

AGREEMENT WITH COLLECTIVE NOUNS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN: A SILENT NOUN AND DISTRIBUTIONAL APPROACH

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Abstract: The current study looks at agreement with collective nouns with functional heads (such as *mulțime* ‘multitude’/ *multitude*) and semi-lexical heads (such as *poliție* ‘police’/ *police*) in English and Romanian. Regarding collective nouns with functional heads, both English and Romanian allow both singular and plural agreement. However, while English allows both singular and plural agreement with collectives with semi-lexical collective heads, Romanian only allows singular agreement. The study proposes a silent noun and distributional account to explain this puzzling behaviour. On the one hand, it argues that all collective nouns involve two nominals, but NP2 may be silent. On the other hand, it argues that collectives with a semi-lexical first nominal are subject to a crosslinguistic agreement parameter, such that in English, agreement is variable, while in Romanian, it is not. One possible reason for this difference could be related to whether the second nominal in a collective is subject-like or not. In English, both nominals in a collective extended projection may be subjects (the first is a DP, and the second is a bare noun). In Romanian, however, only the first nominal (DP1) can be a subject, while the second (NP2) cannot, since bare nouns typically do not function as subjects in Romanian. Because of this, in semi-lexical collective nouns, Romanian speakers realize agreement only with the subject-like DP1.

Keywords: collectives, agreement, functional heads, semi-lexical heads, silent nouns, distribution, subject-likelihood.

1. AIM

The paper looks at the contrast between Romanian and English regarding verbal agreement with collective nouns. Strikingly, with a collective noun such as *government*, English seems to allow two forms of agreement (singular or plural), depending on whether the collective noun is understood as referring to a unit/a group or the members forming that group:²

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² While we here refer to agreement with collectives in English in general, it bears mentioning that there is variability in agreement across different dialects of English, with British English speakers generally allowing for more variability than American English speakers (see Levin 2001, Smith 2012, 2017).

- (1) a. The Government has decided to remove fish farms from the water.
(Northisland Gazette, 2023, 11 October)
b. The Government have decided that judicial salaries will increase by 1.5 per cent.
(<http://services.parliament.uk/.../20090331...>) (example from Croitor and Sorin 2011)

In contrast, Romanian only allows singular agreement (Croitor and Sorin 2011):

- (2) Guvernul a decis.....
Government.the have.3SG decided

This may lead us to conclude that agreement with collectives is semantically driven in English, whereas it is syntactically based in Romanian, receiving a singular value. However, Romanian does not always impose singular agreement with collectives. As pointed out by Tănase-Dogaru (2009, 2022b), with collective nouns whose head is more functional such as those in (3a), Romanian also allows and even favours plural agreement.³ More specifically, it allows both singular and plural agreement depending on the meaning intended by the speaker, just as in English (4): if the speaker intends to focus on the unit/group, then singular agreement can be used (3b); however, if the speaker intends to focus on the individual members making up the group, plural agreement is preferred (3a):⁴

- (3) a. *O mulțime de rude ne-au vizitat.*
a multitude of relatives us have visited.
'A multitude of relatives have visited us.'
b. *O mulțime de rude ne-a vizitat.*
a multitude of relatives us has visited.
'A multitude of relatives has visited us.'
(4) a. A multitude of relatives have visited us.
b. A multitude of relatives has visited us.

The current study tries to account for the contrast in agreement with collectives between English and Romanian by recourse to two ingredients. On the one hand, (i) the study puts forth the proposal that **every collective noun is essentially a sequence of two nominals, with the second nominal being often silent**, not spelled out (this proposal can capture even collective nouns such as *guvern* 'government' / *government* or *parlament* 'parliament', which are not typically succeeded by PPs containing a second nominal). On the other hand, the study argues in favour of (ii) the idea that **there is a parametric structural difference**

³ There seems to be variation in agreement depending on the nouns used. For instance, Tănase-Dogaru (2022b) considers that, if *sumedenie* 'hord' is used instead of *mulțime* 'multitude' in (3b), the sentence becomes unacceptable, and that only plural agreement is possible with this noun.

