

TYPES OF ROMANIAN NOMINAL CLASSIFIERS¹

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Keywords: granularity, classifiers, nominal, verbal, Romanian

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper investigates different types of nominal and classification devices in Romanian, drawing on and further developing previous extensive research in the field. It also touches upon types of verbal classification, leaving this issue for further research. The inclusion of verbal classifiers is motivated by the underlying claim that granularity is a property of language as a whole rather than of the nominal domain specifically, in the sense that both nominal and verbal categories function as classifying devices, pushing substances and events respectively into categories. Therefore, the mention of verbal classifiers serves a purely conceptual role, i.e. that of motivating the granularity hypothesis. The points in the paper are illustrated primarily with Romanian examples; however, English and other languages will be featured. The underlying assumption throughout is the fact that language has a granular structure, in the sense that both processes / events and objects / individuals / substances present in the ontology are pushed into categories by means of classifier devices, which function mainly as approximators of quantity and / or quality. The resulting categories reflect humans' perspective on reality and, more often than not, include an element of arbitrariness, in the sense that the

¹ A version of this paper was presented on March 12th 2026, at the “Iorgu Iordan – Alexandru Rosetti” Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, as part of the series *Conferințele Academiei Române*. I gratefully acknowledge the insightful comments and suggestions of the audience. The present paper is based on previous studies of mine in the domain of nominal classification and nominal classifiers and aims at casting a new light on the way classifiers, be they nominal or verbal / event, push elements in the ontology into categories.

classifying devices are a way of understanding and ordering the world². A second point made by the paper and deriving from the first one, is that as far as classifying devices go, there is no sharp distinction between the two semantic dimensions of quality and quantity. As a preliminary example, in a phrase like *a wave of hate*, the classifier *wave* incorporates several meanings, such as (large) quantity or amount, shape, rising element, threatening quality.

2. CLASSIFIERS

By and large, classifiers are of two main kinds: event classifiers and nominal classifiers, both of which are experientially-grounded, in the sense that they are acquired and used as a result of humans' interaction with the physical world.

In what follows, I will briefly enumerate and illustrate event classifiers cross-linguistically, opening the issue for further research. Event classifiers, therefore, fall into the following categories: the category of tense, the category of aspect, light verbs, grammatical verbal classifiers, and verbal prefixes.

It is easy to see why Tense (1) behaves as a classifying device for events. It is a deictic category that serves to anchor an event in time, which basically amounts to saying that events are classified into past events and present events, i.e. those that happened and those that are happening.

- | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| (1) | Pisica bea apă | Pisica a băut apă. | Romanian |
| | Cat.DEF drinks water | Cat.DEF has drunk water. | |
| | 'The cat is drinking water' | 'The cat drank water' | |

Aspect, be it grammatical or Aktionsart, also qualifies as an event classifier, serving to classify events into perfected (2a) and imperfect events (2b).

- (2) a. John has done his homework b. John has been doing his homework.
English

² This reminds me of the arbitrary classification in Borges' "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins": "[...] animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies." (1993)

It is to be hoped that, although the world is being ordered by the somewhat arbitrary classifying devices that are the purpose of this paper, the main point about language granularity will reach the reader.

Light verbs (3) can also be seen as event classifiers, in the sense that, unlike their full-verb counterparts, they contribute a punctual, bounded interpretation³.

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|-----|--------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| (3) | a pǎlmui / a da o palmă; | a se plimba / a face o plimbare | Romanian |
| | slap / give a slap | walk / take a walk | English |

Some languages employ a system of verbal classifiers that are grammatical in nature (4), working to the same bounded effect.

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| (4) | kan-le liang yan | Chinese |
| | look-PFV two eye.SG | |
| | ‘cast a glance’ | (Greenberg 1972: 30) |

Finally, the same perfected – imperfected, or bounded – unbounded effect is achieved in some languages by the usage of verbal prefixes (5).

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| (5) | a. toptat vs raz -toptat | b. dut vs raz -dut | Russian |
| | stomp vs crush (with one’s foot) | blow vs swell | (Janda et al. 2013) |

Having looked at (what I suspect to be just a few of the) event classifiers, let us turn our attention to nominal classifiers. The term *classifier* was initially applied to numeral-classifier languages, where classifiers are obligatory with numerals and correlate with the lack of plural morphology.

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|-----|--|-------------------|
| (6) | a. Qianmian turan tiao chulai yi zhi laohu | Chinese |
| | Front suddenly jumps one CLAS tiger | |
| | ‘A tiger jumped suddenly in front of us’ | |
| | b. Ta mai le yi zhuang fangzi | |
| | He buy.PERF.ASP one CLAS house | |
| | ‘He bought a house’ | (Chen 2003: 1170) |

In these languages, classifiers perform a double role. The first is to push nouns into classes (big, round objects, small animals, etc., see Denny 1976, Aikhenvald 2000, a.o.). The second is to unveil or mirror properties of the individual denoted by the noun. For example, the classifier for *pen* in Chinese is *zhī*, (lit. ‘branch’), which suggests or mirrors the form of the pen, while the classifier for *table* is *zhāng*, (lit. ‘spread’), which suggests or mirrors the function of the table (see also Tănase-Dogaru 2024a).

³ In Romanian internet slang, the light verbs *a da* ‘give’ and *a lua* ‘take’ serve as syntactic templates which accommodates English loan roots, such as *a da / lua ban*, *trigger*, *karma*, *like*, *ghosting*. As shown in Tănase-Dogaru (2026), these loan roots are simply plugged into the syntactic frame LV + root and serve to provide a bounded interpretation.

