PREVERBAL SUBJECTS AND TOPIC MARKING IN ROMANIAN*

ION GIURGEA[1]

Abstract. Given the fact that subjecthood is not marked in Romanian by placement in a dedicated preverbal position, Romanian has been described as a VSO language in generative studies. From this perspective, the frequency of SV orders is somehow unexpected. I present the pragmatic and structural conditions on subject placement in Romanian and discuss an account which derives the (un)acceptability of the various possible orders based on the idea of a multifunctional position in the preverbal field, which is always present and is used for informational-structural purposes but can also be filled by raising the closest argument. I present evidence that preverbal subjects which are neither topics nor foci do exist in Romanian. I identify certain environments where such subjects are disallowed and propose a prosody-based account for the observed restrictions. I compare the multifunctional position account with other possible analyses, concluding that there are two other accounts which can cover the data: one based on distinct peripheral heads associated with an EPP-feature, and one that replaces the EPP-feature by a pragmatic principle. Finally, I argue that the observed facts are compatible with a view of Romanian as a topic-oriented language.

Keywords: subjects, information structure, topics, word order, Romanian.

1. INTRODUCTION

As is well known, Romanian, like other null-subject languages (especially Spanish and Greek), has a robust 'free-inversion' property: there are no restrictions on postverbal subjects depending on their type (e.g. definites vs. indefinites) or on the argument structure of the verb (e.g. transitivity, number of arguments, unaccusativity). Although there is no fixed order in the postverbal domain, there seems to be a preference for placing the subject before the other arguments in the unmarked order – as can be seen in examples where all the arguments have the

* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0372. I am grateful to Valentina Bianchi, Silvio Cruschina, and Carmen Dobrovie-Sorin for their valuable comments on previous versions of this paper.

[1] "Iorgu Iordan – Alexandru Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, giurgeaion@yahoo.com.

RRL, **LXII**, *3*, p. 279–322, Bucureşti, 2017

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

same information-structural status (in (1), new, non-specific indefinites, in (2), new definites) and there is no narrow focus:

(1) Dacă ți-a zis cineva ceva .... / ? ceva cineva ...
if you.DAT-has told somebody something something somebody
'If somebody told you something...'

(2) A: Ia uite! Mișcă vântul scaunele în grădină.
look moves wind-the chairs-the in garden
'Look! The wind is pushing the chairs in the garden.'

As the subject is generated higher than the other arguments[2], it has been concluded that the VSO pattern reflects the base position of the subject (SpecVP in Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, 1997, SpecvP in Chomsky's 1995 framework, adopted by Alboiu 2002), with the verb moving to the inflectional domain (see (3)), and that nominative assignment takes place in this position, without requiring movement to SpecInfl as in English:

(3) $[_{InflP}$ V(+Infl) $[_{vP/VP}$ S $[t_V$ O]]]

As starting with Chomsky (1998) a Spec-Head configuration is no longer required for verb-subject agreement and case licensing, the configuration in (3) suffices for subject licensing and verb agreement via Chomsky's Agree operation (see Alboiu 2002), without the need of a *pro* in SpecInfl. Romanian has thus been described as a VSO language, in the sense that the case licensing position of subjects is postverbal (Dobrovie-Sorin 1987, 1994, Cornilescu 1997, Alboiu 2002)[3].

However, Romanian is not VSO statistically. Judging by the orders found in all-new contexts, it can rather be described as a mixed type VS/SV. Dobrovie-Sorin (1987:330–331) notices that typical presentational contexts – answers to 'what happened?'-questions – allow SV(X) besides VS(X), but not XVS, and in certain cases V-initial presentative constructions are excluded, some element (most often the subject) necessarily occurring in the preverbal position. Adopting the assumption that there is no preverbal position dedicated to the subject, Dobrovie-Sorin analyzes preverbal subject as 'Themes', a notion that corresponds to 'topic' in current studies on information structure (henceforth, IS), and makes the hypothesis that the subject can be promoted as a Theme ('thématisé') more easily than other constituents. The idea that preverbal subjects are always topics (unless focus-fronted) was adopted by Cornilescu (1997) and Alboiu (2002). This type of

[2] Except in certain exceptional argument structure configurations, on which see section 6.2.

[3] Cornilescu (1997) distinguishes two postverbal case positions for the subject: the thematic position and a postverbal SpecAgrS, which may be occupied by an expletive *pro*, a doubling pronoun in the so-called 'subject doubling construction' or by the raised S. However, as the subject doubling construction is contingent on focal stress on the verb, it may be analyzed as involving raising of the verbal cluster above the preverbal subject position (see Giurgea and Mîrzea Vasile, this issue).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

analysis has been proposed for other null-subject languages with similar word order patterns (Romance and Greek) in several studies (Barbosa 1995, Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou 1998). Against this view, Motapanyane (1994) argued that in certain cases preverbal subjects cannot be treated as topics or foci and, therefore, SpecInfl is an A-position (see also Ştefănescu 1997, Hill 2002). Giurgea and Remberger (2009, 2012, 2014) explained the big frequency of SV-orders and the existence of non-topical preverbal subjects by the presence of an always active attracting feature (probe) on the head whose specifier is the preverbal position (first identified with T, later with Fin), a feature that is either IS-related ([About], [Given], [Foc]), operator-related ([Wh]) or argument-related (a D-feature).

In this study, examining the pragmatic and structural conditioning of the pre- and postverbal placement of subjects, I will show that there are indeed instances of preverbal subjects that are neither topics nor foci. I will propose some refinements of the account in Giurgea and Remberger (2012) and compare it with alternative accounts. Finally, I will show how these accounts can express the intuition that Romanian is, at least to a certain extent, topic oriented, as opposed to languages such as English.

2. POSTVERBAL SUBJECTS: STRUCTURAL AND PRAGMATIC CONDITIONING

It is generally agreed that the pre- vs. postverbal placement of subjects in null subject languages such as Romanian is due, at least in part, to information-structural factors. As the issue of the IS-status of preverbal subjects is much debated, we start by presenting the pragmatic conditioning of postverbal subjects (a detailed discussion of these conditions in the main null-subject Romance languages can be found in Giurgea and Remberger (2012)).

First, there are constraints which are not, prima facie, IS-related, but rather structural. Thus, certain types of *wh-fronting* (essentially, wh-phrases that lack an overt restriction)[4] and *focus fronting* (except for foci that are marked by focal particles) rule out a preverbal subject intervening between the fronted item and the verb:

[4] The exact conditions under which an intervening preverbal subject is possible are not completely clear; Cornilescu (2002) claims that D-linking licenses an intervening subject (like in Italian, see Rizzi 2001, Cruschina 2011), but D-linking in the absence of an overt restriction does not seem acceptable:

(i) *Pe care Ion l-a văzut ieri?
DOM which Ion CL.ACC-has seen yesterday

In the presence of an overt restriction, D-linking appears indeed to be relevant for arguments (see (ii)) but not for adjuncts (see (iii)):

(ii) a. ? Care roman profesorul l-a recomandat studenților?
which novel professor-the CL.ACC-has recommended students-the.DAT
b. * Ce roman profesorul a recomandat studenților?
what novel professor-the has recommended students-the.DAT

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(4) a. Unde îşi ține Maria maşina? / *Unde Maria îşi ține maşina?
where 3REFL.DAT keeps Maria car-the where Maria 3REFL.DAT keeps car-the
'Where does Maria keep her car?'
b. MARIEI i-a dat Ion floarea / *MARIEI Ion i-a dat
Maria.DAT CL.DAT-has given Ion flower-the Maria.DAT Ion CL.DAT-has given
floarea.
flower-the
'Ion gave MARIA the flower. / It is Maria Ion gave the flower to.'

The subject can occur in the preverbal field in these environments, but only before the fronted wh- or focus constituent, functioning as a topic:

(5) a. Maria unde îşi ține maşina?
Maria where 3REFL.DAT keeps car-the
'Maria, where does she keep her car?'
b. Ion MARIEI i-a dat floarea.
Ion Maria.DAT CL.DAT-has given flower-the
'Ion gave MARIA the flower.'

At first sight this supports the view that preverbal subjects are in fact topics: assuming that Romanian does not have a Top position between Foc/Wh and Infl (using the cartographic terminology), or that wh- and fronted foci occur in SpecInfl and topics are adjoined above (see Alboiu's 2002 non-cartographic proposal), the contrast in (4)–(5) follows straight-forwardly. However, the examples (5) are felt as more marked than the acceptable versions of (4) and than the corresponding declarative versions with a preverbal subject and no focus fronting (see (6)): the subject in (5) is either a contrastive topic (evoking alternatives which involve other entities as topics[5]) or an aboutness-shift topic[6]. By contrast, the postverbal subjects in (4) can also be context-given, without involving any contrast or topic shift:

(6) a. Maria îşi ține maşina la taică-su.
Maria 3REFL.DAT keeps car-the at father-her
'Maria keeps her car at her father's.'
b. Ion i-a dat floarea MARIEI.
Ion CL.DAT-has given flower-the Maria.DAT
'Ion gave the flower to Maria'

(iii) În ce oraş oamenii se poartă aşa? vs. *Unde oamenii se poartă aşa?
in what city people-the behave like-that where people-the behave like-that

Relative wh-phrases in *care* 'which' do not rule out an intervening subject, which may follow from the fact that they contain an NP-constituent; the wh-items *cine* 'who', *ce* 'what', when they introduce free relatives, behave like interrogatives in not allowing an intervening subject.

[5] On contrastive topics, see Büring (1999; 2003), Bianchi, Frascarelli (2010).

[6] See Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl (2007), Bianchi, Frascarelli (2010) for this type of topic, which is considered to be different from the contrastive topic.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Moreover, a postverbal placement in the absence of another topicalized constituent sounds odd in (6), suggesting that topic marking is compulsory in the absence of wh- or focus fronting, a matter which we will turn to later (for (7)a, the predicate is not appropriate for a presentational construal, see section 4; in (7)b, the existence of narrow focus implies that the other arguments – the subject and the direct object – are given and are thus able to fulfill the requirement of topic marking):

(7) a. # Îşi ține Maria maşina la taică-su.
3REFL.DAT keeps Maria car-the at father-her
b. # I-a dat Ion floarea MARIEI.
CL.DAT-has given Ion flower-the Maria.DAT

Anticipating the discussion in section 3, the clearest evidence for the fact that the subject position in (5) is not (necessarily) the same as the preverbal subject position in sentences without wh- or focus fronting comes from subjects that are not suited for topichood: they can sometimes occur preverbally, but never before a wh- or fronted focus:

(8) a. *Cineva când i-a spus că nu-l mai susținem?
somebody when 3SG.DAT-has told that not-him any-longer support.1PL
b. Cineva i-a spus că nu-l mai susținem.
somebody 3SG.DAT-has told that not-him any-longer support.1PL
'Somebody told him that we no longer support him.'

Leaving aside these structural constraints, the postverbal placement of the subject can best be described in pragmatic terms: it is *used to signal that the subject is not a topic*. This generalization covers the following three cases:

(i) Presentational (or 'thetic') sentences. These are sentences which do not have any overt constituent as a topic. Traditionally, they are considered topicless sentences, but some studies treat them as having the spatio-temporal coordinates of the described event as a topic (see section 4 below). Using the traditional question-answer test for IS values, these sentences answer to the question 'What happened?':

(9) a. Plânge copilul.
cries baby-the
'The baby's crying.'
b. S-a stricat maşina de spălat.
REFL-has broken machine of washing
'The washer has broken.'
c. Parchează cineva o maşină.
parks somebody a car
'Somebody is parking a car.'

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(ii) Sentences with a topic different from the subject in the (immediately) preverbal position[7]:

(10) Tabloul ăsta l-a cumpărat mama mea de la un anticar.
painting-the this CL.ACC-has bought mother-the my from an antiquarian
'This painting, my mother bought from an antiquarian.'

(iii) Sentences with narrow focus on the subject:

(11) a. Va vorbi MARIA cu Ion. [Context: open issue = who will tell Ion?]
will talk Maria with Ion
'MARIA will talk to Ion.'
b. Va aduce şi ION flori (focal particle on the subject)
will bring also Ion flowers
'Ion too will bring flowers.'
c. Bea vin toată lumea [Context: How many people are drinking wine?]
drinks wine all people-the
'EVERYBODY's drinking wine.'

3. THE ISSUE OF NON-TOPICAL PREVERBAL SUBJECTS

Traditionally, neutral or canonical orders are considered to be those found in sentences where all the material is '(discourse/context-)new'. Besides VS (see (9)), Romanian shows SV and even XVS in such contexts. From an IS-point of view, orders involving a preverbal constituent fall into two types: (i) SV/XV where S/X qualifies as a topic and (ii) SV where S does not qualify as a topic[8].

The fact that all the material is new does not exclude the existence of a topic, because topics are not necessarily (context-)given, or discourse-linked (see Reinahrt 1981, Erteschik-Shir 2007, Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl 2007, Brunetti 2009, contra Rizzi 2005a,b, Rizzi, Shlonsky 2007, López 2009).

Therefore, in order to establish whether S in SV qualifies as a topic, we have to investigate what types of non-subject constituents can undergo topicalization – what are the requirements they must meet in order to be able to be topicalized. Only if we find subjects that do not obey these requirements and nevertheless occur preverbally can we conclude that (non-focalized) preverbal subjects are not necessarily topical.

[7] Clitic-doubling of fronted objects in Ro., as in (10), does not correlate with a sentence-external position, but is obligatory for definite and specific DPs, irrespective of the type of fronting – topicalization, focalization wh-fronting (see Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Cornilescu 2004, a.o.).