⁴ Please note that, according to de Vries (2015, 2017), (4) gives rise to distributivity inferences (from the whole unit to the individual members) via lexical distributivity in contrast to a plural such as *rudele* 'the relatives', which gives rise to distributivity inferences via operator-based distributivity. In other words, the noun *mulțime* 'multitude' in (3) and (4) may be considered lexically ambiguous between a collective and a distributive interpretation.

regarding agreement with a collective sequence of two nominals in English and Romanian. This difference may be motivated by **structural substitutability** (see Yang 2016, Li and Schuler 2023, Brain 1987, Maratsos and Chalkley 1980), i.e., substituting the first nominal subject, which is a DP with the second nominal, which is a bare noun. Since bare nouns can be subjects in English but they are very rarely subjects in Romanian, this amounts to arguing that the parameter of agreement with collective nouns with semi-lexical heads is sensitive to the subject-like nature of the second nominal.

2. A CLASSIFICATION OF COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Before delving into the proposal, we present some general background assumptions about collective nouns that the study embraces. Collective nouns represent nouns denoting a group or set of people, things, etc. (Leech 1989). Syntactically, they represent a subset of nouns that appear in the first nominal position in a binominal quantitative structure (a pseudo-partitive structure). Tănase-Dogaru (2009: 101–102, 2022b: 74–76) discusses two categories of collectives depending on the degree of lexical context expressed by the first nominal:

(a) collectives with functional heads, such as those in (5):

(5) *grămadă / mulțime / sumedenie*
crowd / multitude / horde (a lot of)

(b) collectives with semi-lexical heads, which can be further subclassified into multiple categories:

(i) nouns relating to politics and army-life:

(6) *adunare* / ‘assembly’, *armată* / ‘army’, *cabinet* / ‘cabinet’, *senat* / ‘senate’, *guvern* / ‘government’, *parlament* / ‘parliament’, *partid* / ‘party’, *opozitie* / ‘opposition’, *minister* / ‘ministry’, *consiliu* / ‘council’, *congres* / ‘congress’, *presă* / ‘press’, *comitet* / ‘committee’, *popor* / ‘people’, *trupă* / ‘troop’, *batalion* / ‘battalion’, *detașament* / ‘division’, *flotă* / ‘fleet’, *societate* / ‘society’, *muncitorime* / ‘proletariat’, *clică* / ‘clique’, *bandă* / ‘gang’

(ii) nouns relating to trade(s) and industry

(7) *firmă* / ‘firm’, *companie* / ‘company’, *personal* / ‘personnel’, *departament* / ‘department’, *sindicat* / ‘union’, *club* / ‘club’, *echipă* / ‘team’

(iii) nouns relating to religion

(8) *congregație* / ‘congregation’, *parohie* / ‘parish’, *conclav* / ‘conclave’, *preoțime* / ‘clergy’, *cor* / ‘chorus’, *biserică* / ‘church’

(iv) nouns relating to education and sports

(9) *echipă* / ‘team’, *clasă* / ‘class’, *școală* / ‘school’, *public* / ‘audience’

(v) nouns relating to animal life

(10) *cireadă* / ‘herd’, *turmă* / ‘flock’, *stol* / ‘bevy’, *roi* / ‘swarm’, *haită* / ‘pack’

Importantly, semi-lexical nouns are encoded as semi-lexical in the lexicon, differing from functional nouns in that they are lexically richer and from fully lexical nouns in that they are lexically poorer (Klockmann 2017). That semi-lexical nouns are semantically richer than functional nouns is evident if we think about the fact that, as pointed out to by Klockmann (p.c.), a group of X will always be a multitude of X but a group of politicians will not always count as a parliament.

Additionally, as already mentioned, the distinction between collectives with functional heads and collectives with semi-lexical heads impacts agreement in Romanian: functional collectives allow both singular and plural agreement, while semi-lexical collectives only allow singular agreement. With these considerations in mind, we now move on to a proposal about the structure of collective nouns.