The term *classifier* was then applied to N1s in pseudopartitive N1 of N2 constructions in languages with plural morphology (see Stavrou 2003, Tănase-Dogaru 2009).

- | | | |
|-----|--|----------|
| (7) | Un număr de studenți, o ceașcă de ceai, un bob de orez | Romanian |
| | A number of students, a cup of tea, a grain of rice | English |

Pseudopartitive constructions are nominal expressions which refer both to measuring parts of substances or groups of individuals, and to revealing properties of those substances and individuals. From a syntactic point of view, pseudopartitivity is encoded by means of three strategies: juxtaposition (8), prepositions / other connective morphemes (9), case inflections (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001, Hankamer and Mikkelsen 1998).

- | | | |
|------|---|----------|
| (8) | en kopp te
a cup tea
'a cup of tea' | Swedish |
| (9) | o ceașcă de ceai
a cup of tea | Romanian |
| (10) | säkki perunoita
sack.NOM potato.PART
'a sack of potatoes' | Finnish |

Different classifications of different classifiers in languages with plural morphology are never exhaustive, while the criteria used for the classifications are mainly semantic. In (11) and (12) are given two such classifications, an older one, for English, due to Allan (1977) and Lehrer (1985) and a more recent one, for Romanian, taken from Tănase-Dogaru (2009, 2024a).

- (11) (1) unit counters: a piece of equipment, two head of cattle
 (2) fractional classifiers: three quarters of the cake
 (3) number set classifiers: many hundreds of people, dozens of birds
 (4) collective classifiers: two clumps of grass, a herd of animals
 (5) varietal classifiers: two species of wheat, all kinds of flowers
 (6) measure classifiers: two pounds of cabbage, one liter of wine, a box of candy
 (7) arrangement classifiers: two rows of beans, three stacks of books
 (8) metaphorical classifiers: a bear of a man, a slip of a girl, a dream of a house (Lehrer 1985)
- (12) (1) unit nouns: un gest de omenie / a gesture of humanity
 (2) container nouns: un pahar de vin / a glass of wine
 (3) measure nouns: un litru de lapte / a liter of milk

- (4) shape nouns: un bob de fasole / a grain of beans
- (5) cardinal nouns: o sută de cărți / a hundred of books
- (6) quantifier nouns: o pereche de mănuși / a pair of gloves
- (7) varietal nouns: o categorie de substantive / a category of nouns

Nominal classifiers seem to fall into two classes. The first class contains quantity classifiers (13), while the second contains quality classifiers (14):

- (13) Un litru de lapte, un codru de pâine
A liter of milk, a forest of bread
'a liter of milk, a piece of bread'.
- (14) Terorista de vară-ta, nepriceputul de doctor
Terrorist.DEF of cousin-your, unskilled.DEF of doctor
'that terrorist of a cousin of yours, that unskilled doctor'

It will be shown in the following sections that the boundaries between the two categories are fuzzy, so that classifiers are better seen as arranged along a continuum from quantity to quality.

3. CLASSIFIERS OF QUANTITY

The main role of quantity classifiers is to “portion out” the substance denoted by nouns that are lexically underspecified (Borer 2005). In this sense, the function of quantity classifiers overlaps with that of plural morphology, but also extends beyond it, since classifiers may encode additional properties such as shape, spatial arrangement, or an approximation of size.

Unlike classifiers in languages such as Chinese, Japanese, or Bantu languages, classifiers in languages with plural morphology coexist with plural marking. Their role is therefore not limited to simple individuation, but also includes semantic and pragmatic nuances.

3.1. SIZE CLASSIFIERS

Size classifiers display three main types of interpretation (Brems 2010, Tănase-Dogaru 2022a).

One interpretation is the comparative one. In this case, the interpretation arises from the lexical semantics of N1 and N2, together with the selectional restrictions of the verb. For example, verbs such as *a cădea* ‘to fall’ select an N1 that refers to a concrete entity located in discourse space, from which the subject falls (15a).

- (15) a. Președintele chilian a căzut de pe o **grămadă** de moloz.
 President.DEF Chilean has fallen of on a pile/heap of debris
 ‘The Chilean president has fallen off a pile of debris.’
 b. A intrat cu mașina într-un **morman** de bolovani.
 Have.3SG entered with car in-a pile / heap of rocks
 ‘He drove the car into a pile of rocks.’
 c. Explică metafora ‘un **munte** de cărți’
 Explain.IMP metaphor.DEF ‘a mountain of books’
 ‘Explain the metaphor ‘a mountain of books’.’
 d. **Grămezi** de bani descoperite de protestatari
 Heaps.FEM of money.MASC discovered.FEM.PL by protesters
 ‘Heaps of money discovered by protesters’ (Tănase-Dogaru 2022a:107)

A second interpretation is that of a quantifier, expressing a high degree or large quantity. In such cases, N1 has a functional role equivalent to ‘large quantity’. It does not control agreement; instead, agreement is determined by N2, which is clearly shown by gender agreement in (16c).

- (16) a. A transformat un **maldăr** de fiare într-un business.
 Have.3SG turned a pile / heap of irons in-an business.
 ‘He has turned a pile/heap of scrap metal into a business’
 b. Nu ar trebui [...] să vedem **grămezi** de cadavre acolo.
 Not should have [...] SBJV see heaps of bodies there
 ‘We should not see heaps of dead bodies there.’
 c. Părerii despre **mormanul** de cărți necitite din
 casă
 Opinions about heap.DEF.NEUT of books.FEM.PL unread.FEM.PL. from
 house
 ‘Opinions about the heap of unread books in the house.’ (Tănase-Dogaru 2022a:108)

A special case involves money-related expressions, where certain classifiers that are ambiguous between “size” and “shape” develop a clear quantifier reading, referring to a large amount of money.

