

LEFT-PERIPHERAL ITEMS IN TRANSPARENT FREE RELATIVES ARE NOT DUMMIES. THE ANGLO-ROMANIAN CONNECTION

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Abstract. This paper is a follow-up to Grosu (2023). Its primary goal is to strengthen the argumentation in that paper in favor of a particular analytical approach to ‘transparent free relatives’ (TFRs), which has been in competition for roughly a quarter century with a very different approach, championed by a number of researchers, and first and foremost by Henk van Riemsdijk. The novel argumentation relies primarily on contrasts in acceptability between certain types of English TFRs and their Romanian counterparts. These contrasts show that the introductory elements of TFRs (*what* in English, exceptionally also *who*, and *ceea ce* in Romanian) cannot be dummies, as in van Riemsdijk’s approach. Rather, these items function essentially as in free relatives (FRs), that is, as triggers for abstraction over the variable denoted by their trace.

Keywords: free relatives, transparent free relatives, intensionality, sums vs groups.

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The main goal of this paper is to offer additional arguments in favor of the analysis of transparent free relatives defended in Grosu (2023). Familiarity with that work would be useful to the reader, but is not necessary, since the paper is self-contained. Section 2 presents the background information on transparent free relatives needed to make sense of the ensuing sections. Section 3 brings up several kinds of contrastive Anglo-Romanian data and builds supporting arguments on them. Section 4 concludes the paper.

2. BACKGROUND ON FREE RELATIVES AND TRANSPARENT FREE RELATIVES

2.1. Free Relatives and Transparent Free Relatives

The free relatives (FRs) of English are initiated by a *wh*-phrase, whose precise position has been the object of some controversy. In particular, the following three views have been proposed: [i] A relative-external position, as ‘head’ of a complex XP (Bresnan

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and Grimshaw 1978); [ii] a relative-internal position, in particular, [Spec, CP] (Groos & van Riemsdijk 1981, Jacobson 1995), the head of the complex XP being a null category; [iii] simultaneous presence in the relative and in the matrix, within a multi-dimensional syntactic framework, which views the relative and its matrix as forming two distinct bi-dimensional trees (van Riemsdijk 1998, 2000, 2001, 2006a, 2006b, 2017). All these authors admit (or at least do not contest) the assumption that English FRs are definite descriptions (Jacobson 1988, 1995), a property that does not seem to be derivable from other properties of the language, and which, while widespread cross-linguistically, is not universal (according to Caponigro et al 2021, Meso-American languages allow FRs with indefinite import). The choice between these three options is not of paramount importance in this paper, but for concreteness, we will assume [ii], schematically shown in (1). We feel that this configuration provides the most straightforward basis for compositionally interpreting FRs. This goal can be effortlessly achieved by abstracting at the CP level over a variable denoted by the trace of the *wh*-phrase, and by subsequently applying the null category, interpreted in English as a definiteness operator, to the output of abstraction. As far as we can see, the schema in (1) should also be adequate for Meso-American languages, where the null category can be optionally construed as a trigger for existential quantification.

- (1) $[_{DP/XP} \emptyset [_{CP} \text{wh-phrase}_i \dots t_i \dots]]$

We have indicated the FR's category as DP/XP, because, as will be seen later in this section, FRs of other categories, e.g., AP, also exist.

A sizable amount of earlier literature has addressed the fact that a particular type of FR, characterized by the properties in (2) and the schema in (3), is string-wise homophonous with a construction that is not interpreted as a definite description, and that was dubbed *transparent free relative* by Wilder (1998). Subsequent literature has used the abbreviation 'TFR', which we will also use in what follows.

- (2) a. The initial *wh*-phrase is *what*,
 b. the 'trace' of *what* is the subject of a copular structure or small clause (CS/SC),
 and
 c. the CS/SC is in the scope of an (explicit or implicit) intensional operator (in italics in (3)).

- (3) $[_{DP/XP} \emptyset [_{CP} \text{what}_i \dots (\textit{intensional operator}) \dots [_{CS/SC} t_i (\text{be}) \mathbf{XP}] \dots]]$

2.2. Previous analyses of Transparent Free Relatives

A number of analyses have been proposed for TFRs, and notwithstanding non-trivial differences among them, they seem to fall into two broad categories.

One category consists of proposals which view TFRs as a 'construction' radically different from FRs, both syntactically and semantically, and which share the following core view: The complex XP does not have the configuration in (3), rather, it is 'headed' by the phrase boldfaced in (3), and the remainder of the relative CP is a modifier of that phrase. A non-exhaustive list of studies that adopt this view is: Nakau (1971), Kajita (1977), McCawley (1998), Schelfhout *et al.* (2004), den Dikken (2005), Kim (2011), and van

Riemsdijk (1998; 2000; 2001; 2006a; 2006b; 2017). In van Riemsdijk's works, TFRs are analyzed within a multi-dimensional framework. Much like with respect to FRs, the relative clause and the matrix form distinct bi-dimensional trees, and the item shared by the two clauses is not the *wh*-phrase, but the non-subject of the CS/SC; following Grosu (2023), we will refer to this item with the pre-theoretical term 'pivot.'