[8] Besides nominative subjects, XV with non-topical X can also be found with oblique experiencers, in argument structures where arguably X is generated higher than the (nominative) S. The data will be presented in section 6.2 below.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Whether a constituent counts or not as 'given' can be established by prosody, as given elements are destressed after the last new element in some prosodic domain (see Halliday 1967, Ladd 2008, Büring 2007, 2012, Rochemont 2013, 2016, a.o.) – Romanian, by and large, patterns with English in this respect[9]. Using this criterion, we can see that not only previously mentioned entities, but also entities immediately present in the context of speech, that can be referred to by deictics, can count as given (see (12)). Therefore, the view that topics are given covers cases such as (13):

(12) a. Am cumpărat IERI cartea asta. [pointing to a book]
have.1 bought yesterday book-the this
'I bought this book yesterday.'
b. Nu-mi place aici, e prea TARE muzica [context: at the entry of a place
not-me.DAT likes here is too loud music-the where loud music can be heard]
'I don't like it here, the music is too loud.'

(13) Simfonia asta a dirijat-o foarte bine Karajan.
symphony-the this has conducted-CL.ACC very well Karajan.
'This symphony, Karajan conducted very well.'

All deictic elements, including 1st and 2nd person pronouns, belong here (which also explains the phonological reduction to which personal pronouns and other deictics are typically subject to).

I take absence of destressing to be a criterion of 'new' as opposed to 'given'. New elements show various degrees of connection with the common ground – either to the previous discourse or to the hearer's background knowledge.

Brunetti's (2009) example of a new topic in (14)a, replicated in Romanian in (14)b, shows a definite, which as such carries a presupposition of existence and is related to the context via its descriptive part (by the possessive); it can also be known to the hearer, but this is not necessary:

(14) a. Sai? A mio fratello (gli) hanno rubato la moto. (It.)
know.2SG to my brother (CL.DAT) have.3PL stolen the motorcycle
'You know what? My brother's motorbike was stolen.' (Brunetti 2009: 760)
b. Ai auzit ce s-a întâmplat? Fratelui meu i s-a
have.2SG heard what REFL-has happened brother-the.DAT my CL.DAT REFL-has
furat motocicleta
stolen motorcycle-the
'Did you hear what happened? They stole my brother's motorcycle.'

[9] Although other Romance languages have been claimed to lack destressing of the given, independent of contrastive stress (see Zubizarreta 1998), Romanian clearly has English-type destressing. Besides my own judgments, the application of destressing in Romanian is confirmed by experimental work reported in Göbbel (2003: 369–370).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Definites without a given element inside their descriptive part, such as proper names, can also be topicalized in an all-new context, as in (15). In this case, a felicitous use assumes the existence of the referent is known to the hearer (the referent can be called 'familiar'):

(15) Ştii ce s-a întâmplat? Pe Maria a arestat-o poliția.
know.2SG what REFL-has happened DOM Maria has arrested-CL.ACC police-the
'Did you hear what happened? Maria was arrested by the police.'

In other cases, a new definite can be related to the context via bridging (associative anaphora) – the referent is not familiar, but the context supports the inference of existence of a referent that satisfies the description, based on world knowledge:

(16) Biserica era renumită. Cupola o proiectase Bramante.
church-the was famous dome-the CL.ACC had-designed Bramante
'The church was famous. The dome had been designed by Bramante'.

Here is an attested example of a topicalized new definite related to the context via the descriptive part:

(17) [Context: *S-a făcut doi-trei ani de când a plecat Tudor, a plecat înainte să moară bunică-sa, madam Ioaniu*. 'It's been two or three years since Tudor left, he left before his grand-mother, Mrs. Ioaniu, died']
Camera lui o ține Ivona şi-acu neatinsă
room-the his CL.ACC keeps Ivona even-now untouched
'His room, Ivona keeps (it) untouched even now.'
(G. Adameşteanu, *Dimineață pierdută*, p. 26)

Not only definites, but also property-denoting nominals such as predicative bare nouns can be topicalized if they are related to the context via bridging, as in the following example:

(18) [Context: the current topic is Creangă's primary school: *Putem bănui că clasa funcționa mai înspre primăvară, când era mai cald*. 'We can imagine that the class functioned towards springtime, when it was warmer.']
Învățător era un om tânăr, voinic şi frumos, precât ni se spune,
schoolmaster was a man young strong and handsome as us.DAT REFL says
bădița Vasile a Ilioaei (G. Călinescu, *Ion Creangă*, p. 30)
uncle Vasile GEN Ilioaia.GEN
'(The) schoolmaster was a strong and handsome young man, as we are told, uncle Vasile, Ilioaia's son.'

Indefinites too can be topicalized if they are related via the descriptive part to a context-given or familiar referent (the neighbor in the following example is understood as a neighbor of the speaker's):

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(19) Unei vecine i-au spart geamul.
a.DAT neighbour CL.DAT-have.3PL broken window-the
'They broke the window to a neighbor of mine.'

A frequent sub-case is that of partitive indefinites, which are related via the inclusion relation to a referent whose existence is established in the common ground (note that the partitive relation can be covert):

(20) Am avut zece zile de concediu. O zi am petrecut-o pe drum.
have.1 had ten days of vacation one day have.1 spent-CL.ACC on road
'I had a ten days vacation. One day I spent on the road.'

The varieties of new topics described here correspond to those established by Erteschik-Shir (2007: 16-19) based on topicalization in Danish. For referential DPs, the general condition which covers the various types appears to be presupposition of existence – the existence of the referent must be given or accommodated in the hearer's conceptual model[10]. This means that roughly all kinds of definites are topicalizable. For indefinites, besides specific indefinites (either via description or via partitivity, see (19)–(20)), she finds that only generics and contrastive elements may be topicalized. For generics, what allows topicalization is the existence of the kind in the common ground (cf. loc. cit., p. 22). As for contrastive indefinites, even if they can be non-specific, they must be chosen from "a discoursally available contrast set." I submit therefore that they rely on a context-given or context-linked descriptive part. Under 'context-linked' I include 'expected to occur in a given context', as is the case of the class 'museums' in (21):

(21) În Grecia am văzut multe ruine, însă muzee n-am vizitat
In Greece have.1 seen many ruins but museum not-have.1 visited
'In Greece, I saw a lot of ruins, but museums, I didn't visit.'

Quantificational DPs, like partitives, can be topicalized on the basis of the existence in the (discourse or physical) context or in the common ground of the set on which the quantifier operates (presumably, this set functions as a topic, see Krifka 2001):

[10] Using Reinhart's (1981) file-card model, in which information is structured under headings which represent discourse referents, Erteschik-Shir (1997) defines topics as file cards that exist already in the common ground information and are somehow contextually salient (which she describes as being 'put on the top of the file'). Erteschik-Shir (2007) characterizes topics as *given*, as opposed to *old* (previously mentioned): "Old means that the referent has been mentioned in the conversation; given, however, means that the hearer has the referent in mind or, in Strawson's words, knowledge in the possession of an audience. We should therefore [...] conclude that topics must be given" (Erteschik-Shir 2007: 18). As I explained above, I use the term *given* differently, with a more restricted meaning, as involving a higher contextual availability, which licenses destressing (see Schwarzschild 1999, Selkirk 2008, Rochemont 2013, 2016).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(22) Fiecare casă o vopsiseră în altă culoare.
each house CL.ACC had-painted.3PL in another color
'They had painted each house in a different color.'

In conclusion, in order to attest the existence of non-topical subjects in SV orders, we have to look at indefinites that are neither specific, nor generic, nor contrastive, nor including a context-linked descriptive part. Examples of indefinite preverbal subjects satisfying this requirement can be found; in each case, we will support the claim that the subject is not topical by showing that if the relevant DP is not a subject, it cannot occur preverbally by topicalization.

A case in point are bare existential quantifiers (used as an argument for the existence of non-topical subjects by Motapanyane 1994); thus, (23)a, (24)a show a non-partitive, non-specific *cineva* 'somebody' as preverbal subject; a non-subject *cineva* cannot be fronted in the same neutral environments (i.e., without narrow focus), as can be seen in (23)b,c, (24)b; (23)c is possible if *cineva* is partitive and specific, referring to a person from a known set of people:

(23) a. Cineva îi aduce flori [Context: somebody receives flowers
somebody 3S.DAT brings flowers from an unidentified person]
'Somebody brings her flowers.'
b. # Pe cineva aşteaptă de fiecare dată
DOM somebody waits every time
c. # De la cineva primeşte flori (with non-specific *cineva*)
from somebody receives flowers

(24) a. Dacă **cineva** îți va reproşa că n-ai citit toată
if somebody you.DAT will reproach that not-have.2SG read all
bibliografia, spune-i că nu se găsea la bibliotecă.
bibliography-the tell.IMPV-him.DAT that not REFL found at library
'If somebody reproaches you with not having read all the bibliography, tell them it could not be found in the library.'
b. ?? Dacă **cuiva** (îi) vom arăta asta, nu va crede că am
if somebody.DAT CL.DAT will.1PL show this not will.3SG believe that have.1
făcut-o noi
done-it we
Intended meaning: 'If you show somebody this, they will not believe that we did it ourselves.'

Further evidence that the subject in these cases is not a topic comes from the fact that it cannot undergo long-distance topicalization (see (25)) or occur before a wh-item (see (26), as well as (8)):

(25) a. Cineva taie lemne [out-of-the-blue context: What's that noise?]
somebody is-cutting woods
b. # Cineva cred că taie lemne
somebody think.1SG that is-cutting woods

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(26) a. Cred că cineva a vrut să ne facă rău
think.1SG that somebody has wanted SBJV us.DAT do.3 harm
'I think somebody wanted to harm us.'
b. (*Cineva) când a vrut (cineva) să ne facă rău?
somebody when has wanted somebody SBJV us.DAT do.3 harm

Topic fronting of bare quantifiers is possible only in specific environments, which involve verum focus (see (27)). As shown in Giurgea (2015), these example involve contrastive topicalization of a generalized quantifier; the contrast is realized between the weakest alternative in a series, whose truth value is presented as certain, and stronger alternatives (e.g. having 'many', 'all', or a specific individual in the place of the topic), whose truth value is unknown. The possibility of an intervening subject or topic between the fronted quantifier and the verb in (27)b–c, as well as the stress pattern, show that this fronting is not a type of focalization and does not target the same position as fronted foci (contra Alboiu 2002)[11]:

(27) a. Ceva i-a SPUS el Mariei
something CL.DAT-has told he Maria.DAT
'He (must have) told Maria something.'
b. Ceva el ŞTIE.
something he knows
c. Ceva cu el s-a-NTÂMPLAT
something with him REFL-has-happened
'Something must have happened to him.'

As in examples (23)-(26) there is no verum focus, fronting of *cineva* cannot be explained by the type of topicalization illustrated in (27). This is why non-subject bare quantifiers cannot front in those cases[12].

[11] Arregi (2003) shows the same for Spanish, contra Zubizarreta (1998); Giurgea (2015) elaborates on the semantics of the construction and proposes an account for the correlation with verum focus.

[12] Cornilescu (1997: 32) used examples of the type in (27) as arguments against Motapanyane's (1989) claim that preverbal subject *cineva* 'somebody' is evidence for an A-position for preverbal subjects. As we have seen, the argument does not hold, because fronted non-subject bare existential quantifiers require special contexts, in which they can function as contrastive topics. Cornilescu's examples are, indeed, read with verum focus, except one which has scalar focus on an argument:

(i) Ceva chiar şi Maria ştie la matematică.
something even Maria knows at mathematics
'Even Maria knows something at maths.'

Although I would prefer to have both verum and subject focus here (*Ceva ŞTIE chiar şi MARIA la matematică*), I think (i) may be possible, but only if the current topic of discussion is how good students are at maths; the claim the speaker supports is that any student knows at least something – and here we have the contrast with stronger alternatives, which involve knowledge (by a student) of specific things or of a considerable part of the matter. In order to support this minimal

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Bare plurals are also known to be non-specific indefinites in Romanian. They can occur without being given, in all-new contexts, as preverbal subjects (provided they are complex, i.e. consist of more than just the head noun[13]); if they are not subjects, they cannot be fronted in such environments (see (28)b); long distance topicalization is also excluded (see (28)c):

(28) a. Valuri uriaşe loveau stâncile
waves giant were-hitting rocks-the
b. # Câmpuri întinse lumina luna
fields wide threw-light-on moon-the
c. # Valuri uriaşe mă tem că lovesc stâncile
waves giant 1.REFL be-afraid.1SG that are-hitting rocks-the

A third case in point is scopally non-specific indefinites in all-new neutral contexts (*câte*, in (29), is a co-variation marker, signaling that the DP has narrow scope with respect to *fiecare* 'each')[14]:

(29) a. Câte un leu străjuia fiecare intrare
DISTR a lion guarded each entry

claim, the speaker proposes the least likely choice of a student – hence the scalar focus *chiar şi Maria* 'even Maria'. I think this interpretation still involves verum focus on *ştie*, but as a secondary occurrence focus (a focus structure which is given in the context), which therefore does not bear the main stress.

Moreover, Cornilescu treats fronted existential quantifiers as foci, but this is not supported by prosody: the main stress, followed by destressing, never occurs on the quantifier, but has to occur on an element after it:

(i) a. La urma urmei, chiar şi Maria pe cineva TOT va trebui să invite
b. * La urma urmei, chiar şi Maria pe CINEVA tot va trebui să invite
after all even Maria DOM somebody still will have SJBV invite
'After all, even Maria still will have to invite somebody.'

(ii) a. Ceva chiar şi MARIA ştie la matematică
b. *CEVA chiar şi Maria ştie la matematică
'Even Maria knows something at maths.'

The bare quantifier has at most a low-high pitch reminiscent of the Germanic 'B-accent' that marks contrastive topics.

[13] This constraint, which is also found in other Romance languages (see Delfitto, Schroten 1992, Longobardi 1994, a.o.), is yet unexplained. For an overview of the Romanian data, see Dobrovie-Sorin (2013). Alboiu (2002: ch.2, fn.2) finds that even simplex bare plurals are allowed, in descriptions, if the sentence contains a locative phrase:

(i) Ţigănci vând flori *(pe la colţuri de stradă) (Alboiu 2002, ch. 2, fn. 2)
gypsies(F) sell flowers on at corner of street
'Gypsy women sell flowers at street corners.'