- (17) a. Smiley a încasat o **poală** de bani din drepturile de autor.
 Smiley has gained a lapful of money from rights.DEF of author
 ‘Smiley has gained a lot of money from royalties!’
 b. Bă, luați o **cârcă** de bani din gărzi.
 Yo, take.PRES.2PL a back of money from on-duty.PL
 ‘Yo, you gain a lot of money from being on duty.’

- c. Câștigă relaxat o **pălărie** de bani
 Earn.IMP relaxed a hatful of money.
 ‘Earn a lot of money in a relaxed way.’ (Tănase-Dogaru 2022a: 109)
- d. Dai o **căruță** de bani și poate era mai bine într-un bloc comunist⁴
 Give.2SG a wagon of money and maybe was more good in-an block communist
 ‘You give a lot of money and it may be better to live in a communist block of flats.’

A third interpretation is **evaluative**. In this use, N1 reinforces the negative evaluation associated with N2. The negative connotations of N2 are contextually mirrored by N1, which functions as a quantifier but also carries evaluative force.

- (18) a. În România și Italia sunt o **grămadă** de proști.
 In Romania and Italy are a heap / pile of stupid.MASC.PL
 ‘In Romania and Italy there are lots of stupid people.’
- b. Pe lumea asta sunt o **grămadă** de idioți.
 On world.DEF this are a heap / pile of idiots
 ‘There are a lot of idiots in this world.’
- c. O **mână** de oameni săraci
 a hand of people poor
 ‘a handful of poor people’ (Tănase-Dogaru 2022a: 110)

3.1.1. ‘SMALL SIZE’ CLASSIFIERS: DIMINUTIVES

Diminutives, especially those based on container nouns or measure units (19), also function as classifiers. These typically occur with nouns from the domain of food and have a pragmatic function: they attenuate the potentially face-threatening force of the speech act, making requests sound more polite or less imposing (20) (see Tănase-Dogaru 2025).

- (19) bucăciță de, fărâmiță de, stropșor de, dușculiță de, mânuță de, guriță de
 little piece of, little piece of, little drop of, little mouthful of, little handful of, little mouth of

- (20) a. ...dar se poate să nu serviți și o **guriță** de bitter?
 but REFL can SBJV not serve and a little.mouth of bitter?
 ‘You have to drink a mouthful of bitter’ (CoRoLA)

⁴ <https://condominii.blog/2025/04/16/regretele-romanilor-mutati-in-noile-apartamente-din-orase-dai-o-caruta-de-bani-si-poate-era-mai-bine-intr-un-bloc-comunist/>

- b. Ia și tu o **mănuță** de fragi!
 Take and you a little.hand of berries
 ‘Take a handful of berries, too!’ (CoRoLa)
- c. Dă-mi măcar o **bucățică** de pește!
 give-me at least a little.piece of fish
 ‘Give me at least a little piece of fish!’

3.1.2. ‘SMALL SIZE’ CLASSIFIERS: CONTAINER CLASSIFIERS

Container-type classifiers include nouns such as *înghițitură* ‘mouthful’, *gură* ‘mouthful, lit. mouth’, *dușcă* ‘sip’, *mână* ‘handful, lit. hand’, *dumicat* ‘morsel’. These typically combine with nouns from the domain of food and function as quantifiers.

In particular, the classifier *mână* (‘handful’) can denote either a small quantity of substance or a small group of individuals. This dual interpretation reflects the flexibility of classifiers in mapping both physical and abstract groupings.

- (21) a. Mână de: pământ, lut, ajutor, sare, fulgi dulci (CoRoLa)
 handful of: earth, clay, help, salt, sweetened flakes
- b. Mână de: oameni, voluntari, privilegiați, români
 handful of: people, volunteers, privileged people, Romanians

3.2. COLLECTIVE CLASSIFIERS

Collective classifiers typically have a neutral quantifier interpretation, where agreement may vary between singular and plural, depending on whether the focus is on the group as a whole or on its individual members (22).

- (22) a. Un grup de marinari beți a / au făcut scandal (Ștefănescu 1997)
 A group of sailors drunk has / have made scandal
 ‘A group of drunk sailors made a scandal.’
- b. Un număr de studenți a / au venit la o discuție.
 A number of students has / have come at a discussion.
 ‘A number of students have come for a discussion.’

In some cases, especially with nouns referring to groups of animals, classifiers acquire an evaluative interpretation, often with negative connotations when applied metaphorically to human referents (Tănase-Dogaru 2026).

- (23) a. Cireadă de influencerițe
 Herd of influencers.FEM
 ‘a herd of influencers’

- b. Turmă de profesori
herd of professors
'A herd of professors'
- c. Stol de școlărițe
Bevy of schoolgirls
'a bevy of schoolgirls'

3.3. SHAPE OR SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT CLASSIFIERS

In languages with plural morphology, the association between N1 and N2 involves both a degree of lexical arbitrariness and a degree of semantic "mirroring", whereby N1 reflects certain inherent properties of N2.

- (24) a head of cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower English
a stalk of celery, broccoli, rhubarb
a piece of equipment, furniture, property
an ear of corn
a blade of grass (Lehrer 1985)
- (25) a. o căpățână de varză, usturoi Romanian
a head of cabbage, garlic
b. un fir de iarbă, ceapă, floare (Tănase-Dogaru 2024c)
a thread of grass, onion, flower

Classifiers that encode shape or spatial arrangement may refer to small units, but they frequently develop qualitative or metaphorical meanings. For example, classifiers such as strop ('drop') extend beyond physical substances to abstract nouns, acquiring metaphorical interpretations.

