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# ON THE USE OF THE DEFINITE ARTICLE WITH PREPOSITIONS IN ROMANIAN

ALEXANDRU MARDALE

## 1. *Introduction*

The aim of this paper is double. On the one hand, we present a descriptive overview of the use of the definite article with prepositions in Romanian. On the other hand, we provide a morpho-syntactic analysis of article ‘drop’ in the framework of minimalism.

The paper is organised as follows. In section 2 we introduce the data to be discussed. We compare Romanian examples to other Romance languages, Albanian and English. We also register a few exceptions to the empirical generalization we shall observe. Section 3 is concerned with a brief examination of other cases of article omission representing a different phenomenon. In section 4 we discuss the conditions under which article drop takes place in Romanian. In this section we show that there are a number of necessary but not sufficient conditions being in a competing relation with respect to article drop. Section 5 offers an analysis of this phenomenon in terms of economy and reduced functional structure. Finally, section 6 provides the conclusions of our research.

## 2. *The data*

In a number of Balkan languages, like Romanian, Albanian and Bulgarian, the definite article may be realized as a suffix on the noun (1) or on a prenominal adjective (2) (Grosu 1988, 1994, Giusti 1991, Longobardi 1996, Dimitrova-Vulchanova & Giusti 1998, Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006).

- |     |    |   |             |
|-----|----|---|-------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>parc-ul</i><br>park-the<br>‘the park’  | (Romanian)  |
|     | b. | <i>trapezë-n</i><br>table-the<br>‘the table’  | (Albanian)  |
|     | c. | <i>masa-ta</i><br>table-the<br>‘the table’  | (Bulgarian) |
| (2) | a. | <i>înverzit-ul parc</i><br>green-the park<br>‘the green park’   | (Romanian)  |
|     | c. | <i>i bukur-i dhe i madh-i qytet</i><br>Agr beautiful-the and Agr big-the city<br>‘the beautiful and the big city’ | (Albanian)  |
|     | b. | <i>tservena-ta masa</i><br>red-the table<br>‘the red table’   | (Bulgarian) |

### 2.1 *Definite article drop in Romanian*

As recently shown by Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006, the fact that the definite article may be suffixal in these languages raises fundamental questions with regard to the analysis of the functional category D(eterminer) and its relation with the lexical category N(oun)<sup>1</sup>. It also raises several problems regarding the structure, and consequently the analysis, of DPs when embedded in PPs.

More precisely, in Romanian, a non modified noun preceded by a preposition is necessarily used without the definite article.

- (3) a. *Mă îndrept către parc / \*către parcu-l* (Romanian)  
 me head towards park towards park-the  
 'I'm heading towards the park'
- b. *Ion a împins mașina în prăpastie / \*în prăpasti-a*  
 John AUX pushed car-the in abyss in abyss-the  
 'John pushed the car into the abyss'

When the noun preceded by the preposition combines with an adnominal constituent (AP (4a), PP (4b) or a relative clause (4c)), the definite article is required. In the following examples the adnominal constituent is postnominal.

- (4) a. *Mă îndrept către parcu-l înverzit / \*către parc înverzit.*  
 me head towards park-the green towards park green  
 'I'm heading towards the green park'
- b. *Ion a împins mașina în prăpasti-a din mijlocul pădurii /*  
 John AUX pushed car-the in abyss-the DE+in middle-the forest-the<sub>GEN</sub>  
*\*în prăpastie din mijlocul pădurii.*  
 in abyss DE+in middle-the forest-the<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'John pushed the car into the abyss in the middle of the forest'
- c. *Mă îndrept către parcu-l care a fost construit anul trecut.*  
 me head towards park-the which has been built year-the last  
 'I'm heading towards the park which was built last year'

The situation is identical when the adnominal constituent is prenominal<sup>2</sup>.

- (4') a. *Mă îndrept către înverzitul parc / \*către înverzit parc.*  
 me head towards green-the park towards green park  
 'I'm heading towards the green park'
- b. *Ion a împins mașina în oribil-a prăpastie / \*în oribilă prăpastie.*  
 John AUX pushed car-the in horrible-the abyss in horrible abyss  
 'John pushed the car into the horrible abyss'

Notice that the Romanian indefinite article, which is an indefinite word preceding the noun, i.e., proclitic, does not fall under this rule. In other words, the indefinite article may be present with a (non modified) noun governed by a preposition.

