

A LIFE IN LINGUISTICS
A Festschrift for Alexandra
Cornilescu on her 75th birthday

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DEFINITE ARTICLE DROP AFTER PREPOSITIONS IN ROMANIAN, A REASSESSMENT

Ion Giurgea *

Abstract: In Romanian, the definite article is not overtly realized if the maximal nominal projection consists only of D_{+def} and N and occurs in the complement position of (most) accusative-taking prepositions. Dobrovie-Sorin (2007) proposed that P, D_{+def} and N form a complex head and D_{+def} is deleted when it occurs inside such a complex head. This account is contradicted by the fact that article drop also occurs in coordinations in the complement of P, whenever one of the conjuncts, not necessarily adjacent with P, consists of D_{+def} and N alone. Therefore, I propose a modified account: (i) the requirement of occurring inside a complex head is maintained, but this head is limited to D+N; (ii) based on the fact that the prepositions that trigger article drop include prepositional case markers, I propose that article drop occurs whenever D lacks a case feature. Romanian has a mixed case system which combines inflectional case – including instances of case concord – and prepositional case marking. I propose that inflectional case involves feature spreading of case from K to D and other elements inside the DP (cf. Norris 2014, 2018). If K is prepositional, there is no feature spreading, so D will lack a case feature. A welcome result is that the non-realization of the +def morpheme is correlated with a poorer featural make-up: besides being inside a complex D+N head, the morpheme to be deleted lacks case. Finally, I briefly examine the accounts of definite article suffixation that have been proposed, showing how the article drop rule can be formulated under each account.

Keywords: definite article, case, prepositions, concord, complex heads

1. The data

A remarkable property of Romanian is the ban on definiteness marking on nouns preceded by accusative-taking prepositions, if the noun phrase consists of the noun alone:

- (1) Am pus cărțile pe masă/*pe masa.
have.1 put books-the on table / on table-the
'I put the books on the table.'

As the translation of (1) shows, the absence of definiteness marking in this case is not a matter of definite/indefinite ambiguity (the example cannot be translated with 'I put the books on a table'). Romanian is a language with a well-developed article system, comparable with Italian, Spanish or Modern Greek. In the context in (1), a singular indefinite would have been preceded by an indefinite article. Indefinite singular count nouns are indeed restricted in Romanian to certain well-defined environments, e.g. predicate environments, complements of verbs related to possession (e.g. *Am mașină* 'have.1 car' = 'I have a car'), PPs in *de* 'of', etc. – see Dobrovie-Sorin (2013), Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea (2015). Therefore, *masă* 'table' in (1), despite of the absence of an article, can only be interpreted as definite ('the table'). Once we use a DP that consists of

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more than the noun alone, the article (or another determiner) becomes obligatory in the context in (1), as shown in (2):

- (2) Am pus cărțile pe [masa /*masă} de joc].
 have.1 put cards/books-the on table-the / table of game
 ‘I put the books/cards on the game table.’

This indicates that in (1) we are not dealing with an underspecification in definiteness (contra the proposal in Hill & Mardale 2021): the absence of any overt determiner specification is a way of marking this DP as definite. This is supported by the fact that maximality contexts (unique/maximal reference) normally require a marker of definiteness in Romanian, as in other languages with a fully developed article system¹. Therefore, following Dobrovie-Sorin (2007), we use the descriptive term ‘article drop’ for the obligatory absence of definiteness marking in contexts of the type in (1).

A definite/indefinite ambiguity arises in the plural, because bare plurals are less restricted, being allowed after prepositions, see (4). The ambiguity only holds if the DP consists in the noun alone, see (3), otherwise the definite article being obligatory for a definite interpretation, see (4):

- (3) Câinele doarme în cutii.
 dog-the sleeps in boxes
 ‘The dog sleeps in boxes / in the boxes.’
- (4) Câinele doarme în cutii de lemn / în cutiile de lemn.
 dog-the sleeps in boxes of wood in boxes-the of wood
 ‘The dog sleeps in wooden boxes / in the wooden boxes.’

As made clear by the discussion of the example (1), the ambiguity in (3) is structural: *cutii* ‘boxes’ may be either a definite DP or a bare plural (analyzable as a DP with a null D, see Longobardi 1994, Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2015, or as a NumP, see Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006).

Certain prepositions do not trigger article drop: *cu* ‘with’, *de-a* when introducing games (*a se juca de-a hoții* ‘to play thieves’), *pe* in the collocation *a face pe...* ‘to play the...’ (see Mardale 2007, Mardale et al. 2013):

- (5) a. Mănânc cu furculița / *cu furculiță.
 eat.1SG with fork-the with fork
 ‘I’m eating with the fork/using the fork’
- b. Se joacă de-a hoții.
 REFL play.3 of-at thieves-the
 ‘They are playing thieves.’
- c. Face pe prostul.
 makes on stupid(MSG)-the
 ‘He’s playing the fool.’

¹ This extends even to generic plurals, as opposed to Germanic and older stages of the Romance languages.

The limitation of article drop to accusative-taking prepositions may be correlated to the fact that only accusative-taking prepositions are simple Ps: genitive-taking prepositions contain an element formally identical to the definite article that introduces φ -features, visible on agreeing possessors (e.g. *înainte-a mea* ‘before-DEF.FSG my.FSG’)². Dative-taking prepositions are specialized uses of nouns (*grație* ‘grace’) or participles (*datorită* ‘due to’, the fem. sg. participle of *datori* ‘to owe, be indebted’, *mulțumită* ‘thanks to’, the fem. sg. participle of *mulțumi* ‘to thank’).

There are also nouns exempt from article drop: familiar kinship terms and role nouns that have a proper name behavior, see (6).

- (6) E pentru bunicu’ / șefu’ / mama.
is for grand-father-the boss-the mother-the
‘It’s for grandpa / for the boss / for mum.’

