THE SILENCE OF EXCLAMATION: EXCLAMATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS, SINGULAR INDEFINITE PREDICATES AND SILENT NOUNS

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Abstract: The goal of this analysis is to compare constructions containing singular indefinite predicates (SIPs) of the type '*Ion e un țăran*/Ion is a peasant' with N *de* N constructions of the type '*țăranul de Ion*'/peasant-the of Ion' and explore the role that the degree operator and silent nouns play. The investigation of exclamative constructions will prove instrumental in determining the range of Romanian silent nouns. Singular indefinites in predicate position (predicated of humans) contain a silent noun, and are defined as evaluative modifiers. The relation between N *de* N constructions (which express negative or positive evaluation) and SIPs is marked by the presence of a semi-lexical noun TYPE.

Keywords: exclamative, silent nouns, bare predicates, SIPs, N *de* N

1. N de N constructions, predication and number

This section is concerned with the study of type of construction found in (1-2). These constructions have been referred to as 'qualitative' (Milner, 1978, Hulk and Tellier 2000), predicate inversion structures (Den Dikken, 1998, 2006), binominal NPs (Aarts, 1998), pivotal 'of' constructions (Zamparelli 1996).

(1) a. o mămăligă de om
a polenta of man
'a polenta of a man'
b. o idioțenie de curs
a stupidity of lecture
'a stupidity of a lecture'
c. un cal de femeie
a horse of a woman
'a horse of a woman'
d. o drăcie de calculator
a devil-doing of computer
'a devil-doing of a computer'
e. o zgatie de fată
a slip of girl
'a slip of a girl'

(2) a. a sly fox of a man
b. a rat of a school kid
c. a rock-hard stone of a man
d. an absolute hell of a problem
e. an oaf of a professor

The construction exists in many other languages such as Dutch, Spanish and French, among others:

(3) a. Cet imbécile de garçon (French, Hulk and Tellier 2000)
this imbecile of boy

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b. Deze idioot van een kerel (Dutch, Visan 2003)
this idiot of a guy
c. El gallina de Juan (Spanish, Castillas Martinez 2001)
the chicken of Juan

All these N *de* N constructions – in all languages we have discussed – have a striking similarity to the pseudo-partitive constructions of the type found in (4), namely the obligatory presence of *de* (for Romanian and the other Romance languages we discussed) *of* for English, and *van* for Dutch.

(4) o sticlă de vin
a bottle of wine

This similarity led linguists to postulate the same underlying structure for both types of construction (cf. Corver, 1988), namely one based on predicate inversion. While predicate inversion cannot account for the structure of the so-called pseudo-partitive constructions (cf. Tanase-Dogaru 2007, 2008), the question is whether predicate inversion can account for the structure of N de N constructions, i.e. if we have sufficient grounds to postulate the raising of the predicate starting from the intuition that what N de N constructions are based on is a relation of predication.

1.1. N of N and family resemblance

Den Dikken (1998, 2006) starts from the celebrated analogy between nominal and clausal structures and analyzes N de N constructions in terms of predicate inversion. One of the main tenets of his theory is that while the copular inversion construction is an instance of clausal level predicate inversion, N de N is an instance of nominal level predicate inversion.

(5) I consider [SU John] to be [PRED the easiest target]
I consider [PRED the easiest target] to be [John]

(6) That boy is a coward.
That [PRED coward] of a [SU boy]

This sort of analysis has prompted linguists to view other constructions bearing a family resemblance (in the sense of Zamparelli, 1995) to N de N constructions as predicate inversion structures. Other types of constructions include A de A constructions (Corver, 2000, Visan, 2004), *Cât de / How much of* constructions, *Cum de / How of* constructions (Constantinescu, 2006). They are illustrated in (7a-c):

(7) a. E foc de frumoasă.
is fire of beautiful
'She is very beautiful'
b. Cât de frumoasă e!
how much of beautiful she is!
'How beautiful she is!'
c. Cum era de obosit!
how was he of tired!
'How tired he was!'

