

ROMANIAN COMPLEX ADNOMINAL PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES. THE EXAMPLE OF *DE*-PHRASES

Alexandru Mardale*¹

Abstract: Romanian displays two types of complex PPs (i.e. PPs formed on at least two simple Ps), which may attach to Ns. The first one is headed by a combination of two (and very rarely three) lexical Ps, e. g. *de la* ‘from’, *pe sub* ‘under’, *pe lângă* ‘near’, *de pe lângă* ‘from near’ (e.g. *venirea lui de la Londra* ‘his coming from London’). The second type is headed by a combination of one functional P (*de*) and one lexical P, e. g. *de la* ‘from’, *de pe* ‘on’, *de sub* ‘under’, *de lângă* ‘near’ (e.g. *cartea de pe raft* ‘the book on the shelf’). In this paper, we take a closer look at these two types of prepositional constructions. First, we examine the various morpho-syntactic and semantic constraints under which the different constituents of the complex PPs may fall, e.g. the syntactic and semantic type of the matrix noun, the categorial status of the P’s complement (NP vs DP), and correlatively, the absence or presence of a determiner, their syntactic function (argument vs. modifier), their semantic interpretation (specific – non specific). Second, we pay special attention to the analysis of *de* occurring in the second type of complex PPs. In this respect, we show that complex PPs in type two are not genuine PPs and that *de* is not lexical, but the overt realisation of a functional category, namely, Mod(ifier).

Keywords: complex prepositions, adnominal constituents, *de*-phrases, arguments, modifiers, Romanian

1. Introduction

Romanian displays at least two types of adnominal (i.e. attached to a noun) complex prepositional phrases (PPs), i.e. formed by two and rarely three simple prepositions. The first one involves deverbal or processual (and generally) uncountable matrix nouns – it is illustrated in (i) below, while the second one involves various types of countable matrix nouns – it is exemplified in (ii):

- (i) coborâtul de pe deal² (type A)
descent-the of on hill
‘the descent off the hill’

* Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Département Europe Centrale et Orientale – Section de roumain, Laboratoire Structure et Dynamique des Langues (SeDyL), alexandru.mardale@inalco.fr.

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² Romanian exhibits a particular phenomenon regarding the use of prepositions and the definite article (which is enclitic in Romanian), namely the former is ruled out. This phenomenon takes place when the noun phrase preceded by a preposition does not have any other constituents, and this occurs for the definite reading, in (i) and (ii) above. On the other hand, if a noun preceded by a preposition has another constituent (regardless of its nature), the definite article is obligatory: (i’) *coborâtul de pe dealul mare* descent-the of on hill-the big ‘the descent of the big hill’, (ii’) *copilul de pe strada mea* child-the of on street-the my ‘the child from my street’.

- (ii) copilul de pe stradă (type B)
 child-the of on street
 ‘the child from the street’

Our purpose in this paper is to examine the conditions that determine such constructions, as well as to propose an analysis that shows at the same time their common properties and their differences. We will insist on the second type, which is particular among Romance.

2. Type A

Below there are some examples for this type of construction:

- (1) a. venirea de la Paris
 coming-the of at Paris
 ‘the return from Paris’
 b. un vânt din³ deșert
 a wind of-in desert
 ‘a wind from the desert’
 c. ieșirea de sub anonim
 exit-the from under anonymity
 ‘coming into prominence’
 d. plimbatul pe sub poduri
 walking-the on under bridges
 ‘walking under the bridges’
 e. o excursie pe la mănăstiri
 a trip on at monasteries
 ‘a trip to the monasteries’
 f. alergatul printre⁴ obstacole
 running-the on-between obstacles
 (running through obstacles)

Among the properties of this kind of construction, we notice that the prepositions that can introduce it (as P1) are especially *de* (1a-c) and *pe* (1d-f). *De* is considered here as an ablative preposition, expressing the separation from a point or place of origin (cf. *plecarea de la Paris* ‘the departure from Paris’. *Pe* may express the approximation and/or the location (cf. *jucatul pe sub masă* ‘the playing under the table’. There is no constraint regarding the occurrence of the second (or third) preposition (P2 or P3). Thus, different prepositions may occur there (*la* ‘at’, *în* ‘in’, *sub* ‘under’, *peste* ‘over’, *lângă* ‘near’, *între* ‘between’, etc.).

³ The preposition *din* is a contracted form from *de* ‘of’ and *în* ‘in’.

⁴ The preposition *printre* is a contracted form of *p(r)e* ‘on’ and *între* ‘between’.