Concerning interpretation, van Riemsdijk did not present a compositional semantic analysis of TFRs in any of the works cited above. Rather, echoing Wilder, he confined himself to the informal characterization that the relative CP is a modifier of the pivot with parenthetical import¹. In van Riemsdijk (2017), he added the remark that he views *what* in TFRs as a dummy that contributes nothing to the meaning of the TFR. Consider (4a). Conceivably, the bracketed constituent might be construed as a definite description, if we assume that Mary has a fixed idea about some contextually presupposed entity, a construal that is made more salient by the variant in (4b). Out of the blue, this is not the preferred construal of (4a), and according to Wilder and van Riemsdijk, the preferred reading of this example has the import of the paraphrase in (5a). To be sure, (5a) is not fully synonymous with (4a), since it consists of the linguistic output of two distinct illocutionary acts, where the first makes a categorical assertion, and the second leaves its veracity open to doubt. In contrast, (4a) is the output of a single illocutionary act (let us call it 'an integrated construction'), which at no point and in no way commits the speaker to the belief that what Mary bumped into was Fido/a rabid dog. However, the categorical assertion effect is arguably traceable to the fact that the portion which 'hedges' on the characterization of the pivot temporally *follows* it. If we parenthetically insert an expression with comparable hedging import *before* the pivot, as in (5b), the categorical assertion effect disappears.

- (4) a. Mary bumped into [what *seemed* to her to be {**Fido/a rabid dog**}].
 b. Mary bumped into [what has always (incorrectly) seemed to her to be {Fido/a rabid dog}].
- (5) a. Mary bumped into {Fido/a rabid dog}, at least, this is what it seemed to her to be.
 b. Mary bumped into – at least, according to her impression – Fido/a rabid dog.

Interestingly, Schelfhout *et al.* (2004) go one step further, and maintain that when data like (4a) have parenthetical import, they must exhibit a parenthetical prosodic contour, as in (6).

- (6) Mary bumped into, what seemed to her to be, {Fido/a rabid dog}.
- (7) Mary bumped into [what looked like {Fido/ a rabid dog} to everyone standing near her].

This claim, which implies that TFRs are necessarily non-integrated constructions, is certainly too strong in a number of ways. On the one hand, it is hard to see how a parenthetical contour can be achieved when the pivot is string-wise medial within the TFR,

¹ In van Riemsdijk (2017), an alternative construal is also suggested. See (12)-(14) and the remarks after them.

as in (7), and on the other, even data like (6) are judged unnatural by some people, in fact, by all the native speakers of English we were able to consult. For whatever this is worth, we note that comparable Romanian data strike us, who are native speakers of Romanian, as highly unnatural. We do not wish to deny that such data may be acceptable to some people, in particular, to the authors of Shelfhout *et al.* (2004), but we do want to draw attention to the fact that they are not universally acceptable. More importantly, it will be shown below that a hedging parenthetical construal, even without parenthetical prosody, is not possible for TFRs in general.

The second kind of view concerning data that look like FRs with the properties in (2), but are not construed as definite descriptions, was argued for in Grosu (2014, 2016, 2023). Focusing on Grosu (2023), which revises and refines certain aspects of the two earlier studies, **this study does not deny that construals as in (5a) are possible in certain cases**, what it does deny is that such construals are appropriate for TFRs **in general**. On the positive side, it argues that TFRs in general allow a non-parenthetical integrated construal that differs strikingly from FRs in having **non-specific indefinite import**. To illustrate, (4a) happily allows the paraphrase in (8).

- (8) Mary bumped into something that seemed to her to be {Fido/a rabid dog}].

Given this interpretation, integrated TFRs are allowed in the existential context *there BE – YP*, which, as is well known, exhibits the so called ‘definiteness effect’, i.e., the fact that existentially quantified entity-describing nominals are felicitous in this context, and definite or strongly quantified ones are not, as illustrated in (9). TFRs in this context are displayed in (10).

- (9) There is/are {a dog, #Fido, #the dog, #all dogs, #most dogs} in the garden.
 (10) a. There is now in the garden [what Mary thinks is **a dog**], but it is in fact a cat.
 b. There is now in the garden [what Mary suspects may be **Fido/the neighbour’s dog**], but it is in fact the neighbour’s pet lion.
 c. There are now in front of Mary [what she thinks are **{all our/most} parliamentarians**], but she is in fact facing only a tiny minority of them.

The data in (9)-(10) also support another aspect of Grosu’s approach, namely, the thesis that integrated TFRs are not a syntactic ‘construction’ configurationally distinct from FRs, and that the configuration in (3) is optimal for characterizing the meaning of TFRs. Note that the pivots in (10b-c) are all strongly quantified, and this fact in no way affects the acceptability of these examples. If these pivots were the heads of their TFRs, as Wilder and van Riemsdijk maintained, one would expect these examples to be infelicitous, just like the versions of (9) with strongly quantified nominals. The fact that they are felicitous supports Grosu’s thesis that the pivot of a TFR is present and interpreted in the relative only, just as in comparable FRs.

We earlier stated that a parenthetical construal is not always suitable for TFRs. One situation in which it is not is illustrated in (11), where the pivot is in the scope of relative-internal negation. Note that its attempted parenthetical paraphrase in (12) is self-contradictory. The paraphrase with an explicit indefinite expression in (13) is, however, fine.

