

## ON THE DIACHRONY OF ARTICLE DROP IN ROMANIAN\*

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**Abstract:** Romanian has a peculiar rule which prohibits the overt realization of definiteness marking in DPs consisting only of D<sup>0</sup> and N<sup>0</sup> in the complement position of most prepositions, called *article drop*. We investigate this phenomenon from a diachronic and comparative point of view. Similar phenomena are found in Albanian, Macedonian and some Rhaeto-Romance varieties, but in these varieties the rule is more limited in scope (it is restricted to locative PPs, and also to certain nouns in Rhaeto-Romance). Article drop is a common Romanian phenomenon, being found in the South-Danubian Romanian dialects as well as since the oldest attestations of Romanian. In the other Balkan languages, it may be a structural borrowing from Aromanian (Prendergast 2017). In Romanian, the prepositions exempt from article drop are those that never had locative uses or had predominant non-locative uses, which indicates an origin in locative PPs. Moreover, person-referring nouns are sometimes exempt from article drop, to a larger extent in Old Romanian and Aromanian than in Modern Romanian (where only name-like definites are exempt from the rule). We propose that article drop emerged from the reanalysis of a semantically-conditioned phenomenon into a syntactically-conditioned rule. We identify the origin of article drop in an oscillation between definite marking and zero marking in ‘weak definites’ (in the sense of Carlson & Sussman 2005; cf. Engl. *at school, in jail*). Weak definites often occur in locative PPs, tend to disallow modification and are usually inanimate. These properties correspond to the conditions of application of the article drop rule, as evinced by our diachronic and diatopic survey.

**Key words:** article drop, prepositions, definiteness, locatives, weak definites

### 1. Introduction. Article drop as a grammatical irregularity.

In Modern Romanian the definite article is not overtly realized after most accusative-taking prepositions if the maximal nominal projection consists only of the definite article and the noun, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. Am vorbit despre [film(\*ul)].  
have.1 talked about movie(\*the)  
‘We talked about the movie.’ (not: ‘about a movie’)
- b. Am vorbit despre [film\*(ul) suedez]  
have.1 talked about movie-the Swedish  
‘We talked about the Swedish movie.’
- c. Am vorbit despre [toate filme\*(le)].  
have.1 talked about all movies-the  
‘We talked about all the movies.’

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To rule out a bare noun construal, in (1)a-b we used a singular count noun in an episodic context, with no standardized/stereotypical activity reading<sup>1</sup>. (1)b shows that if the noun is modified, it cannot occur bare in this context. The example (1)c shows that it is not just the complement of D, but the entire maximal nominal projection that counts: if this projection contains a pre-D universal such as *toți* ‘all’, the article becomes obligatory. The impossibility of using the article in (1)a and the obligatory *definite* interpretation of this example show that this type of phrases are really definite DPs, rather than unspecified for definiteness<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, the phenomenon was coined *article drop* (Dobrovie-Sorin 2007). Note that Romanian behaves otherwise as a language with fully developed definiteness marking, like the other modern Romance languages: definiteness marking is (otherwise) obligatory whenever the semantic conditions for definiteness (maximality and presupposition of existence) are fulfilled<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, the obligatory bare use in (1)a should be viewed as a peculiar rule of definiteness marking. This is a common point of most of the analyses of this phenomenon in the generative framework (Dobrovie-Sorin 2007, Isac 2018, 2024, Giurgea 2022, 2024), which agree that the nominals of the type in (1)a are underlyingly definite DPs<sup>4</sup>. Dobrovie-Sorin (2007) proposed a rule of complex head formation that assigns X<sup>0</sup>-status to maximal nominal projections of the type [DP D<sup>0</sup> N<sup>0</sup>]. With certain Ps, this rule extends to the P, forming complex heads of the form [P<sup>0</sup> D<sup>0</sup> N<sup>0</sup>]. Giurgea (2022, 2024) restricts complex head formation to D+N, in view of configurations with conjunctions, such as (2): in this example, we see that article drop applies on the second conjunct of a coordination of DPs in the complement of a P, a case in which P cannot be part of the complex head. Giurgea proposes that article drop only applies after certain Ps because these Ps take a caseless complement, playing the role of K (note that Romanian has certain prepositional case markers such as the differential object marker *pe*, which trigger article drop; such markers are analyzable as K<sup>0</sup> heads). In other configurations, the definite morpheme also spells-out Case (in particular, when there is no P, case is inflectional and must be spelled-out on D). The conclusion is that the definiteness morpheme has a zero realization when it occurs inside a [D<sup>0</sup> N<sup>0</sup>] complex head and it lacks Case<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bare count singulars are allowed in locative PPs only if the phrase V+PP refers to a conventionalized activity/state of affairs (see Dobrovie-Sorin 2013:72):

- (i) a dormi pe pat tare  
to sleep on bed hard  
'to sleep on a hard bed'

<sup>2</sup> This latter view was held by Hill & Mardale (2021), who claim that D is not projected in configurations of the type in (1)a. For further arguments against this analysis, see Giurgea (2024).

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, kind-referring plural and mass DPs are also obligatorily marked with the definite article, unlike in English, which indicates that Romanian, like most other Romance languages, has gone even a step further in the generalization of definiteness marking than English.

<sup>4</sup> As mentioned in fn.2, the only generative analysis which disagrees on this point is Hill & Mardale (2021).

<sup>5</sup> An analysis without complex head formation was proposed by Isac (2024). She assumes that prepositions are base-generated below determiners (D–P–N) and move to their surface position. She proposes that the definite article is not spelled-out when the closest item D agrees with is the P that heads its complement. With modified NPs, NumP raises to a position between D<sub>def</sub> and P and the article can therefore be spelled-out on the N or A head inside NumP with which D agrees.

- (2) distanța între [[casa noastră] și [spital(\*ul)]]  
distance-the between house-the our and hospital(\*the)  
'the distance between our house and **the hospital**'

No matter which analysis is chosen, it is clear that the phenomenon, in Modern Romanian, has a purely formal conditioning. Semantic properties of definites, such as anaphoricity, semantic vs pragmatic uniqueness (Löbner 1985, 2011), specificity, referentiality, genericity are irrelevant. Article drop can be considered an irregularity in definiteness marking, which, like morphological irregularities, calls for an historical explanation. A phonetic source is out of the question: the definite article that is dropped is suffixal, so it does not come into contact with prepositions. This leaves us with a semantic-based explanation: article drop must have resulted from the reanalysis of a semantically motivated lack of article in certain environments into a syntactically conditioned one. As we will see, the data suggest that originally article drop affected locative PPs and might have been restricted to inanimate referents. The fact that absence of modification was a conditioning factor can be made sense of if the omissibility of the article was specific of the so-called *weak definites* in the sense of Carlson & Sussman (2005). Since Romanian is only attested in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, our hypothesis involves syntactic reconstruction (we place the stage with a semantically motivated article omission at an earlier date, during the Proto-Romanian period).

Before developing this hypothesis, we will present the exceptions to article drop in Modern Romanian (section 2). We will then examine the phenomenon in other languages (section 3) as well as in the historical dialects of Romanian and in the old language (section 4), concluding that foreign influence is not likely to have been the cause for the emergence of this rule in Romanian. For Old Romanian, we will present the results of a small-scale corpus research. In section 5 we will argue for the hypothesis that article drop emerged by the reanalysis of the variability in definiteness marking in weak definites.

## 2. Article drop in Modern Romanian.

### 2.1. On the prepositions that trigger article drop

The claim that article drop only applies to *accusative*-taking preposition needs further qualifications. First, a morphological distinction between accusative and nominative is only found in the singular 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pronouns (*eu* 'I' vs. *pe mine* 'on me', *tu* 'you.SG.NOM' vs. *pe tine* 'on you.SG.ACC'). For all the other nominal forms, the 'nominative-accusative' case form can be analyzed as a default form, occurring, for instance, in DPs introduced by an oblique (genitive-dative) determiner when there is no case concord, and after prepositional case markers (see Giurgea 2024, Croitor & Giurgea 2024). The claim that a preposition is accusative-taking is based on the form of the singular 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> pronouns.

