SYNTACTIC EFFECTS OF VERUM FOCUS IN ROMANIAN*

ION GIURGEA[1], CARMEN MÎRZEA VASILE[2]

Abstract. We argue that *verum focus* (understood as focus in which the propositional part of the sentence is constant across alternatives, the focused part being the illocutionary component or the degree of certainty) is manifest in Romanian not only prosodically, by main stress on the finite verbal complex, but also syntactically, by raising of the verbal complex to a Focus position. To the instances of VS orders analyzed in this way by Giurgea and Remberger (2012, 2014), we add another pattern, consisting of an emphatically stressed verb followed by an overt subject pronoun in a context which would have allowed the use of *pro*. We derive the affective values of this pattern (reassurance, threat, strong conviction, concession) from verum focus (which also explains the emphatic stress on the verb). We propose that an overt pronoun instead of *pro* is used in order to signal that the verbal complex has moved from its ordinary position $Infl^0$, undergoing focus fronting. This pattern underwent grammaticalization in some regional varieties, yielding the so-called 'double subject' construction, in which the pronoun is an expletive which fills the SpecInfl position.

Keywords: verum focus, focus fronting, double subject construction, Romanian, subject pronouns, expletives.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is known, on the one hand, that in Romanian focus fronting has an effect on the syntax of the subject, disallowing a preverbal subject that intervenes between the fronted focus and the verb (see Alboiu 2002, Giurgea, this issue). On the other hand, it is known that main stress on the verb can mark a particular type of focus, the so-called 'verum focus'. In this paper, we bring these two issues together, discussing instances of verb-subject orders in Romanian which are due to verum focus, in which the active left-peripheral focus is not checked by moving a constituent in front of the verb, but by the verb itself.

* 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.

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

[2] "Iorgu Iordan – Alexandru Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, and University of Bucharest, carmen_marzea@yahoo.fr.

RRL, **LXII**, *3*, p. 323–338, Bucureşti, 2017

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

The existence of a VS-order associated with verum focus has been pointed out by Giurgea and Remberger (2014), who concentrate on polar questions and compare the Romanian construction to Sardinian predicate fronting. Here, we present further evidence for the idea that verum focus VS belongs to the family of focus fronting structures, in that it involves checking of the focus feature in the left periphery. The main novel observation is that in Romanian the use of an overt subject pronoun instead of *pro* can serve the purpose of indicating a verum focus construction. We will also show how this discourse strategy yielded, via grammaticalization, the so-called 'double subject construction'.

As is well known, in Romanian, as well as in other Romance null-subject languages, VS orders without fronting of some X≠S are used in presentational sentences and in cases of narrow focus subject (see Giurgea, Remberger 2012). To these, we should add a third configuration, exemplified in (1): in this case, the predicate, being I-level, does not allow a presentational construal (see Giurgea this issue, É. Kiss 2002, Giurgea, Remberger 2014); moreover, the subject is not narrow focus; what licenses VS here is emphatic stress on V:

(1) Ştie băiatul cum să obțină ce vrea!
knows boy-the how SBJV gets what wants
'The boy definitely knows how to get what he wants.'
(http://paralelipipedic.blogspot.ro/2009/01/geniu-ascuns.html)

This emphatic stress is not interpreted as narrow focus on the predicate (this would require a contextually salient antecedent of the type *the boy R what he wants*, cf. Rooth 1992, 2016). It is rather the sentence as a whole that is emphasized. This type of emphasis corresponds to what is known in the semantic literature on focus as 'verum focus', a label proposed by Höhle (1988, 1992), who applies it to a phenomenon manifested in German by focal stress on the C position.

2. VERUM FOCUS AND INVERSION

As the semantic characterization of 'verum focus' or 'verum' is still controversial (see Lohnstein 2016 for an overview of the various proposals; even the inclusion of the phenomenon under 'focus' is disputed), we take the formal characterization of this phenomenon as a starting point. Verum focus is manifested by focal stress on an element that fills a (dedicated) clausal functional head position (which extends to the Spec of a null head, for German[3]), which, for declaratives, can be roughly characterized as emphasizing the assertion. The

[3] In German embedded interrogatives, verum focus can be realized by stress on the wh-pronoun that occupies SpecCP.

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

distinction between verum focus and focus on the predicate is observable in sentences with auxiliaries, where predicate focus involves nuclear stress on the lexical verb, whereas verum focus has stress on the auxiliary, including *do*-support in English:

(2) a. A: What did he do with the book? B: He LOST the book. (Predicate Focus)
b. A: I wonder whether he lost the book. B: He DID lose the book. (Verum Focus)

In Romanian, as auxiliaries are clitics, which arguably form a complex head with the verb (see Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Barbu 1999, Dobrovie-Sorin, Galves 2000, Giurgea 2011), we cannot see this contrast (the main stress always falls on the lexical verb, except in negative sentences, where it normally falls on negation). But we can see it in constructions with light verbs, such as the copula (see (4)), or the verb *have* in collocations such as *a avea dreptate* 'be right'. Thus, in (3)a, which is natural in a context where a person named Maria claimed something, the subject *Maria* is destressed because its referent is given in the context, which results in the main stress falling on the predicate; in (3)b, the context is different, requiring that the issue whether Maria is right has already been raised:

(3) a. are DREPTATE Maria (nuclear stress on the predicate)
has right Maria
'Maria is right.'
b. ARE dreptate Maria (verum focus)
has right Maria
'Maria IS right.'

