# I. Introduction: goals, outline and framework

## 1. Motivation, aim and contents

**1.1.** This book is devoted to the investigation of the syntactic licensing of ellipsis in Romanian. The principal motivation for choosing this subject of inquiry is simple and straightforward: ellipsis phenomena in Romanian are severely understudied both in the Romanian literature, and in the foreign literature, with a few relevant exceptions (discussed below). The framework assumed is the minimalist version of generative grammar (see §I.2), and the focus of my inquiry is nominal and verbal ellipsis.

In the latest academic grammar in Romanian (GALR 2008), the most extensive work devoted to the description of the morphology and syntax of Romanian comprising over 1800 pages in 2 volumes, the chapter on ellipsis is 5 pages long (Tomescu 2008), and mostly approaches the same problems discussed in the chapter devoted to ellipsis from the 1963 academic grammar (Rizescu 1966); the terminology and the stand taken with respect to elliptical phenomena is obsolete[1]. The recent extensive grammar of Romanian published by Oxford University Press (GR 2013) does not represent a radical improvement: only nominal ellipsis is separately described in a short subchapter (Nicolae 2013e); cursory reference is made to gapping and other types of ellipsis based on coordination in a subsection of the chapter on coordination (Croitor 2013: 525). By contrast, in the latest representative grammars of certain European languages, the situation is rather different: for example, in Bosque and Demonte's *Gramática descriptiva de la lengua española* (1999), the chapter on ellipsis is 76 pages long (vol. II, p. 2786–2863; author: José M. Brucart) and is written from an up-to-date generative perspective. The conclusion that elliptical phenomena in Romanian are understudied is therefore legitimate.

**1.2.** However, it would be unfair to claim that Romanian elliptical phenomena are not studied at all in the recent literature. There exist two recent doctoral dissertations devoted to ellipsis: Giurgea (2008; revised and published as Giurgea 2010) and Bîlbîie (2011, revised and published as Bîlbîie 2018). A few comments are necessary here, in order

[1] This state of affairs is, of course, understandable and need not be condemned: as is well known, academic grammars are generally based on previous inquiry; the fact that ellipsis is meagrely dealt with simply reflects the fact that this particular topic has not been sufficiently explored in the (Romanian) linguistic community.

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to point out the differences between the present work and Giurgea's and Bîlbîie's dissertations. Giurgea (2008, 2010) focuses on nominal ellipsis, which is also analysed in this book in §III. However, Giurgea (2008) assumes an empty pro-form approach to the phenomena under scrutiny; he focuses mostly on the interpretative disparities between ellipsis sites and their overt counterparts, and on the interpretation of pronouns. In contrast to Giurgea's work, I explicitly adopt and defend a PF-deletion approach to ellipsis (in the sense of Merchant 2001), according to which the ellipsis site is a fully articulated, but silent domain, and I focus on the syntactic conditions that have to be met in order for ellipsis to be licensed. Furthermore, I operate a distinction between nominal ellipsis and substantivization (analysed as the incorporation of silent, but contentful nouns in the sense of Panagiotidis 2003 and Kayne 2005) and I show that assuming two complementary processes with superficially similar outcomes does not lead to a contradiction[2]. Bîlbîie's (2011) work focuses especially on gapping and stripping (see §II, for the distinction between elliptical phenomena based on a multidominant structure and elliptical phenomena based on deletion; see also §I.1.3), that is, on verbal elliptical constructions in which the verbal head is absent. In contrast to Bîlbîie's work, my discussion focuses on licensed types of ellipsis; this variety of elliptical phenomena is more similar to English VP-ellipsis in that a pronounced verbal head licenses the deletion of its complement. Thus, my inquiry should be seen as complementary to Bîlbîie's. Finally, it is necessary to mention that, while the theoretical framework adopted by Bîlbîie is Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG), the framework adopted by us is the same one as Giurgea's, namely minimalism. The choice of theoretical framework is important, as it determines the overall goals of the inquiry.

