ALTCEVA DECÂT NU … DECÂT

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Abstract: The paper contrasts the exceptive constructions containing the particle *decât* in Romanian, namely *nu…decât* and *nu…alt+ceva/cineva decât*, considering the semantic and syntactic properties of these two constructions against the background of the analysis proposed by von Fintel (1993) for English exceptive constructions. It will be shown that (i) exceptives have a common core semantic content but they differ cross-linguistically especially in terms of syntactic behaviour; (ii) the two Romanian constructions differ semantically and syntactically and do not support an ellipsis analysis. Based on synchronic properties as well as diachronic data the paper proposes that these are two independent constructions, the first one containing a null quantifier. Given the semantic similarities between this construction and *doar* and *numai*, the paper argues for a uniform treatment of restrictive focus particles.

Keywords: focus particles, exceptives, restrictives, quantifier, variable

1. Introduction

Romanian provides several possibilities of expressing restriction, among which one involving a positive statement and particles such as *doar*, *numai*, equivalents of English *only*, and two similar constructions involving a negative statement and *decât*:

(1) L- am văzut doar pe Sergiu la petrecere.
CL3rd SG M have1stSG seen-PERF only PE Sergiu at party
'I saw only Sergiu at the party.'

(2) Nu l- am văzut decât pe Sergiu la petrecere.
not CL3rd SG M have1stSG seen-PERF but PE Sergiu at party
'I saw only Sergiu / I saw nobody but Sergiu at the party.'

(3) Nu am văzut pe nimeni altcineva decât pe Sergiu la petrecere.
not have1stSG seen-PERF PE nobody else but PE Sergiu at party
'I saw only Sergiu / I saw nobody but Sergiu at the party.'

In the present paper we will investigate the constructions illustrated in (2) and (3), while attempting, at the same time, to establish their relation with the construction in (1). We will thus discuss the semantic and syntactic properties of the constructions in (2) and (3), which have been labelled exceptives in the literature and have been analysed as having a core semantic property, that of reducing the domain on which a quantifier applies; in other words, domain subtraction (von Fintel 1993).

2. The semantics of *decât*

Von Fintel (1993) proposes a semantic analysis for exceptive constructions as expressing reducing the domain of quantification of a quantifier with which it associates, a property which he labels domain subtraction and which is shared by all exceptive constructions, being the linguistic reflex of the mathematical sign minus.

(4) Every student *but* John attended the meeting.

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The semantic contribution of *but* is that of restricting the domain on which the universal quantifier *every* applies by subtracting the individual 'John'.

Analysing two different exceptive constructions in English, *but* and *except for*, the author identifies another property of some exceptive constructions, Uniqueness, which is claimed to characterize only *but*, free exceptives (*except for*) having a weaker semantics which translates into restrictiveness. Uniqueness is used to account for the impossibility to coordinate two exception constructions with *but* in English. The only way to allow more exceptions is to add more individuals to the set under *but* (5):

(5) *Everybody but John and but Mary attended the meeting.
(6) Everybody but John and Mary attended the meeting.

Von Fintel also correlates this property of *but* with its co-occurrence restrictions. The author claims that the Uniqueness Condition motivates the fact that *but* can only modify universal quantifiers (7) as well as the syntactic restrictions for the position of *but*, namely the fact that it cannot precede the quantifier it modifies, unlike *except for*, and the different syntactic status: but is taken to be a modifier of a determiner, and therefore occupy a position within the DP while *except for* is taken to be a sentence adjunct.

(7) All/*Most/*Mary/*Three/*Some/None of my friends but Chris. (von Fintel 1993:126)

For Romanian, Şerbănescu (1988) distinguishes the two constructions involving *decât* in Romanian, namely NU.....DECÂT and NU+ ALT (ceva/cineva) + DECÂT, in point of their semantic contribution by attributing a restrictive meaning to the first construction and an exceptive meaning to the second:

(8) Maria nu cumpără decât cărți.
Maria not buy3rd SG but books
'Maria buys only books.'
(9) Maria nu cumpără altceva decât cărți.
Maria not buy3rd SG else but books
'Maria buys nothing else but books.'