(4) [Context: people are wondering whether the competition has been announced.]
ESTE anunțat concursul
is announced competition-the
'The competition IS announced.'

Based on these examples, we can infer that verum focus in a sentence expressing the proposition *p* is used when the issue whether *p* is present in the context. Since the new part in these examples, compared to the already given proposition, is the specification of the truth value of this proposition, we may have the impression that the focus is on polarity – indeed, before Höhle's verum focus, this type of focus had been described as focus on polarity (by Halliday 1967, Dik *et al.* 1981, Gussenhoven 1984, for English, and Watters 1979, for the Bantu language Aghem). However, as noticed by Höhle, verum focus is also found in interrogatives and imperatives (see (5), (7)). For Romanian, this is shown by the contrast in (6) (where the syllables bearing stress have been capitalized): (6)a, with neutral intonation, is appropriate if there is no previous expectation that a meeting should take place the following day, whereas (6)b is felicitous if there is such an expectation (e.g., in a context where meetings are usually held on Fridays, but sometimes there are exceptions, the question being uttered on Thursday).

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

(7) illustrates verum focus in an imperative, felicitous if the issue whether the addressee should perform a certain action has already been raised:

(5) A: I have heard that Karl kicked the dog. (Höhle 1992: 112)
B: HAT er den Hund getreten? (German)
'HAS he kicked the dog?'

(6) a. Este şeDINță MÂIne?
is meeting tomorrow
b. ESte şedință mâine?
is meeting tomorrow
'Is there a meeting tomorrow?'

(7) [Context: the addressee is uncertain whether to give permission to X or not]
DĂ-I voie!
give. IMPV-3SG.DAT permission
'DO allow him/her!'

As in interrogatives and imperatives the new part of the sentence cannot be the truth value assigned to the proposition, Lohnstein (2012, 2016) proposes that focus falls on the force component of the clause – what makes a sentence assertive, interrogative or imperative – which he calls 'sentence mood' (he does not refer to illocutionary force because verum focus can also be found in embedded clauses). Büring (2006) also characterizes verum focus by the requirement that the propositional part should be given and claims that focus falls on the assertion (in declarative clauses). The idea that the propositional part is given also underlies Gutzmann and Castroviejo Miró's (2011) analysis. They differ from the previously mentioned approaches in that they do not make reference to focus, treating instead *verum* as a pragmatic operator (an item that does not contribute to the truth-value of the sentence, but to a parallel dimension of meaning that they call 'use-value'), which requires that the issue whether *p* should be given in the current set of questions under discussion and introduces an instruction to downdate the question *p* (to remove it from the set of questions under discussion, by solving it).

Keeping 'focus' in the description of the phenomenon is however useful, not only because it offers a straightforward account of the prosody, but also because it allows reference to alternatives (on the relation between focus and alternatives, see Rooth 1992, Krifka 2008), which will prove to be helpful in our investigation.

Giurgea and Remberger (2014) examine cases in Romanian where what appears to be verum focus, as indicated by nuclear stress on the verb, correlates with VS orders, even with predicates that impose the SV order in neuter contexts (such as I-level predicates; see Giurgea, this issue). Whereas in interrogatives their examples comply with the requirement that the issue whether *p* should be contextually given, for declaratives it appears that mere givenness of the propositional content is not sufficient (VS justifiable by verum focus, for instance, is not used in answers to yes/no questions) and not even necessary. Their examples belong to the category of emphatic assertions, used when the speaker expects the

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

hearer to have doubts about *p*, as in (8) – hence the use in reassurances or threats – or when *p* is considered unexpected or otherwise remarkable with respect to the alternative non-*p*, as in (9), which has an exclamative flavor:

(8) Stai liniştit, ÎNȚELEGE el problema. (Giurgea, Remberger 2014: ex.17)
stay.IMPV.2SG calm understands he problem-the
'Don't worry, he will understand / understands the problem.'
(9) ȘTIE Maria franceză, nu glumă! (ibid., ex. 18)
knows Maria French not joke
'Maria knows/speaks really good French!'

The test of light verb constructions shows that the nuclear stress is not on the predicate, but on the functional head occupied by the finite verb (or clitic auxiliary + lexical verb), which we will call Infl – see the idiom *avea grijă* 'take care', lit. 'have care/worry':

(10) Stai liniştit, ARE el grijă.
stay.IMP.2SG calm has he care
'Don't worry, he WILL take care.'