At the same time, we have noticed in the introduction that these complex NPs are attached to deverbal or processual uncountable nouns and, in this respect, they have the same form and function as in the verbal structure they come from (cf., a.o., Chomsky 1970 for a general discussion on deverbal nouns, and Stan 2003 on Romanian):

- (2) a. venirea (Mariei) de la Paris <= Maria vine de la Paris
 ‘Maria’s arrival from Paris’ ‘Maria arrives from Paris’
 b. plimbatul (Mariei) pe sub poduri <= Maria se plimbă pe sub poduri
 ‘Maria’s walk under the bridges’ ‘Maria walks under the bridges’

With regard to the noun complement introduced by P2, we notice here that it is generally a DP⁵ (i.e. a noun with a determiner), as in (3) below, but under certain circumstances, it may as well be an NP (i.e. a noun without a determiner), as in (4) below:

- (3) a. un vânt din deșertul african / *din deșert african
 ‘a wind from the African desert’
 b. o excursie pe la mănăstirile din Moldova / ??pe la mănăstiri din Moldova
 a trip to the monasteries from Moldavia’
(4) alergatul printre obstacole naturale / ??obstacolele naturale
 ‘the running through natural obstacles’

Parallel to this distinction, we notice that the constructions having a constituent like P2 + DP in an adnominal position may alternate with an adverb (as in (5) below), while those having a constituent like P2 + NP may not (6):

- (5) a. venirea de la Paris => venirea de acolo
 ‘the arrival from Paris’ ‘the arrival from there’
 b. mersul pe sub poduri => mersul pe aici
 ‘walking under the bridges’ ‘walking (around) here’
(6) alergatul printre obstacole => *alergatul pe acolo⁶
 ‘the running through obstacles’ ‘the running over there’

The contrast that we have just described may be also explained if we take into account the type of denotation of the adnominal complement. To be more precise, the constituents

⁵ We adopt here the terminology and distinctions made within the framework of the so-called X-bar theory (Chomsky 1970, Jackendoff 1977), which considers that any (syntactic) category – regardless of its nature (lexical or functional) – may allow for a three-level projection (X⁰, the basic level, which corresponds to the head of the projection; X’, the intermediary level, which bears the head and its possible arguments; X’’ (or XP), the maximal level, which is the head of the construction, its arguments, specifiers and possible adjuncts). In this view, the DP label shall be understood as the maximal projection of the D category (as Determiner), which obligatorily entails an NP argument (which is the maximal projection of the N category (as Noun)). Moreover, the NP projection is rather different from the DP, since the former – unlike the latter – does not entail a D.

⁶ Note that this is a possible example, but with a different meaning.

spelled out as DPs, as in (5), denote places (thus, a specific type of individual), hence their ability to alternate with adverbs. On the other hand, the constituents spelled out as NPs, in (6), denote properties (thus, they are not referential), hence the impossibility to alternate with adverbs.

Furthermore, we stress here that certain complex PPs under discussion have the possibility to occur in their simple form (i.e. without P1), as in (7) below. In such cases, the interpretation of the construction is not the same, namely we switch from an origin-type reading, with complex P, as in (7a-b), to a destination-type reading, with simple P, in (7a'-b')⁷:

- (7) a. venirea de la Paris ≠ a'. venirea la Paris
 'the arrival from Paris'
- b. mersul pe sub poduri ≠ b'. mersul sub poduri
 'walking under the bridges' walking under the bridges)

Taking into account the different properties examined up to this point, we can propose an analysis of complex PPs of type A, represented as in the following structure:

- (8)
-
- a. o sosire de la Paris 'an arrival from Paris'
- b. un vânt din (de + în) deșert 'a wind from the desert'

Starting from this representation, we may – in order to conclude on complex PPs of type A – put forth the main elements of our analysis:

- (i) they are introduced by two ordinary (i.e. lexical) simple prepositions. In other words, lexical P1 takes as a complement a PP introduced by another lexical P2. The latter may take as a complement a DP or an NP;
- (ii) the status of the complex adnominal PP is different according to the type of noun to which it attaches: if the latter is a deverbal noun (8a), the PP functions as an argument; on the other hand, if it is not a deverbal noun (8b), the PP functions as an adjunct.

⁷ This fact is also due to the syntactic and semantic properties of motion verbs from which the deverbal nouns are derived, and it is not an exclusive property of the prepositions.