3. A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF COLLECTIVES: A SILENT NOUN PROPOSAL

3.1. Silent Noun proposal in a nutshell

While most collective nouns appear as sequences of two nominal phrases, not all collective nouns allow the spelling out of a second nominal. Please note that, with functional collective nouns, it is possible to spell out N2:

- (11) a. *a multitude* (of students/teachers/mice etc.)
 b. *o mulțime* (de studenți/profesori/șoareci etc.)
 a multitude (of students/teachers/mice etc.)
 ‘a multitude (of students/teachers/mice etc.)’

This is also the case with some semi-lexical collective nouns such as *committee* or *swarm*:

- (12) a. a committee (of students/teachers)
 a swarm (of bees/mosquitoes)
 b. *un comitet* (de studenți/profesori)
 a committee (of students/teachers)
 ‘a committee (of students/teachers)’
 c. *un roi* (de albine/țânțari)
 a swarm (of bees/mosquitoes)
 ‘a swarm (of bees/mosquitoes)’

However, in the case of many semi-lexical collective nouns, it is odd to spell N2 out as it is already entailed by the first nominal:

- (13) a. **??a government of ministers*
 **??a parliament of politicians*
 b. **?? un guvern de miniştri*
 a government of ministers
 ‘a government of ministers’
 **?? un parlament de politicieni*
 a parliament of politicians
 ‘a parliament of politicians’

The acceptability of spelling out the second nominal seems to be inversely correlated with its predictability based on the first nominal. In (11) and (12), the specification of N2 brings new information: given that committees could involve students, teachers, and many other categories, and given that swarms could refer to bees, mosquitoes, or other insects, specifying the content of N2 is important and necessary from a communicative perspective. In contrast, in (13), since the government is composed of ministers and the parliament of politicians, it is unnecessary to further specify the second nominal. However, this second nominal becomes visible in contexts involving adjective modification such as (14)⁵, which are acceptable in natural language:

- (14) a government of incompetent ministers
 a parliament of corrupt politicians

We take such examples as evidence that, regardless of the acceptability of continuing N1 with an N2, which, as we have seen, has to do with the likelihood with which we can infer the constituents of N1, collectives involving semi-lexical heads all involve two nominals. We thus put forth the proposal in (15).

- (15) Proposal: All collective nouns in English are *NP1 of NP2* structures, where NP2 is a silent plural noun (such as ENTITIES, PEOPLE, INSECTS, a.o.).

Importantly, NP2 may but is not always spelled out (see (11), (12), (13)). Even in cases where it is spelled out on first mention, it is no longer spelled out on second mention (e.g., *A swarm of bees attacked me. The swarm was so aggressive I got scared*).

Further support in favour of a silent noun analysis comes from multiple other structures in English, Romanian, and other languages, where a great variety of silent nouns have been postulated: NUMBER, AMOUNT, YEAR, HOUR (Kayne 2003a, b, 2005, Tănase-Dogaru 2008, 2009), KIND (Leu 2008), TOKENS (van Riemsdijk 2005), GO (van

⁵ We are grateful to Ion Giurgea and Larisa Avram for their suggestions in this regard.

Riemsdijk 2002), PLACE, TIME, PERSON (Corver 2008). (16) and (17) exemplify two such structures (Tănase-Dogaru 2008, 2009), one involving the silent noun NUMBER (see 16), and another involving the silent noun HOUR (see 17).

- (16) a. John has few books =
 John has few NUMBER books.
 John has too few a number of books / the fewest number of books.
 b. Ce de mașini sunt aici!
 ‘What of cars are here’
 what a great number of cars!
- (17) a. It’s five.
 It’s five HOUR.
 b. E cinci.
 is five
 c. E ora cinci.
 is hour five

Collective nouns could be another instance of structure involving silent nouns. For collectives where N2 is entailed by N1, the silent N2 can be very specific, lexically rich, as in (18). In contrast, for collectives where N2 is not necessarily entailed by N1, N2 can be less specific, as can be seen in (19).