- (26) Strop de: îndrăzneală, umilință, lene, gravitate, bine, frumos, mângâiere, perversitate, speranță, lumină, senin, iubire (CoRoLa)
Drop of: audacity, humility, laziness, seriousness, good, beauty, comfort, perversity, hope, light, serenity, love

Some of these classifiers are also **polarity-sensitive**, occurring in negative contexts and contributing a minimizer interpretation.

- (27) Nici picătură de apă, sânge, lacrimi, noroc, rouă (CoRoLa)
No drop of water, blood, tears, luck, dew
- (28) Nici strop de: umbră, oxigen, lacrimă, îndoială, normal, bucurie, sos, zahăr, inteligență, tequila, comunism, lumina
No drop of: shade, oxygen, tear, doubt, normalcy, joy, sauce, sugar, intelligence, tequila, communism, light

Classifiers derived from the domain of water (e.g. *val* ‘wave’, *mare* ‘sea’, *râu* ‘river’) illustrate how meaning arises through the interaction between N1 and N2. This interaction involves a process of co-semiosis and metaphorization (Benigni and Latos 2024), whereby properties of N1 are transferred onto N2.

- (28) **Val** de concedieri massive, o **mare** de lacrimi, un **râu** de sânge
 Wave of lay-offs massive, a sea of tears, a river of blood
 ‘a wave of massive lay-offs, a sea of tears, a river of blood’

3.3.1. THE CLASSIFIER URMĂ ‘TRACE’

Small size” classifiers such as *urmă* (‘trace’) function as polarity-sensitive minimizers and may take scope below additive operators such as *fără* (‘without’) (see Zamfirescu and Tănase-Dogaru 2015).

- (29) *fără urmă de îndoială*
 without trace of doubt
 ‘without a doubt’

In some contexts, the classifier *urmă* is silent, resulting in expressions where only the prepositional structure remains overt.

- (30) *fără urmă de tăgadă*
 Without trace of doubt
 ‘without a trace of doubt’

- (31) *fără de tăgadă*
 Without of doubt
 ‘without a doubt’

It has been proposed (Tănase-Dogaru 2023) that the classifier projection contains a silent nominal element (PIC / URMĂ), meaning ‘unit’ or ‘piece’. This element behaves as a negative polarity item due to the inherently negative or restrictive semantics of the preposition *fără*.

3.4. THE INDIVIDUATING FUNCTION OF DIMINUTIVE SUFFIXES

In certain contexts, diminutive suffixes, in combination with plural morphology, fulfill the same “portioning” function as classifiers. Mass nouns that undergo diminutivization become countable, allowing them to denote discrete units (Tănase-Dogaru 2025a).

Following De Belder (2008), it is shown that this effect can be analyzed structurally by positing a Size Phrase (SizeP), where the diminutive affix functions as the head of the projection.

- (32) a. Câte *păscuțe* ies din toată compoziția?
 How-many Easter cake.DIM.PL come-out from whole dough?
 ‘How many pieces of Easter cake can you get from this dough?’
- b. Noroc că nu mâncăm noi foarte mult
 luck that not eat.PRES.1PL we very much
 câteva *untulețe*, gem...
 a few butter.DIM.PL, marmalade...
 ‘It’s a good thing we don’t eat much, a few little packets of butter, some jam...’
- c. Rețetele noastre de cârnați și *cărnite*
 Recipes.DEF our of sausages and meat.DIM.PL
 ‘Our recipes of sausages and meat bites’ (Tănase-Dogaru 2025a: 166)

4. CLASSIFIERS AND COMPLEX PROPER NAMES

Complex proper names are structures of the type N1 *de* (Proper) N2, in which N1 functions as a classifier. The classifier denotes a social role (kinship term, profession, institutional role), a type of space (city, street, river, village), or another type of entity (theatre, planet, etc.) (van Riemsdijk 1998, Cornilescu 2007, Tănase-Dogaru 2013).

- (34) a. Profesorul Popescu
 Professor.DEF Popescu
 ‘Professor Popescu’
- b. Orașul Iași
 city.DEF Iași
 ‘The city of Iași’
- c. Regina Elisabeta
 Queen.DEF Elizabeth
 ‘Queen Elizabeth’
- d. Planeta Venus
 Planet.DEF Venus
 ‘the planet Venus’
- e. Paragraful 12
 Paragraph.DEF 12
 ‘Paragraph 12’ (Cornilescu 2007:63)

In such constructions, N1 serves to categorize or label the referent denoted by N2, making explicit the class to which the referent belongs.

4.1. COMPLEX TEMPORAL NAMES

Time expressions such as years, months, and hours can be analyzed as complex nominal structures that include an overt or covert classifier (Kayne 2005). The classifier (*year, month, hour*) may remain unexpressed, but it is understood as part of the structure (Tănase-Dogaru 2022b).

- (35) Benedict s-a născut în (anul) 480.
 Benedict REFL-has born in (year.DEF) 480
 ‘Benedict was born in the year 480’. (CoRoLa)
- (36) în (luna) aprilie devine din nou un om liber.
 in (month.DEF) April become.3.SG again a man free
 ‘in April he becomes again a free man’
- (37) E (ora) șase.
 is (hour) six
 ‘It’s six o’clock’

With names of days, a distinction arises between habitual and punctual interpretations. When the day name appears with a definite form, the interpretation is habitual. When it appears without a determiner, the interpretation is punctual, corresponding to a specific event (Franco and Lorusso 2022, Tănase-Dogaru 2022b).

