

The Low Definite Article and the Evolution of the Romanian DP

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1. Previous literature

This lecture addresses a central topic of the syntax of the Romanian DP, namely the Romanian definite articles *-l*, *-cel* with a focus on the enclitic definite article *-l*. The first part of the lecture is a brief presentation of the state of the art regarding the syntax of the two definite articles, which, given their distribution, form a complementary set. The enclitic definite article occurs only on [+N] bases, i.e. on nouns and adjectives; in contrast, the freestanding article may appear only in front of quantifiers, and it selects QPs (cardinals, ordinals, degree quantifiers) which are [N] constituents, categorially.

While the status of *cel* as a free standing definite article under D is not controversial, opinion on the status and the syntax of the enclitic article is divided. The enclitic article has been viewed either as a second-position clitic (e.g. Halpern 1992) or as a suffix (e.g. Ortman & Popescu 2000), which is not surprising since its occurrence on the first N or A of a DP is consistent with both analyses. A second problem on which several analyses have been proposed is how the enclitic article and the N get to be together. The earliest proposal is that of N-to-D movement, (proposed by Dobrovie-Sorin 1987, and adopted by Giusti 1993, Cornilescu 1992, among many); a second proposal has in common with the N-to-D approach, the fact that the article merges under D, it is considered an affix, and suffixation involves the *lowering of the definite article* on the first nominal constituent (see Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006). Yet a third analysis, which adopts a *lexicalist frame* of analysis, proposes that the article is already suffixed on the N at merge, and the article on the noun values the definiteness feature of the Determiner (Cornilescu & Nicolae 2011). As probably apparent, both N-raising and article-lowering instantiate head movement. It has been shown, however, that there is strong evidence (coming from the mirror image order of postnominal adjectives, the relative position of adjectives and postnominal genitives, etc., see Cinque 2004, Shlonsky 2004), that the syntax of the Romanian DP involves NP-movement, rather than N-Movement.

2. Definiteness valuation in Modern Romanian: Syntactic Definiteness, Local Agree

A comparison of the three analyses, mostly on the basis of their empirical coverage, leads to the result that the enclitic article had better be viewed as a *suffix* (not a clitic) and that it *merges already affixed to the noun*. In the minimalist framework proposed by Pesetsky & Torrego (2007), a definite N, i.e. a noun suffixed by the definite article is endowed with a(n) [*u+def: ___*] feature, a feature which values the [*idef: ___*] feature in D.

The idea that the article merges as a suffix on the N is in line with the *Parameter of Definiteness*, (discussed for Semitic languages in Danon 2010), which claims that in certain languages definiteness is not only a semantic feature (Russellian uniqueness and existence), but also a syntactic features. Such languages have characteristic properties, such as, definiteness agreement between adjectives and nouns, the presence of polydefinite constructions, properties which also exist in Romanian. The syntacticization of definiteness in Romanian has to do with fact that the definite article is the case marker of the N, so that it had to be retained even when it plays no semantic role (for instance, on proper names).

As noticed, in definite DPs either the N or the A may bear the suffixed definite article and the article always occurs on the *first* [+N] element in the DP; this means that *only prenominal adjectives* may bear the article, the pattern is either: N[+def] + A[-def] (*regele bun* ‘king.the good’) or, if the A is prenominal, A [+def] + N [-def] (*bunul rege* ‘good.the king’); therefore, the head of the first AP or NP is always the bearer of the definite feature.

This paradigm proves that the checking of definiteness observes strong locality conditions: a) definiteness cannot be checked across a [-N] intervener (hence the use of *cel* with [-N] constituents); b) if there are several potential [+N] candidates marked as [*u+def: ___*], it is always the highest in the DP, the one in the specifier immediately below D, which bears the definite article, as also shown by comparing modified inherently definite proper names: *old Jolyon*, *le vieux Jolyon*, *bătrânul Jolyon*. Assuming that an unvalued [*idefinite*] feature is introduced by the D head, in the examples mentioned above, English checks the [+definite] features across the adjective, exhibiting Long Distance Agree, French and Romanian, exhibit Local Agree, but satisfy it differently, by inserting the definite article (French) or by suffixing the article on the [+N] constituent immediately below D. The pattern of definiteness valuation and realization is as below

Definiteness realization:

Spell out the [definite] feature on the first [+N] constituent of the nominal phrase.

3. Long Distance Agree in Old Romanian (OR). The Lower Definite Article

In Old Romanian (OR, 16th to 18th century), there is a type of variation in the pattern of definiteness checking, never noticed in earlier literature (Gheție 1975, Rosetti 1986, Denusușianu 1961, Dimitrescu 1978, a.o.), and examine its significance for the evolution of the DP. The texts we have examined show relative consistency with respect to the problem discussed here, while clearly differing from Mod(ern) R(omanian).

The lower definite article In OR, the definite article variably occurs *either on the first, or on a lower, constituent*, so that another nominal constituent, for instance, an adjective, may precede the definite noun:

- (i) *spre* *ticaloase* *cuvintele* *mele* *audzul îți pleacă...* (Cantemir)
to vicious words.DEF my hearing you turn
'Lend your ear to my vicious words'

Examples of this type show that in OR locality conditions are not so strict, so that a different pattern of definiteness valuation holds:

Definiteness valuation and realization (Long Distance Agree, OR)

The [+def] feature is realized either on the first or on a lower [+N] constituent of the nominal phrase.

Examples like (i) raise several questions: a) What is the extension in time of this phenomenon? b) What are the contexts that favour the occurrence of the article on a lower [+N] constituent? c) What does the article on a lower N signify for the emergence of the enclitic definite article? d) What are the causes that led to the elimination of this pattern? e) What are the consequences of the loss of the lower article for the syntax of the DP? The aim of the remaining part of the lecture is to suggest answers to (some) of these questions.

Some results of the diachronic analysis

1. The existence of the low article suggests the Romanian definite article is the historical descendent of the Latin *postnominal demonstrative* (see Giusti 1998 on the prenominal demonstrative origin of the Romance definite article).

2. The hypothesis that the definiteness feature merges on N and goes up to the D area through agreement of the adjectives to the definite noun is supported by the existence in OR of polydefinite constructions (see Croitor 2008).

3. In OR, the definite article suffixed on the noun may also occupy a lower position. A lower definite N may be preceded by non-definite adjectives, quantifiers and prenominal adjectives; in all of these cases, OR values definiteness by Long Distance Agree.

4. In (the latter part of) Old Romanian, Long Distance Agree apparently coexisted with Local Agree, a factor that sometimes caused significant ambiguity. Consequently, Romanian settles for Local Agree, selecting the more restrictive grammar. Accordingly, definiteness spells out on the first definite adjective or noun and the low definite article is lost.

5. This parametric change has consequences elsewhere in the structure of the DP, for instance, there are significant changes in the grammar of the prenominal genitives and of the demonstratives.

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