- (18) *a government OF MINISTERS*
 a parliament OF POLITICIANS
 (19) *a committee OF PEOPLE*
 a swarm of INSECTS
 a multitude OF ENTITIES

At this stage, we thus propose that the ability to spell out the second nominal (NP2) in collective nouns hinges on the predictability of N2 based on the first nominal (NP1). When NP2 provides new, informative content, it can be spelled out, whereas when it is already implied by NP1, it remains silent. This supports our broader hypothesis that all collective nouns in English are structured as *NP1 of NP2*, with N2 often being a silent plural noun.

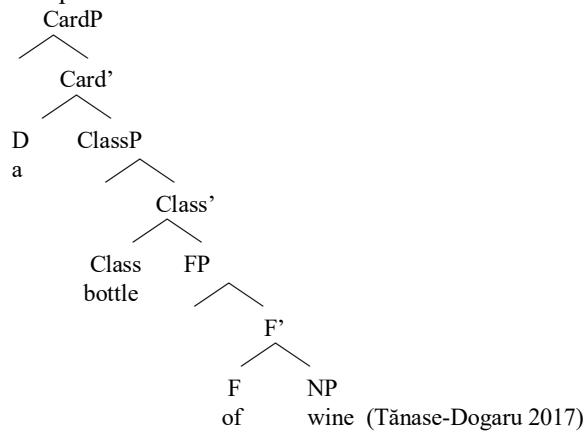
We now delve into the question of how this particular silent noun proposal interacts with previous analyses provided for collectives or other pseudo-partitive structures, and, in particular, what kind of analyses can capture the puzzling behaviour of agreement with collectives in Romanian and English.

3.2. The structure of collectives

In proposing a structure for collective nouns, we build on previous analyses provided for pseudo-partitive structures. Pseudo-partitives have been analyzed as a classifier-noun

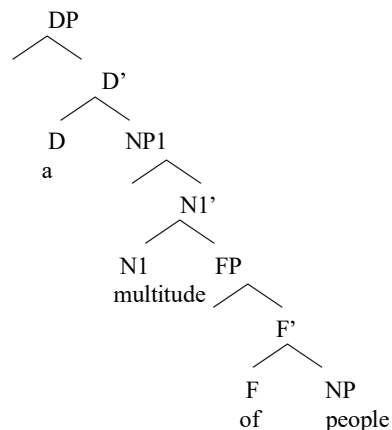
sequence, where the classifier is a semi-lexical or functional noun (see Tănase-Dogaru 2007, 2017, 2022a, van Riemsdijk 1998). Essentially, pseudo-partitives represent extended double-headed projections, with one lexical and one functional/semi-lexical head (see van Riemsdijk 1998). The structure in (20) exemplifies such a structure for the sequence *a bottle of wine*, consisting of two heads: the functional/ semi-lexical classifier head *bottle* and the lexical head *wine*.

(20) Pseudo-partitives

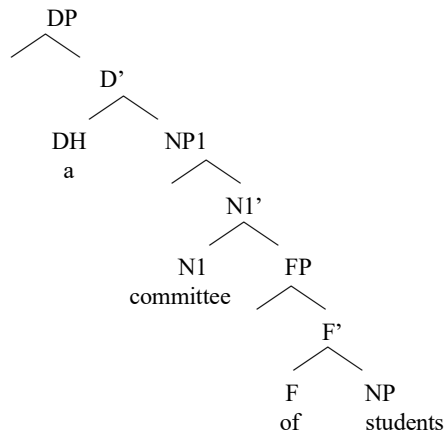


Building on this analysis, we propose a similar structure for collectives with a functional N1 and collectives with a semi-lexical N1. Collectives with a functional N1 such as *a multitude of people* are represented in (21), while (22) structurally represents collectives with a semi-lexical N1 such as *a committee of students*, which are typically followed by an overtly expressed N2. Given the possibility to combine collectives both with definites and indefinites, we have employed a DP projection rather than a Cardinality projection.