- (5) *Mă îndrept către un parc / către un parc înverzit.*  
 me head towards a park towards a park green

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, in terms of D lowering -to- Num(ber), see the Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea (op. cit.).

<sup>2</sup> Note that Romanian, unlike French or German, among other languages, does not have contracted forms of the (definite) article and prepositions.

‘I’m heading towards a (green) park’

The omission of the definite article is not sensitive to the PP’s grammatical function. As shown by the following set of data, the PP may appear in various syntactic positions: preverbal subject in copular sentences (6), subcategorized PP (7), the so-called ‘prepositional’ direct object (8), modifier (9).

(6) *Sub masă este un loc preferat de copii pentru a se acunde.*  
under table is a place preferred by children for to SE<sub>REFL</sub> hide  
‘Under the table is children’s favourite place to hide’

(7) *Am optat pentru președinte.*  
have opt for president  
‘I opted for the president’

(8) *L-am văzut pe profesor.*  
him-have seen PE<sub>ACC</sub> professor  
‘I saw the professor’

(9) *Comoara a fost îngropată în grădină.*  
treasure-the AUX been buried in garden  
‘The treasure has been buried in the garden’

Moreover, this phenomenon is not sensitive to the distinction between lexical (10) and the so-called ‘functional’ prepositions (see (8) above and (11)).

(10) *Victima a fost prinsă sub acoperiș.*  
victim-the AUX been trapped under roof  
‘The victim has been trapped under the roof’

(11) a. *O caut pe secretară.*  
her<sub>CL</sub> look PE<sub>ACC</sub> secretary  
‘I’m looking for the secretary’  
b. *Dau cărți la copii.*  
give books to children  
‘I give books to the children’

Another important observation regarding this phenomenon is that it occurs only with prepositions that assign Accusative Case, not with those that assign Genitive or Dative. In fact, this is a logical consequence of the fact that Romanian Genitive and Dative Case must be (morphologically) marked on the determiner (see Dobrovie-Sorin xxxx, Cornilescu xxx, Grosu xxxx), thus it must be overt.

(12) a. *proteste împotriva discriminări-lor* / *\*împotriva discriminări* (Genitive)  
protests against discriminations-the<sub>GEN</sub> / against discriminations  
‘(some) protests against discriminations’  
b. *succese grație effort-ului* / *\*grație efort* (Dative)  
success thanks to effort-the<sub>DAT</sub> / thanks to effort  
‘(some) success thanks to the effort’

### 2.1.1 Interpretation

Since we are concerned with constructions that lack the definite article, we would expect that they have a non referential and / or at least an indefinite reading. In fact, it is to be noted that, despite the omission of the article, the constructions mentioned above necessarily have a referential and definite reading. This may be proved by the possibility of inserting a strong form of the (demonstrative) determiner.

- (13) *Mă îndrept către acest parc.*  
me head towards this park  
'I'm heading towards this park'

### 2.1.2 Exceptions

There are however two exceptions to this 'rule'.

The first one is represented by the nouns preceded by the preposition *cu* 'with' when it introduces an instrumental PP in a generic use.

- (14) *Medicul operează pacient-ul cu bisturiu-l<sup>3</sup>.*  
doctor-the operates on patient-the with lancet-the  
'The doctor operates on the patient with a lancet'

The second one is represented by idioms preceded by the complex preposition *de-a* 'as'.

- (15) a. *Copiii se joacă de-a școal-a.*  
children-the SE<sub>REFL</sub> play DE-A school-the  
'The children play at being at school'  
b. *Copiii se joacă de-a hoți-i și vardiști-i / detectivi-i.*  
children-the SE<sub>REFL</sub> play DE-A burglars-the and policemen-the detectives-the  
'The children play at being burglars and policemen / detectives'

## 2.2 Crosslinguistic data

In what follows, we compare the Romanian data involving definite article omission with similar constructions in Albanian, certain Romance languages and English.

### 2.2.1 Albanian<sup>4</sup>

The same phenomenon exists in Albanian: when the noun preceded by a preposition is not modified, the definite article cannot appear.