3. Type B

The following examples illustrate this type of complex PPs:

- (9) a. vecinul de la parter
neighbour-the of at ground floor
'the neighbour from the ground floor'
- b. fotografia de pe raft
photo-the of on shelf
'the photo on the shelf'
- c. Revoluția de la 1848
revolution-the of at 1848
'The Revolution of 1848'
- d. aselinizarea din 1969
moon landing-the of-in 1969
'first moon landing in 1969'
- e. priza de sub masă
socket-the of under table
'the socket under the table'
- f. castelul dintre⁸ munți
castle-the of-between mountains
'the castle between the mountains'

More specifically, these are adnominal prepositional adjuncts whose salient property – that makes them different from the previous type (cf. A above) – is to be introduced by *de*, as the only element permitted as P1:

- (10) a. *vecinul pe la parter
neighbour-the on at ground floor
- b. *evenimentele pe la 1848
events-the on at 1848

We note that *de* has to be present even if its complement is not a PP, but an adverb:

- (11) a. casa de la mare => casa de acolo
'the house from the seaside' 'that house over there'
- b. cartea de pe raft => cartea de aici
'the book on the shelf' 'this book over here'
- c. evenimentele din 1989 => evenimentele de atunci
'the events in 1989' 'the events back then'
- d. progresele din prezent => progresele de acum
'the progress at present' 'the nowadays progress'

⁸ The preposition *dintre* is a contracted form from *din* 'of' and *între* 'between'.

Another difference from the previous type, coming more precisely from their status as adjuncts, is that these complex PPs are not sensitive to the nature of the noun to which they attach. They may, as a consequence, occur with different types of nouns: relational (9a), iconic (9b), of event (9c), deverbal (9d), of objects (9e-f), etc.

Semantically (lexically) speaking, such adnominal PPs express the placement in time or in space:

- (12)
- | | | | |
|----|------------------------------|---|----------------------------------------------|
| a. | cărțile de pe masă | = | cărțile care se află pe masă |
| | ‘the books on the table’ | | ‘the books which are on the table’ |
| b. | haina din dulap | = | haina care a fost pusă în dulap |
| | (the coat in the wardrobe) | | ‘the coat that has been put in the wardrobe’ |
| c. | revoluția din 1989 | = | revoluția care a avut loc în 1989 |
| | ‘the revolution in 1989’ | | ‘the revolution that took place in 1989’ |
| d. | orașul dintre lacuri | = | orașul care se găsește între lacuri |
| | ‘the city between the lakes’ | | ‘the city which lies between the lakes’ |

Furthermore, we notice the existence of certain *de* constructions that are ambiguous, allowing for an analysis of either type A or type B. Thus, examples such as those provided under (13) below receive *a priori* the ablative reading (i.e. expressing the source) or the adnominal reading (i.e. expressing location):

- (13)
- | | |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------|
| a. | vinul din Italia |
| | ‘the wine from Italy’ |
| b. | vinul din pivniță |
| | ‘the wine from/in the basement’ |
| c. | florile de la munte |
| | ‘the mountain flowers / the flowers from the mountains’ |

In such situations, the context helps remove the possible ambiguity. More precisely, the interpretation varies depending on whether we suppose the presence of a motion verb in the structure. As such, in (14) – where there is no motion verb – the complex PP receives a type A interpretation, while in (15) it will get a type B interpretation due to the presence of the motion verb *a aduce* ‘to bring’:

- (14) Vinul din Italia se vinde bine peste tot.
 ‘The wine (produced in/coming) from Italy sells well everywhere.’
- (15) A adus multe vinuri din călătorie. Vinul din Italia a fost mai apreciat decât cele din alte părți.
 ‘He brought many wines from his trip. The wine (that was brought) from Italy was more appreciated than the ones (brought) from other places.’

It is also important to emphasise that all adverbials of type B cannot be introduced by *de*. In fact, the latter cannot occur when they attach to uncountable deverbal nouns, more precisely in the following situations:

(i) when the noun to which they attach denotes a complex event (i.e. having overtly realised arguments):

- (16) a. organizarea Jocurilor Olimpice **la** Londra **în** 2012 / ***de la** Londra **din** 2012
 ‘the organisation of the Olympic Games in London in 2012’
 b. semnarea acestei convenții **la** Paris / ***de la** Paris
 ‘the signing of this convention in Paris’

On the other hand, if the head noun denotes a simple event (i.e. without an overtly realised argument), we have to use *de* if the adnominal PP has a specific interpretation:

- (17) a. atentatele **de la** 11 septembrie / ***la** 11 septembrie
 ‘the September 11 attacks’
 b. revoluția **din** (de + în) 1907 **din** România / ***în** 1907 **în** România
 ‘the revolution in 1907 in Romania’

Finally, if the adnominal *PP* allows for a generic reading describing a certain type of event (i.e. without describing a relation between the event and a specific placement), *de* is ruled out:

- (18) a. studiul **la** bibliotecă / ***de la** bibliotecă
 ‘the study at the library’
 b. dansul **pe** masă / ***de pe** masă
 ‘the dance on the table’

(ii) when the noun to which they attach is a non-specific indefinite in intensional (19a) or generic (20) contexts. In fact, the presence of *de* in these constructions triggers a specific reading (19b), while its absence is correlated to a non-specific reading (19c):

- (19) a. Vrea o casă **la** mare. (reading: a house being (built) at the seaside)
 ‘S/he wants a house at the seaside.’
 b. Vrea o casă **de la** mare. (reading: a certain house that is at the seaside)
 ‘S/he wants a (certain) house at the seaside.’
 c. Vrea o casă anume **la** mare.
 ‘S/he wants a certain house at the seaside.’
 (20) O casă **la** mare e mai scumpă decât una **la** munte.
 ‘A house at the seaside costs more than a house in the mountains.’

(iii) when the noun to which they attach is a definite generic in the plural:

- (21) a. Casele **la** mare sunt în general locuințe de vacanță.
 ‘The houses at the seaside are generally holiday residences.’
 b. Casele **de la** mare sunt în general locuințe de vacanță.
 (the same translation as for (21a))

In such a context, *de* may in fact occur, as in (21b), while keeping the generic (thus, non-specific) reading. The absence of *de* is moreover correlated to an additional constraint: the meaning expressed by the adnominal PP has to be an essential condition for the expressed generalisation. This explains why *de* cannot be absent: compare (22a) with (22b):

- (22) a. *Clădirile **în** New York au multe etaje.
 ‘The buildings in New York have a lot of storeys.’
 b. Clădirile **din** (de + în) New York au multe etaje.
 ‘The buildings in New York have a lot of storeys.’

(iv) *de* cannot occur either in case the noun to which it attaches is in a predicative position (i.e. after the copula), more precisely in a definition or characteristic structure: compare (23) and (24) :

- (23) a. Burdwan este o localitate **în** India.
 ‘Burdwan is a town in India.’
 b. Burdwan este o localitate **din** (de + în) India.
 (the same translation as for (23a))
 (24) a. *Indranil est un prieten **în** India
 ‘Indranil is a friend in India’
 b. Indranil este un prieten **din** (de + în) India
 ‘Indranil is a friend from India’

To sum up the conditions of the occurrence of *de* with type B, the generalisation that we can put forth is that it has in fact to occur in structures having a specific interpretation.

Another noteworthy aspect while examining this kind of structure is the (categorical) status and the function of *de*. In fact, we have seen that *de* occurring with type B is different from the previously examined one with type A, in the sense that it does not have the properties of an ordinary preposition (cf. also Mardale 2009, Tănase-Dogaru 2011 for Romanian, Fábregas 2012 for similar constructions in Spanish).

Furthermore, note that *de* from type B is traditionally interpreted as a sort of nominal copula (*GALR* 2005 and 2008, *GBLR* 2010, Nedelcu 2011, Țenchea 2011), whose role is similar to that of the relative *care* ‘that/which/who’, which can be used to paraphrase the structure (cf. also (12) above):

- (25) un vecin **de** la etajul 1 = un vecin **care** locuiește la etajul 1
 ‘a neighbour from the first floor’ ‘a neighbour that lives at the first floor’

Note also that this *de* cannot occur in the corresponding verbal structures, but – as we have seen until now – only to introduce adjuncts in a nominal context:

- (26) a. Am pus cartea **pe** raft. / ***de pe** raft. Cartea **de pe** raft / ***pe** raft a fost interesantă.
 ‘I put the book on the shelf. The book from the shelf was interesting.’

- b. A construit o casă **la** mare. / ***de la** mare. Casa **de la** mare / ***la** mare a costat foarte mult.
'He has built a house at the seaside. The house at the seaside cost a lot.)

