

ON SOME SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF THE ROMANIAN “AT/TO”

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Abstract: A key property of Romanian Datives is that they can be marked in two distinct ways: inflectionally and prepositionally by the P *la* “at/to”. The two types of marking are dictated by the nature of the determiner which can be variable or invariable and which may or may not realize morphological case. The purpose of this paper is to address two aspects which dictate the acceptability of the prepositional marking in standard Romanian: (a) the animacy/definiteness hierarchies and (b) the singular/plural distinction. Firstly, it will be demonstrated that *la*-datives express sensitivity to both the animacy and definiteness hierarchies (Aissen 2003; Croft 2003 a.o.); in light of this, it will be shown that only nouns high on the animacy scale are felicitous with *la*-marking of the dative because they carry a [Person] specification, while abstract nouns, lower on the hierarchy, are not compatible with the *la*-marking. Secondly, the *la*-marking is sensitive to the definiteness scale where 1st and 2nd person pronouns are infelicitous with the *la*-marking as they are strongly individualised, followed by proper names for they are atomic units. Last but not least, following Corbet’s (2000) singular/plural distinction, *la*-datives are preferred with plural nouns as they are not individualised, as opposed to singular nouns which carry this feature and, as a result, makes them dispreferred

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present article aims at delving into some of the semantic properties of Romanian *la*-datives in ditransitive constructions. One important feature of *la*-datives is that they are *core-datives*; the chief property of core datives is c-selection- core-datives are c-selected and semantically entailed by the V. Core-datives merge low (cf. Moraru-Zamfir, 2023). Therefore, their categorial status can be either DP or PP. Phrases headed by *la* are interpreted as DPs when they can be doubled by clitics (where *la* is interpreted as a functional preposition, while equivalent phrases that cannot be doubled by clitics will be analysed as PPs (where *la* is interpreted as a lexical P, in line with Cornilescu et al. (2017). In light of this, the Romanian *la* “at/to” exhibits a dual status- it is both a (i) *functional dative marker* and also a (ii) *core lexical preposition* with a locative/ directional meaning, with lexical *la* assigning Acc case to its object. In other words, a *la*-phrase is a Dat when it can be clitic-doubled (CD), as shown in (1a,b); the morphology of its complement DP is Acc; yet, starting from the idea that pronominal clitics double DPs, *la*-phrases are considered DPs. It is important to mention that CD is optional with

verbs that select [+Person] complements (1a), but mandatory with unaccusatives.

functional *la*

(1) a. (Le)-au cumpărat baloane *la* copii.
they.cl.Dat have bought balloons to children
“They have bought balloons to the children.”

lexical *la*

b. Alexandra a mers *la* mama./ ** mamei.
Alexandra has gone at mother.Acc/ ** mother.Dat
“Mihaela went to mother.”

Romanian exhibits the alternation of nominal constituents marked with Dative with that of PP headed by the functional “*la*”. This alternation is shaped by the following two aspects (cf. Mardale 2008, GOR 2013 a.o): firstly, for DPs with an invariable determiner (e.g. cardinals *la trei* “to three”, *nişte* “some”) *la*-marking is mandatory as shown in (2a) below and secondly, for DPs with a variable determiner case-marking is obligatory as (2b) illustrates (view also adopted in Moraru-Zamfir, 2023). Some constituents (e.g. *cătorva* “some”) allow both types of marking which bear the same syntactic and interpretative properties, but with a stylistic difference: the inflectional marking is specific to standard Romanian while the

prepositional marking pertains to non-standard language (see 3(a, b) below).

- (2) a. Am dat (baloane) *la doi* copii.
 have given balloons LA two children
 "I have given balloons to two children."
 b. M-am opus *întregului* grup.
 meRefl.-have opposed entire-the.DAT group.
 "I opposed the entire group"
- (3) a. A mulțumit *câtorva* profesori.
 has thanked some.DAT professors
 "(S)he thanked some professors."
 b. A mulțumit *la câțiva* profesori.
 has thanked LA some professors
 "(S)he thanked some professors."

As mentioned, the choice between *la*-marking and case-marking is dictated by a morphological property: the nature of the determiner which may or may not realize morphological case. Thus, if the determiner is *invariable* the inflectional dative is replaced by the P construction with "la"; this time only the prepositional marking becomes the only option and therefore the inflectional dative cannot be realised.

