Proceedings XXXV Incontro di Grammatica Generativa
Università di Siena

Romanian null objects and gender*

ION GIURGEA
University of Constance & "Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics, Bucharest
giurgeaion@yahoo.com, Ion.Giurgea@uni-konstanz.de

This paper argues that Romanian has anaphoric object *pro*, which is used for variables bound by a quantifier lacking gender and for propositional objects. It will be shown that the so-called "neuter pronouns" of Romanian and other Romance languages, which are used for referents that do not fall under a nominal concept, are genderless. This follows from the fact that natural gender in these languages is restricted to humans.

1. Introduction

In this paper I will argue for the existence of an anaphoric object *pro* in Romanian. The use of this pronoun is very restricted, which explains the fact that it has gone unnoticed until now, being misinterpreted, in some of its contexts, as a parasitic gap. This pronoun only appears if its antecedent lacks gender. Moreover, when referring to concrete objects, this pronoun must be in the same clause as its antecedent, although it does not require its antecedent to have undergone A-bar movement, like parasitic gaps do. I interpret this fact as showing that when referring to concrete objects, object *pro* can only denote a bound variable. This restriction may be represented syntactically by using Kratzer's (1998) proposal that some instances of bound variable pronouns are bare indices which inherit their ϕ-features via Agree. Besides this use, Romanian also uses null anaphors with verbs taking propositional objects, without any locality restriction. Since antecedents in this case are also genderless, being typically CPs, we are lead to the generalization that Romanian has only genderless object null pronouns.

After presenting the evidence for anaphoric object *pro* in Romanian (section 2), I will argue for the existence of genderless pronouns in Romanian as well as other Romance languages (section 3), which represent the only way to refer to objects which do not fall under a nominal concept in a language in which natural gender is restricted to animates (masculine as a natural gender is "+human/animate", feminine is "+human/animate +female").

2. Null objects in Romanian

As known at least since Dobrovie-Sorin (1994), Romanian does not have arbitrary object *pro*. The correspondent of (1)a in Romanian is agrammatical[1]:

* The research behind this article has been financed by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft,* via the project *Bausteine romanischer Syntax*.

[1] The following abbreviations are used in this paper: 1,2,3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person, ACC = accusative, CL = clitic, DAT = dative, F = feminine, IMPER = imperative, INF = infinitive, M =

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

(1) a. Questa musica rende *pro* allegri (It.) (Rizzi 1986)
this music makes happy.MPL
'This music makes people happy'
b. * Muzica asta face fericiți (Ro.)
music-the this makes happy.MPL

However, I will argue that it has anaphoric object *pro*. The evidence for this type of pronoun comes from a construction which resembles parasitic gaps. The received view on parasitic gaps in Romanian is that they exist in the language, but are restricted to non-clitic-doubled Ā-chains (Dobrovie-Sorin 1990, 1994, Cornilescu 2002, Alboiu 2002):

(2) a. Ce-ai aruncat fără să citeşti?
what have.2SG thrown without SUBJ read.2SG
'What did you throw away without reading?'
b. * Pe care l-ai aruncat fără să citeşti?
OBJ which it-have.2SG thrown without SUBJ read.2SG

However, for me and many other people I consulted, the contrast does not oppose clitic-doubled and non-clitic-doubled fronted elements. What looks like a parasitic gap is only possible with neuter pronouns (*ce* 'what', *nimic* 'nothing'):

(3) a. Ce-ai aruncat fără să citeşti? / fără a citi?
what have.2SG thrown without SUBJ read.2SG / without to read
b. Ce-ai mâncat fără să tai? / fără a tăia?
what have.2SG eaten without SUBJ cut.2SG / without to cut
'What did you eat without cutting?'

(4) NIMIC n-am mâncat fără să tai
nothing not-have.1SG eaten without SUBJ cut.1SG
'I ate nothing without cutting it'

All other types of non-clitic-doubled fronted phrases – DPs of the form [*ce* NP] 'what NP', fronted bare NPs, the animate *wh*-pronoun *cine* –, although non-D-linked, exclude an object gap:

(5) a. Ce carte ai aruncat fără să ??(o) citeşti? / fără a *(o) citi?
what book have.2SG thrown without SUBJ(it) read.2SG/without to (it) read
'What book did you throw away without reading?'
b. Ce aliment ai mâncat fără să*(-l) tai? / fără a*(-l) tăia?
what aliment have.2SG eaten without SUBJ (it) cut.2SG /without to (it) cut
'What aliment did you eat without cutting?'