**1.3.** From the beginning, it should be made clear that there is a distinction between two types of elliptical phenomena: ellipses licensed by a given element ("licensed ellipses"), which are based on deletion (see Merchant 2001), and ellipses parasitic on coordination, which are fed by a multidominant structure (see Citko 2005, 2011a, 2011b). Chao (1988) is the first one to explicitly argue for a division of this type, but the idea is older (cf., for instance, Williams 1977). If we define ellipsis in a very simple way, as Merchant (2018: 19) does ("in ellipsis, there is meaning without form"), then there is no way of determining which process is "more elliptical" than the other. Chapter II is devoted to bringing arguments for this claim by investigating the properties which support this division. The first class of elliptical phenomena includes varieties of deletion like VP-ellipsis, nominal ellipsis and sluicing, while the second class of processes includes gapping,

[2] Merchant (2014) makes the same claim in the analysis of gender mismatches under nominal ellipsis in Greek: conceiving ellipsis as implying a deletion process does not go against the assumption that there exist silent pro-forms which may feed a form of substantivization / incorporation; in fact, the two processes should be conceived of as complementary.

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stripping, right node raising, etc. The focus of this book is constituted by licensed ellipses, and I have chosen to stop at nominal and verbal ellipsis, as they present us with a wealth of empirical facts specific to Romanian, leading to interesting theoretical generalizations. Sluicing in Romanian is not very eccentric when compared to what we find in other Romance languages[3]; Rațiu (2010) and Hoyt and Teodorescu (2012) should be consulted for a general introduction to the problems raised by sluicing in Romanian. Another deletion phenomenon which falls into this class is polarity ellipsis (Martins 1994) licensed by affirmative and negative markers (see also Busquets 2006). Let us now turn to the contents of the present book.

**1.4.** The theoretical analysis is driven by empirical facts. With respect to nominal ellipsis[4] and ellipsis with verbal licensers, I investigate the most representative configurations in which ellipsis is licensed and I show that a theoretical framework like Merchant's (2001) or Aelbrecht's (2010), in which ellipsis is licensed by the presence of an E-feature on a licensing head, is not fully appropriate. Merchant's seminal work is based on sluicing, which in most cases is optional. The choice of pronouncing or silencing a structure superficially gives the impression that the assignment of the E-feature is optional (see footnote 5; in certain configurations, sluicing is obligatory, this indicating from the outset that the E-feature is not genuinely optional). This position cannot be correct: in §II and §III, I identify several contexts in which ellipsis is forced[5], a fact which indicates that E-feature assignment cannot be optional. Furthermore, by assuming an E-feature, whose nature is essentially semantic, one sweeps under the carpet the morphosyntactic problem of ellipsis licensing, as highlighted by authors like Lobeck (1995) (in a late GB framework) and Kennedy (2003) or Rouveret (2012) (in a minimalist framework), which is two-fold: both the licenser and the ellipsis site have to have an appropriate morphosyntactic featural composition. The morphosyntactic aspect of ellipsis licensing is important, as ellipsis is subject to cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic variation, a state of affairs which cannot be accounted for from a purely semantic point of view. An alternative solution to ellipsis licensing, which capitalises on López's (2000) seminal work, is put forward.

[3] E.g. see Rodrigues, Nevins and Vicente (2009), Gonzáles (2010) for sluicing in Spanish.

[4] Yoshida, Wang and Potter (2012) show that gapping does not apply within the DP; apparent examples of so-called "nominal" gapping should be analysed as involving deletion, not multidominance / across-the-board movement.

[5] Sluicing is not optional when it ameliorates island violations; in the respective configuration, ellipsis is forced to apply, as the overt counterpart of the structure is ungrammatical (examples from Merchant 2001: 87; see also Chung, Ladusaw and McCloskey 1995; see also Blümel 2013 for a possible explanation).

(i) a. *They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which.*
b. **I don't remember which (Balkan language) they want to hire someone who speaks.*

(ii) a. *Ben will be mad if Abby talks to one of the teachers, but she couldn't remember which.*
b. **Ben will be mad if Abby talks to one of the teachers, but she couldn't remember which (of the teachers) Ben will be mad if she talks to.*