Following the view that the existence of alternatives is a defining property of focus (see Rooth 1992, Krifka 2008), we can account for the focus in these examples by assuming that the alternatives are {p, ¬p}, even though *p* is not contextually given, and may also include propositions where *p* is associated with various degrees of probability (cf. Romero & Han's 2004 claim that VERUM is focus on an epistemic adverb equivalent to *really*[4]).

We add to Giurgea and Remberger's (2014) observations another type of examples which show a correlation between these types of verum focus and VS orders. In some sentences that express threat, reassurance, concession, strong conviction, we find a destressed subject personal pronoun immediately after the verb. As Romanian is pro-drop, overt subject pronouns are used to indicate contrast, focalization, topic shift, to refer to less accessible entities (for 3rd person pronouns; [cf. Rîpeanu Reinheimer *et al.* 2013: 248–249]). However, after emphatically stressed verbs, we may find an overt pronoun which is not justified by any of these reasons. This can be seen in the following attested example, where, as the context clearly shows, the referent of the subject is the current discourse topic, the subject of the previous sentence, and is not contrasted with other referents, in such circumstances we would normally have expected the use of *pro*:

[4] They define VERUM (and *really*) as conversational epistemic operators that indicate that the speaker is certain that the proposition *p* should be added to the common ground.

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

(11) [Context: Olimpiu: *Cui o fi semănând copilul ăsta, aşa de zevzec? Numai cu mătuş-sa, cu verişoara Adelaida, poate să semene*. "Who might this child resemble, so silly? He can only resemble his aunt, cousin Adelaida."
Anişoara: *Puiu nu e băiat rău, unchiule, e muncitor, inteligent, învaţă carte.* "Puiu is not a bad boy, uncle, he's industrious, intelligent, he learns."
Olimpiu:] Bine-bine, nu le-a luat **el** toate de la verişoara Adelaida.
well-well not them(F)-has taken he all.F.PL from cousin-the Adelaida
A mai luat şi de la mine câte ceva… (T. Muşatescu, *Sosesc deseară*, 38)
has more taken also from me some things
'Well, well, (indeed) he didn't get everything from cousin Adelaida. He got some things from me too.'

Other examples of this type, common in the colloquial register, are given in (12); (12)a indicates strong commitment (which, depending on the context, can be understood as a threat or a reassurance); likewise, (12)b is used to assure the hearer, anticipating possible doubts and rejecting them:

(12) a. AM eu grijă!
have.1SG I care
'I'll take care, be sure!'
b. ŞTIE el ce face!
knows he what does
'He definitely knows what he's doing!'

The sequence *şti* 'know' + pronoun can be used to highlight the purposefulness of the agent's behavior. This can be seen in (13), where the referent of the pronoun is, again, the current discourse topic, and is not contrasted with other referents; the previous sentences talk about a little girl who chooses to go with a certain adult knowing that the latter is more willing than her grandmother to buy her bracelets (being taken from an oral corpus, the example also shows the focal stress on the verb, indicated by capitalization of the stressed syllable):

(13) a ştiUT ea de ce vine la Colţea şi n-a rămas cu mine.
has known she why comes to Colţea and not-has stayed with me
'She knew well why she came to Colţea instead of staying with me.' (ROVA 105)

This order may also occur in the first clause of an adversative coordination – in (14), the referent of the pronoun is the current discourse topic, the speaker's husband, and the use of a strong form is not justified by contrast or topic shift (the preceding sentence has the same referent as the subject: *Trei ani a stat omu' ei la Zamfirescu* 'Her man remained at Zamfirescu's for three years'):

(14) N-are **el** şcoală multă, **da'** are scris frumos (G. Adameşteanu,
not has he school much but has writing beautiful *Dimineaţă pierdută*, 7)
'(It's true) he hasn't much education, but he has a beautiful handwriting.'

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

(15) [Context: somebody is giving presents to his relatives]
O pereche de cărți de joc englezești... Nu sunt **ele** noi de tot, **dar** face
a pair of cards of game English not are they new entirely but makes
să le iei, că se găsesc foarte rar.
SBJV them take.2SG because REFL find.3PL very seldom
'A pair of English cards... (Admittedly,) they are not entirely new, but they're worth taking, as they are very hard to find.' (T. Muşatescu, *Sosesc deseară*, 21)

In such '*(verum) p but q*' environments, it is not the case that the speaker wants to assure the hearer about *p*, or that he finds *p* exceptional or surprising. Paradoxically, the use of *verum* in the first member helps to foreground the second member (*q*). We hypothesize that this effect is achieved in the following way: the speaker anticipates a possible objection to the intention underlying *q*, e.g. to express appreciation of a person, in (14), or to convince the hearer to be glad about the present, in (15); this possible objection is accepted by the speaker, but the mere fact that it was anticipated puts it in the background, with the result that the second member, *q*, receives a prominent status. We tried to render this effect in the English translations by using the expressions 'it's true that' and 'admittedly' in the first member. This asymmetry between the two members makes the first clause equivalent to a concessive clause.