Let us consider the classes of determiners that dictate the choice between the two types of marking (inflectional/prepositional). As suggested above, for DPs with *invariable determiners*, *la*-marking is mandatory and the only option; interestingly the P *la* "at/to" keeps its original allative value (cf. GOR 2013) (see 4(a-e) below).

cardinal numbers (*doi* "two", *trei* "three")

- (4) a. Am oferit (premiu) **la trei** copii.
 have offered prizes LA three pupils
 "I have offered prizes to three pupils"

indefinites (*niște* "some")

- b. Am dat (cadouri) **la niște** foste studenți.
 have give presents LA some former students.
 "I have given presents to some former students."

quantifiers (*tot* "everything")

- M-am adresat **la tot** plutonul.
 MeRefl.-have address LA whole platoon-the
 "I spoke to the whole platoon"

emphatic determiners (*însuși* "(his/it)self")

- M-am adresat **la însuși** directorul medical.
 MeRefl.-have address LA himself medical director-the
 "I spoke to the medical director himself."

adjectives (*astfel de* "such")

- Nu dau informații **la astfel de** oameni
 Give information LA such people.DAT
 "I don't give information to such people"

For DPs with *variable* determiners, the inflectional dative becomes a mandatory choice, at least in standard Romanian (see 5 (a-e), 6(a) and 7 (a,b) below).

q(quantificational)-determiners (întreg "whole", fiecare "every", orice "any", mulți "many", puțini "few", câțiva "some")

- (5) a. M-am adresat **întregului** sat.
 MeRefl.-have addressed entire-the_{DAT} village
 "I spoke to the whole village"
 (Mardale 2008: 151)
 b. Am oferit flori **fiecărei** sărbătorite.
 Have given flowers every birthday girl.DAT
 "I gave flowers to every birthday girl"
 c. Am dat sfaturi **multor** studenți.
 Have given advice many students.DAT
 "I gave advice to many students."
 d. M-am adresat **puținilor** studenți
 rămași la conferință.
 meRefl.- have addressed few students.DAT
 left at the conference
 "I spoke to the few students left at the conference."
 e. A telefonat **câtorva** rude.
 has phoned some relatives
 "(S)he called some relatives"

articles (un "a")

- (7) a. M-am adresat **unui** elev.
 meRefl.- have addressed a_{DAT} pupil
 "I spoke to a pupil"

demonstratives (acest "this", acel "that")

- (8) a. Am dat un premiu **acestui** elev.
 have give an award this pupil.
 "I have given an award to this pupil"
 b. Am dat o carte **acelei** elev.
 have give book that pupil.
 "I have given a book to that pupil"

Other constituents, such as the q-determiner *câțiva* "some" allow both types of marking (case-marking and *la*-marking), as suggested by Mardale (2008:151).

- (9) a. A telefonat **câtorva** colegi.
 has phone_{PastPart} some_{Dat} colleagues
 "(S)he called some colleagues"
 (Mardale 2008:151)
 b. A telefonat **la câțiva** colegi.
 has phone_{PastPart} LA some colleagues
 "(S)he called some colleagues"
 (Mardale 2008:151)

In dialectal Romanian, especially in the spoken language, *la*-marking is preferred even in those situations where its presence is not dictated morphologically. Let us consider 10 (a, b) where

the IO is realized as a PP headed by the P *la*, even if the determiner has case inflection.

- (10) a. Le-am dăruit cadouri
la bunici/ bunicilor.
 CL.DAT.3PL=(I) have given presents.PL.ACC
 to grandparents.ACC/ grandparents.DEF.DAT
 “I offered the grandparents presents”
 (Diaconescu and Rivero 2007: 230)
- b. Dă-i **la** mama.
 give.2SG DAT.CL to mother.
 “Give (it) to mother!”
 (Diaconescu and Rivero 2007: 230)

In certain regional variants of contemporary Romanian, the IO is replaced by a PP headed by *către* “towards”, as (11a) suggests.

- (11) a. A zis bunicul către cerșetor
 să plece.
 Has said grandfather.DEF.NOM toward beggar
 să_{SUBJ} leave.SUBJ.3SG
 “The grandfather said to the beggar to leave”

So far, we have shown that Romanian determiners dictate the type of marking of the Dat: (a) invariable determiners (“some”, *tot* “everything” etc.) call for the prepositional marking of the Dat and (b) variable determiners (*întreg* “whole”, *fiecare* “every”) require the inflectional marking of the Dat, while some determiners allow both types of marking.

The next section addresses the distribution of *la* in standard Romanian, following the animacy/definiteness hierarchies and the singular/plural distinction.

2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF LA FOLLOWING ANIMACY/DEFINITENESS HIERARCHIES

The paper suggests that *la*-datives rely on a combination of several overlapping hierarchies: (a) the Animacy Hierarchy (Human > Animate > Inanimate), a Nominal Hierarchy (pronouns > nouns) and a Person Hierarchy (1st > 2nd > 3rd). Let us start the analysis from the (a) referential hierarchy (Richards 2008) illustrated below in (12) which itself comprises two hierarchies: person/animacy and person/definiteness (see (13a, b) below) and from (b) the plural marking-hierarchy proposed in Corbett (2000), shown in (14).

