

The curious case of N1 (*of*) Proper N2: evaluation vs complex proper names

Mihaela Tănase-Dogaru
University of Bucharest

Constructions binominales en OF et métaphore
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1. Introduction and aims

Focus of the paper - (1-2):

(1) Nu ai noștri au pierdut, ci **teroristul** **ăsta de Nadal** a câștigat.

not Gen ours have lost, but terrorist.DEF this of Nadal has won

‘It’s not that our team has lost, but that the phenomenal Nadal has won’

- in (1) N1 performs an evaluative function, giving rise to a ‘standard’ binominal qualitative construction, in the sense that certain features are transferred from the domain of N1 onto the domain of N2, the resulting interpretation being “Nadal is an extremely good tennis player”;

(2) **Teroristul Carlos Şacalul** a fost condamnat.

Terrorist.DEF Carlos Jackal.DEF has been convicted.

‘The terrorist Carlos the Jackal has been convicted.

- in (2), the absence of the functional element *de* correlates with a complex proper name interpretation, where N1 names or labels the entity denoted by N2, in a fashion similar to constructions such as *the planet Venus* or *der Stadt Wien* (van Riemsdijk 1998, Cornilescu 2007, Tănase-Dogaru 2013, 2024).

Aims

- To describe the difference between the patterns N1 + Proper N2 and N1 + of + Proper N2 in terms of classificatory devices and P-features like evaluation by the speaker, respectively
- To touch upon the role of the linker *de* 'of'

Roadmap

- Section 2 gives the background on Romanian evaluative binominals and complex proper names
- Section 3 takes the steps towards an analysis in terms of evaluative P-features
- Section 4 gives the conclusions

2. Background

2.1. Evaluative binominals

Evaluatives have been the focus of much research in the literature and have been referred to as ‘qualitative’ (Milner 1978, Hulk and Tellier 2000), predicate inversion structures (Corver 1998, Den Dikken 1998, 2006), binominal NPs (Aarts 1998), pivotal N1of N2 constructions (Zamparelli 1996), N/A de N constructions (Español-Échevarría 1998).

- (3)
- a. ce bijoux d’église romane (French), Doetjes and Rooryck 2003:278
‘this jewel of a roman church’
 - b. een boom van een kerel (Dutch) Foolen (2004:76)
‘a tree of a man’
 - c. el bueno de Ignacio (Spanish), Suner 1990:427
‘the good of Juan’
 - d. some chit of a girl (English) Agatha Christie, Five Little Pigs:18
 - e. a high-fashion spook-house of a movie (English), Roger Ebert, The Neon Demon

Either-or relation, i.e. *quantity* OR *quality*, in the literature on binominal constructions:

- Classifier-noun sequences (4) → quantitative expressions
- Evaluative binominals (5) → qualitative expressions

(4) *un strop de sânge*

a drop of blood

(5) *Niciodată să nu te întorci la o otravă de om*

Never SBJV not you return at a poison of human

”You should never go back to a poison of a human being.”

However:

- classifiers have metaphorical uses by means of which they become evaluative;
- classifiers / quantifying N1s and evaluative / qualifying N1s are placed on a cline.

One of the first linguists to use the label *metaphorical classifiers* is Lehrer (1986) in a discussion of (6):

(6) a bear of a man, a slip of a girl, a dream of a house (Lehrer 1986: 111).

Three types of binominals with quantity/quality fuzzy boundaries:

➤ the evaluating use of (small) size nouns (Brems 2010, Tănase-Dogaru 2022): N1 simply emphasizes the negative evaluation of N2; a sort of contextual mirroring of the negative connotations of N2 by an N1 that possesses a quantifying interpretation, which can be paraphrased as ‘a large amount of’.

(7) a bunch of hamfisted dimwits (Brems 2010, 84)

(8) 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.’

(9) O mână de oameni săraci
a hand of people poor
‘a handful of poor people

➤ venary terms

(i) when used in ‘unusual (transferred) contexts’ (Lehrer 1986), the evaluating dimension is clearly visible (10)

(10) Herd / flock / bevy / swarm / gaggle / litter of philosophers

(ii) elsewhere (e.g. *a cackle of hyenas, an ostentation of peacocks* etc.), N1 in the structure *collective noun + of + animals* is a functional element, which has lost any shade of lexical meaning; it is almost a completely bleached noun, with the rough meaning *group*.

