

Eleanor Coghill

## Differential object marking in Neo-Aramaic

**Abstract:** Many languages differentiate between different types of objects, commonly marking definite or highly animate objects. Crosslinguistically, two strategies for differentiating such objects are attested. One is differential object flagging (DOF), whereby an object is flagged by a case-marker or adposition. Another is differential object agreement (DOA), whereby the verb agrees with the object. A third strategy is to combine DOF and DOA, as happens in some North-Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) dialects. This paper will focus on one such case, the Telkepe dialect, spoken in the town of Telkepe in northern Iraq. Definiteness is the main factor behind both object agreement and flagging in Telkepe: animacy does not seem to play a role. However, not all definite objects are marked as such. Objects that are generic or semantically integrated with the verb, even if activated in the previous discourse, tend not to be marked. Definite objects that are in focus also lack marking: differential object marking correlates with topic-hood, not only with the primary but also the secondary topic. These conditions for DOM are similar to Nikolaeva's (2001) findings for Ostyak. The situation in Telkepe is compared with the situation in other NENA dialects and with DOM in earlier stages of the Aramaic language. The regional parallels are also discussed, as are the possibilities of contact influence between Aramaic and Arabic dialects.

**Keywords:** differential object marking, agreement, case, information structure, Semitic, Neo-Aramaic, Arabic

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## 1 Introduction

Differential object marking (DOM) of one kind or another has a long history in the Aramaic language family, stretching from ancient times to the modern day. Recent documentation of modern spoken dialects ("Neo-Aramaic") and new theoretical approaches to differential object marking as a crosslinguistic phenomenon (e.g., Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011) makes this the ideal time for a closer look at the distribution and function of DOM strategies in Aramaic dialects. The focus of this paper is on the role of DOM in the Neo-Aramaic dialect of Telkepe, based on data

from new fieldwork. The findings will be presented against the larger contexts of DOM in Aramaic and the languages of the region, and their significance for the theory of differential object marking examined.

## 2 Differential object marking<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Strategies for differential object marking

Differential object marking (henceforth DOM) is a label used for diverse phenomena in which grammatical objects possessing a certain characteristic are distinguished from objects lacking that characteristic. One of the characteristics commonly distinguished is animacy: the object referent's position on the animacy hierarchy, e.g., whether it is inanimate, animate, human, a personal pronoun etc. (cf., for example, Croft 2003: 130–132). This is normally an inherent characteristic of the referent and is not affected by context. Another characteristic often distinguished is the specificity or definiteness of the object. This is not inherent to the referent but varies according to its role in the information structure (Bossong 1991: 158–163; Aissen 2003: 436–437). The role of DOM in marking these two types of characteristics must therefore differ. As de Swart (2007: 5–6) points out, “animacy can only trigger the occurrence of overt case marking. Definiteness/specificity on the other hand can itself be determined by the occurrence of overt case marking.”

Although these characteristics are quite different from each other, they may be marked by similar strategies. Crosslinguistically, the following broad strategies for differentiating objects are commonly attested, although details differ in each case:

1. Differential object flagging (DOF):<sup>2</sup> flagging object with case-marker or adposition;

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<sup>1</sup> The linguistic examples are glossed in the main according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. For Semitic examples the person/number/gender of person inflection is glossed as, e.g., 1FS for 1.F.SG and 2PL for 2.PL (common gender). The abbreviation PRSP indicates prospective aspect, REC recipient, DIM diminutive and SPEC specific. Intonation is marked in the Neo-Aramaic examples, where it is known and relevant to the point being made: “|” represents an intonational phrase boundary, “ˆ” represents the nuclear stress of the intonational phrase, and “˘” any non-nuclear stress. Note that nuclear stress relates to information structure, which, as will be shown, conditions differential object marking.

<sup>2</sup> DOM is sometimes the term used for this, but as this can also be used generally to cover DOF and DOA, I prefer to use an unambiguous label. I use the term flagging to cover marking an

2. Differential object agreement in the verb phrase (**DOA**): grammatical agreement with the object on the verb itself or by means of clitic pronouns.

## 2.2 Differential object flagging

Turkish (Turkic) provides an example of differential object flagging through case marking. In Turkish, accusative case marking (through a suffix *-(y)i*) is found on all objects that are definite, and also on certain types of indefinite objects (Göksel and Kerslake 2005: 175–176).<sup>3</sup> Biblical Hebrew (Semitic), closely related to Aramaic, uses a preposition in differential object flagging. A particle *'eṭ-* normally precedes the object when it is definite, but is absent when it is indefinite (Waltke and O'Connor 1990: 177–183):

- (1) a. *wa-yyiqqaḥ ya'āqob 'āben*  
 and-took.3MS Jacob stone (pausal form)  
 'And Jacob took a stone'  
 (Genesis 31.45)
- b. *wa-yyiqqaḥ 'eṭ-hā-'eḇen 'āšer . . .*  
 and-took.3MS DOM-the-stone REL  
 'And he took the stone that . . .'  
 (Genesis 28.18)

## 2.3 Differential object agreement in the verb phrase

DOA may take different forms. In Swahili (Bantu), object agreement takes the form of an affix on the verb, which may agree with the object in noun class.<sup>4</sup> This affix can also function as a pronominal object. In Swahili, DOA is found with definite objects and also indefinite human objects (Givón 1976: 159):

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argument with a case or an adposition, following Malchukov et al. (2010: 8). I do not use their term “indexing” to cover cross-referencing and agreement, but simply “agreement,” this being the more familiar term, although not entirely satisfactory.

<sup>3</sup> The use of the accusative can favor a specific reading of an indefinite object (Göksel and Kerslake 2005: 375). This is, however, not the only factor involved: in some cases the use of the accusative with indefinites “is quite independent of the specific/non-specific interpretation” (Göksel and Kerslake 2005: 377).

<sup>4</sup> Nouns denoting animates, however, always take Class 1/2 agreement, regardless of their formal class (Riedel 2009: 46–47).

- (2) a. *Ni-li-ki-soma kitabu*  
 1SG-PST-OBJ-read book  
 ‘I read the book.’  
 b. *Ni-li-soma kitabu*  
 1SG-PST-read book  
 ‘I read a book.’  
 (Givón 1976: 159, glossing added)

In other languages, clitic pronouns adjacent to the verb agree with the nominal object. This is usually known as “clitic doubling”. This kind of DOA is found in Macedonian (Indo-European), where agreement is conditioned mainly by definiteness (Karadzovska 1999: 163):

- (3) a. *Mira ja donese tetratka-ta*  
 Mira it.CLIT.ACC brought notebook-the  
 ‘Mira brought the notebook.’  
 (Karadzovska 1999: 163)  
 b. *Mira donese edna tetratka*  
 Mira brought a notebook  
 ‘Mira brought a notebook.’  
 (Walter Breu p.c.)