- (16) a. *Vuri librin mbi trapezë / \*mbi trapezë-n.*  
put book-the on table on table-the  
'He puts the book on the table'  
b. *Unë po shkoj në park / \*në park-ut*  
I PRT<sub>PROGR</sub> go to park / to park-the  
'I'm going to the park'  
c. *Unë po shkoj në shkollë / kishë // \*në shkollë-n / kishë-n*

<sup>3</sup> Some speakers may use expressions like the following, i.e., without definite article: *tai cu foarfecă* 'I cut with scissors', *tunde cu mașină (de tuns)* 'He cuts (hair) with a hair clipper'.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Ion Giurgea and especially to Etleva Vocaj for helping me with these data.

- I PRT<sub>PROGR</sub> go to school church to school-the church-the  
 ‘I’m going to (the) school / church’
- d. *Thesari është groposur në kopësht / \*në kopsht-in*  
 treasure-the is buried in garden in garden-the  
 ‘The treasure is buried in the garden’

On the contrary, when the noun combines with an adnominal constituent, the presence of the definite article is obligatory. The following constructions contain postnominal constituents.

- (17) a. *Vuri libri-n mbi trapezë-n që bëri gjyshi.*  
 put book-the on table-the that made grandfather  
 ‘He puts the book on the table grandfather made’
- b. *Unë po shkoj në park-ut me pemë të larta /*  
 I PRT<sub>PROGR</sub> go to park-the with trees big  
*\*në park me pemë të larta*  
 to park with trees big  
 ‘I’m going to the park with big trees’
- c. *Unë po shkoj në shkollë-n e çunave / kishë-n ortodokse /*  
 I PRT<sub>PROGR</sub> go to school-the of boys church-the orthodox  
*\*në shkollë e çunave / kishë ortodokse*  
 to school of boys church orthodox  
 ‘I’m going to the boys school / orthodox church’
- d. *Thesari është groposur në kopsht-in për të cilin më fole /*  
 treasure-the is buried in garden-the about it me spoke  
*\*në kopësht për të cilin më fole*  
 in garden about it me spoke  
 ‘The treasure is buried in the garden about you spoke to me’

### 2.2.2 Other Romance Languages and English

The above described phenomenon does not exist in other languages we have examined. Several Romance languages, like French, Italian, and Spanish, but also Germanic languages, like English, show a different behaviour with respect to the use of the definite article after prepositions. This is to say that the latter, which is a definite word preceding the noun, i.e., proclitic, may not fall when embedded in a PP.

- (18) a. *Je me dirige vers le parc / \*vers parc.* (French)  
 b. *Je me dirige vers le parc avec de grands arbres.*  
 c. *Je me dirige vers le vieux parc.*
- (19) a. *Mi dirigo verso il giardino / \*verso giardino* (Italian)  
 b. *Mi dirigo verso il giardino con fiori.*
- (20) a. *Juan se ha escondido detrás de los árboles / \*detrás de árboles.* (Spanish)  
 b. *Juan se ha escondido detrás de los árboles verdes.*
- (21) a. *We are heading towards the park / \*towards park.* (English)  
 b. *We are heading towards the park with big trees.*

## 3. Cricumscribing the phenomenon

The cases described so far must be distinguished from other cases of lack of determiner.

### 3.1 Article omission with bare nouns

These cases are encountered in all the languages mentioned above. It is to be noted that the following examples characterize exclusively the nominal domain, i.e., they appear only as adnominal modifiers in complex nominal structures or compounds. Of particular importance is the fact that no type of determiner is allowed with these nouns (most of them being mass or uncountable nouns), which are necessarily interpreted as indefinite and generally denote properties (of individuals) (Milner xxxx, Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca xxxx, Kolliakou xxxx, Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin xxxx, Mardale xxxx).

- (22) a. *o rochie de mireasă* / \**de o* / *această* / *mireas-a* (Romanian)  
a dress of bride / of a / this / bride-the  
'a wedding dress'
- b. *un pahar de cristal* / \**de un* / *acest* / *cristalu-l*  
a glass of crystal / of a / this / crystal-the  
'a glass of crystal'
- c. *o casă fără uși* / \**fără niște* / *aceste* / *uși-le*  
a house without doors / without some / these / doors-the  
'a house without doors'
- (23) a. *une robe de mariée* / \**d'une* / *cette* / *la mariée*<sup>5</sup> (French)  
b. *un verre en cristal* / \**en un* / *ce* / *le cristal*  
c. *une maison avec jardin* / \**avec un* / *ce* / *le jardin*  
d. *des fenêtres sans volets* / \**sans des* / *ces* / *les volets*
- (24) a. *un bicchiere di cristallo* / \**di un* / *questo* / *il cristallo* (Italian)  
b. *un abito da sposa* / \**da una* / *questa* / *la sposa*  
c. *una casa con giardino* / \**con un* / *questo* / *col* (*con + il*) *giardino*
- (25) a. *un vestido de novia* / \**de una* / *esta* / *la novia* (Spanish)  
b. *una casa con jardín* / *con ventanas* / \**con un* / *este* / *el jardín*  
c. *una copa de cristal* / \**de un* / *este* / *el cristal*  
d. *una mesa de madera* / \**de una* / *esta* / *la madera*
- (26) a. *a mother without child* (*cf. she is without child*) (English)  
b. *a car with / without driver* / \**without a* / *this* / *the driver*  
c. *a house in marble* / *a piece of marble*  
d. *a man of steel*

