ASPECTS OF AGREEMENT IN THE NOUN GROUP

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Abstract*: The present paper represents an attempt to review the most important opinions about the syntactic organization of the noun group which has the structure [cardinal numeral + noun]. A solution to this morphological and syntactical issue should be the first step to establishing the proper form of agreement when an adjectival adjunct is added to this structure.*

Keywords*: agreement, noun group, head, adjunct.*

1. The agreement is a formal expression of the syntactic relations of dependency; the regent assigns its subordinated term the obligation of repeating the grammatical information of the regent, partially or entirely. "In the noun group of Romanian, the information about gender, number and case is repeated following the direction noun regent→adjective, article." (Bidu-Vrănceanu, Călărașu, *et alii* 1997: 16)

Considering the definition of agreement in the noun phrase in Romanian, the present paper aims to highlight certain aspects of agreement in the noun phrase which includes a numeral cardinal. Due to the disputed status of the numeral in Romanian, its syntactic position in the noun phrase is not clearly analyzed – adjunct or head of the group. Consequently, various constructions occur in language use and the normative grammar recommendations differ from one linguist to another or there are no definite positions regarding this type of structures and their relation to standard Romanian: *cele 18 miliarde de lei* or *cei 18 miliarde de lei*?

2. Language researchers' opinions regarding the morphological status of the numeral are very different, so the structure [cardinal numeral + noun] is considered according to the position attributed to the numeral. Furthermore, there are two different patterns depending on the number expressed by the cardinal numeral. If the numeral ranges between *unu* and *nouăsprezece* or is a compound that includes one of these numerals on the final position, then the structure [cardinal numeral + noun] is realized. If the compound numeral expresses a number higher than 20, except those mentioned above, then the structure [cardinal numeral + preposition *de* + noun] is used.

The various interpretations of these structures in use may be grouped as follows, but this classification is far from being exhaustive, as the main goal of the present paper is to approach the issue of agreement in these types of noun phrases with a view to standard Romanian.

2.1. In traditional grammar studies the two types of structures including cardinal numerals are interpreted separately and differently. The numeral is considered to have an adjectival value in the structure [cardinal numeral + noun], so it is a determiner and its syntactic function is an attribute: *opt elevi, o mie trei elevi.*

The other structure is the one that caused a real dispute and the researchers argued for two interpretations. In the constructions with a cardinal numeral followed by the preposition *de* and a noun, the numeral has been assigned the position of a regent and the noun has been considered its subordinated, preceded by the preposition: *douăzeci de elevi*. The main argument for this solution is the possibility of deleting the noun, which would prove its subordinated position. In addition, the presence of the

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preposition can not be ignored and it can be considered a mark of the accusative case of the noun.

Still, this interpretation proved to be vulnerable and other linguists showed that those arguments were not sufficient. In their opinion, the noun is the regent, while the numeral grouped together with *de* represents the subordinated part of the phrase, functioning as an attribute and having the value of a noun. The solution is based on the fact that any adjective added to this type of phrase agrees with the noun, not with the numeral: *douăzeci de elevi scunzi*. Thus, *de* is no longer a preposition, but a postposition, similar to the morpheme which occurs in other types of structures: ***douăzeci de*** *elevi*; ***destul de*** *bun*. This second interpretation makes use of the analogy with other structures including *de*, but the situations are not entirely similar, because in *destul de bun*, *astfel de om*, the first element followed by *de* has the value of an adverb or of an adjective, but never the value of a noun, as the group formed by the cardinal numeral and *de* is said to have.

"Disregarding the syntactic interpretation, the numeral in these structures has the value of a noun, as *de* cancels the agreement" (Neamțu, 1999: 143).

Following this direction, we may assume that the cardinal numeral has the value of a noun, similar to structures such as *un kilogram de mere*, *o minune de copil*, but when it groups together with *de*, they form an adjectival phrase, functioning as a determiner of the noun head. Thus, the analogy with the structures mentioned above is coherent, since these structures are analyzed this way in GALR (GALR, I: 168).

2.2. A different approach on these types of structures and on the numeral as a whole belongs to D. Irimia, who considers that the numeral is a pronoun of quantification. Consequently, in structures such as *cinci copii*, *treizeci de copii*, the first element (*cinci, treizeci*) becomes a pronominal adjective of quantification. Regarding the special situation of the terms which express numbers higher than 19, the author specifies that they develop "a syntagmatic relation with the determined noun by means of preposition *de*" (Irimia, 1997: 132).