The fact that such nouns have a proper name behavior is visible in the case of *tată* ‘father’, which has two definite forms: *tata* (with the *-a* article that normally marks the feminine, except for a handful of masculines in *-ă* – *popă* ‘priest’, *papă* ‘pope’), which is used as a quasi-proper name (like *daddy*, *dad*), and *tatăl*, which is the form normally used when the NP is complex (e.g. *tatăl lor* ‘their father’). Of these two forms, only the first is an exception to the article drop rule:

- (7) E pentru {tata / *tatăl}.
is for father-*a* / father-*l*
‘It’s for dad.’

If for these nouns the definite form has been reanalyzed as a proper name, they no longer constitute an exception to the article drop rule.

The ‘empty/null N’ (which may result from ellipsis) is visible for the article drop rule: as (8) shows, if the noun is null and the suffixal definite article occurs on a prenominal adjective, the rule does not apply³:

- (8) Stă în ultimul vagon → Stă în ultimul / *în ultim.
stays in last-the coach stays in last-the in last
‘(S)he’s sitting in the last coach (of a train)’ → ‘(S)he’s sitting in the last one’

The reason is that the sister of D does not contain, in this case, only the noun, but is a complex constituent, containing an adjective and an elided noun:

² On the issue of agreement in genitives in Romanian and the inclusion of the so-called ‘possessive adjectives’ in the category of agreeing genitives, see Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea (2011), Giurgea (2011).

³ With postnominal modifiers, the definite article takes the ‘strong form’ *cel* before an elided N:

- (i) Stă în apartamentul de sus → Stă în cel de sus
stays in apartment-the of upstairs stays in the.MSG of upstairs
‘(S)he lives in the upstairs apartment’ → ‘(S)he lives in the upstairs one’

- (9) în [DP D_{+def} [ultim(ul) [N(P)Ø]]]

Finally, the condition informally stated at the meaning, that article drop applies “if the noun phrase consists of the noun alone”, must be refined in order to comply with examples with pre-D universals or emphatic modifiers, where article drop does not apply:

- (10) a. în [toate cărțile]
 in all books-the
 b. Când dădea în mine, l-am văzut pe [însuși diavolul].
 when hit.IMPF.3SG in me CL.ACC-have.1 seen DOM himself devil-the
 ‘As he was hitting me,) I saw the devil himself’ (<https://ziare.com/...>)

In these cases, the NP contains just a noun, but the entire extended nominal projection that constitutes the complement of the prepositions contains more than just N and D. Therefore, assuming that DPs with article drop are really definite and thus contain a +def D (see the next section for further discussion), the rule can be stated as in (11):

- (11) Article drop applies if the entire nominal extended projection occurs as a complement of P and consists only of D_{+def} and N

2. Definite article drop as a surface (PF) phenomenon. Dobrovie-Sorin’s (2007) analysis

Given that in Romanian definiteness marking is obligatory when contextual uniqueness is satisfied (see (12) below and (2)), it is reasonable to assume that D_{+def} *exists in the structure* in examples such as (1) and the obligatory absence of definite inflection is *a matter of D’s surface realization*:

- (12) [context: a unique table in the immediate context]
 Masa e curată / *Masă e curată.
 table-the is clean table is clean
 ‘The table is clean.’

If we assume that D is not projected in (1), we cannot explain two things: (i) why the absence of the article is *obligatory* (since P can take DPs, why shouldn’t P be able to take as a complement a DP of the form [D_{+def} [NP_N]] ?) and (ii) why in (1) we only have a *definite* interpretation (absence of D should be correlated with no definiteness feature in semantics).

As the article drop rule does not affect the interpretation (the relevant DPs remain definite), it seems reasonable to place it at the level of the Phonological Form (PF). The more developed view of PF proposed by the Distributed Morphology theory (see Hale & Marantz 1993, Embick & Noyer 2001) provides a rich inventory of operations, among which we may find the tools for implementing article drop. In particular, we may use

feature impoverishment or deletion. We may describe the phenomenon via a rule that deletes the +def feature carried by the inflectional morpheme of the noun (see *mas-a* ‘table-FSG.DEF’ vs. *mas-ă* ‘table-(F)SG’) or the definite morpheme, in case the definite inflection is decomposed into two morphemes (cf. plural *mes-e-le*: ‘table-FPL-DEF.FPL’) – hence the term ‘definite article drop’. The more difficult task is the formulation of the conditions in which this rule applies.

Some PF-rules are sensitive to the immediate environment (preceding/following words), see the choice of an allomorph depending on the next word (ex. (13)) or the merger of two adjacent functional words into a fused form (see (14)):

- (13) în o casă => într-o casă
 in a house in a house
 în / _ [un, o] => într
- (14) a. de le lit => du lit ‘of the bed’ (Fr.)
 b. de în => din ‘of/from in’ (Ro.)

It is clear that the article drop rule is not of this type. As can be seen in the formulation in (11), it must make reference to structural notions, rather than linear adjacency. In the DM model, there is a stage of the PF-derivation where structural information is relevant, as discussed in Embick & Noyer (2001), who differentiate between two types of PF-rules in terms of timing of application:

(i) rules applying before vocabulary insertion, sensitive to abstract syntactic structure; here, they include the lowering of a head on the head of its complement (Chomsky’s 1957 Affix Hopping):

- (15) Mary [_{TP} t_I [loudly play-ed_I the trumpet]]

(ii) rules applying after vocabulary insertion, sensitive to adjacent words in linear order, which they exemplify by degree affixation in English, a rule which requires strict adjacency and is sensitive to the number of syllables of the host:

- (16) a. [-est [smart]] => smart-est
 b. [-est [amazingly smart]] => most [amazingly smart]
 c. [-est [intelligent]] => most intelligent

Since article drop is sensitive to the abstract structure, it belongs to type (i) above – it is a rule that operates on the abstract syntactic representation, before vocabulary insertion.