Both constructions express domain subtraction. Thus in both cases books are extracted from the set of items of which it is predicated that Maria doesn't buy. Based on their semantics, we would expect NU....DECÂT to behave like *except for* and NU..+ALT...+DECÂT to behave like *but*. However both constructions seem to be anti-additive and the coordination test fails.

(10) *Maria nu cumpără decât cărți/altceva decât cărți şi cumpără şi reviste.
'Maria buys only books/nothing else but books and she also buys magazines.'
(11) * Maria nu cumpără decât cărți şi decât reviste.[1]
'Maria buys only books and only magazines.'
(12) Maria nu cumpără decât cărți şi reviste.
'Maria buys only books and magazines.'

[1] As Şerbănescu (1988) notices, it is possible to have asyndetic coordination with *decât*:
Nu cunoscuse din dragoste decât cuvintele schimbate încet, decît privirile şi jurămintele.
'He knew nothing about love except the words whispered, except the looks and the vows.'
(in Şerbănescu 1988:496)

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Also, *decât* cannot appear in the left-periphery.

(13) *Decât cărți cumpără.
'Only books does she buy.'

The co-occurrence restrictions are hard to test for the first construction since it does not involve the presence of an overt quantifier, distinguishes it from both *but* and *except for*. The second construction involves the presence of a complex quantifier of the type *anybody/anything else*, which makes it in a way similar to *but*. So, at first sight it appears that both Romanian constructions behave like but, and are both characterized by the Uniqueness condition.

(14) …nu descoperise nimic altceva decît urechile ciulite ale lui Tic. (Chiriță)
'He had discovered nothing else but Tic's cocked up ears.'

Given the similarities noticed up to this point it is surprising though that, unlike *but*, none of the constructions involving *decât* seems can modify a positive universal like *toți*/*all*.

(15) *I-am cunoscut pe toți decât pe director.
CL3rd PL M have1st SG meet-PERF PE all but PE manager.
'I have met all of them but the manager.'

In such contexts Romanian resorts to other exceptive phrases such as *cu excepția*/*except for*, *mai puțin/less* or *în afară de/besides*.

(16) I-am cunoscut pe toți cu excepția directorului/ mai puțin directorul/ în afară de director.
'I have met all of them except for the manager.'

We would like to propose that such restrictions are not due to the meaning of exceptive phrases, but to different syntactic or lexical properties. We thus suggest a minimal core semantic description of *decât* along the lines of (von Fintel 1993) as expressing domain substraction, replacing uniqueness with 'exhaustive identification' a property proposed by Kiss (1998) to describe the effect of focus movement in Hungarian, namely that of exhaustively describing the set of individuals of which something is predicated. This allows us to include *decât* among the focus particles, along with *numai* and *doar*. We motivate the inclusion of *decât* in the class of focus particles on the grounds of its semantic property of triggering the existence of a set of alternatives (the set to which the exception applies) as well as on the historical development of the focus particles system in Romanian and on certain syntactic properties discussed in the next chapter.

Consider the following sentences:

(17) L-am văzut pe Marcu ieri la televizor.
(18) L-am văzut doar/numai pe Marcu ieri la televizor.
(19) Nu l-am văzut decât pe Marcu ieri la televizor.
'I saw Marcu/ only Marcu on TV yesterday '.

The only difference in examples (17) and (18) is the presence of the focus particle *doar* or *numai*. But while (17) simply asserts that I have seen Marcu on TV yesterday, (18)

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asserts the same thing plus the restriction that Marcu is the only person I have seen and at the same time it presupposes that I expected to see more people (a property which Zeevat 2008 calls mirativity). This other people that I did not see but expected to see form a set which is assumed to be shared by the participants in a dialogue (the alternative set) on which the focus particle expresses a restriction/contrast. This makes (18) true even in the case where I have seen other persons on TV, but these persons do not belong to the set of individuals that I expected to see. Sentence (19) gives rise to the same interpretation, which we take to mean that the semantic and pragmatic contributions of *doar* and *decât* (at least in the NU.....DECÂT construction) are identical. The fact that (19) may in fact allow exceptions other than those introduced by *decât* when these are not 'relevant' exceptions justifies Şerbănescu's description of this construction as semantically different from the NU...+ALT...+ DECÂT and makes the semantics of NU.....DECÂT similar to that suggested by von Fintel (1993) for *except for*. Notice that while the first construction does not allow a contrastive tag, NU.....DECÂT readily does so.