Secondly, all original prepositions in Romanian take the accusative. The handful of dative-taking prepositions represent special uses of nouns or participles: *grație* 'grace' (+Dat. = 'thanks to'), *datorită* 'due (to)' (< *a datori* 'to owe, to be indebted'), *mulțumită*

‘thanks to’ (< *a mulțumi* ‘to thank’). The genitive-taking prepositions of traditional grammar are either functional nouns, like Engl. *in front of*, see *în fața* ‘in face-the’ = ‘before; in front of’, or adverbs assimilated to such nouns, containing a final morpheme homophonous with the definite article (*contra* ‘against’, with *-a* = ‘the.FS’, *îndărătul* ‘behind’, with *-ul* = ‘the.MS’, *înaintea* ‘before, in front of’, with *-a* = ‘the.FS’). This morpheme has  $\phi$ -features and triggers possessor agreement on a pronominal complement: *înainte-a me-a* ‘before-the.FS my.FS’ = ‘before me’ (possessive pronouns/adjectives represent an agreeing genitive form of the personal pronouns, see Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2011).

Among accusative-taking prepositions, only *cu* ‘with’ is a clear exception to the article drop rule:<sup>6</sup>

- (3) Am vorbit cu studentul/\*student  
 have.1 spoken with student-the/student  
 ‘I spoke with the student’

Other items that seem to be accusative-taking prepositions exempt from article drop are probably structurally different from run-of-the-mill Ps, in that they do not take a DP, but a small clause or an elliptical clause: (i) *pe* (literally ‘on’) in the collocation *a face pe...* ‘to act as..., pretend to be...’ and *de-a* in the collocation *a se juca de-a...* ‘to play the...’ probably select small clauses (in traditional grammars, the verb *face* ‘make’ in *a face pe* is analyzed as copular, see Manea et al. (2008:353), Dragomirescu et al. (2016:484); (ii) the comparative prepositions *ca* ‘as, than’ and *decât* ‘than’ introduce degree clauses; they display a prepositional behavior when the verb is elided and the remnant of ellipsis is the subject, by assigning accusative case to this remnant, see (4), where the existence of multiple remnants points to a clausal structure (with *ca*, deletion of the finite verb is obligatory):

- (4) mai iute ca [mine la douăzeci de ani]  
 more fast than me.ACC at twenty of years  
 ‘faster than me when I was 20’

To conclude, the only genuine/original preposition that is exempt from article drop in Modern Romanian is *cu* ‘with’.

## 2.2. Exceptions triggered by the noun: quasi-names and proper nouns

In the colloquial register, certain human nouns with referents well-established for the speaker and the hearer, akin to proper names, do not drop the article, see (5). In this

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<sup>6</sup> *Cu* with a possession or manner meaning often takes bare nouns. Using the test of modification, we can see that these are not instances of article drop (the nominal remains bare when modified):

- (i) o casă cu grădină / o casă cu grădină mare  
 a house with garden a house with garden big  
 ‘a house with a (big) garden’

example, the nouns *grandfather*, *mother*, *boss* can only be understood as taking the speaker or the hearer, or the group of both, as their implicit argument (*bunicu* ‘grandfather-the’ is *my*, *your* or *our grandfather*). The examples in (6) show that if these conditions are not fulfilled, article drop becomes obligatory: in (6)a, *mamă* ‘mother’ has a contextually established implicit argument, being an associative anaphor; this use requires article drop, if *mama* ‘mother-the’ is used, the referent is understood as being the speaker’s mother. (6)b shows that a dependent definite requires article drop.

- (5) E de la bunicu’ / șefu’ / mama.  
is from grand-parent-the boss-the mother-the  
‘It’s from grandpa’ / the (i.e. our, my, your) boss/ mum’
- (6) a. A venit tatăl băiatului, încă o așteptăm pe mamă /#mama.  
has come father-the boy-the.GEN still CL.ACC wait.IP DOM mother/mother-the  
‘The boy’s father has arrived, we’re still waiting for the (his) mother’
- b. În fiecare birou, răspunderea este la șef /#șefu’.  
in every office responsibility-the is at boss/boss-the  
‘In every office, the responsibility lies with the boss.’

The familiar definites that are exempt of article drop resemble proper names and show the same behavior as Engl. *mom*, *dad*, *grandpa*, which have been called ‘quasi-names’ by Pelczar & Rainsbury (1998) (see also Yip et al. (2023)).

While in (5) the referent of the quasi-name is familiar both to the speaker and the addressee, in (7) we see a situation in which the addressee has no previous acquaintance with the referent. The definite is interpreted deictically – there is an office and the speaker points to another person to which the addressee must give the application (we indicate this by using the symbol [☞]). The addressee also lacks previous acquaintance with the speaker – in the imagined context, there is a single addressee, and the plural of the imperative is a politeness marker. Note that the implicit argument of the definite *colega* ‘the colleague(F)’ is the speaker, and the addressee does have direct access to the referent, via perception, so (s)he becomes (minimally) acquainted with the referent as a result of this speech act. If the definite takes a contextual implicit argument and the addressee has no direct access to the referent, as in (8), the article cannot be dropped:

- (7) Lăsați cererea la colega [☞]  
leave.IMPV.2P application-the to colleague(F)-the  
‘Leave the application with my colleague.’
- (8) Era altcineva în biroul Mariei, o colegă. Am lăsat  
was.3S somebody-else in office-the Maria.GEN a colleague(F) have.1 left  
cererea la colegă /#colega.  
application-the to colleague/colleague-the  
‘There was somebody else in Maria’s office, a colleague. I left the request with the colleague.’

We conclude that the deictic use in (7) can be included in the category of quasi-names. The difference with respect to the quasi-names in (5) is that the use is contextual, not fixed for the speaker: unlike *mother, father, boss*, the speaker has several colleagues and it is the context, where the speaker and addressee have immediate access to one of the speaker's colleagues, that links the quasi-name to that particular colleague.

Another type of nouns that are exempt from article drop are feminine proper names ending in *-a/-ă*. With other endings, proper names of persons lack the article, whereas inanimates (such as toponyms) normally take the definite article. In the case of *-a/-ă*, *-a* can be considered a definite article form, because it is replaced with *-ă* (or *-e*, after *-i*) when the noun occurs in common noun positions, just as a definite article would behave, see (9), although with human nouns there is some variation, see (9)b. Moreover, *-a* also behaves like the definite article in having the 'oblique' (i.e. genitive-dative) form *-ei* – although, with human nouns, the preposed oblique marker *lui* is also used (especially in the colloquial register), see (9)c.

- (9) a. *Timișoara* (name of a city), *Anglia* 'England':  
 Am regăsit aceeași Timișoară/Anglie frumoasă.  
 have.1 find.1S same.F.S Timișoara/England beautiful.F.S  
 'I found the same beautiful Timișoara/England.'
- b. *Maria* 'Mary', *Ana* 'Ann', *Georgiana*, *Gianina*  
 Mai era o altă Marie/Ană/Georgiană/Georgiana/Gianina/??Gianină în clasă  
 also was.3S another Maria Ana Georgiana Gianina in class  
 'There was another Maria/Ana/Goergiana/Gianina in the class'
- c. *Mariei* / lui *Maria*  
 Maria-the.OBL OBL Maria  
 'to/of Maria'

In article drop contexts, *-a* is never replaced by *-ă* or *-e*:

- (10) În Timișoara/Anglia, pe Maria, la Ana  
 in Timișoara/England DOM Maria at Ana

This is one reason why all these names have the form in *-a* as a dictionary form. For human nouns, the use of the preposed oblique marker *lui* as well as the fact that all other human proper nouns lack a definite article are further arguments for including *-a* in the lexical entry. We may analyze it as a *proprial article*, a special version of the definite article. Under this analysis, certain proper names are specified in the lexicon as taking a proprial article.