[14] Narrow scope indefinites have also been used as an argument against a topic status of preverbal subjects in Spanish by Suñer (2003). Some of her examples may be treated as an instance of the quantifier topic type discussed in (27), but others are conclusive, corresponding to the Romanian data in (29)–(33).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

'A lion guarded every entry.'
b. # Câte două persoane invitase fiecare
DISTR two persons had-invited everybody
Intended meaning: 'Everybody had invited two persons (each).'

(30) a. O umbră însoțea fiecare figură
a shadow accompanied every figure
b. # O umbră lăsa fiecare figură
a shadow left every figure
Intended meaning: 'Every figure left a shadow.'
c. # O umbră cred că însoțea fiecare figură
a shadow think.1SG that accompanied every figure

Here are attested examples of new, non-specific indefinites in descriptive and narrative contexts – (31) with bare nouns, (32) with indefinite determiners; (33) shows a narrow scope indefinite marked by *câte*:

(31) Bărbați şi femei în port țărănesc (...) trec călare sau pe lângă
men and women in costume peasant.ADJ are-passing riding or beside
caii cu desagi legați unul după altul...
horses-the with saddlebags bound one behind other
'Men and women in folk costume are passing riding or alongside the horses carrying saddlebags bound one behind the other.' (G. Călinescu, *Ion Creangă*, p. 34)

(32) Scena rămâne în întuneric. **O rază de lună** se frânge în fereastră.
scene-the remains in darkness a ray of moon REFL breaks in window
'The scene remains dark. A moon ray breaks into the window.'
(T. Muşatescu, *Sosesc deseară*, p. 18)

(33) Câte un „bonjurist" răpea din când în când pe Eminescu la un pahar de vin.
DISTR a „bonjourist" took-out from-time-to-time DOM Eminescu to a glass of wine
'From time to time some "bonjourist" or other took out Eminescu for a glass of wine.'
(G. Călinescu, *Viața lui Mihai Eminescu*, p. 298)

Examples with negative DPs are more disputable, because the negative is often under focus, in which case its preverbal placement can be analyzed as focalization. I found however attested examples in which the context does not support a narrow focus interpretation (the fronted focus must be a narrow focus, as shown by the obligatory destressing of the following material):

(34) Nimeni în lume nu poate face nimic pentru mine. (Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 124)
nobody in world not can do nothing for me
'Nobody in the world can do anything for me.'

4. CONSTRAINTS ON VS IN UNMARKED SENTENCES

In section 2 we have shown that the postverbal placement of the subject may be used to indicate that the subject is not a topic, and in this case we find two situations with respect to topic marking: either there is an overt topicalized phrase

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(see (10)), or the sentence is V-initial (see (9), (11)). Leaving aside sentences with narrow focus (on which see section 5 below, (46)–(47)), VS sentences with no fronted topic have been characterized as presentational or thetic sentences – traditionally defined as sentences without a topic. It has been noticed that such sentences are constrained, a fact which contributes to the frequency of SV orders in Romanian.

Thus, presentational sentences only allow episodic predications. Generic, iterative and I-level predications are excluded (see Soare 2009, Giurgea, Remberger 2009, 2012; É. Kiss 2002 for Hungarian). This is illustrated by the following contrasting pairs, which have the same general syntactic pattern, but differ in situation type:

(35) a. Ia uite! Trec rândunicile în zbor spre țările calde.
look are-passing swallows-the in flight towards countries-the warm
'Look! The swallows are flying towards the warm countries.'
b. (Rândunicile) zboară (#rândunicile) toamna spre țările calde.
swallows-the fly swallows-the autumn-the towards countries-the warm
'Swallows fly towards the warm countries in autumn.'

(36) a. Cântă copiii un trio. [context: 'What is that music?']
are-playing.3PL children-the a trio
'The children are playing a trio'
b. # Cântă copiii muzică de cameră sâmbăta seara. (with neutral intonation)
play.3PL children-the music of chamber Saturday-the evening
'The children play chamber music on Saturday evenings'

(37) a. (Nichelul) este (#nichelul) un metal magnetic. (Soare 2009: pp. 57-58)
nickel-the is nickel-the a metal magnetic
b. E maică-sa bolnavă.
is mother-his ill
'His mother is ill.'

These restrictions can be explained by the account of presentational sentences proposed by Gundel (1974) and further developed by Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007) (see also Cohen, Erteschik-Shir 2002):

(38) a. all sentences have a topic
b. in presentationals, the spatio-temporal coordinates of the described event function as the topic – the so-called 'Stage topic'

Presentationals typically introduce events into contextually given locations. The 'what happened' test, often used for 'out-of-the-blue' contexts, does not offer a completely all-new context, but rather a context where the time/place coordinates are given, although they may remain covert. The 'here' and 'now' of the current discourse constitute the stage topic. (38)a can be interpreted as a requirement of anchoring the information in the common ground: this anchoring can be achieved via an argument, which will then function as a topic (see section 3 on the

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

presupposition of existence as a condition for topicality), or else via the spatio-temporal location of the event.

I-level predicates and generics do not involve particular locations which may function as stage topics. Therefore, presentational constructions are disallowed.

As known since Milsark (1974, 1977), I-level predicates allow definite and quantificational subjects, but require indefinites to be either specific, via partitivity or via description, or generic:

(39) a. A girl is blond (partitive: *a girl = one of the girls*)
b. A woman I know is bald (indefinite specific via description)
c. A Frenchmen is intelligent (either partitive or generic)

Kratzer (1995) described I-level predicates as predicates that do not introduce a Location argument. On this view, assuming that the stage topic is the Location argument, the restrictions on the subject follow from (38)a: as there is no stage topic, the subject must be the topic and therefore, if indefinite, it must be specific. In view of the generic readings, Erteschik-Shir (1997) proposes that these predicates only disallow *specific* stage-topics, allowing generic stage topics. The default stage topic, offered by the 'here and now of the discourse', is a specific stage topic – therefore these predicates rule out a presentational construal. A generic stage topic is a kind of situations, which defines the domain of the quantification over situations that generic and iterative sentences express (the restrictor of the quantifier over situations). This kind of situations needs to be identified by overt material, which thus belongs to the topic domain[15] – in (39)c, this is the class of Frenchmen (situations involving a member of this class are considered). Note indeed that VS orders in (35)b–(36)b are possible if an adverbial that defines the kind of situations considered occurs preverbally:

(40) a. Toamna zboară rândunicile spre țările calde.
autumn-the fly swallows-the towards countries-the warm
'In autumn, swallows fly towards the warm countries.'
b. Aici cântă copiii muzică de cameră sâmbăta seara.
here play children-the music of chamber Saturday-the evening-the
'Here the children play chamber music on Saturday evenings.'

The notion of stage topic can be further clarified if we consider Klein's (2008) theory of topics. He proposes that sentences are always evaluated with

[15] Note indeed that the split into Restriction and Nuclear Scope, characteristic of quantifications over situations, is often marked by putting restrictive material into the preverbal field, as a type of topic. See Erteschik-Shir (1997) and the remarks immediately below, under (40), for the correlation between restriction and topicality.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

respect to a situation, called 'topic situation'[16], which is often pragmatically identified ('external identification') but can also be identified using linguistic material; it is this material which corresponds to the traditional notion of topic. Under this view, a specific implicit stage topic means that the spatio-temporal coordinates of the speech act or of the situation topic of the previous discourse suffice to identify the situation topic of the sentence[17]. In generics, the topic situation is overtly specified via the restriction – therefore restrictions behave as topics. Arguments, as parts of a situation, can also serve to identify the topic situation. As the topic situation is the frame with respect to which the sentence is evaluated, the presupposition of existence associated to topical arguments follows.

Following the insights in Kratzer (1995), predicates that disallow weak indefinites have been described as non-localizing, in the sense that they do not introduce a Location independent of the argument(s), nor express a spatial relation (see Dobrovie-Sorin, Giurgea 2015 and references therein). Among such predicates, some are S-level (this is the case of most non-verbal predicates; the exclusion of existential bare plurals, which are necessarily weak, constitutes a clear test, see (42)):

(41) A child is tired (*a child* is necessarily partitive)
(42) a. Students were tired/sad. (no existential reading)
b. * Erau {triști / îngrijorați / bolnavi} doctori. (Ro.)
were.3PL sad / worried / sick doctors

The absence of an independent location makes a presentational construal hard to obtain. However, since the predication is episodic, a stage topic is possible in the appropriate context. Indeed, if the event described by the predicate has clear effects in a given situation, whose spatio-temporal coordinates are context-given, presentational VS is allowed:

(43) a. E Maria supărată. [Context: what is that tension in the air?]
is Mary upset
'Mary is upset'

[16] See Klein (2008: 288): "In an utterance, a sentence base and a situation are brought together, and this is what happens when the sentence is made finite. By uttering *It was snowing*, for example, the speaker asserts that a situation X has the properties [be snowing]. He or she ASSERTS something about X. In questions, the speaker challenges the interlocutor to assert something with respect to such an X, and in commands, he instructs the interlocutor to do something with respect to X". He considers crucial for the topic situation the topic time and the topic place, but also mentions topic entities and topic worlds as "features of a situation that may define the canvas" (p. 289).

[17] The implicit stage topic involves coordinates of various extents. Although they are quite narrow in run-of-the-mill episodic sentences, they can extend to a whole world in existential sentences. The use of particular predication structures in other null-subject-languages (see It. *ci*, Sp. *hay*) suggests that this extension must be signaled by the linguistic structure (which would be covert in Romanian, where no difference can be seen between presentational and existential VS).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

b. E Ion bolnav [Context: Why is everybody so worried?]
is Ion ill
'Ion is ill.'

The particular circumstances in which these orders are licensed support the hypothesis that presentationals rely on stage topics. Using Klein's notion of topic situation, the sentences in (43) bring additional information about the current topic situation (described in the context-setting part of the examples); their topic situation is characterized by the same spatio-temporal coordinates as the previously mentioned one; thus, these coordinates function as a stage topic. As this previous situation does not include the entities introduced in (43), they are not marked as topic-situation identifiers (but they could be: to the extent they are familiar to the hearer – they are proper names – they could be used as new topics, see the discussion in section 3).

5. AN ACCOUNT BASED ON A MULTIFUNCTIONAL POSITION

Adopting the principles in (38) and the assumption that topics may be covert, Giurgea and Remberger (2009, 2012, 2014) accounted for the data presented so far by assuming that the preverbal position is obligatorily projected, but can host items of various types: if it is not occupied by a wh- item or a focus, then either a topic or the closest argument occupies it (a 'multifunctional' SpecIP, hosting A-bar moved items but also subjects, has been proposed for other Romance languages by Zubizarreta (1998), Sheehan (2007), a.o.)[18]. Adopting the minimalist probe-goal framework, they encode this idea by assuming the existence of an always active attracting feature ('probe' with an associated EPP) on the verbal functional head that projects this position as a specifier; this head, first identified with T, was subsequently taken to be Fin, in order to accommodate mood particles and negation in projections above T (the preverbal position precedes negation and the subjunctive particle *să*[19]). Presentational VS are assumed to rely on a null adverbial

[18] When there are more than one fronted preverbal elements, dedicated optional peripheral heads like in the cartographic framework can be assumed – e.g., a Top head higher than Fin, if the items preceding the last one are topics. A more problematic case is the Foc-Wh order (used to correct a misunderstood wh-question), possible with a Foc which otherwise does not license Foc-X-V. As the impossibility of an intervening X indicates that [uFoc] is on Fin, for the order Foc-Wh we may assume multiple probes on Fin; alternatively, adopting the idea of syncretic heads (see Giorgi, Pianesi 1997), we may assume that Foc and Fin project syncretically except in certain cases when Fin bears [uWh] (which might be implemented via a Foc head that selects a [uWh] Fin).

[19] It is possible that at least some types of subjunctives lack this position, behaving more like non-finite clauses. This issue cannot be addressed in the space of this article.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

STAGE carrying the topic feature (Aboutness) (see (44)c)[20]; in sentences with null subjects, *pro* may function as a topic (see (44)b); if the sentence contains a clitic object and there is no overt preverbal element, a *pro* associated to this clitic is assumed to satisfy uAbout – see (44)h and the example (45); the prefix u- on probes (from the Chomskyan terms 'uninterpretable' or 'unvalued') is meant here only to indicate that this is an attracting feature, which must be checked by remerge with an item that bears that feature (the exact formal implementation of this raising mechanism is not a concern of this paper[21]):

(44)	Order	Preverbal position (SpecFin)	Probe on Fin
	a. S V, X V S	topic S/X	uAbout
	b. V (X), null S	(topic) *pro*	uAbout
	c. V S (X)	topic STAGE	uAbout
	d. S V X	non-topical S	uD (attracting the closest argument)[22]
	e. wh V S (X)	wh-item	uWh
	f. Foc V S	Focus	uFoc
	h. Cl-V S	(topic) object *pro*	uAbout

(45) Ei, Vica, e un tablou de valoare, **l**-a făcut un pictor de pe vremuri.
eh Vica is a painting of value it.ACC-has made a painter of old-times
'Eh, Vica, it's a valuable painting, a painter of the old times made it.'
(G. Adameşteanu, *Dimineață pierdută*, p. 27)

[20] A null stage topic for presentationals has also been assumed by É. Kiss (2002) for Hungarian: she proposes that the topic must be overtly marked by being placed in SpecTopP and V-initial presentational sentences have the spatio-temporal location of the event as the topic: "eventive sentences with no visible constituent in SpecTop predicate about the situational or contextual restriction on their event variable" (Kiss 2002: 115). Compared to the multifunctional head hypothesis presented in this section, her account is more restrictive, in the sense that obligatory filling is correlated to a specific function – topic. But she is forced to restrict the requirement of filling SpecTop to certain types of sentences, which 'express predication': she claims that sentences with focus fronting, quantifier fronting, interrogatives and optatives lack this requirement because they express other logical operations (quantification, interrogation etc.). We will briefly discuss how a similar approach can be applied to Romanian in section 8.

