# INFLECTIONAL AND PREPOSITIONAL CASE MARKING IN THE ROMANIAN MORPHO-SYNTACTIC SYSTEM: *THE DATIVE*

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*Abstract: This paper aims at examining the domain of case theory with respect to the alternation of inflectional and prepositional case marking in the Romanian morpho-syntactic system. It will be shown that Romanian has an intermediate position on the synthetic-analytic scale, in that the genitive and dative cases are marked both (a) inflectionally and (b) syntactically (cf. GOR, 2013). In this respect, this paper addresses issues concerning the synthetic and analytic marking of the dative. We will show that in standard Romanian, the inflectional dative is replaced by a prepositional construction (la+ ACC) under specific conditions- that is, when the first component of the DP cannot host the specific dative case-marker. On the other hand, in non-standard Romanian the P construction la+ ACC appears very often even under no morphological constraints.*

*Keywords: case marking, inflection, dative, prepositions, (morphological) constraints*

## 1.Introduction

### 1.1 Romanian case marking- a bird's eye view

Romanian has an intermediate position on the synthetic- analytic scale. While the analytical marking is a Romance characteristic, the synthetic marking is inherited from Latin. In Romanian, the genitive and dative cases are marked both (a) inflectionally and (b) syntactically, thus we can notice that (cf. GOR, 2013):

a. Romanian has two types of Gen and Dat *inflectional markers*: (i) *synthetic markers* such (1a) inflectional endings and (1b) gen-dat forms on the enclitic definite article; (ii) *analytic markers* such as (1c) the proclitic morpheme "lui"

1. (a) prieten-u-lui
Friend-SG-DEF.GEN≡DAT
(b) Ioanei, Transilvaniei, Rodicăi, Pragăi
(c) (M) lui Ion
LUI.GEN≡DAT Ion

b. Romanian *syntactically case-marks* the Gen and Dat in three types of structures : (2a) the structure AL+genitive; (2b) structures with analytic case markers (prepositions) and (2c) structures in which case is marked by the inflection of the determiners preceding the noun.

2. *(a) AL+genitive*



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(i) un student al profesorului
a.M.SG student.M.SG AL.M.SG professor.SG.DEF.GEN
"a student of the professor's" (cf.GOR, 2013:266)

*(b) Analytic case markers*

*A*- an analytic marker of the Gen. relation/Dat.relation (cf. GOR, 2013:268)

(ii) a.(mama) a trei copii
mother A three children
"mother of three children"
b. (datorită) a trei factori
because-of A three factors.NOM≡ACC

*(c) Case is marked by the inflection of the determiners preceding the noun*

(iii) unui băiat
a.M.GEN≡DAT boy.NOM≡ACC≡GEN≡DAT (GOR, op cit: 271)

**1.2. The alternation of Dative- marked DPs with PPs headed by "la"**

In Romanian, the alternation of nominal constituents marked with Dative with that of PP headed by the functional "la" is conditioned by the following:
(a) If the first determiner of the DP is invariable then the prepositional-marking with "la" is mandatory, as illustrated in:

3. (a) Am dat (diploma) **la** **doi** elevi.
have give$_{PastPart}$ diplomas LA two pupils
"I have given diplomas to two pupils"
(b) M-am adresat **la** **tot** satul.
Me$_{Refl}$-have address$_{PastPart}$ LA whole village-the
"I spoke to the whole village" (Mardale, 2008:151)

(b) If the first determiner of the DP is variable, case-marking is obligatory, as the following examples illustrate:

4. (a) Am dat (diplome) **unui** elev.
have give$_{PastPart}$ diplomas a$_{DAT}$ pupil
"I gave diplomas to a pupil"
(b) M-am adresat **întregului** sat.
meRefl.-have addressed entire-the$_{DAT}$ village
"I spoke to the whole village" (Mardale, 2008:151)



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(c) Some constituents allow both case-marking and la-marking as seen below (the examples are taken from Mardale, 2008:151):

5. (a) A telefonat **câtorva** colegi.
has phone$_{PastPart}$ some$_{Dat}$ colleagues
"(S)he called some colleagues"
(b) A acordat premii **fiecărui** elev.
Has award$_{PastPart}$ prizes every.Dat pupil
"(S)he gave prizes to every pupil"