2.3. GALR offers another interpretation of these two types of structures with cardinal numeral which tends to unify the analysis, and this syntactic approach is based on a reconsidered description of the numeral. This is said to have three values: substitute, adjective and noun. In the structure [cardinal numeral + noun], the first element has the value of an adjective and it functions as an adjunct of the noun, so the interpretation of this type of noun group does not differ from the one adopted in the traditional grammar studies.

With respect to the second type of structure, that including a cardinal numeral and the preposition *de*, the opinion is quite different from those expressed in traditional grammar studies. In GALR the authors assert that "A construction specific to Romanian is the one that consists of a cardinal numeral (quantifier) followed by the preposition *de* and the quantified noun: *douăzeci de oameni*. The noun may be interpreted as a syntactic head in the noun group, while the numeral is its quantifier adjunct" (GALR, II, 2005: 87). Such an interpretation bases on the analogy with the structures without *de* (*doisprezece oameni*), since the role of the numeral is to quantify in both types of structures, in a semantic approach. The problem with this argument is that the analysis must be rather syntactic than semantic, so, in spite of the analogy, the presence of the preposition *de* should not be ignored. To support this interpretation, another argument is submitted: the agreement of the morpheme *cei, cele* with the noun (*cei două mii de oameni*).

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"This interpretation is supported also by the gender agreement of certain adjectival determiners with the noun (not with the numeral), which gives the status of a head to the noun: *cei (acei/ceilalti/alti) trei sute douăzeci de elevi*." (GALR, I, 2005: 296).

But this argument is not a strong one when used this way, firstly because agreement is an option made by the speaker. The agreement is fluctuant, sometimes the speakers use, for example *cei două mii de lei*, sometimes *cele două mii de lei*, depending on his/her intentions. Does this mean that the syntactic function of the numeral changes, along with its morphological value? It may seem that it does, if we accept agreement as an argument, or a criterion in establishing the syntactic function of the cardinal numeral in this type of structures. Even the authors of GALR admit that there are certain limits to their interpretation, or that it may be rounded by another interpretation offered for those situations where the agreement is different. "The syntactic structure of the noun phrase is less clear […] in the constructions where the agreement is with the quantifier (*cele doua milioane de oameni* […]). The noun value of the quantifier and, especially, the agreement indicate the inversion of the syntactic relation in this type of noun groups, the quantifier being the head and the quantified noun, its adjunct" (GALR, II, 2005: 87).

Secondly, the limits of this argument are proved by the possibility of considering the demonstrative *cei, cele* to be morphemes in the structure of the compound cardinal numerals. The demonstrative article "converted into a morpheme of gender and case of the numerals" (Găitănaru, 1998: 175). So, this element marks the agreement of the entire compound numeral with the noun head of the group.

2.4. A. Cornilescu proposes a generative grammar approach on the disputed issue of the status of numeral and her opinion is completely different from the other interpretations. "If we agree that binders (i.e. constituents which allow nouns to function as arguments by binding their internal variable) belong to the syntactic category Determiners, then cardinal numerals […] should be included in this category" (Cornilescu, 1995: 231).

So, Cornilescu considers the cardinal numerals, as well as ordinal numerals and lexical quantifiers to belong to the syntactic category of Determiners and, as a consequence of this position, they are not subordinated to the noun. "We assume that determiners […] act as functional heads which f-select a NP complement"(Cornilescu, 1995: 230). They are no longer adjuncts in the noun phrase, as they are interpreted in GALR, but functional heads, according to the rule D' $\rightarrow$ D° NP.

2.5. In a semantic perspective, Coseriu provides another approach on the numerals, after he defines three major categories of words based on a semantic analysis: lexeme words, categoreme words and morpheme words. The numeral is included in the same category with the pronoun "which presents only the form of structuring the extra-linguistic reality (therefore, functioning as nouns, adjectives, adverbs) […]. They are words that have categorical meaning, but they do not have lexical meaning" (Nica, 2011: 294).

Coseriu's theory matches the position adopted in GALR since the numeral behaves the same way the pronoun does and belongs to the same category of words, together with a series of adverbial deictic elements. Like a series of pronouns, the numeral may turn into an adjective when it occurs in the specific position of noun determiner and this situation could be seen as such in structures [cardinal numeral + *de* + noun].