Interestingly, the possibility of using the preposed oblique marker *lui* also appears with the quasi-names illustrated in (5) above:

- (11) lu' bunicu' / lu' șefu' / lu' mama / lu' colega (colloquial)  
 OBL grandfather-the OBL boss-the / OBL mother-the / OBL colleague-the

Summing up, article drop does not apply to the proprial article *-a* (with proper names registered in the lexicon) and to the definite article used with quasi-names. Note that even

if we analyze this article as a proprial article, we cannot propose a single generalization according to which the proprial article is not dropped: inanimate proper names that do not end in *-a* do have article drop (see (12)a), but use a definite article in other proper name contexts, see (12)b (for some exceptions, see Miron-Fulea et al. 2013), and there is no reason for not calling this article ‘proprial’:

- (12) *Dunăre* ‘Danube’:  
 a. pe *Dunăre*,  
    on Danube  
 b. *Dunăre\*(a) e frumoasă*  
    *Dunăre-the is beautiful*  
    ‘The Danube is beautiful’

### 3. Article drop in other languages

The phenomenon of article drop conditioned by P and the word-like character of the DP is a rare phenomenon: it has been reported for Romanian (including the South-Danubian dialects: Aromanian, Meglenoromanian and Istroromanian), Albanian, Macedonian, and some Rhaeto-Romance varieties.<sup>7</sup> At least for the Balkan domain, given the various effects of contact known in the literature on the Balkan Sprachbund, it is possible that article drop was a unique development, which spread via language contact.

#### 3.1 Rhaeto-Romance

Meyer-Lübke (1899:§179) sees the article drop of Romanian as the preservation of a system that has been much more widespread in Romance, but the data he provides are not fully convincing. The most similar facts are reported for some Rhaeto-Romance varieties (Sursilvan, Ladin), but the rule is not strict. The examples from Italian are mostly

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<sup>7</sup> In Modern Greek, certain locative PPs allow dropping both the P and the article (see Terzi 2010, Sifaki 2020):

- (i) Pame (stin) platia? (Sifaki 2020:1026)  
 go.IP (to-the) square  
 ‘Shall we go to the square?’  
 (ii) Pame (stin) palia pisina i (stin) kenuria? (Sifaki 2020:1040)  
 go.IP (to-the) old pool or to-the new  
 ‘Are we going to the old swimming pool or to the new one?’

This phenomenon is quite different from the Romanian-type article drop: it is optional, it is only possible with place nominals that are familiar to the discourse participants, “as frequent and scheduled activities take place in these locations” (Sifaki 2020:1025; however, some examples involve weak definites, which need not be familiar, see examples (13), (24), (26), and (27) in Sifaki 2020), it is only possible with singular nouns, it allows modified nouns (see (ii)), it is licensed by the verb (the PP must be selected by a verb of movement such as ‘go’, ‘come’, ‘travel’ or a state verb of location such as ‘stay’, ‘live’, ‘be’, ‘study’) and is only possible with the preposition *se* ‘to, at’, which is clearly related to the fact that *se* is fused with the definite article (*ston* ‘to-the.MS.ACC’, *stin* ‘to-the.FS.ACC’, *sto* ‘to-the.NS.ACC’, *stus* ‘to-the.MP.ACC’, *stis* ‘to-the.FP.ACC’, *sta* ‘to-the.NP.ACC’). Crucially, the omission of the article is contingent on the omission of the preposition, with which it forms a word at the level of the Phonological Form. Therefore, we do not treat this phenomenon as an instance of article drop of the Romanian type.

weak definites, as we will show in section 5. They support, indeed, the claim of an internal origin of the phenomenon, in the sense that Romanian did not acquire the rule as a result of an external influence, but it is not true that Romanian preserves the old system, because in Romanian article drop extends to *all* definites after Ps. For Rhaeto-Romance, a detailed description of article drop after Ps is provided in Mattiuzzi (2020), for the Ladin dialect of Fodom. According to this study, article drop is restricted to *locative* Ps (including temporal localizers, e.g. *davant mëssa* ‘before Mass’ = ‘before the Mass’) and count *singular inanimate* nouns of a certain type: ‘their referent is either (a) an object which is prototypically a part of a conventional location (like the table and the stove in a kitchen, the bed and the wardrobe in a bedroom, the door of a room) or (b) a place or space which is prototypically part of the landscape, like a salient part or building of a village (e.g. the main square, the church), or a landmark (e.g. the wood, the road, the bridge)’ (Mattiuzzi 2020:100). Modification is possible but restricted: the only N-modifiers allowed are argumental PPs, see (13).

- (13) a. *davant porta* (Ladin, Fodom dialect; Mattiuzzi: 2020)  
 before door  
 ‘in front of the door’  
 b. *davant* {\*(l’) *ultima porta* / \*(le) *porte* / \*(la) *porta che (...)* / \*(la) *porta rossa*}  
 before the last door the doors the door that the door red  
 ‘in front of the last door/the doors/the door that.../the red door’  
 c. *davant porta de mia ciauna*  
 before door of my room  
 ‘in front of the door of my room’

### 3.2 Albanian and Macedonian

In Albanian, according to Prendergast (2017), article drop occurs only with the accusative-taking prepositions which have *locative* meaning and with the instrumental preposition *me* ‘with’ (not with comitative *me*); (14)c shows that when *mbi* ‘on’ occurs in a non-locative meaning, the article is not dropped (as opposed to the locative use in (14)b); (14)d shows a non-concrete use of the goal preposition *në* ‘in’; the article is dropped because the meaning is locational (it is the location that is abstract); (14)e-f show that *për* does not trigger drop in the non-locative meaning ‘about’ but triggers drop when it is used to indicate goal. These examples also show that definite articles with proper names behave like with common nouns (a feature which distinguishes Albanian from Romanian).

- (14) a. *Hipi në makinë(\*n)* (Alb., Prendergast 2017:37-40)  
 mounted.3S in car(\*the)  
 ‘(S)he got into the car’  
 b. *E mori mbi shpinë(\*n)*  
 CL.3S.ACC took.3S on back(\*the)  
 ‘He took it onto his back’  
 c. *Ka ardhur koha për një debat kombëtar mbi arsimin*  
 has come time-the for a debate national on education-the



- ‘The time has come for a national debate concerning education.’
- d. Investimi **në arsim** është i shenjtë  
investment-the in education is AGR.MS.NOM sacred  
‘Investment in education is sacrosanct’
- e. Kadare shkroi një novel të famshme **për Gjirokastrën**  
Kadare wrote a novel AGR famous about Gjirokastrë-the  
‘Kadare wrote a famous novel about Gjirokastra.’
- f. Autobuset **për Gjirokastrë** niset për një orë.  
bus-the for Gjirokastrë leaves in an hour  
‘The bus for Gjirokastra leaves in an hour.’

Our informants confirmed the contrast between locative and non-locative Ps ((15)b comes from Dalina Kallulli’s comment on an attested example):

- (15) a. shpënzimet **për shkollë\*(n)** (Dalina Kallulli, Renata Topciu, p.c.)  
expenses-the for school-the  
‘the expenses for the school’
- b. i procesit të mësimit **në shkollë\*(n)** (Dalina Kallulli,  
AGR process-the.OBL AGR education-the.OBL in school(the) p.c.)  
‘of the process of education in school’

According to Vătăşescu (1989) and Bujar Rushiti (p.c.), article drop is obligatory with the locative prepositions *në* ‘in’, *mbi* ‘on’, *nën* ‘under’, *ndër* ‘among’, *nëpër* ‘through’, *përmbi* ‘above’:

- (16) a. varej **mbi tryezë** (Vătăşescu 1989:350-351)  
hang.IMPF.3S over table  
‘It was hanging over the table’
- b. u hodhën **mbi armikun**  
REFL threw.3P on enemy-the  
‘They jumped on the enemy’

These data indicate that in Albanian the zero-allomorph of [def] reflects a locative case, rather than a case-less form as proposed by Giurgea (2022, 2024) for Romanian. Notice that prepositions in Albanian may also take nominative and ablative case, in which case no article drop occurs, and Albanian does not have prepositional case markers like Romanian does, so there is no reason to claim that the article that is dropped occurs in caseless environments.

This case that is reflected in article drop extends to instrumental ‘with’, but not to comitative ‘with’ (and the related complements), as in the examples below (from Vătăşescu 1989: 354-355):

- (17) degjojmë **me veshë\*(t)**  
hear.1P with ears(\*the)  
‘We hear with the(our) ears’

- (18) a. sillet mirë **me** **shokët**  
 behaves well with friends-the  
 ‘(S)he behaves well with his/her friends.’  
 b. luftoj **me** **pengesat**  
 struggle.1S with obstacles-the  
 ‘I’m struggling with the obstacles’

Article drop is also found in Macedonian, but there it is a recent phenomenon mostly found in the colloquial language, according to Prendergast (2017). Considering the fact that article drop is more frequent in regions that were in contact with Aromanian and is entirely absent from the closely related Bulgarian language, Prendergast attributes this phenomenon to the contact with Aromanian.