6. (a) A telefonat **la câtiva** colegi.
has phone$_{PastPart}$ LA some colleagues
"(S)he called some colleagues"
(b) ??A acordat premii **la fiecare** elev.
Has award$_{PastPart}$ prizes LA every pupil
"(S)he gave prizes to every pupil"

Mardale (2008) proposes the following generalization with respect to case-marking of DPs in Romanian based on these constraints:
(i) morphologically-case marked DPs- when the DPs have a variable determiner on the first position
(ii) prepositionally case-marked DPs- when the DPs have an invariable determiner on the first position

### 1.3 The domain of case theory- the Dative

*Case* can be regarded as a contextual category, as a means of registering on the DP its thematic role and syntactic function. In other words, we can stress that a DP's (or NP's) case feature is a reflex of the DP's both function and position in the sentence. Case theory in the generative tradition deals with two types of problems - *case-assignment* and *case realization*. The theory holds that any lexically realized, non-empty DP is expected to bear an *abstract case feature* which makes it interpretable semantically and accounts for its structural position. This principle, known as *Case Filter*, eliminates caseless DPs:

(7) Case Filter

*DP[-Case ], if DP is lexical (applies at Phonological Form)

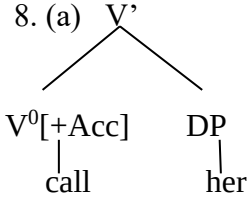
In the same line of thought, Case is assigned by a head to a complement, to a DP which subcategorizes the head and is $\theta$- marked by the head; it can appear in such configurations as



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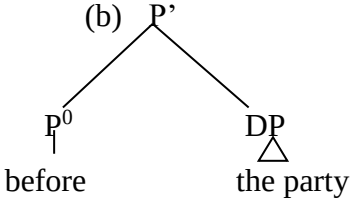
(2a,b) where the two lexical categories, the verb and the preposition, are both case assigners and θ-assigners; the case feature of the assigner is transferred to the DP through the operation of head feature transmission[1]. Following Chomsky's (1981) theory of Abstract Case, (a) NP is Accusative when governed by V, (b) NP is oblique when governed by P and (c) NP is Nominative when (improperly) governed by inflection.

8. (a)



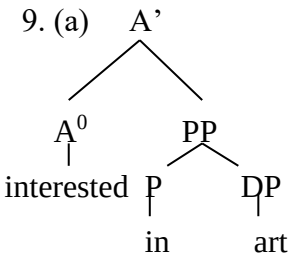

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(b)




Along Vs, Ps are also known to be good case-transmitters. At a first glance many Ns and As in English assign case by means of particular Ps, which are inserted in the D-structure such as *interested in art (9a), passion for music,* etc. At a closer look, English among other languages, has a rule of Dummy Preposition Insertion, which applies at the S-structure, used in connection with the Case Filter Rule (which requires every lexically realized DP to bear case), which illustrates the difference between verbal, nominal or adjectival behavior as illustrated in the following examples with *of* in English, *de* in French and *de* in Romanian (cf. Cornilescu, 2006: 350)

9. (a)




V N

According to Borer (1984) the mechanism of head feature transmission can be included into the broader spectrum of *Inflectional Rules*. These rules refer to those morpho-syntactic operations which provide the transfer of lexical features from heads to arguments.



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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (b)English: | (i) know the truth | (i) knowledge *of* the truth |
| | | A |
| | (ii) like cats | (ii) (be) fond *of* cats |
| | V | A |
| French: | (i) aimer Marie | (i) être amoureux *de* Marie |
| | | N |
| | (ii) aimer la patrie | (ii) amour *de* la patrie |
| | V | N |
| Romanian: | (i) a citi cărţi | (i) citirea *de* cărţi |
| | (ii) a iubi muzica | (ii) iubitor *de* muzică |

When it comes to *case- realization*, we can stress a variety of case-marking devices across languages; in languages such as Latin, Old English, German, inflection can be regarded as the prototypical realization of a case feature. Moreover, in languages such as Romanian and English, prepositions alongside of inflections can be used as case markers while word order is another realization of a case feature (cf. Cornilescu, 2006: 349).

