Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)
CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4
Section: Language and Discourse

ROMANIAN VERBS OF EMISSION

Maria Poponeț

PhD Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract: This paper aims to bring some clarifications regarding Romanian verbs of emission. On the one hand, we provide a classification of these verbs, following the semantic classification in Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995). On the other hand, we bring morphological and syntactic arguments for the unergative status of verbs of emission. Thus, not only are these verbs not derived with the prepositional prefix în-, but, more importantly, they do not show the reflexive clitic pronoun se present with most Romanian unaccusatives. Moreover, some verbs of emission show the Agent-Instrument pattern, a blueprint of unergativity (cf. Potashnik 2009).

Keywords: verbs of emission, Romanian, unaccusativity, unergativity, the Agent-Instrument pattern

1. Introduction

According to a commonly accepted view, verbs of emission describe internally caused eventualities, which "come about as a result of internal physical characteristics of their argument" (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 92). The verbs select a non-agentive argument, usually called an emitter, which does not show control, nor does it undergo a change of state. Here are some examples of English verbs of emission:

(1) **Sound:** *burble, buzz, clang, crackle, hoot, hum, jingle, moan, ring, roar, whir…*
Light: *flash, flicker, gleam, glitter, shimmer, shine, sparkle, twinkle…*
Smell: *reek, smell, stink*
Substance: *bubble, gush, ooze, puff, spew, spout, squirt…*
(Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 91)

It is worth noting that Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) classified them as unergative based on the criterion of internal causation, while Perlmutter (1978, who did not include verbs of substance emission), considered that verbs of emission are unaccusative due to their inability to occur in impersonal passives in Dutch. Nonetheless, Zaenen (1993, quoted in Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995) holds that impersonal passivization cannot be used as an unergative diagnostic as it is sensitive to control, and, verbs of emission, which mostly show inanimate arguments, cannot be attributed control.

Starting from Dragomirescu's (2010) classification of Romanian verbs of emission, we argue that there is in fact evidence against the unaccusative status of these verbs in Romanian. As a matter of fact, the *se*-marked verbs that Dragomirescu (2010) provides do not take emitter subject entities, but rather entities which undergo a change of state. We argue that, in such cases, the verbs bearing the reflexive clitic pronoun *se*, are verbs of change of state, and are

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

unaccusative. On the other hand, by definition, verbs of emission take emitter entities as subjects, rather than entities which undergo some change. In what follows, we will show that such verbs pattern with unergatives, rather than with unaccusatives, i.e. they are non-*se*-marked; usually do not form transitives; some exhibit the Agent-Instrument pattern; most of them are denominal and can form nominals with the suffixes *–or, -oare*.

2. Premise: Romanian verbs of emission are unaccusative (cf. Dragomirescu 2010)

Dragomirescu (2010: 119) provides the following list of Romanian verbs of emission, classified on the criteria of morphological marking and transitive acceptability[1].

(2) **Verbs of emission:**
***Se*-marked without a transitive:** *a se prelinge* "to trickle";

***Se*-marked with a transitive:** *a se aprinde* "to emit light and heat", *a se descărca* "(about clouds) to emit light and sound" (cf. Dragomirescu 2010: 119, fn. 34, 35), *a se difuza* "to diffuse", *a se infiltra* "to infiltrate", *a se propaga* "to propagate", *a se răspândi* "to spread", *a se revărsa* "to spill", *a se trânti* "to flump";

Non-*se*-marked without a transitive: *a asuda* "to sweat", *a curge* "to flow", *a exploda* "to explode", *a izvorî* "to spring", *a transpira* "to sweat", *a ţâşni* "to gush out";

Non-*se*-marked with a transitive: *a picura* "to drip".

However, we argue that the arguments taken by the *se*-marked verbs above are not emitters, but rather, the substance emitted. Consequently, the verbs express the change undergone by the substance.
For instance, the sentence (3a) expresses a transformation, the spread of light. By contrast, (3b) is an example where *a difuza* "to diffuse" has an emitter subject, *lampa* "the lamp", and the emitted substance *lumină* "light" takes the object position:

(3) a. *Lumina* *se* *difuzează* *în* *toate* *direcţiile.*
light.DET SE diffuse.PRS.3SG in all direction.PL.DET
"The light is diffused in all directions."

b. *Lampa* *difuzează* *lumină.*
lamp.DET diffuse.PRS.3SG light
"The lamp diffuses light."