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Corver (2000) notes that the A de A construction shares the following syntactic properties with the N of N construction:
a) the impossibility of subextracting the inverted (nominal / adjectival) predicate:

(8) a. Fools of policemen, they certainly are __!
b. *Fools, they certainly are [__ of policemen]!

(9) a. Extrem de destept te mai crezi tu! (cf. Grosu 1974, in Corver, 2000)
b. *Extrem te mai crezi tu [__ de deştept]!

b) removal of the sequence of N / de A is not allowed:

(10) *Of policemen they certainly are [fools __].
*De deştept te mai crezi tu [extrem __]!

Corver (2000) points out that the ill-formedness of these examples can be explained in terms of non-constituenthood: the copulas of / de (i.e. F) do not form a constituent with *policemen / deştept* that occupy the specifier position of XP. An alternative analysis, in which the constituent F' is fronted, is ruled out as well: the Proper Binding Constraint blocks extraction of F', since the trace of the inverted adjectival predicate (t_j) will not be properly bound when F' is fronted to [SpecCP]. He notes furthermore that it is generally assumed that X'-constituents cannot be fronted to [SpecCP] (cf. Chomsky 1986).

1.2. Problematic aspects

As Constantinescu (2006) points out, non-constituenthood of *de* and *deştept* does not necessarily point to the existence of an inverted predicate. And as I argued elsewhere (see Tanase-Dogaru 2007, 2008), (pseudo-) partitive constructions (classifier phrases) do not involve predicate displacement.

Moreover, Corver (2000) claims that other constructions involving degree modifiers (such as *tare*) involve another kind of predicate displacement – Predicate Fronting. This is A'-raising of the SC-predicate – the degree adverb (*tare*) is removed out of the AP. The fact that de is absent in these structures (tare (*de) destept) suggests to Corver that Predicate Inversion (i.e. A-movement) does not apply in adjectival structures in which the adjective is modified by an adverb. Given that A'-positions typically function as escape hatches for extraction, he suggests analysing such adjectival constructions as *tare destept* in terms of Predicate Fronting internal to the adjectival phrase:

(11) [DegP $tare_j$ [D' Deg [XP [AP destept [X' X [Pred t_j]]]]]]

Corver (2000, 2005) also proposes a predicate displacement analysis for structures with *cât*, *atât*, as well as for simile contructions:

(12) [FP $atât_j$ [F' F+ X_i (=de) [XP lung [X' t_i [AP t_j]]]]]
So of long
(13) a. [FP $cât_j$ [F' F+ X_i (=de) [XP lung [X' t_i [AP t_j]]]]]
How of long
b. [DegP $cât_j$ [Deg' Deg [+Q]/[+EXCL] [FP t' $_j$ [F' F+ Xi (=de) [XP lung [X' t_i [AP tj]]]]] (Corver 2000)

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cât constructions involve Predicate Fronting, i.e. predicate displacement of the A'-type. The *cât de A* pattern only differs from the *A de A* pattern in terms of the properties 'interrogativity' and 'exclamation', and not in its categorial features. That is, he claims, there are reasons for treating cat as an adjectival (i.e. [+N, +V]) element, and, in view of its adjectival nature, it is not unlikely that the (interrogative) degree adjective undergoes Predicate Inversion and ends up in [SpecFP]. de shows up as a result of X-raising to F. The interrogative adjectival *cât* differs, however, from adjectival elements like *extrem* in being able to escape from the adjectival phrase.

This may be related to features such as 'interrogativity' (i.e. [+Wh]) and 'exclamation (i.e. [+Excl]). Corver (2000) assumes that these features are associated with the functional head Deg which heads a DegP projection, whose specifier position has A'-properties and can function as an escape hatch for extraction, similarly to [SpecCP]. Movement of *cât* to the Spec of DegP will then determine the interrogative or exclamative interpretation of *cât*. The resulting structure is the one in (15b).

(14) a. Cât de frumoasă e Maria! (cf. Grosu 1974, in Corver 2000)
b. Cât de vechi este acest document?

(15) a. Cât$_i$ e Maria [t$_i$ de frumoasă]!
b. Cât$_i$ e [t$_i$ de vechi] acest document?

