Report on the properties of determinerless noun phrases

**Aim of research:** establishing the relevant syntactic and semantic features of the determiners of certain categories of nominal phrases, namely those that are determinerless in the surface structure.

**Syntax**

From a syntactic point of view, determinerless noun phrases are subdivided into two categories:

A) Nominal phrases headed by phonologically null determiners; these are DPs from the point of view of both syntax and interpretation. This category includes

1) **Proper names (Petru)**
2) common names preceded by prepositions (*Cartea este pe masă*, ‘the book is on table).

B) Noun phrases which are not preceded by determiners at any level of representations, i.e., the so-called Bare Nouns.

In Romanian, each of these categories have characteristic properties, as follows:

A1) **Proper names**

Romanian proper names exhibit a complex morphology: masculine proper names are determinerless in the Nominative/ Accusative Case, and are preceded by a definite article in the oblique, Genitive/ Dative Cases (*Ioan, lui Ion*). In contrast feminine proper names incorporate the definite article and may have a reconstructed indefinite form: *Maria* o *Marie*.

We have demonstrated that this article, when present, is an expletive (i.e. uninterpretable) definite article; this is shown by the distribution of definite inflected proper names, which is strikingly different from the distribution of common nouns inflected by the definite article. For instance, unlike definite inflected common names, definite proper names may be preceded by a definite adjective, that is, an adjective which has incorporated the definite article itself: Compare: *frumoasă Maria* (beautiful-the Mary-the) vs *frumoasa floarea* (beautiful-the flower-the) (see Cornilescu 2013, *Why Proper Names are not Definite Descriptions?).

The presence of this expletive article signals the existence of an uninterpretable definite syntactic feature [u+def]. The presence of this feature with proper names distinguishes between languages like Romanian, Greek and Portuguese, on the one hand, and languages like English, on the other hand.

While overt definiteness is a property which varies crosslinguistically, it has been shown since Longobardi 1994, that in all languages proper names occupy the determiner slot at the level of Logical Form, where they are interpreted as logical constants. The fact the proper names occupy a higher structural position than common nouns is demonstrable in languages like Italian, in examples of the following type, which show that only the article and proper names may precede possessive adjectives: *Il mio libro, il mio Gianni vs. Gianni mio, *libro mio*.

The common properties which unite proper names beyond their variation for definiteness is an interpretable [i+person]; this feature is shared by proper names and personal pronouns, accounting for the distributional similarities between them and confirming the presence of the D-layer with proper names, since it has been known since Longobardi (2008) that [person] and [(in)definiteness] are the minimum content of the category D.

A2) **Common names preceded by prepositions**

This construction is one of the characteristics of Romanian among Romance languages, since it is not found in other Romance languages (e.g. French: *dans la rue* Romanian: *pe stradă*. In the interpretation of this phenomenon, we have taken into account the following facts: a) first, in some Romance languages there is a phenomenon of head to head movement or, “fusion” of the definite article with the preposition preceding it: *une vue de la rue vs. une vue des (de+les) rues*; b) secondly, in Romanian too, the definite article appears between the preposition in the common noun, provided that the noun is modified by a post-nominal adjectiv or a prepositional phrase: *(la clubul de alpinism)*. In the analysis we have adopted (see Dogaru 2013, Avram & Ciocarlanche
2013) we have assumed that in the context of a preposition, an unmodified noun is preceded by a phonologically null article, which is incorporated in the preposition, just as in other Romance languages, where the article is not null. In other words, the preposition is sufficient to license the unmodified noun, while the article is required to license post-nominal modifiers, as hypothesized in Kayne (1994).

The important role of modification in defining the syntactic and semantic features of determiners was also demonstrated in Cornilescu & Dinu 2013, a study of the corelation between the presence of certain adjectival of pre-nominal modifiers and the features of (in)definiteness and specificity. In the same direction of the interpretative constraints deriving from the internal structure of the nominal phrase Avram si Ciovirnache 2013 analyze the Romanian differential object marking construction in Romanian and Arabic and show that in both languages, the prepositionally marked accusative has strong readings, denoting individuals and generalized quantifiers (<e> and <<e,t>>>, but lacking the property reading.

In conclusion, situations listed in A do not represent true determinerless nominal phrase, but they represent DPs headed by a phonologically null Ds.

B) Bare nominals

Over the past three decades, following Carlson’s (1977) dissertation, bare nouns have been extensively discussed in the literature. Bare nouns are problematic from the point of view of the syntax/semantics interface. In the formal semantics tradition, bare nouns are considered predicates, with of type <e, t>, while the determiner quantifies over the set defined by the nominal predicate, securing an <e>-type denotation at the level of the DP. As far as bare nouns, it is not immediately apparent how they get their <e>-type denotation, in languages where they freely have it (determinerless languages). In many languages, Romance languages included, bare nouns are severely restricted in argumental positions. Romanian is more permissive than other Romance languages.