The verbs *a asuda, a transpira* "to sweat", are verbs of emission with emitter subjects[2]. The verb *a exploda* "to explode" may also carry the meaning "emit light and heat" as illustrated in (4):

[1] The notions "reflexive" and "non-reflexive" employed by Dragomirescu (2010) are replaced by "*se*-marked", and "non-*se*-marked", respectively.
[2] When one sweats, one is the emitter of sweat.

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

(4) *Vulcanul* *a* *explodat.*
volcano.DET AUX.3SG explode.PTCP
"The volcano exploded."

On the other hand, the verb *a curge* "to pour" does not allow emitter arguments (cf. the unacceptability of (5b)), but only theme arguments (cf. (5a)). The same holds for Romanian *a izvorî* "to spring".

(5) a. *Apa* *curge* *din* *sticlă.*
water.DET pour.PRS.3SG from bottle
"Water pours from the bottle."

b. **Sticla* *curge* *apa.*
bottle.DET pour.PRS.3SG water.DET
"The bottle pours the water."

Apart from non-*se*-marking, the morphosyntactic and semantic evidence adduced in the following sections points to the unergative status of Romanian verbs of emission.

3. Arguments for the unergativity of Romanian verbs of emission

The Romanian verbs of emission that we identified fall into four subgroups following Levin and Rappaport Hovav's (1995) classification: verbs of light, sound, smell and substance emission.

3.1.Verbs of light emission

The category of verbs of light emission contains the following verbs in Romanian:

(6) **Verbs of light emission:** *a arde* "to burn", *a fulgera* "to lighten", *a licări* "to flicker", *a luci* "to shine", *a lumina* "to light", *a pâlpâi* "to flare", *a scăpăra* "to flash", *a scânteia* "to sparkle", *a sclipi* "to glimmer", *a străluci* "to shine".

Some of them are derived from nominals which denote the object that the verbs emit, and can, thus, be paraphrased as "emit object x":

(7) **Denominal verbs of light emission:** *a fulgera* "to lighten" > *fulger* "flash", *a lumina* "to light" > *lumină* "light", *a scânteia* "to sparkle" > *scânteie* "sparkle".

Additional evidence for the causer status of the subjects of light emission verbs is the ability of some of them to form nominals with the suffixes *–or, -oare,* e.g. *arzător* "burner", *scăpărătoare* "tinder-box".

3.2.Verbs of sound emission

The second category that we present is the (non-exhaustive) list of verbs of sound emission:

(8) **Verbs of sound emission:** *a bate* "to ring", *a bolborosi* "to burble", *a bubui* "to boom", *a bufni* "to thud", *a cânta* "to sing", *a cârâi* "to croak", *a chiţăi* "to squeak", *a ciripi* "to chirp", *a clipoci* "to ripple", *a dăngăni* "to ding", *a exploda* "to explode", *a fârnăi* "to

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)
CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4
Section: Language and Discourse

snuffle", *a fâsâi* "to fizzle", *a gânguri* "to babble", *a geme* "to groan", *a guiţa* "to squeak", *a hârâi* "to rattle", *a îngâna* "to hum", *a lipăi* "to squelch", *a mârâi* "to snarl", *a mormăi* "to growl", *a mugi* "to howl", *a murmura* "to murmur", *a pârâi* "to crackle", *a pleoscăi* "to splash", *a plesni* "to crack", *a pocni* "to crack", *a pufăi* "to puff", *a rage* "to roar", *a răpăi* "to patter", *a sâsâi* "to hiss", *a scânci* "to whimper", *a scârţâi* "to squeak", *a schelălăi* "to yelp", *a sfârâi* "to sizzle", *a suna* "to ring", *a suspina* "to sigh", *a susura* "to murmur", *a şuiera* "to whistle", *a ticăi* "to tick", *a toarce* "to purr", *a trâmbiţa* "to trumpet", *a tropăi* "to clatter", *a trosni* "to crack", *a ţăcăni* "to snap", *a ţipa* "to scream", *a ţiui* "to whizz", *a urla* "to howl", *a vibra* "to vibrate", *a vui* "to roar", *a zăngăni* "to clatter", *a zbârnăi* "to whirr", *a zbiera* "to yell", *a zornăi* "to rattle".