- (11) Mary bumped into what couldn't possibly have been Fido.
- (12) #Mary bumped into Fido, but it couldn't possibly have been Fido.
- (13) Mary bumped into something that couldn't possibly have been Fido.

In van Riemsdijk (2017), it is suggested that a TFR may have, in addition to the parenthetical import, also the import of a lexical intensional modifier, comparable to the adjective in expressions like *fake/false prophet*. This suggestion may have been intended for dealing with examples like (11), even though, as far as we can tell, van Riemsdijk nowhere explicitly discusses such data. Grosu (2023) shows this suggestion is untenable, one important reason being that lexical intensional adjectives modify N(P)s, not DPs, and in cases like (10), where the pivot is a proper name, there is no N(P).

2.3. Grosu's formal approach to entity-describing TFRs

For entity-describing data, such as (4a), we noted earlier that the TFR construal differs from the FR construal in being non-specifically indefinite rather than definite. We will now provide a more nuanced characterization of the ways in which they differ, according to Grosu (2016, 2023).

Using (4a) for concreteness, we note first that under both interpretations, the pivot provides a characterization of something with reference to Mary's beliefs, and not with respect to what the speaker views as reality. But under the FR construal, which, as noted earlier, is more salient in the alternative version in (4b), Mary's beliefs about a particular entity are **independent of the bumping event**. This can be seen more clearly in the following slightly modified version: *Mary bumped into what seems (and has always seemed) to Bill to be Fido/a rabid dog*. In this case, Bill can certainly be unaware that a bumping event took place, and so can Mary in (4a), if we assume that her sensory nerves are impaired. A plausible context for the FR construal of (4a) is one in which Mary is slightly crazy (or has very poor vision) and believes that a particular statue representing a dog is a living animal, Fido or some rabid dog. Importantly, whatever differences of opinion there may be between the speaker and Mary/Bill, these opinions are about **a unique entity that is constant in all worlds** – in the above context, a particular statue.

Under the TFR construal of (4a), the (possible) disagreement between the speaker and Mary is not about a fixed object, rather, it is about whatever or whoever the bumpee may be. The possibility of disagreement is brought out by the fact that the speaker can felicitously continue (4a) with *but it was in fact a very large tomcat*. As Grosu puts it in the papers cited earlier, a TFR and its pivot describe potentially distinct 'guises' or 'counterparts' of the same thing, where 'the same thing' means being a particular actant in the eventuality described by the matrix. That the counterparts are only potentially distinct emerges from the fact that the speaker may also continue (4a) with *and she was right, it was indeed Fido/a rabid dog*. The speaker may also remain non-committal, and continue (4a) with *I have no idea what it actually was*.

To capture the distinction between the two construals of data like (4a), Grosu uses variables of the type of individuals for the FR construal, and of the type of individual concepts (ICs), which are functions from possible worlds to entities (type $\langle s, e \rangle$), for TFRs.

The latter choice allows different extensions of the IC in the worlds of the matrix and in those of the relative. To see how this is analytically implemented, let us consider the translations assigned to (4a) (reproduced below for convenience) under an FR and a TFR construal of the bracketed constituent, which are shown in (14) and (15) respectively.

(4a) Mary bumped into [what *seemed* to her to be {**Fido/a rabid dog**}].

(14) $\lambda w. \text{bumped-into}_w(\text{mary}, \sigma(\lambda x_e. \forall w' \in \text{seem}_{w, \text{mary}}: \{[x=f], \text{rabid-dog}_{w'}(x), \exists y: \text{rabid-dog}_{w'}(y) \wedge x=y\}))$ ← FR
In words: Mary bumped into the unique contextually presupposed entity which in her seem-worlds is Fido or a rabid dog

(15) a. $\lambda w. \text{bumped-into}_w(\text{mary}, [\sigma_{\langle \langle s, e \rangle, t \rangle} \lambda x_{\langle s, e \rangle} . C_{\langle \langle s, e \rangle, t \rangle}(x) \wedge \forall w' \in \text{seem}_{w, \text{mary}}: \{[x(w')=f], [\exists y: \text{rabid-dog}_{w'}(y) \wedge x(w')=y]\}](w))$ ← TFR
In words: Mary bumped into the matrix value of the unique IC restricted by the contextual variable C, and in Mary's seem-worlds, the IC's value is Fido or some rabid dog.
 b. $\llbracket C_{\langle \langle s, e \rangle, t \rangle} \rrbracket = \lambda x_{\langle s, e \rangle} . \forall w'' [x(w'') \neq \perp \rightarrow P(x(w''))]$
In words: C is the set of ICs whose values are restricted by P in all the worlds in which they are defined.
 c. $\llbracket P \rrbracket = \lambda y. [\text{TFR's matrix}]^{\text{TFR}/y}$
In words: P is the predicate formed by abstracting at the matrix level over the position of the TFR.

The trace of *what* is translated in (14) as a variable x of the type of individuals, and application of the sigma operator to the set created by abstraction yields a unique entity whose existence is contextually presupposed as the denotation of the complex DP. The version with *a rabid dog* as pivot is translated either by application of a property to x or by application of that property to an existentially quantified variable y , which gets equated with x .