Standard Case Theory proposes a division of Case into two types, *structural* and *non-structural*, which differ in their behavior and manner of licensing. This dichotomy has become classical in current generative frameworks, following Chomsky's (1981) opposition between *structural* case and *inherent* case where "Structural Case (…) is a structural property of a formal configuration. Inherent Case is presumably linked to *θ*-role." Yip, Maling & Jackendoff (1987) make a distinction with what they call *syntactic* vs. *lexical* case, where syntactic stands for structural while lexical case is divided into *thematic* (linked to a thematic argument) and *idiosyncratic*, as illustrated below:

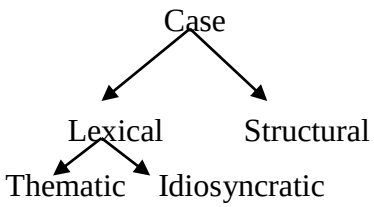



**Fig. 1.1.** Lexical vs. Structural Case (Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987)

Following the same pattern Woolford (2006) claims that in addition to the division between *structural* and *non-structural cases*, the latter should be divided into *lexical* and *inherent Cases*, which also differ in their patterns and manner of licensing. While Lexical Case (idiosyncratic



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case) is lexically selected and licensed by certain lexical heads (verbs and prepositions), Inherent Case is associated with particular $\theta$-positions (inherent dative Case with DP goals; ergative Case with external arguments).

*Two types of non-structural case*

Lexical case: Idiosyncratic, lexically selected case

Inherent Case: Case inherently associated with certain $\theta$-positions

In this respect he proposes that lexical heads license idiosyncratic lexical case while little *v* heads license inherent case which leads us to the conclusion that the Romanian Dative is a non-structural case (view also expressed in Cornilescu, 2016).

**2. Specific features of "la"**

**2.1. Lexical and functional features of "la"**

One must distinguish between *la* as (a) case marker- it marks a dative/genitive relation and (b) lexical *la*- meaning "at/to". In what concerns its lexical characteristics *la* may show (i) Goal which is translated by the English *to*, (ii) Place which is translated by the English *at* and it may also express (iii) Path together with a motion verb. Verbs do play a part in this interpretation as motion verbs that lexicalize Path will license Goal/Source/Path PPs while non-motion verbs lexicalize Place PPs. A relevant remark is that *la* in structures expressing a dative relation still preserves, on the one hand, certain features with lexical *la*, that is an allative value and, on the other hand, it has certain specific features (cf. GBLR 2010, GOR 2013)

**2.2.2. Specific features of lexical *la* "at/to"**

10. (a) Cum mergem[$_{\text{Goal}}$ la Pireu]?
how go to Piraeus
"how can we get to Piraeus?"
(b) Se urcase în tren [$_{\text{Place}}$ la Bucureşti]
refl. climbed in train at Bucharest
"He had got onto the train at Bucharest"
(c) Urca strada [$_{\text{Path}}$ la deal].
climbed street-the at hill
"He climbed the street unhill" (examples cf. Tomescu, 2013: 107)

**2.2.3 Specific features of functional *la***

a) in non-standard Romanian (popular/dialectal speech) "la" may introduce referential genitive phrases (DPs)/ non-referential genitive phrases (NPs)



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11. (a) (mama) la fata asta
mother=her to girl.DEF this
"this girl's mother"
(b) (acoperişul) la/de la casă
Roof.DEF to/from the house
"the roof of the house" (GOR, 2013:269)

b) "la" can also mark a dative relation. Moreover, it still preserves its original allative (directional) value. It can be used (10a) before an element which lacks case infection- a cardinal number, (10b) a quantifier or (10c) an adjective/adjectival collocation:

12. (a) Dă mere la trei copii.
Gives apples to three children
"(S)he gives apples to three children"
(b) Trimite salutări la tot poporul.
Sends greetings to all nation.DEF
"(S)he sends greetings to all nation."
(c) La astfel de oameni nu le pasă de nimic.
to such of humans no CL.DAT.3PL cares about nothing
"This kind of people don't care about anyting." (GOR, 2013:269-270)

