Romanian Definite DPs: a Diachronic View

Daniela Isac. Concordia University
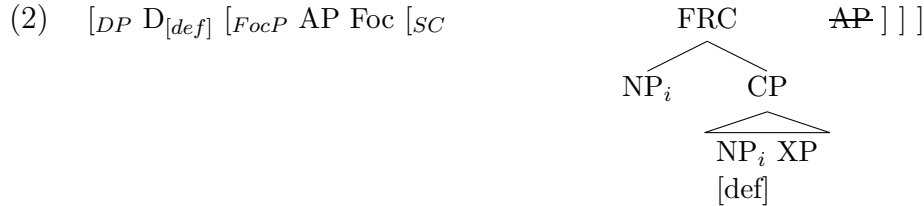
Empirical focus.This paper examines the overt expression definiteness within Romanian DPs from a diachronic perspective. The Romanian definite article is expressed as a suffix on a head within the DP, as a reflex of an Agree relation between the [def] feature on D and the [def] feature on the respective head (Cornilescu & Nicolae (CN) 2009, 2011, Nicolae 2013). In this paper I will focus on a particular type of definite DPs that occured in Old Romanian (OR), in which the definite article was overt on N even if N was not the closest head to the definite D head. Such strings were grammatical in OR only if the noun was followed by a complement or a modifier, and are ungrammatical in Modern Romanian (MR), a language in which the definite article must be overtly expressed on the closest head to D.

(1)   (a) *neştiutor*   *gândul*   *omenesc* *(OR)*
             ignorant   thought.DEF human
             'the ignorant human thinking'

        (b) *neştiutorul*   *gând*   *omenesc* *(MR)*
             ignorant.DEF   thought human
             'the ignorant human thinking'

Previous analyses. CN 2009, 2011, Nicolae 2013 analyze the OR strings in (1.a) as instances of Long Distant Agree (LDA), i.e. an Agree relation between the [def] feature on D and a matching feature on a head that is in a non-local relative position to D. In CN's 2009, 2011 view, the switch from the OR stage in which definiteness could be the outcome of LDA, to MR, in which definiteness is overtly expressed only on heads in a local relation to D, was motivated by the ambiguities generated by an OR type of grammar, which allows non-local Agree. Such ambiguities led to a resetting of the 'definiteness parameter' in favour of the more constrained (i.e. local) version, in accordance to the subset principle.

Problems with previous analyses. A significant problem with the distant Agree view is that alongside with DPs as in (1a), OR also displayed strings in which the definite article was spelled out on the head closest to D (A_{def}-N). Under the assumption that distant Agree was indeed an option in OR, what is needed is a theory that specifies the exact conditions/ contexts in which Agree was local in OR vs contexts in which it was non-local.

Proposal. I propose that the instances in which As are 'skipped' and are not affected by Agree illustrate a particular focus strategy that was available in OR, i.e. the 'cleft-like' strategy (Frascarelli 2010). Once this analysis is assumed, there is no need to posit the existence of non-local Agree in OR. In cleft-like structures, the focus constituent is merged as a predicate of a small clause (SC) and then raises to SpecFocP (similarly to predicate inversion), while the subject of the SC is the Presupposition, which is realized as a (free) relative clause (FRC). The FRC includes an empty NP antecedent and a CP that contains a predication relation between an NP and a predicate (XP) that is different from the one in the SC. Crucially, focussed As do not bear a [def] feature (which is typically associated with an anaphoric feature on lexical items, rather than a focus feature) and thus are not part of the Agree chain established when D searches for a valued matching [def] feature.

(2) $[_{DP}$ D$_{[def]}$ $[_{FocP}$ AP Foc $[_{SC}$ FRC   ~~AP~~ $]$ $]$ $]$

$$
\begin{array}{ccc}
 & \text{FRC} & \\
 & \wedge & \\
\text{NP}_i & & \text{CP} \\
 & & \wedge \\
 & & \text{NP}_i \ \text{XP} \\
 & & \text{[def]}
\end{array}
$$

Given our proposal, the diachronic change in the overt expression of the definite article is not the outcome of a switch from distant Agree to local Agree, but rather of the fact that the predicate inversion strategy for Focus is no longer available in MR.

This analysis is able to account for other cases of apparent LDA discussed in CN 2009, 2011, in which the overtly definite N is preceded by a Possessive. Under the assumption that Possessive phrases can be merged as predicates of a small clause, similar to predicative adjectives, PossPs can also undergo predicate inversion as in (2).

This analysis is also able to account for why the definite article is spelled out on N in these OR DPs only if N is followed by a possessive or by a modifier. In the proposed analysis, the subject of the small clause in (2) is a (free) relative clause. Under the assumption that possessor complements and modifiers are merged as predicates within a reduced relative clause (Kayne 1994), it follows that only in the presence of a complement or a modifier can the noun be the subject of the small clause in (2). CN 2011 also allow for an analysis along these lines for such strings. What differs is that in their view, these strings are structurally ambiguous in that the pre-nominal A can be analyzed either as an emphatic inverted predicative A, or as an A that is merged in the base in a pre-nominal position. In contrast, in our view, these strings are derivable only if the A bears a [focus] feature and raises to a pre-nominal Focus position.

This analysis is supported by the fact that such patterns also exist in other languages of the Balkan Romance family (Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian)

(3) *cu   frănti   pičǫárili (Megl, Saramandu et al, 2011)*
    with   broken   legs.def

    'with the broken legs'

While these strings differ from their OR counterparts in that the N does not have to be followed by a complement or a modifier, they also involve raising of an adjectival predicate which is merged post-nominally within a Kaynean small clause, to a pre-nominal focus position within the small clause. Given that Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian probably split from the rest of the Daco-Romance around the 13th century, and that the OR examples like (1a) are attested as late as the 18th century, we can assume that Proto-Romanian used the strategy of 'predicate inversion' for focus. Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian continued to use it up to the modern days, while Romanian had predicate inversion only in earlier stages, up to the 18th century, after which it lost it.

Selected References: Cornilescu A. & A. Nicolae 2011.'On the Syntax of Romanian Definite Phrases: Changes in the pattern of Definiteness Checking', in Sleeman & Perridon (eds) *The Noun Phrase in Romance and Germanic.* Frascarelli, M. 2010. 'Narrow Focus, clefting and predicate inversion', *Lingua* 120: 2121-2147.