In (15), the trace of *what* is translated as a variable x of the type of individual concepts (ICs), which, as noted earlier, may receive different values in distinct sets of worlds. In the worlds of the relative-internal intensional operator, the value of the IC receives the same explicit characterization from the pivot as the subject of CS/SC does in (14), with the proviso that of the two alternative translations of *a rabid dog* in (15), only the one that uses existential quantification and equation can be used. The reason is that only this alternative gives rise to a possible counterpart of the entity described by the TFR, in particular, a possible bumpee. If the other alternative were used instead, it would have to be the case that the TFR's counterpart in the relative is the property of being a rabid dog, which is absurd. Support for the view that a property is not a possible counterpart of an entity comes from the example in (16a), where the post-copular phrase is an AP (translatable only as a property), and which is only construable as an FR, its only suitable paraphrase being the definite one in (16b).

(16) a. Mary bumped into [what *seemed* to her to be **dangerous**].
 b. Mary bumped into {the thing /#something} that seemed to her to be dangerous.

The null category in (3) is translated as a definiteness operator, type-lifted to be applicable to a set of ICs. There are two possible arguments for this move. One is the desire to be as economical as possible in adapting the analysis of FRs to TFRs. The other is that it is arguably reasonable to consider only the minimal contextually relevant IC, namely, the one that is defined only in the worlds of the matrix and those of the relative, and is moreover restricted to being a bumpee. This bumpee is unique, without being contextually presupposed, since the IC denoted by the TFR and its quantificational properties are not accessible to our intuitions, only its matrix value is. Be this as it may, Grosu (2016) makes it clear that the definiteness of the IC in no way excludes the intuition that a(n entity-describing) TFR is non-specifically indefinite. In view of the fact that the TFR's value is devoid of any explicit characterization and that the speaker of (4a) can thus be non-committal about the properties and reference of the TFR, its value may be assumed to vary across the speaker's belief-worlds. This variation captures the non-specific indefiniteness intuition.

The variable C, which restricts the IC variable in all the worlds in which it is defined, as in (15b-c), ensures that (4a) cannot be true in, e.g., a context where Mary bumped into something in Bucharest at 4 pm on January 4, 2025 and it seemed to her at the same time that some animal in Tokyo was Fido or a rabid dog.

Taking stock of what has been said so far by relying on (4a), entity-describing FRs and integrated TFRs do not differ in their configurational syntax, but do differ in their semantics. For completeness, it seems appropriate to address an issue that Grosu (2003) did not address, namely, exactly how integrated TFRs like (4a) and string-wise homophonous parenthetical constructions like (6), to the extent that they are possible, differ. Undoubtedly, these examples differ in their configurational syntax in essentially the way in which, say, (17a) and (17b) differ.

- (4) a. Mary bumped into [what *seemed* to her to be {Fido/a rabid dog}].
- (6) Mary bumped into, what seemed to her to be, {Fido/a rabid dog}.
- (17) a. It seems that Bill is spying for the Taliban.
- b. Bill is, it seems, spying for the Taliban.

Furthermore, as was noted earlier, the members of the two pairs of data differ semantically in their illocutionary properties, in that (4a) and (17a) are the linguistic output of a single illocutionary act of assertion, (6) and (17b) are the linguistic output of two such acts. We do not see that there is any further significant semantic difference between (4a) and (6), and it seems to us that these examples are adequately paraphrased by (18a-b) respectively. If so, the semantic translation of the parenthetical in (6) need not differ dramatically from that of the TFR in (15), minor adjustments should suffice.

- (18) a. Mary bumped into something that seemed to her to be {Fido/a rabid dog}.
- b. Mary bumped into – something that seemed to her to be – Fido/a rabid dog.

A detailed consideration of the syntax-semantics of parenthetical constructions lies beyond the scope of this paper, so we will not provide a precise analysis of data like (6).

One important consequence nonetheless follows from what has just been said: If our proposal is on the right track, then van Riemsdijk's (2017) claim that *what* in TFRs is a mere dummy is incorrect not only with respect to integrated TFRs, but also with respect to parenthetical ones.

2.4. Grosu's formal approach to property-describing TFRs

Turning now to property-describing data, incontrovertible FRs are definite, just like entity-describing ones, as illustrated by (19a), which is adequately paraphrased by (19b).

- (19) a. Ahmed is finally what his mother had always wanted him to be, a naturalized US citizen.
b. Ahmed is finally that which his mother has always wanted him to be.

A property-describing construction with the properties in (2) is shown in (20).

- (20) This house is [what Bill *would consider beautiful*].

In discussing this example, Grosu (2016, section 5.5) notes that its interpretation as a TFR is not parallel to the way entity-describing TFRs are interpreted. The property assigned to the complex XP in the worlds of evaluation is not made explicit, much as in the case of entity-describing TFRs, but in contrast to that case, it is not indeterminate. A natural context is one in which the speaker observes certain properties of the house that are not contested by Bill or anyone else, e.g. rounded balconies, oblong windows, multi-colored external walls, and the speaker can thus not be non-committal. In this situation, the notion of counterpart is not applicable. Rather, what Bill and the speaker may disagree on is whether a house endowed with such properties is beautiful or not. An appropriate paraphrase of (20) is provided in (21a).