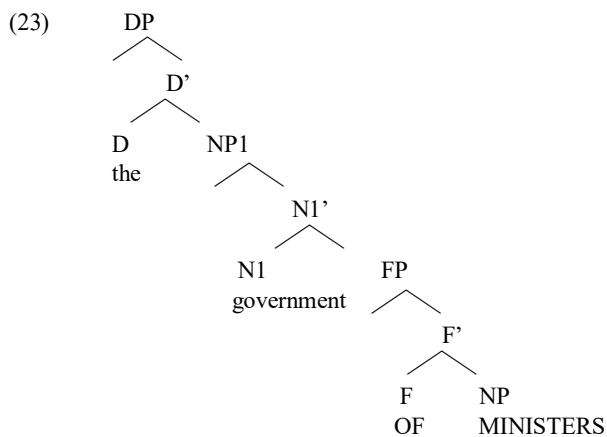
(21) Collective nouns with a functional N1



(22) Collective nouns with a semi-lexical N1 and a typically overtly expressed N2



We propose that collectives with a semi-lexical N1 such as *the government*, which are typically not followed by an overtly expressed N2, can be represented as in (23), such that N2 is a silent noun, entailed by N1. In this way, the behaviour of collective nouns can be captured in a consistent manner, by means of a similar structure.



While collective nouns—whether involving functional or semi-lexical N1s—follow a consistent double-headed structure, the second nominal (N2) can be overt or silent depending on its predictability. This variability explains why both nominals are sometimes present, while other times only the first one appears. Crucially, this structural analysis supports the proposal of silent nouns in collectives.

In this context, it is essential to further explore the interaction between collective nouns with a functional/semi-lexical N1 and agreement, as agreement patterns may shed light on the structural make-up of collectives.

3.3. Agreement variability with collectives. On the functional/semi-lexical nature of N1 and the subject-likelihood of N2

As already presented in Section 1 of the current paper, there is an interesting puzzle regarding agreement with collectives in English vs. Romanian. In English, agreement with collectives with functional and semi-lexical N1s is variable, agreeing in singular with N1 or in plural with the plural marker of the (silent/overt) N2. In semantic terms, this means that agreement with a group N1 seen as a unit is singular, while agreement with the members N2 constituting that group is plural. Variability in agreement may thus be considered semantically driven.

In contrast, in Romanian, collective nouns with a (semi)-lexical N1 are *NP1 of NP2* structures where the N1 is the salient head, while collective nouns with a functional N1 are *NP1 of NP2* structures where N2 can also be the salient head. While collective nouns with a (semi)-lexical N1 allow either singular or plural agreement in both languages, in the case of collective nouns with a (semi)-lexical N1, we propose the existence of an **Agreement with Collectives Parameter** such that:

- (a) in English, agreement may check either the singular feature of N1 or the plural feature of N2.
- (b) in Romanian, agreement only checks the singular feature of N1.

Thus, with collectives with a (semi)-lexical N1, agreement is semantic in English but syntactic in Romanian, i.e., singular regardless of whether the speaker's intent is to refer to a group or the members constituting it.

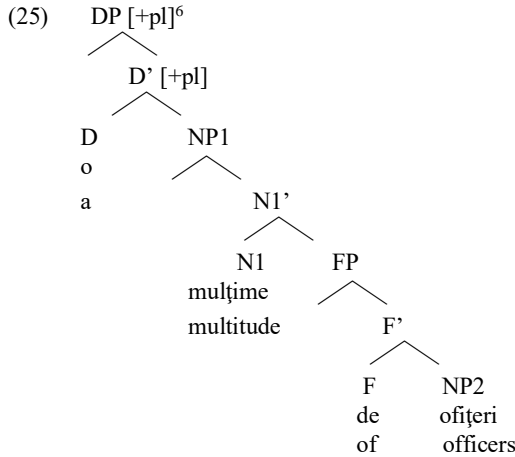
3.3.1. Agreement with collectives with a functional N1

We first discuss agreement with collectives with a functional N1. Such nouns allow variable agreement in both English and Romanian. Just as in English, agreement with size pseudo-partitives seems to be variable (Tănase-Dogaru 2008, 2022a):

- (24) a. A multitude of people has come/have come....
 b. *O grămadă de oameni a venit/ au venit....*
 a multitude of people has come/have come...
 'A multitude of people has come/have come...'