(6) MACAROANE am mâncat fără să *(le) tai
pasta(FPL) have.1SG eaten without SUBJ (them$_{FPL}$) cut.1SG
'It is pasta that I ate without cutting'

---

masculine, NEG = negative clitic (French), NEUT = neuter, OBJ = direct object marker, SG = singular, SUBJ = subjunctive particle.

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

(7) Pe cine ai admirat înainte de a%*(-l) cunoaşte?
OBJ who have.2SG admired before of to (him) know
'Whom have you admired before meeting?'

The explanation I propose for this distribution is that Romanian (or at least the idiolect in which the contrast in (3)-(7) is found) does not have parasitic gaps at all, and what looks like a parasitic gap in constructions with *ce* or *nimic* is in fact a genderless object *pro*. The idea is that every time the accusative object can have a value for the category gender, it will appear in the form of a clitic. In (5)-(6), where there is a nominal antecedent, the pronoun takes the gender of the noun (pronouns anaphoric to expressions which contain a noun can always take the grammatical gender of the noun of their antecedent). In case the antecedent does not contain a noun but is animate, like in (7), the pronoun can take the masculine as a 'natural' (interpretable) gender, since in Romanian, like in the other Indo-European languages which have inflectional gender, the masculine as a natural gender is interpreted as /+animate/ (and /+male/ by an implicature). In (3)-(4), the antecedent is a neuter pronoun. As will be shown in the next section, neuter pronouns are arguably genderless, so the anaphoric pronoun cannot take the gender of its antecedent. Moreover, since natural gender is restricted to animates (the masculine being interpreted as /+animate/, and /+male/ by an implicature, and the feminine being interpreted as /+female/), the anaphoric pronoun cannot appear with a gender feature interpreted as natural gender. It follows that the anaphoric object must be genderless. The fact that we find in this case null objects instead of clitics can be explained if we assume that clitic forms are always marked for gender in Romanian (i.e., there are no morphological defaults for the category gender in the paradigm of accusative clitics), while object *pro* is genderless. Notice indeed that overt pronouns are excluded in (3)-(4):

(3)´ a. *Ce-ai aruncat fără să-l/o citeşti?
what have.2SG thrown without 3rdMSG.ACC/3rdFSG.ACC read.2SG
b. * Ce-ai mâncat fără a-l/o tăia?
what have.2SG eaten without to 3rdMSG.ACC/3rdFSG.ACC cut

(4)´ * NIMIC n-am mâncat fără să-l/o tai
nothing not-have.1SG eaten without SUBJ 3rdMSG.ACC/3rdFSG.ACC cut.1SG

The data presented so far allow an alternative explanation: one may say that the parasitic gap construction exists in the language but is just dispreferred, and the speakers only use it as a last resort when no gender is available for the object pronoun. We may decide between the two explanations using contexts where the antecedent of the pronoun has not undergone movement. If the object in (3)-(4) is a genderless *pro*, we expect it to appear also in these cases, while if it is a parasitic gap, it should not be allowed if its binder has not undergone A-bar movement. The following examples support the *pro* hypothesis, showing null objects anaphoric to indefinite pronouns which have not undergone A-bar movement:

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

(8) a. Au adus ceva ca să monteze mâine
have.3PL brought something in-order-to SUBJ fix/mount.3PL tomorrow
'They brought something to mount tomorrow'
b. Au adus o sculă ca s-*(o) monteze mâine
have.3PL brought an equipment in-order-to.SUBJ (it) fix/mount.3PL tomorrow
'They brought a device which they should mount tomorrow'

(9) a. N-atinge nimic fără să strice
not-touches nothing without SUBJ breaks
'(S)he doesn't touch anything without breaking it'
b. N-atinge nici o jucărie fără s-*(o) strice
not-touches no toy without SUBJ (it) breaks
'(S)he doesn't touch any toy without breaking it'
c. Încearcă, te rog, să atingi ceva fără să strici
try.IMPER please SUBJ touch.2SG something without SUBJ break.2SG
'Would you try to touch something without breaking it?'