The first nominal element simply picks up some of the characteristic features of the animal denoted by the second nominal in structure. For instance, hyenas are known for their typical cackling sound, peacocks are known for their being ostentatious, a.s.o (Tănase-Dogaru 2023).

➤ ‘arrangement’ classifiers

(11) val de concedieri masive o mare de lacrimi un râu de sânge
wave of lay-offs massive a sea of tears a river of blood

- the meaning of the construction arises from the interaction of the N1 and the N2 as the result of a process of *co-semiosis and metaphorization* (Benigni and Latos 2023: 2) → properties of the first noun are mapped onto the second noun.
- N1 tends to grammaticalize into a function word, i.e. an arrangement and/or quantity classifier (Benigni 2022, Benigni & Latos 2023 for Italian, Polish and Russian).
- a grammaticalization process along the cline path leading from quality (i.e. mapping of semantic features – SHAPE, ARRANGEMENT, SIZE, DIRECTIONALITY/ORIENTATION towards quantity – AMOUNT.

What about syntax?

Modern Romanian features the following types of qualitative patterns (see Español-Echevarría 1996 for Spanish):

- (i) DEF-DEF otrava de nevastă-sa / poison.DEF of wife.DEF-his /
'that poison of a wife of his'
- (ii) INDEF-INDEF o bestie de om / a beast of man / 'a beast of a man'
- (iii) DEM-PN acest imbecil de X / this imbecile of X / 'this imbecile
of a(n) X'
- (iv) DEM-INDEF acest imbecil de doctor / this imbecile of doctor /
'this imbecile of a doctor'
- (v) DEF-PRON prostul de el / fool. DEF of him / 'that fool'

- In Romanian: a distinction between single definite qualitative constructions SDPQs (12) and double definite qualitative constructions DDPQs (13) (Tănase-Dogaru 2012a,b, 2013):

(12) Un înger de copil
an angel of child

(13) prostul ăla de frate-tău scârbiți de ciumele de voi
Stupid.DEF that of brother-your sickened by pest.PL.DEF of you.PL
'that stupid of brother of yours' 'sickened by the pests of you all'

Unlike SDPQs, DDPQs (may) feature:

➤ exclusively prenominal adjectives (14)

(14) bietul de tine

poor.DEF of you

'poor you'

sărmanul de Ion

pitiabile.DEF of John

'poor John'

(15) *un biet de doctor

a poor of doctor

*un sărman de copil

a pitiable of child

[DP1] de [DP2]

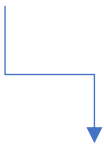


- an e-type denotation for N2, which explains the ban on non-specific DPs, indefinite generics, and downward entailing quantifiers (15)

- (15) a. *N-am vorbit cu idiotul de *orice profesor*
Not-have talked-1sg 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