- (12) Silverstein person/animacy scale
 (Silverstein 1976, Dixon 1994)
 1/2 –person (pron.) > 3–person (pron.) >
 animate (3–person) > inanimate (3–person)

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|---|
| Agents/ Subjects Definite | ... | Patients/Objects Indefinite (cf. Richards 2008:138) |
|---------------------------------|-----|---|
- (13) a. person/animacy scale
 1/2 – person pron. >animate (3–person,
 pron/noun) > inanimate (3–person, pron./noun)
 (cf. Richards 2008:141)
- b. person/ definiteness scale
 1/2– person (pron.)> 3–person (pron.) >definite>
 specific> nonspecific
 (cf. Richards 2008:141)
- (14) 1st person > 2nd person> 3rd person> kin> human>
 animate> inanimate
 (cf. Corbett 2000, 90)

Following the person/animacy scale, if we start the analysis with the left of the scale, person nominals bare the following key characteristics: they are [+animate] and [+definite] and they ask for a 1st, 2nd or 3rd person specification. Let us consider the verb *a da* “give”. As shown in (15a) and (16a) and (16b) *la*-marking of the Dative is strongly dispreferred with first- and second-person pronouns, in both singular and plural. This occurs because 1st and 2nd person pronouns are highly individualised bearing a [definite] feature. One can observe in (15a) and (16a) that the clitics is also sensitive with 1st and 2nd person pronouns.

- (15) a. ?? Dă-(mi) *la* mine coșul cu
 cireșe.
 give (cl.dat.1sg) LA me basket with
 cherries
 “Give the cherry basket to me.”
- a’. Dă-mi mie coșul cu cireșe.
 give.cl.dat.1sg me basket with cherries
 “Give me the cherry basket.”
- (16) a. *Îți dau *la* tine cheia.
 cl.dat.2sg dau LA you key.the
 “I give the key to you.”
- a’. Îți dau ție cheia.
 cl.dat.2sg give you key.the
 “I give you the key.”
- b. *Vă dau *la* voi cheia.
 cl.dat.2pl give LA you key.the
 “I give the key to you.”
- b’. Vă dau vouă cheia.
 cl.dat.2pl give you key.the
 “I give you the key.”

It is important to mention here that it has long been commonly accepted in the literature (Forchheimer 1953; Benveniste 1966, Ritter 2002 a.o.) the difference between (a) 1st and 2nd person

pronouns and (b) 3rd person pronouns. The [Person] feature belongs only to first and second person pronouns (I/you) while third person pronouns lack this feature, they are unmarked. To quote Forchheimer (1953: 5-6), third person “remains in the great pool of the impersonal”.

Examples from CoRoLa illustrate that in non-standard language, Romanian *la*-datives occur with third person pronouns, as shown in (17a, b) (cf. Moraru-Zamfir, 2023)

In non-standard Romanian, *la*-datives occur with 3rd person pronouns as examples from CoRoLa illustrate (see (17) below):

- (17) a. ?? (...) dă la ei tot ce ai, poate așa
scapi de necaz (...)
give LA them all have got, maybe this way
you escape from trouble.the
“(...) give everything you have got to them,
maybe this way you’ll escape from the trouble (...)”
a’. Dă-le lor tot ce ai, poate așa
scapi de necaz.
Give.cl.dat.3pl them all have got, maybe this way
you escape from trouble.the
“Give them everything you have got, maybe this
way you’ll escape from the trouble”

La-datives are illicit with proper names because they are strongly individualized. However, in dialectal Romanian *la*-datives do occur with proper names the examples found on Google suggest (as also discussed in Avram 1997; Iorga 2013 a.o.)

- (18) a. ?? Îi dau rețeta la Maria.
CL.DAT.3SG give recipie.the LA Maria
“I give the recipe to Mary”
a’. Îi dau cartea Mariei.
CL.DAT.3SG give book.the Mary.DAT
“I give the book to Mary”

The literature (Kripke 1972) describes proper names as “saturated expressions” or as “rigid designators”, following the Fregean tradition. One explanation for this would be the very idea that they refer to the same individual in all possible worlds. Following Longobardi (1994), they are analysed as <e> type expressions, with an internal syntactic structure with a definite feature. Being atomic units, strongly individualised, the degree of acceptability with the *la*-dative goes towards the inferior line of acceptability, similar to pronouns.

As suggested in (19a) below, *la*-datives occur with common nouns specified for 3rd person, in the singular, with a referential reading. However, the example in (19b) is preferred in standard language.

In (19c) the demonstrative *ăsta* “this” highlights the referential reading of the noun, thus making the degree of acceptability of the *la*-marking low.

