ADJECTIVES AND SPECIFICITY

ALEXANDRA CORNILESCU and ANCA DINU[1]

Abstract. In recent studies, such as Jacob (2005), Demonte (2008) it has been claimed that in Romance languages (e.g. Spanish), prenominal adjectives signal a [+specific] reading of the containing DP. In this paper, we address the same problem with respect to Romanian prenominal adjectives.

The following *claims* will be defended in this paper: a) The [+specific] reading is just *one* of the possible interpretations of prenominal adjectives. b) Not all prenominal adjectives, however, impose specific interpretations. There is a class of prenominal adjectives which do not convey "an anchoring of the referent with respect to either the speaker or some other participant". This is the case of *prenominal adjectives in generic sentences*. c) The prenominal space is not homogeneous, accommodating generic (taxonomic), as well as specific readings, but prenominal adjectives represent a unitary class, by virtue of other semantic properties (mode of semantic combination, modal, quantificational features).

Keywords: DP-adjectives, NP-adjectives, prenominal adjectives, specificity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is devoted to a study of *prenominal adjectives in Romanian*, aiming to prove that a class of prenominal adjectives, but *not all* of them, encode specificity, i.e. determine a [+specific] interpretation of the DP through their syntax or through their combined lexical meaning and syntax. As known, with [+specific] DPs, the speaker "has a particular referent in mind" and this piece of information is not (or need not be) shared by the hearer, hence specific DPs are typically indefinite. The kind of specificity syntactically encoded by prenominal APs is *epistemic specificity* (Farkas 2002), which reflects a specific information state of the speaker (the subject or some other argument) with respect to the referent of the DP. Unlike scopal specificity, epistemic specificity does not require the presence of any other modal operator with which the indefinite would co-vary (Farkas 2002). In sum, the following properties characterize [+ specific epistemic] DPs (as in von Heusinger, Kaiser 2010).

(i) the interpretation of a specific DP does not depend on the interpretation of the matrix predicate or of semantic operators, such as modal verbs;

(ii) the referent of a specific DP is functionally linked to the Speaker of the sentence or to another referential expression in the sentence, such as the subject or object.

[1] University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, alexandracornilescu@yahoo.com, anca_d_dinu@ yahoo.com. Work on this study was financed by research project PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0959.

RRL, **LIX**, *1*, p. 103–128, Bucureşti, 2014

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

While specific DPs are typically indefinite, specificity and definiteness are independent properties, encoding different notions: Specificity is a referential property of the DP. Definiteness encodes familiarity (as well as uniqueness and existence). As a result definiteness and specificity may co-occur (see von Heusinger 2002), in the sense that specific DPs may be *discourse new*, and then they are indefinite or *discourse old* and then they may be definite. The claim that DPs may encode specificity through the position of adjectives is made against a more general view of the Romanian DP, which proposes that there are two domains of interpretation (or phases) in the DP, a *lexical NP phase* and a *functional DP phase*. This view of DP architecture has been supported in previous work (e.g. Cornilescu, Nicolae 2011; Cornilescu 2004) by different arguments, coming from linearization, the checking of definiteness, the assignment of the genitive case, the syntax of demonstratives, a.o. The syntax and interpretation of adnominal adjectives is also an important empirical argument for distinguishing two nominal areas: an area of NP adjectives (adjectives which combine with NPs) and an area of DP adjectives (adjectives that combine with DPs).

1.1. Position and interpretation of Adjectives in Romanian and Romance

While in English uncomplemented adjectives must be prenominal, with limited exceptions, in Romance languages adjectives are either prenominal or postnominal and the same adjectives receive different interpretations function of their position with respect to the head. Researchers have detected a reliable intuitive correlation between the position of adjectives and their interpretations, but exactly how to characterize the relevant difference has proved to be a difficult task. Demonte (2008:71) proposes the following rough generalization for Spanish:

(1) In Spanish, a language in which adjectives appear pre- and post-nominally, there are systematic (although sometimes not easily describable) interpretative differences associated with the position of adjectives in this syntactic domain.

This difference in meaning can be provisionally described, as is usual in descriptive grammars, as an opposition between *restrictive* and *non-restrictive adjectives*. Knittel (to appear) insists that in French, prenominal adjectives typically have *subjective*, *speaker-bound interpretations*, in opposition with post-nominal adjectives, which have *descriptive objective readings*. The same observations have been made by Romanian researchers. For instance, GBLR 2010: 218 describes prenominal adjectives as "isolated", i.e. non-restrictive. These intuitive descriptions are confirmed by pairs of examples such as (2):

(2) a. o casă mare — a big house
b. un mare om — a great man

Since, as explained above, specific readings of DPs are, in some sense, subjective, encoding a direct evaluation or perception by the speaker of the referent of the DP, it is expected that specific adjectives, i.e. adjectives which confer a [+specific] interpretation of the DP containing them, should be *prenominal*.

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Whenever adjectives occur on both sides of the head, there is one position which is unmarked or default in that it is both much more frequent and ambiguous. In English the default position is prenominal, in Romance languages it is postnominal. Thus, as shown by Morzycki (2008a), the postnominal position of Italian and Spanish harbors both restrictive and nonrestrictive readings, while the prenominal position is unambiguously nonrestrictive:

(3) Le noiose lezioni di Ferri se le ricordano tutti. (Italian, Morzycki (2008a:104))
the boring lectures of Ferri SE remember all
a. **Restrictive*: Everybody remembers just Ferri's classes which were boring.
b. *Nnonrestrictive*: Everybody remembers Ferri's classes, which were boring.

(4) Le lezioni noiose di Ferri se le ricordano tutti.
the lectures boring of Ferri SE remember all
a. *Restrictive*: Everybody remembers just Ferri's classes which were boring.
b. *Nnonrestrictive*: Everybody remembers Ferri's classes, which were boring.

In Romanian as well, the postnominal position is frequent, unmarked and ambiguous. In contrast, the prenominal space disambiguates in favour of the nonrestrictive subjective reading.

1.2. Prenominal adjectives and specific interpretations

The idea that prenominal adjectives in Romance DPs may confer *specific* interpretation to the DP has long been noticed and it has been related to other, more general, interpretative principles (the difference between inherent and contextual properties of objects, the relevance of focus, etc.). This view has been developed with new arguments in important recent studies. An example is Demonte (2009:88), who claims that "In indefinite context, DPs with prenominal adjectives have a specific reading. On the other hand, DPs with postnominal adjectives are ambiguous between a specific and a non-specific interpretation." Demonte comments on examples like (5a), remarking that the DP containing the prenominal adjective is specific and takes wide scope with respect to the quantifier. In contrast, in (5b), with a postnominal adjective, the narrow scope interpretation is preferred in Spanish.

(5) a. Ana sabe que *todos* lo conferenciantes se entrevistaron con *una muy importante periodista.* (wide scope)
'Ana knows that all the researchers were interviewed by a very important journalist.'

b. Ana sabe que *todos* lo conferenciantes se entrevistaron con *una periodista muy importante*. (narrow scope)
'Ana knows that all the researchers were interviewed by a very important journalist.'

The idea that (all) prenominal adjectives have specific readings in (languages like) Spanish has also been argued for by Ticio (2003) and especially by Jacob (2005). Like Ticio and Demonte, Jacob ultimately believes that all and only prenominal adjectives have specific readings. He connects the specific interpretation in prenominal position with the

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

information structure of the DP, namely with the fact that prenominal adjectives are not focused. According to Jacob (2005), adjective position is not triggered directly by specificity, it depends on *information structure and relevance, and it is via these functional levels that it is related to specificity*. His proposal is that postnominal adjectives are *focused* and *must be restrictive*. In contrast, prenominal adjectives, which are not focused (unless contrastively stressed), and which are not restrictive, are free to express any other discourse function that the adjective could fulfill, including specificity. Specificity depends on the fact that [–focus] adjectives are appositive. The relevant notion of focus is information focus, since, as will be seen below, and as also remarked by Demonte, contrastively focused adjectives are often specific.

Summing up his analysis, Jacob concludes that prenominal adjectives in argumental NPs are not rhematically focused and thus acuquire a specific interpretation. He equates specificity with the non-restrictive reading[2].

Against these general remarks, we will show that a closer examination of the data leads to a slightly different picture regarding the correlation between the prenominal position of the adjective and specificity. The following *claims* will be defended in this paper:

(a) The [+specific] reading is just *one* of the possible interpretations of prenominal adjectives.