Importantly, agreement has interpretative consequences (Landman 2004, 2016; Rothstein 2009, 2017): when a hearer processes (24a), they understand that the speaker intended to focus on the group as a whole, while in (24b), they understand that the speaker intended to focus on the individual members making up the group.

While singular agreement can be explained through agreement with N1, plural agreement could be explained through agreement with the lexical N2 head, or through the percolation of the plural number feature to the higher functional component, resulting in a plural feature which values the whole structure (see more on percolation in Manzini 2019, Manzini and Franco 2019, but also Eberhard 1997, Eberhard *et al.* 2005, Hammerly *et al.*, 2019, Staub, 2009, 2010), as in (25). Importantly, percolation may be favoured by the functional nature of N1.



The latter proposal has been more popular among researchers. Following the work of Selkirk (1977), agreement alternations in pseudo-partitives have been explained in terms of structural ambiguity (Manzini 2019, Manzini and Franco 2019). In the case of a sentence such as (26a), it has been argued that *the senators* is embedded within the head noun (*a group*) by means of the preposition *of*, and that the verb agrees with the singular head of the DP as a whole (*a group*), while the plural feature remains within the embedded NP. In contrast, in the case of a sentence such as (26b), *senators* is “measured” by *a group*, and the plural feature of the second nominal percolates to the higher DP, triggering plural verbal agreement.

- (26) a. [DP_[sg] A group [PP of [NP_[pl] senators]]] *is*_[sg] voting
 b. [DP_[pl] [DP_[sg] A group] D [NP_[pl] of [NP senators]]] *are*_[pl] voting

Variable agreement with collectives involving functional N1s in both English and Romanian can be explained by arguing that the functional nature of the first nominal allows the plural feature of N2 to percolate through the structure when the agreement focuses on individual members. In contrast, when the agreement focuses on the collective as a whole, percolation does not occur, and the agreement is with the first nominal.

While the percolation approach has received a lot of attention in the literature, there is also the possibility that agreement may simply happen with N2 instead of N1, because N2 is perceived as more salient.

3.3.2. Agreement with collectives with a semi-lexical N1

Whereas agreement with collective nouns with a functional N1 is variable both in English and Romanian, agreement with collectives with a semi-lexical N1 represents a puzzle in need of a solution. In addition to the claim that all collectives are sequences of two nominals, the second ingredient of our proposal is that agreement is sensitive to whether the

⁶ Please note that, according to Dobrovie-Sorin (2009), Number is valued on the Det in Romanian rather than on the noun.

second nominal is subject-like or not, i.e., whether in principle, N2 could be a subject. We expect that it should be more likely for participants to agree with a noun if that noun is subject-like.

Subject-likelihood can be related to **structural substitutability**, a property which has been argued to characterize distributional learning (Yang 2016, Li and Schuler 2023) but which may affect processing, as well as operations such as agreement. According to this approach, a structure such as *NP1 of NP2* is recursive if *NP1* and *NP2* are productively substitutable, i.e., any noun that appears in one of these positions can be used in the other position as well. If *NP2* can appear as a subject instead of *NP1*, then agreement should be possible with both *NP1* and *NP2*. However, if *NP2* cannot appear as a subject, then agreement should only be possible with *NP1*.

Throughout the paper, for ease of reference, we have described collectives as *NP1 (of) NP2* sequences. However, this simplified description glosses over the fact that the two nouns occur in very different phrases: the first noun is a DP, given that the noun is typically preceded by a definite/indefinite determiner, while the second noun is a bare noun, an *NP2*. For this reason, it is more accurate to describe collective noun subjects as *DP1 (of) NP2* sequences. With this important consideration in mind, we can further proceed to a discussion of how structural substitutability interacts with agreement in different ways in English and Romanian.