The idea that all-new VS sentences rely on a null argument functioning as a topic originates in Calabrese (1992), who proposed, for Italian, a null event argument; Saccon (1993), Pinto (1997), Tortora (2001), and Sheehan (2007, 2010) characterized it as a null locative argument.

[21] Following Mensching (2009), Giurgea and Remberger describe IS-probes as unvalued features (uAbout, uFoc) that search for a goal specified for that feature (e.g. +About, +Foc) and can take only one value, if they find a matching goal; they trigger the goal's raising (remerge) due to an attracting specification – an EPP sub-feature. Rizzi (2006) envisages this type of description for his criterial features, but prefers a simpler account, in which criterial features are interpretable, although they attract.

[22] This probe can also derive the SV order with a topical preverbal S, if the use of uD is not a last resort. For more on this issue, see section 6.1.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

This analysis rules out V-initial orders that cannot be interpreted as presentationals and do not involve a null or clitic argument. It explains thus the restrictions on neutral VS-orders discussed in section 4. However, V-initial VS-orders where S is narrow focus appear to have a wider distribution than neutral VS orders. Thus, I-level predicates, which rule out V-initial VS in all-new contexts, allow a postverbal subject under narrow focus:

(46) Ştie MARIA franceză / Ştie franceză (şi) MARIA.
knows Maria French knows French (also) Maria
'MARIA speaks French.'

As this order cannot involve the uD, uFoc or uWh probe, we expect the uAbout probe to be active. But what could be the topic in these contexts, if a stage topic is excluded with I-level predicates? If the topic is a way of anchoring information in the common ground (see Erteschik-Shir 1997), we may consider that the given part of the sentence, the property *speak French*, functions as a topic – it is known that property-denoting expressions, including VPs, can appear as topicalized phrases:

(47) De ştiut franceză, ştie Maria.
SUP know.SUP French knows Maria
'As for knowing French, Maria does.'

However, in (46) we do not find a constituent with this denotation at the beginning of the sentence. Giurgea and Remberger propose that the verb, as part of a Given constituent, satisfies a uGiven probe here in a head-head configuration (if Fin is not part of the verbal complex head, it must be assumed that the verbal complex raises to Fin). However, a deeper consideration of these contexts is needed before adding another probe and type of configuration to the list in (44). The context of (46) contains as a potential antecedent for focus a question under discussion of the form 'who (among a restricted set of people) knows French'. Possibly, this antecedent provides a salient situation (containing people which may or may not speak French) whose spatio-temporal coordinates can function as a Stage topic, or the topic is indeed the property 'know French', represented by the VP, and the V, as the head of the VP, bears About and can check the uAbout probe in a head-head configuration.

One might object that with I-level predicates, the subject is always the topic, even when under narrow focus. But there is a piece of evidence that narrow-focused subjects of I-level predicates are not (or need not be) topics. As noticed by

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Strawson (1964), definite descriptions which fail to refer give rise to truth-value gaps only when they function as topics – see (48) – which he explains by the role played by the topic in assessing truth:

(48) a. The King of France is bald (truth-value gap)
b. The exhibition was visited by the King of France (false)

Strawson notices that the truth value gap appears if (48)a has neutral intonation, in which case the subject is the topic. If *the king of France* bears focal stress, licensed by a context such as in (49), the sentence becomes false:

(49) [Context: What bald notables are there?]
The King of FRANCE is bald. (false)

We may thus conclude that, although *bald* is an I-level predicate, it can have a non-topical subject, if the context forces narrow focus of the subject.

6. THE DISTRIBUTION OF NON-TOPICAL PREVERBAL SUBJECTS

The system in (44) raises a number of questions, which I will address in the following sections. First, one may be tempted to eliminate the probe attracting the closest argument, in favor of the uAbout probe: why not assume that, in the absence of a suitable topic, a purely formal [About] feature is assigned to the closest argument, so that the uAbout probe can be satisfied? Giurgea and Remberger (2012) suggest this as a possibility. In different terms, such a position is adopted by Dobrovie-Sorin (1987: 330–331), who recognizes an asymmetry between subjects and other elements w.r.t. preverbal placement in out-of-the-blue contexts, but treats all preverbal subjects, as well as topicalized elements, as 'Themes' (a term corresponding to 'topic' as used here), considering that subjects are more easily 'thematized'. This would imply that the types of subjects that have been described in section 3 as non-topical have the same IS formal marking as run-of-the-mill topics.

I will not adopt this position, because I consider that extending notions such as aboutness or theme to narrow scope indefinites such as in (29)a, (30)a or negative quantifiers such as (34) deprives this notion of any significant content. Moreover, certain facts, which I will present in what follows, indicate that there is no prosodic correlate for a putative extended [about] feature. Thus, as we shall see, certain environments rule out non-topical preverbal subjects, due to a prosodic conflict; topical subjects, even if they are new, do not trigger this conflict, as their prosodic properties are different.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Let us now introduce these further constraints on non-topical preverbal subjects.

6.1. Constraints on SV with non-topical S: a prosodic account

Certain environments do not allow a non-topical preverbal S. Thus, in the following examples – all with intransitive verbs – VS is the only possible order in a presentational context:

(50) a. A telefonat Maria / # Maria a telefonat (out-of-the-blue)
has phoned Maria Maria has phoned
b. A venit Maria / # Maria a venit
has come Maria Maria has come
c. S-a stricat un bec în sufragerie / # Un bec s-a stricat în sufragerie
REFL-has broken a bulb in dining-room a bulb REFL-has broken in dining-room
d. A murit papa (azi dimineață) / #Papa a murit (azi dimineață)
has died pope-the this morning pope-the has died this morning
e. Plânge copilul / # Copilul plânge
is-crying child-the child-the is-crying

Although we often find this situation with unaccusatives, it is also encountered with some unergatives (see (50)a,e). As can be seen from the examples, there is no definiteness constraint on the subject. Moreover, whereas for similar judgments about the correspondent of (50)a in Italian it has been assumed that *telefonare* takes a null locative (Goal) which occupies the subject position (Pinto 1997, Tortora 2001), this account does not extend to the unergative (50)e, nor to the unaccusatives in c-d.

With indefinites, the requirement that S is topic in certain SV orders explains why the preverbal indefinite must be partitive in (51)b, as opposed to (51)a (as noticed by Pinto (1997) for Italian and Solà i Pujols (1992) for Catalan):

(51) a. S-a scufundat o navă (out-of-the-blue, *o navă* new indefinite)
REFL-has sunk a ship
'A SHIP sank.'
b. O navă s-a scufundat (*o navă* partitive)
a ship REFL-has sunk
'A/One ship SANK.'

In view of these data, Giurgea and Remberger (2012) hypothesized that there is a preference of the [About] probe over the [D] probe, the latter being used as a Last Resort when no suitable goal for the About probe is found, because the null Stage adverbial is not projected. But it is not clear at all why STAGE can always be projected in the contexts in (50)–(51), but can fail to be projected in the contexts

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

discussed in section 3 (examples (23)–(26) or (28)–(32)). If non-topical preverbal subjects were a last resort, we would not expect to find them when the clause contains a context-given item, as this item would certainly qualify as a topic. But we do find non-topical preverbal subjects in such contexts (see also (33) above):

(52) O prezumție savuroasă cuprinde de aici încolo **pe diacon**.
a conceit delicious seizes from now on DOM deacon
'From now on a delicious conceit seizes the deacon.' (Călinescu, *Ion Creangă*, 63)

After examining the various environments in which SV orders with non-topical S are excluded, I have come to the following generalization:

(53) SV with non-topical S is infelicitous if V is sentence-final, or at most followed by certain adjuncts

Indeed, in most of the examples cited so far, V is sentence-final. By contrast, in all the examples of SV with non-topical S presented in section 3 and in this section, V is followed by one or more constituents: S-V-O in (23)a, (28)a, (25)a, (29)a, (30)a, (52); S-V-CP in (24)a, (26)a; S-V-[Adv&PP] in (31); S-V-PP in (32); S-V-Adv-O-PP in (33); S-V-O-PP in (34).

A contrast between SVX and SV in presentational contexts has also been noticed by Soare (2009):

(54) a. Un copil a căzut de pe scară. / # Un copil a căzut. (Soare 2009:57, ex. 53)
a child has fallen from on ladder a child has fallen
'A child has fallen off the ladder. / A child has fallen down'.
b. Un copil plânge în parc. / # Un copil plânge.
a baby is-crying in park a baby is-crying
'A baby is crying in the park. / A baby is crying.'
c. Hoții au spart un butic Bouchard azi noapte.
thieves-the have broken-into a boutique Bouchard last evening
'The thieves broke into a Bouchard boutique last evening.'

The way (53) is stated strongly suggests a prosody-based account. I propose that there is no 'preference' in choosing between the uAbout and uD probe – the latter is not a Last Resort – and SV-orders with non-topical S are ruled out in certain environments as a result of conflicting prosodic requirements. My account is based on the observation that examples where thetic SV is ruled out in Romanian mostly correspond, in English, with thetic sentences that end in a destressed verb[23]:

[23] According to Ladd (2008: 249), Bolinger (1954) first noticed that "the nuances of VS versus SV order in Spanish and Italian are generally extremely very similar to the nuances of unaccented versus accented intransitive predicates in English".

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(55) a. JOHNSON died
a´. A murit Johnson / # Johnson a murit
has died Johnson Johnson has died
b. The BABY's crying
b´. Plânge copilul / # Copilul plânge
cries child-the child-the cries
c. Our DOG's disappeared
c´. (Ne)-a dispărut câinele / # Câinele (ne-)a dispărut
(us.DAT)-has disappeared dog-the dog-the (us.DAT)-has disappeard
d. A new VIRUS was discovered
d´. A fost descoperit un nou virus / # Un nou virus a fost descoperit
has been discovered a new virus / a new virus has been discovered
e. Your MOTHER telephoned
e´. A sunat maică-ta / # Maică-ta a sunat
has called mother-your mother-your has called
f. The FRIDGE blew up
f´. A explodat frigiderul / # Frigiderul a explodat
has exploded frigde-the fridge-the has exploded

Destressing of the verb here contravenes the general principle that the rightmost new element bears nuclear stress. The explanation of this phenomenon is still controversial (see Rochemont 2013 for an overview of the accounts and their problems). I would tentatively follow Büring's (2012) account here. Assuming that stress placement is established via prominence rules that apply inside certain domains – here, prosodic phrases – he explains the English stress pattern, which extends to German V-final environments, by a general principle according to which predicates are less prominent than arguments. This rule is overridden by the prosodic rules which perform destressing of the Given and assign prominence to a narrow focus. These stronger rules do not concern us here, as we are dealing with all-new contexts.

My proposal is that the principles that underlie destressing of the final V in English and German thetic sentences are also operative in Romanian, producing the same stress pattern as in English for the Romanian SV versions of (55), but this pattern violates another principle, which is operative in Romanian but not in Germanic. As a result, SV is excluded, and the VS order, which can also be generated by the syntax of Romanian, is resorted to. Here are the prosodic constraints I assume – the first two also found in Germanic, the third specific to Romanian (and, probably, other Romance languages):

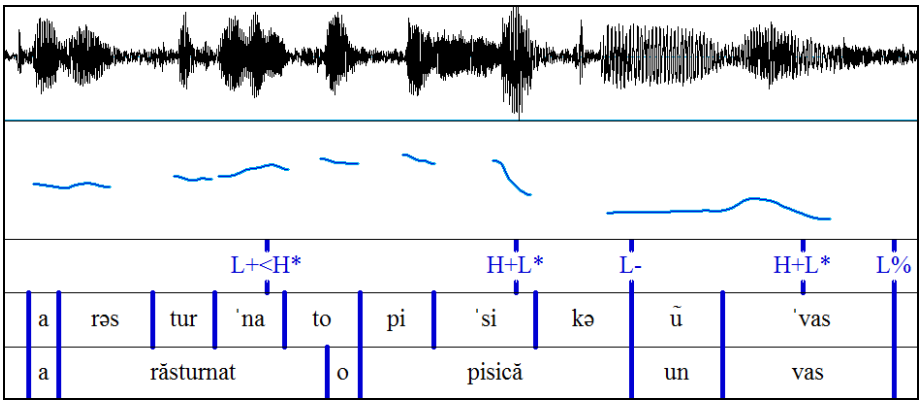
(56) a. Predicates are integrated into a wider prosodic phrase, wherever possible[24] (Predicate Integration)

[24] Büring refers to 'predicates' rather than 'verbs' or 'heads' because some XP constituents semantically functioning as predicates might be destressed:

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

b. Inside a prosodic phrase, the predicate is less prominent than the arguments and heavy adjuncts (Predicate Weakness)[25]
c. In a prosodic phrase, the main stress falls on the last new prosodic word (Novelty Marking)

Independent evidence that (56)a is operative in Romanian comes from the difference in stressing between XY and VY sequences, where all elements are new. If X and Y are arguments, the normal stress pattern involves a falling (normally H+L*) tone on both X and Y – in the following, I will indicate falling tones (H+L* and H*+L) with capitals (the example (57) has been tested on 6 speakers, all of which produced the same intonational pattern, one of which is exemplified here, analyzed using Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2012)):



(57) A răsturnat o piSIcă un VAS
has turned-over a cat a vase
'A cat turned over a vase.'

(i) Your COAT's on fire.
(ii) Your EYES are red.
Likewise, in Romanian, SVX in which (VX) forms an idiom behaves like SV with V-final:
(iii) Are loc o şedinţă / # O şedinţă are loc (out-of-the-blue context)
has place a meeting a meeting takes place
'A MEETING is taking place.'