(20) Nu am văzut pe altcineva decât pe Petre aseară la petrecere, *nu şi pe George.
not have1st SG see-PERF PE else but PE Petre last night at party, not too PE George
'I haven't seen anybody else but Petre last night at the party, *not George too.'

(21) Nu l-am văzut decât pe Petre aseară la petrecere, nu şi pe George.
'I have seen only Petre last night at the party, not George too.'

3. Brief overview of the emergence of the exceptive particles system

In the writings of the 17th and the 18th century, *decât* is mainly used as a comparative particle, *numai* (only) being generally used to express restrictiveness. During this period there are very few occurrences of *decât* as a restrictive particle and these include mostly the construction *nu...+ alt…+ decât*. But *nu ... decât* is also found in texts from the same period.

(22) că alte dovezi nu au *decît* cele ce le-au arătat la anul 1792 comisarului Duțilovici (Stefanelli 1915)
'that they have no other evidence except that which they showed to officer Duțilovici in the year 1792'

(23) şi această protimisis nu să înțelege *alt decît* că şi de va vrea stăpînul (Pravilniceasca Condică 1780)
'and this priority is not to be considered except if the lord wants so'

The sentences containing *decât* without an overt quantifier (e.g. *când* 'when') combine in most cases the exceptive value of the particle with its comparative value.

(24) ...n-are omul mai mare mîngîiere *decît* când şade la masă cu priiatenii cei dragi. (Varlaam C. 1643)
'… a man has no other greater pleasure than dining with his dear friends.'

Jasanoff (in von Fintel and Iatridou 2005) argues that the *que* in the *ne . . . que* construction in French, similar to the Romanian construction, comes from Latin *quam* ('than') and not from *quod* (the complementizer 'that'). The Latin construction would be of the type *non vidi (hominem) quam Iohannem*. The deletion of *alium* did not take place in Latin, so it must have been a later development that happened independently. The puzzling fact is that

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constructions of this type *ne . . . que* appear in all Romance languages, and not only (the authors also identify it in Greek and Irish). Their suggestion is that this might have been spread by imperfect bilinguals serving as the vehicle of transmission. This might as well be the case of the *decât* constructions in Romanian.

Exception was expressed mainly with the construction *fără numai* (without only) or *fără de* (without):

(25) Nime nu-i bun, *fără numai* unul Dumnedzău. (Biblia 1647)
'Nobody is good except God.'
(26) Alt fecior n-a avut *fără de* acesta. (Varlaam C. 1643)
'He had no other son except this one.'

Very rarely, *decât* is used in combination with *numai* and *fără* or both:

(27) Nu vom putea într-alt chip să ne deşteptăm sufletele ... *fără decît* cu cea folositoare aducere aminte de porunca lui Hristos. (Biblia 1688)
'We will not be able to awaken our souls in any other way except by remembering Christ's commandment.'
(28) să nu poată să-l ceară mai în lungă vreme *decît numai* înă la zi întîiu a lui mai. (Pravilniceasca Condică 1780)
'and not to be able to request it earlier then the first day of May'
(29) şi să nu-i trimiță cu logofeți şi cu zapcii de-ai lor, *făr decît* numai cînd va fi trebuință.
'and not to send them with chancellors and with their tax-collectors except when it will become necessary.'

At the same time there is oscillation between the spelling of *decît* as one word or as two separated components

(30) Şi cum nu veade cel orb înaintea sa nemică, nice țărmure, ...nice altă nemică *de cîte*-i aduc lui moarte. (Varlaam C. 1643)
'And just like the blind man sees nothing in front of him, no land, …nothing else except what brings him death.'

