing a white shawl.’
‘I am wearing one of my white shawls/one of my shawls, the white one.’

b. intsku-s-∅-ka=kini ma kóche/ma kóche-ni,
give-PRF-PRS-1/2IND=2SG.OBJ one car/one car-OBJT
náni=ri xatsi-s-∅-ki?
where=2SG.SBJ have/put-PRF-PRS-INT
‘I gave you a car/ one of my cars. Where did you put it?’

In the sentences in (25), if the NPs present –ni, the mandatory reading is specific-partitive:
‘one of my white shawls, the white one’ (25a), and ‘one of the cars I had’ (25b).

The sentences in (24) and (25) give evidence that when the interpretation of an indefinite
NP can only be specific, it is possible to omit the case marker, since its appearance
occurrence necessarily entails a partitive reading. In these cases, because the marking is not
necessary to restrict the denotation of the NP in terms of the specific/non-specific contrast,
its occurrence must entail the partitive reading associated with –ni.

The case marker can also be obviated in contexts where only the partitive reading of
an NP is adequate.

(26) a. pawáni=ri pá-kurhi-a-ka ma tsúntsu-(ni)
tomorrow=2SG.SBJ take-MDL/REFL-FUT-1/2IND one pot-OBJT
énki ishú=ksii xá-∅-∅-ká
REL here=1/3PL.SBJ there.is/be-PRF-PRS-SBJV
‘Tomorrow you will take one of the pots that there are here’.

In (26) the relative clause establishes a subset of entities that restrict the reference of the NP
‘a pot’, thus the NP reading may only be partitive. If the NP lacks case marking, the
interpretation is partitive –any of the pots that there are here. The occurrence of the case
marker prompts the reading that the speaker has a particular pot in mind: one from the set
specified in the relative clause (specific-partitive reading). The same situation can be found in constructions without relative clauses, as in (27).

(27) a. Xwánu atára-a-nt’a-sha-p-ti echéri-icha-ni
Juan sell-DISTR-ITR-PROG-PST-3IND plot-PL-OBJT

ka Lúpi pyá-ku-s-p-ti ma echéri(-ni)
and Lupe buy-3APPL-PRF-PST-3IND one plot(-OBJT)

‘Juan was selling plots and Lupe bought a plot from him.’

In (27), the occurrence of the applicative suffix –ku in the coordinate sentence establishes that the plot that Lupe bought is one of the plots that Juan was selling. Since the NP ma echéri may only have a partitive reading it can be left unmarked. As in (26), if in (27) the NP is case marked, the reading is specific partitive: a particular plot (that the speaker identifies) of those that Juan sold.

The lack of case marking is also found in constructions where the only possible reading of the NP is specific partitive.

(28) xirína-nt’a-sha-Ø-ka ma tsúntsu
look.for-ITR-PROG-PRS-1/2IND one pot

ts’á-ńki=ni ishú xurák’u-a- Ø-p-ka
those-REL=1SG.SBJ here leave-DISTR-PRF-PST-SBJV

‘I am looking for one of the pots that I left here’.

While some native speakers consulted do accept the marking of the NP ma tsúntsu in (28), the occurrence of –ni does not alter the interpretation of the NP. That is, the occurrence of the case marker does not contribute to the interpretation of the NP. Similarly in (29), the NP ma sunúnta is unmarked. Given the situational context and the shared knowledge, it is

---

18If the applicative in (27) is eliminated, the case marker is necessary to obtain a partitive reading.
possible to infer a partitive reading of the NP. However, the speaker adds information that shows that he has a particular blanket in mind of the ones there are in the house.

(29) [The father says to his son at the entrance of their house:]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ixu, } & \text{nì-Ø } \text{p'irá-ni } \text{ma } \text{sunúnta, } \text{imá-ni} \\
\text{son, } & \text{go-IMP } \text{take.out-NF } \text{one } \text{blanket } \text{that-OBJT} \\
\text{swadéru-ni } & \text{imá-ka } \text{aparéxu-rhu } \text{xa-Ø-Ø-ká,} \\
\text{saddlecloth-OBJT } & \text{thatREL } \text{gear-LOC } \text{be-PRF-PRS-SBJV} \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘Son, go get a blanket, that saddlecloth that is with the rest of the riding gear.’