In a Romance contrastive perspective, we emphasise that this kind of construction is not to be found in languages of the same family. Here are some Romance examples showing this impossibility:

- (27) a. J'ai mis le bol **sur** la table. Le bol **sur** la table / ***de sur** la table est encore chaud. (French)
'I put the pot on the table. The pot on the table is still hot.'
- b. J'ai une réunion **dans** une semaine. La réunion **dans** une semaine / ***de dans** une semaine me stresse. (French)
'I have a meeting in a week. The meeting next week is stressing me.'
- (28) a. Ho messo la tazza **sul** tavolo. La tazza **sul** tavolo / ***di sul** tavolo è ancora calda. (Italian)
'I put the cup on the table. The cup on the table is still hot.'
- b. Ho una riunione **fra** una settimana. La riunione **della** settimana / ***di della** settimana mi fanno innervosire. (Italian)
'I have a meeting in a week. The meeting next week is stressing me.'
- (29) Puse el bol **sobre** la mesa. El bol **sobre** la mesa / ***de sobre** la mesa todavía está caliente. (Spanish)
'I put the cup on the table. The cup on the table is still hot.'

It is however attested in languages such as Chinese and Tagalog (cf. Rubin 2002), and under conditions similar to those in Romanian. To be more precise, *de* in Chinese and *na* in Tagalog occur exclusively in an adnominal adjunct context, to introduce PPs in constructions with specific interpretation.

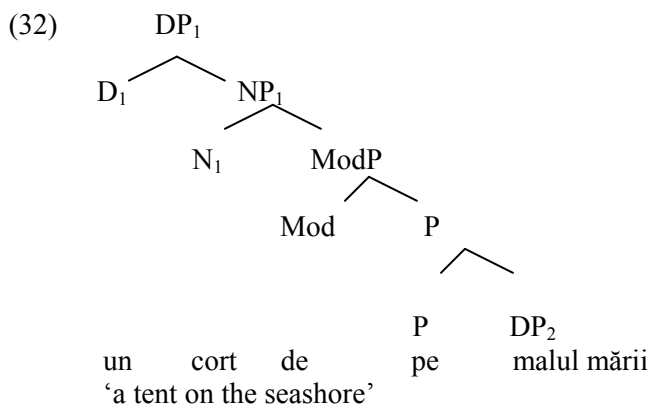
Examples (30a) and (31a) show in fact that *de* and *na* – just as *de* in Romanian, in (26) above – are absent from locative verbal structures, while (30b) and (31b) show that they are obligatory in the corresponding nominal structures:

- (30) a. Na yiben shu zai zhuozi-shang. (Chinese)
that-CLS book on table- high
'The book is on the table.'
- b. Na yiben zai zhuozi-shang **de** shu
that-CLS on table- high DE book
'The book on the table.'
- (31) a. Nasa probinsya ang bahay (Tagalog)
in-the province TOP house
'The house is in the country.'
- b. Binili niya ang bahay **na** nasa probinsya
bought he TOP house NA in-the country
'He has bought the house in the country.'

To answer the question regarding the categorial status and the function of *de* occurring with type B, we follow the analysis of Rubin (2002). The special properties of *de* in Romanian (and, by extension, of *de* in Chinese and *na* in Tagalog) have made this author consider them not as lexical categories (i.e. as genuine prepositions), but rather as a sort of functional elements (cf. also van Riemsdijk 1990), whose occurrence is strictly constrained.

In fact, as we have seen so far, *de* is the only one that can occur in such a position, i.e. that cannot alternate with other prepositions (cf. (10) above)), it has no lexical meaning and its occurrence is restricted to the adnominal context, its role being to introduce locative or temporal modifiers (PPs); moreover, its presence leads to a specific reading of the structure as a whole.

Consequently, based on such specific properties of *de*, we can consider them as the realisation (i.e. lexicalisation) of a functional category, namely Mod (as Modifier). On this analysis, the structures in which it occurs shall be represented as follows:



4. Conclusions

In this paper, we have examined the constructions involving two types of adnominal complex PPs in Romanian. Despite their partial formal homonymy, we have shown, on the one hand, that they are PPs formed with two lexical prepositions expressing the separation from a point or place of origin (type A, e.g. *plecarea de la mare* ‘the leaving from the seaside’). They generally attach to deverbal nouns and may function as arguments or as adjuncts of the latter. On the other hand, we have seen that they are PPs formed with a functional element (namely *de*) and a lexical preposition expressing time or location (type B, e.g. *ședința de la prânz* ‘the midday reunion’, *ziarul de pe birou* ‘the newspaper on the desk’). They occur with different types of nouns and function exclusively as adjuncts of the latter. We have also noticed that they are subject to numerous constraints of occurrence (notably the specific interpretation) and, furthermore, that this is a peculiar construction among Romance.

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