- (21) a. This house has an observable property or a plurality of such properties P, and in Bill's world-view, if a house has P, it is beautiful.
b. This house has the unique plurality of properties P, such that in Bill's world-view, a house is beautiful if and only if it has P.

The semantics of data like (20) and the ways in which it differs from the semantics of data like (4a) are discussed in considerable detail in Grosu (2016), and the formal details need not be reproduced here. We confine ourselves to a brief and informal presentation of the principal features of that analysis. In contrast to the analysis of data like (4a), where the trace of *what* denotes a function from worlds that can take **distinct values** in distinct sets of worlds, in data like (20), the trace of *what* denotes a variable of the type of **constant** properties, which thus has the same value in all the worlds in which it is defined. Grosu observes that the equative construal of the copula, which was necessary for entity-describing TFRs in order to capture the counterpart relation, is not suitable here, because it would imply that Bill likes a unique kind of house, e.g., one which looks exactly like the White House. This kind of situation cannot be excluded in principle, and might occur if Bill is a bit crazy, in which case (20) is paraphrasable by (21b), the null sister of CP has to be a definiteness operator of a suitable logical type, and the bracketed expression has the status of an FR. For the 'normal' situation in our world, where people typically like a variety of types of houses, the TFR needs to be existentially quantified. Concerning the interpretation of the CS/SC, Grosu (2016) proposes to use strict predication interpreted as a generic

statement with the essential implicational import of “if a house has P in the worlds of Bill’s world-view, then *ceteris paribus*, it is beautiful in those worlds.”

Note that resort to existential quantification in the analysis of the TFR in (20) implies that the necessary English-specific definiteness of incontrovertible FRs needs to be relaxed. In what follows, we will see several instances of features inherent to FRs that need to undergo under-specification in certain sub-types of TFRs, on a language-specific basis. In case TFRs diachronically grew out of FRs, it looks as if this process has occasionally operated in order to maximize the range of available TFRs.

TFRs that serve an adverbial function and describe properties of events have also been mentioned in the literature. Kajita (1977) provides the example in (22).

- (22) He came out the next day, but I didn’t get a chance to talk to him [what you *might call privately*].

One may be suspicious of this example on the grounds that the verb *call* favours the possibility of interpreting the pivot as having meta-linguistic import. To avoid this pitfall, we constructed the example in (23), which our consultants found acceptable. There thus does not seem to be any reason to doubt that TFRs with the import of manner adverbials are possible in English. The interpretation of (23) is parallel to that of (20), as can be gathered from the paraphrase in (24).

- (23) She entered the room [what Bill {*would consider/might view as*} **surreptitiously**].
 (24) She entered the room in a particular observable way (e.g., barefoot), and in Bill’s world view, if someone enters a room this way, (s)he does so surreptitiously.

An interesting fact is that in this case, there do not seem to exist comparable FRs, that is, FRs with the import of manner adverbials and with the properties in (2), as illustrated in (25), where the *wh*-item cannot be *what*.

- (25) She entered the room exactly [{*how/#what*} Bill had entered it.

The contrast between (23) and (25) might seem to provide *prima facie* support for van Riemsdijk’s approach to TFRs, which maintains that *what* is a dummy without significance in TFRs, the categorial properties of the TFR being determined solely by the pivot. We will see in the next section, however, that such a conclusion is premature.

We conclude this by expanding a bit on the remark made above in connection with (22). In quite a few of the examples brought up by van Riemsdijk, the relative-internal intensional operator is a verb like *call* or *describe (as)*. Such verbs invite a meta-linguistic construal of the pivot, which may be made explicit by using quotation marks, and which is absent with verbs like *consider* or *view (as)*. Meta-linguistic construals of the pivot make possible TFR-like constructions that are otherwise excluded, and some of van Riemsdijk’s argumentation for his approach to TFRs relies precisely on data with meta-linguistic import, which are radically different from the data of interest in this paper. As Grosu (2003, section 4.2.3) observes, van Riemsdijk’s example reproduced in (26) cannot be replicated with verbs that exclude meta-linguistic construals, as illustrated in (27).

- (26) Nick lost what according to the dictionary are called his marbles.
 (27) a. #Mary kicked {what must have been/what John thinks is} the bucket.
 b. #John is pulling what Mary thinks is my leg.
 c. #John really stuck what most people consider his foot in it this time.
 d. #This claim does not hold what can be reasonably viewed as water.

We put aside data like (26), which require completely different semantics that needs not be explored here.

3. THE TRANSPARENT FREE RELATIVES OF ROMANIAN AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TWO COMPETING ANALYSES

3.1. TFRs in Romanian

In English and a number of other languages, e.g., German and Dutch, *what*-FRs and TFRs are initiated by pronouns from the interrogative paradigm. This is not so in all languages. In French, for example, *quoi* may not take a tensed clause as sister, and a light-headed relative that begins with *ce qui/que* is used instead in FRs, TFRs and embedded interrogatives. Romanian allows both patterns in FRs (see (28) = (21) in Grosu 2023), but only the French pattern in TFRs, as in (29) (= (22) in Grosu 2003) and (30)².