[25] The proposal that destressing of new predicates is contingent on their forming a prosodic constituent with an argument is due to Gussenhoven (1983), who uses the term 'focus domain'. The term 'prosodic phrase' that I use corresponds to Pierrehumbert's (1980) 'intermediate phrase'. A treatment of Gussehoven's 'focus domains' as intermediate phrases can be found in Beckman (1996). The observation that arguments are more prominent than verbs goes back to Schmerling (1976).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

However, in VY only Y receives a H+L* tone; a second H+L* tone on V sounds awkward[26]:

(58) a intrat o piSIcă / # a inTRAT o piSIcă / # A răsturNAT o piSIcă un VAS
has entered a cat has entered a cat has turned-over a cat a vase
'A cat came in / turned over a vase.'

Assuming that each prosodic phrase in a broad focus declarative has a H+L* main stress (decomposable into a H* pitch accent and a L phrase accent[27]), this contrast can be explained if V must be integrated into a wider prosodic phrase[28]:

(59) (a răsturnat o piSIcă)$_{\phi}$ (un VAS)$_{\phi}$
(a intrat o piSIcă)$_{\phi}$
(a răsturNAT)$_{\phi}$ (o piSIcă)$_{\phi}$ (un VAS)$_{\phi}$
(a inTRAT)$_{\phi}$ (o piSIcă)$_{\phi}$

[26] According to Göbbel (2003:351–352), a prenuclear V may distinguish between new (marked by a H* tone) vs. given (no peak), in sentences such as *vine Mariana* 'Mariana is coming':

H* H+!H* L%
(i) Vine Mariana : out-of-the-blue (Göbbel 2003: 351–352, ex. 12b)
H+!H* L%
(ii) Vine Mariana : narrow focus on Mariana (Göbbel 2003: 346–347, ex. 7a)

What is crucial for my account is that no phrasal -L tone appears after V in (i) and similar examples (a judgment confirmed by Göbbel (2003: 355–360)). The presence of a peak on V does not contravene Predicate Weakness, because a prenuclear accent is in principle less prominent than the last accent in the phrase, which constitutes the 'nucleus' (see Ladd 2008: chapter 7, Büring 2012). Moreover, Göbbel also reports examples where a new prenuclear V has no stress at all (see ex. 14b on page 352, 37–41 on pp. 366–367; this is regular when V is placed between two arguments, see pp. 363–365) and when a given prenuclear V bears a H* tone (ex. 22b on page 358), which shows that prenuclear accents are not good indicators of prominence in general (as has been noticed for English, see Ladd 2008, loc.cit.).

[27] On the decomposition of falling nuclear stresses into a high nuclear tone and a low phrasal tone, see Pierrehumbert (1980), Grice et al. (2000). On the falling character of the nuclear stress in Romanian unmarked declaratives, see Göbbel (2003:342), who analyzes it as H+!H* or H+L* (a high leading tone followed by a fall on the stressed syllable), followed by a L boundary tone.

[28] Regarding the stress pattern in (57)–(59), (60), (61), the fact that a falling tone appears on each new argument has also been noticed for English by Beckman (1996), as shown by the contrast between (i) and (ii) below, where (i), which has destressing of the given *the book*, has a peak on either *sent* or *the book*, but differs from (ii) – where the object is new – in that this peak is not followed by a marked fall:

(i) She sent the book to MAry. (*sent* or *book* bear H*)
(ii) She sent a BOOK to MAry. (*book* bears H*L)

For H*L tones on subjects as signaling a new referent (cf. the Ro. (60) for preverbal subjects), cf. Ladd (2008: 300), who notes the following contrast in English:

(i) [Context: A: Everything OK after your operation? B: Don't talk to me about it!
H* H* H* L L%
a. The butcher charged me a thousand bucks! : epithet reading of *the butcher*
H*L H* H* L L%
b. # The butcher charged me a thousand bucks! : *the butcher* is a new referent

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Let us now see how the constraints in (56) explain the possible and impossible orders in presentationals. In SVX, V forms a p-phrase with X, obeying (56)a; HL stress on X conforms to (56)b–c:

(60) (o PAsăre)$_\phi$ (a intrat pe feREAStră)$_\phi$
a bird has entered through window

Similarly for VSX, where V forms a p-phrase with S:

(61) (a intrat o PAsăre)$_\phi$ (pe feREAStră)$_\phi$

SV with stressed V and S obeys (56)b–c, but not (56)a (Integration), as V is not integrated into a wider p-phrase:

(62) # (o PAsăre)$_\phi$ (a inTRAT)$_\phi$

SV with HL only on V is disallowed by (56)b (Predicate Weakness):

(63) # (O pasăre a inTRAT)$_\phi$

SV with destressed V obeys (56)a-b, but not (56)c – the additional principle which distinguishes Romanian from Germanic, which requires the last *new* p-word in a phrase to bear the main prominence:

(64) # (O PAsăre a intrat)$_\phi$

The VS order complies to all three conditions:

(65) (A intrat o PAsăre)$_\phi$

Note now that the stress pattern in (63) is in fact possible if the sentence is not presentational, but has a topical subject (in (63), this would be a partitive indefinite: *o pasăre* = 'one of the birds'). The account of this fact is twofold: first, the subject may qualify for givenness deaccentuation. As we already mentioned, Büring's constraint which we formulated as Predicate Weakness in (56)b is overridden by the rule that assigns less prominence to Given wrt non-Given (manifested in the postnuclear domain by destressing). Destressing of partitive indefinites is indeed possible in Romanian:

(66) Îl cuNOSC pe unul din vorbitori.
CL.ACC know.1SG DOM one from speakers
'I know one of the speakers / one speaker.'

For non-given topics, the explanation is that the topic is required to form a distinct p-phrase, characterized by a specific phrase tone (an H phrase tone).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Special intonational properties of fronted topics have been indeed noticed for Romance – see Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl (2007), who argue that in Italian the L+H* and H* tones are associated to aboutness-shift and contrastive topics, respectively. We may assume that the topic-comment partition must be signaled prosodically by creating distinct p-phrases for the topic and the comment[29]. Thus, with a new contrastive topic, we have the following stress-pattern (where small caps indicate a raising intonation, LH):

(67) MaRIa a veNIT.
Maria has come
'Maria came.'

The rule of Predicate Integration must apply after the rule that creates distinct prosodic phrases for the topic and comment parts. At this stage, V does not find a wider phrase in which it can be integrated (I added "wherever possible" to the formulation of the rule (56)a first of all in view of the cases in which the sentence consists of V alone, so integration in a wider domain is out of the question)[30].

L+H* H- H* L- L%
(68) $([\text{MaRIa}]_{\text{Topic}})_{\phi}$ $([\text{a veNIT}]_{\text{Comment}})_{\phi}$

One might also consider that topic phrases are in a higher domain than non-topical S, possibly in a different spell-out domain, which would put them outside the cyclic domain in which Predicate Integration applies – an account of this type

[29] See Ladd (2008: 277) and references therein for an account of the prosodic contrast asso-ciated to the two readings of (i) in terms of two vs. one prosodic phrases (intermediate-phrases, in his terms):

(i) Dogs must be carried [sign in the London underground]
a. Dogs must be CARRIED : anyone in the underground that brings a dog must carry it
b. DOGS must be carried : anyone in the underground must carry a dog

Dogs is new in both variants. But in the first case, as part of the restriction, it forms a different prosodic phrase. Therefore the predicate keeps its own accent (on the correlation between the restriction of generic operators and topicality, see section 4). In b, as the predicate and the argument are nodes inside a single prosodic phrase, a special rule that gives higher prominence to the argument applies, reversing the normal association of prosodic strength with the rightward node.

The same account of the absence of predicate destressing in generic sentences and with I-level predicates can be found in Göbbel (2003: 164).

[30] For this contour, see Dascălu-Jinga (2001: 46). She does not distinguish topical from non-topical preverbal subjects, but the examples she gives clearly involve topical preverbal subjects, having V-final SV with the verb *come*:

– ‾ – _
(i) Mama vine
mother is-coming

Göbbel (2003: 404) describes the topic contour as L* followed by a H boundary tone, but the example he gives has a given item as a topic. In any case, it is clear that topics form a prosodic/intermediate phrase with a high pitch at the end.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

has been proposed by Kratzer and Selkirk (2007) for similar accentual contrasts in German, where, as we can see in (69)–(70), final V destressing only appears in thetic sentences (the predicates in (70) disallow a presentational construal):

(69) a. Ich hab' gerade im Radio gehört, daß der König von BAyern etrunken ist
I have just in-the radio heard that the king of Bavaria drowned is
b. Ich hab' gelesen, daß die MeTALLarbereiter gestreikt haben
I have read that the metal-workers gone-on-strike have
(70) a. Ich hab' irgendwo gelesen, daß der König von BAyern geSPONnen hat
I have somewhere read that the king of Bavaria was-crazy
b. Ich hab' gehört, daß der RHEIN STINKT
I have heard that the Rhine stinks

However, Büring (2012) shows that integration can also apply non-locally, between V and an argument in SpecCP, which cast doubts on any account based on a cyclic application of the rules at different stages inside one and the same clause:

(71) (We need to know various things about you: Where are you from? What were your previous jobs? Which school did you go to?) How many LANguages do you speak?

I conclude therefore that we cannot dispense with a rule referring to the Topic-Comment partition of the clause in favor of a phase-based account. We can thus maintain the multifunctional position account, in which topical and non-topical subjects occupy the same position.

The examples in (50)c-d, where SV is banned although V is not final, but followed by an adjunct, are still in need of an explanation. It is clear that not all adjuncts disallow presentational SV, as shown in (31)–(32). In those examples, the postverbal material is long and the verb is not unergative. However, we can also find short locative adjuncts with unaccusatives in felicitous examples, like (60). The difference between (60) and (50)c–d seems to be that the adjunct is event-internal in the first case, specifying the path of the movement of the Theme ('through the window'), whereas in (50)c–d it is external, placing the whole event in space or time[31]. I suggest that in cases where the adjunct is event-external, Predicate Integration first obtains with the subject and the adjunct occurs in a distinct prosodic phrase, leading to infelicity in the SV prosodic phrase like with V-final SV.

In sum, Romanian, having more word order flexibility than Germanic languages, can make unrestricted use of the principle of Novelty Marking in (56)c, which allows a better match between prosody and IS: a deaccented V is interpreted as given, leading to a narrow focus interpretation of the S. In Germanic, a deaccented V is ambiguous (it can be given or new). This is a consequence of the strong word order constraints, namely, the preverbal placement of the subject, in English, and head-final VP/TP in German.

[31] See Maienborn (2000) on the distinction between internal and external locative modifiers.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

6.2. S in non-topical SV is raised as the highest argument, rather than as Nominative

The multifunctional account presented in section 5 used a uD probe for non-topical preverbal subjects. Why not the φ-probe that is assumed to license nominative case and is reflected in verbal agreement[32]? The reason is the behavior of non-canonical argument patterns, where the highest argument is not nominative, but an experiencer/affected dative (see *plăcea* 'like', *lipsi* 'lack', *i se întâmpla* 'happen', *îi păsa (de)* 'care about') or prepositional accusative (*durea* 'hurt'). Such arguments are often called 'quirky subjects'. Yet, we should note that they do not have all the subject properties of Icelandic quirky subjects (they are not controlled in obligatory control configurations, they do not behave as subjects w.r.t. raising constructions[33]). With such verbs, we do not find SV with non-topical (nominative) S. Moreover, examples of Dative-V orders with a non-specific Dative can be found – the attested example (72) can be contrasted with examples where the fronted dative is not a 'quirky S', which are impossible (see (73); the context does not allow the topicalization associated with verum focus which we discussed in section 3):

(72) drama celor doi adolescenți sinucigaşi putea fi evitată dacă **cuiva**
drama-the the.GEN two teenagers suicidal could be avoided if somebody.DAT
i-ar fi păsat de ei
CL.DAT-would have cared of them
'The two suicidal teenager's drama could have been avoided if somebody had cared for them'. (www.evz.ro, 8 dec. 2015)

(73) * ... dacă cuiva (i-)ar fi scris / povestit (ei)
if somebody.DAT (CL.DAT)-would.3PL have written / reported (they)

We can also use the test of sentences with two negative quantifiers, as these quantifiers cannot be topics and emphatic focalization of one of them excluding the other is unwarranted. There is a clear contrast between the order Dat-V-S (totally acceptable) and S-V-Dat (ungrammatical or at best marginal, for some speakers), showing that the argument that can occur preverbally without being focalized or topical is the dative experiencer and not the nominative subject[34]:

---

[32] As proposed by Hill (2002), and, for Spanish, by Sheehan (2010).

[33] These properties are illustrated by the following examples:

(i) Începi {să guşti /*să-(ți) placă} poezia
start.2SG SBJV taste.2SG / SBJV-(you.DAT) like.3 poetry-the
'You start to enjoy/*like poetry'

(ii) Candidatul era presupus {a cunoaşte / *a-(i) plăcea} literatura
candidate-the was supposed to know to-(CL.DAT) like literature-the
'The candidate was supposed to know/*like literature.'

[34] The clitic doubling of the 'quirky subject' is characteristic of these constructions: if we omit the clitic, (74)a becomes ungrammatical, whereas for (74)b, the acceptability improves, but the example is still not fully perfect, and some speakers even reject it:

(i) %? În România, nimic nu mai place nimănui de la o vreme.
in Romania nothing not more likes nobody.DAT since some time

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(74) a. În România, nimănui nu-i mai place nimic de la o vreme.
in Romania nobody.DAT not-CL.DAT more likes nothing since some time
'In Romania, recently nobody likes anything.'
b.?? În România, nimic nu-i mai place nimănui de la o vreme.
in Romania nothing not-CL.DAT more likes nobody.DAT since some time

Besides the word order facts, the idea that the oblique experiencer is the highest argument is supported by the fact that it does not allow reflexivization:

(75) a. * Maria îşi place sieşi
Maria CL.3.REFL.DAT likes 3.REFL.DAT
Intended meaning: 'Maria likes herself.'
b. Maria îşi dă sieşi premii
Maria CL.3.REFL.DAT gives 3.REFL.DAT prizes
'Maria awards herself prizes.'

