DECONSTRUCTING THE "ADVERB PLUS COMPLEMENTIZER CONSTRUCTION" IN ROMANIAN

Cornelia Daniela Lupşa[*]

Abstract: In this paper I examine the "adverb plus complementizer" construction (Ramat and Ricca 1998: 212) in Romanian, seeking to establish its characteristics in more detail than usually achieved in the literature on adverbs. I show that, at least in Romanian, this construction displays regularities that can shed light on our understanding of the basic mechanism of sentence-building and how adverbs are integrated in a sentence. I also argue that a correct description of this construction requires the integration of two opposing theories on adverbs that have come to be represented by Cinque 1999 and Ernst 2002.

Keywords: the adverb plus complementizer construction, sentence adverb, root complementizer, adverb movement, left periphery

1. Introduction

Quite a few European languages (Latvian, Estonian, Polish, Russian, French, and Romanian) exhibit the construction in (1) – exemplified with Romanian – which Ramat and Ricca (1998: 212) call the "adverb plus complementizer" construction: a root sentence in which a sentence adverb is obligatorily followed by a complementizer that typically introduces finite subordinate clauses (e.g. French que or Romanian că).

(1) Bineînțeles / Evident / Probabil *(că) îl place pe Ion.
of course / evidently / probably *(that) him likes on Ion
'Of course/ evidently/ probably s/he likes Ion.'

Sentences such as *Of course she loves John* in English must be expressed as in (1): 'Of course that s/he loves John', at least in Romanian. Crucially, the complementizer is required only if an adverb is present, so it seems reasonable to assume that it is the adverb that triggers the overt realization of the complementizer in a root clause.

The existence of such constructions has long been noted in the descriptive grammars of French and Romanian (e.g. *GLR* 1963), without an explanation for their

[*] Center for Liberal Arts Education and Research, Iwate Prefectural University, Takizawa, c-lupsa@iwate-pu.ac.jp, dlupsa2004@yahoo.com.

[†] I would like to thank Guglielmo Cinque, Yoshiaki Kaneko, Nobu Miyoshi, Masaru Nakamura, Fumikazu Niinuma, and Mika Takahashi for reading and commenting on this article at various stages in its development and for encouraging me to pursue this topic. I am also grateful to the audiences at the 12th Conference of the English Department of the University of Bucharest, 3-5 June 2010, Bucharest, and "The Interface of Minimalism and Cartography" Workshop jointly organized by Tohoku University's Department of English Linguistics and the Center for Language Sciences of Kanda University of International Studies, 29 November 2010, Sendai. All remaining errors are my own.

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

peculiar form. They are sometimes mentioned in generative studies of adverbs (Cinque 1999: 18, 19; Ernst 2002: 427) as possible instances of adverb movement to the CP field. Such sentences are thought to be idiosyncratic. Looking at the data in French, Bonami et al. (2004: 149) assert that "the adverbs possible in this zone do not seem to form a coherent class". Hill (2007) is, to my knowledge, the only other generative study that deals with this construction in Romanian, but I will argue later that she fails to take into consideration crucial data and that her analysis cannot be correct.

This article focuses on the Romanian construction in (1) and its aim is twofold. First, I will show that this construction is far from being an idiosyncratic phenomenon; the adverbs that enter into this construction come from well-defined classes and trigger the complementizer only under certain conditions. Thus, the construction in (1) displays surprising regularities that can throw light on our understanding of how sentences are built and how adverbs are integrated in a sentence. Second, concerning the theoretical treatment of this construction, I will argue that a correct description of this construction requires the integration of two opposing theories on adverbs that have come to be represented by Cinque (1999) and Ernst (2002).

When first looking at constructions such as (1), one analysis immediately suggests itself: the possibility that (1) might be an embedded structure. Indeed, Romanian traditional grammar assumes a biclausal structure for the sentences in (1): the adverb is the complement of the copula verb *be* in a main clause in which *be* has been elided, while the bracketed string is a subordinate clause introduced by the subordinating conjunction *că*, as shown in (2).

(2) ~~Este~~ Evident [că îl place pe Ion]
~~Is~~ evidently [that him likes on Ion
'S/He evidently likes Ion.'

Such an analysis is to a certain extent justified in that there are sentences such as (3) which can be argued to be the underlying form of (2), in which the copula verb *be* is realized overtly. The problem with such an analysis is that many of these adverbs cannot co-occur with the copula *be*, as shown by the example in (4).