It can be difficult to distinguish clitics from agreement affixes, as Lyons (1999: 208) notes, and relatively free clitics might well develop into more bound agreement affixes. Therefore these strategies are here treated as variants of a single strategy: differential object agreement.

## 2.4 Combining strategies

As we will see below, it is also possible to combine DOM strategies, and this is what in fact occurs in some dialects of Neo-Aramaic, including the dialect of Telkepe.

## 3 Telkepe Neo-Aramaic<sup>5</sup>

North-eastern Neo-Aramaic (henceforth NENA) is a highly diverse dialect group spoken by Jews and Christians originating in Northern Iraq and surrounding

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<sup>5</sup> Examples from the Telkepe and Alqosh dialects are from the author’s own fieldwork. Further information on these dialects can be found in Coghill (2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b).

countries. These dialects are part of the Aramaic language family and, as such, belong to the Semitic branch of Afro-Asiatic. The dialect which forms the focus of this article is spoken in the town of Telkepe (Arabic *Tall Kayf*), just north of Mosul in northern Iraq.

The dialect of Telkepe has accusative alignment. There is no case marking, except, arguably, for the flagging of definite objects. Pronominal subjects and objects are normally expressed solely on the verb, but may additionally be expressed with independent pronouns when serving as the topic or the focus:

- (4) a. *b-šaqł-ā-lə*  
 FUT-take-3FS-OBJ.3MS  
 ‘She will take him/it.’  
 b. *’āyi b-šaqł-ā-lə*.  
 she FUT-take-3FS-OBJ.3MS  
 ‘SHE will take him/it.’

Word order is conditioned by information structure, rather than syntax: for instance a topic normally comes first, regardless of its grammatical role.

Differential object marking in the dialect of Telkepe is found with definite objects. It is realized both by object agreement on the verb (DOA) and by flagging (DOF) with a preposition *ta*, which also has a dative function.

As in most NENA dialects, there is no definite or general indefinite article. Therefore a bare noun is potentially definite or indefinite:

- (5) *barānw* ‘a ram’, ‘the ram’

An article *xa-* (identical to the numeral *xa-* ‘one’) is used to present indefinite nouns that are expected to play a prominent role in the following discourse (translated, e.g., by ‘a certain’). These normally have a specific reference:

- (6) *xa-gorv məθ-lv baxt-e*,  
 a-man died-3FS wife-his  
 ‘A certain man, his wife died . . .’

## 4 Differential object marking in NENA dialects

DOM is found across NENA for definite objects. Most dialects distinguish objects as definite by object agreement on the verb, and by this alone (cf. Hoberman 1989: 102–105 for a discussion of this feature in the Jewish dialect of Amadiya).

Typical is the dialect of the village of Alqosh, which is very closely related to the dialect of Telkepe:

(7) NENA, Alqosh

- a. *šqəl-lə barāna.*  
took-3MS ram  
'He took a/the ram.' (lit. 'He took ram')
- b. *kəm-šāqəl-lə* (= suppletive past form allowing pronominal object suffixes)  
PST-take.3MS-OBJ.3MS  
'He took it.'
- c. *kəm-šāqəl-lə barāna.* (with object agreement on verb)  
PST-take.3MS-**OBJ.3MS** ram(m.)  
'He took the ram.' (lit. 'He took it ram')

Alternatively, or in combination with object agreement, certain dialects also use flagging with a preposition that synchronically or historically marked indirect objects (recipients and beneficiaries).<sup>6</sup> Depending partly on the dialect involved, this dative preposition may take the following forms: *l-*, *qa*, *ṭla*, *ta* (some dialects have more than one variant). The variation is due to the different historical developments of the dative prepositions in the highly diverse NENA dialects.<sup>7</sup> The following examples show some of these variants in their roles as differential object markers:

(8) NENA, Barwar

- a. *malāxa mūrāš-le qa-rābbən.*  
angel woke-3MS **DOM**-monk  
'The angel woke the monk.'  
(Khan 2008a: 785, glossing added)

<sup>6</sup> It is very common crosslinguistically for a DOM marker to have the primary (or historical) function of marking indirect objects. According to the estimates of Bossong (1991: 157), "DAT identity of the ACC' marker is found in more DOM languages than all other cases of identity taken together."

<sup>7</sup> The variant *l-* is the original Aramaic (and Semitic) dative preposition (which also functioned as a DOM marker in earlier Aramaic). The variant *ṭla*, found for instance in the dialect of Barwar, probably derives from earlier Aramaic *meṭṭūl* (its form in Syriac) 'for the sake of' (Maclean 1901: 111); for the grammaticalization path see Heine and Kuteva (2002: 54). The variant *ta* (as well as *ṭa*, found in the dialect of Hamziye) seems to be cognate with this (their suffixed form *ṭāl-* is identical). An origin in Kurdish (Kurmanji) *ṭ'a* 'until' seems a less likely semantic development. The variant *qa* is of uncertain origin: it may also be derived from *ṭla* (*ṭla* > *qla* > *qa?*).

- b. *zìpt-alle-la* | *ʔla-Māmo.*  
 pushed.PRF.FS-**OBJ.3MS**-COP.3FS **DOM**-Mamo  
 ‘She pushed Mamo.’  
 (Khan 2008a: 785, glossing added)

NENA, Jewish Urmi

- c. *əl-brat-éw* *+rāba g-bé-wa-la.*<sup>8</sup>  
**DOM**-daughter-his very **IND**-love-PST-**OBJ.3FS**  
 ‘He used to love his daughter a great deal.’  
 (Khan 2008b: 298, glossing added)

## 5 Differential object marking in the Telkepe dialect

### 5.1 Strategies of DOM in Telkepe and parallels in other languages

In the dialect of Telkepe, agreement plus flagging (DOA + DOF) alternates with agreement alone (DOA). The preposition used to flag definite objects in this dialect is *ta* ‘to, for, DOM’:

- (9) a. *šqəl-lə barānv.*  
 took-3MS ram  
 ‘He took a/the ram.’ (lit. ‘He took ram’)
- b. *kəm-šāqəl-lə*  
 PST-take.3MS-**OBJ.3MS**  
 ‘He took it.’
- c. *kəm-šāqəl-lə barānv.* [DOA]  
 PST-take.3MS-**OBJ.3MS** ram(m.)  
 ‘He took the ram.’ (lit. ‘He took it ram’)
- d. *kəm-šāqəl-lə ta barānv.* [DOA + DOF]  
 PST-take.3MS-**OBJ.3MS** **DOM** ram  
 ‘He took the ram.’ (lit. ‘He took it to ram’)

There are parallels to the combined strategy in other languages. In Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic, Semitic), for instance, a direct nominal object is marked as definite

<sup>8</sup> Note that in this dialect objects normally come before the verb: the word order in this example does not necessarily indicate topicalization.

both by agreement on the verb (an object suffix agreeing in person, number and gender) and by a preposition (otherwise marking the dative) before the nominal object (Givón 1976: 164):