(uajpa.37)

The case alternation in of indefinite NPs in P’orhépecha shows that the case marker triggers specific and partitive readings, restricting the denotation of these NPs. Nevertheless, the analyzed data present evidence that the language allows for, and in some cases demands, the omission of marking when there is textual information (discursive or syntactic) and/or extra-linguistic information (situational context or shared knowledge) that makes it possible to determine or infer these readings. This behavior is coupled is similar to that of the definite NPs that I present next.

5.5. Inanimate definite NPs without determiners

In P’orhépecha, the case marking of singular NPs lacking determiners and having inanimate referents results yields in a definite reading (semantic definiteness).

(30) a. \[
\begin{align*}
\text{éka } & \text{mita-nt’a-s-p-ka } \text{kwártu-ni} \\
\text{when } & \text{open-ITR-PRF-PST-SBJV } \text{room-OBJT} \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘When she opened the room again….’. (tembuna.75)

b. [A body was being taken for burial. He came close…]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{and } & \text{p’a-rhi-s-Ø-ti } \text{kája-ni} \\
\text{y } & \text{touch-surface-PRF-PST-3IND } \text{box-OBJT} \\
\end{align*}
\]
‘...and touched the coffin.’ (San Lukasí 7 (12))

c.  

tumpí  xamá-síran-ti      itsí-rhu  
boy    go.around-HAB.PST-3IND   water-LOC

xirína-nt’a-ni    xácha-ni  
look.for-ITR-NF   axe-OBJT

‘The boy was looking around for his axe in the water.’ (tumbi.105)

In sentences like those in (30), –ni provides the definite interpretation of the inanimate objects; i.e., the case marker has the function of expressing the definiteness of the object. Nevertheless, as occurs with specific and partitive NPs, the case marker can be obviated when the intended referent may be unequivocally recognized and, therefore, the NP admits only a definite reading. This situation may be due to the occurrence of relative clauses, to information previously given in the discourse, or to shared knowledge. The sentences in (31) show NPs with definite reading which contain a restrictive relative clause.

(31)  

a.  [He asked his mother...]

éska  ú-ku-pirin-ka      t’irékwa.....  
that do/make-3APPL-COND-SBJV   food

amámpempa  sóntku      ú-nt’a-s-∅-ti
mother.3PSR quickly do/make-ITR-PRF-PRS-3IND


t’irékwa  imá-nka      pá-pirin-ka
food  that-REL  take-COND-SBJV

...(that) to make him some food... his mother quickly made the food that he would take.' (María juata.40)

b.  
inrīta-∅=rini     sáni   karabína
hand-IMP=1SG.OBJ  a.little carbine

énka  xiniani      xa-∅-∅-ká
REL there be-PRF-PRS-SBJV

‘Hand me the carbine that is over there.’ (Tata.56)

c.  
imá      xó-nkwarhi-s-∅-ti      lásu-ni
that tie-waist-PRF-PRS-3IND  rope-OBJT

imá-nka      ximpó  xá-∅-p-ka      t’irhiparkurhitini     k’wiripita


that-REL POSP be-PRF-PST-SBJV hanging meat
‘He tied the rope that the meat was hanging from around his waist.’
(tumbi tembuchati.81)

In (31a, b) the NPs are unmarked, while in (31c) the nominal head presents exhibits case marker. In this kind of construction, given the restriction imposed by the relative clause, the marking is optional because it does not affect the interpretation of the NP.

The absence of marking in the NPs that are semantically definite is also common in constructions involving body parts, where the possessor is an argument of the predicate (part-whole relations). According to Birner (2013:254), the nouns that refer to parts can have a definite interpretation since they are inferable from given the mention of the whole and the shared knowledge. This fact coincides with Givon’s statement (1984:400), in which he postulates that the referents of nouns that indicate body parts acquire a definite character (unique reference) when the possessor has been identified in the discourse.

(32) a. wéna-s-Ø-ti xeyá-a-ku-ni sítárhi-ni
   star-PRF-PRS-3IND rub-center-LOC.EXP-NF stomach-OBJT
   ‘Hei began to rub hisj stomach.’ (miringua.92)

b. tarháta-s-p-ti ép’u
   lift.up-PRF-PST-3IND head
   ‘He lifted up his head.’ (San Lukaşi 21 (1))

c. ka méntk’u kutsikwa p’ikú-era-ni
   and suddenly ear pull.off-ADV-NF
   ‘..and hej pulled off hisj ear.’ (San Markusî 14 (47))

d. kurhú-k’u-s-Ø-ti xák’i(-ni) Martíni-ni
   burn-hand-PRF-PRS-3IND hand(-OBJT) Martin-OBJT
   ‘He burned Martin’s hand’.