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3. The previous review of different theoretical approaches on the cardinal numeral issue and its syntactic position in the noun phrase has no other goal but to offer a starting point for establishing a normative framework regarding the agreement in such structures.

The necessity of a clarification regarding the morphological and syntactical status of the cardinal numeral included in such structures proves to be a condition for deciding upon the rightness of the agreement in those types of noun phrases.

If the theoretical approaches on the status of numeral are different, even opposite sometimes, if the syntactic interpretations of the structures including a cardinal numeral followed by *de* are various, then the problem of the agreement in such structures has more than one solution.

There are numerals which "sometimes present a difference between the gender of the concept and the gender of the substituted noun: *cei două sute de oameni; cele două sute de oameni; cele două sute de cărți*" (Găitănaru, 1998: 175).

In GALR there is a similar note: "In certain situations, the gender agreement is not controlled by the noun, but by the gender of the simple numeral included in the compound numeral, cf. *cele 18 miliarde de lei* […], but also *cei 20 de miliarde de lei*" (GALR, I, 2005: 296).

While GALR avoids offering a direct answer regarding the proper agreement in the structures [cardinal numeral + *de* + noun], Mioara Avram considers that there are two correct variants regarding the agreement in the noun group formed by a cardinal numeral followed by the preposition *de* and a noun, but she separates the situations with a numeral less than two thousands from the rest of the cardinal numerals, as with the former the agreement in gender is exclusively controlled by the noun: *cei (acești, alți) 195 de lei*. The same type of agreement occurs with higher numerals, "except those which express round numbers, beginning with *două sute*; with these, the agreement may be done either with the noun or with the numeral, depending on what the speaker wants to point out." (Avram, 1986: 102). Thus, another variable parameter is added to the morphological and syntactical status of the numeral, a pragmatic element: speaker's intention.

V. Gutu Romalo offers a clear opinion about the agreement in this type of structures: "In such situations, this determiner is often improperly agreed with the noun which the compound numeral refers to: ***Cei*** *aproape optzeci de milioane de* ***locuitori****…*[…] (instead of ***Cele*** *aproape optzeci de* ***milioane*** *de locuitori*)" (Guțu Romalo, 2008: 45-46).

So, there are two variants of agreement occurring with this type of constructions, according to the position assigned to the numeral – head or adjunct – within the noun phrase. In its turn, this assignment may be determined by speaker's intentions and communication aims, which represents a pragmatic variable.

The use of these structures in spoken or written Romanian shows that both variants occur, reflecting the gender agreement of the (pronominal) adjective with the noun or with the cardinal numeral: *din cei 989.700 de turişti, din cei 4,33 milioane de turişti* (jurnalul.ro, 02.09.2013), *primele 10 milioane de euro la capitalul companiei* (zf.ro, 21.08.2013)

If the noun is considered the head of the group, then the deletion of the preposition *de* is possible and it may be regarded as a consequence of the fact that speakers use the cardinal numerals disregarding the number they express. This kind of structures are not recommended in standard Romanian, however they should be taken into account as they represent the outcomes of a tendency in language use. As speakers

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consider the noun to be the head of the group and use the numeral as an adjunct, the noun imposes the agreement to the verb – predicate, when the syntactic position of this noun is subject: *490 milioane euro au fost consumaţi până-n iunie, când mai erau disponibile fonduri de 300 de milioane de euro* (jurnalul.ro, 28.08.2013), *32.000 angajati Nokia sunt transferati la Microsoft* (jurnalul.ro, 03.09.2013)

The feminine form of the adjective in the noun group or in the predicative position proves that it agrees with the cardinal numeral, which is considered to be the head of the noun phrase and, consequently, the subject of the sentence: *primele 10 milioane de euro la capitalul companiei* (zf.ro, 21.08.2013), *1,2 miliarde de euro pot fi mobilizate de populaţie* (zf.ro, 03.09.2013).

Taking a look to spoken Romanian could be a useful and necessary stage, but it is not enough. The question asked at the beginning of the present paper (*cei 18 miliarde de lei* or *cele 18 miliarde de lei*) could be answered with a view to standard Romanian when a clear and definite position regarding the normative recommendations is adopted.

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