- (10) a. *riʔiyä biʔise*  
 he.saw man  
 ‘He saw a man’  
 (Givón 1976: 164)
- b. *riʔiy-o lä-biʔise*  
 he.saw-**him** **DOM**-man  
 ‘He saw the man’  
 (Givón 1976: 164)

Both strategies are also found in Spanish (Indo-European): the preposition *a* (“personal *a*”, a dative preposition) and clitic doubling. Conditions for their use with direct objects are not identical, and also vary from dialect to dialect. They are both, nevertheless, conditioned by the animacy hierarchy: in Standard Spanish personal *a* is obligatory with specific human objects (11a), while clitic doubling is obligatory if the object is a strong (non-clitic) pronoun (11b):

- (11) a. (**La**) *invité a Mabel.*  
**ACC.3FS** invited.1SG **ANIM** Mabel  
 ‘I invited Mabel.’  
 (Belloro 2007: xiv, 131)
- b. \* $\emptyset$ /**Lo** *vi a él.*  
 \* $\emptyset$ /**ACC.3MS** saw.1SG **ANIM** him  
 ‘I saw him.’  
 (Belloro 2007: 15, glossing added)

Both are, however, also being used increasingly further down the animacy scale, especially in South America (Belloro 2007: 15–16; Suñer 1988: 399–401).

In Spanish the two strategies are relatively independent of each other. Both can occur without the other under certain conditions. In Telkepe, on the other hand, flagging is normally only used in conjunction with agreement on the verb. Examples, like (12a) and (12b) below, of DOF without DOA, were accepted by two separate informants, when suggested to them. However, in many hours of discourse the author has never found any spontaneously occurring cases of DOF without DOA, suggesting that such sentences are rather artificial (hence the marking with “?”):

- (12) a. *ʔšqəl-lə ta barānv.*  
 took-3MS DOM ram  
 ‘He took the ram.’
- b. *ʔzi-bānə ta beθ-i.*  
 PRSP-build.3MS DOM house-my  
 ‘He is going to build my house.’

The strategies with and without flagging are in most cases interchangeable (but see Sections 5.2.3–5.2.4). Closely related dialects in neighboring villages (such as Alqosh) use only object agreement: contact influence from these is one possible reason that flagging is apparently not consistently used in Telkepe.

## 5.2 Conditions for DOM in Telkepe

### 5.2.1 Definiteness as a trigger

The main trigger for DOM in Telkepe is apparently definiteness: animacy does not appear to play any role, nor do some other factors cited in the literature. Object agreement and/or flagging are, for instance, attested with humans, animals and inanimates:

- (13) a. *k-nabl-i-wā-lə kálu l-bèθv,|*  
 IND-take-3PL-PST-OBJ.3FS bride to-house  
 ‘they used to take the bride home’
- b. *kəm-šāqəl-lə ta barāna,|*  
 PST-take.3MS-OBJ.3MS DOM ram  
 ‘He took the ram’
- c. *bd-āxəl-wā-lə ta zàrv,|*  
 FUT-eat.3MS-PST-OBJ.3MS DOM crop  
 ‘it would eat the crop.’

Agreement and/or flagging are also attested with nouns otherwise marked as definite, e.g., nouns with possessive suffixes. This demonstrates that DOM cannot be functioning primarily as a disambiguation strategy, i.e., to distinguish definite objects from indefinite ones:

- (14) a. *hādax dāx kəm-qaṭl-ət-tə bròn-i?|*  
 thus how PST-kill-2MS-OBJ.3MS son-my  
 ‘How did you kill my son like that?’

- b. *kəm-qāṭəl-lə*                      *ta*    *bàxt-e.*|  
 PST-kill.3MS-OBJ.3FS    DOM    wife-his  
 ‘He killed his wife.’

They are found with verbs that take highly affected objects (e.g., *kill*, *hit*) and verbs which take an unaffected object (e.g., *see*, *like*) (see Hopper and Thompson 1980: 252–253 for a discussion of object-affectedness as characteristic of prototypical transitivity). This indicates that in Telkepe DOM is not conditioned by affectedness:

- (15) a. *’ánv kəm-qatł-ən-nə*                      *ta*    *bròn-ux.*|  
 I        PST-kill-1MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM    son-your.MS  
 ‘I have killed your son.’  
 b. *lá-g-be-lə*                                      *ta*    *xòr-e.*|  
 NEG-IND-love.3MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM    friend(m.)-his  
 ‘He doesn’t love his friend.’  
 c. *kəm-xāz-ən-nə*                      *ta*    *gòrv.*|  
 PST-see-1MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM    man  
 ‘I saw the man.’

This is evidence against Næss’ (2004: 1186) proposal that accusative case-marking is “a marker of a high degree of affectedness in objects”.

DOA and DOF are found with a wide variety of TAM forms, showing that DOM is not conditioned by tense, aspect or modality:

- (16) a. *gaðl-àn-nə*                      *kos-i.*|  
 plait-1FS-OBJ.3MS    hair(m.)-my  
 ‘Let me plait my hair.’  
 b. *bd-āxəl-wā-lə*                                      *ta*    *zàrv.*|  
 FUT-eat.3MS-PST-OBJ.3MS    DOM    crop(m.)  
 ‘It would eat the crop.’

There is only one attested case with an indefinite object, found in spontaneous speech. Attempts to elicit this sentence again were not successful, suggesting it may have been an error:

- (17) *kud*    *k-nabl-ì-lə*                                      *xa-nášv*    *p-sàjən.*|  
 when    IND-take-3PL-OBJ.3MS    a-person    in-prison  
 ‘When they take someone into prison,  
*kə-m’aml-ì-lə*                                      *p-qəšyũθv.*|  
 IND-treat-3PL-OBJ.3MS    in-harshness  
 they treat him harshly.’

### 5.2.2 Cases where definite objects do not take DOM

Not all objects that might be considered definite take agreement or flagging. It is common for objects that could be considered generic or non-specific to lack such marking, even if they have been referred to in the immediately preceding discourse. Take the following example:

- (18) *zárw kud k-āwe-wv dāḡal,| kə-zá-wā-lan k-‘ašp-ùx-wv.*  
 crop when IND-be.3MS-PST weeds IND-go-PST-1PL IND-weed-1PL-PST  
 ‘The crop, when there were weeds, we used to go and weed.  
*k-‘ašp-ùx-wv dāḡālə,*  
 IND-weed-1PL-PST-Ø Ø weeds  
 We used to weed (the) weeds’

In this example, the second mention of ‘weeds’, where it is an object, does not trigger object flagging/agreement, even though it might be considered definite through prior mention. This appears to be because no specific weeds are referred to, but rather weeds in general. A parallel to this may be found in Turkish, where “bare generics” (unmarked for number or definiteness) normally do not take the accusative case (Göksel and Kerslake 2005: 383).