As can be seen in (32), -ni may or may not be present with body part nouns, whether unique or multiple (see Baker 2005; Levinson 2006). Since body part terms refer to a part of an argument of the predicate, it is possible to delimit their reference. In the case of non-unique
body parts, shared knowledge allows the listener to establish a subset that includes the possible referents of the given noun. However, in contrast to the constructions in (32), the case marking is mandatory when a non-unique body part is identified in such a way that it excludes other member(s) of the subset of accessible referents. Compare (32c) with (33).

(33) ka méntk’u kutsíkwa xurhik’antani ládu and suddenly ear right side

anápu-ni p’ikú-era-ni
POSP-OBJT pull.off-ADV-NF
‘..and he pulled off the right ear.’ (San Lukasï 22 (50))

The non-optional occurrence of –ni in (33), in contrast to (32c), seems to respond, as in (16) and (17) above, to the exclusion that the NP entails: of his ears, (just) the one on the right side.19.

The behavior of the body part nouns shown in (32), is also common with items of clothing that the participants of the event are/were wearing. In these cases, it is presupposed that the entity referred to is identifiable for the hearer, who can assign it a unique reference.

(34) a. xí=chka=ni xú-nkwá-sín-∅-ka xuchiiti
1SG=ENF=1SG.SBJ come-ITR-HAB-PRS-1/2IND 1SG.POSS
acháati-ni k’áts’ikwa p’iku-nt’a-ni ya
man-OBJT hat pull.off-ITR-NF ya

peru sunúnta=chka
but overcoat=ENF

19It could be argued, recovering the distinction between strong and weak definites (Baker 2005), that the obligatoriness of marking in constructions as in (33), vis à vis its optionality in (32), is due to the fact that the NP “the right ear” is a strong definite (a sole entity satisfies the content of the description), while the optionality of case marker with NPs like “the ear” in (31b) is due to the fact that these, given the cardinality of the nominal, are weak definite NPs. However, this does not seem correct, since the marking is also optional with the nominals of unique parts (as well as with other NPs semantically definite that are discussed subsequently), which meet the definition of strong definite.
‘I am coming to pull off my husband’s hat, but he already pawned the/his overcoat.’ (pirekwa.168)

b. Eli kachú-ch’a-s-∅ti kollári(-ni)
Eli break-neck-PRF-PRS-3IND necklace(-OBJ)
‘Eli got her necklace broken (the one she was wearing).’

In (34a), from the predicate *p’ikúni ‘ pull off’, it is possible to infer that reference is being made to the hat and the overcoat that the husband wears/was wearing. In (34b) the predicate presents the spatial suffix –ch’a used to refer to the neck of the subject (where the necklace is located); that is, reference is made to the necklace that Eli was wearing. Therefore, it can be proposed that the nominals in (34), having a referent that is clearly identifiable and/or unique, do not require –ni in order to restrict their denotation. This explains the fact that other inanimates appear unmarked, as the entity that they refer to is identified clearly due to the information given in the discourse and extra-linguistic knowledge; therefore, the object can be assigned a unique reference.

In the sentences in (35), ‘carbine’ and ‘lime pot’ are unmarked; however, they have a definite interpretation since their referents, given shared knowledge, are inferred from the information previously introduced in the discourse. That is, these are “inferrables” that behave as discourse-old information (Birner 2006, 2013).

(35) a. [Speaking of a hunter…]
t’wíni=na karábiná isí aná-nti-ta-s-∅ti
long.ago=EV carbine so long.vert-angle-CAUS-PRF-PRS-3IND
‘(They say that) he had put the carbine in the corner long ago.’ (tata.56)

b. xí xarhá-s-∅ka kirá-t’á-ku-ni parhánkwa-rhu
1SG be-PRF-PRS-1/2IND round-side-LOC.EXP-NF stove-LOC
éka arinte demónio kúchi sapíchu ya
when this devil pig small already
‘I was sitting by the stove…, when this devil of a pig broke our lime pot’.
(pirekwa.252)

Example (35a) comes from a narration about a hunter. The overt mention of the hunter and shared knowledge license the definite reading of the NP ‘carbine’; i.e., the particular/unique referent of this NP is identifiable as ‘the carbine of the hunter’. In (35b), the information given in the first sentence, ‘he was sitting by the stove’ conveys allows the identification of the ‘lime pot’ (a pot that is used on the stove), as the pot that was near the stove. Similarly, in (35c) it is understood that they will open the door of the house to the master.