- (28) a. Am găsit astăzi [ce ai pierdut tu ieri].
 have.1 found today what have.2SG lost you.SG yesterday
 ‘I found today what you lost yesterday.’
 b. Am găsit astăzi [ceea-ce ai pierdut tu ieri].
 have.1 found today that-COMPL have.2SG lost you.SG yesterday
 ‘I found today that which you lost yesterday.’
 (29) M-am poticnit de [{ceea-ce /#ce} părea a fi un arici].
 refl-have.1 stumbled of that-COMPL what seemed to be a hedgehog
 ‘I stumbled over what seemed to be a hedgehog.’
 (30) Casa asta este [{ceea-ce / #ce} Ion ar {descrie ca/?considera} frumoasă].
 house(F)-the this is that-COMPL what Ion would describe as consider beautiful.FS
 ‘This house is what Ion would consider/describe as beautiful.’

The introductory element *ceea ce* (often written as a single word, *ceea ce*, before the middle of the last century) consists of a demonstrative form (belonging to the

² Grosu (2023) implies that the exclusive option of a light head from the demonstrative paradigm in the TFRs of Romanian supports the analysis in (19a), where the IC denoted by the TFR exhibits a definiteness operator, over one in which it is existentially quantified. We do not think this suggestion can be maintained. As can be seen in (30), property-describing TFRs are also initiated by *ceea ce*, but such TFRs can only be analyzed as existentially quantified, for reasons made explicit in section 1 (see the comments after example (20)).

Suggestive is also the fact that French *ce qui/que* is used with interrogative complements of verbs like *se demander* ‘to wonder’, which are clearly not definite.

paradigm of *acela* ‘that-one’) and the relative complementizer *ce* (homophonous with the wh-pronoun *ce* ‘what’). As shown in Grosu (2013:647-648), there is evidence that the string *ceea ce* may be analyzed as a single element, in particular, a neuter relative pronoun, for the following reasons: (i) *ceea* never occurs in other contexts (the feminine singular demonstrative is *aceea* and the strong definite article is *cea*); (ii) a sequence *P+ceea ce* can correspond to a PP both in the matrix and the embedded clause, which is characteristic of free relatives and is impossible with regular *D+ce* sequences, see (31)a vs. b (with *D+relative* clause sequences, the *P* must occur in the Spec of the embedded relative, and the relativizer in this case must be *care*, see (31)c)³:

- (31) a. Ion se ocupă [**de ceea ce** se ocupă și Maria].
 Ion refl occupies of that COMPL REFL occupies also Maria
 ‘Ion does (as a profession) what Maria does/takes care of what Maria takes care.’
 b. *Ion se ocupă [**de cea/aceea** [**ce** se ocupă și Maria]].
 Ion REFL occupies of the.FS that-one.FS COMPL REFL occupies also Maria
 Intended: ‘Ion takes care of the one (that thing/person) that Maria also takes care of’
 c. Ion se ocupă [**de cea/aceea** [de care se ocupă și Maria]].
 Ion refl occupies of the.FS that-one.FS of which REFL occupies also Maria
 ‘Ion takes care of the one (that thing/person) that Maria also takes care of.’

In order to capture both the syntactic unity and the morphological complexity which underlies the contemporary spelling *ceea ce*, we will write this form with a hyphen, *ceea-ce*, using the gloss ‘that-COMPL’ in order to distinguish it from *ce* glossed as ‘what’.

Turning now back to the data, (29) includes an entity-describing TFR, comparable to (4a). (30) includes a construction that purports to be a property-describing TFR comparable to (20), but note that the version with *ar considera* ‘would consider’ has marginal acceptability. In fact, all the data we have been able to find on the web use verbs like *numi* ‘all’, see (32), which allow a meta-linguistic construal of the pivot.

- (32) a. Întotdeauna a fost ceea ce unii ar numi hiperactivă.
 always has been that COMPL some.MP would call hyperactive
 ‘She has always been what some may call hyperactive’
 (<https://ro.feelbach.com/bloguri/se-simt-bine/feel5ive-o-face-din-nou>)
 b. Nu ne numărăm printre ceea ce s-ar putea numi creștini practicanți.
 not refl count.1PL among that COMPL REFL-would.3 can call Christians practicing
 ‘We are not among what could be called practicing Christians.’
 (Dinu D. Nica, „Apocalipsa după Sile”, in the Corola corpus)

³ For extensive discussion of FRs with a ‘missing’ preposition, see Grosu (2003), section 3.2.

It thus seems that TFRs describing properties of entities are not easily available in Romanian. As for data like (22)-(23), they are ungrammatical, as illustrated in (33). It thus emerges that TFRs describing properties of events are impossible, even with meta-linguistic import.

- (33) a. *Maria a intrat în cameră [ceea-ce aş numi ‘pe furiş’].
 Maria has entered in room what- COMPL would.1s call surreptitiously
 b. *Maria a intrat în cameră [ceea-ce Ion ar {considera/descrie ca}
 Maria has entered in room what- COMPL Ion would consider/describe as
 pe furiş].
 surreptitiously

In the preceding section, we noted that the contrast between (22)-(23) and (25) seems to provide *prima facie* support for van Riemsdijk’s approach to TFRs, which accounts for this contrast effortlessly. However, the contrast between (22)-(23) and (33) has no obvious explanation under his account, since it seems implausible that an adverbial phrase should allow modification in one language, but not in another. It seems far more plausible to localize the cross-linguistic contrast in the inherent properties of lexical items. Specifically, it may be assumed that the categorial and logico-typical restrictions on *what* in FRs and interrogatives constitute an unmarked state of affairs, which is relaxed in TFRs, and that a comparable relaxation is not possible in *ceea-ce*. In the next section, we will see that a different inherent property may be relaxed in *what*, but not in *ceea-ce*. This in turn points to the conclusion that these items are not dummies, and that their properties play an important part in the syntax and semantics of TFRs.