Another characteristic of the object here is that it is semantically closely integrated with the activity of the verb (‘šp ‘to weed’): there is little difference between the verb alone (in the first line) and the verb plus object. This is significant because Khan (2008a: 775) reports for the Christian dialect of Barwar that DOM may be lacking for “objects lacking distinctness from the activity”, giving the following example:

- (19) [Context: “He said ‘Mother, who has worked?’ She said ‘My dear, you have worked, the ass and the ox,’]  
*‘u-‘āna mtugbárt-ən bēθa.*  
 and-I looked.after.PRF.FS-1SG-Ø Ø house  
 ‘and I have looked after the house’ or ‘I have done housekeeping.’  
 (Khan 2008a: 775, 1662–1663)  
 [Note the comparable English expression *to keep house*]

The two characteristics are related: semantic integration is conditional on the object being generic. If an object is specific, then it has a life of its own and cannot be so semantically bound to the activity of the verb. On the other hand, a generic object is not necessarily semantically integrated to the activity of a verb: as in the sentence *I like books*, or *He sells parachutes*.

Such constructions (without DOM) are semantically related to incorporated object constructions (Croft 2003: 168). There is, however, no reason to doubt the argument status of such nouns in Neo-Aramaic.

We shall examine some other Telkepe examples. A similar case is the following:

- (20) *kud k-māṭē-wə zārə,| kə-zzā-wā-lan lə-ḡzādə,|*  
 when IND-mature.3MS-PST crop IND-go-PST-1PL to-harvesting  
 ‘When the crop matured, we used to go for the harvesting’  
*ḡazādə ḡ-ḡazd-ī-wə,| ḡ-ḡazd-ī-wə zārə,|...*  
 harvesters IND-harvest-3PL-PST IND-harvest-3PL-PST-Ø Ø crop  
 ‘The harvesters harvested. They would harvest the crop, ...’

Here, although *zārə* ‘crop’ in the second line has already been mentioned and might thus be considered definite, it could be understood as having a generic rather than specific reference. It is also semantically closely integrated with the verb: ‘crop’, or a sub-category of crop, is what is normally expected after the verb ‘to harvest’.

Likewise, *bḏānə* ‘plough’ in the second line of the following example is an integral part of the activity of driving a plough, i.e., ‘ploughing’, and is not object-marked, despite a prior mention in the first line:

- (21) *bāb-i wewə fallāḥ,| k-ṭārē-wə bḏānə,|*  
 father-my was farmer IND-drive.3MS-PST plough  
 ‘My father was a farmer. He drove a plough.’  
*kud k-ṭārē-wə bḏānə,|...*  
 when IND-drive.3MS-PST-Ø Ø plough  
 ‘When he drove the plough, ...’

In the following example from the same text, *qənyānə* ‘ox’ is definite from the context (a plough implies an ox to pull it), but is lacking DOM. Again it could be seen as integral to the activity of ox-driving:

- (22) *ʿu nāšv k-ārē-wə yādd-əd-hòjar,|*  
 and person IND-hold.3MS-PST handle-of-plough  
 ‘And a person held the handle of the plough,  
*ʿu k-ṭārē-wə qənyānə ta-z-zālə ʿādəl,|*  
 and IND-drive.3MS-PST-Ø Ø ox for-COMPL-go.3MS straight  
 and drove the ox so that it would go straight.’

The following appears to be a counter-example:

- (23) *kúll-ay təlkepə 'əθwā-la 'arāθv,|* . . .  
 all-3PL Telkepe had-3PL fields  
 'All of Telkepe, they had fields . . .  
*g-zar-ì-wv| xəttə-u šārə| ben šātv l-šātv:|*  
 IND-SOW-3PL-PST wheat-and barley between year to-year  
 They sowed: wheat and barley, every other year  
*lá-g-zar-i-wā-la 'arāθv kùt-šātv. |*  
 not-IND-SOW-3PL-PST-OBJ.3PL lands every-year  
 They didn't sow the fields every year.'

In the phrase 'sow the fields', the object, fields ('*arāθv*), might be considered both generic and semantically integrated with the verb. Nevertheless, in this example it does take an object marker. It may be that in this case, the actual fields of Telkepe are in the speaker's mind. Unlike the crop in Example (20), the fields have a stable referent: they are the same year after year, while the actual crop would be different each year.

The question remains whether semantic integration of the object with the verb is a conditioning factor for lack of DOM, or whether all generic objects take DOM and it is just the case that generic objects are frequently also semantically integrated.

In the following example, the object of *ta'niwv* 'carried', i.e., the wheat, does not take DOM, although it is activated in the discourse:

- (24) *xəttə peš-ì-wv b-dəpnv,|* . . .  
 wheat remain-3PL-PST in-side  
 'The wheat remained to the side, . . .  
*ta'n-ì-wv xəttə,| māθ-a-wā-lə l-bèθv,|*  
 carry-3PL-PST-Ø Ø wheat bring-3PL-PST-OBJ.3MS to-house  
 They carried the wheat and brought it home'

The lack of DOM cannot be explained by semantic integration with the verb (all sorts of things can be carried). It could be explained, however, by the noun's generic status (this is a habitual activity, so it cannot be specific wheat that is referred to).

Another case is the following sentence, from a discussion of marriage:

- (25) *brònv,| lá-k-yāðe-wv brātv. |*  
 bo not-IND-know.3MS-PST-Ø Ø girl  
 'As for the boy, he wouldn't (normally) know the girl.' (before he married her)

The girl could be understood as definite (her existence is implicit in a discussion of marriage). She is however generic (no specific girl is intended), but she is not semantically integrated with the verb *lá-k-yāðe-wə* ‘he wouldn’t know’. Here again, the noun’s generic status seems to suffice to exclude DOM.

Likewise the following example, where the activated object *zarv* ‘crop’ is generic, but not closely integrated with the verb ‘eat’:

- (26) *láppəš k-āwé-wə ‘aqúbrv ta-d-āxəl-wə zarv.*|  
 no.longer IND-be.3MS-PST mouse for-COMPL-eat.3MS-PST-Ø Ø crop  
 ‘There were no longer mice to eat the crop.’

On the other hand, there are other cases where generic status does not seem to be sufficient to exclude DOM for definite objects:

- (27) a. *k-nabl-í-wā-lv kálu l-bèθv,*|  
 IND-take-3PL-PST-OBJ.3FS bride to-house  
 ‘they used to take the bride home’ (definite from context)  
 b. *báb-i kabìrv k-əbe-wā-la ta ‘ənglezáyə*|  
 father-my very IND-like.3MS-PST-OBJ.3PL DOM English.PL  
 ‘My father really liked the English.’  
 c. *g-bāré-wə ‘aqúbrv benaθ-zàrv,*|  
 IND-happen.3MS-PST mouse among-crop  
 ‘There used to appear a mouse among the crop.’  
*bd-āxəl-wā-lə ta zàrv,*|  
 FUT-eat.3MS-PST-OBJ.3MS DOM crop  
 ‘It would eat the crop.’