However, this type of null object does not behave like regular pronouns either. Thus, the antecedent cannot be in another sentence:

(10) Au adus ceva$_i$. * O să monteze *pro*$_i$ mâine
have.3PL brought something FUT SUBJ fix/mount.3PL tomorrow

I conclude that anaphoric genderless objects are restricted to a bound variable use. This idea can be formalized using Kratzer's (1998, 2009) proposal that at least some instances of pronouns with a bound variable reading represent bare indices with ϕ-features inherited via Agree from the binder. Adopting this theory, what we called null object *pro* can be considered to be the spell-out of a bare index with unvalued Gender.

Kratzer uses this theory to explain the existence of bound variable readings for 1st and 2nd person pronouns, as reflected in the sloppy reading of an example such as:

(11) I'm the only one who takes care of **my** children
(sloppy reading = the other do not take care of **their** children)

Notice however that the null objects in (3)-(4) and (8)-(9) are inside adjunct clauses (introduced by 'without', 'before', 'in order to'). Then we must allow this type of Agree – which we may call *indexical Agree* – to reach into adjunct clauses. The following example shows that bound variable readings of 1st person pronouns are indeed possible in *without*- clauses, confirming our prediction:

(12) Numai eu am plecat fără să ştie supraveghetorul meu (✓sloppy reading)
only I have left without SUBJ knows supervisor-the my

In conclusion, Romanian null objects are used as bound variables which have neuter pronouns as antecedents[2]. This can be explained by the fact that neuter

[2] Null object pronouns must be distinguished from the sequence null D + noun-ellipsis (i.e., nominal ellipsis in bare nouns). As Giannakidou and Merchant (1996) and Panagiotidis (2002) have shown for Greek, and Giurgea (2008) for Romanian, what looks like an indefinite null

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

pronouns do not have gender, while object clitics are always marked for gender. Evidence for the idea that neuter pronouns are genderless will be provided in the next section.

3. Genderless pronouns in Romance and Romanian

In this section, I will provide evidence for the proposal that the so-called 'neuter pronouns' of Romanian and other Romance languages are genderless.

I will start by considering definite neuter pronouns. In Romance languages, including Romanian, definite neuter pronouns are used for referents which do not fall under a nominal concept. There are two situations of reference to entities which do not fall under a nominal concept: (i) the referent is a perceptual object which has not been categorized ('identified') yet (see (13)) or (ii) the referent is a propositional object, introduced in the discourse by a clausal projection (see (14)):

(13) a. Ce-i **asta**? (Rom.)
what is this
b. Qu'est-ce que c'est **ça**? (Fr.)
c. Qué es **esto**? (Sp.)

(14) a. Nu cred **asta**. (Rom.)
not believe.1SG this
b. **Cela** je ne **le** crois pas (Fr.)
this I NEG it believe not
c. **Esto** no **lo** creo (Sp.)
this not it believe.1SG

Gender on definite pronouns can reflect either the gender of their antecedent ('anaphoric gender') or a property of the referent ('natural gender'). Romance languages have a binary gender opposition on pronouns between masculine and feminine[3], and as these names suggest, these genders, as natural genders, reflect properties of animates (i.e. sex; the masculine is the unmarked term, see above). Gender on pronouns can also be anaphoric (this being the only option for inanimates). In this case, the gender of the pronoun reflects the gender of the nominal concept under which the referent falls, if the pronoun is referential, or the gender of its binder, if the pronoun has a bound variable reading. If the

object in examples such as (i) is to be analyzed as the null D of bare nouns (cf. Longobardi 1994) followed by noun ellipsis. One argument for this analysis is the possibility of having overt modifiers of the noun, like in the other instances of noun ellipsis examples, as shown (ii)-(iii):

(i) Nu mai sunt pahare. – Lasă că aduce [Ø] Maria
not more are glasses let.IMPER that brings Maria
'There are no more glasses' – 'Don't worry, Mary will bring some'

(ii) Ai luat trandafiri galbeni? Eu aş fi vrut [$_N$e] roşii.
have.2SG bought roses yellow I would have liked red
'Did you buy yellow roses? I would have preferred red'

[3] Romanian has two values for the category Gender on targets of agreement and pronouns, but three "controller genders" or nominal agreement classes – masculine, feminine and a third class called "neuter" or "ambigeneric", which trigger masculine agreement in the singular and feminine agreement in the plural, and are resumed by masculine pronouns in the singular and feminine pronouns in the plural (see Corbett 1991 on the distinction between 'target gender' and 'controller gender' or 'nominal agreement class').