A formulation of article drop as a PF-rule sensitive to the abstract syntactic representation was proposed by Dobrovie-Sorin (2007). Her analysis aims at bringing the two requirements mentioned in (11), the word-like character of the nominal extended projection and the presence of a preposition, under a single rule. As a first step, she assumes an operation that creates complex X⁰ (word-level) constituents – called *extended heads* – without involving movement (previously, complex head formation was normally assumed for head movement; see Matushansky 2006):

- (17) $[_{FP} F^0 [L^0]] \Rightarrow [_{F^0/L^0} F^0 \oplus L^0]$, where F^0 is a functional head, L^0 is a lexical head and $F^0 + L^0$ is an extended head

She does not decide whether this rule applies at PF or earlier than that, i.e. in syntax. She proposes that this rule applies to the $[P[D N]]$ complex and the article is dropped iff it occurs inside such an extended head:

- (18) (i) D and N form a complex head: $[P [Det [N]]] \Rightarrow [P [_{D^0/N^0} Det \oplus N]]$
 (ii) P forms a complex head with D and N: $[P [_{D^0/N^0} Det \oplus N]] \Rightarrow [P^0/_{D^0/N^0} P \oplus Det \oplus N]$
- (19) The definite article is deleted whenever it is governed by a preposition that belongs to the same Extended Head

3. A problem for Dobrovie-Sorin's account

This account becomes problematic once we consider what happens when a coordination of DPs occurs in the complement of P. Since a precondition of the rule is that D+N forms a complex word with P, the prediction is that the rule should not apply when the complement of P contains a complex constituent formed by coordination. But the rule does apply: if one of the conjuncts contains only D and N, the article is dropped, even if P is not adjacent to the DP and irrespective of the word/phrase status of the other conjunct:⁴

- (20) *privești* *către* [grădină și munte] / * *către* grădina și muntele
 view-the towards garden and mountain towards garden-the and mountain-the
 'the view towards the garden and the mountain'
- (21) *privești* *către* [[grădinile de legume] și [munte/*muntele]]
 view-the towards gardens-the of vegetables and mountain/mountain-the
 'the view towards the vegetable gardens and the mountain'

The only possibility of defending Dobrovie Sorin's analysis is to assume that a P is present before the second conjunct in these examples and is deleted. But why should we assume that P must be present? There is no clear reason for banning a constituent of the form $[DP \& DP]$ in the position of complement of *către* 'towards'.

⁴ Even if for (20) one could assume formation of complex heads $N+\&+N$, as in verbal complexes of the type in (i)a (auxiliaries in Romanian behave as proclitics), this cannot apply to (21) – compare (i)b, which shows that clitic auxiliaries do not allow coordination of complex phrases (see Giurgea 2011):

- (i) a. am [spălat și curățat] masa
 have.1 washed and cleaned table-the
 b. * am [[spălat vasele] și [curățat masa]]
 have.1 washed dishes-the and cleaned table-the

Actually, article drop applies even in cases when we can be sure that there is only one P combining with a coordination of DPs: as shown in (22)a, the preposition *între* ‘between’ cannot take a single singular DP; it either takes a coordination or a plural, which shows that it requires a plurality-denoting complement (see (22)b). This means that in (22)c and (23), where we see article drop applying in a singular DP which is the second member of a coordination after *între*, we can be sure that no instance of *între* has been deleted before the second conjunct. Indeed, if we repeat *între* before the second conjunct, the example becomes ungrammatical, see (22)d:

- (22) a. **între* *casă*
 between house
 b. *între* *casa* *mea* *și* *a* *ta* / *între* *case*
 between house-the my and GEN your between houses
 ‘between my house and yours/between the houses’
 c. *între* [*casa* *mea*] *și* [*parc*(***ul**)]
 between house-the my and park(*the)
 ‘between my house and the park’
 d. * *între* *casă* *mea* *și* *între* *parc*
 between house-the my and between park
- (23) *Distanța* [*între* [*casa* *mea* *și* *oraș*(***ul**)]] e de 20 de kilometri.
 distance-the between house-the my and city(*the) is of 20 of kilometers
 ‘The distance between my house and the city is 20 km.’

To conclude, if we use complex head formation in order to formalize the restriction of article drop to maximal projections containing only D and N, we must eliminate P from the complex heads. This is the path I will follow in the analysis that I will propose.

4. Towards an analysis

Let us first summarize the conditions on article drop:

- (24) (i) The maximal projection of N occurs in the complement position of accusative-taking prepositions (with the three exceptions listed in §1)
 (ii) The maximal projection of N consists of [D_{+def} + N]

4.1 On pre-D elements

We have seen that the notion of ‘maximal projection of N’ used in (24)(ii) is meant to cover the pre-D elements, which prevent article drop:

- (25) *în* [*toate cărțile*] / **în* *toate cărți*
 in all books-the in all books

In such cases, the complement of D consists of N alone. This shows that a rule of complex head formation between D and N, triggered by the word-status of the NP, is insufficient: a complex head would be formed in (25), yet the article is not dropped.

Pre-D universals may be analyzed as heads (Q) selecting for definite DPs (Giusti 1990, Cardinaletti & Giusti 1992) or as specifiers or adjuncts of the DP (cf. Sportiche 1988, who analyzes them as adjuncts to NP).

- (26) a. [_{QP} [_Qtoate] [_{DP} cărțile]]
 b. [_{DP} [_Qtoate] cărțile]

If we adopt (26)a, the rule of article drop must be specified as applying only to DPs that are complements of P – assuming that members of coordinated structures (see §3 above) count as complements of the head that combines with the whole coordinated structure. Thus, the rule will apply in (27)a, but not in (27)b where the complement of P is a QP:

- (27) a. [**între** [_{DP} casa mea] și [_{DP} oraș]]]
 b. [**în** [_{QP} [_Qtoate][_{DP} cărțile]]]

In the analysis in (26)b, the DP is always the complement of P. Therefore, the condition must be stated differently, as a requirement that the whole DP should become word-level (X^0) by complex head formation:

- (28) (i) Complex head formation (revised):
 A DP of the form [_{D+def} N⁰] is reanalyzed as an X^0 constituent [_{D⁰} D⁰ N⁰]
 (ii) Definite article drop: D⁰ belongs to a complex head [_{D⁰} D⁰ N⁰] and occurs in the complement position of P

An argument for a specifier-analysis of pre-D universals, as in (26)b, comes from constructions of the type Universal+Numeral+DP (see (29)a)⁵; since the numeral cannot occur by itself before a definite DP (see (29)b), it is reasonable to assume that in (29)a it forms a constituent with the universal:

- (29) a. (pe) [[toți trei] băieții]
 on/DOM all three boys-the
 ‘(on) all three boys’
 b. * trei băieții
 three boys-the

⁵ This placement of numerals only occurs with small numbers:

- (i) toți {patru/?cinci/?șase} băieții
 ‘all four five six boys-the’

Therefore, I adopt a specifier-analysis of pre-D elements and, accordingly, the formulation in (28).