On the basis of the data, it seems that definite objects (i.e., objects already activated in the discourse) are not normally marked when they are generic AND semantically integrated with the verb (as in ‘to weed the weeds’, ‘to harvest the crops’). When they are merely generic, they may also not be marked, but this is less consistent.

It is noticeable that the reflexive pronoun is only attested (in both spontaneous discourse and elicited translations) without any differential object marking (although an informant accepted the construction with DOA as grammatical):

- (28) a. *lá-k-majəhy-an gyān-i.*|  
 NEG-IND-tire-1FS self-my  
 ‘I don’t tire myself out.’

- b. *zi-mxáll-ən*      *gyàn-i.*  
 PRSP-wash-1MS    self-my  
 ‘I’m going to wash myself.’
- c. *kúd-nāšv*      *k-əbə*      *gyàn-e|*  
 every-person    IND-love.3MS    self-his  
 ‘Everyone loves himself’

This is also common in the Christian dialect of Barwar (Khan 2008a: 774–775), where it is part of a more general tendency not to mark objects that are inalienably possessed. In Telkepe, it is also usual not to mark such objects (such as body parts):

- (29) a. *sód*              *kəmm-ux.*  
 shut.IMP.SG    mouth-your.MS  
 ‘Shut your mouth!’
- b. *səd-lv*              *’èn-a.*  
 shut.PST-3FS    eyes-her  
 ‘She shut her eyes.’
- c. *se*              *mxálləl*              *pəθ-ax!*  
 go.IMP.FS    wash.IMP.SG    face-your.FS  
 ‘Go and wash your face!’

There are however counterexamples (with DOA alone):

- (30) a. *se*              *mxálləl-lv*              *pəθ-ax!*  
 go.IMP.FS    wash.IMP.SG-OBJ.3FS    face(f.)-your.FS  
 ‘Go and wash your face!’
- b. *p-sarq-àn-nə*              *kos-i.*  
 FUT-brush-1FS-OBJ.3MS    hair(m.)-my  
 ‘I’ll brush my hair.’

When objects with (inalienable) family members were elicited, these also lacked any object marking:

- (31) a. *muθé-li*      *bāb-i*      *’āxv.*  
 brought-1SG    father-my    here  
 ‘I brought my father here.’
- b. *’āyən*              *yəmm-ux!*  
 help.IMP.SG    mother-your.MS  
 ‘Help your mother!’

Reflexive and (to a lesser extent) other inalienably possessed objects can be viewed as being semantically fairly integrated with the verb, which could explain the frequent omission of object marking.

A case of more canonical definite objects without DOM marking is found in objects that take narrow focus. In the following example the king (*malkv*) can be understood as definite, as he has been mentioned several times in the immediately preceding discourse. He is also specific. In line two, where *malkv* is the object of the verb, *malkv* is not in focus, but rather the verb is. In this case *malkv* takes DOA and DOF. In the fourth line, the victims are contrasted and are thus in narrow focus and take no object marking. (*Malkv* in the fourth line, lacking the nuclear stress, is puzzling and is discussed later as Example [38]):

- (32) *pəš-lə*            *həm-āwu zəl-lə*|    (*b-*)*pláxv*    *gebəd-mālkv*,|  
 became-3MS    also-he    went-3MS    (in-)work.INF    chez-king  
 ‘He too went to work with the king,  
*ta-t-qāṭəl-lə*                            *ta*    *malkv*.|  
 for-COMPL-kill.3MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM    king  
 in order to KILL the king.  
*qṭəl-lə*    *bròn-e*|    ‘*āwu(?)*<sup>9</sup>    *bròn-ən-malkv*,|    *qṭəl-lə*  
 killed-3MS    son-his    he(?)    son-of-king    killed-3MS  
*bāxt-ən-malkv*|  
 wife-of-king  
 He killed HIS SON, the KING’S son, he killed the WIFE of the king,  
 ‘*u*    *ba’dèn*,|    *qṭəl-lə*    *malkv*.|  
 and then    killed-3MS    king’  
 and then he killed the king.’

The following are some other examples (elicited through translation) of objects in narrow focus without DOM:

- (33) a. *mán xze-lux tāmṽ?*| – *xze-li tòmṽ*.|  
 who saw-2MS there    saw-1SG Thomas  
 ‘Who did you see there?’ – ‘I saw THOMAS.’  
 b. *màn xze-lux tāmṽ?*|    *mālkv wəlla wazìrv?*|  
 who saw-2MS there    king    or    minister  
 ‘Who did you see there? The king or the minister?’  
 – *xze-li wazìrv*.|  
 saw-1SG minister  
 – ‘I saw the MINISTER.’

<sup>9</sup> Recording unclear at this point.

- c. *lá-xze-li tòmṽ.* | *xzé-li mixayîl.*  
 not-saw-1SG Thomas saw-1SG Michael  
 ‘I didn’t see THOMAS. I saw MICHAEL.’

The last example may be contrasted with the following one where the whole utterance is in focus (and there is DOA):

- (34) *lá-kxāz-ən-nə mǎxxu.* |  
 not-IND-see-1MS-OBJ.3MS Mike  
 ‘I don’t (can’t) see Mike.’

This exception for definite objects in narrow focus is also present in the dialect of Barwar (Khan 2008a: 777).

An explanation of the data is suggested by Nikolaeva’s findings for Northern Ostyak (Uralic) (Nikolaeva 2001; Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011: 142–150), where DOM (here agreement on the verb, i.e., DOA) is conditioned by information structure. Nikolaeva argues that DOA is found where the object is a “secondary topic”, and is absent when it takes narrow focus. The secondary topic is, in the words of Nikolaeva (2001: 17), “An entity such that the utterance is construed to be ABOUT the relationship between it and the primary topic”. For instance take the exchange *What did John do to Peter? – He hit Peter/him*. Here *he* is the primary topic, while *Peter/him* is the secondary topic (Nikolaeva 2001: 30). The secondary topic must be activated (i.e., “has been evoked within the same text or is present in the situation of speech”, Nikolaeva 2001: 23).

It is the case in Telkepe that differential object marking is absent when the object takes narrow focus (see above). It is also the case that an object that is a (primary) topic takes DOA (but not DOF, see Section 5.2.3). It remains to ask whether cases of DOM in Telkepe can be identified as secondary topics.

In some cases they can be quite clearly identified as such:

- (35) [in the context of a wedding, the bride already having been mentioned]  
*yóm-əd-xamšûšābṽ* | *k-nabl-î-wā-lṽ* *kālu l-bêṭṽ.* |  
 day-of-thursday IND-take-3PL-PST-OBJ.3FS bride to-house  
 ‘Thursday, they used to take the bride home’

In the example above, *kālu* ‘bride’ is activated, as it has been mentioned recently in the discourse, and in any case the presence of a bride is normally a given at a wedding. *Kālu* is not in narrow focus: the whole phrase ‘they used to take the bride home’ is in broad focus, while Thursday is the topic.