In other cases, we find that the case marker is omitted when the referent has been previously mentioned in the discourse (discourse-old) and, therefore, is identifiable by the hearer (identity inference, according to Birner 2006).

(36) a. tsítá-s-∅-ka=ni ménturia ácha lose-PRF-PRS-1/2IND=1SG.SBJ again axe ‘I lost the axe again.’(tumbi.58)

b. xí antá-t’a-ta-era-s-∅-ka karréta 1SG get.closer-side-CAUS-ADV-PRF-PRS-1/2IND cart méro árbula k’éri-rhu mero tree big-LOC ‘I got the cart close to a big tree.’(tumbi.58)

c. pá-ku-s-∅-ti=na wáp’a karabína take-3APPL-PRF-PRS-3IND=EV son/daughter.3PSR carbine ‘(They say that) his son took him the carbine.’ (imanga noteru eskampka.56)
In the sentences in (36), the unmarked nouns ‘axe’ and ‘cart’ have been previously introduced in the discourse as the objects carried by the protagonist. Likewise, in the story of the hunter, karabína has been previously mentioned, first in (35a) and then in (31b) ‘lend me the carbine that is there’, just before (36c). Out of context, the native speakers do not accept the sentences in (36) without case marked objects. In the following narration excerpts, the lack of marking in NPs with a definite reading can be observed. Here, the referents have been previously introduced by definite NPs marked by –ni (therefore, they are discourse-old).

(37)  a. xwá-ni Maria indé-ni t’ípích’ukwa-ni ka
bring-IMP Maria this-OBJT trousers-OBJT and

kamísa táti-iri-ni
shirt father.1/2PSR-GEN-OBJT
‘Maria, bring those trousers and your father’s shirt.’

b. segíri-ni p’á-mi-na-ni kamísa ka t’ípích’ukwa
keep.on-FN take-APPL-PASS-FN shirt and trousers
‘Then the shirt and the trousers were taken to him (lit. he was taken (given) the shirt and the trousers).’ (jimbani.32)

(38)  a. chkeráku-Ø sáni lásu-ni ya..
loosen-IMP a.little rope-OBJT already
‘Loosen the rope a little (so that I can get down)…’

b. imá=t’u=na chkeráku-ni lásu ya
that=also=EV loosen.up-FN rope already
‘(They say that) she loosened the rope immediately.’ (tumbi tembuchati.81)

In the sentences in (39), about people who have money, the presence vs. absence of the case marker in the noun tienda ‘store’, as well as the different readings of these NPs, can be observed.

(39)  a. ts’à=sí xatsí-am-p-ti sentábu
those=FOC have/put-HAB.PST-PST-3IND money

ts’imá-nka tienda xatsí-am-p-ka
those-REL store have/put-HAB.PST-PST-SBJV
'Those were the ones who had money, those who had stores.'

b. imá tienda-ni ximá xatsí-s-p-ti tsumíntu-rhu
that store-OBJT there have/put-PRF-PST-3IND corner-LOC
‘He had the store on the corner over there.’

c. imá ximá=sì xatsí-am-p-ti tienda
that there=FOC have/put-HAB.PST-3IND store
‘It was there where he had the/his store.’(tumina 15,16)

In (39a) the reading of the bare noun ‘store’ can only be generic and the NP does not exhibit case marker. The sentence in (39b) is about one of the people who had money, the noun is case-marked and its reading is definite (the store that belongs to the person the narrator was talking about). In (39c), following (39b) in the narration, the bare noun ‘store’ has a definite reading and does not present case marking. According to the native speakers consulted, in (39c) a generic reading of ‘store’ is not admitted; instead, they all offered the translation ‘his store’ (even though there is no possessive determiner), which shows that the referent has been assigned a unique identity; i.e., the noun refers to a particular entity identifiable by the hearer.