4.2 The status of the P. Article drop with prepositional case markers

As examples (10)b, (29)a and (30) show, the P that triggers article drop can also be the differential object marker (DOM) *pe*; as shown in (30), DOM marks constituents that have the distribution of direct objects, its use depending on the properties of the DP:

- (30) Văd fata / Văd pe cineva / O văd **pe fată**
 see.1SG girl-the see.1SG DOM somebody / CL.3FS.ACC see.1SG DOM girl
 ‘I see the girl’ ‘I see somebody’ ‘I see **the girl**’

The DOM *pe* can be seen as the spell-out of structural object case, possibly with some other feature(s) stemming from the DP (such as Person, see Cornilescu 2000, Giurgea 2019). Therefore, *pe* is rather a K (case head) than a P (for the proposal of a functional projection KP for case, see Abney 1987; Lamontagne & Travis 1987; Loebel 1994; Bittner & Hale 1996).

Romanian does, indeed, have other preposed case markers (genitive *a*, *al*, dative *la*). Genitive *a* never takes definite DPs (while *al* is an agreeing case-marker that takes oblique DPs, i.e. genitive-dative), but dative *la* may take definite DPs, in certain conditions, in the colloquial register of the standard language (see Iorga-Mihail 2013), and this use is very widespread in regional varieties (see Giurgea 2021). Like *pe*, dative *la* triggers article drop – see (31), where dative clitic doubling clearly indicates the K status of *la*:

- (31) Ce **le-ai** dat **la copii** să facă?
 what CL.3PL.DAT-have.2SG given **to children** SBJV do.3
 ‘What assignment did you give **to the children**?’

But if case involves a KP projection, what is the difference between overt Ks (see (32)a) and the situations in (32)b-c, where the article is not dropped?

- (32) a. O văd pe fată.
 CL.3FS.ACC see.1SG DOM girl
 b. Văd fata / *fată.
 see.1SG girl-the / girl
 ‘I see the girl.’
 c. I-am dat fetei / *fete.
 CL.3SG.DAT-have.1 given girl-the.DAT girl.DAT
 ‘I gave (it) to the girl.’

The idea I intend to develop is that article drop applies whenever the definiteness morpheme is not used to express case. This would make the zero-realization involved in

this rule less unexpected, as the morpheme that is dropped spells-out less features than the morpheme that is not dropped.

This idea can be formally implemented in several ways:

- (33) (i) Whenever there is no prepositional K or P, D and K form a complex head
 (i.a) in syntax
 (i.b) by PF-lowering
 (ii) Whenever there is no prepositional K or P, D has a case feature that it lacks when K is prepositional

Deciding between these possibilities is not an easy task, because although Romanian tends to express case only once in a DP, it has kept some traces of the old case concord system of Latin.

Thus, if we set aside personal pronouns, Romanian only has three inflectional cases – nominative-accusative (‘direct’), genitive-dative (‘oblique’) and vocative. The nominative-accusative, which also appears after prepositions and prepositional case markers, can be considered a default form. Unambiguous case markers for the oblique and vocative usually appear only once in a DP, on a determiner or another functional item or – in the case of the vocative – on the noun or a prenominal adjective (see (34)-(35)), but there are also instances of iteration, as we will see in (36) below.

- (34) a. *acest-**ui*** *bun-Ø* *prieten-Ø*
 this-MSG.OBL good-MSG friend-SG
 b. *alt-**ui*** *bun-Ø* *prieten-Ø*
 other-MSG.OBL good-MSG friend-SG
 c. *acest-**ui*** *alt-Ø* *bun-Ø* *prieten-Ø*
 this-MSG.OBL other-MSG good-MSG friend-SG
- (35) a. *bărbat-**e***
 man-MSG.VOC
 b. *tiner-**e*** *bărbat-Ø*
 young-MSG.VOC man-MSG

For the oblique, iteration (or case spreading) is obligatory with pre-D universals (where case also occurs on the definite Ds) and in a series of fully inflected functional items that precedes an empty N, see (36)a-b, and is optional with postnominal demonstratives (which occur after a noun marked with the suffixal definite article) and when the series of functional items precedes an overt N and is in the plural, see (36)c-d (AUGM, the *-a* augment, is an element that appears before empty N, in certain conditions, as well as on postnominal demonstratives)⁶; for the vocative, iteration occurs with certain adjectives (see Croitor & Hill 2013), as exemplified in (36)e:

- (36) a. *tutur-**or*** *acest-**or*** *bărbaṭ-**i***
 all-PL.OBL this-PL.OBL man-MPL

⁶ See Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea (2013), Barbu (2009).