Verbs that express sounds made by the contact between two surfaces, or verbs which describe situations with manipulable emitters show transitive causative variants (cf. (9)), as exemplified in (10)-(15).

(9) **Verbs of sound emission which show transitives:** *a bate* "to ring", *a bubui* "to boom", *a foşni* "to rustle", *a pocni* "to crack", *a trosni* "to crack", *a zăngăni* "to clatter", *a zornăi* "to rattle".

(10) a. *Clopotele* *bisericii* *bat* *în* *fiecare* *zi.*
bell.PL.DET church.GEN ring.PRS.3PL in every day
"The church bells ring every day."

b. *Clopotarul* *va* *bate* *clopotele* *pentru* *deschidere.*
bell ringer.DET will ring bell.PL.DET for opening
"The bell ringer will ring the bells for the opening." (adapted from http://www.primariatm.ro/epress.php?epress_id=5763)

(11) a. *Petardele* *bubuie* *în* *întuneric.*
cracker.PL.DET boom.PRS.3PL in dark
"Crackers boom in the dark."

b. *Cei* *care* *bubuie* *petarde* *riscă* *amenzi* *de* *până* *la* *500 lei.*
those who boom.PRS.3PL cracker.PL risk.PRS.3PL fine.PL of to at 500 lei
"Those who boom crackers run the risk of getting fines of up to 500 lei."
(http://www.reporterntv.ro/stire/mii-de-petarde-au-fost-confiscate-in-ultima-saptamana-la-constanta)

(12) a. *Deodată* *ziarul* *de* *pe* *terasă* *a* *foşnit.*
suddenly newspaper.DET of on porch AUX.3SG rustle.PTCP
"Suddenly, the newspaper on the porch rustled."

b. *Se* *răsuci* *foşnind* *ziarul* *şi* *căută*

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

SE twist.PST.3SG rustling newspaper.DET and search.PST.3SG
o poziţie mai comodă.
a position more comfortable
"He twisted rustling the newspaper and searched for a more comfortable position."
(https://dexonline.ro/definitie/fo%C8%99ni)

(13) a. *Degetele de la mâini pocnesc foarte uşor.*
finger.PL.DET from hand.PL crack.PRS.3PL very easily
"My hand fingers crack very easily."

b. *Majoritatea oamenilor îşi pocnesc degetele.*
majority.DET people.GEN CL.3PL.DAT crack.PRS.3PL finger.PL.DET
"Most people crack their fingers."
(http://www.trocmaer.eu/de-ce-ne-pocnesc-degetele/)

(14) a. *Armele zăngănesc în timpul deplasării.*
weapon.PL.DET clatter.PRS.3PL in time.DET displacement.GEN
"The weapons clatter when displaced."

b. *Îşi zăngănesc armele.*
CL.3PL.DAT clatter.PRS.3PL weapon.PL.DET
"They clatter their weapons."
(https://dexonline.ro/definitie/zangani)

(15) a. *Cheile zornăie în geantă.*
key.PL.DET rattle.PRS.3PL in bag
"The keys rattle in the bag."

b. *Oamenii îşi zornăie cheile.*
man.PL.DET CL.3PL.DAT rattle.PRS.3PL key.PL.DET
"People rattle their keys." (adapted from
http://secretlyafashionista.blogspot.ro/2013/10/cugetarea-saptamanii-4-cateva-lucruri.html)

Some of the verbs above show the Agent-Instrument pattern (cf. Potashnik 2009), whereby the subject of the intransitive sentence (i.e. the emitter) is introduced by instrumental/locative prepositions when an agent is added. Such alternating verbs denote events which can present two performers or causers one of which is the agent, the other the "instrument".
Here, we selected the verbs *a bubui* "to boom" and *a zornăi* "to rattle" that take part in the transitive alternation (cf. (11), (15)), and also show the Agent-Instrument pattern as illustrated in (16) and (17):