This 'concessive' environment shows another peculiarity: the presumptive mood, a special mood form of Romanian which indicates epistemic possibility, can be used here without indicating uncertainty about *p*. The following attested example occurs in a context where the fact that the speaker is a countryman is an established fact, exempt from any real or feigned controversy:

(16) Ia ascultă-mă, de la țară **oi** **fi eu**, **dar** așa de prost nu sunt
hey listen.IMPV-me from country PRSM.1SG be I but so of stupid not am
să-ți crez toate mofturile dumitale.
SBJV-you.DAT believe.1SG all trifles-the your(POLITE)
'Now listen, I MAY be a countryman, but I'm not so stupid as to believe all your trifles.' (I. L. Caragiale, "Politică înaltă", in *Momente*, 1260)

In such examples of the form '*verum*(PRESUMPTIVE(*p*)) *but q*', the use of verum may be explained as an anticipation of a possible objection (like in (14)–(15) above): the speaker anticipates that *p* may be a reason, for the hearer, to expect ¬*q*. This is why *p* is mentioned although it constitutes background knowledge. This anticipation opens a set of alternatives where *p* is associated with various degrees of probability. We see here again the asymmetry between *p* and *q*: using *p* alone would be totally infelicitous; using just *'p but q'*, without verum or the presumptive, would also be infelicitous, because *p* is already known. The only acceptable paraphrase for (16) is '*although p, q*':

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

(17) a. # Sunt de la țară, dar nu sunt așa de prost încât să-ți cred toate mofturile.
'I'm a countryman, but I'm not so stupid as to believe all your trifles.'
b. Deşi sunt de la țară, nu sunt așa de prost încât să-ți cred toate mofturile.
'Although I'm a countryman, I'm not so stupid as to believe all your trifles.'

The use of a possibility modal, instead of the indicative, can be explained by the fact that asserting *p* is irrelevant, the important point being only the compatibility between *p*, taken as a hypothesis, and *q*. This 'concessive' use of an epistemic possibility modal is also found in other languages, such as English – see the so-called 'concessive *may*'[5], in the translation of (16) – German (Palmer 2001: 31) and Greek (Papafragou 2000: 129). Note that in English, the main stress falls on the modal (Papafragou 2000: 129), which is indicative of verum focus.

A further context in which the verb + unstressed subject pronoun order is used for rhetorical reasons is illustrated in (18). Unlike in the examples discussed so far, here we have focus stress on an argument – *un roman* 'a novel'. This example resembles the previous ones by the fact that the clause where the V-Pron order occurs is background information (it recalls an event that had often before been mentioned in the text), being used only for the sake of an argument); moreover, like in (14)–(16), the proposition *p* expressed in that clause is in a concessive relation with respect to one coordinated with it (*n-am murit* "I didn't die") – so we can explain the V-Pron order as in (14)-(16). The whole ($p \wedge q$) coordination is used as an argument for the compatibility between another proposition *r* and *q* (*r* = "They will hack my play in the theatre", *q* = "I will not die"), based on the fact that the unexpectedness of *p*, given *q*, is greater than the unexpectedness of *r*, given *q*; this second relation involves scalar focus on *p*, which is contrasted with *r*, and since "a novel" is the last element of the material that differentiates *p* from *r* ('lose a novel' vs. 'have the play hacked'), it receives focal stress:

(18) Am pierdut **eu** *un roman*, care îmi era drag, şi n-am murit – o
have.1 lost I a novel which me.DAT was dear and not-have.1SG died will
să mor cu atât mai puțin pentru o piesă pe care mi-o vor
die.1SG with as-much less for a play which me.DAT-CL.ACC will.3PL
stâlci ei la teatru!
hack they at theatre
'I lost a NOVEL, which I cherished so much, and I didn't die, I will die all the less so for a play that they will hack in the theatre!' (M. Sebastian, *Jurnal*, 173)

[5] See Quirk et al. (1985:224), Sweetser (1990), Papafragou (2000), Palmer (2001: 31), Collins (2009: 93), Narrog (2014). Palmer (2001:109) points out a similar use of the Latin subjunctive.

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

3. ANALYSIS

Under the assumption that *verum* is indeed a type of focus, the use of a VS order relates naturally to the already mentioned observation that focus fronting disallows a preverbal subject that follows the focus. Indeed, Giurgea & Remberger (2014) proposed that VS orders with verum focus are a special type of focus fronting, where the verbal complex itself checks the focal feature. They assume that verum focus is focus on polarity, that polarity is represented by a Σ head, as proposed by Laka (1990), which is part of the inflectional complex, and that the left-peripheral attracting Foc feature (probe) can be checked via head movement, not only via phrasal movement. We have seen that the view that verum focus is focus on polarity is problematic in some respects. Lohnstein (2012, 2016) proposes that verum focus is focus on the head encoding "sentence mood", which roughly corresponds to sentential force. This accounts indeed for the German verum focus marking at the C-level. However, he acknowledges that verum focus effects can also be achieved by focusing semantically light verbs placed in clause-final position in embedded clauses, which he explains by the fact that, due to semantic lightness, the focal alternatives are reduced to *p* and ¬*p*. Here, we remain agnostic on the exact element which bears verum Focus. For our purposes, it is sufficient to assume that this element is part of the Romanian inflectional complex and, as such, it can satisfy the Foc probe by head movement.