In the following example, *kətwə* ‘thorn’, once introduced, becomes activated. The focus (indicated by the nuclear stress) is on the verbs *kəmpalʔālə* ‘she got (it) out’ and *kəmsəqlālə* ‘she took (it)’, while the primary topic is the old woman:

- (36) *werə*            *kətwə b-aql-e*,|    *zəl-lə*        *gebəs-sòt-u*,|  
 entered.3MS    thorn    in-foot-his    went-3MS    chez-old.woman-DIM  
 ‘A thorn got into his foot. He went to a little old woman,  
*kəmpalʔ-ā-lə*                      *kətwə b-aql-e*,|  
 PST-get.out-3FS-OBJ.3MS    thorn    in-foot-his  
 She got out the thorn in his foot.  
*kəmsəql-ā-lə*                      *kətw-e*,| . . .  
 PST-take-3FS-OBJ.3MS    thorn-his  
 She took his thorn . . .’

Likewise in the following example, the focus (marked by nuclear stress) is on the verb *ta-t-qāʔəllə* ‘that he might kill him’:

- (37) *pəš-lə*            *həm-āwu zəl-lə*|    (*b-*)*plāxə*        *gebəd-mālkə*,|  
 became-3MS    also-he    went-3MS    (in-)work.INF    chez-king  
 ‘He too went to work with the king,  
*ta-t-qāʔəl-lə*                      *ta*    *mālkə*.|  
 for-COMPL-kill.3MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM    king  
 in order to KILL the king.’

A counter example is, however, the following:

- (38) *qʔəl-lə*        *bròn-e*|    ‘*āwu*(?)    *bròn-ən-mālkə*,|    *qʔəl-lə*        *bàxt-ən-mālkə*|  
 killed-3MS    son-his    he(?)    son-of-king        killed-3MS    wife-of-king  
 ‘He killed HIS SON, the KING’S son, he killed the WIFE of the king,  
 ‘*u*    *ba’dèn*,|    *qʔəl-lə*        *mālkə*.|  
 and then        killed-3MS    king’  
 and then he killed the king.’

In the second line we would either expect *mālkə* ‘king’ to be in focus (being contrasted with the other victims) and hence to take nuclear stress, or we would expect the verb to be in focus (he finally managed to kill him), and *mālkə*, being activated, to be a secondary topic and take DOM. Neither is the case. This is, however, so far the only counter-example found.

In some cases the object in a DOA construction does take the nuclear stress. This does not necessarily indicate focus however. When the nuclear stress is on

the final component of the intonation phrase, it can be ambiguous as to whether the final component is in narrow focus or whether the whole phrase is in broad focus. In the following example the context shows us that the whole predicate ‘have killed your son’ is in focus:

- (39) *zâl-lə kəm-āmér-ə ta malko,*  
 went-3MS PST-say.3MS-OBJ.3MS to king  
 ‘He went and said to the king,  
 ‘*’ānv kəm-qaṭl-ān-nə ta bròn-ux.*  
 I PST-kill-1MS-OBJ.3MS DOM son-your  
 “I have killed your son.”’

Predicate focus does not rule out the inclusion of a secondary topic (Nikolaeva 2001: 20), and *brònv* ‘son’ is in fact activated in the immediately preceding discourse.

Cases of DOM in Telkepe could therefore be attributable to the topic (primary or secondary) status of the object: primary topics only take DOA, secondary topics can in addition take DOF. Not all cases where DOM is absent in Telkepe can, however, be attributed to narrow focus on the object: there remain the generic/semantically integrated objects discussed above, which were not in narrow focus. The facts still parallel the situation in Ostyak, however, where object agreement only occurs with specific objects (Nikolaeva 2001: 12). This would exclude objects that are generic.

What of the fact that in Ostyak it is only secondary (not primary) topic objects that take object marking? In fact in Ostyak, unlike in Telkepe, objects cannot be primary topics, only subjects can: for the equivalent function a passive construction would be used instead (Nikolaeva 2001: 15–16). The exclusion of object agreement from primary topics could therefore be a side-effect of an unrelated rule of Ostyak, and we should not expect other languages necessarily to have such an exclusion.

The evidence points towards the conclusion that the conditions for DOM in Telkepe are as follows:

1. The object should be definite (activated or assumed from context).
2. The object should not be semantically integrated with the verb. More broadly, if it is specific rather than generic, then it is more likely to take object marking.
3. It should have (primary or secondary) topic status (rather than narrow focus).

That these conditions are also largely found in an unrelated language, Ostyak, suggests that, with further investigation, crosslinguistic tendencies might be identified.

### 5.2.3 Conditions for presence or lack of DOF (flagging with *ta*)

The choice between marking a definite object through DOA alone or through the combined strategies DOA + DOF is not entirely unconditioned. Objects functioning as a primary topic normally take DOA, while DOF is unattested:

- (40) a. *sákθv*                    *g-dārá-wā-lv*                    *b-hòjar*.|  
 ploughshare IND-put.3PL-PST-OBJ.3FS in-plough  
 ‘The ploughshare they used to put on the plough.  
 ’*u hòjar k-āré-lə*                    *palàxv*.|  
 and plough IND-hold.3MS-OBJ.3MS ploughman  
 And the plough is held by the ploughman.’ (lit. ‘And the plough the  
 ploughman holds.’)
- b. ’*áni*    *ǝa’if*    *šaqI-i-wā-la*                    *kùll-ay*.|  
 these weak take-3PL-PST-OBJ.3PL all-3PL  
 ‘The weak ones, they took out all of them.’

In some cases where a NP could be either subject or object (due to flexible word order), flagging may be important for disambiguating:

- (41) a. *kəm-māxe-lə*                    *gor-a*.  
 PST-hit.3MS-OBJ.3MS husband-her  
 ?‘He hit her husband.’ (*gora* = object and *-lə* agrees with it)  
 OR  
 ‘Her husband hit him./He was hit by her husband.’ (*gora* = subject and  
*-lə* is the pronominal object)
- b. *kəm-māxe-lə*                    *ta*    *gor-a*.  
 PST-hit.3MS-3MS.OBJ DOM husband-her  
 ‘He hit her husband.’  
 \*‘Her husband hit him.’

For the meaning ‘He hit her husband’, the informant insisted on the necessity of using *ta*. In dialects that do not have DOF this strategy of disambiguation is not available. The ambiguity is only possible here because both participants would take 3ms. agreement and both are capable of the action of the verb. There is also no context (as these were elicited) to inform us who was most likely to be the aggressor. In most cases there will be something other than *ta* that disambiguates. Nevertheless, the examples show one way in which the choice between the two strategies might not always be arbitrary.

### 5.2.4 DOM in ditransitive constructions

As mentioned, DOF uses a preposition which also serves to mark an indirect object (recipient/beneficiary of a ditransitive construction):

- (42) *wál-lə pârə ta xa-məškènv.*  
 gave-3MS money to a-poor.person  
 ‘He gave money to a poor person.’

