# DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR SEMI-LEXICALITY

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**Abstract:** Starting from a tripartite classification of syntactic categories into lexical, functional and semi-lexical, the paper analyzes pseudo-partitive constructions and monoclausal modal structures in Romanian, advancing the claim that both constructions consist of single extended projections, headed by one lexical and one semi-lexical/functional head. The aim of the paper is twofold. On the one hand, it strives to offer a non-exhaustive list of criteria for diagnosing semi-lexicality in the nominal and verbal domains; on the other hand, it aims at showing yet another similarity between nominal and clausal structures.

**Keywords:** pseudo-partitives, extended projections, monoclausal structures, semilexicality

## 1. Introduction. The lexical-functional continuum

Starting from the intuitive difference between lexical and functional categories, namely that lexical categories have descriptive content while functional categories have the role of connecting lexical items into articulated discourse, in the course of time, various diagnostic criteria have been proposed to distinguish one class from the other (see Emonds 1985):

(i) Functional categories are closed classes, seldom having more than twenty-thirty members.

(ii) Functional categories are usually phonologically and morphologically dependent; they do not carry stress and often develop weak, contracted forms; they may be realized as clitics or affixes.

(iii) Functional elements are characterized by "unique morpho-syntactic behavior", i.e. the members of different classes of functional elements cannot be differentiated from each other only by means of descriptive semantic features.

When trying to determine whether a particular category exhibits either lexical or functional features it becomes noticeable that, while some cases are clear-cut, such as the distinction between noun and determiner, some other cases are more difficult to decide upon.

One such case the category P, which is an intermediate category between open classes and grammatical categories. They have both grammatical features –

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they make up a closed set – and lexical features – they can assign theta-roles directly or in conjunction with a lexical category (in *John always relies on me*, 'me' is assigned the Theme theta-role by the preposition *on* in conjunction with the verb).

Within the verbal domain, semi-lexical candidates might be auxiliary verbs (Emonds 1985), certain verbs featuring in verb clusters in Germanic Verb Raising (van Riemsdijk 2002), certain verbs that allow restructuring in Italian, like *sembrare* (Haegeman 2005).

For the nominal domain, Emonds (1985) refers to the pro-form *one* in *the good ones*, the reflexive *self*/*selves*, and *thing* in *something good*.

The aim of the paper is to add several members to the semi-lexical domain:

(i) nouns functioning as N1 in quantitative pseudo-partitives, which behave as semi-lexical nouns doing the job of classifiers.

(ii) some Romanian modal monoclausal constructions involving the verbs *a putea* 'can', *a trebui* 'must', *a fi* 'be', *a avea* 'have' are VP-complexes headed by a semi-lexical verb.

In order to accomplish this goal, the paper will articulate and evaluate a (non-exhaustive) list of diagnostic criteria which may prove instrumental in deciding whether an item belongs to semi-lexical part of the lexical-functional continuum.

## 2. Semi-lexical nouns and extended projections

Classifiers in plural languages have been treated either as lexical instantiations of functional categories (Li 1999, Löbel 1999) or as semi-lexical heads which exhibit both functional and lexical properties (van Riemsdijk 1998, Stavrou 2003, Tănase-Dogaru 2009). In van Riemsdijk (1998), quantifier nouns such as *number* in *a number of examples* and *couple* in *a couple of cigarette*s are considered to be functional heads, by virtue of their being closed-class items, while other type of nouns which may be used in pseudo-partitive constructions (measure nouns, partitive nouns, container nouns, collective nouns, kind nouns) are semi-lexical heads.

The difference between functional and semi-lexical heads is reflected in verb agreement and gender agreement with the determiner. As Löbel (2001) points out, especially agreement is taken as evidence that some measure nouns "may waver between functional and semi-lexical status" (van Riemsdijk 1998); in (1a), the measure noun *kilo* is functional, in (1b) it is semi-lexical:

(1) a. Er zit drie kilo heroine in die zak.
There sit three kilo heroin in that bag.