3.2. Van Riemsdijk’s claim that a human pivot can license a human construal of the TFR

Van Riemsdijk notes the contrast in (34), where the (a) subcase includes an incontrovertible FR, and the (b) subcase, a possible TFR.

- (34) a. #Bill is speaking with [what arrived at 3 o’clock].
 b. Bill is speaking with [what seems to be **Mary**].

His approach accounts for this contrast in the following way: In (34a), *what* is the head of the FR, and being inherently specified as non-human, the FR is inappropriate in a context that requires a human. In (34b), *what* is a dummy, the TFR is headed by a human pivot, and is thus licensed in this context.

Grosu’s approach can also account for the contrast in (34) as follows: In (34a), the inherent non-human specification of *what* restricts the **individual variable** that the foot of the chain it heads is interpreted as. In (34b), the inherent specification of *what* is compatible with the **IC variable** that the foot of the chain it heads is construed as, and does not constrain the **values of the IC** in the worlds in which it is defined. This is so because in (15), the IC’s values are restricted only by the variable C, whose definition in (15b,c) makes no reference to properties of *what*.

Now, consider (35), the Romanian counterpart of (34b).

- (35) # Bill stă de vorbă cu [ceea-ce pare a fi **Maria**].
 Bill sits to talk with that-COMPL seems to be Maria
 Intended: ‘Bill is talking with what seems to be Mary.’

The contrast between (34b) and (35) can be accounted for within Grosu’s approach by assuming that the inherent [-Human] specification of the pronoun *what* and of comparable items in other languages is only a default value, which may be overridden on a language- and construction-specific basis. In particular, it may be overridden in English TFRs, but not in the TFRs of Romanian (and of a number of other languages; see examples (39)-(40) in Grosu 2023). Within van Riemsdijk’s approach, the account just suggested cannot be adopted, since *what* and its cross-linguistic counterparts are viewed as dummies, and it is not clear what alternative account may be available.

3.3. Van Riemsdijk’s claim that the syntactic number of the pivot determines that of the TFR

This claim was based on the data in (36), where the (a) subcase includes an incontrovertible FR, and the (b) subcase, a possible TFR. Van Riemsdijk views the facts in (36a) as indicating that *what*, although compatible with semantic plurality, is syntactically singular, and being the head of the FR, necessarily triggers singular agreement in the matrix verb. Concerning the facts in (36), van Riemsdijk views them as indicating that the pivot heads its TFR, and that the inherent syntactic singularity of *what* in no way affects the syntactic number of the TFR.

- (36) a. [What I read last summer] {was/*were} written by Dickens and Hemingway.
 b. [What could best be described as **pebbles**] {were/*was} strewn across the lawn.

Grosu (2003) draws attention to a number of facts. First, a plural non-subject of an equative CS/SC may describe a sum or a group, and this semantic distinction has syntactic consequences. As can be seen in (37), the sum vs group construal of the non-subject, which is presumably conveyed to the subject under equation, also triggers a corresponding syntactic number in the subject, as well as in the copula, if there is one.

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| (37) | a. These are/*is poisonous mushrooms . | ← sum |
| | b. This is/*are poisonous mushrooms . | ← group |
| | c. Bob considers [these poisonous mushrooms]. | ← sum |
| | d. Bob considers [this poisonous mushrooms]. | ← group |

Further consequences of the sum/group construal of a plural nominal emerge when this nominal is the pivot of a TFR. As can be seen in (38), a sum/group construal of the pivot triggers a corresponding syntactic number in the chain headed by *what*, overriding the syntactic singularity of this item, which appears to be no more than a default value, much like its non-human specification (see the preceding section). As a result, the entire TFR inherits the syntactic number of *what*, and triggers a corresponding number in the matrix verb, refuting van Riemsdijk’s claim that the syntactic number of the pivot necessarily determines the syntactic number of the TFR.

- (38) a. [What seem to be **poisonous mushrooms**] need/?*needs to be disposed of promptly.
 b. [What seems to be **poisonous mushrooms**] needs/?*need to be disposed of promptly.

A second fact noted by Grosu is that the infelicity of the starred version of (36b), which contrasts with the felicity of the un-starred version of (38)b, is attributable to pragmatic incompatibility between the group construal of the TFR and the matrix predicate *strewn*. (39) (a slightly modified version of Grosu's (51)) shows that acceptability is significantly improved with a pragmatically more suitable predicate.

- (39) ?What can best be described as pebbles lies in a heap near the tree in your garden.

A third fact noted by Grosu, which strengthens the assumption that syntactic singularity is only a default value in *what*, is that the facts in (38) are preserved under an FR construal of the bracketed constituent, which is possible in this case, and arguably preferred in (40) (= Grosu's (49)).

- (40) a. [What have always seemed to Bill to be pebbles] now seem to Mary to be diamonds.
 b. [What has always seemed to Bill to be pebbles] now seems to Mary to be diamonds.