(b) Not all prenominal adjectives, however, impose specific interpretations. There is a class of prenominal adjectives which do not convey "an anchoring of the referent with respect to either the speaker or some other participant". This is the case of *prenominal adjectives in generic sentences*.

(c) The prenominal space is not homogeneous, accommodating generic (taxonomic), as well as specific readings, but prenominal adjectives represent a unitary class, by virtue of other semantic properties (mode of semantic combination, modal, quantificational features).

2. FRAMEWORK OF THE ANALYSIS

2.1. Background

The starting point of the analysis is a more complex and explicit classification of adjectives from a threefold perspective, integrating syntax, ontology, and mode of semantic combination. Traditionally, the basic syntactic roles of an adjective are *attribution* and *predication*. Following Larson and Marusic 2004, we reinterpret these roles as a contrast between NP-adjectives and DP-adjectives. *NP-adjectives* are noun modifiers and combine with an NP constituent, while DP-adjectives are *predicates on individuals* and combine with a DP constituent. ***NP-adjectives*** are *attributive* in the sense of Baker (2003)[3]; they directly merge with the NP, *without functional structure mediating the relationship* with the noun (6a). Therefore, NP-adjectives are the "*direct modifiers*" of Sproat, Shih (1988).

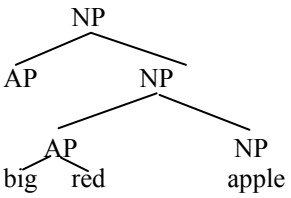
[2] "The prenominal non-restrictive modifier is *hardly compatible with a non-specific reading of the NP:* it seems clear that non-restrictive modifiers require a ready-made referent".

[3] "adjectives have an option which is unique to them: that of being merged directly with the NP, *without functional structure mediating the relationship*." Since functional structure is not required, attributive NP-adjectives should merge as *adjuncts of the NP.*

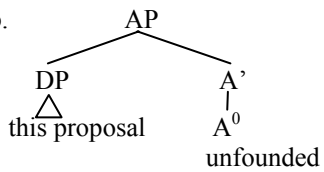
BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Under Baker's analysis, typical NP-adjectives merge as pre-nominal *adjuncts of the NP*. In contrast, ***DP-adjectives*** are sister to DPs. Their main syntactic option is to merge as small clause predicates, and combine with *DP-subjects*, as in (6b). There is however ample evidence for the existence of DP-adjectives **inside** the noun phrase as well. For instance, under standard GB assumptions (Browning 1987), the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive modifiers amounted to the claim that restrictive modifiers are NP- sisters, while non-restrictive modifiers are DP-sisters, as in (6c). More recent studies have argued for the existence of predicative, DP-modifiers in *prenominal* position as well. For relevant discussion see (Sleeman 1998, Marusič, Žaucer, to appear, Cornilescu, Nicolae 2012). In the current interpretation, *specific adjectives* will prove to be DP-adjectives in terms of this classification.

(6) a.



b.



c.



In an ontology that countenances (at least) objects and kinds, as in (Carlson 1977), adjectives may have object level readings (*Mary is tall*) or kind-level reading (*chemical engineer*) or both. The well-known ambiguity of *beautiful dancer* in (7) may easily be described in these terms (see MacNally, Boleda 2004).

(7) a. Mary is a beautiful dancer.
Mary is beautiful. (as an individual, object level reading).
Mary is beautiful (as a dancer, kind level reading).

A third factor relevant for this analysis is the *mode of semantic combination*, that is, the rule by means of which adjectives combine with the NP or DP constituent. Two modes of combination have been described in the literature: functional application and predicate modification:

(8) a. **Functional Application** (Heim, Kratzer 1998: 44)
For $\alpha \in D_{\sigma}$, $\beta \in D_{<\sigma, \tau>}$ and γ such that γ immediately dominates both α and β,
$[[\gamma]] = [[\beta]]([[\alpha]])$

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

b. **θ-Identification or Predicate Modification** (Higginbotham 1985)
For $\alpha \in D_{<e, \sigma>}$, $\beta \in D_{<e, \sigma>}$ and γ such that γ immediately dominates both α and β, $[[\gamma]] = \lambda x\, [[\alpha]](x) \wedge [[\beta]] (x)$.

Functional application combines constituents that have *denotations of different types*, such that one of them, the function, takes the second for its argument. Thus, in the predicative configuration, (6b) the adjective *unfounded* is of type <e, t> and combines with its <e>-type subject *this proposal* by functional application. More generally, *DP-adjectives* are always predicates and combine with their DP-argument by functional application.

θ-Identification combines predicates of *the same type*, i.e. having *the same denotation*, by means of *set intersection*, therefore by the conjunction of predicates. Adjectives that may combine with NPs by θ-Identification are *intersective,* as seen in (9a). Not all adjectives are intersective (Bolinger 1967 a.o.). A well-known example of non-intersective adjectives is the group of intensional adjectives like *former, alleged*, *mere*, etc. With these adjectives the intersective paraphrase is ill-formed, as shown in (9b). Compare:

(9) a. red ball → λx[[red](x) and [ball]](x)
b. former king → *λx[[former](x) and [king]](x)

Intensional adjectives have traditionally been analyzed as second order functions denoting properties of properties of individuals and having <<e,t>,<e,t>> denotations cf. (Montague 1974; Siegel 1976). Accordingly, they combine with NPs by *functional application*, as in (10).

(10) $[[\text{former}_{]<<e,t>,<e,t>>}[\text{king}]_{<e,t>}]$ → λx[[former][king]](x)

The examples have shown that, depending on their denotation, NP-adjectives combine with the sister NP either by θ–identification (the case of intersective adjectives) or by functional application (non-intersective adjectives). In contrast, DP-adjectives always combine with their subject by functional application.

2.2. Some relevant adjectival classes

2.2.1. *NP-Adjectives*

On the basis of the criteria presented above, it is useful to define three classes of adjectives, which exhibit a strong and relatively stable correlation between syntactic construction and semantic type, the latter determining the mode of combination with the noun. The three classes are: qualifying adjectives, intensional adjectives and taxonomic adjectives (relative adjectives).

An important empirical fact is that adjectives may shift their denotation depending on the syntactic configuration where they occur; each adjective may be associated with a family of denotations, but in each of the three adjectives classes there are certain prototypical adjectives, on the basis of which the class is identified and learned.

The first adjective class is that of **qualifying adjectives**. Qualifying adjectives (*înalt* 'tall'*, frumos* 'beautifull'*, brun* 'dark', etc.) exhibit a cluster of properties, which we briefly

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

review. They denote *properties of objects*, mapping objects onto truth values, so that they are <e,t> adjectives. From a syntactic perspective, they are freely used attributively (as NP-adjectives) or predicatively as (DP-adjectives), as shown in the examples in (12).

When they are attributive, they merge as *left adjuncts of NPs*, in all languages. Depending on the language, adjuncts may be linearized to the left of the nominal head (English) or to the right of the head (Romance), with the linearization operation occurring at PF. The unmarked position of qualifying adjectives is *post-nominal* in Romanian. Qualifying adjectives are *intersective* and combine with the noun by *predicate modification*. With qualifying adjectives, the structure (Adj (N)) (x) endorses both of the inferences 'x is N' and 'x is A'.

(11)



Qualifying adjectives are *gradable*; they are modified by both degree words (*foarte/cam înalt* 'very/rather tall') and adverbial modifiers (*incredibil de înalt* 'incredibly tall') and appear in comparative constructions. Since they describe properties of individuals, they characteristically answer questions of type *Cum este N?* 'How is N?', 'What is N like?' (Knittel, to appear). Knittel (2005) also notes that, morphologically, they may serve as bases for deriving nominalizations: *înalt/înălțime* 'tall/tallness', *lung/lungime*, 'long/length etc, which describe the same referents (12d).

(12) a. un băiat foarte înalt
a boy very tall
'a very tall boy'
b. Băiatul acela este (foarte) înalt.
boy.the that is (very) tall
'That boy is (very) tall'
c. Cum este Ion? Ion este cam înalt pentru vârsta lui.
'How is Ion? Ion is rather tall for his age'
d. Ce înălțime are Ion? Cât de înalt este Ion?
What height has Ion? How DE tall is Ion?
'What is the height of Ion? How tall is Ion? '

As already mentioned, in Romanian, qualifying adjectives preferably occur in postnominal position, however, with different interpretations, discussed below, most of them may also appear pre-nominally (13):

(13) Înalții munți se vedeau în zare.
tall.the mountains SE saw in horizon.
'The tall mountains were seen in the distance.'

