Prepositional semantics in the grammaticalization of DOM in Old Romanian

Alexandru Mardale, INaLCO Paris – SeDyL UMR 8202 CNRS
Edgar Onea, University of Graz

Introduction. Romanian marks direct objects only under certain licensing conditions constrained by the animacy and definiteness scale (Aissen 2003), thereby being a classical differential object marking (DOM) language (Bossong 1985). The DO-marker is homonymous with the locative preposition *p(r)e* "on" (cf. Latin *per*). This stands in contrast to other Romance languages such as Spanish or Sardinian in which DO-markers are homonyms with dative markers. This raises the question how *p(r)e* could grammaticalize into a DO-marker in Romanian (cf. Drăganu 1943, Onu 1959, Niculescu 1959/65, Coteanu 1969). In this paper, we provide novel data and propose a novel hypothesis regarding this question.

Empirical data. The oldest original (i.e., not translated) Romanian texts come from the 16th c. (*Documente şi însemnări româneşti* [Romanian Documents and Notes], 1521-1625). In the 16th c., DOM in Romanian is obligatory with personal pronouns and proper names and optional with DOs in a variety of other semantic categories high on the definiteness and animacy scale (Dimitrescu 1960, Mardale 2009/15, Stan 2013). In contrast, in modern Romanian (MR), DOM is much wider spread on the definiteness scale (a.o., Dobrovie-Sorin 1994, Tigău 2011). Hence, in the 16th c., we are witnessing a relatively early phase of grammaticalization in the development of DOM (von Heusinger & Onea 2008, Nicula Paraschiv 2016, Avram & Zafiu 2017), which may shed some light on the source of grammaticalization. At this stage, *p(r)e* has three main usages. Firstly, it is a run-of-the-mill locative preposition similar to MR (1a). Secondly, it also functions as a DO-marker, again, similar to MR (1b). The crucial usage is the third one witnessed in (2): *p(r)e* surfaces as a preposition with a very bleached spatial meaning denoting an abstract concept to be discussed in more detail below.

(1) a. *iară până au pus Hristos pe cruce 5533* (1587)
    again until have put Christ on cross 5533
    "and again, until they have pur Christ on the cross, in 5533"

   b. *să pomenească şi pre Radu (...)ş pre părinţii lu[i] (...) în sfânta liturghie* (1570)
    SUBJ mention also DOM Radu and DOM parents.DEF him in holy.DEF mass
    "shall also mention Radu and his parents during the holy mass"

(2) a. *Şi cheltuiala măruntă pre treaba lu voievod* (1599-1600)
    and expense.DEF small CONCERNING business.DEF GEN ruler
    "And small expenses for / concerning the ruler's activity"

   b. *ce să ne trimeţ răspunsu pre aceste cuvente* (1600)
    but SUBJ us.DAT you.send answer.DEF CONCERNING these words
    "But to send us the answer to these words"

While we find similar abstract usages even in MR, e.g. *responsabil pe probleme economice* ('responsible for economic problems'), the modern usage is historically entirely unrelated to the one discussed above and goes back to foreign influence (e.g. English *on*).

Our main hypothesis is that in the relevant third usage *p(r)e* expresses a semantic role that we will dub TOPIC in the sense in which *a book on/about elephants* has elephants as topic (and not content or theme). This should not be confounded with any semantic/pragmatic notion of discourse or sentence topic (Reinhart 1981), though of course it is related to aboutness of sentences understood as speech acts. This semantic role may appear either together with or dissociated from the semantic role THEME with a certain group of verbs. For this reason *p(r)e* often occurs in a situation in which it semantically marks TOPIC but (due to the lexical semantics of the verb) the *p(r)e*-marked argument is also a THEME and often a DO. From this, we assume that *p(r)e* may have developed into a general THEME- and finally into a DO-marker.