Note also that the Romanian preposition *cu* 'with', which normally combines with a noun followed by the definite article (see the section § 2.1.2., ex. (14)), does not license a D either in examples of this second type:

- (27) a. *o casă cu grădină tropicală* / \**cu grădin-a tropicală*  
a house with garden tropical with house-the tropical  
'a house with a tropical garden'
- b. *o pălărie cu boruri largi* / \**cu boruri-le largi*

<sup>5</sup> Those examples are acceptable with a different (partitive) interpretation.

a hat with brims large with brims-the large  
 ‘a broad-brimmed hat’

Interestingly, the presence of an adnominal constituent / modifier does not induce the realization of a determiner (in contrast with what happens with the article drop described in § 2).

- (22') a. *o rochie de mireasă africană* (Romanian)  
 a dress of bride African  
 ‘an african wedding dress’  
 b. *un pahar de cristal de Boemia*  
 a glass of crystal of Bohemia  
 ‘a glass of bohemian crystal’  
 c. *o casă fără uși de lemn*  
 a house without doors of wood  
 ‘a house without doors in wood’
- (23') a. *une robe de mariée africaine* (French)  
 b. *un verre en cristal de Bohème*  
 c. *une maison avec jardin tropical*  
 d. *des fenêtres sans volets verts*
- (24') a. *un bicchiere di cristallo bianco / di Boemia* (Italian)  
 b. *un abito di sposa africana*  
 c. *una casa con giardino tropicale*
- (25') a. *un vestido de novia africana* (Spanish)  
 b. *una casa con jardín tropical / con grandes ventanas*  
 c. *una copa de cristal francés / de Bohemia*  
 d. *una mesa de madera de roble*
- (26') a. *a house with tropical garden* (English)  
 b. *a car with / without cyber driver*

### 3.2. Article omission with certain spatial PPs

According to Stvan (1998), (2006), these cases are characterized by the presence of a special type of null determiner. They are characterized by three distinct types of interpretation – the two first being pragmatically conditioned: (i) Familiarity Implicature; (ii) Activity Implicature and (iii) Generic use.

- (28) a. *a merge la școală / la biserică / la teatru* (Romanian)  
 to go at school at church at theatre  
 ‘to go to school / church / theatre’  
 b. *a fi în pușcărie / în spital*  
 to be in prison in hospital  
 ‘to be in prison / hospital’
- (29) *shkoj në shkollë / në kishë* (Albanian)



go at school at church  
 ‘to go to school / church’

- (30) a. *to go to school / to church* (English)  
 b. *to be in jail*  
 c. *to be on campus*

- (31) *otiva na utchilishte / na tcheva* (Bulgarian)  
 go to school to church  
 ‘to go to school / church’

We will not analyse these cases here<sup>6</sup>. It is clear that the phenomenon is different from the one described in § 2. above, although some implicational relation may hold between the two phenomena : if a language has Article Drop in general, it will also have article drop with prepositions, but not conversely.

#### 4. *The suffixal nature of the Romanian definite article: necessary or sufficient condition?*

One question that arises when examining the data in section 2 is whether the drop of the definite article takes place in all the languages that have suffixal definite articles. In other words, *is suffixal status necessary and / or sufficient condition?*

A partial answer can be supplied if we look at Bulgarian (32) – (32’), where the definite article, in spite of its suffixal status, always appears after the preposition.