An indirect object also (optionally) triggers agreement (*ta* is obligatory to mark an indirect object regardless of definiteness):

- (43) *zál-lə kəm-āmér-ə ta málkə,* ...  
 went-3MS PST-say.3MS-3MS.OBJ to king(m.) ...  
 ‘He went and said to the king, ...’

The theme (direct object of a ditransitive construction) may also take agreement:

- (44) *kəm-kāθú-lə kθāwə ta xāθ-e.*  
 PST-write.3MS-3MS.OBJ book(m.) to sister(f.)-his  
 ‘He wrote the book for his sister.’

But not both theme and recipient:

- (45) a. *kəm-yāwəl-la-’ilə.*  
 PST-give.3MS-REC.3FS-OBJ.3MS  
 ‘He gave it to her.’  
 b. *\*kəm-yāwəl-la-’ilə ta xāθ-e kθāwə.*  
 PST-give.3MS-REC.3FS-OBJ.3MS to sister-his book  
 ‘He gave his sister the book.’

Therefore if there is agreement in a ditransitive construction, it only occurs with one of the objects.

Givón (1976: 164–166) examines the interaction of DOA and ditransitivity in the related dialect of Jewish Zaxho and finds that object agreement is with the direct object, unless the indirect object is placed, in topic position, at the beginning of the clause:

- (46) *an gure, baxta qam yaw-a-lu aw hammash.*  
 these men woman PST give-3FS-OBJ.3PL that book

‘The men, the woman gave them the book.’  
(Givón 1976: 165, glossing elaborated)

More data is needed to establish what conditions the choice in Telkepe of direct or indirect object marking: a likely factor would of course be topic-hood.

The conditions for flagging in ditransitive constructions are simpler. For the theme, only agreement may be found: flagging is disallowed. This is in contrast to patients, which allow agreement + flagging:

- (47) a. *\*kəm-yāwi-lə*                      *ta*    *kθāwə*    *ta*    *ğða-baxtv*.  
          PST-give.3PL-OBJ.3MS    DOM book    to a-woman  
          ‘They gave the book to a woman.’  
       b. *kəm-šāqəl-lə*                      *ta*    *barāna*,|  
          PST-take.3MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM ram  
          ‘He took the ram’

This again resembles the situation in Spanish, where the preposition *a* can be used to mark both recipient and patient, but rarely the theme (Company Company 2003: 234). See Coghill (2010b) for more information on ditransitivity in Telkepe.

## 6 DOM strategies and conditioning in other dialects

In NENA dialects the following strategies are attested:

- (a) agreement alone
- (b) agreement and flagging
- (c) flagging alone

In Telkepe only strategies (a) and (b) are attested in spontaneous discourse. Many other dialects only use (a), for example the Christian dialects of Alqosh, Peshabur and ‘Aqra (author’s own data). A few, however, use all three strategies.

From a sample of three diverse dialects which have all three strategies (Christian Barwar [Khan 2008a: 773–790, 810, 811–812]; Jewish Urmi [Khan 2008b: 298–301]; Jewish Arbel [Khan 1999: 288–292]), some general tendencies can be observed. Agreement in general is mainly conditioned by definiteness (and found across the animacy hierarchy). In Barwar and Arbel it is also attested with certain types of indefinites (e.g., in Barwar, indefinites with a prominent role in ensuing discourse or placed before verb as topics [Khan 2008a: 779]).

Where flagging is involved (whether alone or combined with agreement), animacy tends to play a role in addition to definiteness.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in Barwar, flagging alone is almost always found with animates. In Jewish Urmi, DOA + DOF is restricted to human definites, except when a demonstrative is present in the NP (e.g., ‘these apples’):

- (48) *əl-brat-éw*                    *+ràba g-bé-wa-la.*<sup>11</sup>  
 DOM-daughter-his    very    IND-love-PST-OBJ.3FS  
 ‘He used to love his daughter a great deal.’  
 (Khan 2008b: 298, glossing added)

By contrast, in Telkepe, there is no animacy restriction on flagging. One question is whether flagging in Telkepe was always conditioned only by definiteness, rather than by animacy; or whether there was originally an animacy condition, but that flagging was gradually extended down the animacy hierarchy until animacy was no longer a factor. With the data available, however, this cannot be established for Telkepe, and it could alternatively be that the animacy restriction in the other dialects is a newer development.

## 7 Background of DOM in Aramaic

DOM (both agreement and flagging) has a long history in Aramaic (Rubin 2005: 94–104), and has survived the complete reorganization of the verbal system (and pronominal object marking).

Earlier dialects of Aramaic, such as Syriac, marked definite objects with both agreement and flagging with a dative preposition *l-* (Nöldeke 1904: 227–234). In Syriac the possibilities were:

- (a) no differential marking (ambiguous whether indefinite or definite)
- (b) flagging alone (unlike Telkepe)
- (c) agreement and flagging
- (d) agreement alone

The following examples show the four possibilities:

<sup>10</sup> See Croft (2003: 166–171) for a discussion of the interaction of definiteness and animacy as conditions for differential object marking.

<sup>11</sup> Note that in this dialect objects normally come before the verb: the word order in this example does not suggest topicalization.

- (49) a. *bnā baytā*  
 built.3MS house  
 ‘He built a/the house.’
- b. *bnā l-baytā*  
 built.3MS DOM-house  
 ‘He built the house.’
- c. *bnā-y(h)i l-baytā*  
 built.3MS-OBJ.3MS DOM-house  
 ‘He built the house.’
- d. *bnā-y(h)i baytā*  
 built.3MS-OBJ.3MS house  
 ‘He built the house.’
- (Nöldeke 1904: 227, transcribed from the original script)

Flagging was also used with certain types of indefinite noun phrases:

- (50) *ḥzaw gabrā l-ḥad d-ukkām-(h)wā*  
 saw.3MPL man DOM-one.M REL-black-was  
 ‘They saw a certain man who was black.’
- (Nöldeke 1904: 231)

Khan’s (1984) comparative study of object marking in Semitic found that object agreement in Syriac occurred predominantly with human referents and textually prominent inanimate referents. He relates this to a hierarchy of “individuation”, but it could equally be understood as conditioned by topicality.

A study of object marking in the related dialect of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (Morgenstern 2011: 223–266), shows that in this dialect agreement and flagging only occur together, i.e., variants b. and d. of the Syriac examples above do not normally occur. In Jewish Babylonian too, definiteness is an important conditioning factor. Morgenstern (2011: 246–247) argues, however, (building on Khan 1984) that definiteness is subsumed under the broader value of individuation. In some other varieties of early Aramaic, flagging with *l-* was more restricted, being confined to animate definites (Rubin 2005: 102).