The same explanation of the origin of article drop is proposed by Prendergast (2017) for Albanian. The arguments for this proposal are: (i) in Old Albanian, we find a special case, the locative, in contexts where article drop occurs in Modern Albanian. The locative, which only occurs in the definite declension, as *-t* for both numbers (opposed to Acc. sg. masc.+fem. *-n(ë)*, neuter *-të*, plural *-të*), is attested in all dialects of Albanian. (ii) In Romanian, article drop is much older: it is found since the oldest attestations of the language and is common to all four historical dialects ((Daco-)Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, Istro-Romanian), facts which indicate a common Romanian date.

The Albanian historical data presented by Prendergast are insufficient to demonstrate this thesis. Therefore, we checked his claims on a fragment (around 15 pages) of Gjon Buzuku’s Missal (*Meshari i Gjon Buzukut*), the oldest extensive Albanian text, dating from 1555. Our results by and large support Prendergast’s claims:

(i) there is no article drop in locative PPs with concrete inanimate referents, time intervals and events, also with some generic abstract nouns; the article mostly occurs in the locative, as *-t*, see (19), but there are also some examples of accusatives, see

- (19) *ëmbë qiell-t* ‘in the sky’, *ënbë mal-t* ‘on the mountain’, *për ditë-t* ‘during the day’, *për natë-t* ‘during the night’, *për-ënbi Izrael-t* ‘upon Israel’, *ëndër gjind-t* ‘in the nations’, *ëndë mjesëditë-t* ‘towards South’, *ëndë pjaca-t* ‘in (the) public squares/markets’, *për-ënbi qiell-t* ‘on the sky’, *dierje ënbë e ëndenjuni-t* ‘until sunset’, *ënbë shkam-t* ‘on the chair’, *ënbë kryq-t* ‘on the cross’, *ënde Azje-t* ‘in Asia’, *për-ënbë dhë-t* ‘on Earth’, *me të bame-t* ‘with the deeds’, *ëndë purgatuor-t* ‘in the purgatory’, *ëndë njegullë-t* ‘in the fog’, *ënbë erdhi-t* ‘on the vineyard’, *ëndë e ëngjallun-it* ‘in resurrection’, *ëndër ulqën-it* ‘amidst the wolves’, *me urtë-t* ‘by wisdom’, *me të ditun-it* ‘by knowledge’, *ënbë e dërejtë-t* ‘in justice’, *ëndë fëdigë-t* ‘in torments’, *ëndë gropë-t* ‘in (the) holes’, *ëndë burgje-t* ‘in (the) prisons’, *ëndaj fqinjë-t* ‘among neighbors’  
 (20) (*me na qitunë*) *jashtë ferë-në* ‘to take us out of hell’, *ëm Krisht-në* ‘in Christ’

(ii) instances of zero-article in locative PPs (with unmodified nouns) are mostly with abstract nouns and other mass nouns, which can be analyzed as bare NPs (see (21)a); it also occurs with body-parts (see (21)b); otherwise, it is rare with count Ns; the examples we found, given in (21)c, may be analyzed as articleless weak definites, cf. Engl. *in prison*:

- (21) a. *ën shjenjëtenë* ‘in holiness’, *ëndë e mirë* ‘in good(ness)’, *ëndë karitat* ‘in charity’,  
*ëndë e dërejtë* ‘in justice/righteousness’, *ëndë t’erëtë* ‘in darkness’, *ën paq* ‘in  
peace’, *për gjuk* ‘for judgment’, *për dëshmi* ‘for testimony’, *ëndë urtë* ‘in wisdom’,  
*ëndë zjarm* ‘in fire’, *për të vërtetë* ‘in truth, truly’  
b. *ëndë mend* ‘in mind’, *ën ballë* ‘on the forehead’, *me zemërë* ‘with the(ir) heart’  
c. *pr’udhë* ‘on the way’, *ëndë burg* ‘in prison’

Note that the locative case was also used with the instrumental preposition *me* ‘with’. Matzinger & Schumacher (2018) even call this case ‘instrumental’. It is possible that this form represents the conflation of the Indo-European instrumental and locative cases. The fact that *me* took the *-t* form (instrumental-locative) and now triggers article drop (unlike Romanian *cu* ‘with’) provides support to Prendergast’s (2017) claim that article drop replaces the old locative.

Of course, much more research on the history and geographical varieties of Albanian is required to provide a definite answer, but the limited information we could get is compatible with the idea that article drop in Albanian is more recent than in Romanian and has emerged via contact with Aromanian.

#### 4. Article drop in Romanian dialects and Old Romanian

##### 4.1 South-Danubian Romanian dialects

The general descriptions of the South Danubian dialects do not mention differences from standard Romanian with respect to article drop. However, Isac (2024:96-99) mentions variation: she provides examples both with and without article drop, taken from corpora. She only discusses anaphoric definites in order to be certain that the interpretation is definite, excluding a bare noun construal. Here are some of her examples with no article drop:

- (22) a. *și așa legăt-a căsu cu verughele după caroța*  
and so tied-has coffin-the with chains-the behind carriage-the  
‘and so he tied the coffin with chains behind the carriage’  
(Istro-Romanian, Cantemir 1959: 83, in Isac 2024:98)
- b. *acâțară un fur (...) işirâ ta z-eadă cum va lo-aspîndzură pi*  
caught.3P a thief went-out.3P that SBJV-see.3 how will CL.ACC-hang.3 DOM  
**furlu**  
thief-the  
‘They caught a thief (...) They went out to see how they will hang the thief’  
(Arom. from Dobrogea, Saramandu 2007:238, in Isac 2024:98)
- c. *Mes-a nuntru în palaț, cola flat-av o mușată fêtă (...)* *Elî toț*  
gone-have.3 inside in palace there found-have.3 a beautiful girl they all  
*patru lasat-av pe fata și (...)*  
four left-have DOM girl-the and

‘They went into the palace, where they found a beautiful girl. (...) All four left the girl and (...)’ (Istro-Romanian, Pușcariu 1929:216-217, in Isac 2024:97)

Isac provides no further generalizations or statistics about the exceptions to article drop. Therefore, we examined a number of texts ourselves.

In the Aromanian texts we consulted, we found variation only for human referents. As we can see in Table I, in the first 38 pages of Papahagi’s (1905) fairy tales collection (*Basme*), we found no exception to article drop with inanimates, but with human referring-nouns we found 8 exceptions and 9 instances of article drop (see Table I). As the human referents in these examples are sometimes the main characters in the story (e.g. *moașa* ‘the old woman’ and *aușlu* ‘the old man’), they may have been treated as quasi names. A clear instance of a quasi-name is *amirălu* ‘the emperor’ – function nouns referring to rulers also show this behavior in Old Romanian, see 4.3 below.

Table I: article drop contexts in Papahagi, *Basme*, 1-38

+person		article drop			overt article		
		locative	non-loc.	total	locative	non-loc.	total
	familiar	4		4	-	2	2
	anaphoric	3	2	5	3	3	6
	<b>total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>
inanimate	particular	94	15	109	-	-	0
	generic, weak	52	2	54	-	-	0
	body-parts	32	2	34	-	-	0
	expressions	15		15	-	-	0
	<b>total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

In Megleno-Romanian, the situation is similar. Exceptions to article drop only occur with animates, which are either quasi-names or main characters of a story. In 7 pages of texts from Atanasov (2002), we only found one exception, with a human referent, see (23).

- (23) mearseră **la murarlu** și... (Megleno-Romanian, Atanasov 2002:363)  
 went.3P to miller-the and  
 ‘They went to the miller and (...)’

In the first four fairy tales in Capidan (1928), exceptions to article drop were only found with person-denoting referents, see Table II. As person-denoting referents include divine/supernatural beings and also animals treated as persons in fairy tales, we will use the term ‘personal nouns’. Besides quasi-names (*ampiratu* ‘the emperor’, *Domnu* ‘the Lord’), article drop was found 3 times with the main character of a story (*izmichiaru* ‘the servant’).