- (32) a. *Otpravam se kîm masa-ta / \*kîm masa*  
 head me towards table-the towards table  
 ‘I’m heading towards the table’  
 b. *Otivam kîm tchekva-ta / \*kîm tchekva*  
 go towards church-the towards church  
 ‘I’m heading towards the church’  
 c. *Otivam kîm utchilishte-to / \*kîm utchiliste*  
 go towards school-the towards school  
 ‘I’m heading towards the school’

- (32’) a. *Otpravam se kîm tservena-ta masa.*  
 head me towards red-the table  
 ‘I’m heading towards the red table’  
 b. *Otivam kîm tchekva-ta do teatîr-a.*  
 go towards church-the near theatre-the  
 ‘I’m heading towards the church near the theatre’  
 c. *Otivam kîm utchilishte-to na Andrei.*  
 go towards school-the of Andrew  
 ‘I’m heading towards Andrew’s school’

The Bulgarian data clearly show that a suffixal definite article is *not sufficient* for article drop. This generalization is also suggested by the fact that article omission is impossible with modification (4).

<sup>6</sup> For more details concerning the analysis of this type of data, see also Baldwin & alii 2006.

This leaves open the hypothesis that the suffixal status of the definite article is a *necessary condition* on article drop, since the definite article does not fall in those languages in which it is not a suffix (see (18) – (21) *supra*). The fact that the Romanian indefinite article, which is proclitic, does not fall either (5) may be viewed as evidence in favour of this view.

To sum up, let us consider that the definite article omission in Romanian (and Albanian) is subject to at least two constraints: first, *the status of the article*; second, *modification*.

Given the facts presented so far, a number of issues have to be addressed: (i) what is the licensing mechanism for the lack of the definite article with prepositions?; (ii) why must the definite article appear when the noun combines with a modifier?; (iii) why is the definite reading permitted?

## 5. *Analysis*

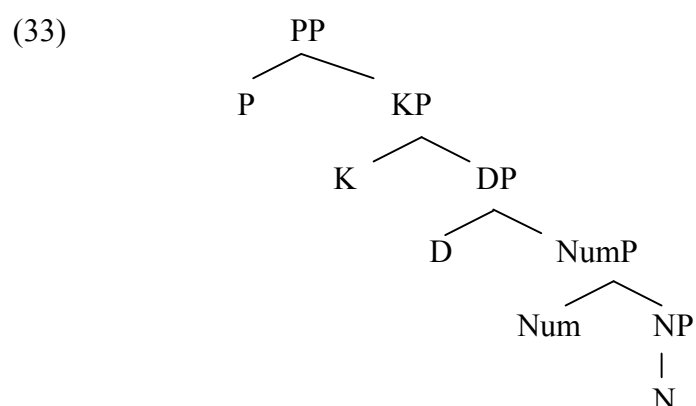
To answer these questions, we will suggest that the definite article drop with prepositions in Romanian (and Albanian) can be analyzed as a special case of incorporation.

Since Baker 1988, Farkas & de Swart 2003, among others, we know that incorporation is characterized by a special morpho-syntax which correlates with a special semantics. As shown by these authors, incorporated elements may exhibit (one of) the following features: (i) they have reduced functional structure; (ii) they are restricted to special positions; (iii) they are restricted to special interpretations.

In the next subsections, we demonstrate that prepositional constructions lacking the definite article are characterized by the properties we have cited, especially by the features (i) and (iii).

### 5.1 *DP structure*

We assume the following hierarchical structure for the nominal projections preceded by a preposition (adapted from Barrie 2006, Barrie & Spreng 2006 proposed for German). More precisely, we assume a structure in which the lexical projection of the noun is dominated by three functional projections: the Num(ber) projection, the D(eterminer) projection and the Case projection. It is clear that there may be another (functional) projections, but they are not relevant for our discussion.



#### 5.1.1 *Case marking*

Since the lack of the definite article does not take place with prepositions that assign Genitive or Dative Case (see (12) *supra*), but only with those that assign Accusative, we consider that Accusative Case is the default (or at least a ‘weak’) Case in these constructions. The main

argument in favour of this view is that Romanian Accusative Case is identical to the Nominative Case<sup>7</sup>, i.e., the nominal form which is found in dictionaries.

Consequently, we assume that the Case is not checked in these constructions. In other words, we assume that Case and its projection, i.e., KP are absent. This is to say that *P and DP are adjacent*.

### 5.1.2 Number marking

Another fact that signals a reduced functional structure concerns number marking. It is to be noted that the lack of D with the definite interpretation takes place generally when the noun is marked for singular. When the noun is marked for plural the indefinite interpretation is not excluded, even obligatory.