- (38) Merg la magazin luna – *habitual interpretation*
 Go.1SG at shop Monday.DEF
 ‘I go shopping on Mondays.’
- (39) Merg la magazin luni – *punctual interpretation* (triggered by N-to-D movement)
 Go.1SG at shop Monday
 ‘I’m going to the shop on Monday.’

When the noun stays in the D layer, the classifier must be overtly expressed. In such cases, the classifier *zi* (‘day’) cannot be omitted (40).

- (40) a. Merg la film viitoarea *(**zi** de) marți
 Go.1SG at film next.DEF *(day of) Tuesday
 ‘I’m going to the movies next Tuesday’
- b. minunata *(**zi** de) marți
 wonderful.DEF *(day of) Tuesday
 ‘the wonderful Tuesday’

4.2. COMPLEX NAMES OF LANGUAGES

Romanian displays three main constructions for referring to languages. One involves a null classifier (41), where the noun *limbă* ('language') is implicit. Another includes the classifier explicitly (42), and a third uses an adverbial form in *-ește* (43) (Tănase-Dogaru 2024b).

- (41) Vorbește română = vorbește LIMBA română
 Spek.3SG Romanian = speak.3SG LANGUAGE Romanian
 'She speaks Romanian (language).'
- (42) Vorbește limba română
 Speak.3SG language Romanian.
 'She speaks the Romanian language'
- (43) Vorbește românește.
 Speak.3SG Romanian-ește
 'She speaks Romanian.'

Adverbs in *-ește* are semantically flexible and may express similarity (44), relation (45), conformity (46), and other meanings (Haneș 1961:147; Croitor 2024:206):

- (44) bătrânește câineșteamericaneste
 old man-ește dog-ește American-ește
 'like an old man, like a dog, like an American'
- (45) bisericeste etimologicește trupest
 church-ește etymology-ește body-ește
 'from the point of view of the church / etymology / body'
- (46) creștinește firește omeneste
 Christian-ește nature-ește human-ește
 'what Christians do / in the way of the human nature is / what humans (ought to) do'.

From the interpretation of similarity, certain forms have developed into glossonyms.

- (47) americaneste, leșeste, rămlenește, șvăbește (Croitor 2024: 206)
 American-ește, Polish-ește, Rome-ește, Schwaben-ește
 'language spoken by Americans', 'Polish language', 'language spoken in Rome', 'language spoken by Schwaben'

In contemporary Romanian, there is still a degree of ambiguity between the interpretation ‘like X’ and ‘in the X language’. In some contexts, the *-ește* form is ambiguous between these readings (48), while in lexicalized expressions the interpretation ‘like X’ is clearly preferred (49). In (48), the *-ește* derivative is ambiguous between two interpretations: *like the English* and *in the English language*; (49) only trigger the *like X* interpretation.

- (48) Salută englezește.
 Greet.PRES.3SG English-ește
 ‘(S)he greets people like English people do / using English’
- (49) a. A șters-o englezește.
 Has wiped-it English-ește
 ‘(S)he took French leave.’
 b. Sărută franțuzește.
 Kiss.PRES.3SG French-ește
 ‘(S)he engages in French kissing’

The constructions with and without the explicit classifier differ aspectually. The version without the preposition tends to have a generic or habitual reading, while the version with the preposition corresponds more closely to a progressive interpretation. In both cases, the classifier noun may be either overt or silent.

- (50) a. Vorbește (limba) engleză.
 Speak.3SG (language) English.
 ‘She speaks English.’
 b. Vorbește **în** (limba) engleză.
 Speak.3SG in (language) English.
 ‘She speaks English.’

(50a) is a generic / habitual sentence; (50b) roughly corresponds to the English progressive.

4.3. COMPLEX NAMES OF COLORS

Color expressions can also be analyzed as complex nominal structures involving a classifier (Kayne 2005, Español-Echevarría 2016, Tănase-Dogaru 2024c). The classifier (*culoare* ‘color’) may be implicit or explicit (51).

- (51) a. masa verde
 Table.DEF green
 ‘the green table’

- b. masa de culoare verde
 table of color green
 ‘the green color table’

A similar pattern is found with expressions referring to shape, where the classifier (*formă* ‘shape’) can be either overt or omitted (52).

- (52) a. masa rotunda
 Table.DEF round
 ‘the round table’
 b. masa de formă rotunda
 table.DEF of form round
 ‘the round form table’

When the classifier is expressed, the construction becomes more explicit and often more formal, while the version without the classifier is more compact and commonly used in everyday language.

- (53) a. Verdele este asociat cu natura.
 Green.DEF is associated with nature.DEF
 ‘Green is associated with nature’
 b. Culoarea verde este reprezentarea universală a siguranței.
 Color.DEF green is representation.DEF universal of safety.GEN
 ‘The color green is the universal representation of safety.’

4.4. COMPLEX NAMES OF STREETS AND METRO STATIONS

Names of streets and metro stations also involve classifier structures. The classifier (*șosea* ‘road/highway’, *stradă* ‘street’, *stație* ‘station’) may be overt or omitted, depending on context (Tănase-Dogaru 2025b).

- (54) a. Cod poștal pentru Șoseaua Andronache
 Code postal for Road.DEF Andronache
 ‘Postal code for Andronache Road’
 b. Cum să ajungeți la Andronache
 How to get at Andronache
 ‘How to get to Andronache Road’
 (55) a. Trenurile dinspre stația Republica au întors la stația
 Trains.DEF from station.DEF Republica have turned at station.DEF

Piața Unirii.