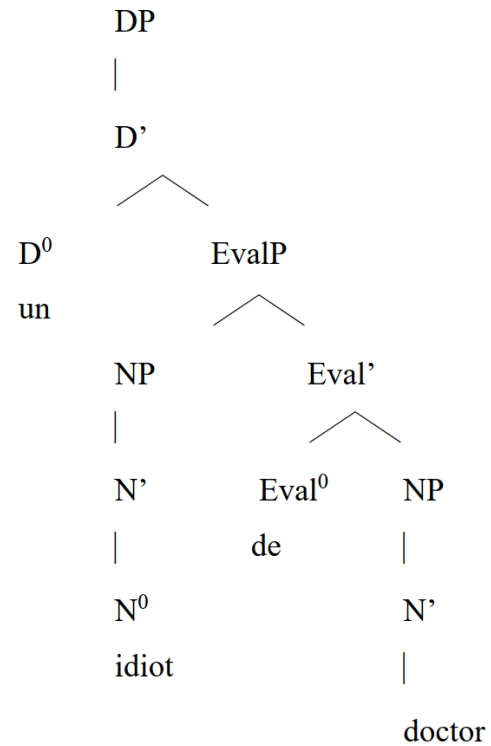
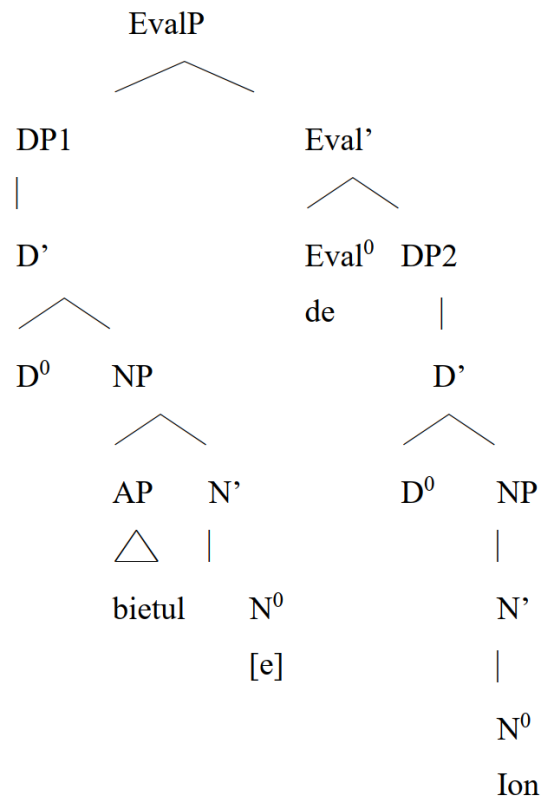
- agreement in definiteness (16) - if the lower term is a definite DP, the higher one must also be definite

- (16) a. prostul de doctorul ăla *un prost de doctorul ăla
stupid.DEF of doctor.DEF that a stupid of doctor.DEF that
'the stupid of that doctor' 'that stupid of a doctor'
- b. un prost de doctor prostul de doctor (anaphoric)
a stupid of doctor stupid.DEF of doctor
'a stupid of a doctor' 'that stupid of a doctor'


[DP1] de [DP2]

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- adjectives merge in different positions in the DP, according to their denotations (Cornilescu 2009, Cornilescu and Nicolae 2011, Svenonius 2008); exclusively prenominal adjective are DP-periphery adjectives → an outer D in DDPQS which contains the adjective modifying an empty noun (Tănase-Dogaru 2011)



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Interim conclusions:

- fuzzy boundary between classifiers and qualifiers
- two types of qualitatives in Rom
- *evaluation and checking of P-features*

2.2. Complex proper names

(i) Complex / descriptive proper names

- formed of a common noun + proper name. The descriptive noun designates a social role (kinship, profession, institutional role), or a sort of place (city, street, river, village, etc), some other entity (a theatre, a planet, etc.) (Cornilescu 2007)

(17) Profesorul Ionescu / regina Elisabeta / Oraşul Iaşi
professor.DEF Ionescu / queen.DEF Elisabeth / city.DEF Iasi
'Professor Ionescu' 'Queen Elizabeth' 'the city of Iaşi'

Van Riemsdijk (1998) calls these constructions “qualificational constructions”, while the semi-lexical head N1 is dubbed a “qualifier”

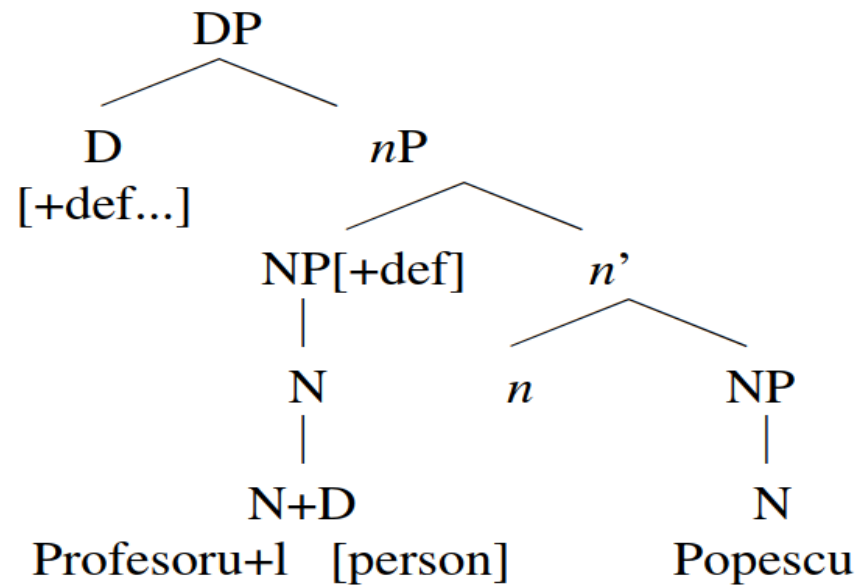
(18) der Planet Venus / die Stadt Wien / der Monat März