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A "disclaimer of sincerity" is in order at this point. The two main domains under analysis here are unequally represented as far as the theoretical analysis of ellipsis licensing is concerned: nominal ellipsis benefits from a quasi-exhaustive survey of data (most relevant configurations in which ellipsis is licensed are identified) and fully worked out analysis of ellipsis licensing. By contrast, the part devoted to ellipsis with verbal licensers mostly focuses on the identification of the relevant class of licensers of ellipsis in Romanian. In other words, with respect to the verbal domain, I have consciously taken a more empirically oriented perspective on the elliptical phenomena to the sacrifice of detailed theoretical analysis. As will be obvious from §IV, in which verbal ellipsis is discussed, this does not mean that I have merely applied the diagnostics to delimit the class of verbal licensers; rather I have identified the relevant configurations where ellipsis is legitimate, and relevant generalizations are also put forward; however, the *why*-question (*why* is ellipsis licensed by these particular verbs and not by others) is not given an answer of similar refinement as for nominal ellipsis.

This results from the state-of-art with respect to the study of verbal ellipsis in Romanian: except for Bîlbîie's study of gapping and stripping, virtually nothing more is known about the domain of verbal ellipsis in Romanian. The general view found in the literature is that ellipsis of the English VP-ellipsis type is not generally found in Romance, except for (European and Brazilian) Portuguese and Galician (see, among others, López 1994, Martins 1994, Rouveret 2012 for this claim). It is true that Romanian is not a Verb-Stranding VP-ellipsis (VVPE) language of the Portuguese/Galician type; however, the claim that ellipsis with verbal licensers is not represented in Romanian is far from being accurate. As will be shown in §IV, Romanian features ellipsis licensed by at least the following classes of verbal licensers: ellipsis licensed by modal verbs (Modal Complement Ellipsis, in the sense of Aelbrecht 2010), by aspectual verbs (Aspectual Complement Ellipsis), and, surprisingly, by the verb *fi* 'be' (not in all of its instances, but only when it is inflected). Besides the delimitation of the class of licensers, many other problems of empirical interest are also brought to the fore: for instance, the fact that, contrary to what has been claimed with respect to English (Gergel 2009) or Romance (López 1994), epistemic modals are also good licensers of ellipsis in Romanian; epistemic readings of modals survive under ellipsis in English as well (David Pesetsky, *p.c.*). Another point of interest concerns ellipsis with aspectual licensers: due to the transitive (simple and complex) nature of these verbs, ellipsis is subject to a global derivational constraint (in the sense of Lakoff 1969, 1970, Postal 1972); this variety of ellipsis was studied more extensively in my 2016 paper (Nicolae 2016), written after the first draft of this book. In contrast to this state of facts characterizing Romanian, other Romance languages benefit from detailed studies devoted not only to the distribution and syntax of verbal ellipsis, but also to the acquisition of ellipsis; this is the case of Portuguese (see Santos 2009). And, in contrast to verbal ellipsis, much more is known about Romanian nominal ellipsis (see, for

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an early analysis, combining elements of structural grammar and early generativism, Manoliu Manea 1968; see, more recently, Coene 1999, Giurgea 2008, 2010, Cornilescu and Nicolae 2010, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b).

To sum up, I believe that the accurate delimitation of the empirical domain is compulsory for a correct understanding of ellipsis (in fact, of any linguistic phenomenon) in order to avoid hasty generalizations and analyses built on a very restricted set of data, which fail to be fruitfully extended to account for a larger array of data.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework on ellipsis is presented in §II; in this section, I minimally lay out the general theoretical ingredients necessary for the analysis.

**2.1.** As stated, the theoretical framework adopted is Generative Grammar (Chomsky 1957 and ssq. work) in its minimalist version (Chomsky 1995 and ssq. work). To be more precise, I am adopting the second variant of minimalism (Chomsky 2000 and ssq. work), which disposes of the Spec-Head agreement operation and refines the conception on feature mechanics: features are no longer checked, but valued. The operation that drives feature valuation is Agree, and features are conceived of as having two dimensions, *valuation* and *interpretability*.

I follow Pesetsky and Torrego (2007), and distinguish between *interpretable* and *uninterpretable* features, on the one hand, and *valued* and *unvalued* features, on the other hand. The syntactic derivation is driven by the need to delete uninterpretable features (Chomsky 2000, 2001). In Pesetsky and Torrego (2007) (as well as Frampton and Gutmann 2006) Agree is a form of feature sharing (1).