So far, this explains the fact that the subject is postverbal. But why is an overt form used even when all the pragmatic conditions for the use of *pro* are fulfilled? We suggest that the overtness of the subject is a way of making visible the raising of the verbal complex in order to check the Foc probe. Assuming the analysis of subject placement in Romanian in Giurgea & Remberger (2012), further discussed and elaborated in Giurgea (this issue), the relevant configurations are in (19). The background assumption is that there is a multifunctional preverbal position, labeled SpecFin, that accommodates fronted foci, wh-phrases, topics or preverbal subjects, due to the existence of various attracting probes on Fin. In the special case of verum focus, the Foc probe can be checked by head-movement of the verbal complex to Fin, as in (19)b. Now, if the subject is not overt, it is impossible to say whether Fin's probe has been satisfied by the inflectional complex, as an instance of verum focus, as in (19)b, or by *pro*, which can satisfy an Aboutness probe in Fin, as in (19)a. In other words, (19)b with an overt S_{Pron} is unambiguous, whereas with an S_{Pron} = *pro*, it is undistinguishable from (19)a.

(19) a. $[_{FinP}\ pro_{+About}\ [Fin^{0}_{uAbout}\ [_{InflP}\ V+Infl\ ...]]]$
b. $[_{FinP}\ V+Infl_{+Foc}\ –Fin^{0}_{uFoc}\ [_{InflP}\ t_{V+Infl}\ [S_{Pron}\ ...]]]$

As for the position of the pronominal subject, given that it always occurs immediately after the verb, one may assume SpecInfl, or a SpecSubj below Fin. However, as discussed in Giurgea (this issue), there is evidence that such a position

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

is not available in other cases of focus fronting. There are two possibilities: (i) under the multifunctional head analysis, we may assume that the subject occupies a position independently available for postverbal subjects, and adjacency results from the fact that, like in German, weak pronouns must raise at least as high as the highest scrambling position (we might also consider a constraint pertaining to Weight, requiring light elements to precede heavy elements in the postverbal domain, which would act as a PF filter); (ii) we may allow in this precise case an exception to the competition between the focus probe and the probe attracting subjects; Sheehan (2010) explained the competition between Foc/Wh and preverbal subjects in Spanish by the existence of a single EPP that can be associated to one of the Fin and Infl heads, but not to both. Extending this to Romanian, we might assume that there is a particular instance of Fin, which attracts a +Foc inflectional complex (bearing thus verum focus) and furthermore selects a +EPP Infl, or Subj (in case we adopt Cardinaletti's 2004 SubjP hypothesis). As discussed in Giurgea (this issue, section 6.2), in Romanian non-topical preverbal subjects are not always nominatives, but can also be 'oblique experiencers' in the pseudo-quirky-case constructions of the type *a-i plăcea* 'to-CL.DAT like', which indicates a uD probe attracting the closest argument, instead of the uϕ probe. We can find, indeed, dative pronouns after the verb, in similar verum focus conditions, if the verb takes a dative experiencer:

(20) Ce facem la ultimul seminar, o să vedem la curs. O să-mi VIe **mie**
what do.1PL at last-the seminar will see.1PL at course will-me.DAT come.3 me.DAT
o idee. (CORV 167)
an idea
'What we'll do in the last seminar, we'll see in class. I will surely find something.'

Therefore, if we adopt solution (ii), we should consider that the head responsible for the subject's placement bears the uD probe, rather than uPhi, being comparable to the cartographic Subj. Solution (i) is more economical from a syntactic point of view, being compatible with a simpler version of the multifunctional head approach, in which there is no distinct Subj head.

4. FURTHER EXTENSIONS: THE DOUBLE SUBJECT CONSTRUCTION

The sequence verbal complex + unstressed subject pronoun has been clearly grammaticalized as a marker of a verum focus of the types discussed in the previous sections in the guise of the so-called 'double subject construction', which is found in various regional varieties of Romanian[6]. In this construction, a

[6] GALR (2008 II: 353) characterizes the construction as *popular* (i.e. sub-standard). Indeed, in the colloquial register of the contemporary standard language in Bucharest, which we speak, examples with a fully integrated subject and a clearly expletive pronoun, such as (21)-(24), do not

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

non-pronominal subject co-occurs with the subject pronoun (see Byck 1937, Cornilescu 1997). Probably originating in an apposition or afterthought, this non-pronominal subject became fully integrated[7]; the following example shows that it is not right-dislocated and does not need to be adjacent to the pronoun:

(21) Bate **el** **Ivan** în poartă cât poate, dar au prins **ei** acum
knocks 3MS.NOM Ivan in gate how-much can.3SG but have.3PL caught they now
dracii la minte.
devils-the at mind
'Now Ivan is knocking at the gate as much as he can, but this time the devils have got the trick.' (I. Creangă, *Ivan Turbincă*, apud GALR 2008 II: 352)

One may find examples where the subject is indefinite or part of an idiom, showing that the pronoun has lost its normal interpretation:

(22) Dar o să vie **ea** **o vreme** când să se găsească cineva să scrie
but will come.3 3FS.NOM a time when SBJV REFL find.3 somebody SBJV write.3
despre vitejiile Românilor. (I. Ghica, *Scrisori către Vasile Alecsandri*,
about braveries-the Romanians-the.GEN apud TDRG, s.v. *el*)
'But a time will definitely/hopefully come when there will be somebody to write about the braveries of Romanians.'

(23) S-a găsî **iel** **ac** şî **di cojocu** **lui**
REFL-will find 3MS.NOM needle also of sheepskin-the his
'There WILL be somebody who will have a rod in pickle for him.'
(Herzog, Gherasim, *Glosarul dialectului mărginean*, apud Puşcariu 1924–1926: 1393)

In some regional varieties, the pronoun may even show an unagreeing masculine singular form, like an expletive:

(24) a. Las' c-o să pățască **el** **hoții**
let.IMPV that-will undergo.3 3MS.NOM thieves-the
'Don't worry, the thieves will get it!' (Braşov dialect; Puşcariu 1924-1926: 1393)
b. Are să-l certe **el** **preoteasa** pe popă
has SBJV-CL.ACC scold.3 3MS.NOM priest's-wife-the DOM priest
'The priest's wife will (definitely) scold the priest.' (ibid.)
c. Vine **el** **Junii**
comes 3MS.NOM lads-the
'(The feast called) *Junii* will come!' (ibid.)
d. Lasă c'a veni **el** **vara**.
let.IMPV that-will come 3MS.NOM summer-the(F)

seem acceptable. There are attested examples in literary texts (starting from the XIXth century), mostly used to give a colloquial flavor.

[7] The view that this construction originates in the construction discussed in sections 2-3, in the way suggested here, is also held by Iordan (1944/1975).

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

'Don't worry, the summer will come!'
(T. Pamfile, *Văzduhul după credințele poporului român*, apud DLR, s.v. *el*)

Based on the fact that the pronoun is unstressed and always adjacent to the verb, Cornilescu (1997) analyzed it as a weak pronoun and, on the assumption that weak pronouns occupy case positions, she identified the position of this pronoun with SpecAgrS. She proposed that SpecAgrS is always postverbal in Romanian because the verbal complex raises to a higher head, M(ood).

This analysis does not explain why the construction is limited to affective sentences, in which the emphatic stress on V indicates verum focus. In order to account for this, we propose that the verbal complex only raises to a higher position in case of verum focus and, like the unnecessary overt subject in the construction discussed in the previous sections, the doubling pronoun is used in order to make this raising visible.

Unlike the pronoun in the construction discussed in sections 2-3, the doubling pronoun is an expletive (a view also endorsed by Cornilescu 1997), as shown by the co-occurrence with indefinite subjects (see (22)-(23)). An expletive status is also obvious for the varieties in which the pronoun does not agree with the thematic subject (see (24)) and in the use with weather predicates:

(25) După vreme rea a fi el vreodată și senin. (I. Creangă, *Harap-Alb*)
after weather bad will be 3MS.NOM sometime also clear
'After bad weather, it WILL be fair weather someday.'

The fact that the expletive only appears in case the verbal complex raises to mark verum focus can be formalized in terms of selection: there is a special variety of the head responsible for fronted foci – a variety of Fin under the multifunctional head hypothesis discussed in Giurgea (this issue) – which attracts the inflectional complex and also selects for an inflectional head with an expletive specifier – $Infl_{expl}$; as we remain agnostic here about the exact internal make-up of the inflectional complex, we just use the label Infl for the highest head in this complex, which is selected by Fin. Assuming that verum focus is also marked on this Infl head, we can assign the relevant Fin head the selectional feature $+Infl_{expl+Foc,}$ in addition to the uFoc probe. The probe, finding Infl as a goal, will attract it, triggering head movement.

The expletive pronoun is directly inserted in SpecInfl as a result of a selectional property of $Infl_{Expl}$. In the agreeing construction (see (22)), the expletive is a matrix of unvalued ϕ-features that agree with the features on T (or AgrS) which, in turn, agree with the subject.