- (34) a. *Am vorbit despre filme.* (Romanian)  
 AUX talked about movies  
 ‘We/I talked about movies’  
 b. *Am pus romanele pe rafturi.*  
 AUX put novels-the on shelves  
 ‘We/I put the novels on shelves’  
 c. *Am ascuns cărțile sub dulapuri.*  
 AUX hidden books-the under cupboards  
 ‘We/I have hidden the books under cupboards’

Since this phenomenon seems to be restricted to singular forms, we assume that singular features represent the default number marking. In other words, similarly to Case marking, we assume that Num may not be checked and that its projection, i.e., NumP may be absent.

This can be considered as an additional (but not sufficient) condition on the incorporation of D into P.

## 5.2 M-merger / incorporation

The facts described above suggest that the definite determiner can incorporate into the preposition under certain conditions: (i) lack of KP, (ii) lack of modification and (iii) ‘weak’, i.e., suffixal status. The lack of NumP may be viewed as a fourth condition.

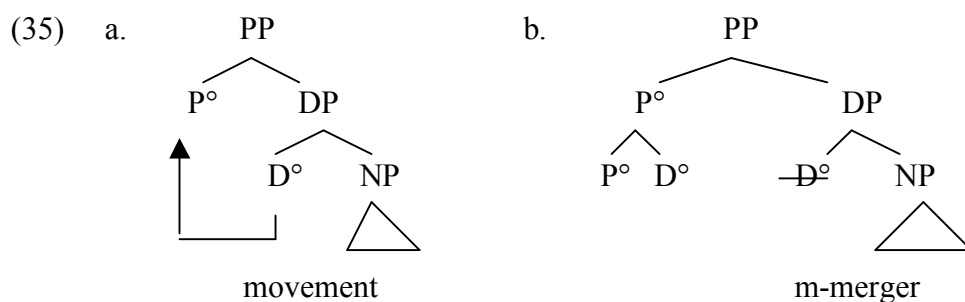
According to Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006, the suffixation of the definite article is to be analyzed as Lower D-to-Num<sup>o</sup> (comparable to Affix-Hopping, i.e., Lower I-to-V / v in English – see Embick & Noyer 2001).

If indeed, Num<sup>o</sup> is not projected in the relevant examples, then D-Lowering cannot apply (since the position which it must lower is absent). This forces it to incorporate into the next higher projection, which is the preposition.

As for the technical details of this analysis, we may use the morpho-syntactic mechanism of *m-merger*<sup>8</sup> (Matushansky 2006) to formalize the article ‘drop’ with prepositions. This mechanism takes place at PF level and is defined for two heads in a particular configuration (35). It consists in the following two operations: (i) movement of the attracted head, i.e., the ‘weak’ one – here the suffixal article, to the attracting head, i.e., the ‘strong’ one – here the preposition, and (ii) m-merger. The result of m-merger is a single syntactic head which contains the features of both initial heads.

<sup>7</sup> The distinction between Nominative and Accusative is visible with certain forms of the pronouns, but not with ‘true’ nouns.

<sup>8</sup> Morphological merger.



M-merger cannot take place under modification since modification depends on a ‘rich’ functional structure, i.e., on the projection of D, among others. Consequently, the determiner cannot be attracted by the preposition, because it must project the DP-level in order to ensure the entire functional structure of the nominal construction.

On the other hand, the lack of the definite article may be understood as a question of economy of language. More precisely, if a language may express a certain sense by using a minimal structure, i.e., a reduced (functional) structure, it does. In other words, there are languages which have the possibility to express a referential and definite without lexicalizing the definite article. It may be the case of Romanian (and Albanian). Certainly, this leads to a fresh analysis of the others elements in the structure (e.g. the preposition which probably exhibit definiteness features).

## 6. Concluding remarks

We suggested that the lack of the definite article with prepositions in Romanian can be accounted for by analyzing it as a type of incorporation which takes place under strict conditions: (i) lack of modification, (ii) weak status of the article, i.e., suffixal status, (iii) strict locality, i.e., incorporated D is obligatorily linearly adjacent to its host category P and are phonologically fused.

These cases of article incorporation must be distinguished from other cases of article omission (e.g. adnominal PPs taking a bare noun complement, certain spatial PPs).

## 7. References

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