In the eventuality of retaining a predicate inversion analysis for all these constructions, we cannot assume that (16b) could have (16a) as an (underlying) source.

(16) a. ?inteligent atât (Constatinescu, 2006)
intelligent so
b. atât de inteligent
so of intelligent

In what follows, I will propose an alternative analysis of these constructions, which appeals to the issue of silent nouns.

2. Silent nouns revisited

What I would like to propose in this section is that the configuration of many structures containing de contains a silent noun of the type NUMBER / AMOUNT or TYPE / KIND. If we conceive of these structures in this way, then the need for postulating a predicate inversion rule is overridden.

Silent nouns of the type mentioned above are involved in the underlying structure of exclamatives like the ones in (17) (see Tănase-Dogaru 2007a,b):

(17) a. Ce de băieți la petrecere! = Ce de NUMBER băieți la petrecere.
what of boys at party = what of NUMBER boys are at party
'there are so many boys at the party'
b. Ce băieți sunt la petrecere! = Ce KIND boys are at party (tall, handsome, etc)
what boys are at party! = What KIND boys are at party
'the boys at the party are really handsome, tall, etc'
c. Ce număr mare *(de) baieți la petrecere!
what number big *(of) boys at the party

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It is my belief that the same structure can be ascribed to *A/Av de A, cât de* and *cum de* structures. Consider the following set of examples taken from Constantinescu (2006):

(18) a. atât de mulți copii
so of many-M.PL. children
b. atâția copii
so-M.PL. children
c. atât de puțini copii
so of few-M.PL. children

(19) a. cât de mulți copii!
how of many-M.PL. children
b. câți copii!
how-M.PL. children
c. cât de puțini copii
how of few-M.PL. children

Constantinescu (2006) notes that there is equivalence between the (a) and (b) examples, while no such equivalence of interpretation exists between the (b) and (c) examples. Therefore, we can assume that the agreeing forms *destul*, *atât* and *cât* can be analyzed along the lines proposed by Kayne (2002) for the analysis of *troppo* etc., i.e., they include an unpronounced MANY / MUCH, actually MANY NUMBER / MUCH AMOUNT:

(20) a. destui MANY NUMBER copii
b. atâți(a) MANY NUMBER copii silent MANY NUMBER / MUCH AMOUNT
c. câți MANY NUMBER copii

This hypothesis is supported by the corresponding English structures:

(21) a. How many NUMBER children
b. How much AMOUNT money overt many / much, silent NUMBER /AMOUNT
c. So many NUMBER children

Constantinescu (2006) points that in the examples where many / much is pronounced – mult, which in Romanian agrees in number and gender with the noun – *destul, atât* and *cât* which are used in front of it are invariant forms; instead a functional head, *de*, is inserted. When MULT (i.e. MANY / MUCH) is unpronounced atat, cat, destul are used in their adjectival forms, agreeing with the noun – they incorporate phi-features when there is unpronounced MULT. The result of this analysis is that the structures with atat de, cat de and cum de can be seen as having silent nouns in their internal structures. These nouns can be paraphrased as DEGREE:

(22) a. e atât de frumoasă! = she is so DEGREE of beautiful
b. cât de frumoasă e = how much DEGREE of beautiful she is
c. cum e de obosit! = how much DEGREE of tired he is

Having discussed silent nouns with these types of constructions, it is now high time to approach the subject of silent nouns and N *de* N constructions.

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2.1. Silent nouns, scalarity and N de N constructions

It is a well-known observation that nouns functioning as N_1 in N de N constructions form a rather restricted class. Milner (1978) suggests that the class of nouns that can appear as N_1 is closed, i.e. only the so-called *noms de qualité* can function as N_1 in these constructions. Ruwet (1982) and Hulk and Tellier (2000) claim that any noun that can function as an evaluation can appear in the position of N_1.

I will go along the lines of Matushansky (2002), who argues that the nouns appearing in the N_1 position must be scalar. As Vişan (2003) points out, one test to judge scalarity of nouns is the following: any noun which can appear in an environment sensitive to degree, such as modification by *aşa* / *asemenea* (so) in Romanian.

