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DOM IN ROMANIAN AND THE REFERENTIAL FORM-MENTAL ACCESSIBILITY INTERPLAY

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Abstract: *It is generally assumed that the form of the NP (proper name, definite NP, etc.) reflects the degree of activation of the referent introduced by it in the discourse (Givon 1981; Ariel 1988, etc.). I will show in this paper that the relation between a referring expression and the activation status associated with it plays an important role when trying to explain the distribution of pe-marking (in the sense of differential object marking) in Romanian, i.e. the pe-marked direct objects are more prominent in the discourse than their pe-unmarked counterparts.*

Key words: *discourse prominence, anaphoric and cataphoric continuity.*

1. Introduction

Romanian is one of many languages which exhibit the phenomenon of differential object marking (DOM). So, a direct object can appear in an unmarked or in a marked form, the latter being morphologically realized by means of the autonomous lexeme *pe*. Animacy, referentiality and topicality are the generally acknowledged factors that determine if a direct object will be preceded by *pe* or not. If a direct object is situated high on one or more of the above mentioned scales, then the probability of it being *pe*-marked is high.

The picture is not that simple as it might seem at first glance, though. Instances which cannot be explained solely by the above mentioned factors are encountered, especially when analyzing direct objects realized as indefinite or definite nominal phrases (NP).

After analyzing different texts I observed that differentially marked direct objects realized as a NP are more prominent in the discourse in comparison to the unmarked ones. It seems that we need an additional discourse-based parameter to account for (at least) these cases of DOM in Romanian.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 deals with the phenomenon of DOM in Romanian, concentrating on the "controversial cases" (indefinite and definite NPs) which still need to be explained. Section 3 comprises the theoretical frame of the present paper. Concepts like "topic continuity" and "accessibility hierarchies" underline the existent (co)relation between the form of a referent and its accessibility in the minds of the discourse participants. Bearing this

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in mind, we will see in Section 4 that the differentially marked direct objects receive a special status in the production and perception of the discourse. Section 5 comprises the summary, the concluding remarks and some suggestions for further research.

2. The "Controversial" Cases

In what follows I will concentrate on direct objects realized as indefinite or definite NPs which involve not clearly delimitated or explained alternations between the *pe*-marked and the unmarked construction. The examples (1) and (2) below illustrate this variation:

(1) a. Ana o vizitează pe o fată
Ana CL visits PE a girl
'Ana visits a girl'
b. Ana vizitează o fată
Ana visits a girl
'Ana visits a girl.'

(2) a. Ana o vizitează pe fată
Ana CL visits PE girl
'Ana visits the girl.'
b. Ana vizitează fata
Ana visits the girl
'Ana visits the girl.'

The direct objects in the examples (1a) and (2a) which are realized as an indefinite NP and as a definite NP respectively are preceded by *pe*. In the (1b) and (2b) examples, the direct objects appear unmarked with *pe*. However, when comparing the sentence (1a) with (1b) and (2a) with (2b), we realize that they differ minimally and that animacy, referentiality and topicality cannot account for all cases, in which *pe*-marking seems to be optional[1].

Constructions as the ones presented above underline the limitations as well as the insufficiency of the general acknowledged criteria that trigger DOM (i.e. animacy, referentiality and topicality) to explain the controversial cases of *pe*-marking in Romanian. A more detailed picture of the principles involved in DOM-marking arises from an analysis of the particular discourse context where these constructions occur. As it will be shown in Section 4 below, the *pe*-marked direct objects have a special status in the production and perception of discourse. I will use the concept of "topic continuity" introduced by Givon (1981) to underline the fact that *pe*-marked objects are more prominent in the discourse than their unmarked counterparts.

3. Degrees of Mental Accessibility

3.1. Topic Continuity

Before the seminal work of Givon, the concept of topic was understood in an intuitive way, a sentence was therefore conceived as containing at most one topic. Givon (1981, 1983) was the first to introduce the graded concept of "topic continuity" (the situation in which the same topic extends over several clauses) for the behavior of discourse referents across more than one sentence. In other words, every discourse entity exhibits some degree of topicality.

This behavior is mirrored by the form of referential expressions used, as it can be seen in (3). Givon (1983) showed that an entity realized as a zero anaphor is an accessible topic and is most continuous, while an indefinite NP is less accessible and therefore usually discontinuous.