- b. mult-**or** alt-**or**-a
 many-PL.OBL other-PL.OBL-AUGM
- c. mult-**or** alt-**or**/alt-e problem-e
 many-PL.OBL other-PL.OBL/-FPL problem-FPL
- d. om-u-l-**ui** acest-**ui**-a / acest- \emptyset -a
 man-MSG-DEF-MSG.OBL this-MSG.OBL-AUGM this-MSG-AUGM
- e. iubit-**e** prieten-**e** / prieten- \emptyset
 beloved-MSG.VOC friend-MSG.VOC / friend-MSG

Moreover, in DPs introduced by an element marked with the unambiguous oblique case markers, singular feminine nouns and adjectives show a form identical with the plural of the ‘direct’ (nominative-accusative) case (see (37)a); this form cannot suffice to mark case by itself; thus, if there is no functional element that can carry the unambiguous oblique suffix, the nominal must be introduced by the preposition *de*, which can be assumed to be a genitive case marker specialized for bare nouns – this is particularly clear in complex event nominalizations, where either the morphological oblique or the prepositions *de* and *a*⁷ mark the DP corresponding to the object in the verbal structure, as shown by Cornilescu (2001, 2003), see (37)b-c:

- (37) a. un-**ei** alt-e ap-e sărat-e
 a-FSG.OBL other-FSG.OBL/FPL water(F)-SG.OBL/FPL salted-FSG.OBL/FPL
- b. a aduce această apă => aducerea acest-**ei** ap-e
 to bring this water bringing-the this-FSG.OBL water(F)-SG.OBL/PL
- c. a aduce apă => aducerea **de** ap-ă / * aducerea ap-e
 to bring water bringing-the of water-SG bringing-the water(F)-SG.OBL/PL

The instances of iteration of unambiguous case morphemes illustrated in (36) are problematic for the hypothesis of a complex head [D+K] for inflectional case ((33)(i)). On the other hand, the strong limitations on case concord show that case cannot be treated on a par with the other concord features: gender and number concord between N, adjectives, determiners and other inflected functional items applies systematically, as opposed to case concord.

There are theoretical models of concord which treat case concord differently from ϕ -feature concord. Even for languages where case and ϕ -concord work on a par (as in the old Indo-European type represented by Latin, Greek, Icelandic, or Balto-Slavic languages), a different mechanism has been proposed due to the fact that case reflects the external structural environment in which a nominal projection is embedded, so that it is primarily a property of the maximal nominal projection: according to Babby (1987), Delsing (1993), Matushansky (2008), Pesetsky (2013), Norris (2014, 2018), case is first assigned to the NP/DP and then the case feature percolates downward on determiners, nouns and adjectives. The notion of case assignment, used in GB (see Chomsky 1981,

⁷ The preposition *a* is used for DPs headed by functional items that do not inflect for case, such as cardinals:

(i) aducerea a două sticle
 bringing *a* two bottles

1986), has been refined in the minimalist framework in order to comply with the Inclusiveness Condition: structural case is present in the numeration as a feature in need of checking (being unvalued or uninterpretable). In the model that uses KP, case can be considered to be base-generated on K (i.e., present in the numeration on the K head). By downward percolation, this feature is copied on designated elements in the complement of K. This process has been considered post-syntactic by some researchers (see McFadden 2004⁸, Norris 2012, den Dikken & Dékány 2018), but Richards (2012) provided some arguments for placing it in syntax, a view endorsed by Norris (2014, 2018). As for K, the standard assumption is that for structural cases, the feature is uCase, but Romanian challenges this assumption: both for the accusative and for the genitive (which behaves as an adnominal structural case) we see several varieties of K heads depending on various properties of their complements – for the accusative we have DOM and DOM-less objects, for the genitive we have oblique-marked genitives accompanied by the head *al* that shows concord agreement controlled from outside, and the prepositions *a* and *de*. Therefore, in my work on Romanian genitives I proposed that K is born with specific structural case features in need of licensing (see Giurgea 2011), which I characterized as unvalued features specified for the categorial feature of their licensor: uv* for accusative, un* for genitive, uT for nominative (see Giurgea 2014)⁹. A further item which, in my opinion, should be considered lexically specified for structural case is *pro* (which can be seen as headed by a K with uT). Under this view, we can account for the difference between inflectional and prepositional case marking in Romanian by the following parameterization:

- (38) a. Inflectional cases trigger case spreading inside their complement:
 nominative, DOM-less accusative, agreeing genitive, dative, vocative
 b. Prepositional cases do not trigger case spreading inside their complement:
 DOM, genitive *a* and *de*, dative *la*

Thus, in the absence of case spreading there is no case feature on determiners, nouns and adjectives. This is why *apă* ‘water’ appears in its unmarked singular form with the prepositional genitive K *de* in (37)c, but when embedded in a KP with inflectional genitive, it shows the oblique form *ape*, see (37)b.

The data in (36)-(37) clearly show that case spreading exists in Romanian. For the situations in which it is not manifested, illustrated in (34)-(35), we may assume either massive morphological underspecification or particular constraints on the heads at hand: thus, the oblique targets certain functional items for which we can assume a D-feature, where the unambiguous oblique morphemes surface, and otherwise only N and As carrying FSG. Indeed, all items that receive the unambiguous oblique morphemes are

⁸ McFadden does not resort to K, proposing, instead, that case is first assigned to D and then its value is copied on the morphemes generated at PF on N and As inside the complement of D.

⁹ See also Pesetsky (2013), who treats morphological case in terms of the copying of part-of-speech information from heads to their dependents.

As for the dative, I cannot address here the issue of whether it is structural (in which case it can be represented as uAppl, being licensed by an Appl head), inherent (in which case it does not involve any unvalued feature), or both (depending on the type of dative).

either D or have a relation with Ds: postnominal demonstratives must be dominated by a definite D, pre-D universals must occur in the Spec of a definite D, *alt* ‘other’ may function as a D, possibly via raising to D – see the contrast in (39) between *alt* functioning as a D and *alt* that remains in a lower position:

- (39) a. *alt-ei* *problem-e* , *alt-ui* *om-Ø*
 other-FSG.OBL *problem(F)-SG.OBL/PL* other-MSG.OBL *man(M)-SG*
 b. *un-ei* *alt-e* *problem-e* , *un-ui* *alt-Ø*
 a-FSG.OBL *other-FSG.OBL/PL* *problem(F)-SG.OBL/PL* a-MSG.OBL *other-MSG*
 om
 man(M)-SG

Most importantly for our purposes, as case spreading proceeds top-down, it will always affect D.