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b. ?Er zitten meerdere kilo's heroine in die zak
There sit several kilos heroin in that bag.

Pseudo-partitive constructions consist of a single (extended) projection, in which N1 is a semi-lexical noun (cf. van Riemsdijk 1998, Vos 1999, Tănase-Dogaru 2007, 2009).

In Dutch, partitive constructions can be divided into two major groups: Direct Partitive Constructions (henceforth DPC), as in (2a) – with no intervening material between the container and the containee – and Indirect Partitive Constructions (2b):

(2) a. een bus toeristen / een pan soep
a bus tourists / a pan soup
b. een bus met toeristen / een pan met soep
a bus with tourists / a pan with soup

DPCs are argued to involve a single projection in which N1 is a semi-lexical noun. Vos (1999) restates the analysis by considering DPCs as involving a kind operator (represented by the functional noun) that requires a lexical noun. Together, they form an extended nominal projection. Pseudo-partitive constructions in English and Romance languages are treated in van Riemsdijk (1998) as disguised DPCs because they behave like DPCs with respect to selection, as shown in (3):

(3) a. Mary ate a whole tray of / *with pastries.
b. Jean a dilue plusieurs bouteilles de vin / * avec du vin.
Jean has diluted several bottles of wine / with wine.

In (3a), the verb *eat* selects N2 *pastries* and not N1 *tray*, which shows that the pseudo-partitive construction *tray of pastries* is an extended projection, with one lexical (*pastries*) and one semi-lexical head (*tray*).

### 2.1 Functional features of N1

#### 2.1.1 Relational nouns

It is a well-known fact that most nouns that are involved in pseudo-partitive constructions (where they have functional status) also appear as full lexical nouns:

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(4) a. a green bottle / o sticlă verde
b. a bottle of wine / o sticlă de vin
c. *a green bottle of wine / *o sticlă verde de vin[1]

In (4a), *bottle* / *sticlă* is lexical noun, while in (5b) it is a semi-lexical noun, fact which is emphasized by the ungrammaticality of (5c).[2]

Thus, a first characteristic of semi-lexical and functional heads: they are used as relational nouns, i.e. they head a (multi-headed) extended projection. The same idea is reinforced by Cheng and Sybesma (1999) who, in discussing cases like (5), point out the interpretational differences between *de* and *de*-less structures in Chinese:

(5) a. san bang (de) rou
three CLS pounds DE meat
b. liang xiang (de) shu
two CLS box DE book

In the absence of *de*, *xiang* 'box' receives a more concrete interpretation, relating to its being an actual box, while in the context of *de* a measure interpretation is favored, i.e. boxful.

### 2.1.2 Semantic bleaching

In the case of nouns used as heads of pseudo-partitives, they presuppose a 'somewhat reduced lexical meaning in comparison to the quantified noun to which they are a sister' (Löbel 2001). Thus in the Romanian examples in (6), the noun *vârf* used in a pseudo-partitive construction becomes semantically "bleached", i.e. does not retain its original meaning of 'peak':

(6) a. am ajuns în vârf(ul muntelui)
have reached in peak(the mountain-the.GEN)
'I have reached the peak (of the mountain).'
b. am pus la mâncare un vârf de sare
have put at food a peak of salt
'I have added a little salt to the food.'

[1] The ungrammaticality of (4c) relates to cases where *bottle* / *sticlă* is a quantity-designating noun, i.e. a container of wine.
[2] However, this does not relate to a general exclusion from such structures. An example like *a big bottle of wine* is fine because *big* modifies the quantifier status of *bottle* not its qualitative properties (Henk van Riemsdijk, p.c.).

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Bhattacharya (2001) also acknowledges the fact that a criterion for the functional character of the classifier is the lack of descriptive content: "This holds as well for the complex (i.e. the Num-Cla complex) as it does not pick out a class of objects but elaborates some property of the complement noun".