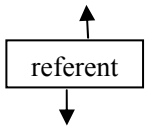
(3) zero anaphors
[most continuous/ accessible topic]
↓
indefinite NPs
[discontinuous/ less accessible topic]

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Assuming that more important referents tend to be more anaphorically accessible and cataphorically persistent, Givon (1983) tested the topicality of referents in an indirect way, by analyzing the referential continuity in two opposite directions, as shown in (4):

(4) Measures of topic continuity (Givon 1983):

Anaphoric continuity/ referential distance/ Look back



Cataphoric continuity/ Topic persistence/ Look forward

Referential distance determines how recently an entity has been mentioned, by looking at the sentences on the left of the referent. The smaller the distance between antecedent and anaphora, the more prominent/ important the denoted referent is in the analyzed discourse segment.

Topic persistence gives evidence about the further mentions of the referent. The more often the referent is mentioned again in the following discourse, the more prominent/ important it is for the text segment.

3.2. Accessibility Hierarchies

Accessibility, giveness or salience theories offer a procedural analysis of the referring expressions, as marking different degrees of mental accessibility. In this framework, where "accessibility" is regarded as a gradient category rather than a categorical one, as in DRT, a discourse referent can be more or less accessible. The basic idea behind this theory is that referring expressions are actually accessibility markers indicating the addressee how to retrieve the appropriate mental representation of an entity. In conclusion, the referential form of the referent mirrors its accessibility status and its prominence in the discourse.

This correlation was analyzed by many linguists and psycholinguists, however, even if the terminology of Givon (1983), Ariel (1988) or Gundel et. al (1993) differs in that they talk about "different degrees of mental accessibility", "activation" or about "hierarchies of cognitive states", they unanimously agree upon the fact that all referents are part of a prominence scale. What they tried was to capture the relation between the accessibility of an entity and the referential expression through which it is realized by means of a scale, as for example the "Givenness Hierarchy' in (5).

(5) Givenness Hierarchy (Gundel, Hedland & Zacharski 1993)

in focus >	acti-vated >	fami-liar >	uniquely identi-fiable >	refe-rential >	type identi-fiable
it	*that*, *this*	*that* N *this* N	*the* N	indef. *this* N	*a* N

more accessible ⟷ less accessible

This approach suggests that the mental accessibility of an entity has a strong impact upon the reference form which will be chosen to refer to it. Examples 6 (a-f) show the relation between the referential form and the mental accessibility of the referent it designates:

(6) a. I couldn't sleep. **It** kept me awake.
b. I couldn't sleep. **That** kept me awake.
c. I couldn't sleep. **That dog** (next door) kept me awake.
d. I couldn't sleep. **The dog** (next door) kept me awake.
e. I couldn't sleep. **This dog** (next door) kept me awake.
f. I couldn't sleep. **A dog** (next door) kept me awake.

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The hearer of the (6f) sentence only has to know what a dog looks like to understand the least restrictive construction "a dog". However, the hearer of a sentence like that in (6a) cannot understand the most restrictive form "it" unless s/he has a concrete mental representation of the dog the speaker is talking about. It is the correlation between different cognitive statuses and the referring expression that are important in Gundel's approach.

As it became obvious in (5) above, there are two determiners which can precede a NP in English in a specific indefinite context: the indefinite article *a* and the determiner *this* (the referential and not the deictic *this* determiner). However, these two forms cannot be used interchangeably. Ionin (2006) notes that besides their different scopal behavior (*this*-determiners do not take narrow scope with respect to intensional or modal operators and negations), the two forms also differ with respect to the noteworthiness property. The examples 7 (a) and (b) underline the latter difference:

(7) a. She wrote √an/ #this article and then went straight to bed.
b. She wrote √an/ √this article and realized only afterwards that it had no title.

If the speaker uses *this* over *an* in (7a), s/he conveys additional information about the NP headed by the determiner. Accordingly, the hearer expects that the speaker will talk about the article again, perhaps explaining what the noteworthy quality of the article is. Because this expectation remains unfulfilled in (7a) in contrast to (7b), the usage of *this* is rendered infelicitous. So, in the so called "transparent context" as in (7), a noteworthy referent can be preceded by *this* if it will be implicitly or explicitly referred to again.

We will see in Section 4 that the apparent optionality of the *pe*-marked construction and the unmarked one can be explained (in most contexts) in a similar manner as the variability presented above.