Let us now consider comparable data in Romanian, and investigate their implications for the two competing approaches. Data comparable to those in (37) are displayed in (41).

- (41) a. (Chestiile) alea arătau a ciuperci veninoase. ← **sum**
 things-the those looked like mushrooms poisonous
 'Those (things) looked like poisonous mushrooms.'
 b. (Chestia) aia arăta a ciuperci veninoase. ← **group**
 thing-the that looked like mushrooms poisonous
 'That (thing) looked like poisonous mushrooms.'

But data comparable to (38) differ from the latter in their acceptability values, as can be gathered from (42). In particular, (42a) contrasts in acceptability with (38a). In both cases, the pivot purports to denote a sum, as can be gathered from the plurality of the relative-internal inflected verb.

- (42) a. ??[Ceea-ce par a fi **ciuperci veninoase**] vor trebui aruncate de îndată
 that-COMPL seem to be mushroom poisonous will.3PL must thrown immediately
 la gunoi.
 at trash
 'What appear to be poisonous mushrooms should be thrown away immediately.'

- b. [Ceea-ce pare a fi **ciuperci veninoase**] va trebui aruncat de îndată
 that-COMPL seems to be mushroom poisonous will.3SG must thrown immediately
 la gunoi.
 at trash
 ‘What appears to be poisonous mushrooms should be thrown away immediately.’
- (42’) Ciuperci veninoase {vor / *va} trebui aruncat*(e) de îndată la gunoi.
 poisonous mushrooms will.3PL/will.3SG must thrown(.FPL) immediately at trash
 ‘Poisonous mushrooms {need, *needs} to be thrown away immediately’.

Within van Riemsdijk’s approach, the deviance of (42a) is a complete surprise, since the plural pivot, assumed to be the head of the TFR, is expected to coerce plurality in the matrix verb (see (42’)). Within Grosu’s approach, the following account is available: The inherent singularity of *ceea-ce*, much like its inherent non-human specification (see section 2.1), resists overriding, in contrast to English *what*, which allows it. This state of affairs supports the view that left-peripheral items **must** be taken into account when constructing a syntactic and semantic account of TFRs, and **cannot be viewed as mere dummies**.

3.4. A variety of TFRs found in English and absent in Romanian

As hinted at in footnote 1, Schütze & Stockwell (2019) report that English also allows TFRs initiated by *who*, which exhibit effects comparable to those found in *what*-TFRs, and which are moreover degraded to varying degrees under circumstances in which incontrovertible *who*-FRs are comparably degraded. We provide in (43) a kind of example not cited by them, which reinforces their thesis.

- (43) There is now [who can’t possibly be Mary’s husband] in her bedroom.
 (44) There is now someone who can’t possibly be Mary’s husband in her bedroom.

This example demonstrates the possibility for the construction at issue to occur in the existential context, and is naturally paraphrasable as in (44). It also exhibits a definite pivot, which does not affect the acceptability of the example. Finally, it excludes a parenthetical construal, due to the relative-internal negation, which targets the pivot. In sum, this example and those brought up by the authors show convincingly that English allows *who*-TFRs.

Romanian does not allow comparable TFRs, either with a *wh*-like pronoun or with a demonstrative light head, as shown in (45), where the bracketed constituent is necessarily definite.

- (45) Ion s-a certat cu [{*cine / cel* ce} pare a fi un clown].
 Ion REFL-has quarreled with whom the.MSG COMPL seems to be a clown
 ‘Ion had an argument with the person who seems to be a clown.’
 ≠ ‘Ion had an argument with somebody who seems to be a clown.’

The fact that Romanian does not have such TFRs does not argue against van Riemsdijk's approach, since it is possible to assume that in Romanian, the items in italics in (41) are not possible dummies. Our reason for bringing up this topic is that facts internal to English argue against the view that *wh*-items are dummies in TFRs.

One such fact was noted by the authors themselves: the parallel degradation of *who*-FRs and *who*-TFRs under comparable circumstances can be accounted for more naturally if the two constructions are viewed as sharing a common configuration than if they are viewed as having radically different configurations. An additional fact, which shows that the *wh*-item does contribute to the interpretation of the complex DP, is that *who*-TFRs cannot be used to describe inanimate entities, as illustrated by the deviance of (46).

(46) *There is now [who can't possibly be Mary's thesis] on my desk.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has primarily examined several types of distinction between the integrated TFRs of English and those of Romanian, and has argued that these distinctions receive a natural explanation under the view that TFRs share the configurational properties of FRs, but remain mysterious under the view that TFRs are 'headed' by their pivot and that their left-periphery consists of dummies.

In particular, the data show that the introductory element *ceea ce* used in Romanian TFRs has the following properties: (i) it is the only one that can be used in TFRs, although in other FRs it can be replaced by *ce* 'what'; (ii) it can be used in nominal and adjectival contexts, but not in adverbial contexts; (iii) it cannot refer to humans; (iv) when used in adjectival contexts, it allows the adjectival predicate to agree with the matrix subject (see (30), (32)), which can be explained by an agreement chain containing *ceea ce* – *ceea ce* agrees with the matrix subject, and in the base position inside the TFRs, it agrees with the adjectival predicate.

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