### 2.1.3 Modification and sub-extraction

Semantic bleaching of N1 triggers transparency to modification. In (7), the modifiers *wonderful*, *stupid*, *sexy* obviously modify the second noun in the construction; the same applies to (8):

(7) a. a wonderful cup of tea
b. a stupid gang of schoolboys
c. a sexy bunch of girls

(8) a. o gaşcă idioată de huidume
a gang idiotic of bullies
b. o sticlă minunată de şampanie
a bottle wonderful of champagne
c. un stol grăbit de şcolăriţe
a bevy hurried of schoolgirls

The fact the pseudo-partitive as a whole can be modified by attributive modifiers that rather belong to N2 than N1 suggests the fact that the semantic head of the construction is N2. So, if we consider pseudo-partitives as single multi-headed projections, modification facts point to N2 as the lexical head of the extended nominal projection (which can be modified by attributive modifiers) and to N1 as the functional/semi-lexical head of the same projection, which is transparent to modification.

Sub-extraction phenomena also point to the fact that, although consisting of two constituents, pseudo-partitive constructions have one referent. When N2 is topicalized, the functional element *de/of* disappears, which I take to indicate the fact that pseudo-partitives consist of a unique multi-headed projection, as in (9):

(9) a. Bani, Ion are o grămadă (*de)
money, John has a heap (*of)
b. Spectatori, au plecat o mulţime (*de)
spectators, have left a multitude (*of)
c. Ceai, a băut toată lumea câte o ceaşcă (*de)
tea, has drunk all world each a cup (*of)

In close connection to their reduced lexical meaning, these nouns also exhibit features that are known to pertain to semi-lexical/functional categories (see

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Emonds 1985 and Bhattacharya 2001). Thus, they tend to constitute a closed class, i.e. they are limited in productivity[3], possess a small number of members and do not encourage novel coinages.

### 2.2 Lexical features

#### 2.2.1 Agreement

Agreement helps to demonstrate that, although consisting of two members, pseudo-partitive constructions are single projections with a single referent (see van Riemsdijk 1998, Löbel 1999 and Stravrou 2003).

The verb selects either N1or N2, as shown by the fact that it can agree in number with either of them:

(10) a. Un număr de studenţi mă aşteptau pe hol.
a number.SG of students-PL me were expecting on hallway
b. Un număr mare de studenţi a venit.
a number.SG big of students-PL has come

The same variation in agreement is observed by Stavrou (2003), who discusses Greek pseudo-partitives like (11):

(11) a. Iparhun/iparhi mia sira diavathmisis
are/is a range-SG gradations-PL
b. Ena buketo luludja itan pesmen-o/-a sto patoma.
a bunch flowers was/were thrown on the floor

This kind of variation is expected if we assume that pseudo-partitives constitute a unitary phrase involving two nominal constituents. This "freedom" of choice (Stavrou 2003) of the verb to select either of the two nouns within a single projection can only be accounted for if we take into consideration the categoriaal nature of the first noun, which is conceived of as neither fully lexical nor entirely functional. Another prediction is that the lack of agreement between the verb and N1 is more evident if the noun is closer to the functional end of the lexical-functional continuum.

[3] One may wonder whether Romanian nouns used as N1 in pseudo-partitive constructions are really limited in productivity as there are clear differences between the restricted distribution of a purely functional noun (e.g. pereche/pair) and the freer distribution of a semi-lexical noun like sticlă/bottle. However, it is precisely this distinction in terms of distribution that allows for different degrees of lexicality.

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To put it simply, we would expect N1 in pseudo-partitive constructions to trigger agreement when N1 has semi-lexical status; on the other hand, N2 is expected to trigger agreement when N1 has functional status.

This distinction mirrors the one proposed by Doetjes and Rooryck (2003) between "pure degree" and "comparative" interpretations of pseudo-partitives. In (12a), the noun *vârf* 'peak' triggers agreement on the adjective and is thus assigned semi-lexical status, while in (12b), the noun *sare* 'salt' triggers agreement on the adjective, which is a clue to the functional or "pure degree" status of *un pic* 'a little'. In other words, in (12a) the classifier is in the middle of the lexical-functional continuum and it is not fully grammaticalized, while in (12b) the classifier is fully grammaticalized and has reached the functional end of the continuum.