In the same line of thought, other informal prepositional structures with (13a) plural common nouns are tolerated in standard language. On the other hand, prepositional structures with (b) singular common nouns and (c) proper names belong to the dialectal language (cf. GOR, 2013: 270):

13. (a) Le dau la copii să mănânce.
CL.DAT.3PL give.1SG to children să$_{SUBJ}$ eat.SUBJ.3PL
"I feed the children"
(b) Îi dau la copil
CL.DAT.3SG give.1SG to child
"I give to the child"
(c) Îi dau la Mihai
CL.DAT.3SG give.1SG to Mihai
"I give to Michael"

**3. Dative Goals vs. Prepositional Goals (la+ Acc DP)**



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### 3.1. Stylistical differences

It is important to point out that while Dative Goals and Prepositional Goals (la+ Acc DP) have the same syntactic properties, they differ stylistically as *Goal datives* belong to *standard Romanian* (14a) while *PP Goals* belong to *popular/dialectal speech*(15b):

14. Dative Goals: belong to **standard Romanian**

(a) Am înapoiat studenţilor lucrările.
have. 1sg returned students.DAT.DEF papers.DEF
"I have returned the papers to the students. Tigău(2012)

Prepositional Goals (la+Acc DP): belong to **popular/dialectal speech**

(b) Ion îi aduce la Elena flori.
John DAT.CL brings to Helen flowers.
"John brings Helen flowers." (Diaconescu, 2004)

### 3.2. Some syntactic matters

Moreover, in Romanian, indirect objects whose first complement of the NP is invariable (thus they cannot receive a dative case- marker) will be realized as a PP headed by the P "la" ("to"(+Acc)) as the following example illustrates( cf. GOR, 2013: 153):

15.(a) Am dat premii la doi copii/ dintre copii
(I) have given prizes to two children. ACC of children
"I gave prizes to two children/ two of the children.

These indirect objects realized as a PP headed by "la" can be (a) clitic doubled and (b) the PP can be substituted with a DP whose determiner is positioned at the left of the phrase ( cf. GOR, 2013: 153):

16. (a) $Le_i$ dau flori la două profesoare.
CL.DAT.3PL (I) give flowers to two teachers.ACC
"I give flowers to two teachers"

(b) Le dau flori acestor/ aceloraşi/ celor
două profesoare.
CL.DAT.3PL (I) give flowers these.DAT the-same.DAT CEL.PL.DAT two teachers.DAT
"I give flowers to these/to the same/to the two teachers"



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In spoken Romanian, the indirect object realized as a PP and headed by "la" can appear in configurations where the first complement of the phrase bears case inflection, thus the realization by a PP alternates with the realization by a dative DP :

17. Le-am dat bomboane la copii/ copiilor
CL.DAT.3PL=(I) have given candy.PL.AC to children.ACC children.DEF.DAT
"I gave the children candies" (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 153)

Both the dative Goals and the PP Goals (la+ Acc DP) allow clitic doubling. In this respect, in clitic doubled constructions, "la" stands a case marker, as the following example illustrates, and not as a lexical preposition:

18. Profesorul le- a vorbit studenţilor/ la studenţi.
Professor.the they.DAT.CL has spoken students.Dat/ to students
"The professor spoke to the students."

In some regional variants in present-day Romanian, the indirect object may be replaced by a PP headed by către "towards" (if selected by verbs of saying, spune "tell", zice "say" etc):

19. A zis domnul către slujitor să plece
Has said lord.DEF.NOM towards servant $sa_{SUBJ}$ leave.SUBJ.3SG
"The lord said to the servant to leave"

"La" may also introduce indirect object DPs which can be morphologically case marked as the following example illustrates (Diaconescu & Rivero 2007:230 quoted in Tigău 2012):

20. Dă -i la mama.
give.2SG DAT.CL to mother.
"Give (it) to mother!"

**3.3. Conclusions**



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In sum, Romanian disposes of both a synthetic and analytical marking of the Dative. As illustrated in this paper, the inflectional dative is replaced by a prepositional construction (la+ ACC) under specific conditions- that is, when the first component of the DP cannot host the specific dative case-marker. On the other hand, in non-standard Romanian the P construction *la+ ACC* appears very often even under no morphological constraints.

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