Table II: article drop in Capidan, *Literatura populară la meglenoromâni*, p. 23-28

		article drop			overt article		
		locative	non-loc.	total	locative	non-loc.	total
personal	quasi-name	-	-	-	4	3	7
	familiar or anaphoric	2	7	9	1	2	3
	<b>total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
inanimate		28	1	<b>29</b>	-	-	0

In Istro-Romanian, in the first five stories of Cantemir's (1959) collection (p. 5-45), we found a similar situation (see Table III): we found exceptions to article drop with personal quasi-names – *cesaru* ‘the emperor’, *dracu* ‘the devil’, *măia* ‘mom’ (probably *uomu* ‘the man’ referring to the hearer’s husband belongs to this category) – and only two with personal nouns that cannot be quasi-names: *io te ăntrebu de jensca și de uomu* ‘I am asking you about the woman and the man’ (p. 42), *che neca vire (...) e de uomu mușat pul* ‘so that (...) from the man a beautiful bird emerges’ (i.e. ‘the man is turned into a beautiful bird’) (p. 43). Besides, we also encountered 8 exceptions with inanimates, although the drop is largely predominant<sup>8</sup>. Two of them are occurrences of the temporal PP *ăn vera* ‘in summer-the’ (p. 11, 23), which might rely on an adverbial use of the temporal noun (cf. Ro. *dimineața*, Istro-Ro. *damareța* ‘morning-the’ = ‘in the morning’). The other ones are: *marș ăn sacu* ‘go into the bag’ (p. 19), *a zvonit za catra misa* ‘(the bell) rang for the mass’ (p. 43), *nu te ăntrebu io de misa* ‘I’m not asking you about the mass’ (p. 43), *cine va veri la misa* ‘who will come to the mass’ (p. 43), *s-a facut de beseriche că, de altaru jensche și (...)* ‘from the church emerged a horse, from the altar a woman and (...)’ (p. 43). The last example shows that *de* ‘from’ in this use may also trigger article drop (see *de beseriche* ‘from church’ = ‘from that specific church’). Likewise, the word *mișe* ‘mass’, which occurred in three exceptions, is also found with article drop (in the same fragment we find *do vote uâm zvonit za cătra mișe* ‘twice I rang the bell for the mass’, *cire va ii la mișe* ‘who will go to the mass’, *cine va veri la mișe* ‘who will come to the mass’). If we eliminate the quasi-names, we only get 10 exceptions overall (see last row in Table III), which, compared to the 204 cases of article drop, represent only 4.7% of the contexts of application of the rule. The table also shows that lack of article drop is somewhat more frequent with non-locative uses of prepositions, but the number of examples we found is too small to allow any generalization in this respect.

<sup>8</sup> In Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian we did not find exceptions with inanimates. Isac (2024) gives three examples, but two of them are misinterpreted. In (i), *la cafenelu ți ira Yiani* ‘to the coffee house where Yiani was’ is not an article drop context because the NP contains a relative clause; Isac reads *ți* as ‘there’ (instead of ‘where’).

(i) Dusi la cafene, la cafenelu ți ira Yiani (Arom.)  
went to coffee-house to coffee-house-the where was Yiani

(Isac 2024:99, < Papazizi-Papatheodorou 1996: 66)

In the second example, taken from Atanasov (2002:380), there is indeed an article with an unmodified noun, but the DP is not anaphoric, it is part of a complex proper name which appears with some variation, first as *Ropa din căreașă* ‘rock/precipice-the from cherry’, then as *Ropa di căreașa* ‘rock/precipice-the of cherry-the’; it might be that the second term is also a proper name, in which case *-a* is not dropped (see 2.2 above). The third example could not be checked.

Table III: article drop in Cantemir, *Texte istroromâne*, p. 5-24

		article drop			overt article		
		locative	non-loc.	total	locative	non-loc.	total
personal	quasi-name	-	-	0	12	5	17
	anaphoric/familiar	1	5	6	-	2	2
	generic	3	-	3	-	-	0
	<b>total</b>	4	5	<b>9</b>	12	17	<b>19</b>
animal		2	1	<b>3</b>			
inanimate		167	25	<b>192</b>	4	4	<b>8</b>
total excluding quasi-names		173	31	<b>204</b>	4	6	<b>10</b>

#### 4.2 Daco-Romanian varieties

The dialectology treatise edited by V. Rusu mentions only two regional peculiarities (i.e., differences from Standard Romanian) with respect to article drop: (i) the preposition *pentru* ‘for’ may occur without article drop in Maramureş, Bucovina, Sălaj and Năsăud (Vulpe 1984:341, Marin & Marinescu 1984:380):

- (24) **pântru zmeura** cobora ursul (Vulpe 1984:341)  
 for raspberry-the went-down.IMPF.3s bear-the  
 ‘The bear used to come down for the raspberries’

(ii) In Transylvania (in the area around Sibiu), there are examples with the preposition *la* ‘to, at’ followed by a personal noun without article drop: *la doctoru* ‘to the doctor’ (Marin & Marinescu 1984:380). However, this might be an instance of the quasi-name pattern discussed in section 2.2.

#### 4.3 Old Romanian

Studies on Old Romanian noticed some variation with respect to article drop: there are examples where article drop does not occur, and, more seldom, where it does although the noun is modified (Nedelcu 2016:430-431, Stan 2013:33, Mica 2022). According to Mica (2024), the exceptions are more frequent in the oldest period of the language (1500-1650). With respect to the noun, the exceptions to article drop are mostly found with nouns referring to persons, in particular those with well-known, clearly identifiable referents (Nedelcu 2016, Pană-Dindelegan 2016:81-82, Mica 2022), e.g. *doamna* ‘the lady’, *soltanul* ‘the sultane’, *împăratul* ‘the emperor’, *paşa* ‘the pasha’, *bălaurul* ‘the dragon’. For these, Pană-Dindelegan (2016:82) suggests a ‘contextual recategorization of the noun as a proper name’, which corresponds to our ‘quasi-name’ type presented in section 2.2 above and also attested in South-Danubian dialects (see section 4.1). With respect to the prepositions, *pentru* ‘for’ is often exempt from article drop (Nedelcu 2016:431). This corresponds to the pattern attested in Northern Romanian varieties (see 4.2 above).

Mica (2024) is a large corpus research devoted to this issue. She classifies the examples according to the following parameters: (i) semantic type of noun, where she distinguishes personal and four types of non-personal nouns (prototypical, collective, mass, abstract); (ii) number (sg. vs. pl.); (iii) period (first stage of Old Romanian, 1500-1650 vs. last stage of Old Romanian, 1651-1780). All the prepositions are discussed, without distinguishing those that lack article drop in Modern Romanian (*cu* ‘with’ and prepositionally used comparative elements such as *ca* ‘as, than’, *decât* ‘than’, Old Ro. also *de* ‘than, from, of’). This study is useful due to the large amount of data, but has some important drawbacks: (i) no distinction is made between bare nouns and true definites (therefore, the larger amount of zero article in plurals found by Mica may be due to the inclusion of bare nouns); (ii) there is no separate counting of quasi-names, some of which reject article drop even today, e.g. *Domnul* ‘the Lord’, *Fiul* ‘The Son (i.e. Jesus)’, *dracul* ‘the devil’, *Tatăl* ‘the Father (i.e. God)’; therefore, not all the examples with article for the [+person +singular] conditions are exceptions to the article drop rule of Modern Romanian; (iii) no semantic distinctions within definites are considered (categories such as anaphoric, generic, familiar, weak, dependent/referentially variable are never used). For these reasons, we had to conduct our own corpus research.

Before presenting our own results, we provide a statistic based on Mica (2024), which confirms the correlation between the +person feature and the absence of article drop – see Table IV, where we added the numbers given by Mica for the various prepositions, eliminating *de* ‘of’ and *fără* ‘without’, which often take bare NPs, and the elements that do not trigger article drop in modern Romanian (*cu* ‘with’, *ca* ‘as’, *decât* ‘than’).<sup>9</sup>

Table IV: def-marking on unmodified Ns in Mica (2024)  
after Ps other than *de*, *fără*, *cu*, *ca*, *decât*

	personal nouns		count non-personal nouns	
	+def	-def	+def	-def
texts from 1520-1650	206 (41%)	296 (59%)	7 (1.5%)	440 (98.5%)
texts from 1660-1780	396 (29%)	991 (71%)	21 (3%)	661 (97%)

Our study, restricted to texts from the oldest period (16<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries) revealed a different picture, more similar to Modern Romanian: we only found 25% absence of article drop with personal nouns, and most of the examples can be analyzed as quasi-names. Moreover, a number of exceptions are due to the prepositions *pentru* ‘for, by’ and *derept* ‘for, because of’, which are often exempt from article drop. If we eliminate quasi-names and these prepositions, the exceptions to article drop are rather sporadic.