(12) a. Un vârf de sare e suficient.
a peak.M of salt.F is sufficient.M
b. Un pic de sare e suficientă.
a little.M of salt.F is sufficient-F

Other similar examples in Romanian may point to the fact that N1 container nouns trigger agreement and are, therefore, interpreted as semi-lexical (13a-b), while N1 quantifier-like nouns (see van Riemsdijk 1998) are less likely to trigger agreement and are, therefore, interpreted as functional (14a-b).

(13) a. Un pahar /degetar /ţoi/ ţap /butoi/ borcan/lighean/
a glass/ thimble/long-necked glass/mug/ barrel/ jar/ basin/
castron de bere e suficient.
tureen.M of beer.F is sufficient.M
b. O damigeană/canistră/sticlă/cană/carafă/halbă de vin e suficientă.
a demijohn/canister/bottle/mug/decanter/pint-F of wine.M is sufficient-F
(14) a. Un strop de mândrie e necesară.
drop.M of pride-F is necessary-F
b. O grămadă de orgoliu e nenecesar.
a pile-F of pride-M is unnecessary.M

To briefly conclude the section, pseudo-partitives in Romanian are single multi-headed projections. Agreement in variation depends on the semi-lexical or functional status of N1. N1 is an instantiation of the feature complex [+Functional, −Grammatical], i.e. it is a non-grammatical category with functional features and behavior.

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### 2.2.2 Selection

Selection is between the predicate and either N1 or N2. In (15) the verb *overturn* may select either the object *tray* or the second noun *pastries*, resulting in two interpretations, one in which the tray gets turned over and the other in which the pastries get turned over:

(15) a. Ei au răsturnat o tavă de prăjituri [+ambiguous]
They have overturned a tray of pastries.
b. Ei au răsturnat o tavă cu prăjituri. [–ambiguous]
They have overturned a tray with pastries.

If the main verb is a verb imposing strong selectional restrictions on its object, such as *a mânca* 'eat', the reading in which only the tray is affected is odd. This will be taken as evidence that in (16a), the verb selects *prăjituri* 'pastries' as object, while in (16b) it selects tavă / tray:

(16) a. Au mâncat o tavă de prajituri.
have eaten a tray of pastries
'They have eaten a tray of pastries.'
b. ?? Au mâncat o tavă cu prajituri.
have eaten a tray with pastries
'They have eaten a tray with pastries.'

N1 can have either a quantificational – where it indicates a certain amount or quantity – or a referential interpretation – where it refers to an actual object, one that is present in the universe of discourse. If the verb imposes strong selectional restrictions on N1, like *a ţine* 'to hold', N1 has a referential interpretation and it refers to an actual object in the discourse domain (17a). The construction contains two referential expressions: *sticlă* 'bottle' and *lapte* 'milk', which can be referred to by means of the pronouns *ea* for the feminine *sticlă* (17b) and *el* for the masculine substance noun *lapte* (17c):

(17) a. Ion ţine o sticlă$_i$ de lapte$_j$.
Ion holds a bottle of milk
b. (Ea$_i$) e spartă.
(it) is broken-F
c. (El$_j$) e acru.
(it) is sour-M

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When N1 has a purely quantificational interpretation (18a) – in other words, when it functions as a classifier – we can only refer back to the substance noun *lapte* (18b), since the classifier does not refer to an actual object that is present in the universe of discourse:

(18) a. Ion a băut o sticlă$_i$ de lapte$_j$.
Ion drank a bottle of milk.
b. *(Ea$_i$) e spartă.
(it) is broken-F
c. (El$_j$) e acru.
(it) is sour-M

A verb like *a fuma* 'smoke' selects a complement which refers to some substance that can be smoked, i.e. tobacco, or to an object made out of this substance (19a). A complement like *cutie* 'box' does not satisfy the selection restriction of the verb (19b), but a pseudo-partitive expression like *cutie de trabucuri* 'box of cigars' is acceptable.