The existence of all these variants shows that the status of *decât* was not yet fixed during the period. The fact that *numai* was initially used with the function of *decât* shows that initially the two semantic operations of restriction and exclusion could be performed by the same item, *decât* specializing later as an exceptive in negative contexts. Another important fact to be noticed is that *numai* as an exceptive particle had to be preceded by *fără*, a negative element both in the 17-18th century and in present-day Romanian. We suggest that the use of *fără*, *fără numai* and *fără decât* to express exception shows the fact that the exception particle includes a negative component. This element had to be overtly realized in the 17-18th century, while in present-day Romanian it incorporated as a feature of *decât* in the *nu...decât* construction. As for the origin and evolution of the *decât* constructions, Jasanoff (in von Fintel and Iatridou 2005) argues that the *que* in the *ne . . . que* construction in French, similar to the Romanian construction, comes from Latin *quam* ('than') and not from *quod* (the complementizer 'that'). The Latin construction would be of the type *non vidi (hominem) quam Iohannem*. The deletion of *alium* did not take place in Latin, so it must have been a later development that happened independently. The puzzling fact is that constructions of this type

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ne . . . que appear in all Romance languages, and not only (the authors also identify it in Greek and Irish). Their suggestion is that this might have been spread by imperfect bilinguals serving as the vehicle of transmission. This might as well be the case of the *decât* constructions in Romanian, given that their number is notably higher in translations from French performed at that time. However, more research is necessary to determine whether we are dealing with borrowings or the constructions developed independently in Romanian.

4. On the nature of *decât* and its syntactic restrictions

Isac and Reiss (2003) analyse X else constructions (something else, someone else, nothing else, etc) in English (illustrated in 31) as involving a complex quantifier made up of two elements: a bare quantifier containing a variable which ranges over a set of elements one of which is co-indexed with the antecedent and else, also analysed as a quantifier ranging over a variable which is coextensive with the variable introduced by the preceding bare quantifier. This second element is supposed to contribute the exclusive interpretation, by eliminating previously mentioned individuals from the domain of quantification (32):

(31) I visited Mary$_i$ and Peter visited [someone else]$_{j\neq i}$
(32) a. [Q NP1]$_i$ [$_{PP}$ P [NP else [NP2]$_i$]
b. some-one Ø else e
c. $\exists$ x_i else x_i

The authors propose the same analysis for Romanian ALT(*cineva*, *ceva*, etc.) constructions Romanian allowing the option of dropping the first quantifier:

(33) cine alt-cine-va
who else-who-va
who else-somebody/ who else

The *–va* particle is analysed as expressing indefiniteness and introducing the variable which duplicates the variable implicit in the *wh*-word or in the bare quantifier.
The authors do not discuss the alternative construction where the exception follows the else construction being introduced by *but* or *except*.

(34) I just can't bear to see her so happy in love with someone else but me.
(35) You will not be allowed to tell the Judge what someone else except the defendant told you.

Such constructions are similar to the Romanian ALT(*ceva*, *cineva*, etc.) + DECÂT construction. We propose the same analysis for ALT component as involving a variable ranging over a set coextensive with that of the variable introduced by the preceding quantifier be it preserved or dropped.

(36) …nu descoperise nimic altceva decît urechile ciulite ale lui Tic. (Chirita)
not discover3rd SG nothing else but ears-DEF cocked up POS Tic
'He had discovered nothing else but Tic's cocked up ears.'

But we suggest that the contribution of ALT is not that of subtracting the exception from the set but that of assuring the Uniqueness condition by providing that no element in set

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over which the quantifier ranges is identical to the exception. The semantic effect is similar to that of an exceptive particle. The exception operation is performed by *decât*, which we propose is also associated with a variable ranging over a set coextensive with that of the variable associated to the *alt(ceva, cineva)* element and which extracts from the domain the element/set accompanying it.