Piața Unirii

‘The trains from Republica subway station turned around at Piața Unirii station’.

b. Acum ceva ani, coboram la Republica.

Now some years, get off.1SG.IMPERF at Republica

‘Several years ago, I would get off at Republica subways station’

With metro station names, the classifier is often omitted, especially in spoken language, but also in written Romanian. In such cases, the interpretation relies on contextual knowledge.

- (56) Cum să ajungeți la Lujerului = Cum să ajungeți la STAȚIA Lujerului
 How to get at Lujerului = How to get at STATION Lujerului
 ‘How to get to Lujerului station’

The use of a silent classifier is preferred when there is no ambiguity regarding the interpretation of N2. This strategy is also connected to the use of specialized prepositions.

- (57) a. Locuiește la Londra (city)
 Live.3SG.PRES at London
 ‘She lives in London’
 b. Locuiește pe Londra (street)
 Live.3SG.PRES on London
 ‘She lives on London street’

In some contexts, especially when N2 appears in the genitive case, the classifier is easily recoverable from context and is therefore left unexpressed (see 56). This reflects a general tendency in Romanian to omit predictable elements when their meaning can be inferred.

The classifier structures discussed so far have been primarily oriented toward quantity, individuation, and categorization by class membership. However, as briefly anticipated in the introduction, the boundary between quantity and quality is not sharp. The following section turns to classifiers whose primary function is evaluative rather than quantifying, showing that the same structural devices may encode properties of a very different semantic nature.

5. CLASSIFIERS OF QUALITY

Quality classifiers are constructions in which N1 attributes a qualitative property to the referent denoted by N2. These constructions are attested cross-linguistically and often involve evaluative or expressive meanings (see Tănase-Dogaru 2011, 2012).

- (58) a. *ce bijoux d'église romane* (Doetjes and Rooryck 2003:278) French
 b. *een boom van een kerel* (Foolen 2004:76) Dutch
 c. *el idiota del vecino* (Villalba 2007:131) Spanish
 d. *some scrawny chit of a girl*⁵ English
 e. *a high-fashion spook-house of a movie*⁶ English

In Romanian, several structural patterns can be identified, depending on the definiteness and type of the elements involved. These include combinations such as definite–definite, indefinite–indefinite, demonstrative–proper name, demonstrative–indefinite, and definite–pronoun (see Español-Echevarría 1996 for Spanish):

- (59)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| DEF-DEF | <i>otrava de nevestă-sa</i> / poison.DEF of wife-his / 'that poisonous wife of his' |
| INDEF-INDEF | <i>o bestie de om</i> / a beast of a man / 'that beastly man' |
| DEM-PN | <i>acest imbecil de X</i> / this imbecile of X |
| DEM-INDEF | <i>acest imbecil de doctor</i> / that imbecile of doctor / 'that imbecile of a doctor' |
| DEF-PRON | <i>prostul de el</i> / stupid.DEF of him / 'that stupid guy' |
| | <i>biata de mine</i> / poor.DEF of me / 'poor me' |

Romanian distinguishes between simple qualitative constructions and double-definite constructions (Tănase-Dogaru 2012, 2013). In simple constructions, the structure is relatively straightforward, while in double-definite constructions both elements carry definiteness marking.

- (60) *Un înger de copil* *un idiot de doctor*
 An angel of child an idiot of doctor
 'an angel of a child' 'an idiot of a doctor'

⁵ <https://speakr2customrs.livejournal.com/22382.html>

⁶ <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-neon-demon-2016>

- (61) a. prostul ăla de frate-tău
 Stupid.DEF that of brother-your
 ‘that stupid of a brother of yours’
 b. scârbiți de ciumele de voi⁷
 sickened by pests.DEF of you
 ‘sickened by the pests that you are’

Double-definite qualitative constructions display specific syntactic constraints. For example, only certain adjectives can appear prenominally, and some combinations are excluded.

- (62) bietul de tine *un biet de doctor
 poor.DEF of you *a poor of doctor
 ‘poor you’ ‘int. a poor of a doctor’

From a semantic point of view, N2 denotes an entity of type <e>, which explains why non-specific, generic indefinite, or downward entailing contexts are not compatible with these constructions.

- (64) a. *N-am vorbit cu idiotul de *orice profesor*.
 Not-have talked-SG with idiot.DEF of any professor
 b. *E important să vorbești cu un idiot de *un profesor*.
 is important to talk-2SG with an idiot of a professor
 c. *N-am vorbit cu idioții de *puțini profesori*.
 Not-have talked with idiots.DEF of few professors

Agreement in definiteness is also required: if the lower element (N2) is definite, the higher element (N1) must also be definite. This reflects a structural dependency between the two elements.

- (65) prostul de doctorul ăla *un prost de doctorul ăla
 Stupid.DEF of doctor.DEF that *a stupid of doctor.DEF that

5.1. N1 + (de) + PROPER N2

In constructions where N2 is a proper name, N1 may function either as a classifier in a complex proper name structure or as an evaluative element (Tănase-Dogaru 2025c, to appear).