(23) N- am mai văzut un asemenea dobitoc / nătărău / mocofan / ticălos
Not have more seen a such imbecile / dork / oaf / bastard

As Matushansky (2002) points out, the group of nouns that behave as scalar to this test is exactly the class of nouns that are natural as N_1 or as epithets. The shift undergone with nouns when used as N_1 is the same as the shift in meaning undergone by a non-scalar predicate which appears in a scalarity-sensitive context, such as that of a degree operator:

(24) My cook is more French than Napoleon.

In this example, the predicate French undergoes a shift in meaning and comes to mean 'having the properties typically associated with being French'. In the same way, singular indefinites denoting roles, professions, etc. in predicate position can be said to be coerced into an emotive, epithet-like interpretation:

(25) a. Ion e un țăran – Ion has all the properties associated with peasants.
'Ion is a peasant.'
b. Ion e un copil – Ion has all the properties associated with children.
'Ion is a child.'

That the singular indefinite predicate configuration is prone to epithet-like interpretations in Romanian can be supported by the fact that in spoken Romanian, the following (considered sub-standard by normative grammars) sentences are possible:

(26) a. Eşti un drăguț! = drăguțul de tine
You are a nice = nice-the of you
b. Eşti un simpatic! = simpaticul de tine
You are a nice = nice-the of you

On the other hand, epithets expressing negative evaluation are more natural in predicate position in Romanian:

(27) a. Ion e un urât = urâtul de Ion
Ion is an ugly = ugly-the of Ion
'Ion is ugly' = the ugly Ion'
b. Ion e un aerian = aerianul de Ion
Ion is a scatterbrained = scatterbrained-the of Ion
'Ion is scatterbrained = the scatterbrained Ion'

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What I would like to claim is that silent nouns of the type TYPE are involved in the structure of these expressions. Thus, the structure of (26) and (27) can be represented as (28):

(28) a. Eşti un drăguţ! = Eşti un TYPE drăguţ!
You are a nice = you are a TYPE nice
b. Eşti un simpatic! = Eşti un TYPE simpatic!
You are a nice = you are a TYPE nice
c. Ion e un urât = Ion e un TYPE urât
Ion is an ugly = Ion is a TYPE ugly
d. Ion e un aerian = Ion e un TYPE aerian
Ion is a scatterbrained = Ion is a TYPE scatterbrained.

On the pattern of these epithets, nouns denoting professions, roles, etc. can be coerced into epithet-like nouns:

(29) a. Ion e un clovn = clovnul de Ion
Ion is a clown = clown-the of Ion
b. Ion e un savant = savantul de Ion
Ion is a savant = savant-the of Ion
c. Ion e un copil = copilul de Ion
Ion is a child = child-the of Ion
d. Ion e un cârpaci = cârpaciul de Ion
Ion is a mender = mender-the of Ion

Matushansky (2002) suggests an analysis where the derivation of N de N constructions in English is based on degree movement. The trigger for movement is an emotive operator – used to express the subjectiveness of the speaker – a type of exclamative operator which is a type of degree operator. I concur with Matushansky (2002) in that the requirement that N_1 should be scalar suggests the presence of a degree operator in the N de N constructions.

My claim is that nouns that can function as N_1 in N de N constructions fall into two categories:
a) nouns that are scalar in nature and thus can express degree and function as epithets, which in turn fall into two sub-classes:
1) nouns expressing negative evaluation: idiot / idiot, netrebnic / wreck, zăpăcit / irresponsible, prost / stupid
2) nouns expressing positive evaluation: drăguţ / nice, simpatic / nice, scump / dear
b) nouns that can be coerced into having a scalar interpretation: ţăran / peasant, copil / child, dansator / dancer, clovn / clown, savant / savant, carpaci / mender, etc.

These nouns are all related to an underlying structure containing silent nouns that can be paraphrased as TYPE (cf. van Riemsdijk, 2005). Thus, they express a property which is predicated of a (silent) noun, a property which is relevant in a certain degree.