(3) Este evident că îl place pe Ion.
is evident that him likes on Ion
'It is evident that s/he likes Ion.'
(4) *Este poate că îl place pe Ion.
is maybe that him likes on Ion

Adverbs such as *bineînţeles* 'of course', *poate* 'maybe', *firește* 'naturally', and *desigur* 'of course' cannot co-occur with the verb *be*. So why is (3) fine? The difference between (3) and (4) is that *evident* is also an adjective that can change category to become an adverb through zero-derivation, while *bineînţeles* 'of course', *poate* 'maybe', *firește* 'naturally', and *desigur* 'of course' are originally adverbs and cannot cooccur with 'be'. It

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

seems unreasonable to assume that the sentences in (1) have ungrammatical underlying forms such as (4), so I will assume that the traditional grammar's biclausal analysis of the "adverb plus complementizer construction" is not correct and that (1) and (3) are not derivationally related, but simply that in (1) we are dealing with the adverb *evident*, and that in (3) we are dealing with the adjective *evident*, and that these two sentences are assigned different structures. Having dispelled the possibility that (1) is some kind of embedded structure in which the matrix verb has been deleted, let us proceed to a more detailed analysis.

2. A pattern emerges

Roughly, the distribution of Romanian adverbs can be summarized as follows: sentence adverbs come first in a sentence, before the auxiliary and the verb, and, unless broken off from the rest of the sentence by comma intonation, they (almost) always trigger the overt realization of the complementizer; lower adverbs come after the verb (including participles in composite tenses) and are not distinguished in their distribution by any peculiar features; the middle field is somewhat impoverished in Romanian, as few adverbs (mainly short, one-syllable temporal or aspectual adverbs) can occur between the auxiliary and the verb (Dobrovie-Sorin 1994:10,11, 26; Cinque 1999:147, 227). Let us exemplify this outline with *sigur* 'surely', which has multiple uses and so can, conveniently for us, occur in multiple positions.

(5) Sigur că va veni.
surely that will come
'Of course s/he's coming.'

The sentence adverb *sigur*, derived through zero-derivation from the adjective *sigur* meaning 'certain', takes on the meaning 'of course' when in sentence-initial position and obligatorily triggers the overt realization of the complementizer. On this interpretation, *că* is not optional, contrary to what is assumed in Hill (2007). Let us call this adverb $sigur_1$. It is also possible for *sigur* to occur lower in the sentence, as in (6), adapted from Hill (2007: 72):

(6) Vine sigur (la ora 5).
comes surely (at hour 5)
'S/he comes for sure (at 5).'

In a lower position, *sigur* takes on the meaning 'for sure'/ 'for certain', easier to isolate in a context such as *She will come for sure at 5, and not, for instance, at 4*, and cannot trigger the overt realization of the complementizer. Let us call this one $sigur_2$. $Sigur_2$ can also occur sentence-initially, in which case it must be stressed, as represented in (7), and cannot trigger the complementizer.

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

(7) SIGUR va veni.
surely will come
'S/He's coming for sure.'/ 'It is CERTAIN s/he's coming.'

Sentences such as (5) above can be embedded (contrary to the assumption made in Hill 2007: 79), as shown in (8):

(8) Spunea că sigur că va veni.
said that of course that will come
'S/he said that of course s/he will come.'

The adverb-*că* sequence in (1) and (5) can be built recursively, as in (9a), even when embedded, as in (9b):

(9) a. Bineînțeles că probabil că va veni la petrecere.
of course that probably that will come to party
'Of course s/he will probably come to the party.'
b. Spunea că bineînțeles că probabil că va veni la petrecere.
said that of course that probably that will come to party
'S/he said that of course s/he would probably come to the party.'

There is a strict adjacency requirement on the adverb-*că* sequence; it cannot be broken up by a fronted element, for instance, as shown in (10).

(10) Bineînțeles (*pe Ion) că îl iubeşte.
of course on Ion that him loves
'Of course it's John s/he loves.'

Although degree adverbs such as *aproape* 'almost' trigger the complementizer, speech-act adverbs such as *sincer* 'sincerely' (somewhat surprisingly) do not.

(11) Aproape că l -a omorât pe Ion.
almost that him-has killed on Ion
'S/He almost killed John.'
(12) Sincer, (*că) nu îl plac pe Ion.
honestly (*that) not him like on Ion
'Honestly, I don't like John.'

Regarding which adverbs do or do not trigger the complementizer, the data can be summarized as in Table 1. With the exception of speech-act adverbs and the evaluative adverbs *din fericire* 'fortunately' and *din nefericire* 'unfortunately', all higher adverbs trigger the overt realization of the complementizer immediately after them.