(1) **Agree (Feature sharing version)** (Pesetsky and Torrego 2007:4)
(i) An unvalued feature F (a *Probe*) on a head H at syntactic location α ($F_\alpha$) scans its c-command domain for another instance of F (a *Goal*) at location β ($F_\beta$) with which to agree.
(ii) Replace $F_\alpha$ with $F_\beta$, so that the same feature is present in both locations.

Agree is initiated by some head at a location α (the Probe), provided with an *unvalued*, *uninterpretable* or *interpretable* feature $F_\alpha$; the c-command domain is scanned for another instance of F, in some (Goal) phrase β, $F_\beta$, with which it agrees. Conceived of as *feature sharing*, Agree consists in replacing $F_\alpha$ with $F_\beta$, so that the same feature is present in both locations. A link accessible throughout the derivation is thus established.

Importantly, by putting together *valuation* and *interpretability*, Pesetsky and Torrego (2007) arrive at a fourfold feature typology; feature participating in Agree bear the

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same numerical index; an empty pair of brackets signals that a feature has not participated in Agree.

(2) [uF] [1]: uninterpretable, valued [*i*F] [1]: interpretable, valued
[uF] [ ]: uninterpretable, unvalued [*i*F] [ ]: interpretable, unvalued

**2.2.** As for the syntactic structure of the nominal phrase and of the clause, the following assumptions are made. The ideas presented here serve to minimally delineate the framework adopted; details and refinements are provided in §III and §IV, where nominal and verbal ellipsis are discussed and properly analysed.

With respect to the nominal phrase, I adopt without further justification the DP-hypothesis (Abney 1987, Giusti 1993, Longobardi 1994). From this perspective, the minimal DP contains a functional layer, represented by determiners (and quantifiers), and a lexical layer, represented by the head's (i.e. noun's) projection. The functional layer is associated with the argumental properties of the nominal phrase; the lexical layer is associated with predicative, descriptive content. On the model of Rizzi's scission of the CP, I adopt an "updated" syntactic structure of the DP, namely, the split-DP hypothesis (see Giusti 1996, 2005, 2012, Ihsane and Puskas 2001, Aboh 2004, Laenzlinger 2005a, 2005b, 2010, Cornilescu 2007, Cornilescu and Nicolae 2011b, Ledgeway 2012a); the D-head splits into a lower $D_{internal}$ position, and a higher $D_{external}$ projection, with the space between $D_{internal}$ and $D_{external}$ accommodating DP-internal constituents marked from the point of the DP-internal information structure; for the limited purposes of the discussion here, I will assume, like Giusti (2012) and Cornilescu and Nicolae (2012a), that the space between $D_{internal}$ and $D_{external}$ contains only one projection, labelled Contr(ast)P; the head of ContrP accommodates DP-internal contrastive constituents. A word of caution is in order here: I believe, like Giusti (2012), that not just any repetition of a determiner triggers the split of D; definiteness agreement can be resolved as a phenomenon of agreement (see §III.2.2.3). The split of D is determined by the presence of different determiners in the two D heads, and obligatorily activates the DP-internal left periphery, where notions like topic and focus become relevant. DPs are phasal domains (see Chomsky 2008)[6].

Clauses are conceived of as being CPs; the C-projection may be split into a higher Force head and a lower Fin head (as in Rizzi 1997); the split-CP hypothesis will be instrumental in understanding the syntax of the Romanian subjunctive and, implicitly, the internal make-up of the ellipsis site in the case of ellipsis with modal and aspectual verbs.

[6] There are relevant proposals for a bi-phasal analysis of the DP (Cornilescu and Nicolae 2011b, Simpson and Syed 2016, Syed and Simpson 2017, Roberts 2017 i.a.), on the model of the bi-phasehood of the CP; however, I will follow here the traditional mono-phasal analysis of the DP, as nothing crucial hinges on this issue.

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With respect to verb movement, the level of raising of synthetic forms is high in the inflectional domain (Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Cornilescu 2000, Alboiu and Motapanyane 2000, Ledgeway 2015, Schifano 2015, 2016, 2018, Nicolae 2015a, 2019). In the case of analytic forms, the auxiliaries target high positions, as shown by their ability to precede the additive light adverbial *mai*; the lexical verb also raises out of the *v*P, as shown by its ability to precede floating quantifiers and the adverbial *des* ('often') (see Alboiu and Motapanyane 2000, Ledgeway 2015).