Differential object marking has survived not only into North-eastern Neo-Aramaic, but also into another Eastern Aramaic language, Neo-Mandaic. In the dialect of Khorrasmshahr, agreement on the verb and flagging with the preposition *əl-* are both found when the object is specific (Häberl 2009: 135–136, 141–144).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The preposition can, however, also be found with a generic noun when this has already been introduced into the discourse (Häberl 2009: 143).

It can be seen, therefore, that there has been a continual presence of differential object marking in Aramaic, even though the precise morphological markers have changed. Furthermore, definiteness and animacy, which were conditioning factors in ancient dialects, continue to be conditioning factors in modern dialects. More work is required to establish if there are pertinacious conditions in Aramaic that have motivated the creation of new DOM-markers whenever the old ones were lost.

## 8 Parallels in regional languages

Neo-Aramaic DOM is not an isolated phenomenon in the region. There are parallels with neighboring languages, for instance Persian and Turkish, which mark certain types of objects (especially definites) with affixes. In Persian, a historic dative/indirect object marker *-rā* has developed into a marker of definite and (with the indefinite article *-i*) indefinite-specific objects, in a similar development to *ta* (Windfuhr 1979: 47–48):

- (51) a. *hasan-râ*                    *did-am*  
           Hasan-SPEC.OBJ saw-1SG  
           ‘I saw Hasan.’  
       b. *zan-i-râ*                    *did-am*  
           woman-INDF-SPEC.OBJ saw-1SG  
           ‘I saw a (certain) woman.’  
           (Windfuhr 1979: 47–48, glossing added)

In Persian, as in Telkepe Neo-Aramaic, generic objects are not marked (cf. Lazard 1982: 181, 1992: 186):

- (52) a. *âb*            *xord-am*  
           water drank-1SG  
           ‘I drank water.’  
       b. *čub-o*        *čomâq mi-xâ-yd*  
           stick-and cudgel IPFV-want-2PL  
           ‘Do you want (the) stick and cudgel?’ (i.e., ‘Do you want to be beaten?’)  
           (Lazard 1992: 186, glossing added)
- (53) a. *ketâb-râ*                    *xând-am*  
           book-SPEC.OBJ read.PST-1SG  
           ‘I read the book.’

- b. *ketâb xând-am*  
 book read.PST-1SG  
 ‘I read a book/books (unspecific).’  
 (Lazard 1982: 181, glossing added)

The Neo-Aramaic case is, however, unlikely to result from the influence of Turkish or Persian, as DOM is found already in very early Aramaic. The influence, therefore, would be more likely to have occurred in the opposite direction. It is plausible, however, that only language-internal factors were at play.

Arabic dialects of the areas where Aramaic was historically spoken (the Levant and Iraq) also have differential object marking for definite objects, using both agreement and flagging with a dative preposition *la-/li-* (cf. e.g., Cowell 1964: 434–5; Johnstone 1975: 107, Brustad 2000: 353–358). As this kind of differential object marking is not common in Arabic dialects outside the former Aramaic-speaking areas, it is probable that it arose in these dialects in earlier times as a result of influence from the Aramaic substrate. The following are some examples:

(54) Syrian Arabic

- šəft-u*                      *la-mḥammad*      *əl-yom*  
 saw.2MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM-Muhammed    today  
 ‘Did you see Muhammed today?’  
 (Brustad 2000: 354)

(55) Mosul Arabic

- a. *ġabbât-u*                      *lə-l-walad*  
 raised.3FS-OBJ.3MS    DOM-the-boy  
 ‘she raised the boy’  
 (Jastrow 1979: 49)
- b. (DOA alone)
- nənâ‘-u*                      *s-səmmāq*  
 soak.1PL-OBJ.3MS    the-*səmmāq*(m.)  
 ‘we soak the *səmmāq*’  
 (Jastrow 1979: 49)

(56) Tikriti Arabic

- fakk-u*                      *li-l-bāb*  
 opened.3MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM-the-door(m.)  
 ‘he opened the door’  
 (Johnstone 1975: 107)

(57) Jewish/Christian Baghdadi Arabic

*bāʿ-u*                      *l-el-bēt*  
 sold.3MS-OBJ.3MS    DOM-the-house(m.)  
 ‘he sold the house’  
 (Blanc 1964: 128)

(58) Muslim Baghdadi Arabic

*fallšoo-ha*                      *li-l-madrasa*                      *l-ʿatiiga*  
 tore.down.3PL-OBJ.3FS    DOM-the-school(f.)    the-old.FS  
 ‘they tore down the old school’  
 (Erwin 2004 [1963]: 334)

Regarding the prevalence of DOF (flagging) in the Arabic dialects of northern Iraq, if this results from Aramaic influence, it must date to earlier times, as a majority of Neo-Aramaic dialects do not have DOF, including those spoken in the immediate vicinity of Mosul (the “Mosul Plain dialects”), such as Alqosh. The Neo-Aramaic dialect of Telkepe appears to be an exception among the Mosul Plain dialects. As Telkepe is the village situated closest to the city of Mosul, it is quite likely that its use of DOF is a borrowing back from Arabic into Aramaic. This would be an interesting case of the borrowing of a feature, its loss in the donor language and then its transfer back from the recipient to the original donor.

## 9 Conclusions

Differential object marking in North-eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA), has long been thought to be conditioned primarily by definiteness (at least in the case of object agreement, cf., e.g., Hoberman [1989: 102]). The evidence from the Telkepe dialect shows that, while definiteness plays an important role, topic-hood is the crucial factor: definite objects in focus do not take DOM, while definite objects serving as primary or secondary topic do. Specificity is also a factor: generic definite objects are likely not to trigger DOM, although this is by no means a strict rule. Semantic integration of the object with the verb increases the likelihood that DOM is absent.

In Telkepe, the two strategies of differential object agreement and flagging (DOA and DOF) occur under more or less the same conditions. DOA may, however, occur without DOF, but not vice versa. Two conditions have been identified where only DOA is allowed (where the object is preposed as primary topic, or where it is the theme of a ditransitive construction). Otherwise, the choice between DOA and DOA + DOF may be unconditioned (perhaps resulting from the influence of

neighboring dialects lacking DOF) or there may be conditioning factors yet to be identified. In other NENA dialects possessing both forms of DOM (agreement and flagging), these two strategies are more independent: flagging in some dialects is restricted to, or more likely with, objects high on the animacy scale.

The evidence from Telkepe, and more tentatively from other NENA dialects, appears to fit recent approaches (e.g., Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011; Iemmolo 2010) emphasizing the role that topic-hood plays in conditioning DOM cross-linguistically. Whether DOM is first developed as a topic-marker, as Dalrymple and Nikolaeva suggest (2011: 207–215), and other attested conditioning factors (such as animacy) arise from a broadening or narrowing of the functions of this marker, is a question beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on establishing the precise synchronic functions of DOM in Telkepe. Future research will address questions of diachrony: such as how precisely differential object agreement and flagging developed in North-eastern Neo-Aramaic; how independent these two developments are; and whether topic-marking was in fact the earliest function of the DOM markers in the NENA dialects.

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