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

pronoun has an antecedent in the discourse, it will take the gender of (the noun of) its antecedent. Since gender is a property of nouns, this indicates that besides co-reference the pronoun has a relation of identity-of-sense anaphora with its antecedent, which we may call "nominal anaphora" (see Corblin 1995 on this notion)[4].

(15) a. Am pus **paltonul**$_i$ pe scaun. Peste **el**$_i$ am pus umbrela. (Rom.)
have.1SG put coat(M)-the on chair over 3rd.MSG have.1SG put umbrella-the
b. J'ai laissé mon **manteau**$_i$ là-bas. **Il**$_i$ doit être nettoyé (Fr.)
I have left my coat(M) over there 3rd.MSG must be cleaned

If the pronoun is used deictically, it will have the gender of the nominal concept under which the referent falls:

(16) [before a bill fallen on the ground]
a. Ia-**o**, ce mai aştepți (Rom.) (*hârtie* "bill" – feminine)
take-3rd.FSG what still wait.2SG.
'Take it, what are you waiting for?'
b. Prends-**le**, tu hésites encore ? (Fr.) (*billet* "bill" – masculine)
take-3rd.MSG you hesitate still

Since noun ellipsis can also involve a concept which is salient in virtue of its presence in the communication situation rather than in the discourse (what has been called 'pragmatic antecedent' by Hankamer and Sag (1976)), as shown in (17) below, the facts in (16) confirm the idea that gender in pronouns may come from nominal anaphora[5].

(17) [before a hat on a shop display]
a. Am şi eu **una** aşa (Rom.)
(*pălărie* "hat" – feminine)
have.1SG also I one.F like-this
b. Moi aussi j'en ai **un** comme ça (Fr.)
(*chapeau* "hat"– masculine)
me too I PRO-N-CL have one.M like this
'I too have one like this'

But, as we have seen in (13)-(14), there are cases in which pronouns must refer to entities for which there is no nominal concept available (either they are perceptual objects not yet categorized, or propositional objects introduced into

[4] Therefore it has been proposed that pronouns contain an anaphoric N, which provides the gender (see Panagiotidis 2002, a.o.). There are also pronouns whose only relation with their antecedent is nominal anaphora – the so-called 'laziness pronouns' (Karttunen 1969). For an overview of the various cases in which the only relation between the pronoun and their antecedent is nominal anaphora, see Elbourne (2005).

[5] Discourse anaphora and deixis are arguably two facets of the same phenomenon: reference to a contextually salient entity, or, in the case of identity-of-sense anaphora, recovery of a contextually salient concept. An entity or concept may be salient either by having been mentioned in the discourse (discourse anaphora) or by its presence in the utterance context (deixis). This explains why there are no demonstratives specialized for contextually salient non mentioned entities, but languages consistently use the same expressions for reference to previously mentioned entities and to contextually salient non mentioned entities.

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

the discourse by CPs). What gender can these pronouns have? Nominal anaphora cannot provide gender, since there is no nominal concept under which the referent falls, and natural gender cannot be used either, because it is restricted to animates. Then we expect to find forms lacking gender.

Before providing evidence that the forms with this use – which I will call *anominal* – are indeed genderless, I would like to point out that languages which have a neuter gender typically use the neuter in this case, this being in most of the cases the only use of the neuter as a natural gender[6]:

(18) a. Ich glaube **es** nicht (Germ.)
I believe it not
b. Nonne mauis **illud** credere(..) (Latin.)
isn't-it prefer.2SG that believe.INF (Cicero, *De Natura Deorum,* III.12))
'Don't you prefer to believe that…'
c. Nescio **id** quid est (Latin)
not-know.1SG that.NEUT what is

The use of the neuter may be explained by the fact that it is the semantically unmarked gender, used both for inanimates and for maximal generality. In other words, the /-animate/ interpretation is the result of an implicature, so that the neuter can be said to be devoid of any descriptive content in its use as natural gender.