⁷ https://www.romaniatv.net/consilierea-unui-deputat-psd-catre-protestatari-scarbity-de-ciumele-de-voi-v-as-teleporta-pe-toti-in-india_338999.html

- (66) a. **Legionarul Sechila**, săltat de la Aeroportul Otopeni, încerca să plece
Guardist.DEF Sechila, busted of at Airport.DEF Otopeni, try.IMPF to leave
'Guardist Sechila, busted at Otopeni Airport, was trying to leave.'
b. Pare că **legionarul de Georgescu** nu prea agreează ideea.
Seems that Guardist.DEF of Georgescu not too approves idea
'It seems that the Guardist of a Georgescu does not really approve of the idea'
- (67) a. La 25 ianuarie 1947 a murit **gangsterul Al Capone**.
at 25 January 1947 has died gangster.DEF Al Capone
'On the 25th of January 1947 the gangster Al Capone died'
b. **Gangsterul ăla de Mustață** nu mai atrage pe lângă el decât maxim 400 persoane.
gangster.DEF that of Mustață not more attracts on near him but 400 persons
'That gangster of Mustață no longer attracts more than 400 persons around him.'
- (68) a. Printre primii deținuți s-a aflat și vestitul **mafiot Al Capone**.
among first.DEF detainees REFL-has found and famous.DEF mafioso Al Capone.
'Among the first detainees was also the famous mafioso Al Capone.'
b. PNL îi cheamă pe sălăjeni să îl pedepsească pe **mafiotul de Băsescu**.
PNL them calls DOM s. to him punish DOM mafioso.DEF of Băsescu
'The National-Liberal Party calls on the inhabitants of Sălaj county to punish Băsescu, that mafioso.'
- (69) a. Cum a făcut bani **mercenarul Potra** în Congo
How has made money mercenary.DEF Potra in Congo
'How the mercenary Potra made money in Congo'
b. E două clase peste **mercenarul de Oțele**
is two classes above mercenary.DEF of Oțele
'He is twice as good as that mercenary of a footballer Oțele'

In the a variants of the examples above, the nominal expressions are complex proper names, where N1 names or labels the entity denoted by N2, while N1 is used as a name of role or 'profession'. In the b variants, the nominal expressions are qualitative binominal constructions, where 'negative' features are transferred from the domain of N1 onto the domain of N2.

5.2. EVALUATIVE CLASSIFIERS OF “HUMAN QUALITY”

Certain classifiers are used to evaluate human referents along a scale from negative to positive. These classifiers are often desemanticized and function primarily as markers of evaluation (Tănase-Dogaru 2025d).

- (70) a. o **jigodie de om** ne-a vândut pe toți
 a distemper of man us-has sold DOM all
 ‘that scumbag of a man has sold us all.’
 b. e o **dulceață de om**
 is a jam of man
 ‘He is a sweetness of a man’

Some classifiers place the referent at the negative end of the scale (*jigodie* ‘distemper’, *japiță* ‘bitch’, *javră* ‘cur’, *canalie* ‘rascal’, *bestie* ‘beast’, *gunoi* ‘trash’, *diavol* ‘devil’, *drac* ‘devil’, *rahat* ‘shit’, *curvă* ‘whore’), while others place it at the positive end (*dulceață* ‘sweetness’, *scumpete* ‘sweetheart’, *drăgălășenie* ‘cuteness’, *drăguțenie* ‘cuteness’, *înger* ‘angel’, *minune* ‘wonder’, *grădină* ‘garden’, *bestie* ‘beast’). Despite their original lexical meanings, these items function mainly as evaluative devices in this context.

5.3. OPTIONAL CLASSIFIERS

Some classifiers form a closed class, including items such as *fir*, *cap*, and *căpățână*. These classifiers are optional and alternate with constructions in which no classifier is present (Tănase-Dogaru 2024d).

- (71) a. trei fire de floare b. trei flori
 three threads of flower three flowers
 a. trei fire de ceapă b. trei cepe
 three threads of onion three onions
 a. trei capete de vită b. trei vite
 three heads of cattle three cattle.PL
 a. trei căpățâni de varză b. trei verze
 three heads of cabbage three cabbages
 a. un calup de unt b. un unt
 a block of butter a butter
 a. trei tablete de ciocolată b. trei ciocolate
 three pieces of chocolate three chocolates

In the absence of an overt classifier, the construction may be ambiguous between a reading involving a *plurality of subkinds* (72a) and a reading involving a *plurality of individuals*. When the classifier is overtly expressed, only the interpretation involving individual units is available (73) (see Schvarcz and Nemes 2021, Nemes and Schvarcz 2022 for Hungarian):

- (72) a. Am nevoie de trei verze: una roșie, una albă și una de Bruxelles.
 (I) have-need of three cabbages: one red, one white and one of Brussels
 ‘I need three (kinds of) cabbages: a red one, a white one, and a Brussels sprout.’
 b. Am nevoie de trei verze; patru ar fi prea mult.
 (I) have-need of three cabbages; four would be too much
 ‘I need three cabbages; four would be too much.’
- (73) a. ?? Am nevoie de trei căpățâni de varză: una roșie, una albă și una de Bruxelles.
 (I) have-need of three CLAS.HEADS of cabbages: one red, one white and one of Brussels.
 ‘I need three cabbages: a red one, a white one, and a Brussels sprout.’
 b. Am nevoie de trei căpățâni de varză; patru ar fi prea mult.
 (I) have-need of three CLAS.HEADS of cabbage; four would be too much.
 ‘I need three cabbages; four would be too much’ (Tănase-Dogaru 2024d:471)

Therefore, the role of overt classifiers in such constructions is that of encoding a reading of the type *individual unit*, as opposed to a reading of the type *kind of*.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined a range of classification devices in Romanian, with a focus on nominal classifiers, while also briefly addressing event classifiers. The analysis has shown that classification is a fundamental property of language, reflecting its inherently granular structure. Both events and entities are systematically organized into categories through linguistic means, and classifiers play a central role in this process.

The discussion of event classifiers has highlighted that categories such as tense, aspect, light verbs, grammatical classifiers, and verbal prefixes contribute to the structuring of events along dimensions such as temporality and boundedness.