Our corpus comprises religious and historical texts, as well as documents:

(i) religious texts: *Codicele Voronețean* ‘The Voroneț Codex’ (1563-1583, with a lost older original) and Coresi’s *Tâlcul evangheliilor și Molitvenic rumânesc* ‘The Gospels and Romanian Prayer Book’ (1567-1568)

<sup>9</sup> Among the four categories of non-personal nouns distinguished by Mica –prototypical, collective, mass, and abstract – we considered only the first two categories, because article-less mass and abstract nouns are more likely to represent bare nominals (remember that +/-definiteness was not taken into account by Mica).

(ii) historical texts: Mihail Moxa's *Cronica universală* 'The Universal Chronicle' (1620) and Grigore Ureche's *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* 'The Chronicle of Moldova' (1642-1647, pp. 57-115)

(iii) documents: *Documente și însemnări românești din secolul al XVI-lea* 'Romanian Documents and Notes from the 16th century'; 4 volumes of documents from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century: DIR XVII A (Moldova), I. 1601-1605, DIR XVII A (Moldova), II. 1606-1610, DIR XVII A (Moldova), IV. 1616-1620, DIR XVII B (Țara Românească), II. 1611-1615.

Using electronic versions of these texts, we searched for all the various prepositions that trigger article drop in Modern Romanian. We extracted all the examples with personal nouns (in article drop contexts). For non-personal nouns, where article drop is almost general (see Table IV above), we only extracted the examples without drop (the exceptions). The results are as follows:

(i) Most nouns without drop belong to the quasi-name category – referents well-established for the speaker and hearer or for the speaker's community:

(a) Nouns conventionally used for referring to divine/supernatural beings: *Tatăl* 'the Father', *Fiul* 'the Son', *Domnul* 'the Lord', *Părintele* 'the Father', *dracul* 'the devil', *Precista, preacurata* 'the perfectly pure, immaculate (FEM)' (= Virgin Mary), *spășitorul* 'the Savior'

(b) Kinship terms, referring to the speaker's relatives: *părintele* 'the father'; we include here, as being in a kinship relation to the entire humanity, *strămoașa* 'the ancestor(F)', referring to Eve

(c) Names of (political, administrative, military, ecclesiastic) functions: *împăratul* 'the emperor' (45 ex.), *domnul* 'the king' (the title of the sovereigns of the Romanian states) (4 ex.), *craiu* 'the king' (used for the sovereigns of Catholic states) (7 ex.), *papa* 'the pope' (1 ex.), *vornicul* 'a sort of minister' (1 ex.), *gărdinariul* 'the cardinal' (2 ex.), *pârcălabul* 'the prefect/mayor' (1 ex.), *părintele* 'the priest' (2 ex.), *giupânul* 'the gentleman, master' (1 ex.), *împărăteasa* 'the empress' (1 ex.), *miiășul* 'the commander (of a thousand men)', (2 ex.), *vătașul* 'the captain/overseer' (1 ex.).

These nouns are only in the singular in our corpus. They don't have variable reference (with one exception), nor generic reference. We do not include here referents new/unfamiliar for the hearer: indirect anaphora (ex. 'some man X ... *the children...*'), anaphora with an indefinite antecedent. With generics, article drop is the rule, as in (25):

- (25) ce se cade a fi și a se ști **întru domni** și întru țer[i]  
what REFL ought.3S to be and to REFL know among lords and among countries  
'What ought to be and to be known among lords and among countries'  
(DIR XVII, B. II,12 [1611])

Types (a) and (b) above have remained exempt from article drop to this day, although not always with the same nouns (e.g. *părinte* 'father' is nowadays exempt of article drop only in the meaning 'priest'). For type (c), the modern language has article drop, except for some familiar uses (*șefu* 'the boss'):



- (26) a. și-l duse legat la împăratul (Moxa, C. 152)  
 and-him brought.3 bound.MS to emperor-the  
 b. și-l duse legat la împărat(\*ul) (Modern Ro.)  
 and-him brought.3 bound.MS to emperor(\*-the)  
 ‘and he brought him bound to the emperor’

(ii) Regarding prepositions, *pentru* and *derept* ‘for’ show many exceptions, although they can also occur with article drop; the exceptions are particularly common with abstract nouns.

(iii) In some instances when the article occurs on an adjectival/participial base (see (27)), the presence of the article might be explained by the presence of a null noun, in which case the structure would not constitute an exception, because the DP does not consist only of  $D_{+def}$  and  $N^0$  (cf. Modern Romanian *la ultimul* ‘at last-the’, with N-ellipsis: [ $D_{+def}$ [*ultimul* [ $NP\emptyset$ ]])).

- (27) n-ară putea bate așa **pre nevinovatul** (Coresi, T. Ev. - Molitv. 29<sup>v</sup>)  
 not-would.3S can beat so DOM innocent-the  
 ‘He couldn’t beat like that the innocent (person).’

If we eliminate all these situations, we are left with a total of 9 exceptions to the rule, for personal nouns, from a total number of 146 instances of overt definiteness, see Table V:

Table V: article drop of personal nouns in our corpus

<b>Personal nouns, +def (no article drop)</b>			
names for divine/supernatural beings	54	Total quasi-names: 125	Total: 137
kinship terms anchored to the speaker	3		
names of functions, familiar sg. referents	68		
with <i>derept</i> and <i>pentru</i> ‘for’	5		
with adjectival/participial bases	7		
others:			
- unique/maximal in a restricted situation, based on specific shared knowledge	2		Total: 9
- unique/maximal in a restricted situation, based on general shared knowledge	1		
- anaphoric	2		
- indirect anaphor	1		
- generic	3		
<b>Total no article drop:</b>	<b>146 (25%)</b>		
<b>Personal nouns, -def (article drop)</b>	<b>434 (75%)</b>		

If we compare these 9 exceptions to the total number of examples with drop (434), we can see that they represent 2.03% (of the total number of 443 situations where article drop was expected to occur).

(iv) With non-personal nouns, exceptions to article drop are indeed few. If we put aside the prepositions *pentru* and *derept* ‘for’, which tend to be exempt of article drop, we are left with sporadic examples. The results are presented in Table VI, where we also register whether the preposition has a locative interpretation or not (for the relevance of this feature, to which we will turn in the next section, see the fact that *pentru* and *derept* are predominantly non-locative, *cu* is always non-locative, as well as the observations about Albanian and Rhaeto-Romance in section 3). We can see that only 21 examples are clear exceptions.

Table VI: nonpersonal nouns without article drop

	local	non-local	
<i>pentru</i> and <i>derept</i>		41	Total: 44
adjectival/participial base	1	2	
<i>în</i> ‘in’	6		Total: 21
<i>întru</i> ‘in’	1		
<i>de</i> ‘of, about, concerning, by, from’		5	
<i>spre/pre</i> ‘on, upon’	4	1	
<i>de pre</i> ‘based on’		3	
<i>prin</i> ‘through, by means of’		1	
Total local/non-local:	12	53	

## 5. The origin of article drop

As we explained in the introduction, we think that this phenomenon, which nowadays is essentially morphosyntactically-triggered, must have resulted from the reanalysis of a semantics-based pattern. For a certain type of definites, the use of the article was variable or not yet established. The speakers misinterpreted the conditions regulating the absence of the article, replacing a semantic conditioning with a formal one: absence of modification and complement of preposition. It is well-known that the emergence of definiteness marking is gradual, the article spreading over time to more and more contexts (see Laury 1997, Lyons 1999, Hawkins 2004, De Mulder & Carlier 2011, Skrzypek 2012, Kraiss 2014, Ortman 2014, Simonenko *forthc.*):

- (28) anaphoric and exophoric > contextual (‘pragmatic’) uniqueness > ‘semantic uniqueness’ (+ particular reference) > generics

What are the relevant features we have to look for? We think that *locative structures with weak definites* must have constituted the basis from which this innovation emerged. Note that under ‘locative’, we include goal, spatial origin (ablative), path (perlative), temporal location.