Now I will proceed to the discussion of 'anominal' pronouns in Romance, arguing that they are genderless. (I consider the term 'anominal' more appropriate than the traditional label 'neuter pronoun', because 'neuter' normally refers to a gender and here I argue that these forms are in fact genderless).

As anominal pronouns, we sometimes find special forms (see Meyer Lübke, *Rom. Gr.* III, § 87, 98-99, II § 98), other times, forms taken from the paradigm of one of the genders. Iberic languages (exemplified here by Spanish) use a special inflection, *-o*, restricted to the singular:

(19)

	masc.sg.	fem. sg.	anominal pronoun:	
3rd person	él	ella	ell**o**	
demonstratives:	este	esta	est**o**	(close to the speaker)
	ese	esa	es**o**	(close to the hearer)
	aquél	aquella	aquell**o**	(remote)

In French, Catalan and Italian we find a special root: French *ce/ça* (demonstrative and weak pronoun), *ceci, cela* vs. *celui-ci/celle-ci, celui-là/celle-là* (demonstratives), it. *ciò*, cat. *això* (demonstratives), *ho* (clitic), prov. *ço* :

[6] This observation argues against the idea that Romanian has three values for the category of Gender. As shown in note 3, Romanian 'neuter nouns' are resumed by masculine pronouns in the singular and feminine pronouns in the plural. If Romanian pronouns had three genders, with the neuter having forms identical to the masculine in the singular and to the feminine in the plural, we would have expected to find masculine singular forms used for uncategorized perceptual objects and propositional objects. But, as we have seen, we find either null pronouns or the genderless demonstratives, formally identical with the *feminine*, and with some verbs the *feminine* clitic *o*.

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

(20) a. **C**'est impossible (Fr.)
that/it is impossible
b. **Ho** crec (Cat.)
3rd.neuter believe
'I believe it'

Under the hypothesis that anominal pronouns lack gender, the existence of special forms is expected: the difference between these forms and the other pronominal forms corresponds to a difference in gender. Picallo (2002) explicitly proposed that Spanish -*o*- pronouns are not marked for Gender.

But we may also find forms from the paradigm of one of the genders:
(i) Masculine accusative clitics in French, Italian and Iberic languages except Catalan:

(21) a. Je **le** sais (Fr.)
I 3rd.M know
b. **Lo** so (It.)
c. **Lo** sé (Sp.)

(ii) *pro* in null subject Romance languages:

(22) a. Ce-i asta? ***pro*** e un cal / *El e un cal (Romanian)
what is that is a horse 3rd.Mis a horse
b. ***pro*** e imposibil
is impossible.M.SG.

(23) Decidieron [PRO producir aquellos documentales]$_i$ aunque ***pro***$_i$ no les
decided.3PL produce.INF those documentaries although not them
proporcionara nunca ningún beneficio (Sp.) (Picallo 2002: note 13, (i)c)
provide.3SG never no benefit
'They decided to produce those documentaries although it wouldn't ever provide them with any benefit'

(iii) PP clitics:

(24) a. Nous **y** pensons (Fr.)
we to-it think
b. **Ci** pensiamo (It.)
c. **Hi** pensem (Cat.)

(iv) Romanian doesn't productively use object clitics as anominal pronouns. The feminine form *o* appears in anominal use only with a handful of verbs (see (27)). In most cases where Western Romance uses a neuter object clitic, in Romanian there is no overt object at all:

(25) a. Ți-am spus-**o** de mult
you.DAT-have.1 told-3rd.F of/since much
'I told you long ago'

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

b. E, acum am făcut-**o**
well now have.1 done-3rd.F
'Well, now I/we did it'

(26) a. Nu (*o) sper/ ştiu / (?o) cred (without a nominal antecedent for *o*)
not (3rd.F) hope.1SG/ /know.1SG/ (3rd.F) believe.1SG
b. Je ne **le** crois/espère/sais pas(Fr.)
c. I don't believe **it** (Engl.)
d. Ich glaube **es** nicht (Germ.)