2.2. My silent nouns are the Emotive TYPE

In analyzing N de N constructions in Romanian I will follow Matushansky (2002) in assuming that N de N constructions are base-generated, that N_2 is the semantic head and N_1 is a modifier. This modifier is used to express the mood or feeling of the speaker, which turns it into an emotive modifier. As argued before, this modifier is a scalar noun.

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This is tantamount to arguing against predicate inversion with N de N constructions (cf. Matushansky, 2002, van Riemsdijk, 2005). I will list two arguments Matushansky uses to argue against predicate inversion with these constructions (for other reasons why predicate inversion cannot account for quantitative pseudo-partitives, see Tănase-Dogaru 2007):
a) extraction out of N_2 is possible, which would be unexpected if N_2 is the subject of a predication:

(30) a. Which linguist is this a beauty of a book about?
b. *Which linguist is a /the book a beauty

b) N_1 is iterable, which is unexpected if it is a predicate:

(31) That asshole of an idiot of a musketeer

I retain from Matushansky's analysis the ideas that N de N constructions are base-generated and that N_1 is a modifier that expresses the mood of the speaker. I follow the line of van Riemsdijk (2005) in assuming a silent semi-lexical noun TYPE in the structure of N de N constructions. The nominal modifier, i.e. N_1, can be taken to modify the silent noun and not the lexical noun directly. There may be one important counterargument to the view that N_1 modifies a silent semi-lexical noun, namely the phrasal nature of this element. Matushansky (2002) derives this phrasal nature from the fact that N_1 has its own determiner and it can take an adjective as in (32):

(32) a big fat bastard of a spider

However, as van Riemsdijk (2005) notes silent semi-lexical heads can be modified, as in (33), where the adjective modifies the lexical noun beer but 'it might be said to extend its scope over both juxtaposed nouns, that is, it is the glass of beer that is cool' (van Riemsdijk, 2005):

(33) a. een koel glas bier (Dutch, van Riemsdijk, 2005)
a cool glass beer
'a cool glass of beer'
b. un pahar de bere rece (Romanian)
a glass of beer cold
'a glass of cold beer'

Now recall the discussion about Romanian Ce-exclamatives, where the presence of the de-element indicates the presence of the silent semi-lexical noun NUMBER, while the de-less construction signals the presence of the semilexical noun TYPE or SORT:

(33) a. Ce (NUMBER) de țigări ai fumat!
What of cigarettes have2ND PS. SG smoked
'You have smoked so many cigarettes!'
b. Ce (TYPE) țigări fumează ăsta!
What cigarettes smokes this (one)
'The cigarettes this one smokes are so expensive / big / stinky, etc'

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Exclamatives with role-denoting nouns and N de N constructions involve the same semi-lexical noun which is present in the structure of (33b):

(34) a. ce țăran / vierme mai eşti! = ce TYPE țăran /vierme mai esti
what peasant / worm more are
'what a peasant / worm you are'
b. un țăran / vierme de bărbat = un TYPE țăran / vierme de bărbat
a peasant / worm of man
'a peasant / worm of a man'

I have established elsewhere (see Tănase-Dogaru 2007a, Constantinescu and Tănase-Dogaru 2008) that the role of the indefinite article in Romanian SIPs equals that of degree words like *ce*. It follows that SIPs involve the presence of the silent semi-lexical noun TYPE, as well. It is interesting to notice that when the overt type appears in the structure, it triggers the appearance of the de-element.

The same happens with the silent classifier NUMBER, which – when overt – triggers the appearance of the nominal marker de.

(35) a. Ce număr de băieți!
What number of boys
b Ce tip de băiat!
What type of boy

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, bare predicates in Romanian are projected as Number Phrases which retrieve instantiations of a kind and predicate a property of that kind. Singular indefinites in predicate position (predicated of humans) contain a silent noun, a structure which turns them into evaluative modifiers. The relation between N de N constructions (which express negative or positive evaluation) and singular indefinites in predicate position is thus marked by the presence of a semi-lexical noun TYPE.

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