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

Table 1 Classes of Romanian sentence adverbs and *că*

Class	Că	Tokens
Speech act	no	*sincer* 'sincerely', *sincer vorbind* 'sincerely speaking', *serios* 'seriously'
Evaluative	yes	*noroc* 'luckily', *păcat* 'regrettably', *bine* 'well', *bineînțeles* 'of course', *sigur*$_1$ 'of course', *firește* 'naturally', *chiar* 'really'
	no	*din fericire* 'fortunately', *din nefericire* 'unfortunately'
Evidential	yes	*evident* 'evidently', *parcă* 'seems that', *cică* 'reportedly', *pesemne* 'apparently'
Epistemic	yes	*cu siguranță* 'with certainty', *cu certitudine* 'with certainty', *fără îndoială* 'without doubt', *fără nici o îndoială* 'without any doubt'
	yes*	*poate* 'maybe', *probabil* 'probably'
Degree	yes*	*aproape* 'almost'

* may be left out in spoken language

At this point, we can accomplish the first task we have set ourselves: showing that the "adverb plus complementizer" construction is not idiosyncratic, but that it displays regularities; we can also throw light on two questions that come to mind when looking at Table 1: why speech-act adverbs differ from all the others, and why the adverbs trigger *că*, and not some other element. Let us consider the lexical requirements of the adverbs in Table 1: speech act adverbs require simply an act of communication (Bellert 1977); on the other hand, evaluative, evidential, and epistemic classes have to modify propositions (Bellert 1977, Ernst 2002); degree adverbs such as *aproape* can modify propositions too, among other objects (observe that the lower we go down the columns in Table 1, the wider the range of modified objects, and, probably not coincidentally, the laxer the requirements on the pronunciation of *că*). The complementizer *că* introduces finite subordinate clauses only, so it can be said that it always heads propositions. The fact that the adverbs trigger *că* may be a way for them to check that they are merging with the right kind of object: a proposition – if they require one. We can now describe the "adverb plus complementizer construction": it is a simple root sentence with an adverb that requires a proposition; given the right language, the adverb makes sure it merges with one by requiring the head of the string (proposition) following it, an element such as *că*, to be pronounced overtly. One more question comes to mind when looking at Table 1: the baffling behavior displayed by the evaluatives *din fericire* 'fortunately' and *din nefericire* 'unfortunately'. This question is related to the content of the next section.

3. Conclusions

Given the syntax-related facts discussed in section 2, it seems unlikely that the "adverb plus complementizer construction" is the result of adverb movement to the CP field, as in Cinque (1999) and Ernst (2002). Nor does it seem that the fine structure proposed by Rizzi (1997), however richly articulated, can easily accommodate these

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

facts. As far as I know, the only other attempt at an analysis of (1) has been made by Hill (2007)[1]. Building on Rizzi's (1997) fine structure and work by Speas (2004) and Speas and Tenny (2003) on the encoding of evidentiality in syntactic structure and the syntax-pragmatics interface, Hill (2007) proposes that the adverb in sentences such as (1) is the head of a Speech Act Phrase selecting a CP in which *că* fills the ForceP head. Let us start with the hypothesis that the adverb is the head of a SpeechActP. Putting aside Hill's implausible assumption that the adverbial PPs in Table 1 should be non-projecting heads, this runs into problems with speech-act adverbs and degree adverbs; specifically, the *că*-selecting SpeechAct head position should be able to host speaker-oriented adverbs, but from Table 1 we now know that so-called speech-act adverbs do not select *că*, and that non-speaker-oriented adverbs (e.g. *aproape* 'almost') surprisingly do. Next, the conclusion that *că* should be in ForceP is based on a set of factually incorrect premises: first, that structures such as (1) cannot be embedded (and, according to Hill 2007 this means that the regular complementizer and the one triggered by the adverb are mutually exclusive, so they must occupy the same position, namely, ForceP); this is disproved by (8); second, that structures such as (1) do not allow *wh*-extraction, as shown in (13).

(13) *Ce sigur că a cumpărat?
what surely that has bought

According to Hill, (13) is ungrammatical because there is nothing above the adverb-*că* sequence that can attract and host the *wh*-word, so the adverb and *că* must be located above the FocP projection targeted by wh-movement, that is, *că* must be in ForceP. But we know since Jackendoff (1972: 84) and Bellert (1977) that most sentence adverbs are semantically incompatible with questions, so the ungrammaticality of (13) cannot be used to argue for a particular position for *că*. In addition to these problems, observe that data such as (9b) would require no less than three or four ForcePs per sentence—an unattractive and implausible consequence for Rizzi's (1997) structure, assuming that clause typing takes place only once.

So which is the best description? Let me sum up the main distribution facts we have to account for:

(i) sentence adverbs have a fixed position in the sentence; they cannot appear anywhere else in the sentence (without a break in intonation); the order of the adverb and the complementizer is fixed; it cannot be inverted;
(ii) nothing can intervene between the adverb and its complementizer;
(iii) the adverb-*că* sequence is recursive.