The second adjective class is that of **intensional adjectives**, such as *viitor*, 'future', *fost,* 'former'*, pretins,* 'alleged'*, simplu,* 'mere', etc, They denote *properties of properties of objects*, of type <<e,t><e,t>>. Syntactically, they are strictly *NP-adjectives*, since they are

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

completely excluded from predicative positions. Their mode of combination is *functional application*, with the adjectives taking the nominal property as its argument. Notice that the A+N order corresponds to the functor (argument) structure. Given their denotations as properties of properties of individuals, intensional adjectives have only *kind-level readings*. Their special semantic property is that the (Adj (N)(x) structure does not endorse 'x is A' and does not even endorse 'x is N'. Somebody who is an alleged scholar is not a scholar.

Intensional adjectives have one more important property: they escape ordering by the Cinquean hierarchy, as stressed in Teodorescu (2005), who argues that only adjectives which produce equivalent readings by combining with the noun are ordered by the Cinquean hierarchies. For example, the DPs in (15a-b) are denotationally equivalent, though they may differ in the placement of focus, while (14a-b) determine very different referents. Therefore, unlike qualifying adjectives, intensional adjectives always *stack* and must be projected in an order which is strictly dependent on their semantic scope; a change of word-order changes truth conditions, as apparent from the examples in (14):

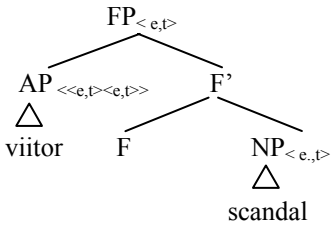
(14) a. un fost viitor ministru
a former future minister
b. un viitor fost ministru
future former minister

(15) a. o minge roşie mare
a ball red big
'a big red ball'
b. o minge mare roşie
a ball big red

Given their always prenominal position and their interpretation by stacking, intensional adjectives (16) are projected as *specifiers* and at least in English and Romance remain in prenominal position (17).

(16) viitor scandal
future scandal

(17)



Since intensional adjectives are introduced by higher functional heads, they are expected to precede qualifying adjectives, as borne out by both English and Romanian (19). Intensional adjectives occupy the highest position in the NP domain. They are directly preceded by quantifiers (which mark the NumP) and determiners (20).

(19) fost ministru progresist
former minister progressive
'former progressive (cabinet) minister'

(20) doi foşti colegi
two former colleagues

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

The third category of adjectives is that of **taxonomic adjectives**: *cerealier* 'cereal', *național* 'national', *comic* 'comic', *român* 'Romanian', *chimic* 'chemical', *medical* 'medical', *literal* 'literal', etc. This very large class includes **relative adjectives** (see MacNally, Boleda 2004, Cornilescu 2004 for Romanian and Knittel 2005 for French), as well as **taxonomic uses of qualifying adjectives**. It is relative adjectives that determine the properties of this adjectival class. Relative (taxonomic) adjectives denote *subkinds of the kind denoted by the NP*, not properties of individuals. Syntactically they are *NP-adjectives* and have *kind-level readings*. Their predicative use is severely restricted (21b), in that their subject cannot be a DP that only has an object level interpretation, such as a proper name:

(21) a. Martin is a technical architect.
b. *Martin is technical.

They are felicitous as predicates if they denote discriminating properties of subkinds (Knittel 2005) and the subject may have a kind-level reading as in (22).

(22) a. Tigrul este carnivor. / Această pasăre poate fi carnivoră.
The tiger is carnivorous. / This bird may be carnivorous.
b. Aceste probleme sunt teritoriale.
These problems are territorial.

Taxonomic adjectives are *subsective*, i.e. the structure [A [N]](x) entails 'x is N', but not (necessarily) 'x is A'. Their subsective interpretation differentiates them from both qualifying adjectives, which are intersective, endorsing both 'x is N' and 'x is A', and from intensional adjectives which endorse neither inference. Given their interpretation, they combine with the NP by *functional application*.

Relative adjectives have characteristic morphosyntactic properties that further differentiate them from both qualifying and intensional adjectives. From a morphological point of view, relative adjectives are derived from nouns, as apparent in the list above. Since they do not denote properties, but sub-kinds, relative adjectives do not serve as a basis for deriving property-expressing nominalizations (*chimic/ *chimicitate,* 'chemical/*chemicalness') or when they do, the derived noun does not denote the same property and cannot characterize the same referent as the adjectives. Compare the qualifying and the taxonomic use of the adjective *muzical* below (23):

(23) a. voce muzicală → muzicalitatea vocii
voice musical musicality.the voice.Gen
'musical voice' → 'the musicality of the voice'
b. educație muzicală → *muzicalitatea educației
education musical musicality education.Gen
'musical education' → 'the musicality of education'

Relative taxonomic adjectives are typically *ungradable*, they do not accept degree modifiers (degree words or adverbs that show degree) and they cannot be compared. There are however a few characteristic adverbs which restrict the use of the noun to the given subkind: *strict* 'strictly', *tipic* 'typical': *costum tipic românesc* 'typical Romanian costume'. They answer the questions *Ce tip de/fel de N*? 'What type/kind of N?'. Relative adjectives occur *strictly postnominally* (24).

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

(24) a. literatură română/ *literatură mai română/ *literatură foarte română/ *româna literatură
literature Romanian/literature more Romanian/literature very Roamanian/ Romanian literature
'Romanian literature'/ 'more Romanian literature'/ 'very Romanian literature'
b. reuniune familială/ *reuniune incredibil de familială
reunion familial/ reunion incredible DE familial
'family reunion'/ 'incredibly familial reunion'
b. secret strict profesional
secret strictly professional
'strictly professional secret'

Since they are post-nominal adjectives, they are also projected as adjuncts, linearized post-nominally, but they should be lower adjuncts than qualifying adjectives, since they always stay closer to the head than qualifying adjectives.

(25) maşină românească modernă
car Romanian modern
'modern Romanian car'

Conclusion. This brief presentation has shown that not all NP-adjectives have the same privileges of occurrence with respect to the head and that not all of them license the same type of inferences on the basis of their combination with the NP. Post-nominal adjectives merge as adjuncts, prenominal adjectives merge as specifiers.

2.2.2. *DP-adjectives*

We have so far mentioned only predicative and postnominal DP adjectives (see (6) and (25) above). We are however interested in *prenominal* DP-adjectives; these occur higher than NP adjectives in the nominal left periphery. Following Laenzlinger (2005), and Ihsane and Puskas (2001), the nominal left periphery could be viewed as the space between a higher D_{deixis} and a lower $D_{determination}$, a space containing FPs headed by interpretable P-features (Focus, Quantification, Topic). Adjectives merge or move to the left periphery, i.e. to a position above the lower D, if they *contextually incorporate* suitable P-features (contrastive Focus, mainly). These adjectives have a cluster of syntactic and semantic properties which make it possible for them to express *subjective evaluation*, i.e. properties of the *object* as *perceived by the speaker in the context*. Examples are the italicized adjectives in (26a-b), which may occur to the left of intensional adjectives and cardinals, which is supposed to mark the boundary of the NP-domain (Cornilescu, Nicolae 2011).

(26) a. un *simpatic* [fost prim-ministru]
a nice former prime minister
b. aceste *fenomenale* [şapte legi]
these phenomenal seven laws

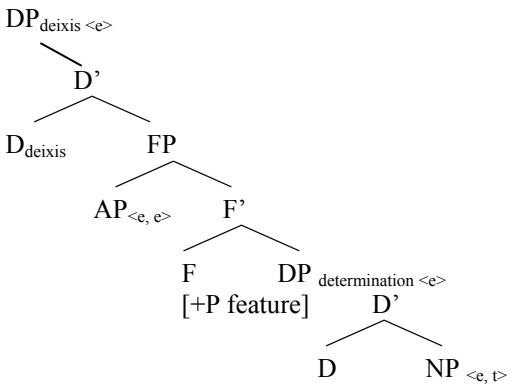
The analysis of periphery adjectives should start from the fact that they are prenominal and denote context-bound properties of identified referents (objects); the latter must be DPs, i.e. constituents of type <*e*>. Left periphery adjectives map objects onto objects, so they are *functions* of type <*e,e*>.