(3) a. *Elevii mei au <u>mai</u> <u>toți</u> văzut filmul.*
students.DEF my AUX.PERF.3PL MAI see.PPLE all movie.DEF
'My students have all seen the movie before.'

b. *El va veni <u>des</u> la bunica de acum încolo.*
he AUX.FUT.3SG come.INF often to grandma from now onwards
'He will often visit grandma from now on.'

As is well-known, floating quantifiers diagnose subject positions (Sportiche 1988); adverbs like Rom. *des*, Fr. *souvent*, Engl. *often* diagnose verb raising (Cinque 1999); the additive light adverbial *mai* merges as a specifier of the Asp projection and adjoins to the lexical verb, moving along with it (Cornilescu and Cosma 2013, Nicolae 2015a, 2019).

While I preserve from the 2013 analysis the original intuition that verb movement proceeds as phrasal movement, I have revised the general theory of verb movement by adopting Vicente's (2007) '$V^0$-to-Spec', which is developed at length in my 2019 monograph (Nicolae 2019: ch. 2). The details of this analysis are schematically presented in §IV here too.

Finally, I follow the relevant literature in assuming that the clausal domain is bi-phasal (Chomsky 2001, 2008 among many other authors); both phasal heads, C and *v*, have peripheries, interface domains where P(ragmatic)-features are satisfied (see Rizzi 1997 for the CP-periphery and Belletti 2004 for arguments that there is also a "low" periphery; this is the *v**-periphery, which accommodates low foci and topics).

**2.3.** As has been known since Williams (1977) and López (2000), ellipsis is a Discourse Grammar phenomenon[7]. Thus, a stand on the syntax-pragmatics/information structure interface has to be taken. I have chosen to adopt and adapt López's (2009) theory,

[7] Recall from §I.1.3 above (and see §II) that, by following a long tradition (stemming at least from Chao 1988), I distinguish between two types of elliptical process: ellipses with a licenser, which are based on deletion, and ellipses based on a multidominant structure. I focus only on verbal and nominal ellipsis with a licenser in this dissertation; according to Williams (1977), who operates a similar distinction, ellipses based on deletion are Discourse Grammar ellipses, in the case of which the interface with the pragmatic / information structure component is highly relevant.

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as it offers, on the one hand, the general framework which integrates discourse into syntax with minimal alterations to the standard system as developed since Chomsky (2000), and, on the other hand, a system of (two) features with unambiguous semantic effects and clear syntactic correlates. According to López (2009), syntax and pragmatics / information structure interact cyclically; this interaction is mediated by the *phasal heads*, which may invasively assign P(ragmatic)-features to constituents, acting thus upon narrow syntax[8].

### 3. Some technical remarks on the organization of this book

**3.1.** The methodological principle which has been conscientiously followed throughout the dissertation is that ellipsis cannot be properly understood without first understanding the syntax of overt / fully pronounced structures. This methodological principle is well expressed by Bhattacharya and Simpson (2012) in their analysis of sluicing in Indo-Aryan, being well captured by the following quote: "what is clearly required in each fresh examination of sluicing in a language is a careful comparison of sluices with other patterns in the same language, in particular those relating to wh-movement, case, copulas, and cleft construction" (Bhattacharya and Simpson 2012: 190). There are, indeed, differences between elliptical structures and their overt counterpart (see §II for details), but these disparities should not be conceived of as indicating that the ellipsis site has a structure altogether different from its overt counterpart, but rather as the effect of the discourse algorithm which identifies the identical part(s) (to be elided) and the contrasting part(s) (the remnants) and appropriately marks them.