Turning now back to article drop, the correlation between prepositional Ks and article drop can now be stated as follows:

- (40) Article drop applies if D is not marked for case

This can be extended straightforwardly to prepositions that do not function as case markers if we assume that they do not select for KP, but rather for DP. This formalizes the intuition that prepositions and case markers have a similar function (note that case concord is by no means limited to structural cases: semantic cases such as ablative, instrumental, locative participate to case concord in languages from various families – Indo-European, Finno-Ugric, Kartvelian, Chukotko–Kamchatkan, Cushitic, various Australian languages, etc.¹⁰). For prepositions that do not trigger article drop, I assume that they select for KP. This is obvious for the few dative-selecting prepositions (see §1), for which it is no longer necessary to assume a different categorial status. The other exceptions, *cu* ‘with’, *pe* in *a face pe* ‘to play the..’ and *de-a* with names of games, must be assumed to select for a KP with inflectional accusative. Summarizing, the account that relates article drop to a poorer feature specification of D, in the form of lack of case, has the implications in (41):

- (41) a. Prepositions that trigger article drop select for DP
 b. Prepositions that do not trigger article drop select for KP

This view implies that the direct case forms are actually unmarked forms, used both for caseless morphemes (see *ap-ă* in (37)c) and for the nominative and accusative case (in DM, this follows from the absence of vocabulary entries specified for nominative or accusative, for the relevant morphemes: the Subset principle ensures that the unspecified forms will be inserted). The only cases where we see a difference between nominative and accusative are personal pronouns. After prepositions, distinct accusative forms appear in the 1st and 2nd singular (*eu* ‘I’ vs. *cu/la mine* ‘with/at me’). Since *cu*

¹⁰ See Plank (1995) on *Suffixaufnahme*, which is a form of case concord.

‘with’, which does not trigger article drop and should thus be assumed to select a KP, and the prepositions that trigger article drop all combine with accusative forms (see *mine* in the aforementioned example), we are led to conclude that the accusative forms (*mine* ‘me.ACC’, *tine* ‘you.ACC’, *sine* 3REFL.ACC) are actually default forms (being used both for +accusative pronouns and for caseless pronouns).

Besides these pronominal forms, under my proposal, a difference between nominative/accusative-marked forms and forms unmarked for case appears in the case of the definite article: it is only the latter that undergoes article drop.

4.3 Conclusion on the article-drop rule

Summarizing, the first condition on article drop formulated in (24), which identifies its domain as the complement of accusative-taking prepositions, has been formalized as the requirement that the definite morpheme dropped be caseless.

As for the second requirement, that the maximal projection of N should consist only of D_{+def} and N, I maintain Dobrovie-Sorin’s rule of complex head formation, which assigns an X^0 status to a DP that contains only D^0_{+def} and N:

$$(42) \quad [DP D^0_{+def} N^0] \rightarrow [D^0 D^0_{+def} N^0]$$

We can now state the article-drop rule as follows:

- (43) The definiteness morpheme has a null realization iff
- (i) it has no Case feature
 - (ii) it occurs in a complex head $[D^0 D^0_{+def} N^0]$

5. On the nature of the ‘definiteness morpheme’

The further characterization of the article drop phenomenon depends on the analysis of definiteness marking in Romanian. A full treatment of this very complex phenomenon cannot be done in the space of this article, therefore I will not defend a single analysis, preferring instead to explore how the article drop rule can be formulated under the most promising analyses.

5.1 Analyses of the suffixal definite article

Three main analyses of the suffixal definite article have been proposed in the literature¹¹: (i) N-to-D raising (Dobrovie-Sorin 1987, Grosu 1988, 1994, Giusti 1991); (ii) lowering of D at PF (Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006); (iii) agreement in definiteness

¹¹ From a morphological point of view, it is clear that the definiteness marker that appears as a bound morpheme on nouns and adjectives is an inflectional morpheme and not a clitic, see Ortmann & Popescu (2000), Giurgea (2013c), Nicolae (2019).

between a null D and the closest N or AP (Cornilescu & Nicolae 2011a,b, 2012, Nicolae 2019, 2020).

Under (ii) and probably also (i), the DEF morpheme that is deleted by article drop is the D itself, whereas under (iii), and possibly (i) (depending on the analysis of head movement), it reflects a feature of N or A(P).

The suffixal article appears on the first N or AP in the phrase, whichever comes first. The AP can be complex (see (44)b-c), and when it contains a coordination, the article is repeated on both conjuncts (see (44)c), which makes a head raising analysis problematic; the article can also be repeated with coordination of nouns, see (44)d where a single referent is introduced, showing that the coordination is not at the DP-level:

- (44) a. *descoperire-a importantă*
discovery-the important
b. [(foarte) important-a] *descoperire*
(very) important-the discovery
c. [lung-ul și dificil-ul] *parcurs*
long-the and difficult-the pathway
d. [coleg-ul și prieten-ul] *nostru tocmai ne vorbește*
colleague-the and friend-the our just us.DAT speaks
'our colleague and friend'

The lowering analysis can account for the coordination data by making the assumption that lowering treats coordination structures as symmetric and when two items satisfy the conditions of the lowering rule, the displaced morpheme will attach to both of them. Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea (2006) point out the English Affix Hopping rule, treated as lowering by Embick & Noyer (2001), shows the same behavior with respect to coordination (cf. *He talks and eats at the same time*).

An argument for a post-syntactic treatment of definiteness suffixation is the existence of a strong form (*cel*) that is used when the closest constituent does not fulfill the conditions for suffixation: before cardinals, *de*+ordinals and empty Ns:

- (45) a. [**cele** [două [fete]]]
the.FPL two girls
b. [**cea** [[de-a doua] [problemă]]]
the.FSG of-al second problem
c. [**cel** [[NØ] nou]]
the.MSG new 'the new one'

In the agree-based analysis, a distinct variety of D, selecting for the relevant phrases (CardP, *de*-OrdP, n/Num marked for ellipsis), must be assumed for these cases.