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Since they combine with DPs, they are *DP-adjectives*, (i.e. they have DPs in their scope) and since they are prenominal, we will assume that they merge as selected *specifiers,* and remain prenominal, as suggested in (27).

As to the mode of semantic combination, left periphery adjectives combine with the DP they have in their scope by *functional application.* As such, they are clearly *non-restrictive*. They are *predicates* true of the DP, i.e., they are *DP-internal predicative adjectives*. Pragmatically, they characterize the *object referred to* as perceived by the speaker in context; therefore, they are object-level adjectives. Thus, the nominal expression in (26a) refers to a former prime minister, whom the speaker additionally describes as nice.

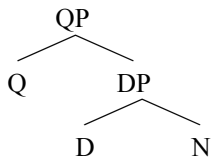
(27)



Configuration (27) is empirically supported. Thus, Kim (1997) proves that in Korean, non-restrictive modifiers *move overtly out of the scope of the determiner to Spec DP*. The resulting configuration is similar to (27), relying on the same old intuition that *non-restrictive modifiers* (adjectives or relative clauses) *are sisters of DPs*.

An important problem raised by the Split D hypothesis is that of the semantic role of the lower D in (27). In our view, the lower D supplies the appropriate object-level <e> denotation, since periphery adjectives have <e,e> denotations. The higher D apparently quantifies over an <e> entity, rather than over the (complete) range of a predicate. Situations like this have been discussed by Matthewson (2001), for St'át'imcets. In this language, Qs are always sisters *of full DPs*, containing overt plural Determiners as in (28), and there are always two steps in the creation of a generalized quantifier. The first is the creation of a plural, group level DP of type <e>, the second involves quantification over parts of the plural individual denoted by the DP [Matthewson 2001:147].

(28)



Matthewson suggests that English is a disguised version of St'át'imcets in that, in both languages, *quantifiers expect a sister of type <e>,* not of type <*e,t*>. The invisible lower determiner might be a *choice function* which returns a *contextually determined*

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

<*e*>-type plural individual, over which the higher determiner/ quantifier operators, or it might be a iota operator.

Since DP adjectives express the speaker's evaluation of the referent, DP adjectives confer [+specific] interpretations to the DP. The proposal that we make is that *specific adjectives are DP-adjectives inside nominal phrases.* However, while it is true to say that all specific adjectives are prenominal in Romanian, the converse is not true, since not all prenominal adjectives in Romanian are DP adjectives, not all of them have object-level interpretations. Some prenominal adjectives have kind-level interpretations, expressing permanent properties, or properties which are not context bound.

3. GENERIC READINGS OF PRENOMINAL ADJECTIVES

The existence of kind-level readings in prenominal position is primarily confirmed by the possibility of *generic sentences* whose subject DP contains a prenominal adjective.

(29) Viitorii regi sunt fericiți.
future.pl.the kings are happy
'Future kings are happy'

In this section we identify the subclasses of adjectives which may appear pre-nominally in *kind generic sentences* (Carlson 1977).

From a syntactic point of view, adjectives which occur in generic sentences are *NP-adjectives*, and, since their interpretation is taxonomic, their canonical position is postnominal. When the subject of a generic sentence contains an adjective, the adjective is there to denote a subkind of the kind denoted by the NP. The interpretation of the adjective is kind-level, rather than object-level. Subkinds are based on intersective and subsective readings and both of these are typically available postnominally. Thus, qualifying adjectives have intersective readings only in post-nominal position (30a, b), while taxonomic adjectives (which generate subsective readings) only occur in post-nominal position (30c).

(30) a. Maşinile scumpe dau statut posesorului.
cars expensive give status owner.Dat.
'Expensive cars give social status to the owner.'
b. *Scumpele maşini dau statut posesorului.
expensive.the cars give status owner.Dat.
c. Literatura română se studiază prea puțin./ *Româna literatură se studiază prea puțin.
literature Romanian SE studies too little./ Romanian literature SE studies too little.
'Romanian literature is insufficiently studied.'

There are however, several classes of adjectives, which may or even must appear in prenominal position in generic sentences. Consider the examples below:

(31) a. Foştii miniştri sunt bogați.
former ministers are rich

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

b. Un simplu muritor nu poate răspunde la toate întrebările.
a mere mortal not can answer to all questions
'A mere mortal cannot answer all the questions.'
c. Oriunde există, Inaltele Curți de Justiție iau hotărâri definitive.
wherever exist High.the Courts of Justice take decisions definitive
'Wherever they exist, High Courts of Justice take definitive decisions.'
d. Un bun student nu face aşa ceva.
a good student not does such this
'A good student does not do such things.'

The examples in (31) illustrate the two important categories of adjectives which have generic interpretations in prenominal position: a) intensional adjectives (31a-b) and b) qualifying adjectives which have developed taxonomic interpretations (31c-d). Within the second category, one may further distinguish the subclass of *evaluative adjectives* (*bun* 'good', *rău* 'bad', *mare* 'big', *mic* 'small'), which, unlike *true taxonomic adjectives*, continue to be gradable, but compare subkinds, instead of individuals.

As to intensional adjectives, there is little surprise that they are prenominal in generic sentences, since they are restricted to prenominal position anyway.

Within the subgroup of qualifying adjectives, some (*mare* 'big', *mic* 'small', *înalt* 'tall') appear to have developed genuine taxonomic readings, in fixed syntagms: *marea burghezie* 'the upper middle class', *mica producție* 'small production', *mica burghezie* 'petty bourgeoisie', *mare maestru la şah* 'chess grandmaster', *marii clasici* 'great classics', *înalta trădare* 'high treason', *Înalta Curte* 'High Court', *înalt demnitar* 'high official', *mare om de stat* 'great statesman', *marele urs alb* 'the great white bear', *mic industriaş* 'petty industrialist', etc. In particular, in such combinations, these qualifying adjectives appear to be ungradable.

(32) a. Marele panda/ foarte marele panda este o specie amenințată.
big.the panda/ very big.the panda is a species endangered
'The big panda/ the very big panda is an endangered species.'
b. Mica producție de mărfuri/ *foarte mica producție de mărfuri naşte capitalism.
small.the production of goods/ *very small production of goods generates capitalism
'small scale goods production'

However, typically, qualifying adjectives remain gradable even when they have prenominal taxonomic readings: *înal* 'tall', *bun* 'good', *rău* 'bad', *mare* 'big', *mic* 'small' a.o. Since they are kind-level in this case, the degree variable ranges over subkinds.

(33) a. Un groaznic de rău platnic trebuie ocolit.
an awful of bad payer must avoided
'An awfully bad payer must be avoided'
b. Un (foarte) înalt funcționar este bine plătit.
a (very) high official is well-paid
c. O foarte mare soprană trebuie răsfățată de public.
a very great soprano must spoilt by public
'A very great soprano must be spoilt by the public.'

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Used prenominally in generic sentences, qualifying adjectives with taxonomic interpretations acquire properties similar to those of prototypical (noun- based) taxonomic adjectives.

In the first place, as already shown, when they form subkinds, these adjectives do not always take degree modifiers. In fact, it is rather the case that the relevant subkind varies its degree within a limited interval of the scale, suggesting the existence of a threshold or even a fixed point on the scale. The degree variable continues to be present in the structure of these adjectives and we hypothesize that it is the degree variable which makes possible the prenominal position. It is relevant that even relative adjectives may appear prenominally if they have degree interpretations (34). The different denotations (taxonomic, qualifying) of the same adjective may co-occur (35):

(34) a. un comportament elitist/ *un elitist comportament
a behavior elitist/ an elitist behavior
'an elitist behaviour'/ an elitist behaviour'
b. un foarte elitist comportament
'a very elitist behaviour'

(35) Mica producție, mult prea mică în anul acesta, ne poate pune în pericol.
small-scale production, much too small in year.the this, us may put in danger
'Small scale production, much too small in this year, may endanger us.'

The taxonomic reading is lost or awkward in predicative position, only the qualifying reading survives. Thus, sentence (36a) below is not contradictory and sentence (36b) is not redundant, since in different positions, the adjective activates two different interpretations. Notice word order in (36b), where the qualifying, predicative adjective (this high official is tall) precedes the taxonomic reading.