The non-agreeing construction in (24) is more problematic: as can be seen in (24)a,c, the verb does not agree with a plural subject, so that it looks as though it agrees with the expletive. Indeed, Cornilescu (1997) proposes that AgrS agrees with the expletive and licenses it as nominative, whereas nominative on the

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

thematic subject is licensed by T via government (for these two ways of licensing nominative, she refers to Roberts 1991). But how can the thematic subject fail to agree and nevertheless be licensed as nominative? Note however that the failure of agreement with the thematic subject can only be in number, not in person – no example of the type *Ți-arată el eu* 'you.DAT-shows 3MS.NOM I' has ever been attested. Secondly, 3rd person singular is a morphological default form in Romanian (used, e.g., with sentential subjects or in configurations with no nominative subjects, e.g. *îmi place de X* 'me.DAT likes of X'). Thirdly, absence of plural agreement with 3rd person subjects is widely attested in southern dialects, independently of the double subject construction. We propose therefore that the co-occurrence of a masculine singular expletive with a plural subject and a singular form of the verb is contingent on the possibility of licensing 3rd person subjects without number agreement. As a matter of fact, the only examples with singular expletive and plural subjects we have found in the literature[8] are those registered by Puşcariu in the dialect of Braşov (see (24)a,c), a dialect in which absence of number agreement in the 3rd person is current (Procopovici 1933: 10). Most of the attested examples show only gender mismatch, the expletive showing a masculine singular form and the subject being a feminine singular, as in (24)b,d (in DLR, s.v. *el*, we found 7 examples of this type, from various sources, compared to only two of number mismatch, both taken from Puşcariu's article).

We propose therefore that (i) the non-agreeing expletive differs from the agreeing one in having valued ϕ-features and (ii) the verb must show agreement with both the expletive and the thematic subject. As a result, no mismatch between the expletive and the thematic subject is allowed if the verb requires a value for that feature. Therefore, person mismatch is excluded, gender mismatch is always allowed (Romanian verbs do not agree in gender) and number mismatch is only allowed for the 3rd person, in those varieties that independently allow absence of number agreement with 3rd person subjects.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have proposed that in certain cases an overt subject pronoun placed immediately after the verb is used to indicate that the verbal complex has moved from its ordinary position $Infl^0$, undergoing focus fronting. The focus in this case is associated to a clausal functional head, as an instance of 'verum' focus. As sentences with *pro* are potentially ambiguous between an underlying SV order, with S in the regular topic subject position and no active left-peripheral focus, and a VS order, with the emphatically stressed verbal complex checking a focus probe by head movement, an overt pronoun is sometimes used, instead of *pro*, in

[8] Cf. Olsen (1928), Procopovici (1933), Paul (1934), Byck (1937), Iordan (1944/1975), Ulrich (1985), DLR s.v. *el*, TDRG s.v. *el*, GALR.

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

postverbal position, to disambiguate in favor of the second interpretation, even when the discourse context would have allowed the use of *pro*. This pattern, which can be treated as a matter of pragmatic choice between *pro* and an overt pronoun in the standard language, underwent grammaticalization in some regional varieties, the pronoun having become an expletive which fills the SpecInfl position, with the same purpose of indicating that the verbal complex has raised above $Infl^0$. This is how the so-called 'double subject' construction emerged, whose restriction to emphatic assertions can thus be explained.

CORPUS

G. Adameşteanu, *Dimineaţă pierdută*, 3rd edition, Bucureşti, Editura 100 + 1 Gramar, 1997.
I. L. Caragiale, *Momente* [1901], in: *Opere. I. Proză literară*, Bucureşti, Univers Enciclopedic, 2000.
CORV = L. Dascălu-Jinga (coord.), *Corpus de română vorbită (CORV). Eşantioane*, Bucureşti, Editura Oscar Print, 2002.
T. Muşatescu, *Sosesc deseară*, in: *Scrieri*, vol. I, Bucureşti, Editura pentru Literatură, 1969.
ROVA = L. Dascălu-Jinga (coord.), *Româna vorbită actuală (ROVA), Corpus şi studii*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2011.
M. Sebastian, *Jurnal (1935–1944*), Bucureşti, Humanitas, 1996.

REFERENCES

Alboiu, G., 2002, *The features of movement in Romanian*, Bucureşti, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.
Barbu, A. M., 1999, "Complexul verbal", *Studii şi cercetări lingvistice*, 50, 1, 39–84.
Büring, D., 2006, "Intonation und Informationsstruktur", in: H. Blühdorn, E. Breindl, U. H. Waßner (eds), *Text-Verstehen. Grammatik und darüber hinaus*, Berlin, New York, de Gruyter, 144–163.
Byck, J., 1937, "L'emploi affectif du pronom personnel en roumain", *Bulletin linguistique*, 15–33.
Cardinaletti, A., 2004, "Towards a cartography of subject positions", in: L. Rizzi (ed.), *The Structure of CP and IP. The Cartography of Syntactic Structures, II*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 115–165.
Collins, P., 2009, *Modals and Quasi-Modals in English*, Amsterdam, Rodopi.
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.
Dik, S. C., M. E. Hoffman, J. R. de Jong, S. I. Djiang, H. Stroomer, L. de Vries, 1981, "On the typology of Focus Phenomena", in: T. Hoekstra, H. van der Hulst, M. Moortgat (eds), *Perspectives on Functional Grammar*, Dordrecht, Foris Publications, 41–74.
DLR = Academia Română, *Dicţionarul limbii române*. Serie nouă. Bucharest, Editura Academiei.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., 1994, *The Syntax of Romanian*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., C. Galves, 2000, "Proclisis, enclisis and head-to-head merge", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics* 2, 1, 35–51.
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.
GALR = Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti", *Gramatica limbii române*, coord. V. Guţu Romalo, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2008 (2 vol.).