But there are also cases in which neither *cel* nor the suffixal article mark definiteness, but, rather, the use of a certain phrase in DP-initial position suffices to mark the DP as definite. This is the case of *al*-phrases (genitives and ordinals) and superlatives (for the fact that superlative *cel* is not a D but a degree head, see Giurgea 2013a,b), see

(46)a,b,c; the a',b',c' examples show that these phrases can also occur inside indefinite DPs, without any formal difference:

- (46) a. [[al doilea] tren]
*al*_{ORD.MSG} second train
 'the second train'
 a'. un [al doilea] tren
 a *al*_{ORD.MSG} second train
 'a second train'
 b. [[ai noștri] [trei eroi]]
*ai*_{GEN.MPL} our three heroes
 'our three heroes'
 b'. alți eroi [ai noștri]
 other heroes *ai*_{GEN.MPL} our
 'other heroes of ours'
 c. [[cele mai cunoscute] [două [cărți]]]
SUP.FPL COMP well-known two books
 'the two best known books'
 c'. un [cel mai mare] număr
 a *SUP.MSG COMP* great number
 'a highest number'

These examples can be accounted for on the assumption that *al*-phrases and superlatives may have a +def feature (not manifested morphologically) that enters a checking/agree relation with a null D, probably accompanied by movement to SpecDP (see the position before cardinals in ex. (46)b and c). The lowering analysis must assume a different type of D in these cases, so, in the end, both analyses are forced to admit several varieties of definite D.

There is also a construction in which the def-marked N occurs in a higher position, which has been taken as indicative for N-to-D movement (see Grosu 1994, Cornilescu 2005): thus, although N+def cannot occur before cardinals, the strong form *cel* being used instead (see (45)a), it can occur before demonstratives (which are in this case marked with the augment *-a*) and then it can also precede cardinals, the order being N+def – Dem – Card, see (47)a; in this construction, only the N head raises – as shown in (47)b, even in compound-like N+PP constituents, Dem must intervene between N and the PP:¹²

¹² Ordinals in the order N+def – Ord have also been considered indicative of movement (see Grosu 1994), because the postnominal position of the ordinal is sometimes excluded with other determiners:

(i) ușa a doua / o (*ușă) a doua (ușă)
 door-the *al*_{ORD.FSG} second a door *al*_{ORD.FSG} second door

However, the postnominal position is not totally excluded, but is possible if the ordinal denotes a classifying property:

(ii) un loc al doilea
 a place *al*_{ORD.MSG} second

- (47) a. *fetele a(ce)stea două / *fetele două / aceste două fete*
 girls-the these(FPL)-AUGM two girls-the two these(FPL) two girls
 b. *fața a(ce)sta de masă / *fața de masă a(ce)asta*
 face-the this of table face-the of cloth this
 ‘this table cloth’

However, coordination of Ns under a single D as in (44)d are allowed in this construction, which is unexpected if N targets the D head itself:

- (48) [*colegul și prietenul*] *ăsta al nostru*
 colleague-the and friend-the this *al* our
 ‘this colleague and friend of ours’

If head-to-head raising involves complex head formation, the N&N-constituent in (48) must be taken to form a single complex head with D.

Another possibility is that N does not target D, but rather the Spec of the demonstrative phrase (DemP). This immediately accounts for the fact that this movement is only found in DPs with demonstratives (in the hypothesis that movement targets D, a special D must be assumed that selects DemP and attracts N, because in the absence of Dem movement of N past a cardinal is forbidden, see **fetele două* in (47)a)). As for the fact that the NP is not pied-piped (see (47)b), we may assume that by virtue of an economy principle the minimal constituent needed for convergence is moved. Since N is the lexical head of the projection in which the attractor, Dem, is found, it is reasonable to assume that N⁰ is local enough to be visible for the displacement rule – i.e., it is not embedded in a phase which would require pied-piping the whole phase.¹³ The operation of moving a head to the Spec of a higher head in the same extended projection was independently argued to be the first step in deriving head-movement, by Matushansky (2006). Further evidence for this proposal comes from the construction in (49), which is found in the colloquial register and is practically restricted to a couple of evaluative adjectives (*sărac, biet* ‘poor’):

- (49) *săracu’ băiatu’ ăla*
 poor-the boy-the that
 ‘that poor boy’

Nicolae (2019), who draws attention on this construction, analyzed it by using two DP layers. But this is problematic because these adjectives are not used before N+def in the absence of a demonstrative (*??săracu băiatu* ‘poor-the boy-the’). Using several D-

Therefore, the position after N+def in (i) may rely on the construction in (ii), assuming that in definite DPs it is more easy to get a classifying interpretation of an ordinal. In conclusion, more research is needed to establish whether movement is indeed involved in (some instances of) the N+def – Ord orders.

¹³ If nP is considered to be a phase, N can be assumed to have been head-moved to n⁰, a position which is visible for operations in the higher phase (see Chomsky 2001).

layers is also problematic on semantic grounds (it is currently assumed that D binds the external argument of the NP, and a variable cannot be bound twice). Taking N in (49) to be in SpecDemP solves this issue, allowing *săracu* ' to occupy its normal position immediately below D (the same position as in *săracu* ' *băiat* 'poor-the boy'):

(50) [_{DP} D_{+def} [_{EvalP} *săracu*' [_{Eval}⁰ [_{DemP} [_N *băiatu*'] [_{Dem} *ăla*] [_{NP} *t_N*]]]]]]]

Under this analysis, the +def feature is not needed to explain N-movement with postnominal demonstratives, the +N feature being sufficient. Note also that +def APs are never moved in front of Dem (**frumoasele acestea fete* 'beautiful-the these girls'), which supports the conclusion that the relevant feature is +N rather than +def.

However, the construction in (49) is problematic for the lowering analysis because the suffixal article occurs on two constituents that are not coordinated.