(v) As demonstratives, Romanian uses forms identical to the feminine singular:

(27) a. Ce e **aia**?
what is that.FSG.
'What's that?'
b. Nu cred **asta**
not believe.1SG that.FSG

We may suppose that the fact that some forms with an adnominal use are identical with forms of the paradigm of one of the genders is due to morphological underspecification. The crucial evidence for this hypothesis comes from Romanian, where anominal demonstratives and the homonymous feminine demonstratives have a different syntactic behavior. These facts also show that anominal demonstratives differ in gender from feminine demonstratives. First, and most importantly, singular anominal demonstratives do not trigger feminine agreement on a predicative adjective, but masculine agreement:

(28) Asta e imposibil
this.FSG. is impossible.MSG

The most likely explanation for this agreement mismatch is that the apparent masculine agreement represents a morphological default, used when the controller is unmarked for gender (Cornilescu 2000, Giurgea 2008). The idea that the masculine singular form of adjectives is a morphological default is supported by the fact that this form is used with clausal subjects (see (29)) and, for most adjectives, may also be used adverbially (see (30)):

(29) [A-ți iubi duşmanii] / [Să-ți iubeşti duşmanii] e imposibil
to you.DAT love enemies-the SUBJ-you.DAT love.2SG enemies-the is impossible
'To love one's enemies is impossible'

(30) Scrie greu / încet / frumos
writes difficult.MSG / slow.MSG / beautiful.MSG
'He writes with difficulty /slowly / beautifully'

This idea is confirmed by the special behavior of the predicate 'good'. When applied to propositional objects or state of affairs, the adjective 'good' has the special form *bine*, which also appears as an adverb ('well'). This form has a further restriction: it cannot appear with nominal subjects (the form *bine* used

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

with nouns has a different meaning – 'respectable' –, normally applied to humans). This restriction cannot be explained by semantics, because it applies even if the nominal subject refers to a proposition or state of affairs (see (31)c). The explanation I propose is that *bine* lacks gender, and an adjectival predicate must copy the gender of its subject. The only DPs which may appear as subjects of *bine* are neuter pronouns (see (31)a), confirming the idea that these pronouns are genderless:

(31) a. Asta/*pro* e bine/* bun
this is *bine* / *bun*
'That's good'
b. [Să-ți iubeşti duşmanii] e bine
SUBJ-you.DAT love.2sg enemies-the is *bine*
'To love one's enemies is good'
c. *Întoarcerea noastră / *Iubirea de duşmani e bine
returning-the our love-the of enemies is *bine*

Note moreover that neuter indefinite and quantificational pronouns may appear as subjects of *bine*, confirming our proposal in section 2 that these pronouns lack gender (ex. (32)). When referring to concrete objects, these pronouns take *bun* (see (33)), which shows that *bine* is not simply the genderless form of *bun*, but has in addition a semantic restriction to propositional objects:

(32) a. Ce-i mai bine? Nimic nu-i bine
what is more *bine* nothing not-is *bine*
'What's better? Nothing is good'
b. Ceva e bine în ce-a făcut
something is *bine* in what has done
'There IS something good in what he did'

(33) Adu-mi ceva bun
bring.IMPER me.DAT something good

Another difference between feminine and anominal demonstratives is that while the former take the differential object marker (*pe*) even if they refer to objects, in case of noun ellipsis[7], the latter never take *pe*:

(34) a. Ia(-o pe) asta ! (e.g. *pălărie* 'hat' – feminine)
take(3rd.F OBJ) this.F
'Take this one!'
b. Ia asta! (with no nominal antecedent)
take this
c. N-am spus(*-o pe) asta
not-have.1SG said(3rd.F OBJ) this

Another peculiarity of anominal demonstratives is that they are never clitic-doubled when fronted (as noticed by Cornilescu (2000)). They are in fact the

[7] *pe* is impossible with inanimates with an overt noun. With ellipsis, absence of *pe* is marginally possible with inanimates, and obligatory with animates.