(16) *Copiii bubuie cu carbit pentru a vesti*
child.PL.DET boom.PRS.3PL with carbide for INF.PREP announce

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

Învierea.
Resurrection.DET
"Children boom with carbide to announce the Resurrection."
(http://www.replicahd.ro/images/replica230/rep3.htm)

(17) *Băiatul* *zornăia* *din* *jucărie*
boy.DET rattle.IPF.3SG from toy
"The boy was rattling with the toy." (adapted from
http://www.7-zile.com/2014/11/27/unice-tara-jucariile-muzicale-ale-lui-dumitru-jompan-de-la-colectie-la-muzeu/)

The meaning of sentences exhibiting the Agent-Instrument pattern does not seem to be equivalent to the meaning of transitive causative sentences: the causative stresses the capacity of the entity in object position to emit a sound as a result of an agent's manipulation (i.e. "They boom crackers" means "They caused crackers to boom"), while in the Agent-Instrument construction, the stress is on the agent's ability to produce a sound by means of the manipulated instrument; the emitter interpretation is distributed between agent and instrument (i.e. "Children boom with carbide" means "Children produce the boom with the use of carbide"). The agent is a causer in the transitive causative, but an emitter in the sentence exhibiting the Agent-Instrument construction. The participation of verbs of emission in the Agent-Instrument construction supports the causer interpretation of the emitter subjects of these verbs, through transfer of causation from instrument (i.e. emitter proper) to agent[3].
Although some verbs of emission show causative transitives, the intransitive is unergative on other tests.
For instance, most of these verbs are derived from imitations of sounds (i.e. onomatopoeia), and are denominal; the relationship between form and meaning is transparent: the verbs are liable to the interpretation "do the sound x".
Furthermore, some form nominals with the suffix *-oare*, with the meaning "object which produces sound x": *bâzâitoare, cârâitoare, hârâitoare*, *pârâitoare, plesnitoare*, *scârţâitoare, sfârâitoare, zbârnăitoare* "rattle", *pocnitoare* "cracker", *şuierătoare, ţipătoare, ţiuitoare* "whistle", *urlătoare* "waterfall".

3.3.Verbs of smell emission

The small number of Romanian verbs of smell emission listed in (18) does not alternate, and does not take part in the Agent-Instrument construction:

(18) **Verbs of smell emission:** *a duhni* "to reek", *a mirosi* "to smell", *a puţi* "to stink".

Noteworthy, unlike verbs of change of state, in general, verbs of emission are not derived with the prefix *în-* "in", commonly associated to "become". The morphological makeup of verbs of emission falls into place since their meaning is not "come into a state", but rather "emit object x", in our example (19a), "emit smell".

(19) a. *Florile* *miros* *puternic* *după* *ploaie.* (emission verb)
flower.PL.DET smell.PRS.3PL strong after rain

[3] Specifically, one can say "Children produced the boom", because one can say "Crackers produced the boom".

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

"Flowers emit a strong smell after the rain."

b. *Florile* *au* *înmiresmat* (verb of change of state)
flower.PL.DET AUX.3PL scent.PTCP
grădina.
garden.DET
"The flowers scented the garden."

3.4.Verbs of substance emission

Verbs of substance emission split into verbs that can occur intransitively with emitter subjects only, without the substance emitted (cf. (20)), and verbs that only show up transitively with the substance emitted in object position (cf. (21)).

(20) **Verbs of substance emission which can be used intransitively:** *a asuda* "to sweat", *a fumega* "to smoke", *a împroşca* "to splash", *a lăcrima* "to water", *a picura* "to drip", *a pufăi* "to puff", *a puroia* "to suppurate", *a radia* "to radiate", *a saliva* "to salivate", *a sângera* "to bleed", *a spuma* "to foam", *a stropi* "to sprinkle", *a şiroi* "to stream", *a transpira* "to sweat", *a vomita* "to vomit", *a zemui* "to ooze".

(21) **Verbs of substance emission which can only be used transitively:** *a difuza* "to diffuse", *a emite* "to emit", *a emana* "to emanate", *a împrăştia* "to spread", *a propaga* "to propagate", *a răspândi* "to spread", *a revărsa* "to pour out".