In English, N2 can occur instead of DP1, given that bare plurals can occur as subjects:

- (27) a. The government has/have just made a decision. ✓
 b. Ministers have just made a decision. ✓
- (28) a. The committee (of students) has/have decided. ✓
 b. Students have decided...✓

In contrast, in Romanian, N2 cannot occur instead of DP1. This is because bare plurals cannot normally occur as subjects (Tănase-Dogaru 2014), as they observe **The Naked Noun Constraint**:

(29) ***The Naked Noun Constraint***

An unmodified common noun in the preverbal position cannot be the surface subject of a sentence under conditions of normal stress and intonation. (Dobrovie-Sorin 2013)

In other words, in Romanian, only DP1 (i.e. N1 followed by an article) can be a subject but not the bare noun N2.

- (30) a. *Comitetul (de studenți) a decis...*
 committee.the (of students) has decided
 ‘The committee has decided...’
- b. *??/*Studenți au decis...*
 students have.3pl decided
 ‘Students have decided...’

We argue that, given the Naked Noun Constraint, the silent bare plural N2 is an unlikely subject, which is why participants do not treat N2 as a head. We put forth the proposal in (31):

(31) **Proposal about agreement with semi-lexical collectives integrating the Naked Noun Constraint** Agreement with semi-lexical collective nouns (*DP1 of NP2*) is sensitive to the subject-likelihood of the silent bare N2.

If N2 can be a subject, as in English, then the *DP1 (of NP2)* sequence becomes ambiguous between two interpretations, where agreement may take place either with the singular feature of DP1 or the plural feature of NP2, depending on the meaning intended by the speaker (individual members vs unit). If N2 cannot be a subject, as is the case in Romanian, then agreement with *DP1 (of NP2)* sequence will obligatorily involve agreement with DP1.

Further evidence that agreement may be modulated by the presence on the determiner on nouns comes from recent experiments on agreement attraction in Romanian (Bleotu and Dillon 2024), a phenomenon whereby a verb agrees with an intervening noun instead of the head noun:

(32) *The key to the cabinets are ... (Bock and Miller 1991)

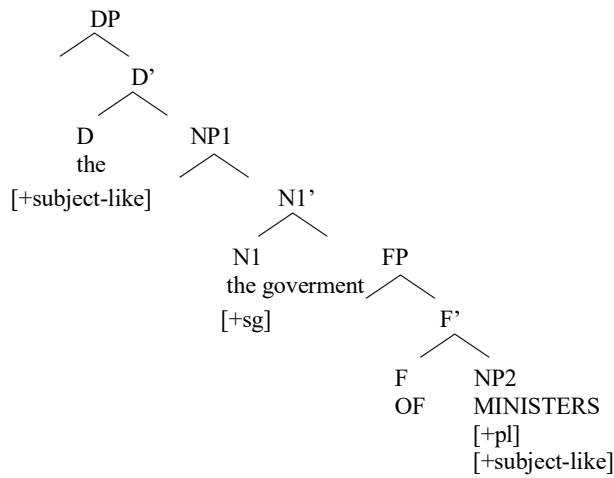
Bleotu and Dillon (2024) found that adult native speakers of Romanian were more likely to make errors of agreement when the intervenor was a subject-like DP, as in (33b), rather than a (non-subject-like) BN, as in (33a):

- (33) a. **Pisica de lângă fete sunt...*
 cat.the DE near girls are
 ‘The cat near girls are...’
 b. **Pisica de lângă fetele blonde sunt...*
 cat.the DE near girls.the blond are
 ‘The cat near blond girls are...’