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

only instance of a definite DP which is not clitic-doubled when fronted – in Romanian, clitic doubling is obligatory with definites and partitive indefinites, whether they are topics or foci:

(35) a. Asta aşteptam!
this waited.1SG
'That's what I was waiting for'
b. Ocazia asta *(o) aşteptam!
opportunity-the this 3rd.F.CL.ACC waited.1SG
'That's the opportunity I've been waiting for'
c. O carte a citit-o fiecare (specific)
a book has read-3rd.F.CL.ACC everybody
c′. O carte a citit fiecare (non-specific, narrow scope)
a book has read everybody

The hypotheses in section 2 provide a straightforward explanation for this behavior: anominal demonstratives lack gender, while accusative clitics always spell-out gender. An accusative bare index with unvalued gender will have a null spell-out. If we assume that bare indices are the same thing as clitics or represent a *pro* associated with a clitic, the null object found with genderless antecedents indicate that a genderless clitic has a null spell-out. By recognizing the existence of genderless clitics with a null spell-out, we may keep the generalization that definite and partitive indefinites are clitic-doubled when fronted in Romanian: anominal demonstratives are not an exception, but are clitic-doubled by a null clitic.

Note that anominal neuters can be doubled by the feminine clitic *o* exactly with those verbs which allow a feminine clitic denoting a state of affairs or proposition:

(36) Asta n-am făcut-o / spus-o
this not-have.1SG done-3rd.F / said-3rd.F

This seems to suggest that these verbs allow an anominal pronoun marked as feminine. The fact that anominal demonstratives do not allow feminine adjectives (except in the affective idiomatic expression *asta-i bună* lit. 'that's good.FSG', meaning 'I can't believe that!') can be explained by assuming that the anominal interpretation of feminines can only be licensed by the verb (perhaps via a sort of contextual recovery of a null N), so that feminines in an anominal use are only possible in the object position of certain verbs. In the absence of the licensing verb, the anominal interpretation is only possible with genderless pronouns, therefore singular anominal demonstratives cannot trigger feminine agreement on predicative adjectives (except in the aforementioned expression, where the same contextual recovery of an N can be invoked)[8].

[8] In the plural, Romanian allows a null N with the interpretation /-animate/ – e.g. *multe* 'many.FPL' = 'many things', *altele* 'other things', *toate* 'everything', *cele ce…* 'the.FPL that..' = 'the things that' etc. (see Giurgea 2008 for discussion). As expected, this N can also combine with demonstratives, giving the impression of the plural of anominal pronouns – *astea* 'these (things)', *alea* 'those (things)'. Since no nominal content is recovered by ellipsis and the meaning is /-animate/, these forms qualify for what I called 'anominal use'. Note however that in this case the interpretation comes from the properties of the feminine plural null N and not

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

Another peculiarity of genderless pronouns – anominal definite pronouns, neuter indefinite and quantificational pronouns – appears in relative clauses (Al. Grosu, p.c.). While DPs containing a (lexical or elliptical) N as well as animate pronouns only allow the *care* strategy of object relativization in contemporary Romanian, a strategy which involves obligatory clitic doubling, neuter pronouns only resort to the *ce-* strategy, which allows lack of clitic doubling:

(37) a. o carte [pe care am cumpărat-o la târg]
a book(F) OBJ which have.1SG bought-3rd.F at market
'a book I bought at the market'
b. *o carte [ce-am cumpărat la târg]
a book what have.1SG bought at market

(38) a. ceva [ce am cumpărat la târg] /
something what have.1SG bought at market
'something I bought at the market'
b. *ceva [pe care l-am cumpărat la târg]
something OBJ which 3rd.M-have.1SG bought…

The most likely explanation of this contrast is that *pe-* marking requires the presence of gender, which also explains the absence of *pe-* marking on anominal pronouns, shown in (36) above[9].

To conclude, we have shown that definite anominal pronouns (i.e. definite pronouns referring to entities which do not fall under a nominal concept), as well as indefinite and quantificational neuter pronouns (which may also be qualified as 'anominal') are genderless in Romance languages.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that Romanian has anaphoric null objects used for antecedents which lack gender. In languages with a binary masculine/feminine gender opposition, genderless pronouns are used for reference to entities which do not fall under a nominal concept – either uncategorized perceptual objects, or propositions and state-of-affairs introduced by clausal projections. The genderless pronouns of Romanian are *pro*, the demonstratives *asta/aceasta* and *aia/aceea* (formally identical to the feminine singular, but distinguished from the feminine singular by their syntactic behavior with respect to agreement, clitic-doubling and accusative marking) and the so-called neuter indefinite and