(36) a. Acest înalt deminitar este dezamăgitor de scund/ de puțin înalt.
this high official is disappointing of short of little tall
'This high official is disappointingly short/ is insufficiently tall.'
b. În cameră se află un foarte înalt înalt deminitar.
in room SE is a very tall high official
'In the room there is a very tall high official.'

When used taxonomically, qualifying adjectives answer the question *Ce tip de N ?/ Care N?* 'What type of N?/ which N?'.

(37) a. Faptele de înaltă tradare se pedepsesc cu cea mai mare asprime.
acts.the of high treason SE(refl) punish with the greatest severity
'High treason acts are punished with greatest severity.'
b. Ce tip de fapte se pedepsesc cu cea mai mare asprime?
'What types of deeds are punished with the greatest severity?'

From a morphologic point of view, the taxonomic readings of qualifying adjectives do not yield nominalizations, or, if there are nominalizations, they are not applicable to the same referent, since they do not have the same meaning.

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

(38) a. Un bun rege asigură prosperitatea țării.
a good king ensures prosperity country.Gen
'A good king secures the prosperity of the country.'
b. ??*Bunătatea regelui asigură prosperitatea țării.
goodness.the king.Gen ensures prosperity.the country.Gen
??'The kindness of the king secures the prosperity of the country.'
c. Bunul rege l-ar putea ierta pe criminal.
good.the king him-could forgive PE murderer
'The good king could forgive the murderer.'
d. Bunătatea regelui l-ar putea ierta pe criminal.
goodness.the king.Gen him-could forgive PE murderer.
'The kindness of the king could forgive the murderer.'

Taking into account that, in Romanian, one property of taxonomic adjectives is precisely their postnominal position, two questions arise: what allows qualifying adjectives to express subkinds in prenominal position? The second question, not unrelated to the first, is why genuine taxonomic adjectives, i.e. relative adjectives do not appear prenominally? The answer that we would like to suggest is that, other things being equal, linearization also takes into account the functor + argument structure, giving preference to linearizations where this order is observed. We also suggest that in the A+N order, the functor-argument roles are not always distributed in the same way.

Recall that the prenominal space is characterized by the absence of intersectivity; prenominally, A+N combinations are not based on predicate modification, but on functional application. When an A may be either intersective or subsective, in Romance, only the subsective reading occurs prenominally. This explains why taxonomic (subsective) interpretations of qualifying adjectives prefer the prenominal position. Occurrence before the noun has a disambiguating effect. Thus, in (39), the adjective *excepțional* allows both the intersective (object-level), and the subsective (kind-level) reading in postnominal position, as shown by the examples in (39a) and (39b); in prenominal position only the kind-level reading survives, as shown in (39c).

(39) a. un actor excepțional prin curajul politic
an actor exceptional through courage political
'an exceptional actor through political courage'
b. un actor exceptional in rolul lui Hamlet
an actor excepțional in part.the of Hamlet
'an exceptional actor in Hamlet's part'
c. un excepțional actor prin toată cariera sa / *prin curajul politic
an exceptional actor through all carrier his / through courage political
'an exceptional actor through his whole carrier / through his political courage'

Notice also that the A+N order is indicative of the functor+argument interpretation. Consider relative taxonomic adjectives now. Recall that, according to Bosque and Picallo (1996), they fall into two classes: *thematic* and *classificatory* adjectives. It is thematic adjectives that clearly reveal the semantic structure ivolved in interpreting the N+A order. By definition, thematic arguments fill theta roles in the argument/event structure of the

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

nominal head. They function as *semantic arguments* of the noun, even if they cannot have the properties of syntactic arguments. In fact, it has been proposed that thematic arguments start out as NPs and are adjectivized during the derivation (see Fabregas 2007 for a proposal along these lines), as suggested by pairs of examples of the following kind (40). It follows then that at least for thematic adjectives it is the NP inside the adjective which is the argument of the noun.

(40) a. producție cerealieră, producție de cereale (Theme)
production cereal, production of cereals
'Cereal production'
b. vers eminescian, vers de Eminescu (Agent)
'line by Eminescu'

More generally, Pustejovsky (1991) suggests that the taxonomic adjectives saturates some variable/qulia in the Noun's lexical conceptual structure. The result is that the noun is the functor and the AP is an underlying semantic argument. This explains their closeness to the head, and their preference for the post-nominal position, in languages which allow adjectives to occur after the noun.

In contrast, qualifying taxonomic adjectives are functions that take the NP as the argument, hence they may occur prenominally and the subsective reading may prefer the prenominal position.

Summing up, there are a few adjective classes which allow generic readings in prenominal position. These adjectives may be characterized as *NP-adjectives*, with *kind-level* readings and semantically combining with the NP by *functional application*. The combination is not appositive (even if it is non-intersective). Adjectives other than the classes discussed above are *post-nominal* in generic sentences for readings already explained above.

The existence of a class of generic interpretations in prenominal position goes against the claim, sometimes made in the literature, that in Romance pre-nominal adjectives are always specific (Jacob 2005; Demonte 2009).

Nothing in the description of adjectives which have generic interpretation in prenominal position suggests that in prenominal positions they *always* occur in generic sentences. Occurrence in *episodic sentences* is possible, but the interpretation continues to be *kind-level* and specific readings do not emerge, or if they do emerge, they have nothing to do with the presence of the adjective.

(41) a. Ion a devenit mare maestru acum doi ani.
Ion has become big master now two years
'Ion became grandmaster two years ago.'
b. Ieri s-a născut un alt mare panda.
yesterday SE(refl) has born another big panda
'Yesterday another big panda was born'
c. Se întâlnise cu un viitor paralamentar.
SE (refl) had-met with a future parliamentarian
'He had met a future parliamentarian.'

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

The adjectives in example (41) have taxonomic uses, but occur in episodic sentences. Used pre-nominally, the same qualifying adjectives may have *taxonomic* (prototypical) or *specific* readings depending on the context where they occur. Thus, in (42a), *tânăr* 'young' is interpreted as a taxonomic NP-adjective, while in (42b) it confers specificity to the direct object, behaving like a DP-adjective.

(42) a. Caut un tânăr student care să vrea să locuiască la etajul doi.
'I'm looking for a young student who would want to live on the second floor.'
b. Aşteptam un tânăr bunic, care îşi plimba nepotul.
'I was waiting for a young grandparent who was talking a walk with his grandson.'

Thus, the DP periphery typically includes properties which characterize the speaker's knowledge of the referent. Evaluative adjectives like *celebru* 'famous', *important* 'important', *cunoscut* 'well-known' are clearly related to the epistemic status of the speaker.

4. SPECIFIC (IN)DEFINITES AS DP-ADJECTIVES

4.1. Some basic empirical properties of Specific DPs with prenominal adjectives

By definition, the referent of a [+specific] DP is anchored with respect to the speaker (speaker specificity) or with respect to some other argument (general epistemic specificity). An adjective that conveys specificity does not express a classificatory property, but it expresses an *independent judgment* by the speaker regarding the referent of the DP. It follows that s*pecific readings of adjectives are a subset of the non-intersective (appositive) readings* and express context bound properties, judged as true at the time of evaluation. Since they express an independent judgment about an already identified referent, the specific adjective is *a predicate on a DP*, as explained above. It is a DP left periphery adjective and combines with the DP in its scope by functional application. Specific adjectives have *object level readings*, as apparent in their semantic type: functions that map objects onto objects <*e,e*>. As to the class of adjectives which engender specificity readings, they are *qualifying adjectives*.

In this section we present further empirical properties of specific DPs with prenominal adjectives. First, we review the evidence that a qualifying adjective in prenominal position leads to specificity effects. Second, we turn to some classes of adjectives and some nominal constructions which favour the specific interpretations of the adjective.

With indefinite DPs, the presence of qualifying adjectives in pre-nominal position has a disambiguating effect forcing the choice of the *specific reading* of the DP. In contrast, the post-nominal position is ambiguous as to specificity.