The fact that article drop originated in locative PPs is strongly suggested by the particular behavior of the preposition *cu* ‘with’. This is the only preposition that never triggers article drop, in all varieties of Romanian. *Cu* is also the only *the only Romanian*

preposition that already lacked any locative meaning in Latin, i.e., at a stage of the language which predates the emergence of articles. All the other prepositions with non-locative uses also have some locative uses or had such uses in the past (as can be established by etymology), as shown in Table VII (in which we also give the old forms and meanings of the prepositions and their etymology)<sup>10</sup>.

Table VII: non-locative and locative uses of Romanian prepositions

	non-locative	locative
<i>de</i> ‘of; from’ (Lat. <i>de</i> )	partitive, genitive, comparative, aboutness (‘about’), cause/agent, certain complements	ablative (origin) (today, usually with a PP complement: <i>de la</i> ‘from at’, <i>de pe</i> ‘from on’, <i>d-in</i> ‘from in’ etc.)
<i>despre</i> < <i>de</i> ‘from’ + <i>spre</i> ‘on’	‘about’	Old Ro.: ‘from (on), from the surface of’
<i>spre/pre/pe</i> ‘on’ (Lat. <i>super</i> )	differential object marker; certain complements	‘on’, ‘onto’, ‘upon’ (later differentiated into <i>pe</i> ‘on’ and <i>spre</i> ‘towards’)
<i>pre/pe</i> ‘through, by’ (Lat. <i>per</i> )	Old Ro.: means (‘by, through’) (Modern Ro. <i>prin</i> < <i>pre</i> + <i>în</i> ‘in’)	perlative (usually with a PP complement: <i>pr-in</i> , <i>pe la</i> , <i>pe după</i> etc.)
<i>de către</i> < <i>de</i> ‘from’ + <i>către</i> ‘towards’	Modern Romanian: agent (‘by’)	Old Ro.: ‘from’
<i>fără</i> ‘without’ (Lat. <i>forās</i> ‘outside’)	‘without’ (Old Ro. usually with a <i>de</i> -PP, and also with the meaning ‘besides’)	locative adverb etymon: Lat. <i>forās</i> ‘outside’
<i>pentru/prentru/printru</i> ‘for’ < <i>pre</i> + <i>întru</i>	purpose, reason (‘for’); Old Ro. also means (‘by’)	‘through, in’ (< <i>pre</i> ‘through’ + <i>întru</i> ‘in, into’ < Lat. <i>intrō</i> )
<i>d(e)rept</i> (< participle, Lat. <i>dērectus/dīrectus</i> ‘straight(ened); oriented towards’)	cause (‘because of’), purpose (‘for’), ‘instead’	‘before, in front of, towards’

<sup>10</sup> The historical perspective on the prepositions explains why *pe* appears twice in the table: with the meaning ‘on’, from which the differential object marking was developed, it continues Latin *super* ‘over’, Old Ro. *spre*. With the meaning ‘through, by’ (perlative marker), it continues Latin *per*, Old Ro. *pre*. In Old Ro. *spre* and *pre* were confounded and evolved together to *pe* (but *pr-* is preserved in the compound with *în* ‘in’: *prin* ‘through the interior of, through, by’). *Spre* with a directional meaning (‘onto, upon, to (the surface of)’) was then differentiated from *pre/pe* and acquired the meaning ‘towards’. The sequences *de* ‘from’ + *spre* and *pre* ‘through’ + *spre* became opaque: *despre* (‘from on’) became an unanalyzable preposition, with the meaning ‘about’ (because of this meaning, we listed it in Table VII); *prespre* (‘through/by on’) was dissimilated to *preste* and then simplified to *peste*, which is nowadays used with the meaning ‘over, above’.

Moreover, the two prepositions which in Old Romanian show a significant number of exceptions to article drop have predominantly non-spatial uses (reason, purpose):

(i) *pentru* ‘for’ already had predominantly non-spatial uses in old Romanian (in the variants *prentru*, *printru*) and had even become specialized for non-spatial uses in the variant *pentru* (see Chivu 1991). The spatial use – perlocative + interior, ‘through (the interior of)’ – was subsequently restricted to the form *printru* which has become in modern Romanian an allomorph of *prin* before the indefinite article (following the distribution of *în/intru* ‘in’), e.g. *prin geam* ‘through the window’ vs. *printr-un geam* ‘through a window’. As we have seen in section 4.2 above, *pentru* is still exempt from article drop in an area of Northern Romania (Maramureş, Bucovina, Năsăud, Sălaj);

(ii) *derept* ‘for, because of; before, in front of’ also had predominantly non-spatial uses since the earliest attestations.

For the fact that article drop originated in locative PPs, one might consider the following explanation: it has been noticed that, in the first stages of development of definiteness marking, the determiners which are to become definite articles tend to be used for important discourse referents (see De Mulder & Carlier 2011 and references therein). Definite locations are often used to specify a spatio-temporal frame and do not become important discourse referents (e.g. *from the pocket*, *on the wall* etc.). This may have led to a higher frequency of zero-marked definites with locative prepositions.

However, this hypothesis does not explain why *absence of modification* is a triggering factor for article drop. This is the reason why we propose that *weak definites* were involved in the emergence of article drop: one of the properties of weak definites is precisely the reduced potential for modification. More precisely, the first piece in our account of the origin of article drop is the hypothesis in (29):

- (29) The definites for which zero-marking after prepositions was allowed, at an unattested stage of Romanian, were the so-called *weak definites* (in the sense of Carlson & Sussman 2005).

Weak definites are new and have variable reference with respect to various operators, being paraphrasable with indefinites (see Carlson and Sussman 2005, Aguilar-Guevara 2014, Schwarz 2014, Krifka & Modarresi 2016, Brocher et al. 2020, Krifka 2021), see (30) (in (30)a, in the relevant reading the newspaper is different each morning and is not familiar to the hearer or anaphoric; in (30)b, the speaker need not have a specific hospital in mind, and the people involved might also have gone to different hospitals):

- (30) a. He’s reading **the newspaper** every morning. = He’s reading a newspaper every morning.  
b. They had to go to **the hospital**. = They had to go to a hospital.

Weak definites introduce arguments of stereotypical activities and have strong lexical restrictions. Thus, as opposed to *the journal* in (30)a, *the book* does not yield a weak reading (presumably, as a name of an activity, *read* alone is sufficient, adding *book* would be too uninformative). In (30)b, *the hospital* behaves as a weak definite only if going to the

hospital is for treatment (the standardized activity associated to hospitals). This is why in (31)b-c *the hospital* cannot have the weak reading.

- (31) a. He's reading the book ≠ He's reading a book  
b. They had to visit the hospital ≠ They had to visit a hospital  
c. They had to go to the hospital for a footage ≠ They had to go to some hospital...

Weak definites may be considered parts of descriptions of kinds of events (Schwarz 2014; see also Krifka & Modarresi 2016 for a similar view)<sup>11</sup>. Definiteness does play a role, in the sense that weak definites are used in situations in which we expect the existence of entities of type N. This is why a weak definite is not appropriate in (32), as Schwarz (2014) pointed out:

- (32) [context: a cruise ship on the Atlantic; in the middle of the ocean]  
a. # We have to get you to the hospital somehow!  
b. We have to get you to a hospital somehow! (Schwarz 2014)

According to Schwarz, the *iota* operator introduced by the definite takes scope very low, within a description of a kind of events, which is then instantiated by the event denoted by the predicate of the clause.<sup>12</sup>

Let us now see why weak definites are the most likely source of the phenomenon of article drop.

(i) *Absence of modification*. Because they are part of descriptions of prototypical activities, weak definites are usually unmodified. As shown by Aguilar-Guevara (2014), only a restricted range of modifiers, which can be considered kind-level modifiers, are allowed. This is shown in (33) with the test of variable reading: in (33)a, Ann and Joan may have gone to different hospitals. This possibility is due to the fact that *the hospital* in *go to the hospital* can have a weak definite reading. If we add an entity-level modifier such as *old*, as in (33)b, the variable reading disappears. This shows that *the old hospital* is not a weak definite. In (33)c, the modifier introduces a kind of hospitals. Therefore, the weak reading is allowed, as can be seen from the possibility of having a variable reading.