It looks like what we need is a fixed relationship between the adverb and *că*, that can be recursive, and this is what Cinque (1999) proposes: adverbial phrases occupy the

[1] Cruschina and Remberger (2008) analyze one of the adverbs in Table 1, *cică* 'reportedly' or 'allegedly' (now one word, but originally formed from *ci* meaning 'say' and the complementizer *că* through agglutination; Ştefan Oltean, p.c.), as an evidentiality marker. Its history and meaning certainly warrant such an analysis, but I hope to have shown here that *cică* is part of a basic mechanism / phenomenon that encompasses such evidentiality marking in Romanian. I thank Giuliana Giusti for pointing out their work to me.

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

unique specifier position of various functional projections. The adverb-*că*-adverb-*că* sequence fits the Spec-Head-Spec-Head structure of Cinque 1999; this also immediately accounts for (i)-(iii) above and suggests a possible explanation for the behavior of 'fortunately' and 'unfortunately'; these adverbs *are* special in a way, in that they are among the very few adverbs that can take complements (semantic arguments), and argument-takers are incompatible with the left branch (Alexiadou 1997). This also accounts for the fact that not only adverbs show up in front of *că*, but also adverbial PPs; if the position they occur in is an XP position, the occurrence of such phrases is entirely predictable. One piece of criticism leveled at Cinque's theory of the syntax of adverbs is that it requires a large number of heads that are phonologically empty (Ernst 2002: 111-2); here we see both the specifier (the adverb or adverbial phrase) and the head of the functional projection overtly realized at the same time, so, if the analysis here is on the right track, it provides new and strong evidence that Cinque's (1999) approach is correct.

However, leaving aside minor kinks such as the right projection for 'almost' in Cinque's (1999) strict hierarchy of projections, observe that we seem to be assuming more than necessary: nothing in the complementizer *că* suggests that it is an evidential head or an epistemic head. So while it certainly looks like the adverbs do not simply adjoin to projections as in Ernst 2002, but that they merge with dedicated heads according to highly restricted combinatorial principles as in Cinque 1999, what they combine with is not an evaluative or evidential head, but one that expresses finiteness, so that we get an adverb-proposition-adverb proposition sequence that satisfies the lexical requirements of the adverbs. In other words, we need the combinatorial principles in Cinque 1999, but not the specific projections—and the semantic composition rules in Ernst 2002. What is certain about the "adverb plus complementizer" construction though is that it is not some sort of *rara avis* – a funny anomaly of Romanian and other European languages – but a reflection of the basic mechanism that combines adverbs and other words to build sentences.

References

Alexiadou, A. 1997. *Adverb Placement: A Case Study in Antisymmetric Syntax*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Bellert, I. 1977. On semantic and distributional properties of sentential adverbs. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8: 337-351.

Bonami, O., Godard, D. and Kampers-Mahne, D. 2004. Adverb classification. In F. Corblin and H. de Swart (eds.), *Handbook of French Semantics*, 143-184. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.

Cinque, G. 1999. *Adverbs and Functional Heads: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cruschina, S. and Remberger, E.-M.. 2008. Hearsay and reported speech: Evidentiality in Romance. In P. Benincà, F. Damonte and N. Penello (eds.), *Selected Proceedings of the XXXIV Incontro di Grammatica Generativa*, 95-116. Special issue of *Rivista di Grammatica Generativa* 33.

Dobrovie-Sorin, C. 1994. *The Syntax of Romanian*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Ernst, T. 2002. *The Syntax of Adjuncts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

GLR. 1963. Graur, A., Avram, M. and Vasiliu, L. (eds.). 1963. *Gramatica limbii romîne*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne.

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)

Hill, V. 2007. Romanian adverbs and the pragmatic field. *The Linguistic Review* 24: 61-86.
Jackendoff, R. S. 1972. *Semantic Interpretation in Generative Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Ramat, P. and Ricca, D. 1998. Sentence adverbs in the languages of Europe. In J. van der Auwera (ed.), *Adverbial Constructions in the Languages of Europe*, 187-275. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Rizzi, L. 1997. The fine structure of the left periphery. In L. Haegeman (ed.), *Elements of Grammar*, 281-337. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
Speas, M. 2004. Evidentiality, logophoricity and the syntactic representation of pragmatic features. *Lingua* 114: 255-276.
Speas, P. and Tenny, C. 2003. Configurational properties of point of view roles. In A.-M. Di Sciullo (ed.), *Asymmetry in Grammar*, 315-344. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

BDD-A9867 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:00:09 UTC)