7. ONE OR MORE HEADS? COMPARISON OF THE MULTI-FUNCTIONAL HEAD APPROACH WITH OTHER EPP-BASED ANALYSES

In section 5 I presented an account that encodes the various syntactic and pragmatic conditions on the preverbal placement of subjects by various probes associated to a single head at the border between the inflectional and peripheral domains of the clause.

This proposal is at odds with the main tenets of the cartographic framework (cf. Rizzi 1997, 2004a, 2006), according to which IS-related positions are specifiers of dedicated heads, the attracting features being borne by distinct heads (Top, Foc, or more specific heads for varieties of topics and foci as well as other peripheral phrases, such as Frame), which may in principle co-occur, are optional[35] and obey a general hierarchical order. In this framework, non-topical preverbal subjects are accommodated in a dedicated position SpecSubj, placed at the border between the periphery and inflectional domains. This head is lower than Fin, the head that defines the lower bound of the peripheral domain, so a fortiori it is lower than Top and Foc. It is above the inflection-related heads (Mood, AgrS, T etc.). Such a position was first proposed in Cardinaletti (1997), based on the fact that

'In Romania, recently nobody likes anything.'

This shows that *plăcea* can also take a canonical argument pattern, in which the dative is not a quirky subject, but this pattern is dispreferred, and even excluded for some speakers.

[35] According to Rizzi (1997), the only obligatory peripheral heads are Force and Fin, which define the upper and lower border of the left periphery.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

weak pronoun subjects cannot be separated from V by parentheticals, whereas other subjects (so-called 'strong') can be. She identifies two positions, SpecAgr$_1$P and SpecAgr$_2$P for strong and weak subjects respectively; in Cardinaletti (2004), Agr[1] has been renamed Subj. Cardinaletti brings evidence that SpecSubj accommodates not only nominative subjects, but also the 'quirky subjects' discussed in the previous section, and that this position is distinct from the topic position in Italian. Thus, only nominative subjects and oblique experiencers or PPs with an affectee interpretation can occur between a non-finite auxiliary raised to C and the lexical verb (see (76)) and before a subjunctive in a complementizer-less subordinate (see (77))[36]:

(76) a. Avendo Gianni telefonato a Maria... (It., Cardinaletti 1997: ex. 39a)
having Gianni called to Maria
b. Essendo a Gianni piaciuto molto il regalo, … (ibid., ex. 89a)
being to Gianni pleased much the gift
c. Essendo su Gianni caduta una grande disgrazia, ... (Cardinaletti 2004: ex. 31)
being on Gianni fallen a big disgrace
d. * Avendo a Roma vissuto per venti anni, ... (Cardinaletti 1997: ex.39b)
having in Rome lived for twenty years
e. ?? Avendo a Gianni dato questi libri.. (ibid., ex. 89b)
having to Gianni given these books

(77) a. Credevo Gianni avesse telefonato a Maria (It., Cardinaletti 1997: ex. 41a)
believed.1SG Gianni had.SBJV called to Maria
b. Credevo a Gianni piacessero queste storie (ibid., ex. 90a)
believed.1SG to Gianni pleased.SBJV.3PL these stories
c. ?? Credevo a Gianni (gli) avesse dato questi libri
believed.1SG to Gianni (CL.DAT) had.SBJV.3SG given these books
(Cardinaletti 2004: ex. 20)

As this high subject position is not restricted to agreeing elements (nominative subjects), Cardinaletti proposes that this position is characterized by the feature 'subject-of-predication' (hence the label Subj). Rizzi (2005), Rizzi and Shlonsky (2006, 2007) take over this view and assimilate Subj to criterial heads, but with three important differences: it is obligatorily projected, it only attracts nominative or quirky subjects (including dative experiencers of the Italian type), and it can be satisfied by an expletive. The 'subject of predication' feature is characterized in terms of 'aboutness': "The configuration [DP [Subj XP]] receives an interpretation paraphrasable as «About DP, I'm reporting event XP»" (Rizzi,

[36] This position is also available for pre-copular DPs of specificational sentences (e.g. *credevo la causa della rivolta fossero Gianni e Maria* 'believed the cause of-the riot were.SBJV Gianni and Maria' – Cardinaletti 1997, ex. 83b). Cardinaletti mentions them because she endorses their analyses as inverted predicates (Moro 1993); the data show that they qualify as surface subjects rather than topics, as was also expected based on their behavior in non-pro-drop languages.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Shlonsky 2007: 118). The difference wrt the feature in Top is considered to consist in absence of a D-linking requirement.

But we have seen that topicalized phrases need not be D-linked. Also, at least some of the non-topical subjects identified in section 3 – narrow scope indefinites, negative pronouns – can hardly be taken to be 'what the sentence is about'. Moreover, it is not expected for an IS-related feature to be restricted to specific grammatical functions – nominative subjects and oblique experiencers. Therefore, I simply characterized the feature responsible for these orders as a feature looking for the closest D-element (the highest argument). We may call this DP 'subject of predication', but it should be clear that this label doesn't add anything to what we already see – that the DP in question is the highest in the argument structure[37] and is placed in a preverbal position.

Now, for Romanian there have not been found contexts where only the highest argument can appear, such as those in (76)-(77) for Italian. But even for Italian, the existence of such contexts does not rule out a multifunctional head analysis: it can be claimed that in those configurations the multifunctional head is not projected, and the relevant functional head can only bear the uD probe – this is plausible given that one of the configurations is non-finite, and the other involves a special subordinating mood and a truncated periphery (complementizerless subjunctives); moreover, Aux-to-Comp is a configuration that licenses nominative in non-finite environments.

Going back to finite clauses, if we place the uD probe on a distinct head Subj, independent of the heads that bear the other probes, it is hard to explain the IS-related restrictions on VS orders that we have discussed. Why is VS(X) bad in a non-presentational context, whereas XVS is fine? Rizzi and Shlonsky (2007:128) propose that presentationals have no aboutness-topic ("a certain event is not described as been «about» a certain argument") and an expletive (which is *pro* in null-subject languages) is used in this case "to formally satisfy the aboutness criterion". But, first, a postverbal subject is not only licensed by a presentational construal, but also by a (non-subject) preverbal topic – see (10), (13)a, (14)b, (15), (16) and the contrasts between (35)b–(36)b and (40). Secondly, the constraints on presentationals can be understood if we adopt the stage topic hypothesis, as we have shown in section 4, which implies that presentationals are not topic-less. Thirdly, expletive *pro*, an element with no effect at either of the interfaces (it is by definition devoid of semantic content and has no phonological effect), is theoretically doubtful (see Manzini, Savoia (1997), Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou (1998), Richards, Biberauer (2005), a.o.). A general problem for expletive *pro* for

[37] For passives, it must be explained why the demoted agent does not count as the highest argument, as the Theme can appear as a preverbal non-topical S (at least with copular passives):

(i) Mari pancarte şi inscripții sunt purtate de-a lungul vastei săli (Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 82)
big banners and inscriptions are carried across wide-the hall

There are several possibilities: movement of the internal argument to a specifier above the external argument position, by itself or as part of the VP (the 'smuggling' movement proposed by Collins (2005)), or non-projection of the external argument (see Bruening 2013).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

languages such as Romanian is that it lacks evidence internal to that particular language, being based exclusively on the fact that in other languages we observe that a certain position must be filled. Even the comparison with European languages that have overt expletives does not fully support the postulation of expletive *pro*, because overt expletives show restrictions on associated postverbal subjects that are not found in null-subject languages (see the definiteness effect and the restriction to certain argument structures; cf. Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou 1998):

(78) a. *There/it spoke John/we
b. *Il a parlé Jean/nous (Fr.)
it has spoken Jean/we
c. A vorbit Ion / Am vorbit noi (Ro.)
has spoken Ion / have.1PL spoken we

As Subj is supposed to be present in all languages, this hypothesis does not account for the fact that the postverbal placement of subjects in languages such as Romanian is much less constrained and is largely sensitive to information structure, whereas overt subject expletives strongly depend on argument structure.

A further problem for the existence of an always projected specialized head Subj is the impossibility of preverbal subjects intervening between certain wh-phrases and fronted foci and the verb, presented in section 2 above. As shown by Cornilescu (1997), this constraint cannot be explained as the result of the verb's raising to the left of the preverbal subject position (as in English interrogatives). As in Romanian auxiliaries behave as clitics with respect to the verb (cf. Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, a.o.), the absence of subject-auxiliary inversion (**Ce a Ion făcut?* 'what has Ion done?') is not a compelling argument against V raising, because one may assume that the whole 'verbal complex' (comprising the auxiliary and the lexical verb) raises to the left of the subject. But, as Cornilescu shows, raising of the verb can be ruled out based on adverb placement facts: certain adverbs such as *tocmai* 'just', *abia* 'hardly, just' can only occur before the verb, in which case they follow a preverbal subject (see (79)a); if V had raised above the preverbal subject position in interrogatives, we would expect the order wh-V-S-Adv; yet this order is impossible: the adverb cannot be postverbal, it preserves its preverbal position (see (79)b) (80)b.

(79) a. Ion (abia) îl aşteaptă (*abia) pe Petru (Cornilescu 1997: ex. 19–20)
Ion hardly CL.ACC waits hardly DOM Petru
b. Pe cine (abia) aşteaptă (*abia) Ion (*abia)? (ibid., ex. 21-22)
DOM whom hardly waits hardly Ion already
(80) a. (*Tocmai) Maria (tocmai) l-a sunat (*tocmai) pe George[38]
just Maria just CL-ACC called just DOM George
'Maria has just called George.'

[38] The ungrammaticality refers to the *temporal* adverbial *tocmai* 'just'; a homophonous item *can* occur in those positions: the focal particle *tocmai*, which, attached to the following constituent, translates as 'precisely, exactly, right' (it marks the focus as unexpected).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

b. Pe cine (tocmai) a sunat (*tocmai) Maria (*tocmai)?
DOM who just has called just Maria just
'Whom has Maria just called?'

To this we may add another argument, based on sentences in which the subject must be preverbal in neutral order (because the predicate does not allow a presentational construal, see section 4). If such a sentence contains two postverbal elements – V-X-Y – raising of V past the preverbal subject position in interrogatives predicts that only the order Wh-V-S-X-Y should be acceptable as a neutral order. But, as the b examples below show, we can also find the order Wh-V-X-S-Y (see the boldfaced position of the subject):

(81) a. (Maria) e (#Maria) bună (#Maria) la matematică (with neutral intonation)
Maria is M. good M. at mathematics
b. De când e (Maria) bună (**Maria**) la matematică? (neutral intonation)
since when is M. good Maria at mathematics
(82) a. (Ion) ştie (#Ion) bine (#Ion) să prezinte (with neutral intonation)
Ion knows I. well I. SBJV present.3
b. Ce ştie bine **Ion** să facă? (neutral intonation)
what knows well Ion SBJV do.3

If Subj is always projected, why can't a preverbal subject occur with this type of fronting? Cardinaletti (2009) tried to provide an account for similar facts found in Italian[39]: following Rizzi and Shlonsky's (2006, 2007) proposal that the Subj criterion can be satisfied by a higher Fin bearing a nominal feature, under local C-command[40] (a proposal first devised for French subject relatives with *qui*, then used for English locative inversion), Cardinaletti claims that the types of raising that disallow a preverbal S involve a 'nominal' Fin head, which is used as an escape-hatch for operator movements, attracting the items which are to move to a higher Foc/Wh position. By virtue of its nominal feature, the Fin head satisfies the Subj criterion under a head-head local c-command configuration, making the projection of SpecSubj unnecessary and, therefore, excluded on economy grounds. For languages, such as English, that do not ban the SpecSubj position in this configuration, Cardinaletti assumes that the head Fin has a verbal feature (attracting the verb), instead of a nominal one.

This account relies on ad hoc assumptions, which are unlikely on conceptual grounds: how can a clausal functional head, belonging, thus, to the extended

[39] The restrictions imposed by wh-elements in Italian are similar to those in Romanian. As for focalization, she notes that some speakers disallow intervening preverbal subjects (just as in Romanian), whereas others allow them.

[40] Criteria are normally satisfied in a Spec-Head configuration. In this configuration, SpecH is the closest constituent to H that asymmetrically c-commands H. If a projection does not contain a specifier, the immediately superior head is the closest asymmetrically c-commanding constituent.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

projection of V, be considered nominal just by virtue of an uninterpretable attracting feature? Why is the feature that attracts wh- and focus phrases nominal? Among focus and wh-phrases that do not allow an intervening subject we also find non-nominal constituents, such as adverbs and adjectival phrases[41]:

(83) a. Când (*Maria) face (Maria) cumpărăturile?
when Maria does Maria buyings-the
'When does Maria do the shopping?'
b. AŞA (*Maria) se poartă (Maria)!
so Maria REFL bears Maria
'That's how Maria behaves!'
c. RECE (*limonada) trebuie (limonada) servită (limonada)!
cold orange-juice-the must orange-juice-the served orange-juice-the
'The orange-juice must be served COLD!'

Finally, why must Fin be used as an escape-hatch only for these types of movement, and not for others – such as topicalization, which may also show reconstruction effects that indicate movement?

(84) Pe părinții săi$_i$ [orice copil]$_i$ îi crede
DOM parents-the his any child CL.ACC believes
'His (own) parents, any child believes.'

