

**Syntax meets etymology: the origin and development of Romanian strong demonstratives**

**1. Background.** It is well-known that Romanian demonstratives arrange in a unique morpho-syntactic system from a Romance comparative perspective. This ‘uniqueness’ stems from the intersection of two options attested in Romance:

(a) a morpho-phonological distinction between *weak* and *strong* forms; strength is achieved through the suffixation of the particle *-a* (weak: *acel* / strong: *acela* ‘that’);

(b) a particular distribution of the weak and strong forms; weak forms function exclusively as prenominal determiners (1), while strong forms are used pronominally (2) and as postnominal determiners (3), obligatorily preceded by a definite noun (3a); the postnominal demonstrative construction is also subject to a supplementary adjacency constraint: the demonstrative is strictly adjacent to the definite head noun (3b) (noun plus adjective sequences cannot precede strong demonstratives, cf. (3c)). (W and S in the glosses stand for WEAK and STRONG)

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| (1) | <i>acel</i> / <i>acest</i> <i>om</i><br>that.W this.W man<br>‘this / that man’                  | (3) | a. | <i>omul</i> <i>acela</i> / <i>acesta</i><br>man.DEF      that.S this.S<br>‘that / this man’ |
| (2) | <i>Acela</i> / * <i>Acela</i> <i>ajuns</i> .<br>that.S that.W has arrived<br>‘That one arrived’ |     | b. | <i>omul</i> <i>acela</i> <i>înalt</i><br>man.DEF      that.S tall<br>‘that tall man’        |
|     |   |     | c. | * <i>omul</i> <i>înalt</i> <i>acela</i><br>man.DEF      tall      that.S                    |

The distinction between weak and strong demonstratives is attested in Romance (e.g., modern Nap. *chisto/sto*, Anzese: *chisso/sso*; *kwéstə/stú*, *kwéssə/ssú*; NCal. *chistu/stu*, *chissu/ssu*, Ledgeway 2015), but correlates with a determiner/pronoun functional specialization. Similarly, adnominal demonstratives in prenominal and in postnominal position are also attested in other Romance languages (e.g. Spanish), but the form/position specialization (weak – prenominal; strong – postnominal) and the adjacency constraint are specific to Modern Romanian.

The previous investigation of textual evidence from the earliest Romanian writings (dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> c.) has revealed that (i) the form/position specialization characterizing Modern Romanian is not at work in Old Romanian (weak and strong forms can be used indiscriminately as prenominal and postnominal determiners, and as pronouns); (ii) the adjacency constraint characterizing Modern Romanian adnominal strong demonstratives (cf. (3b) vs (3c)) is not functional in Old Romanian (Nicolae 2015). The emergence of the system presented in (1) – (3) can be thus observed in the attested history of the Romanian language.

**2. Goals of the paper.** While the syntax of prenominal weak demonstratives is not problematic in Romanian, being similar to that of other prenominal demonstrative determiners in Romance, the origin and syntax of strong demonstratives stand in need of an analysis. The paper has two related goals: (i) to bring syntactic evidence in favour of Manoliu’s (2006, 2011) hypothesis according to which the final particle *-a* of strong demonstratives historically derives from the reduced forms of Latin distal ILLAC (‘(over) there, that way’) and proximal HAC (‘here, this way’); thus, strong demonstratives originate from genuine demonstrative-reinforcer

constructions (Bernstein 1997; Roehrs 2010); (ii) to show that the adnominal usage of strong demonstratives is the effect of the reanalysis as a single DP of a biphrasal appositional construction made up of a definite head noun and a pronominal strong demonstrative (Manoliu 2006); reanalysis correlates with categorial specialization (Diessel 1999): weak forms specialize as heads, while strong forms specialize as phrases.

### 3. Ingredients of the analysis: etymology meets syntax

In conjunction with the goals established above, we put forward the following diachronic scenario accounting for the specialization of weak and strong forms, and for the development of the postnominal demonstrative construction in the passage from Old to Modern Romanian. (i) The weak forms, directly inherited from Latin, functioned both as pronouns and as adnominal determiners, as shown by the earliest Romanian written records. (ii) The strong forms, reinforced by ILLAC and HAC – which presumably formed in an unattested stage of Romanian –, were originally pronominal and had a deictic, exophoric usage (Manoliu 2006). (iii) The existence of formally distinct, yet categorially non-distinct, demonstratives triggers a process of *diachronic specialization*: weak form specialise as heads in accordance with van Gelderen’s (2004) *Head Preference Principle*, while strong forms preserve their phrasal status. (iv) As an effect of their specialisation as heads, weak forms are gradually excluded from the pronominal usage and are retained only as adnominal determiners; vice versa, the phrasal nature of strong forms accounts for their usage as pronouns. (v) Finally, the adnominal usage of strong demonstratives results from the reanalysis of a biphrasal appositional construction in a P-ambiguous context.

The occurrence of adnominal strong demonstratives in postnominal position in DPs in which the head noun is the bearer of definiteness indicates that strong demonstratives are unable to value the definiteness feature hosted by D<sup>0</sup>. Diachronically, this is the effect of the very frequent occurrence of strong demonstratives in the low definite article construction (4) (Cornilescu and Nicolae 2011): in this construction (pervasive in Old Romanian), demonstratives precede a definite noun; definiteness valuation proceeds across the demonstrative, making the demonstrative “invisible” for probing by the [*i*def] feature of D<sup>0</sup>.

(4) [aceasta moșia] vândut-am (Old Romanian, 1595-1596)  
 this.S property.DEF sell.PPLE=have

Synchronically, if we agree with Leu (2008), Roehrs (2010) a.o. that phrasal demonstratives (i.e. the strong forms of Romanian) (i) have a complex internal structure and (ii) are phrasal domains, then the “invisibility” of strong demonstratives for probing is a *Phase Impenetrability Condition* (Chomsky 2000) effect: the demonstrative stem, which is the bearer of definiteness, is too deeply embedded in the structure of the complex phrasal demonstrative to be an accessible (visible) Goal for the [*i*def] Probe in D<sup>0</sup>.

The adjacency constraint (3) derives from general conditions on movement: being phrasal, strong demonstratives merge in a specifier of a functional projection below D; in order to access D, the probed noun can only undergo head-movement to D, as phrasal movement across the demonstrative triggers a minimality violation involving a phrasal constituent crossing over another phrasal constituent (Cornilescu 2005).

**References** Bernstein, J., 1997, “Demonstratives and reinforcers in Romance and Germanic languages”; Chomsky, N., 2000. “Minimalist Inquiries: the Framework”; Cornilescu, A., Nicolae, A., 2011. “On the Syntax of Romanian Definite Phrases: Changes in the Patterns of Definiteness Checking”; Cornilescu, A., 2005. “Romanian demonstratives and minimality”; Diessel, H., 1999. *Demonstratives: Form, Function, and Grammaticalization*; Ledgeway, A., 2015. “Varieties in Italy”; Leu, T., 2008, *The Internal Syntax of Determiners*; Manoliu, M., 2011. “Pragmatic and discourse changes”, Manoliu, M., 2006, “La dialectique du changement linguistique: les sept vies du démonstratif roumain”; Nicolae, A., 2015. “On the Syntactic

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