Although only briefly addressed here, these elements suggest that classification operates not only in the nominal domain but also in the verbal domain, opening avenues for further research.

With respect to nominal classifiers, the paper has shown that their role extends beyond simple individuation or counting. In languages with plural morphology such as Romanian and English, classifiers coexist with plural marking and contribute additional semantic and pragmatic information, including shape, spatial arrangement, size approximation, and evaluation.

A major point emerging from the analysis is that the distinction between quantity and quality classifiers is not clear-cut. While quantity classifiers are primarily associated with the “portioning” of substances and the expression of amount, and quality classifiers with evaluation, the data show that many classifiers display mixed interpretations. Size classifiers, for example, may simultaneously express quantity, spatial configuration, and evaluative meaning, while shape-based classifiers often develop metaphorical extensions into the domain of quality.

The analysis of diminutives and container classifiers has further shown that pragmatic factors play an important role in classifier use, especially in contexts involving politeness and mitigation. At the same time, polarity-sensitive classifiers and silent classifier structures point to a more abstract level of representation, where classification may be encoded even in the absence of overt lexical material.

The discussion of complex proper names has demonstrated that classifier structures extend beyond common nouns into the domain of proper reference. In such constructions, classifiers serve to categorize referents by assigning them to socially, spatially, or conceptually defined classes. The alternation between overt and silent classifiers in this domain reflects both syntactic constraints and discourse-related factors.

Finally, the analysis of quality classifiers has shown that Romanian makes extensive use of evaluative binominal constructions, which are subject to specific syntactic and semantic constraints. These constructions illustrate how classification interacts with evaluation, allowing speakers to position referents along a scale of positive and negative values. The distinction between classificatory and evaluative uses of similar structures further supports the view that classifiers operate along a continuum rather than within discrete categories.

In conclusion, the data discussed in this paper support the view that classifiers are best understood as flexible devices that mediate between quantity and quality, categorization and evaluation, lexical meaning and pragmatic interpretation. Rather than forming clearly delimited classes, classifiers in Romanian appear to be organized along a continuum, reflecting the complex ways in which language encodes human experience and structures reality.

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TIPURI DE CLASIFICATORI NOMINALI ÎN LIMBA ROMÂNĂ

(Rezumat)

Această lucrare investighează tipologia și funcția clasificatorilor nominali în limba română, plasându-i în contextul mai amplu conform căruia granularitatea este o proprietate structurală a limbajului în ansamblu, operantă atât în domeniul nominal, cât și în cel verbal. După o scurtă trecere în revistă a clasificatorilor evenimențiali (timpul gramatical, aspectul, verbele suport, clasificatorii verballi gramaticali și prefixele verbale) ca dispozitive de clasificare a evenimentelor, lucrarea se concentrează pe obiectivul său principal: clasificatorii nominali din construcțiile pseudopartitive de tipul N1-de-N2. Se arată că aceștia se plasează pe un continuum de la cantitate la calitate, și nu în două clase discrete. La polul cantității, lucrarea analizează clasificatorii de mărime, colectivi, de formă și de aranjare spațială, alături de clasificatorii diminutivali de „mărime mică” și cei de tip container, arătând cum aceste dispozitive codifică lecturi comparative, cuantificatoriale și evaluative, și cum unele dezvoltă extensii sensibile la polaritate, de tip minimizator sau metaforic. Discuția extinde apoi structurile clasificatoare la nume proprii complexe – inclusiv expresii temporale, denumiri de limbi, nume de culoare și formă, precum și nume de străzi sau de stații de metrou – susținând că atât clasificatorii manifești, cât și cei muți servesc la categorizarea referențelor în funcție de clasa socială, spațială sau conceptuală. La polul calității, lucrarea analizează construcțiile binominale evaluative, detaliind tiparele lor de acord în definititudine și constrângerile sintactice care disting structurile simplu-definite de cele dublu-definite. Lucrarea conchide că clasificatorii românești sunt mai bine înțeleși nu ca membri ai unor categorii fixe, ci ca dispozitive flexibile care mediază între cuantificare și evaluare, sens lexical și funcție pragmatică, reflectând modul granular în care limbajul organizează experiența umană.

TYPES OF ROMANIAN NOMINAL CLASSIFIERS

(Abstract)

This paper investigates the typology and function of nominal classifiers in Romanian, situating them within a broader claim that granularity is a structural property of language as a whole, operative in both the nominal and verbal domains. After briefly surveying event classifiers (tense, aspect, light verbs, grammatical verbal classifiers, and verbal prefixes) as classifying devices for events, the paper turns to its main focus: nominal classifiers in pseudopartitive N1-of-N2 constructions. These are shown to fall along a continuum from quantity to quality rather than into two discrete classes. On the quantity end, the paper examines size, collective, shape, and spatial-arrangement classifiers, along with diminutive-based "small size" and container classifiers, showing how these devices encode comparative, quantifier, and evaluative readings, and how some develop polarity-sensitive, minimizer, or metaphorical extensions. The discussion then extends classifier structures to complex proper

names – including temporal expressions, language names, color and shape terms, and street or metro station names – arguing that overt and silent classifiers alike serve to categorize referents by social, spatial, or conceptual class. On the quality end, the paper analyzes evaluative binominal constructions, detailing their definiteness-agreement patterns and the syntactic constraints distinguishing simple from double-definite structures. The paper concludes that Romanian classifiers are best understood not as members of fixed categories but as flexible devices mediating between quantification and evaluation, lexical meaning and pragmatic function, reflecting the granular way language organizes human experience.