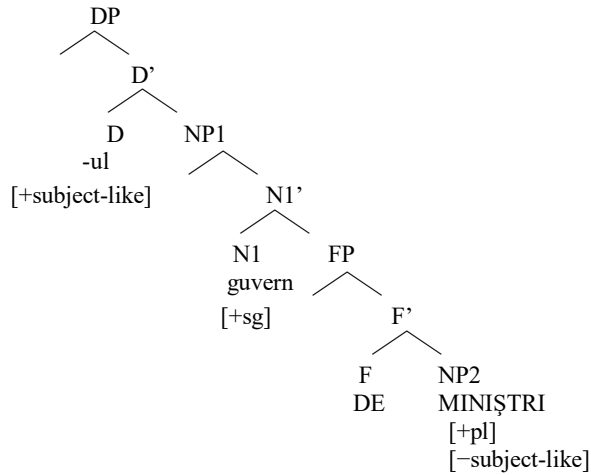
It bears pointing out that a comparison between agreement with semi-lexical collectives and agreement attraction has its limitations. Importantly, agreement attraction with a plural intervenor results in ungrammatical utterances, while agreement with semi-lexical collectives is a grammatical phenomenon, revealing a speaker’s competence, similarly to agreement with pseudo-partitives (see Mazzaggio *et al.* 2020, Foppolo *et al.* 2023). Nevertheless, the two phenomena have been argued to rely on similar mechanisms (e.g. the percolation, movement of the plural feature higher up in the structure; see, for instance, Eberhard 1997 for agreement attraction and Manzini 2019; Manzini and Franco 2019 for agreement with pseudo-partitives). Thus, it is possible and even likely that factors that influence agreement attraction may also influence the formation of specific agreement patterns with semi-lexical collectives, leading to agreement variability in English but singular agreement in Romanian.

With semi-lexical collective nouns, agreement checks not only phi-features but also considers the subject-like nature of the nouns which are part of the collective structure. Subject-likeness may be handled either through a filter which only considers for agreement nouns which can be subjects, or as a feature on N and D, marking them as having the property [+/- subject-like]. (34) and (35) exemplify the latter mechanism for collective nouns with a semi-lexical DP1 and a silent NP2 in English and Romanian:

(34) Collective nouns with a semi-lexical DP1 and a silent NP2 in English:



(35) Collective nouns with a semi-lexical N1 and a silent N2 in Romanian:



A similar representation can be constructed for collectives with a semi-lexical DP1 and an overt second nominal (such as *comitetul de studenți* 'the committee of students').

Overall, when N1 is semi-lexical, the agreement patterns diverge between English and Romanian given considerations regarding the subject-likeness (or lack thereof) of the second nominal. English allows more flexibility in agreement, recognizing N2 as a potential subject, whereas Romanian's Naked Noun Constraint disfavours agreement with a bare noun and forces singular agreement with DP1. This suggests that subject-likeness plays a crucial role in shaping agreement preferences, especially in languages like Romanian, where bare nouns cannot function as subjects.

A remaining question is why is it that the subject-likeness of the second nominal only seems to lead to singular agreement in the case of collectives with a semi-lexical head but not in the case of collectives with a functional head in Romanian, which allow variable agreement. We argue that this is because of the nature of N1: given that they are semantically lighter, functional nouns allow the second nominal to act as a head or allow percolation of the plural feature to the higher projection, unlike semi-lexical nouns. Thus, both the functional/semi-lexical nature of the first nominal and the subject-likeness of the second nominal seem to have consequences for agreement patterns.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have argued that all collective nouns are sequences of two nominals, and that collective nouns trigger different mechanisms of agreement depending on (i) the functional/(semi)-lexical nature of the first nominal, and (ii) the subject-like nature of the second nominal. For collective nouns where the first nominal is functional, agreement is variable both in English and Romanian, and it can be accounted for either through percolation of the plural to the higher projection or, possibly, through agreement with N2. For collective nouns with a (semi)-lexical first nominal, agreement is variable in English and singular in Romanian. This can be accounted for by arguing that participants have lexicalized a preference to agree with the first nominal in Romanian, given that bare nouns cannot be subjects in this language under normal circumstances. While the current proposal seems plausible from a theoretical standpoint, further experimental studies are needed to test its validity. Moreover, further cross-linguistic studies are necessary to test whether this proposal holds for other languages as well.

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