(37) D A [decât] C (P) = True → P ∪ D (A-C)
(38) D A [altcineva decât] C P = True → P ∪ D (A-C) & ∩ {S P∪ (A-S) } = C

The analysis that we propose for NU....DECÂT is similar. That is we assume that *decât* is associated with a variable which ranges over a set including an element co-indexed with the exception. But in the absence of a preceding quantifier, the elements of set are provided by the discourse (much in the same way as for restrictive focus particles such as *doar*, *numai*, *only*). This explains the semantic differences between the two constructions, namely the possibility to allow for other exceptions except those introduced by *decât (*in the absence of the ALT element, uniqueness is no longer guaranteed).

Up to this point it may seem that the only difference between the two constructions is the presence/lack of an overt complex quantifier so we might assume that we are dealing with an elliptical version of the same construction. Analysing a construction similar to NE....DECÂT in French (*ne....que*), Rooryck (2006) points out that this is not a case of ellipsis since the elided element cannot be recovered. Besides, if this were a case of ellipsis we would not expect any semantic differences between the two constructions. As we have pointed out before, these two constructions differ semantically.

Further differences are observed in the co-occurrence restrictions exhibited by *decât* in the two constructions. So far, all the examples that we have provided contained negation so we might be tempted to analyse *decât* as an item restricted to negative contexts, that is an NPI or a negative quantifier. Teodorescu (1971) (in Şerbănescu 1988) suggests an analysis of *decât* as a negative element triggering the negative marker on the verb as a sort of agreement marker) . But on a closer inspection of the data, we find that the first construction ALT...+ DECÂT is not restricted to negative contexts. It may also appear in positive questions

(39) Cine altcineva decât Maria a mai venit la petrecere?[2]
who else but Maria have3rd SG come-PERF to party
'Who else except Maria came to the party?'

Von Fintel (1993) notices the presence of similar constructions in English involving *but*, which may be problematic for an analysis of *but* as modifying exclusively universal quantifiers.

(40) Who but John would say such a thing? (Von Fintel 1993:137)

This apparent contradiction of his analysis is explained by the fact that the presence of *but* in questions triggers a rhetoric effect and rhetoric questions are assumed to have a negative import.

[2] Isac and Reiss (2003) treat similar examples in English as involving a homophonous *else* due to the cumulative meaning that the *else* seems to have in these contexts. We believe that this is the same element, at least in Romanian. By modifying the semantics of ATL to express non-identity (uniqueness) both interpretations are allowed. Though the presence of *mai* (*more*) in Romanian facilitates this analysis as the cumulative interpretation of the sentence may be ascribed to *mai.* Notice however that *mai* is optional.

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In Romanian the rhetoric effect is not obligatory. Questions containing ALT...+ DECÂT may be interpreted as being merely information seeking. In Romanian the rhetorical interpretation is usually associated with the subjunctive mood, while the indicative indicates informational interpretation. Such questions are compatible with both moods.

(41) Cine altcineva decât Mihai ar scrie o lucrare pe tema asta? – rhetorical
'Who else but Mihai would write a paper on this topic?'
(42) Cine altcineva decât Mihai a (mai) scris o lucrare pe tema asta? – information seeking
'Who else except Mihai has written a paper on this topic?'

The ALT...+ DECÂT construction may also appear in positive declarative contexts.

(43) Altcineva decât directorul a prezindat şedința.
else but manager-DEF have3rd SG preside-PERF meeting-DEF
'Somebody else presided the meeting, not the manager.'
(44) A venit însoțită de altcineva decât de Mihai.
have3rd SG come-PERF accompany-PERF by else but by Mihai.
'She came in the company of somebody else, not Mihai.'

As the examples above show, the construction is allowed both in pre-verbal and in post verbal position, both in positive and in negative contexts.

(45) Am realizat că nimeni altcineva decât mine nu mă poate ajuta.
have1st SG realize-PERF that nobody else but me not CL1st SG F can3rd SG help
'I realized that nobody else but me can help me.'

The post-verbal position is preferred in negative contexts, possibly for computation reasons preventing very long pre-verbal subjects in general.

The position of *decât* in the second construction is much more restricted. That is *decât* may only appear in negative contexts.