**3.2.** At this point, a serious question regarding the organization of the material emerges. Essentially, there are two options, both of which have been pursued in the literature. One solution is to first present the syntax of the overt structure and then turn to ellipsis; this type of approach has been pursued by authors like Gergel (2009), working on English VP-ellipsis, or Aelbrecht (2010), working on Dutch modal complement ellipsis. Another solution is to proceed in a more local fashion, combining to various degrees the analysis of the overt structure with the analysis of its elliptical counterpart. I have adopted

[8] See López (2009: 100-104) on the potential problems raised by this proposal with respect to Chomsky's (1995) *Inclusiveness Condition*; see also §III.3.2.6, where I also discuss this problem, essentially defending López's line of reasoning. In a nutshell, like López, I believe that phasal heads have the ability to invasively act upon narrow syntax; this follows from their instrumental role of being points where the structure is ***transferred*** to the interfaces (see Chomsky 2000, 2001) and avoids a severe *Look-Ahead* problem (e.g. semantics permitting, constituents are topics or foci in a given discourse; thus, the feature characterizing a constituent as a topic / focus should not be present on the respective constituent from the Numeration, but assigned at a later point, when felicitous discourse integration comes into play; this happens at Transfer).

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the second solution to organize the material of the book; this can be observed more prominently in §IV, where I analyse in turn ellipsis with various types of verbal licensers.

As for the internal organization of the chapters, each chapter has an introductory section which outlines the problems to be discussed and the puzzles to be solved, and a conclusions section; the conclusions not only summarize the problems discussed in the respective chapter, but also assess the relevance of the results from a more theoretical standpoint.

**3.3.** Certain diachronic problems are also taken up in the book. For instance, in order to understand the synchronic syntax of the Romanian DP, I felt the need to incorporate in the analysis certain diachronic facts, some of which are new, some of which are drawn from previous personal and/or joint work or from other different sources; some diachronic remarks on the subjunctive / infinitive competition as complements to modal verbs will also be presented.

It is thus necessary to mention that I have adopted the periodization of Romanian put forward by Gheție (1975), who distinguishes between old Romanian (1521-1780) and modern Romanian (1780–present day). The landmarks of these periods, 1521 and 1780 correlate with the following facts: 1521 represents the *earliest attested* text written directly in Romanian[9], *Neacșu's Letter*, while 1780 represents the year when *Elementa linguae daco-romanae sive valachicae* was published; this is the first grammar of Romanian with a large circulation. This distinction is not motivated only by extra-linguistic factors; as Gheție (1975) himself shows, there is a relevant number of linguistic differences between these two periods, a fact which motivates this cut[10].

Both periods are subject to other cuts: old Romanian is further subdivided into early old Romanian (1521-1640) and late old Romanian (1640-1780); the period comprised between 1780 and 1830 is known as the pre-modern period. Because of space limitations, I did not go into extremely refined details which would put these subdivisions to work; when relevant, I did, however, point to the differences between these subdivisions.

Note that the label "old Romanian" does not correspond to the label "old" applied to other Romance varieties (e.g. Old French, Old Spanish, etc.); the division old / modern with respect to Romanian depends on the earliest attested Romanian writings[11].

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[9] *Neacșu's Letter* is not the earliest attested Romanian text. As shown by Mareș (2000), *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki* (*The Hurmuzaki Book of Psalms*) is older than the *Letter*, but it is a translation, not a text written directly in Romanian.

[10] Gheție's (1975) classification was implicit in older histories of Romanian, such as Densusianu's (1961), and has been adopted by most researchers after 1975 (see, for instance, Rosetti 1986). Gheție's classification is thus the standard one.

[11] Authors like Hill (2013a) have chosen the label "early modern Romanian" for the period comprised between the 16th and the 18th c. in order to observe the general periodization of the Romance languages; I have chosen to follow tradition, by choosing the label "old Romanian".

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### 4. Examples and glossing

The choice of examples generally reflects the present-day spoken and written language; the source for the examples from older stages of Romanian is clearly indicated. All the examples chosen have been checked with other native speakers to ensure their well-formedness and their pragmatically felicitous character[12]; in the case of certain (pragmatically) awkward examples, the source has been indicated in footnotes.

As for the glossing of the examples, I have employed the conventions and abbreviations from the OUP *Grammar of Romanian* (GR 2013), which essentially follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules; a list of all the Abbreviations and Conventions employed has also been provided. It is important to mention that the glosses are not exhaustive – they are intended to be adequate for the immediate purpose of the example.

The book has been written according to the conventions of British English.

[12] I wish to thank to Adina Dragomirescu who had the patience and good will to go through all the examples.

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