(19) a. Ion a fumat un trabuc.
Ion smoked a cigar.
b. *Ion a fumat o cutie.[4]
Ion smoked a box.
c. Ion a fumat o cutie de trabucuri.
Ion smoked a box of cigars.

Therefore, the verb selects N2 rather than N1 to satisfy its selectional restrictions. N1 is a functional or semi-lexical item, which designates amount or quantity but has no actual referent. A noun which exhibits both functional and lexical features can best be described as semi-lexical.

## 3. Semi-lexical verbs

Researchers have already discussed motion verbs in Romance (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2005, *sembrare* (Haegeman 2005) and modal semi-auxiliaries in Romanian (Avram 1999, Zafiu 2005) as amenable to an analysis in terms of semi-lexicality:

[4] Example (19b) is acceptable only when the larger context supplies information about the contents of the box.

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(20) Vaju a pigghiu un pani (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2005)
go-1SG to fetch-1SG a bread
'I go to fetch bread.'
(21) Non lo sembra capire (Haegeman 2005)
not it seem-3SG understand
'He doesn't seem to understand it.'
(22) Maria poate desena foarte bine (Avram 1999)
Maria can-3SG draw very well
'Maria can draw very well.'

It has been claimed that these verbs are merged as functional heads in the extended projection of the (main) lexical verb; the VP-complex represents a monoclausal structure (see Dobrovie-Sorin 1987, Avram 1999, Cinque 2004, Cardinaletti and Giusti 2005, Haegeman 2005). The main arguments have to do with restructuring: clitic climbing, long NP movement and the fixed order of the two elements. If the structure is monoclausal, i.e. extended projection with one semi-lexical and one lexical head, it should display transparency effects (cf. Cinque 2004). We can, therefore, advance the claim that both in the nominal and in the verbal domain, semi-lexical elements head an extended projection.

### 3.1 Modals in Romanian

Modal verbs in Romanian do not represent a well-defined, clear-cut syntactic class[5]. Modal verbs in Romanian have specific features, which led some researchers to consider them grammatical operators – going by the name of semi-auxiliaries (see Guţu 1956, *Gramatica limbii române* 1966); however, these verbs also have lexical features.

Romanian grammars acknowledge the hybrid status of modals in Romanian by stating that the sequence V1+V2 in (23a-d) is a complex predicate (Zafiu 2005):

(23) a. Pot citi.
can.1SG read
'I can read.'
b. Trebuie vorbit cu primarul.
must spoken with mayor-the
'One must speak to the mayor.'

[5] Different researchers have different lists of modal verbs in Romanian. These lists may include *a putea* 'can', *a trebui* 'must', *a avea* 'have', in structures like (23d), *a fi* 'be', in structures like (23c), and optionally *a veni* 'come', in structures like *Îmi vine sa plâng* 'I feel like weeping', *a părea* 'seem', *a da* 'give', in structures like *Dă să spună* 'She is about to say', and *a sta* 'stay', in structures like *Stă să cadă* 'It is going to fall'.

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c. E de scris pentru mâine.
is of written for tomorrow
'There's a lot to write for tomorrow.'
d. Avem de scris pentru mâine.
have of written for tomorrow
'We have a lot to write for tomorrow.'

### 3.1.1 Lexical features

Romanian modals, i.e. a *putea* and *a trebui*, can enter two structures: a monoclausal structure – with a VP complex (24) – and a biclausal structure (25). When *a putea* enters the biclausal structure, it governs a tensed clause, which is a lexical feature, since auxiliaries lack referential value, they have reduced semantic content and therefore cannot assign any theta-role and do not govern any tensed clause.

(24) a. Ion poate citi.
Ion can-3SG read
'Ion can read.'
b. Romanul *Ion* trebuie citit.
novel-the *Ion* must read-PAST PART
'The novel *Ion* must be read.'
(25) a. Ion poate să citească.
Ion can-3SG SĂ read-3SG SUBJ
'Ion can read.'
b. Ion trebuie să citească.
Ion must SĂ read-3SG SUBJ
'Ion must read.'