Verbs like *a difuza* "to diffuse" are unacceptable as intransitives, with emitter subjects only, as shown by the unacceptability of (22a), and require the presence of the substance emitted in object position as in (22b).

(22) a. **Lampa* *difuzează*
lamp.DET diffuse.PRS.3SG
"The lamp diffuses."

b. *Lampa* *difuzează* *lumină.*
lamp.DET diffuse.PRS.3SG light
"The lamp diffuses light."

While the emitted substance of verbs like *a picura* "to trickle", *a împroşca* "to splash", *a stropi* "to sprinkle" is implicit (i.e. liquid), it is not always specific enough, its overtness giving rise to a transitive as in (23):

(23) *Acel* *robinet* *împroaşcă* *apă* *murdară.*
that tap splash.PRS.3SG water dirty
"That tap splashes dirty water."

Many verbs of substance emission are denominal as is apparent in (24) below:

(24) **Denominal verbs of substance emission:** *a fumega* "to smoke" > *fum* "smoke", *a lăcrima* "to water" > *lacrimă* "tear", *a picura* "to drip" > *picur* "drip", *a pufăi* "to puff"

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

> *puf* "puff" , *a puroia* "to suppurate" > *puroi* "pus", *a radia* "to radiate" > *rază* "beam", *a saliva* "to salivate" > *salivă* "saliva", *a sângera* "to bleed" > *sânge* "blood", *a spuma* "to foam" > *spumă* "foam", *a stropi* "to sprinkle" > *strop* "drop", *a şiroi* "to stream" > *şiroi* "trickle", *a zemui* "to ooze" > *zeamă* "juice".

Some verbs form nominals with the suffixes *–or, -oare,* in support of the causer status of their argument: *difuzor* "diffuser", *emiţător* "emitter", *propagator* "propagator", *stropitoare* "sprinkler", *radiator* "radiator", *ţâşnitoare* "drinking fountain".
So far, morphosyntactic and semantic evidence was adduced in support of the unergative status of verbs of emission. The sporadic transitive causative versions of some verbs of sound emission do not constitute sufficient evidence for the unaccusative status of these verbs, which are unergative on the other criteria quoted in the literature. By contrast, *roll*-verbs (cf. Levin and Rappaport Hovav's 1995 classification), which are unaccusatives that express activities, participate systematically in the causative alternation and almost all are *se*-marked as is apparent from the classification in (25).

(25) ***Roll*-verbs:**
***Se*-marked with a transitive:** *a se clinti* "to stir", *a se deplasa* "to move", *a se învârti* "to spin", *a se mişca* "to move", *a se rostogoli* "to roll", *a se roti* "to rotate", *a se urni* "to stir";

Non-*se*-marked without a transitive: *a aluneca* "to slide";

Non-*se*-marked with a transitive: *a glisa* "to glide".

Verbs of emission, also, express activities, but none of them is morphologically marked by the reflexive clitic pronoun *se,* and only few of them register transitive causatives.

4. Conclusion

The absence of the reflexive clitic pronoun *se,* the systematic lack of participation in the causative alternation, the participation in the Agent-Instrument construction, the denominal structure of most of them, along with the derivation of nominals with the suffixes *–or, -oare* for some of them, jointly point to the unergative status of Romanian verbs of emission. Importantly, the verb type, i.e. verb of emission or verb of change of state, depends on the type of subject selected.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Dicţionar Explicativ Român: http://dexonline.ro/.
Dragomirescu, Adina (2010). *Ergativitatea. Tipologie, sintaxă, semantică,* Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.
Levin, Beth (1993). *English verb classes and alternations: A preliminary investigation,* Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
Levin, Beth and Malka Rappaport Hovav (1995). *Unaccusativity: At the syntax-lexical semantics interface,* Cambridge: MIT Press.

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)

Perlmutter, David (1978). "Impersonal passives and the Unaccusative Hypothesis", in *Proceedings of the fourth annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 157-189, Berkeley: Berkeley Linguistics Society.
Potashnik, Joseph (2009). *A study of inanimate unergatives*, MA dissertation, Tel-Aviv University.

BDD-A25384 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:11 UTC)