Solutions to this problems are very diverse. Chierchia (1998) proposes a Nominal Mapping Parameter, classifying languages between those which allow bare NPs, in the singular or in the plural in argument position, (as in the English, Birds fly, /*The birds fly) and languages where this is not possible, as in the French,*Oiseaux volent vs. Les oiseaux volent; the latter use bare nouns only as predicates. If this analysis is adopted, argumental bare nouns denote another type of entities, namely kinds, bare nouns being considered proper names of the ontological category of kinds, as in Carlson’s earlier proposal.

A second category of solutions, consider that the syntactic category NP cannot function as an argument, but can be syntactically extended towards a referential projection such as the DP, or, at least, the Num(ber)P. In the first case, bare NPs are extended so as to become DPs with a phonologically null Determiner. Restrictions on the distribution of bare NPs appear as restrictions on the licensing of the null D. In the second type of analysis, which we have also adopted and adapted for Romanian, argumental bare nouns are viewed as NumPs, as in (Tanase Dogaru, 2012). The Number feature is sufficient for securing an <e>-type denotation.

Relevant results on the syntax and interpretation of bare nouns have also been obtained in Tigau 2013, „Points of Similarity between Differential Object Marking in Romanian and Scrambling in German with a Focus on Indefinite Direct Objects”. The paper investigates the interpretation of indefinite DPs, which can be differentially marked in the Accusative, in contrast with bare NPs which do not show DOM. It is shown that in languages like Romanian and Turkish, unlike Hungarian or German, the position where the indefinite/bare phrase appears does not change its scope and its binding properties, since Romanian, Turkish, etc. are non-configurational languages as far as DP scope is concerned.

Semantics

The syntactic features already discussed are supplemented by semantic features, where necessarit, so as to secure appropriate denotations for all types of determinerless noun phrases. We have examined, in turn, the three types of DPs mentioned so far.
A1) Proper names
In the literature there is an on-going discussion between the advocates of the theory of proper names as definite descriptions, originating in Frege’s work (a recent example is Matushansky, 2008, „Call me an ambulance”, and the advocates of the theory that proper names are essentially different from descriptions. The second type of theories, originating in Russell (1905), but brilliantly stated in the works of Kripke (1971, and later) claim that proper names are essentially different from descriptions since they are rigid designators, therefore, expressions that denote the same individual in all possible worlds.

Our analysis adopts Kripke’s position, which is more in line with the syntax we have presented. The property of rigidly designating an individual is tied to the inherent interpretable [person] feature, while definiteness which apparently connects proper names and definite descriptions is an uninterpretable feature (as shown in Cornilescu 2013 Why Proper Names are not Definite Descriptions?).

A2) Common names preceded by prepositions
Their semantic analysis is unproblematic, starting from the fact that these nouns are in fact definite, determined by a phonologically null definite article. At LF, these nouns function as definite descriptions.

B) Bare nouns
In the syntactic analysis we have preferred to consider bare NP to be NumPs, rather than DPs; this categorial difference mabe be used to account for, or, at least, to state the distributional restrictions of bare nouns used as arguments in Romanian. This language is more permissive than other Romance languages, in that it alloes not only plural bare nouns, but also singular bare nouns to appear in certain argument position. There are only few contexts where bare NP argument are excluded; one such context ist hat of the preverbal subject, a position where plural bare NPs cannot occur, unless they are focussed or co-ocircante, and singular bare NPs are simply impossible: (*?Elevi citesc, pupil-PI read’ vs **Elev citeste, pupil-Sg reads).

In the semantic interpretation of bare NPs,we have started from their analysis in Hungarian, as delineated in Farkas si De Swart 2003. The analysis relies on the difference between presupposition and assertion in the interpretation of the Number feature, capitalizing on the difference between the features [Number plural] and [Number singular]. The presence of the feature [Numebr plural] signals the exsitence of a non-atomic, group-level individual in the previous discourse; in other words the existence in the universe of discourse of a non-empty set of individuals of the relevnt kind deonyed by the NP is presupposed. The interpretation of the bare NP is done by accommodating this presupposition in the main DRS, therefore, the individuals introduced by the plural feature are those of which the main predicate of the sentence is true. Pluraly thus has a role which is analoguous to that of a determiner. This interpretation explains why plural bare NPs may be used as arguments in many languages, unlike singular bare NPs, where there is a conflicy between the requirement of accommodation and the inexistence of a plural (group) individual, which should guarantee that the set denoted by the NP predicate is not empty in the given context.