- (19) a. ?? Îi dau o carte la fată.
CL.DAT.3SG give a book LA girl
“I give a book to the girl”
a’. Îi dau o carte fetei.
CL.DAT.3SG give a book girl.DAT
“I give a book to the girl.”
b. ??? Dă la mama revistele.
give LA mother magazines.the
“Give the magazines to mum”
(Avram 2004)
b’. Dă-i mamei revistele.
give CL.DAT.3SG mum magazines.the
“Give mum the magazines”
c. ?? Emite-i un cec la băiatul ăsta.
draw.CL.DAT.3SG a check LA boy this
“Draw a check to this boy”
c’. Emite-i un cec băiatului.
draw.CL.DAT.3SG a check boy.DAT
“Draw this boy a check.”

However specific to non-standard Romanian, *La*-datives occur with collective nouns, also known as “group nouns” (Leech 1989) (*personal* “staff”, *echipă* “team”, *comitet* “committee”, *popor* “people”, *trupă* “troop”, *congregație* “congregation”, *biserică* “church” etc.) with a [+human] reference, carrying a 3rd person specification. As noted by Tănase-Dogaru (2009) collective nouns accept countable quantifiers, determiners, plural markers and plural anaphoric pronouns.

- (20) a. Managerul dă bonusuri la personal.
manager gives bonuses LA staff
“The manager gives bonuses to the staff”
a’. Managerul dă bonusuri personalului.
manager gives bonuses staff.Dat
“The manager gives the staff bonuses”
b. Comandantul dă ordine la pluton.
commander gives orders LA platoon
“The commander gives orders to the platoon”
b’. Comandantul dă ordine plutonului.
commander gives orders platoon.Dat
“The commander gives the platoon orders”
c. Primarul a trimis ajutoare bănești la nevoiași.
Mayor sent support financial LA poor.the
“The mayor has sent financial support to the poor.”

Furthermore, *la*- datives can occur with nouns with [+animate], [-human] features (see 24(a-b) below) and, as the examples suggest they are better tolerated with the prepositional frame, for DPs lower on the animacy better tolerate the *la*-marking.

- (24) a. Fetița împarte mâncarea *la* pisici.
 girl.the shares food.the LA cats.
 “The girl shares the food to the cats.”
 Fetița împarte mâncarea pisicilor.
 girl.the shares food.the cats.Dat
 “The girl shares the cats the food”
 Fetița dă mâncare *la* câțel.
 girl.the gives food LA dog.
 “The girl gives food to the dog”
 Fetița dă mâncare câinelui.
 The girl gives food dog.Dat
 “The girl gives the dog food”.

La is also used with common nouns with a [+human] feature, singular/plural and with a generic, non-specific reading. In contrast to (24a-b) where the nouns have a referential reading, in (25a,b) the nouns have a generic reading and they are situated lower on the definiteness hierarchy; thus, we make the claim that they better tolerate the prepositional construction.

- (25) a. Primarul a oferit haine *la* orfani.
 mayor.the has offered clothes LA orphans.
 “The mayor has offered clothes to the orphans”
 b. Primarul a oferit haine orfanilor.
 mayor.the has offered clothes orphans.Dat
 “The mayor has offered the orphans shelter.”

Moreover, *la* is used with common nouns with a [-human][-animate] features, in the singular/plural.

- (26) a. A pus îngrășământ *la* plante.
 has put fertilizers to plants.the
 “He has put fertilizers to the plants.”
 a'. *?A pus îngrășământ plantelor
 has put fertilizers plants.the
 “He has put fertilizers to the plants.”
 b. A adăugat miere *la* limonadă.
 has added honey to lemonade.the
 “He has added honey to the lemonade.”
 b'. *?A adăugat miere limonadei.
 has added honey lemonade.Dat
 “He has added honey to the lemonade”

One observation is in order here. *La*-datives are endowed with an interpretable [person] feature, which brings about sensitivity to the animacy scale. That is why, functional *la* cannot occur with abstract nouns, because only nouns prominent on the hierarchy, endowed with [+animate] [+person] features are tolerated with the *la*-marking of the dative. In other words, the [i-person] feature represents an s-selectional requirement of the DP *la* combines with and it brings along sensitivity to the animacy scale. Consider the examples in (27a-

b) where *la*-dative cannot occur with abstract nouns, in sharp contrast to the inflectional marking of the dative.

- (27) a. *A supus proiectul *la* atenția organizației.
 has submitted project.the to attention organization.the
 “He submitted the project to the organisation’s attention”
 a'. A supus proiectul atenției organizației.
 has submitted project.the attention.the.dat organisation.the.gen
 “He submitted the project to the board’s attention”

3. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the present examination has revealed that the P *la* exhibits sensitivity to both the animacy and definiteness hierarchies where *la* is preferred with nouns high on the animacy scale; abstract nouns are infelicitous with the *la*-marking. In line with the definiteness hierarchy, 1st and 2nd person pronouns and proper names are strongly individualised and they are dispreferred with the *la*-marking.

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