(43) a. Cele cinci fete au făcut cunoştintă cu un actor *celebru* [±specific]
the five girls have made acquaintance with an actor famous
'The five girls have made acquaintance with a famous actor'
b. Cele cinci fete au făcut cunoştintă cu un *celebru* actor [+specific]
the five girls have made acquaintance with a famous actor

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Thus, while on the [-specific] reading of (43a), any famous actor would make the sentence true, (43b) is appropriately used only if the famous actor is one that is known by the speaker or, perhaps, (also) by the five girls the sentence is about. In example (44) below, it is also likely that the referent of the DP *celebrul actor* is salient to the subject of the propositional attitude verb *sperau* 'hoped'.

(44) Cele cinci fete sperau că celebrul actor le va da autografe.
'The five girls were hoping that the famous actor will sign them autographs.'

There is evidence which shows that *prenominal adjectives are favoured in constructions which encode specific readings on their own, while they tend to be excluded in constructions which syntactically encode non-specificity.*

One construction inducing specificity with indefinite DPs is Differential Object Marking (DOM). In Romanian, direct objects which are differentially marked are always preceded by the preposition *pe* 'on' and may also be doubled by pronominal clitics, as in (45b). Direct objects which are differentially marked have convincingly been shown to induce specific readings (cf. Dobrovie-Sorin 1994; Cornilescu 2000; Pană Dindelegan 2003, von Heusinger, Onea 2008, von Heusinger, Chiriacescu (2013), Ciovârnache, Avram (2013)). The effect of DOM is that the object retains its <*e*>- type reading and loses its property <*e,t*> reading. It is expected then that pre-nominal qualifying adjectives are also possible in DOM-ed indefinite direct objects, such as (45b). The pre-nominal adjective strengthens the specific, object-level reading. In contrast, after an intensional verb like *cere* 'require, need', differential object marking (46b) and pre-nominal adjectives (46c) are both dispreferred.

(45) a. Căutam *un actor celebru***.** [±specific]
I was looking for an actor famous
'I was looking for a famous actor.'
b. (Îl) caut PE *un celebru* *actor* al teatrului dumneavoastră. [+specific]
him-(I)am looking.for PE a famous actor from theatre your
'I'm looking for a famous actor from your theatre.'

(46) a. Rolul cere *un actor celebru***.** [-specific]
part.the needs an actor famous
'The part needs a famous actor.'
b. */?? Rolul îl cere PE *un actor celebru***.**
part.the needs PE an actor famous
c. ??Rolul cere *un celebru actor*. [+specific]
part.the needs a famous actor.

A second context which matches specificity effects with prenominal qualifying adjectives is that of rhetorical questions. According to Bosque (2001), rhetorical questions license the *non-specific reading of indefinites* (47a). In these contexts the presence of a pre-nominal qualifying adjective in the indefinite DP makes the rhetorical reading impossible, and in fact, the question is infelicitous (47b):

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

(47) a. Când (naiba) mi-ai recomandat tu un roman *interesant*? [-specific]
when (the hell) to me-(you)have recommended you a novel interesting
'When did you recommend me an interesting novel?'
b. ??/*Când (naiba) mi-ai recomandat tu un *interesant* roman?
when (the hell) to me-(you)have recommended you a interesting novel

Similarly, directive speech acts, which also represent intensional contexts, are felicitous with non-specific indefinites (48a). Pre-nominal adjectives are not welcome in these contexts either (48b):

(48) a. Ar trebui să scrii un roman *interesant* [-specific]
You should SUBJ write a novel interesting
'You should write an interesting novel'
b. ??/*Ar trebui sa scrii un *interesant* roman.
You should SUBJ write a novel interesting

Finally, indefinite non-specific determiners, such as negative indefinites and free choice determiners *niciun*/*nicio* 'no', *vreun orice* 'any', which exclude the specific reading due to their lexical meaning (49a, b), are not compatible with pre-nominal adjectives either (49a', b') (see Bosque 2001; Ticio 2008 for similar Spanish data):

(49) a. Cumperi *orice* roman *celebru* b. N-am văzut *niciun* articol *interesant*
(you) buy any novel famous (I) haven't seen no article interesting
'You buy any famous novel' 'I haven't seen any interesting article'
a'. ??Cumperi *orice celebru* romanb'. *N-am văzut *niciun interesant* articol
(you) buy any famous novel (I) haven't seen no interesting article

Generalizing on these contexts, one may conclude that constructions which independently induce specificity effects welcome prenominal adjectives, while contexts which invite non-specific readings likewise tend to reject prenominal adjectives.

4.2. Which adjectives typically give specific readings

From above the discussion, it has already followed that all prenominal adjectives are qualifying, or possibly relative adjectives, which acquire qualifying gradable readings. Since prenominal adjectives are either taxonomic or specific, it is important to see whether the syntax of the DP itself or the lexical meaning of the adjective may favour the specific interpretation. (Recall that in the preceding paragraph we have looked at factors other than the DP itself.)

In the first place, syntax may be a reliable guide to specific interpretations. If it is accepted that taxonomic adjectives are NP-adjectives and merge below Number, then adjectives which occur to the left of intensional ones or to the left of quantifiers, overtly signal their belonging to the DP periphery and their specific interpretation.

(50) a. un foarte popular *viitor* ministru
'a very popular future minister'

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

b doi suspect de bogați *foşti* preşedinți
two dubious of rich former presidents
'two dubiously rich former presidents'

As to lexical meaning, one typical group of adjectives that signal specificity are *size adjectives* which express *high degree modification of gradable nouns* (Pastor 2010, Morzycki 2008b). It is the high degree in the modification structure that signals subjectivity and thus specificity.

(51) a. Cele cinci fete au vorbit cu un actor *celebru.* [± specific]
'The five girls talked to a famous actor.'
b. Cele cinci fete au vorbit cu *un actor celebrisim* [+specific]
…… an actor famous+ Superlative
'The five girls talked to a very famous actor.'

High degree modification of gradable nouns is achieved using the same group of size adjectives: *mare* 'big'*, mic* 'small', *enorm* 'enormous'*, colosal* 'colossal*', uriaş* 'huge', etc.

(52) a. mare dobitoc b. enorm/colosal actor
'a big idiot' 'an enormous/colossal actor'
(53) un foarte mic om de ştiință
'a very little man of science'

Degrees may evaluate different conceptual dimensions in the lexical conceptual structure of the noun, creating the illusion of ambiguity. When only one property can be evaluated, a contradiction may arise, as in (55), in contrast with (54):

(54) Nu era *mare* la stat, dar era un *mare* om.
not was great of stature but was a great man
'He wasn't tall of stature, but he was a great man'
(55) #This chair isn't very big, but it is a very big chair.

As always with readings based on functional application, the degree reading of a size adjective seems unavailable in post-copular position, where the adjective retains its descriptive, size meaning.

(56) a. un mare colecționar de timbre
a big collector of stamps
'a big stamp collector'
b. %Acest colecționar este mare.
'This collector is big'
c. Această casă este mare.
'This house is big.'

An interesting situations is that of adjectives which are inherently specific on their evaluative readings: *afursit* 'cursed, damn'*, nebun* 'crazy, insane'*, nenorocit* 'wretched, unfortunate', *nefericit* 'unhappy', etc. These adjectives have two readings, a descriptive and

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

an evaluative meaning. Their special property is that they may have appositive (non-intersective) specific readings in post-nominal position as well, in addition to the expected descriptive intersective reading. Thus *afurisit* may have its descriptive religious meaning (cursed) as in (57a), or it may be evaluative, conveying the speaker's annoyance, irritation, negative evaluation of the referent, as in (57b). The postnominal position is ambiguous as expected, but what counts is the possibility of a specific interpretation in postnominal position. The adjective continues to be a predicative DP adjective.

(57) a. un păcătos afurisit de biserică
a sinner cursed by the church
b. Un hoț afurisit furase roțile.
a thief damned had stolen wheels.the
'A damned thief had stolen the wheels.'
c. un vecin nebun (ambiguous)
'an insane neighbour', 'a crazy neighbour'
d. un expert nenorocit (ambiguous)
'an unfortunate expert', 'a wretch of an expert'

Interestingly, (some of) these adjectives are uncomfortable in pre-nominal position. They choose to occur in the special *A/N de N* construction, which is a syntactic means of encoding a subjective attitude reflecting knowledge of the referent:

(58) a. ??Afursitul doctor o ținuse să aştepte./ Afursitul de doctor o ținuse să aştepte.
'The damn doctor had kept her waiting./ That idiot of a doctor had kept her waiting.'
b. ???Un nebun ministru a nenorocit învațământul./ Un nebun de ministru a nenorocit învațământul.
'An insane minister has wretched the education./A madman of a minister has wretched the education.'