Our main empirical argument is a series of minimal pairs all exhibiting the abstract structure in (3) and exemplified on two distinct verbs in (4):

(3)   a. S refl. transV *p(r)e* DP$_{PP}$

       b. S transV *p(r)e* DP$_{DO}$

(4)   a. *s-au   jeluit   sluga   noastră Ştefan **pre**   Samoil* (1619)

        REFL.3-has complained servant.DEF   our   Stephen ABOUT Samuel

        "And our servant Stephen complained about Samuel"

       b. *jeluiaşte sluga   noastră Ştefan Moimăscul **pre** nişte cuconi mici* (1622)

        mourns servant.DEF our   Stephen Moimăsc.DEF DOM some children little.PL

        "Our servant Stephen Moimăsc mourns for some (little) children"

       c. *se-au   tocmit **pre**   megiiaş[i]* (1617)

        REFL.3-have haggle ABOUT neighbours

        "They haggled over their neighbours"

       d. *amu tocmit* **pre**   *Muşat postelnic   şi   **pre**   Negoe pîntru 4*

        I.have hired DOM Muşat chamberlain and   DOM Negoe for   4

       rumîni vii   şi   pîntru 6   delniţi,   fîrî   rumîn (1622)

        serfs   alive and   for   6   plots.of.land without   serf

        "I hired Musat the chamberlain and Negoe in exchange for 4 living serfs and for 6 plots of land, without serfs"

In the semantic analysis of the structure in (3), we focus on one particular verb, which will be ***a (se) jelui*** ('complain'), but the discussion concerns other verbs in the corpus, such as *a (se) tocmi* "to hire, to negotiate", *a (se) jura* "to swear", *a (se) mira* "to astonish/to be astonished", *a (se) griji* "to take care of someone/to confess", *a (se) ruga* "to pray". Interestingly, notice that the pronominal (i.e., reflexive) counterpart[1] of these verbs is assumed to be a foreign (old slavic) influence, due to language contact during the OR period (Candrea 1916, Densusianu 1961, Pană Dindelegan 1968/2014, Todi 2001, Dragomirescu 2010, Nicula Paraschiv 2014).

We argue that *a jelui* assigns three semantic roles: the AGENT (the one who does the complaining), the TOPIC (what the complaint is about) and the THEME (the person affected by the topic). In the structure (3a) the AGENT and the THEME are the same person, and the AGENT surfaces as the subject while the THEME is a reflexive object. The TOPIC in this case is the oblique PP headed by *p(r)e*. In (3b), on the other hand, the AGENT is expressed as the subject, whereas the THEME and the TOPIC are both expressed by the *p(r)e*-marked object DP. Semantically, this amounts to a slightly more specific reading, often translatable as *to mourn someone* or as *to moan someone,* in which case the TOPIC of the complaint is some inalienable (tragic) property of the THEME, say the property of being dead. The crucial step in the grammaticalization of *p(r)e* as a DOM-marker is that in structures such as (3b) *p(r)e* could initially have been understood as a PP grammatically encoding the TOPIC and by pragmatic inference the THEME, but the structure can easily be reanalyzed as *p(r)e*-marking the THEME and the TOPIC being pragmatically inferable. Once *p(r)e* is used as a THEME-marker (usually with human animate and highly salient individuals), it can start appearing as a DO-marker in other constructions as well.

Conclusion In conclusion we suggest that one source of grammaticalization of DO-markers in natural language involves the bleached semantic usage of locative markers as markers of the semantic role TOPIC. We expect this observation to apply to other DOM-languages as well, as will be hopefully revealed by future research. At the same time, our suggestion is closely related and supports insights of Hill (2013), Antonov & Mardale (2014), Mardale (2015) for Romanian and Dalrymple & Nikolaeva (2011), Iemmolo (2012) for other (Romance) languages. The semantic connection between TOPIC as a semantic role and *aboutness topic* for sentences also remains an intriguing theme for further research.

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[1] Most of them are no longer available in MR.