---

from the absence of gender (the existence of this null N is shown by the combination with adnominal determiners and modifiers, e.g. *cele din cer şi de pe pământ* 'the.FPL of-in sky and of on earth' = 'the things in the sky and on the earth'). Therefore we predict clitic doubling to be possible, and indeed these DPs are doubled by feminine plural clitics when the conditions for doubling are fulfilled:

(i) Toate le ştie
all.FPL 3rd.FPL knows
'(S)he knows everything'

[9] A similar phenomenon has been used as an argument for the idea that 'neuter pronouns' are unmarked for gender by Picallo (2002), for Spanish. She notes that the interrogative *cuál* 'which' is compatible only with masculine or feminine nominals, but not with neuter pronouns or sentences (in this case, only the neuter interrogative *qué* 'what' is allowed). She explains this contrast by assuming that *cuál* is always marked for gender.

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

quantificational pronouns (*ceva* 'something', *ce* 'what', *nimic* 'nothing', *orice* 'anything', *tot(ul)* 'everything'). As genderless null objects, Romanian has the null anaphora used with verbs which take propositional objects and a null object restricted to a bound variable interpretation, which is only used if the binder has no gender. This item differs from parasitic gaps by the fact that it does not require an A-bar moved antecedent but instead requires its antecedent to be genderless (a 'neuter pronoun'). Under Kratzer's (1998) analysis of bound variables readings, this pronoun can be analyzed as a bare index with an unvalued gender feature.

References

Alboiu, G. (2002) *The features of movement in Romanian*. Editura Universității Bucureşti, Bucharest.

Corbett, G.(1991) *Gender*. Cambridge University Press.

Corblin, F. (1995) *Les formes de reprise dans le discours*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Cornilescu, A. (2000) Notes on the interpretation of the prepositional accusative in Romanian. *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, 91-106.

Cornilescu, A. (2002) Rhematic Focus at the Left Periphery, The Case of Romanian. In Claire Beyssade et al. (eds), *Romance Linguistics and Linguistic Theory 2000*, John Benjamins, 77- 92.

Dobrovie-Sorin, C. (1990) Clitic doubling, wh-movement, and quantification in Romanian. *Linguistic Inquiry* 21: 351-397

Dobrovie-Sorin, C. (1994) *The Syntax of Romanian*. Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter.

Elbourne, P. (2005) *Situations and Individuals*. Cambridge, Mass., London: MIT Press.

Giannakidou, A. and J. Merchant (1996) On the interpretation of null indefinite objects in Modern Greek. *Studies in Greek Linguistics. Proceedings of the 10th Annual Meeting of the Department of Linguistics of the University of Thessaloniki*.

Giurgea, I. (2008) Recherches sur la structure interne des pronoms et des expressions nominales sans nom exprimé. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Paris 7.

Hankamer, J. and I. Sag (1976) Deep and Surface Anaphora. *Linguistic Inquiry* 7:3, 391-428.

Karttunen, L. (1969) Pronouns and variables. In Binnick, R., A. Davidson, G. Green & J. Morgan (eds.) *Papers from the Fifth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 108-116. University of Chicago.

Kratzer, A. (1998) More Structural Analogies Between Pronouns and Tenses. *Proceedings of SALT VIII*, ed. by Devon Strolovitch and Aaron Lawson, 92-109. Ithaca: Cornell University

Kratzer, A. (2009) Making a Pronoun: Fake Indexicals as Windows into the Properties of Pronouns. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40:2, 187-237.

Longobardi, G. (1994) Reference and Proper Names : a Theory of N-Movement in Syntax and Logical Form. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 25, 4, 609-665

Meyer-Lübke, W. (1890-1906) *Grammatik der romanischen Sprachen*. Leipzig.

Rizzi, L. (1986) Null Objects and the Theory of pro. *Linguistic Inquiry* 17, 501-557

Panagiotidis, P. (2002) *Pronouns, clitics and empty nouns*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, Philadelphia.

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)

Picallo, C. (2002) Abstract agreement and clausal arguments. *Syntax* 5:2, 116-147

BDD-A22694 © 2009 Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Cognitivi sul Linguaggio
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.103 (2026-01-19 08:50:24 UTC)