- (33) a. Ann went to **the hospital** and Joan did too. (variable reading: weak definite)  
b. Ann went to **the old hospital** and Joan did too. (no variable reading)  
c. Ann went to **the psychiatric hospital** and Joan did too. (variable reading)

(ii) *Variation in the use of the article*. In languages with fully developed articles, absence of THE is still found in certain idiomatic constructions with an interpretation akin to weak definites, in locative PPs, as shown in (34) for English.

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<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Löbner (1985) claims that this type of non-unique definites denote constituents of abstract situations, rather than particular objects.

<sup>12</sup> According to Krifka & Modarresi (2016), the definite is a function of the matrix event therefore it is bound by VP-level existential closure, like existential bare nouns; definiteness comes from the fact that for certain events stereotypical participants are defined.

- (34) a. go to church, go to school, be at school  
 b. be in jail  
 c. go to bed

These constructions involve stereotypical activities: *to church*: for the divine service, *to school*: for learning, *in jail*: for serving a sentence etc. Typically, the noun lacks modification (*\*be in old jail, \*be at music school*). In (35)-(36), we present examples of bare nouns with a weak definite interpretation from Romance languages.

- (35) en prison ‘in prison’, en classe ‘in class (Fr.)  
 (36) a. andare in chiesa ‘go to church’ (It.; cf. Meyer-Lübke 1899: §179)  
 b. entrare in barca ‘get on the boat’  
 c. essere in campagna ‘be in the countryside’  
 d. rimanere in sella ‘stay in the saddle’ (= ‘to stay afloat, keep doing well’)  
 e. (essere) in biblioteca ‘(be) in the library’  
 f. (essere) in giardino ‘(be) in the garden’  
 g. prendere in bocca ‘take in the mouth’  
 h. uscire/partire di/da casa ‘get out of the house, leave home’

(iii) Weak definites usually have *inanimate referents*. Aguilar-Guevara (2014) lists the types of nouns that allow a weak definite reading; among them, only the type *profession* has a human denotation, with a few verbs (*call the doctor/plumber, go to the doctor, the plumber came* etc.). This could constitute an explanation for the special behavior of personal nouns with respect to article drop. It is possible that article drop was extended later to personal nouns, which would explain the variability found in South-Danubian dialects and the preservation of the article with quasi-names, which are all person-denoting.

(iv) Weak definites often occur in locative PPs. To check this claim, since weak definites occur in stereotypical activities, we have to consider the activities that may have been stereotypical at the unattested stage of Romanian where article drop emerged (presumably during the Common Romanian or Proto-Romanian period, i.e., before the separation from the South-Danubian dialects). In (37) we list a series of such stereotypical activities or situations, whose descriptions contain locative PPs:

- (37) a. go to the forest/woods, be in the forest (for work), go to the field, work in the garden, in the vineyard, in the orchard, go (for work) to the vineyard/orchard  
 b. take (the heard, the cattle) to the pasture  
 c. put/bring... in the wagon (Rom. *pune/duce în căruță*)  
 d. put (food) on the fire, warm/stay by the fire (Rom. *pune pe foc, (se) încălzi/sta la foc*)  
 e. put (food) on the table, be/sit at the table (Rom. *pune la masă, fi/sta la masă*)  
 f. lie on the bed (*sta în pat*), get out of bed (Rom. *se scula din pat*)  
 g. go to the plowing, be at (the) plowing (Rom. *se duce la arat, fi la arat*)  
 h. go to church, be in church (Rom. *merge/fi la biserică*)  
 i. go to the market/fair, buy at the market/fair, bring the cows to the fair (Rom. *la*

*târg*)

j. be on the road/way (Rom. *fi pe drum/pe cale*)

According to our hypothesis, there was a stage in Proto-Romanian where the article could be absent on weak definites, but not on regular definites, as exemplified in (38)-(39), where the a examples are weak definites and the b examples are regular definites:

- (38) a. Pune mâncarea **spre focu** / lemne **'n focu**  
puts food-thes on fire woods in fire  
'(S)he's putting/puts the food on the fire /woods on the fire'  
b. Se ul'tă **la focu-lu**  
REFL watches to fire-the  
'(S)he's watching the fire'
- (39) a. Lucrează/Mearge **la viñe**  
works goes to/at vineyard  
'He's working in the vineyard/going to the vineyard'  
b. Mearge **la viñ-a de susu / la viñ-a veacl'e**  
goes to vineyard-the of up to vine-the old  
'He's going to the upper/old vineyard'

Moreover, it is likely that there was speaker variation, some speakers using the article also for weak definites. In this situation, the frequency of the pattern in (38)a-(39)a led to a reanalysis, *in particular for those speakers who used DEF for both types*: the presence of the article in cases of modification such as (39)b was reanalyzed as being due to modification, rather than to the fact that the definite is not weak. As a result, in examples of the type in (38)b, i.e., unmodified regular definites, the article began to be omitted. This is how the article drop rule emerged.

An intermediate Proto-Romanian stage might have looked like the one we have seen in the Fodom dialect in section 3.1: zero article only with locative Ps and with nouns indicating prototypical locations or prototypical objects in a location.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The rule that requires definite article drop in maximal nominal projections consisting only of  $D_{\text{def}}$  and  $N^0$  is a crosslinguistically rare phenomenon that lacks a semantic or phonological motivation. This rule is found in all branches of Romanian, being reconstructible for Proto-Romanian. It is also found in Modern Albanian, for locative prepositions, and some Macedonian varieties, but in these languages, it seems to have arisen through contact with Aromanian (Prendergast 2017). A similar phenomenon, but restricted to locative Ps and certain nouns (that prototypically denote locations or objects expected to be found in a certain environment) is operative in Ladin (the dialect of Fodom, see Mattiuzzi 2020). Given the lack of synchronic motivation for the article drop rule, it is interesting to see how it may have emerged. Our hypothesis is that it originated via the reanalysis of a pattern of variation which was initially semantically motivated: in certain

DPs selected by prepositions, the article could be present or absent with no meaning difference. As this occurred predominantly in DPs whose N had no modifiers, the phenomenon was reinterpreted as a rule that allowed zero realization of the article in DPs consisting only of  $D_{\text{def}}$  and  $N^0$ . The fact that zero variant subsequently became obligatory was probably the result of the tendency towards economy (of pronunciation). We found that the prepositions that triggered this rule were initially locative (this is why *cu* ‘with’, which has never had locative uses during the entire history of Romanian, is always exempt of article drop, and in some varieties *pentru* and *derept* ‘for’, which had predominantly non-locative uses, are also exceptions to the rule). Moreover, diachronic and dialectal evidence suggests that article drop was generalized earlier to inanimates than to person-denoting nouns (even today, a sub-type of person-denoting nouns, the ‘quasi-names’, do not undergo article drop). Based on these three conditions – (i) locative Ps, (ii) absence of modification, and (iii) inanimate Ns – we identified the semantic type where article drop originated as the *weak definites* in the sense of Carlson & Sussman (2005), the type *go to the hospital, be in church, be on the way*, where variation in the use of the definite article is attested in various languages (see Engl. *in church, go to jail, be at school*, Fr. *en classe* ‘in class’, It. *entrare in barca* ‘get on the boat’, *andare in chiesa* ‘go to church’ etc.).

We also present the results of a corpus research on Old Romanian texts and small-scale corpus researches on South-Danubian dialects, which show that the exceptions to article drop are mostly confined to person-denoting nouns and, at least in Old Romanian, most of the examples qualify as quasi-names.

For Albanian, Prendergast’s (2017) claim that article drop replaced the old locative case appears to be supported by the data. As the locative case showed no variation depending on modification, the fact that the zero form only replaced the locative in case of absence of modification, otherwise the accusative article being used, may be explained by the influence of Aromanian, as proposed by Prendergast, but could also be due to the existence of variation in cases of weak definites, as we proposed for Proto-Romanian. More research on Old and dialectal Albanian is needed in order to decide between these alternatives. The recent date of the phenomenon in Macedonian and its absence from the closely related Bulgarian support Prendergast’s hypothesis of an external influence for this language.

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