(46) Nu a venit decât Ioana.
not have1rd SG come-PERF but Ioana
'Only Ioana came.'
(47) *Decât Ioana a venit.
but Ioana have3rd SG come-PERF
'Only Ioana came.'

In negative contexts, *decât* is restricted to a post-verbal position.

(48) *Decât Ioana nu a venit.
but Ioana not have3rd SG come-PERF
'Only Ioana didn't come.'

We take these restrictions to indicate that *decât* must appear in the scope of negation. In pre-verbal position focus particles outscope Negation as clearly indicated by the difference in the interpretation of the following sentences containing *numai*.

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(49) Numai Ioana nu a venit.
only Ioana not have3rd SG come-PERF
'Only Ioana didn't come.'
(50) Nu a venit numai Ioana.
not have3rd SG come-PERF only Ioana
'Ioana is not the only one who came.'

While the first sentence conveys the information that Ioana didn't come and everybody else did, the second example describes a situation where Ioana came and somebody else came. The second interpretation is due to the effect of focus under the scope of negation: the focused phrase acts as the nuclear scope of negation (Partee et al. 1998)

The exclusion of *decât* is pre-verbal position can also be accounted for on syntactic grounds. The reason behind this restriction is the covert quantifier. Movement of the covert quantifier+ *decât* to preverbal position would lead to a violation of the Empty Category Principle. as reformulated by Kayne (1981) von Fintel (2000) shows that for scope reasons, *decât* must raise over its host quantifier at LF. This leads to a structure where the covert quantifier is governed by *decât*. But since the particle does not meet the type condition imposed by the ECP and is not co-indexed with the quantifier either, this construction is disallowed. Kayne brings examples of similar constructions from French. The author analyses the example below as involving the presence of a covert element similar to *beaucoup* (*many*).

(51) Jean n'a pas trouvé de livres.
Jean not have3rd SG find-PERF of books.

Just as in the case of the Romanian construction the phrase 'de livres' cannot appear in preverbal position in the passive counterpart of the construction.

We reject the analysis of *decât* as a negative quantifier. If *decât* were a negative quantifier than we might expect it to appear in any position in the clause, including the pre-verbal field, especially since quantifiers are assumed to check their [Q] feature in a pre-verbal position. Furthermore, its function as exceptive particle is sufficient to explain the perceived positive interpretation of the sentence. Decât subtracts the element which it introduces from a set on which negation quantifies so implicitly it introduces an affirmative proposition as well.

(52) Nu am cunoscut-o decât pe Elena.
'I only met Elena.'

asserts two different propositions: I have seen Elena (positive) and I haven't seen anybody else (negative). Also, if *decât* were negative we would expect n-words to appear under its scope. But as the following example shows, n-words are ungrammatical under the scope of *decât*. While it may be claimed that the phrase introduced by *decât* may not be negative for semantic reasons (the exception may not be the empty set), it is still impossible to have an n-word following the exception phrase, a totally unexpected restriction if *decât* were a negative quantifier.

(53) *N-am vorbit decât cu Elena niciodată.
not have1st SG speak-PERF but with Elena never
'I have never spoken only to Elena.'

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Any n-words must appear in before *decât*. This restriction can be accounted for if we analyse *decât* as a focus particle, since focus particles have local scope. Thus any existential quantifier following *decât* would be under its scope, and therefore outside the scope of negation.
The fact that in this construction *decât* has a negative feature while in the ALT...+ DECÂT construction it doesn't, indicates that this are two linguistic items, historically related but with different status and function in present-day Romanian, which we might label DECÂT1 and DECÂT2.

5. Conclusions

Based on their semantic differences (restrictiveness vs. exclusiveness) and the syntactic restrictions imposed on *decât* in each case we have shown that *nu....decât* and *nu...+alt decât* are two different constructions in the present state of the language. These two constructions involve two different lexical items which are historically related, both having the same phonological form, *decât*1 and *decât*2. Furthermore, we have showed that at least *decât*1 can be treated as a focus particle, being included in the same class of restrictive particles also containing *numai* and *doar*.

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