4. The Diachronic Study

In order to investigate the factors triggering DOM in Romanian, I performed a diachronic study that comprises the time period 1900-2000. Due to lack of space I cannot discuss the study on detail, but see Chiriacescu (2007) for an ample discussion of the factors triggering DOM in Romanian. The part of the survey which is especially relevant for the purposes of this paper is the investigation of the behaviour of the referents of the *pe*-marked objects with respect to their persistence in the subsequent discourse.

4.1. The Corpus Data

The investigated time span of 100 years was segmented into two time periods of 50 years each. I analyzed 200 direct objects found in 3 short stories written during 1900-1950 and another 200 direct objects found in 3 short stories written during 1950-2000.

The reason for choosing the prose fiction type "short story" was because of the relative limited number of highly animated referents occurring in such texts in comparison to novels, for example. Furthermore, short stories provide a good starting point for diachronic analyses since they tend not to be conservative with respect to language change. Also, the language used is usually neither restricted to one register only, nor is it specialized (in comparison to Bible translations, for example).

Each referent of a direct object found in these short stories was coded for two properties: i.) the grammatical function of

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the anaphor (the DO itself) and ii.) the "referential persistence" (in the sense of Givon 1983, Ariel 1988) of every newly introduced referent realized as a DO. We can assume that within a discourse, important referents are mentioned more frequently. This method measures the number of times within the next five clauses that a referent of a NP persists as an argument of the clause, following the point in which it was introduced as a DO. The values that are assigned are from 0 to 5. The referential persistence (RP) thus indirectly underlines the referent's prominence/ importance in the subsequent text.

To briefly exemplify the application of the RP measure developed by Givon (1983), consider the text segment in (8) below:

a. **Pe Bălan îl** avea de mult.
b. Cum **[el]**$_1$ împlinea trei ani şi jumătate,
c. **i**$_2$-a cumpărat din iarmaroc de la Frumoasa, o nadişancă nouă-nouţă.
d. Un an întreg şi-a plimbat boierul *soţia*,
e. în nadişanca trasă de **căluţul sprinten**$_3$**.**
f. După acest an fericit, *coana Casuca*$_i$ muri.
g. Boierul, amărât ca vai de lume, nu-şi mai găsea astâmpăr.
h. De la o vreme află leacul[2].

The direct objects in (8) above behave as follows: The first referent, "pe Bălan", is introduced in the clause (8a) above. Within the next five clauses- (8b) through (8f) - it is mentioned again three times. The second character "soţia", is introduced in the text as an unmarked DO in (8d). Within the next 5 sentences the referent of this object is mentioned again only once, in (8f).

Returning to the main analysis, it is worth mentioning that it does not include cases where an anaphor refers to the entire previous clause, or to a superset or subset of previously mentioned referents.

4.2. Results and Discussion

Parts of the findings of the diachronic analysis are summarized in the table (9) below:

RP measure	*1900-1950*		*1950-2000*	
	[-pe]	*[+pe]*	*[-pe]*	*[+pe]*
S. 1	8%	39%	12%	52%
S. 2	7%	29%	7%	55%
S. 3	3%	24%	5%	45%
S. 4	5%	24%	4%	34%
S. 5	8%	15%	1%	21%

The table above shows that the referents of the morphologically marked direct objects ([+pe]) are more often taken up in the following 1-5 sentences than the referents of the unmarked objects ([-pe]). This means that the referent of a direct object grows in importance when it is preceded by *pe*. Moreover, this study underlines the fact that the special status of the *pe*-marked direct objects did not change since the beginning of the 20th century.

5. Concluding Remarks

The above presented diachronic study confirmed many linguists' intuition about the special status DOM-marked direct objects have (c.f. Guntsetseg on Mongolian, among others). In this paper, I have provided evidence for the fact that the referent of a direct object will be more often mentioned again in a discourse, if it is *pe*-marked. The reason for this behaviour is the high activation/ accessibility of the *pe*-marked referent in the memory of the discourse participants. The results of this study underline the necessity to introduce a discourse-based parameter on the list of the DOM-triggering factors in Romanian.

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Given the possibility that other parameters (e.g. different verb classes) could interact with *pe*-marking as well, further research is needed.

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[1] For an ample discussion of ot]her relevant aspects concerning DOM with indefinite NPs and definite NPs, see Chiriacescu & von Heusinger (2009) and von Heusinger & Chiriacescu (2009).

[2] Emil, Gârleanu "Nadişanca" (1905).

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