At least two important features point to the lexical nature of these verbs: they take tenses and they have agreement morphology. *A trebui* has a [+agreement] paradigm when it is followed by a participle with passive meaning (26a) and when it takes a dative indirect object (26b):

(26) a. Ele trebuiesc trezite (Avram 1999)
they must3-PL woken-F PL
'They must be woken up.'
b. Formularele ce- ţi trebuiesc pentru asta.
forms-the what-you.DAT must-3PL for this
'the forms you need for this'

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Another major lexical feature is the ability of *a putea* to assign theta-roles, as in (27):

(27) Copilul poate învăţa orice limbă străină (Avram 1999)
child-the can-3SG learn any language foreign
'The child can learn any foreign language.'

### 3.1.2 Functional features

*A putea* + bare infinitive and *a trebui* + participle represent VP complexes, in which the modal and the syntactic head of the VP denote one event structure and one argument structure, therefore paralleling the structure of pseudo-partitive constructions, which were shown to have a unique referent and to consist of a single double-headed projection.

#### 3.1.2.1 Clitic climbing

When *a putea* is followed by the bare infinitive, clitic climbing is obligatory (28); when *a putea* is followed by a subjunctive clause, clitic climbing is ungrammatical (29):

(28) a. Ion o poate vedea.
Ion CL.3SG F ACC can-3SG see
'Ion can see it.'
b. *Ion poate o vedea.
Ion can-3SG CL.3SG F ACC see
(29) a. Ion poate să o vadă.
Ion can-3SG SĂ CL.3SG F ACC see
'Ion can see it.'
b. *Ion o poate să vadă.
Ion CL.3SG F ACC can-3SG SĂ see

Bare infinitives following *a putea* are therefore VPs with no functional projection that could host the clitic, which climbs to *a putea*.

#### 3.1.2.2 Negation

Romanian bare infinitives cannot be negated, which points to the same analysis of V1+V2 in terms of complex predicates.

(30) a. Ion nu poate citi.
Ion not can read
'Ion cannot read.'

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b. *Ion poate nu citi.
Ion can not read

### 3.1.2.3 Clitic adverbs

"Clitic" adverbs of the type *mai* 'still', *şi* 'and, also', *cam* 'quite' can only appear in front of the inflected *a putea* (Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Avram 1999):

(31) a. Mai poate citi.
still can-3SG read
'He can still read.'
b. *Poate mai citi.
can-3SG still read

### 3.1.2.4 Resistance to passivization

Sentences containing *a putea* + bare infinitive resist passivization. Thus, (32b) is not the passive counterpart of (32a), as shown by Avram (1999):

(32) a. Ion poate citi romanul.
Ion can-3SG read novel-the
'Ion can read the novel.'
b. Romanul poate fi citit de Ion.
novel-the can-3SG be read by Ion
'The novel can be read by Ion.'

To sum up, Romanian "modal verbs" with monoclausal structures have both lexical features, i.e. they take tenses, with the exception of the *perfect compus*, they have agreement morphology and can assign theta-roles and functional features, i.e. they are defective (they cannot take certain tenses, sometimes they cannot appear in non-finite clauses, they cannot be used in the passive), they are rarely used in other tenses than the present and they undergo obligatory clitic climbing (restructuring).

## 4. Conclusions

The analysis of semi-lexical heads in Romanian has focused on N1 in pseudo-partitives and V1 in monoclausal modal structures. Both N1 and V1 were shown to exhibit both lexical and functional features, which points to their being amenable to an analysis in terms of semi-lexical categories.

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Though semi-lexicality is a matter of fuzzy boundaries, the analysis of nominal and verbal semi-lexicality in Romanian has shown that semi-lexical categories exhibit some degree of morphosyntactic "defectiveness" and semantic bleaching in combination with a "strongly lexical" feature, such as triggering agreement. It remains to be seen whether semi-lexicality itself is a matter of degrees.

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