The agree-based analysis is supported by the existence of constructions which can only rely on +def checking, as we do not see any article morpheme, see (46). Its main problem is the fact that, unlike other features that participate to DP-internal agreement (gender, number, even case, see (37)a), definiteness marking normally occurs only once – the exceptions being coordinated constructions and the construction in (49). The agree-based analysis developed in Cornilescu & Nicolae (2011a,b, 2012) and Nicolae (2019, 2020) holds that Ns and As may come from the lexicon with a definiteness feature, which is valued, but uninterpretable on N (needing to be checked via ϕ -Agree with D_{+def}) and unvalued on As, being valued via Agree with N. But this predicts that the definiteness morpheme should always occur on N and all agreeing As, like the number feature.

A possibility that has not been envisaged so far is to use the top-down feature percolation (feature spreading) proposed by Norris (2014, 2018) for case concord, which we have adopted in §4.2 above: indeed, definiteness, like case, is a feature that originates high in the DP. The percolation mechanism must be enriched with a parameter that specifies how far down it goes: for definiteness, the closest ϕ -bearing element, N(P) or AP, is targeted, except for the construction in (49). The instances of multiple definiteness marking and low definite articles on nouns found in Old Romanian, which have been adduced as arguments in favor of the agree-based analysis in Cornilescu & Nicolae (2011a), can also be accommodated in the percolation approach, by relaxing the locality condition. Note that obligatory definiteness marking of N and all agreeing APs has never been attested in Romanian, which indicates that the Old Romanian facts should be kept separately from ϕ -agreement.

5.2 The article drop rule under the various analyses of the suffixal article

Turning now to the article drop rule, let us see what exactly is 'dropped'. In (43) we made reference to a 'definiteness morpheme'. Indeed, the suffixal article can be recognized as a distinct morpheme which carries its own gender/number/case inflection, which sometimes can be identified as a distinct morpheme (see (51)a-b) and sometimes not (see (51)c); moreover, sometimes the definite article deletes the inflection of the base, see (51)d:

- (51) a. fet-e-l-e
 girl-PL-DEF-FPL
 b. fet-e-l-or
 girl-PL-DEF-PL.OBL
 c. vulp-e-a
 fox-SG-DEF.FSG
 d. frumoas-ă / frumoas-a
 beautiful-FSG beautiful-DEF.FSG

The segmentation in (51), where the endings of the definiteness inflection are decomposed into a def morpheme and a ϕ +case morpheme, straightforwardly corresponds to the lowering analysis, in which the definiteness morpheme is the D head itself. The double occurrence of ϕ -features in (51)a-c follows from the fact that D has participated to agreement. If definiteness is a feature – as in the agree-based analysis and in the downward percolation analysis – the Def morpheme might be treated as a ‘dissociated morpheme’, a terminal introduced at PF, according to the assumptions of DM. Alternatively, N’s inflectional features may be analyzed as the spell-out of an n head that N merges with during the syntactic derivation. For the multiple occurrence of ϕ -features fission might be employed, or else the whole ϕ +def marking may be treated as a single morpheme – e.g. *-ele*, *-elor*, *-ea* in (51)a-c would correspond to FPL.DEF, F.PL.DEF.OBL, and FSG.DEF, respectively.

In the feature-based analysis, if the definiteness morpheme is analyzed as a dissociated morpheme, article drop can be treated as an impoverishment rule, that deletes the +def feature of N before the insertion of inflectional morphemes:

- (52) $[_{D^0} D^0 [_{N^0} N +\text{def}]] \Rightarrow [_{D^0} D^0 [_{N^0} N]]$,
 on condition that N does not have Case

Alternatively, if article drop applies after the insertion of the inflectional morpheme(s) or if the noun’s inflectional morphemes are not dissociated, the rule will remove the definiteness morpheme, see (53)a, which assumes two inflectional morphemes (the removed element is bold-faced), or the definiteness feature of the inflectional morpheme, see (53)b, which assumes a single inflectional morpheme:

- (53) a. $[_{D^0} [_{D+\text{def}}] [_{N^0}[N][\beta\text{Number}][+\text{def } \alpha\text{Gender } \beta\text{Number}]]]$
 $\Rightarrow [_{D^0} [_{D+\text{def}}] [_{N^0}[N][\beta\text{Number}]]]$
 iff the def morpheme has no Case
 b. $[_{D^0} [_{D+\text{def}}] [_{N^0}[N][+\text{def } \alpha\text{Gender } \beta\text{Number}]]]$
 $\Rightarrow [_{D^0} [_{D+\text{def}}] [_{N^0}[N][\alpha\text{Gender } \beta\text{Number}]]]$
 iff the def morpheme has no Case

Under the PF lowering analysis, article drop can be seen as an alternative to lowering – what is dropped is the D head which otherwise would lower on N:

- (54) $[_{D^0} [_{D+\text{def}} \alpha\text{Gender} \beta\text{Number}}] [_{[N]} [_{N^0} \beta\text{Number}]]] \Rightarrow [_{[N]} [_{N^0} \beta\text{Number}]]$
iff D has no Case

Note however that under this analysis lowering would be peculiar in the case of DPs consisting of only D and N: since the assumption is that complex head formation always applies, Def-lowering – which must apply when case is present – should be very local, targeting the sister of D inside the complex D+N. This might also be considered an instance of local dislocation.

6. Conclusions

Irrespective of the precise analysis of definiteness suffixation, the proposal that I made provides some motivation for the article drop rule: the definiteness morpheme that is dropped is poorer in terms of feature, lacking Case. This accounts for the fact that article drop occurs after prepositions and prepositional case-markers: when no prepositional marker is present, the definiteness morpheme also serves to mark case and therefore it is not dropped. As for the limitation of article drop to nominal extended projections that contain only D^0 and N^0 , I maintained Dobrovie-Sorin's (2007) proposal that the $[_{DP} D_{+\text{def}} N^0]$ constituent is reanalyzed as an X^0 -element. This possibility is presumably connected with the suffixal status of the definite article in Romanian: the $D_{+\text{def}}$ that participates to complex head formation is either null (as in the feature-based analysis of the suffixal article) or a bound morpheme that lowers at PF.

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