At the end of this discussion regarding prenominal adjectives in Romanian, a legitimate question is to wonder what it is that pre-nominal adjectives share in Romanian, since so far we have only insisted that the prenominal space is uneven, accommodating both NP-adjectives and DP adjectives. The clue is given by the semantics of those adjectives which are always prenominal: intensional adjectives. Intensional adjectives are usually described as modal, since their referents are evaluated with respect to several possible worlds, differing along some parameter such as the time parameter (*viitor* 'future', *fost* 'former'). Modal operators have correctly been described as quantifiers over possible worlds, and, it appears that it is the quantificational feature which might unify the semantics of pre-nominal adjectives in Romanian. Leaving intensional adjectives apart, all prenominal adjectives are qualifying adjectives (basic or derived), whose most characteristic property is gradability, the existence of a degree variable in their lexical structure. Degrees are inherently quantificational. Recently, Pastor (2010) proposes a split analysis of degrees, assuming that their complement always is a *quantifier phrase*, which fixes the relevant part of the scale. He claims that "gradable adjectives project a quantifier phrase above AP and below DegP (Pastor 2010: 257)", i.e. DegP > QP > AP. Moreover, periphery adjectives are

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

focused or contrastively topicalized, inducing another quantificational dimension. Very generally, *the smallest content of the functional heads introducing prenominal adjectives is a (modal) quantificational feature.*

Another, already mentioned unifying property of pre-nominal adjectives is their mode of combination, both NP adjectives and DP adjectives combining with the nominals by functional application.

5. DENOTATIONS OF DPs CONTAINING SPECIFIC ADJECTIVES

In this section we offer a formal semantic interpretation of the analysis above, throwing light on the relevance of the syntax and of the classification we have constructed for an appropriate semantic interpretation.

In the preceding sections we have shown that specificity adjectives are appositive and predicative. Also, the specificity propositions they determine is an independent assertion, representing the epistemic status of the speaker with respect to the referent of the DP. These properties place specificity adjectives in the larger class of parenthetical expressions, as recently shown (Morzycki 2008a). Morzycki importantly notices that parenthetical interpretations of prenominal appositive adjectives are *not formally signalled*, unlike the case of post-nominal appositions, which are indicated by a phonological pause. The formal problem is how to decompose a DP containing an appositive adjective, so as to suitably capture the independent parenthetical propositions. Following Larson and Marusič (2004), Morzycki (2008a: 115) proposes the decomposition in (59b) for statement (59a); in (59b) *they* is the analogue of an E-type pronoun. He comments that "The linguistic trick is to use *they* to refer back to a plural individual consisting of the set quantified over by *every*. Maybe what these restrictive modifiers modify is a potentially plural discourse referent such as the one the pronoun in" (59b) refers to:

(59) a Every unsuitable word was deleted.
b. Every word was deleted. They were unsuitable.

They is an *E-type* pronoun, and consequently it is interpreted like a definite description (Heim 1990). As known, definite descriptions involve a contextual domain restriction, so that (59b) actually means:

(60) Every word was deleted. *The words* were unsuitable.

What's being quantified over in the unsuitable-words example is not, of course, all words, but only the contextually relevant ones, a fact reflected here using contextually supplied resource domain variables. Based on these intuitively correct notions, Morzycki proposes a bi-dimensional semantic analysis, separating the assertions in (59a) from the conventional implicature in (59b) and (60). He implements this analysis in the style of (Potts 2007), who follows earlier proposals by Karttunen and Peters (1979).

An essential property of the decomposition proposed by Morzycki is that the parenthetical constructions should contain no free variable, a condition which is satisfied by introducing the anaphoric expression (the E-type pronoun) *they*, covering a definite

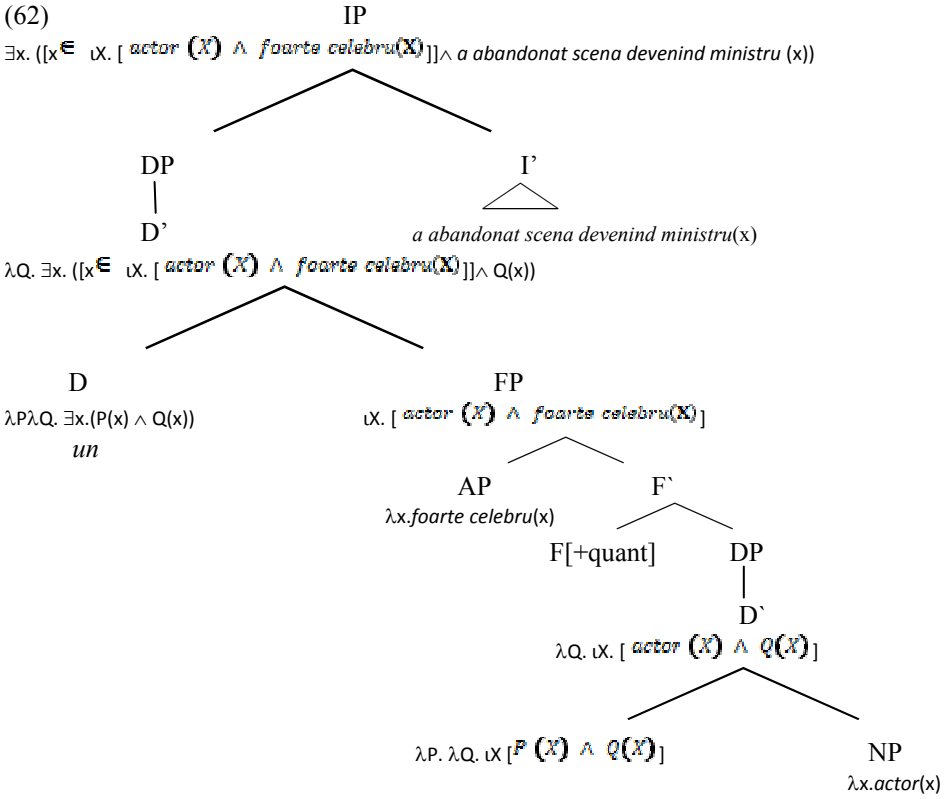
BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

description. One may say that sentences like (59a) imply a double level quantification, creating a *contextually given group* that satisfies the nominal property and is the subject of the specificity adjective, and then quantifying over the members of this group.

We claim that the syntax that we have constructed allows the same type of decomposition as proposed by Morzycki, without the complication of arbitrarily separating the specificity predicate away from the sentence. Here is an example derived in (62):

(61) Un foarte celebru actor a abandonat scena, devenind ministru.
'A very famous actor abandoned the stage, becoming a cabinet minister.'

(62)



It is easy to follow the derivation from bottom to top, since it works in a very straightforward manner. The important step is the introduction of a group-level individual *X*, which represents the maximal set of individual which satisfy the nominal restriction *actor*. This set is treated as a definite description, as in Morzycki's analysis, so that the set variable takes a silent definite article, as proposed by Mathewson (2001) for the configuration in (61) above. The specificity adjective is predicated about this *group-level individual* and it is at this step that the independent appositive assertion is represented: ιX[celebru(X) ∧ actor(X)]. See the similarity with Morzycki's (60), *the words were unsuitable*.

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

The higher determiner *un* quantifies over an *individual variable* and simply says that there is an individual *x* belonging to the contextual given set *ιX*, satisfying the property that he abandoned the stage to become a cabinet minister.

The reason for which one might want to separate an expressive propositional constituent is precisely that the specific adjective is an independent predicate on a context given referent. The idea that specific adjectives have DP sisters allows us to interpret them as predicates on the referent of the DP. Providing a referent for the lower DP is the role of a choice function or of the iota operator proposed by von Fintel (1994) or by Mathewson (2001).

6. CONCLUSIONS

1. We started out with an attempt to describe the readings of prenominal adjectives in Romanian. Against the claim that this space is uniquely occupied by specificity adjectives in Romance languages (Jacob 2005, Demonte 2009), we have shown that, at least in Romanian, there are three types of readings of prenominal adjectives: generic readings, taxonomic episodic readings and specific episodic readings. The first two are characteristic for NP-adjectives, while the specific interpretation is typical of DP-adjectives.

2. We have shown that there are specific syntactic and lexical means which characterize the three types of readings realized in prenominal positions.