A possible way of accounting for the various restrictions on VS and SV without assuming competition for the same position between subjects and A-bar moved constituents was proposed by Sheehan (2010: 247) for Spanish: the EPP, characterized as a sub-feature of a probe which determiners movement of the goal, can be either associated to φ on T (triggering raising of preverbal subjects) or to a Top, Foc or Wh feature on Fin. This proposal still assumes a multifunctional head – the various types of constituents that block a preverbal S are all assumed to be in SpecFin. Only non-topical subjects are divorced from this head and assumed to occupy SpecInfl/SpecT, the specifier of the head that performs verbal agreement and nominative assignment.

The idea that EPP either associates to Fin or to Infl requires some additional technical assumptions compared with the multifunctional head approach, but is not unfeasible: as Fin and Infl are major heads in the functional 'spine' of the clause, we may represent some co-occurrences restrictions among them by means of selection: for this case, a +EPP Fin selects for a -EPP Infl, and, vice versa, a -EPP Fin selects for a +EPP Infl.

As for the exact label of the lower head, T is problematic given that preverbal subjects come before preverbal negation and, in Romanian, also before

[41] I used Romanian examples, but the same objections can be raised for Italian.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

the subjunctive mood particle *să*. However, given that these elements show clitic behavior with respect to the verb, one may assume complex head formation (cf. Dobrovie-Sorin, Galves 2000), which would allow T's φ and EPP features to project up to the Neg or Mood level and trigger movement to SpecNeg/SpecMood. Another possibility is to assume an AgrS head above Mood, divorcing nominative assignment from the surface position of the subject agreement features.

A more serious problem is the subject behavior of oblique experiencers, discussed in section 6.2. As they do not participate to the nominative-verb agreement relation and are not quirky subjects of the Icelandic type (see footnote 33), they cannot be related to the φ-probe in Infl/AgrS. One might assume that, given that the indirect object is the highest argument, this is an instance of Agree with multiple goals However, the details of the analysis should be worked out. Pending a solution, I will refer to the head responsible for raising the highest argument as Subj (in case it is distinct from Fin), assigning it a uD probe which, like criterial features, is not limited to goals that are in need of case licensing (have uCase). Moreover, once this position is divorced from subject agreement, it might also be optionally associated with the uAbout probe (cf. Rizzi's formulation of the subject criterion).

To conclude, we have two possible EPP-based accounts:

(85) a. One head: Fin {uAbout/uWh/uFoc/uD}-EPP (Giurgea, Remberger 2009, 2012)
b. Two heads: Fin {(uAbout?)/uWh/uFoc}-EPP / Subj {(uAbout?)/uD-EPP}

In the next section we will envisage a third, pragmatic-based account, which dispenses with the EPP.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS: ROMANIAN AS A TOPIC-ORIENTED LANGUAGE, AND A POSSIBLE ACCOUNT BASED ON A PRAGMATIC PRINCIPLE

The generalizations presented in this article and the analyses discussed above raise several questions that it is now time to address. Some of the facts I have presented support a description of Romanian as a topic-oriented language: the fact that V-initial VS orders in sentences without narrow focus either indicate a stage-topic (a presentational construal) or have a given V or VP (see section 4), and that VS orders indicate a non-topical S (unless the sentence has special types of fronting or S is right-dislocated[42]; see section 2). 'Topic oriented' means that the

[42] Right-dislocation in Romanian would require a special extensive discussion, which cannot be done here. I would just like to point out that its existence is doubtful for non-subjects; regarding its treatment in the multifunctional head approach, it can be formalized using two movement steps – left-movement of the topic followed by movement of the remnant (see Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl 2007) – possibly involving two ordered probes on the same head (Giurgea, Remberger 2009).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

language marks the topic-comment partition by word order. In a strictly topic-oriented language, we would expect that all clauses that can be said to have a topic should put this topic either before or after the rest of the clause, which represents the comment. On the assumption that all sentences have a topic, combined with the stage-topic hypothesis, topic-orientation can be analyzed as involving the existence of an always projected attracting Top head, as has been indeed proposed by É. Kiss (2002) for Hungarian (but with a further restriction to certain types of clauses, see footnote 20). However, some facts of Romanian do not fit into a topic-orientation analysis:

(i) We have seen that SV(X) with non-topical S is possible (sections 3 and 6). This raises the questions of what the topic is in such examples and why it is S that occupies the preverbal position, instead of the topic.

(ii) Sentences with focus fronting and wh-fronting do not necessarily indicate the topic structure of the clause (a higher topic is possible, but not obligatory in these sentences) – see sections 2, 7.1 and 7.4. From the perspective of topic orientation, we must understand why an overt marking of the topic is unnecessary in wh-interrogatives and focus-fronting sentences, as well as in the contexts of SVX orders with non-topical S.

Regarding SVX orders with non-topical S, what I can conclude at this stage of the research is that they are often presentational – having a context-given or salient spatio-temporal location: thus, (28)a, (29)a, (30)a, (31), (32) are descriptions, in which the current stage is given; (35)a, (36)a, (43) localize an event at the *here* and *now* of the discourse; (23) is also about a salient situation (repeated flower bringing), likewise (25)a, (36)a, (43) and the subordinate in (26)a, which bring additional information about a specific event known to the hearer; (52) occurs in a narrative context, localizing the event immediately after the previously described one. In other cases, we may speak of an extended situation whose location includes the previously mentioned one, which might satisfy the hearer-givenness requirement of a stage topic (see (33), (34)). If all instances of non-topical preverbal S were indeed found in presentationals, we could say that the topic is marked here via a null STAGE in a SpecTop higher than the preverbal S (cf. É. Kiss (2002), who proposes a null Stage topic in SpecTop for V-initial presentational sentences). We could then modify the multifunctional head approach by associating the uAbout probe with a higher head Top. Instead of an always active SpecFin, the restrictions on VS orders discussed in section 4 would then be explained by the following principles (following É. Kiss's (2002) similar proposal for Hungarian, see footnote 20):

(86) a. Certain sentences – in particular main clauses without narrow focus or interrogative wh- items – require topic marking, which is realized in SpecTop
b. Presentationals rely on a null Stage topic in SpecTop
c. Wh-items, foci and non-topical preverbal highest arguments are hosted in SpecFin; Fin does not always have an attracting feature

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

(86) a may be construed as an interface requirement, which would dispense us with any obligatory EPP-feature in the left periphery. The fact that this requirement does not apply to sentences with narrow focus and to partial interrogatives is explained below (see the discussion around (90)).

As opposed to the multifunctional approach, this Top-pragmatic approach crucially assumes that SV-clauses with non-topical sentences have a Stage topic. We have seen that in many cases this is plausible. But is it always so? It appears that sometimes such sentences do not involve a context-given spatio-temporal location, but contain another element which makes the connection with the background information, a context-given argument. This might the case in (87), where the situation described is not at all temporally or spatially related to the previous discourse, but the connection is made via a referent (Paşadia), and possibly also in (24)a above:

(87) [Context: about a character named Paşadia: *Paşadia era un luceafăr* – Paşadia was a Morning Star]
Un joc al întâmplării îl înzestrase cu una din alcătuirile cele mai
a game GEN chance-the.GEN him had-endowed with one of make-ups- the most
desăvârşite ce poate avea creierul omenesc.
accomplished that can have brain-the human
'A game of chance had endowed him with one of the most accomplished make-ups that the human brain can have.' (M. Caragiale, *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, p. 60)

Therefore, as an alternative to (86)a, we may consider that obligatory overt topic marking does not apply to contexts where the connection with background information is obvious – see (88), which translates as a pragmatico-semantic principle in (89):

(88) Continuity topics need not be overtly marked by word order (where continuity topics include the current stage and context-given referents)
(89) Use a Top head / a [top]-attracting feature wherever there is no topic continuity!

The distinction between different types of topics has been extensively argued for in work by Frascarelli and collaborators (Frascarelli, Hinterhölzl 2007, Bianchi, Frascarelli 2010, Frascarelli, Ramaglia 2013), who show that in case of multiple topicalization, continuity topics come after aboutness-shift and contrastive topics, being either preverbal, but closer to the verb, or in a right-dislocated position. Although the principle in (88) can also account for the partial topic-orientation of Romanian under the multifunctional head approach, it is important to notice that adopting this principle allows us *to get rid of the postulation of an always present EPP-feature* in the left periphery.

Regarding now sentences with wh- and focus-fronting, although contrastive and aboutness-shift topics are possible, topic marking is never required: not just for

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

continuity topics is a special placement of the topic dispensable, but also for new topics – thus, a generic context that does not allow an all-new VS order in a declarative (see (90)a) can allow it in an interrogative ((90)b can be an out-of-the-blue question):

(90) a. # Dorm păsările în cuiburi în copaci
sleep.3PL birds-the in nests in trees
b. Tati, unde dorm păsările?
daddy where sleep.3PL birds-the
'Daddy, where do birds sleep?'

Why is topic marking not required here? My proposal is that such marking is not necessary because *given a Focus/Wh-Background partition, the topic can be taken to be the whole Background*, rather than a referent contained in it. In other words, the topic of (90)b is not birds, but bird sleeping. Remember that under the view adopted here (see in particular section 3), the chief role of topics is to provide an anchoring of the information in the common ground of the conversation. For referential expressions, this implies a presupposition of existence as a minimal requirement; non-referential expressions are also either given or somehow expected in the context. Now, a wh-question of the form Wh(x)P(x) is usually associated with the presupposition that there is an x that satisfies P(x) – thus, the question *Who gave you the keys?* comes with the presupposition that there is somebody who gave the keys to the hearer[43]. Even if the sentence is all-new, it contains nevertheless a part that the speaker treats as present in the common ground (e.g., the existence of an event of keys giving is presented as known to both the speaker and hearer in the aforementioned example). Based on this, I suggest that *in wh-clauses, the remaining part of the clause functions by default as a topic*. (90)b is about the class of situations s characterized by an instantiation of the kind *birds* that sleeps in s; *Who gave you the keys*? is about the situation characterized by an event of giving the keys to the hearer. For Romanian, this hypothesis is supported by the fact that the unmarked intonation of main wh-interrogatives involves nuclear stress on the wh-item and destressing of the rest of the sentence, realized as a low plateau – an intonation which mimics that of declaratives with focus fronting (see Ladd 2008, Jitcă et al. 2015).

In the case of focus fronting, the givenness of the rest of the sentence, the so-called Background, is most of the time obvious[44]. Like for wh-questions, a sentence such as *ÎN CUIBURI dorm păsările* 'It's in nests that birds sleep' is about the class of situations s characterized by an instantiation of the kind *birds* that sleeps in s. As such topics are immediately retrievable from the Wh/Foc-Background partition of the clause, overt topic marking is not necessary.

[43] This is a 'soft' presupposition, see Abusch (2010).
[44] The exception is mirative focus fronting, see Bianchi *et al.* (2016), Cruschina *et al.* (2015).

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Given this account, the multifunctional head analysis, which was first developed only to account for the data, starts to find some conceptual motivation: the always active preverbal position is used to indicate the topic when the identification of the topic is not obvious. Such identification is obvious when there is topic continuity and when the sentence is a wh-interrogative or contains a narrow Focus. Therefore, although topic marking can still be done in these cases, the always active position may be associated with other probes – uD, uWh or uFoc. It remains to be seen whether the uD probe (the probe that attracts the closest argument) can also be used when there is a higher Top head that attracts the topic – the research I have carried so far did not offer a clear answer to this question.

The hypothesis of a distinct Subj position can account for the proposed view of the topic orientation of Romanian in the following way: Subj is in principle used to attract the topic – therefore, it is not restricted to nominatives and oblique experiencers, like in Rizzi's theory. However, as in the case of continuity topics it is obvious what the topic is, Subj has developed a purely formal version, which just attracts the closest argument. Secondly, since topic marking is in principle superfluous in wh-interrogatives and sentences with narrow focus, an active head Foc/Wh (or Fin, if we put the uWh and uFoc probes on Fin) imposes a truncated clause structure, from which Subj is absent.

The account based on the pragmatic principle in (88), which dispenses with the always projected EPP-feature, can cover wh-interrogatives and clauses with focus fronting by restricting (89) to sentences without wh-movement and focus fronting. The reason for that is the fact that, as proposed above, sentences with wh-movement and focus fronting offer a way of deducing the topic part, which applies by default: the rest of the sentence, the sister of the moved wh-phrase or focus, functions as the topic. Thus, we may say that such sentences do mark the topic by word order, although indirectly, and thus comply with (88).

A final issue which should be considered is the purpose of the uD probe, which just attracts the closest argument, without any information structural import. I suggest that its purpose is to ease legibility after linearization: in a clause containing two or more potentially long constituents (S and other arguments or adjuncts), the highest one is clearly delimitated from the others by being placed on the opposite site of the head of the clause (V+Infl). We have seen, indeed, in section 6 that prosodic factors play an important part in licensing SV orders with non-topical S, which always cortain postverbal constituents.

CORPUS

G. Adameşteanu, *Dimineaţă pierdută*, 3rd edition, Bucureşti, Editura 100 + 1 Gramar, 1997.
M. Caragiale, *Craii de Curtea-Veche*, in *Opere*, ed. by B. Cioculescu, Bucureşti, Univers Enciclopedic, 2001.
G. Călinescu, *Ion Creangă*, 3rd edition, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1989.
G. Călinescu, *Viaţa lui Mihai Eminescu*, 3rd edition, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1989.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

T. Muşatescu, *Sosesc deseară*, in *Scrieri*, vol. I, Bucureşti, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969.
M. Sebastian, *Jurnal (1935–1944*), Bucureşti, Humanitas, 1996.