6. Conclusions

As has been shown, in P’orhépecha the DOM involves the dimensions of Animacy and Definiteness. However, certain morphosyntactic features of NPs —the presence of demonstratives (lexical definiteness) and of plural inflection— trigger case marking without taking into account animacy and, in the case of plural NPs, neither animacy nor definiteness. This behavior, coupled with the possibility of unmarked inanimate singular NPs with definite reading (semantically definite), makes it difficult to account for DOM by focussing only on relations of prominence on the Animacy and Definiteness Scales.
The behavior DOM exhibits in P’orhépecha calls for a distinction to be established between case marking splits, resulting in NPs that must be case marked, and (fluid) case marking alternations, where the case marker may have an effect on the interpretation of NPs (cf. Malchukov y Hoop 2007). I have sustained that the conditions determining DOM in P’orhépecha may be clarified taking into account the distinction between the intrinsic features of the NPs that trigger case marking, and those not codified by morpho-syntactic devices and that may be expressed through the case marker (see de Swart 2007; Klein and de Swart 2009). I have given evidence supporting the fact that, in P’orhépecha, both inherent properties (high animacy) and grammatical properties of the NP (occurrence of demonstratives that entail lexical definiteness and the presence of plural inflection) trigger case marking without exception. The obligatory marking of definite or indefinite NPs with human or animate referents, and with plural NPs, shows that the occurrence of the case marker with these NPs is independent of their referential value. That is, the definiteness scale is irrelevant in accounting for the presence of the case marker. The fact that the NPs with demonstratives must be marked (whatever the inherent properties of the nominal head) shows that, in spite of the fact that the lexical definiteness triggers case marking, the definite reading of those NPs is not the result of the presence of the case marker.

This analysis of P’orhépecha matches the proposal of de Swart (2007), based on DOM in languages such as Hindi, Turkish, Kannada, Persian (see Johanson 2006; Kornfilt and von Heusinger 2009), in that the case marker cannot be employed to code definiteness/specificity when it is obligatory, due to inherent features of the nominals, such as animacy, or due to other grammatical particularities of the language. As de Swart sustains, it is only when the referential properties of NPs are not coded by other means that the case marker can be used to express definite or specific readings.
I have argued that the consideration of diachronic factors clarifies the marking splits exhibited by P’orhépecha. The marking of NPs with human and animate referents can be attributed to the extension of the occurrence of the case marker on the animacy scale (from human to animates), in such a way that the marking is triggered by animacy, thus rendering definiteness irrelevant. The marking of NP with demonstratives, regardless of the animacy, seems to be related to the inflectional properties exhibited by demonstratives in the 16th century, in contrast to other types of determiners. In contrast to what has been proposed in previous studies of P’orhépecha, I have put forward the idea that the obligatory marking of plural NPs is not motivated by their individuated nature, but by diachronic factors (related to the inflectional restrictions that the nominals exhibited during the 16th century), which favor the establishment of a link between an object with plural inflection and the presence of case marker.

The NPs that in P’orhépecha admit marking alternation are singular inanimate NPs without definite determiners or with the indefinite determiner ma, and singular animate nominals with a generic or collective sense. In these cases, I have shown that the presence vs. absence of marking has an effect on the referential interpretation of the NPs, in such a way that it might be argued that DOM responds to a definiteness scale. Indeed, I have put forward the idea that the presence of the case marker plays the role of restricting the accessible referents and, therefore, the referential readings of the NPs are an effect of this marking. This explains the absence of marking in inanimate singular nominals with generic or abstract sense, as well as in non-specific indefinite NPs, while the definite, specific indefinite and partitive NPs, are case marked. Nevertheless, I have shown that the occurrence/absence of case marker is not always predictable according to the referential
properties of the NP, and that this behavior is not explained only in terms of optative marking as has been proposed for other languages (see Morimoto 2002, Næs 2004).

The apparent paradoxical situation exhibited by DOM of singular NPs with inanimate referents in P’orhépecha can be then explained by recognizing that with this type of NP the case marker is obligatory when it is required to delimit its denotation, but it is not when such delimitation is unnecessary. Therefore, the case marker may, and in some cases must, be omitted when there is textual information (syntactic or discursive) and/or extra-linguistic information (situational context and shared knowledge) that allow for the unequivocal interpretation of the NP. This fact demonstrates that, in P’orhépecha, the information provided by the syntactic-discursive and/or extra-linguistic context is an essential factor in accounting for the case marking alternation and the readings resulting from presence vs absence of case marker.

Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADV</td>
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LOC  locative  SG  SINGULAR
MDL  middle voice  vert  vertical

Symbols
= enclitic
(*) inclusion of this item renders ungrammatical
*(-) exclusion of this item renders ungrammatical

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