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

Giurgea, I., 2011, "The Romanian verbal cluster and the theory of head movement", in: J. Herschensohn (ed.), *Romance Linguistics 2010. Selected papers from the 40th Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages (LSRL)*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 271–286.

Giurgea, I., this issue, "Preverbal Subjects and Topic Marking in Romanian".

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.

Gussenhoven, C., 1984, *On the Grammar and Semantics of Sentence Accents*, Berlin, New York, Walter de Gruyter.

Gutzmann, D., E. Castroviejo Miró, 2011, "The Dimensions of Verum", in: O. Bonami, P. Cabredo Hofherr (eds), *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics 8*, http://www.cssp.cnrs.fr/eiss8, 143–165.

Halliday, M. A. K., 1967, *Intonation and Grammar in British English*, The Hague, Mouton.

Höhle, T. 1988, "Vorwort und Nachwort zu Verumfokus", *Sprache und Pragmatik,* 5, 1–7.

Höhle, T. 1992, "Über Verumfokus im Deutschen", in: J. Jacobs, (ed.), *Informationsstruktur und Grammatik*, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 112–141.

Iordan, I., 1944/1975, *Stilistica limbii române*, Bucureşti, Institutul de Lingvistică Română, 1944, 2nd revised edition, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1975.

Krifka, M., 2008, "Basic notions of information structure", *Acta Linguistica Hungarica,* 55, 243–276.

Laka, M. I., 1990, *Negation in syntax: On the nature of functional categories and projections*, doctoral dissertation, MIT.

Lohnstein, H., 2012, "Verumfokus–Satzmodus–Wahrheit", in: H. Lohnstein, H. Blühdorn (eds), *Wahrheit–Fokus–Negation*, Hamburg, Buske Verlag, 31–67.

Lohnstein, H. 2016, "Verum focus", in: C. Féry, S. Ishihara (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 290–313.

Narrog, H., 2014, "Beyond intersubjectification. Textual uses of modality and mood in subordinate clauses as part of speech-act orientation", in: L. Brems, L. Ghesquière, F. Van de Velde (eds), Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 29–51.

Olsen, H., 1928, *Étude sur la syntaxe des pronoms personnels et réfléchis en roumain*, Copenhagen, Bianco Lunos Bogtrykker.

Palmer, F. R., 2001, *Mood and Modality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Papafragou, A., 2000, *Modality. Issues in the Semantics-Pragmatics Interface*, Oxford, Elsevier.

Paul, R., 1934, *Un capitol de stilistică românească: subiectul de voinţă*, Cluj, Tipografia „Progresul".

Procopovici, A., 1933, *Pronumele personal în funcţiune morfologică verbală*, Cluj, Cartea Românească.

Puşcariu, S., 1924–1926, "Pe marginea cărţilor", *Dacoromania*, 4, 1303–1409.

Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, 1985, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, London, Longman.

Rîpeanu Reinheimer, S., T. Tasmowski, A. Vasilescu, 2013, "Personal and reflexive pronouns", in: C. Dobrovie-Sorin, I. Giurgea (eds), *A Reference Grammar of Romanian*. I, *The Noun Phrase*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 231–281.

Roberts, I., 1991, *Verbs and Diachronic Syntax*, Dordrecht, Kluwer.

Romero, M., Ch. Han, 2004, "On negative y/n-questions", *Linguistics and Philosophy.* 27, 609–658.

Rooth, M., 1992, "A Theory of Focus Interpretation", *Natural Language Semantics*, 1, 75–116.

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)

Rooth, M. 2016, "Alternative semantics", in: C. Féry, S. Ishihara (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Information Structure*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 19–40.

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.

Sweetser, E., 1990, *From Etymology to Pragmatics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

TDRG = H. Tiktin, *Rumänisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 1st edition, Bucureşti, Imprimeria Statului, 1903–1924, 3rd edition, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 2001–2005.

Ulrich, M., 1985, *Thetisch und Kategorisch. Funktionen der Anordnung von Satzkonstituenten am Beispiel des Rumänisch und anderer Sprachen*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag.

Watters, J., 1979, "Focus in Aghem", in: L. Hyman (ed.), *Aghem grammatical structure (Southern California occasional papers 7)*, Los Angeles, University of Southern California, 137–197.

BDD-A26355 © 2017 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:54 UTC)