3. Specific readings are a subclass of appositive (nonrestrictive or nonintersective) readings and this property naturally follows from the analysis of specificity adjectives as DP-adjectives. The syntax we have constructed allows for a simple compositional analysis of DP containing specific adjectives, relying on the idea that DP have peripheries and, under the split DP analysis, there is a syntactic space between a higher and a lower determiner , where (focused) specific adjectives merge. This allows them to be DP-sisters, that is, predicative adjectives which make an independent assertion, representing the speaker's information status with respect to the referent of the DP.

4. The analysis of the data has shown that, syntactic things being equal, linearization also gives preference to the functor + argument structure.

5. The prenominal space is uneven, including attributive and predicative adjectives. However, there are some common properties of these adjectives: they are non-intersective, they combine with the NP/DP by functional application, and they check a modal or quantificational feature which allows them to remain in prenominal position.

REFERENCES

Ciovârnache, C., L. Avram, 2013, "Specificity and Animacy in the Acquisition of Differential Object Marking in Persian as L2", *Revue roumaine de lingustique,* LVIII, 4, 419–438.

Baker, M. C., 2003, *Lexical Categories: Verbs, Nouns, and Adjectives*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bolinger, D., 1967, "Adjectives in English: Attribution and predication", *Lingua,* 18, 1–34.

Bosque, I., C. Picallo, 1996, "Postnominal adjectives in Spanish DPs", *Journal of Linguistics,* 32, 349−386.

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Bosque, I., 2001, "Adjective Position and the Interpretation of Indefinites", in: J. Gutierrez-Rexach, L. Silva-Villar (eds), *Current Issues in Spanish Syntax and Semantics,* Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin − New York, 17−37.
Browning, M.A., 1987, *Null operator constructions*, Ph. D. dissertation, MIT.
Cornilescu, A., A. Nicolae, 2011, "On the syntax of Romanian definite phrases: Changes in the patterns of definiteness checking", in: P. Sleeman, H. Perridon (eds), *The noun phrase in Romance and Germanic*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 193–222.
Cornilescu, A., 2000, "Notes on the Interpretation of the Prepositional Accusative in Romanian", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, II, 1, 91−106.
Cornilescu, A., 2003, "Romanian Genitives Revisited", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, IV, 1, 45−70.
Cornilescu, A., 2004, "Relative Adjectives", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics*, 50−73.
Demonte, V., 2008, "Meaning-form correlations and adjective position in Spanish", in: L. McNally, C.Kennedy (eds.), *Adjectives and Adverbs. Syntax, Semantics, and Discourse,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 71−100.
Dobrovie-Sorin, C., 1994, *The syntax of Romanian. Comparative Studies in Romance*, Berlin – New York, Mouton de Gruyter.
Fabregas, A., 2007, "The internal syntactic structure of relational adjectives", *Probus,* 19, 1, 135–170.
Farkas, D, 2002, "Specificity Distinctions", *Journal of Semantics*, 19, 1−31.
Farkas, D., K. von Heusinger, 2003, "Stability of Reference and Object Marking in Romanian", presentation at *Workshop on Direct Reference and Specificity*, Vienna, August.
von Fintel, K., 1994, *Restrictions on Quantifier Domains*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Student Linguistics Association (GLSA), University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
Gramatica de bază a limbii române. 2010. (coord. Gabriela Pană Dindelegan), Bucureşti, Univers Enciclopedic Gold.
Heim, I., 1990, "E-type pronouns and donkey anaphora", *Linguistics and Philosophy,* 13, 137−177.
Heim, I., A. Kratzer, 1998, *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, Blackwell.
von Heusinger, Klaus, E. Onea, 2008, "Triggering and Blocking Effects in the Diachronic Development of DOM in Romanian", *Probus*, 20, 1, 71–116.
von Heusinger, K., S. Chiriacescu, 2013, "The Discourse Structuring Potential of Differential Object Marking. The Case of Indefinite and Definite Direct Objects in Romanian", *Revue roumaine de linguistique*, LVIII, 4, 439–456.
Higginbotham, J., 1985, "On Semantics", *Linguistic Inquiry,* 16, 547−594.
Ihsane, T., G. Puskas, 2001, "Specific is not Definite", *Generative Grammar in Geneva,* 2, 39–54.
Jacob, D., 2005, "Adjective position, specificity, and information structure in Spanish*", Fachbereich Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Konstanz*, 119, 71−80.
Karttunen, L., S. Peters, 1979, "Conventional implicatures in Montague Grammar", in: Choon-Kyu Oh, D. A. Dineen (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 11: Presupposition*, New York, Academic Press, 1–56.
Kim, Y-K., 1997, "Agreement Phrases in DP", *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics,* 9.
Knittel, M.L., 2005, "Some remarks on adjective placement in the French NP", *Probus,* 17, 2, 185–226.
Kremers, J., 2003, *The Arabic Noun Phrase: A Minimalist Perspective*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Nijmegen.
Knittel, M.L. (to appear) "Taxonomic Adjectives in French: A Syntactic Account", *Journal of Linguistics*, available at http://hal.inria.fr/hal-00418115.
Laenzlinger, Ch., 2005, "French Adjective Ordering: Perspectives on DP-Internal Movement Types", *Lingua*, 115, 5, 645–689.
Larson, R. F. Marušič, 2004, "On Indefinite Pronoun Structures with APs: Reply to Kishimoto", *Linguistic Inquiry,* 35, 2, 268−287.
Marušič, F., R. Žaucer, 2013, "A definite article in the AP − evidence from colloquial Slovenian", to appear in: L. Schrucks, U. Etxeberria, A. Giannakidou, Kosta (eds.), *Nominal constructions in Slavic and beyond.*

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)

Mathewson, L., 2001, "Quantification and the Nature of Cross-Linguistic Variation", *Natural Language Semantics*, 9, 145−189.

McNally, L**.**, G. Boleda, 2004, "Relational adjectives as properties of kinds", in: O. Bonami, P. Cabredo-Hofherr (eds.), *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics* 5, 179−196 [Abstract, PDF, BIB]

Montague, R., 1970, "English as a Formal Language", in: B. Visentini *et al.* (eds.), *Linguaggi nella società e nella tecnica,* Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 189−224. Reprinted in Montague 1974: 188−221.

Morzycki, M, 2008a, "Non restrictive modifiers in non-parenthetical positions", in: L. McNally, C. Kennedy (eds.), *Adjectives and Adverbs*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 101−122.

Morzycki, M, 2008b, "Degree modificational gradable nouns", *NLS*, 175−203.

Pană-Dindelegan, G., 2003, *Elemente de gramatică. Dificultăți, controverse, noi interpretări*, Bucureşti, Humanitas.

Pastor, A., 2010, "Predicative degree constructions in Spanish", *Probus*, 22, 27−71.

Potts, Ch., 2007, "Conventional implicatures", in: G. Ramchand, Ch. Reiss (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Interfaces*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 475−501.

Pustejovsky, J., 1991, "The generative lexicon", *Computational Linguistics*, 17, 4, 409–441.

Siegel, M., 1976, *Capturing the Adjective*, PhD thesis, UMass, Amherst.

Sleeman, P., E.Verheugd, 1998, "Licensing DP-Internal Predication", in: A.Schwegler, B.Tranel, M. Uribe-Etxebarria (eds), *Romance Linguistics: Theoretical Perspectives*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 271−282.

Sproat, R., C. Shih, 1988, "Prenominal Adjectival Ordering in English and Mandarin", *Proceeding of NELS* 12, 465−489.

Stavrou M., A. Alexiadou, 2001, "Adjective-Clitic Combinations in the Greek DP", in: B. Gerlach, J. Grijzenhout (eds), *Clitics in Phonology, Morphology and Syntax*, Amsterdam, Benjamins, 63−84.

Tănase-Dogaru, M., 2012, *The Syntax of Quantity and Quality in Romanian*, Bucureşti, Editura Universității din Bucureşti.

Teodorescu, A., 2006, "Adjective ordering restrictions revisited", in: D. Baumer, D. Montero, M. Scanlon (eds), *Proceedings of the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics* (WCCFL) 25, Cascadilla Press, Somerville, MA, 399–407.

Ticio, M. E., 2003, *On the Structure of DPs*, doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut.

BDD-A421 © 2014 Editura Academiei
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:20 UTC)