REFERENCES

Abusch, D., 2010, "Presupposition triggering from alternatives", *Journal of Semantics*, 27, 1–44.
Alboiu, G., 2002, *The features of movement in Romanian*, Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.
Alexiadou, A., Anagnostopoulou, E., 1998, "Parametrizing AGR: Word order, V-movement and the EPP-checking", *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 16, 491–539.
Arregi, K., 2003, "Clitic Left dislocation is contrastive topicalization", in: E. Kaiser, S. Arunachalam (eds.), *Proceedings of the 26th Annual Penn Linguistics Colloquium*, *U. Penn Working Papers in Linguistics*, 9, 1, 31–44.
Barbosa, P., 1995, *Null subjects*, doctoral dissertation, MIT.
Beckman, M. E., 1996, "The Parsing of Prosody", *Language and Cognitive Processes*, 11, 17–67.
Bianchi, V., M. Frascarelli, 2010, "Is topic a root phenomenon?", *Iberia,* 2, 1, 43–88.
Bianchi, V., G. Bocci, S. Cruschina, 2016, "Focus fronting, unexpectedness, and evaluative implicatures", *Semantics and Pragmatics*, 9, 1–54.
Boersma, P., D. Weenink, 2012, *Praat – Doing phonetics by computer* [Computer program]. http://www.praat.org/ [Retrieved on June 13, 2016].
Bolinger, D., 1954, "English prosodic stress and Spanish sentence order", *Hispania*, 37, 152–156.
Bruening, B., 2013, "*By* Phrases in Passives and Nominals", *Syntax*, 16, 1, 1–41.
Brunetti, L., 2009, "On links and tails in Italian", *Lingua*, 119, 756–781.
Büring, D., 1999, "Topic", in: P. Bosch, R. van der Sandt (eds), *Focus. Linguistic Cognitive and Computational Perspectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 142–165.
Büring, D., 2003, "On D-trees, Beans and B-Accents", *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 26, 511–545.
Büring, D., 2007, "Semantics, Intonation, and Information Structure", in: G. Ramchand, C. Reiss (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Interfaces*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 445–473.
Büring, D., 2012, "Predicate integration – phrase structure or argument structure?", in: I. Kucerova, A. Neeleman (eds), *Contrasts and Positions in Information Structure*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 27–47.
Calabrese, A. 1992, "Some Remarks on Focus and Logical Structures in Italian", *Harvard Working Papers in Linguistics*, 1, 19–27.
Cardinaletti, A., 1997, "Subjects and clause structure", in: L. Haegeman (ed.), *The New Comparative Syntax*, London, Longman, 33–63.
Cardinaletti, A., 2004, "Towards a cartography of subject positions", in: L. Rizzi (ed.), 115–165.
Cardinaletti, A., 2009, "On a (wh-)moved topic in Italian, compared to Germanic", in: A. Alexiadou, J. Hankamer, T. McFadden, J. Nuger, F. Schäfer (eds), *Advances in comparative Germanic syntax*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 3–40.
Chomsky, N., 1995, *The Minimalist Program*, Cambridge, Mass., the MIT Press.
Chomsky, N., 1998, "Minimalist Inquiries: The Framework", *MIT Occasional Papers in Linguistics*, 15, Cambridge, MIT Press.
Cohen, A., N. Erteschik-Shir, 2002, "Topic, Focus and the Interpretation of Bare Plurals", *Natural Language Semantics*, 10, 125–165.
Collins, C., 2005, "A Smuggling Approach to the Passive in English", *Syntax*, 8, 81–120.
Cornilescu, A., 1997, "The double subject construction in Romanian. Notes on the syntax of the subject", *Revue roumaine de linguistique*, 42, 3-4, 101–147.
Cornilescu, A., 2002, "Rhematic focus at the left periphery: The case of Romanian", in: C. Beyssade, R. Bokbennema, F. Drijkoningen, P. Monachesi (eds), *Romance Languages and Linguistic Theory 2000*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 77–91.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Cornilescu, A., 2004, "Direct object movement and the structure of the Romanian left periphery", in: M. Coene, G. De Cuyper, Y. D'Hulst (eds), *Antwerp Papers in Linguistics (APiL) 7: Current Studies in Comparative Romance Linguistics*, 141–166.
Cruschina, S., 2011, *Discourse-Related Features and Functional Projections*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Cruschina, S, I. Giurgea, E. Remberger, 2015, "Focus fronting between declaratives and exclamatives", *Revue roumaine de linguistique*, 60, 2-3, 257–275.
Dascălu-Jinga, L., 2001, *Melodia vorbirii în limba română*, 9, Bucureşti, Univers Enciclopedic.
Delfitto, D., J. Schroten, 1992, "Bare plurals and the number affix in DP", *Probus*, 3, 2, 155–185.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., 1987, *Syntaxe du roumain. Chaînes thématiques*, doctoral dissertation, Université Paris 7.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., 1994, *The Syntax of Romanian*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., 2013, "Bare nouns", in: C. Dobrovie-Sorin, I. Giurgea (eds), *A Reference Grammar of Romanian. I: The Noun Phrase*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 49–95.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., C. Galves, 2000, "Proclisis, enclisis and head-to-head merge", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, 2, 1, 35–51.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., I. Giurgea, 2015, "Weak Reference and Property Denotation. Two Types of Pseudo-Incorporated Bare Nominals", in: O. Borik, B. Gehrke (eds), *The Syntax and Semantics of Pseudo-Incorporation*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 88–126.
É. Kiss, K., 2002, "The EPP in a Topic-Prominent Language", in: P. Svenonius (ed.), *Subjects, Expletives, and the EPP*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 107–124.
Erteschik-Shir, N., 1997, *The Dynamics of Focus Structure*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Erteschik-Shir, N., 2007, *Information Structure. The Syntax–Discourse Interface*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Frascarelli, M., R. Hinterhölzl, 2007, "Types of topics in German and Italian", in: K. Schwabe, S. Winkler (eds.), *On information structure, meaning and form*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 87–116.
Frascarelli, M., F. Ramaglia, 2013, " 'Phasing' contrast at the interfaces", in: V. Camacho-Taboada, A. Jiménez-Fernández, J. Martín-González, M. Reyes-Tejedor (eds), *Information Structure and Agreement*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 55–81.
Giorgi, A., F. Pianesi, 1997, *Tense and Aspect: From Semantics to Morphosyntax*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Giurgea, I., 2015, "Bare Quantifier Fronting as Contrastive Topicalization", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, 17, 2, 23–38.
Giurgea, I., E. Remberger, 2009, "Postverbal subjects in Romance null-subject languages. Information-structural conditions and variation", talk given at *Going Romance*, Nice.
Giurgea, I., E. Remberger, 2012, "Zur informationsstrukturellen Konfiguration und Variation postverbaler Subjekte in den romanischen Null-Subjekt-Sprachen", *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft*, 31, 43–99.
Giurgea, I., E. Remberger, 2014, "Polarity Fronting in Romanian and Sardinian", in: M.-H. Côté, E. Mathieu (eds.), *Variation within and across Romance Languages. Selected papers from the 41st Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages (LSRL), Ottawa, 5–7 May 2011*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 173–197.
Göbbel, E., 2003, *Syntactic and Focus-structural Aspects of Triadic Constructions*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
Grice, M., R. Ladd, A. Arvaniti, 2000, "On the Place of Phrase Accents in Intonational Phonology", *Phonology*, 17, 2, 143–185.
Gundel, J. K., 1974, *The role of topic and comment in linguistic theory*, doctoral dissertation, University of Texas.
Gussenhoven, C., 1983, "Focus, Mode and the Nucleus", *Journal of Linguistics*, 19, 2, 377–417.
Halliday, M.A.K., 1967, "Transitivity and theme in English (II)", *Journal of Linguistics*, 3, 199–244.
Hill, V., 2002, "Adhering focus", *Linguistic Inquiry*, 33, 1, 164–172.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Hill, V., 2006, "Stylistic inversion in Romanian", *Studia linguistica*, 60, 2, 156–180.
Jitcă, D., V. Apopei, O. Păduraru, S. Maruşca, 2015, "Transcription of Romanian intonation", in S. Frota, P. Prieto (eds.), *Intonation in Romance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 284–316.
Klein, W., 2008, "The topic situation", in: B. Ahrenholz, U. Bredel, W. Klein, M. Rost-Roth, R. Skiba (eds), *Empirische Forschung und Theoriebildung: Beiträge aus Soziolinguistik, Gesprochene-Sprache- und Zweitspracherwerbsforschung: Festschrift für Norbert Dittmar*, Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 287–305.
Kratzer, A., 1995, "Stage-level and Individual-level Predicates", in: G. Carlson, F. J. Pelletier (eds.), *The Generic Book*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 125–175.
Kratzer, A., E. Selkirk, 2007, "Phase theory and prosodic spell-out: the case of verbs", *The Linguistic Review*, 24, 93–135.
Krifka, M., 2001, "Quantifying into question acts", *Natural Language Semantics* 9, 1–40.
Ladd, R., 2008, *Intonational Phonology* (2nd edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
Longobardi, G., 1994, "Reference and Proper Names", *Linguistic Inquiry*, 25, 4, 609–665.
López, L., 2009, *A Derivational Syntax for Information Structure*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Maienborn, C., 2001, "On the position and interpretation of locative modifiers", *Natural Language Semantics*, 9, 191–240.
Manzini, R., L. Savoia, 1997, "Null subjects without pro", *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics,* 9, 301–313.
Mensching, G., 2009, "Defective probes? (No) agreement and (no) movement in Romance", talk given at the *Movement and Morphology Workshop*, at Leucorea, Wittenberg.
Motapanyane, V., 1994, "On preverbal positions in Romanian", *Revue Canadienne de Linguistique / Canadian Journal of Linguistics*, 39, 15–36.
Pierrehumbert, J. B., 1980, *The phonetics and phonology of English intonation*, doctoral dissertation, MIT.
Pinto, M., 1997, *Licensing and interpretation of inverted subjects in Italian*, doctoral dissertation, Utrecht University.
Reinhart, T., 1981, "Pragmatics and linguistics: An analysis of sentence topics", *Philosophica,* 27, 53–93.
Richards, M., T. Biberauer, 2005, "Explaining Expl.", in: M. den Dikken, C. Tortora (eds). *The function of function words and functional categories*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 115–154.
Rizzi, L., 1997, "The fine structure of the left periphery", in: L. Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 281–337.
Rizzi, L., 2001, "Reconstruction, weak island sensitivity, and agreement", in: C. Cecchetto, G. Chierchia, M. T. Guasti (eds), *Semantic Interfaces*, Stanford, CA, CSLI, 145–176.
Rizzi, L., 2004a, "On the Cartography of Syntactic Structures", in: L. Rizzi (ed.), 3–15.
Rizzi, L., 2004b, "Locality and the left periphery", in: A. Belletti (ed.), *Structures and Beyond. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, Volume 3*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 223–251.
Rizzi, L. (ed.), 2004, *The Structure of CP and IP. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures*, *II*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
Rizzi, L., 2005, "On some properties of subjects and topics", in: L. Brugé, G. Giusti, N. Munaro, W. Schweikert, G. Turano (eds.). *Proceedings of the XXX Incontro di Grammatica Generativa*, Venezia, Cafoscarina.
Rizzi, L., 2006, "On the Form of Chains: Criterial Positions and ECP Effects", in: L. Cheng, N. Corver (eds), *Wh-movement*: *Moving on*, Cambridge, Mass, MIT Press, 97–134.
Rizzi, L., U. Shlonsky, 2006, "English Locative Inversion and Heavy NP Shift", in: M. Frascarelli (ed.), *Phases of Interpretation*, Berlin, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 341–361.
Rizzi, L., U. Shlonsky, 2007, "Strategies of subject extraction". in: U. Sauerland, H. M. Gärtner (eds), *Interfaces + Recursion = Language? Chomsky's Minimalism and the View from Syntax-Semantics*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 115–160.
Rochemont, M., 2013, "Discourse new, F-marking, and normal stress", *Lingua,* 136, 38–62.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)

Rochemont, M., 2016, “Givenness”, in: C. Féry, S. Ishihara (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 41–63.
Saccon, G., 1993, *Post-verbal Subjects. A Study Based on Italian and its Dialects*, doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.
Schmerling, S. F., 1976, *Aspects of English Sentence Stress*, Austin, Texas University Press.
Schwarzschild, R., 1999, “Givenness, AvoidF and other constraints on the placement of accent”, *Natural Language Semantics*, 7, 141–177.
Selkirk, E., 2008, “Contrastive focus, givenness and the unmarked status of ‘discourse-new’ ”, *Acta Linguistica Hungarica,* 24, 3/4, 331–346.
Sheehan, M., 2007, *The EPP and null subjects in Romance*, doctoral dissertation, Newcastle University.
Sheehan, M., 2010, “ ‘Free’ inversion in Romance and the Null Subject Parameter”, in: T. Biberauer, A. Holmberg, I. Roberts, M. Sheehan (eds), *Parametric variation: Null subjects in Minimalist Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 231–263.
Soare, G., *The Syntax-Information Structure Interface: A Comparative View from Romanian*, doctoral dissertation, University of Geneva.
Solà i Pujols, J., 1992, *Agreement and Subjects*, doctoral dissertation, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
Strawson, P. F., 1964, “Identifying Reference and Truth-Values”, *Theoria,* 30, 86–99.
Suñer, M., 2003, “The lexical preverbal subject in a romance null-subject language: where art thou?”, in: R. Nuñez-Cedeño, L. López, R. Cameron (eds.), *A Romance Perspective on Language Knowledge and use*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 341–357.
Ştefănescu, I., 1997, *The Syntax of Agreement in Romanian*, MIT Occasional Papers in Linguistics, 14, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.
Tortora, C. M., 2001, “Evidence for a Null Locative in Italian”, in G. Cinque, G. Salvi (eds), *Current Issues in Italian Syntax. Essays offered to Lorenzo Renzi*, London, Elsevier, 313–326.
Zubizarreta, M. L., 1998, *Prosody, focus and word order*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

BDD-A26354 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:05:09 UTC)