the Planet Venus / the city Vienna / the month March

‘the planet Venus’ / ‘the city of Vienna’ / ‘the month (of) March’

This semi-lexical “qualificational” noun in functions as a classifier, indicating the kind of entity the proper name denotes, as in *Professor Smith*. While for simple proper names, the proper name itself checks the classifier feature, by Move or Agree, for descriptive proper names, the descriptive common noun merges as the specifier of the nominal-class head, since the feature of this n-head is one of the features of the common noun. With descriptive proper names the silent classifier head is overt.

- the proper name is too low to check [+def, +φ + person], so the descriptive NP must be definite, and checks the D[+def] feature. English, in contrast, allows long-distance Agree.



(20) a. în aprilie devine din nou un om liber.

in April become.3.SG again a man free

‘in April he becomes again a free man’

b. în luna aprilie au loc expoziții și festivaluri

in month.DEF April have.3.PL place exhibitions and festivals

‘In the month of April exhibitions and festivals take place.’

(21) a. E șase.

is six

‘It’s six o’clock.’

b. E ora șase.

is hour six

‘It’s six o’clock.’

c. It’s six.

It’s six HOUR (Kayne 2005:258)

- ‘names’ of years, months and hours behave syntactically in a fashion parallel to descriptive proper names of the type *the planet Venus*. These constructions possess a classifier in their make-up, a classifier that is either silent or overt (Tănase-Dogaru 2022b)

(b) Proper temporal adverbs

(22) a. luni (punctual)

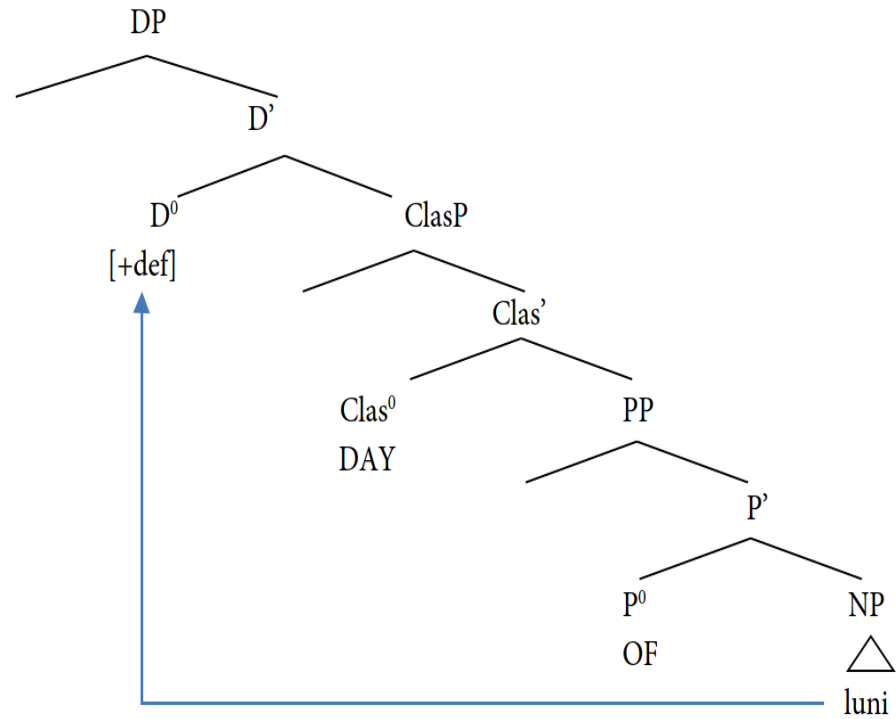
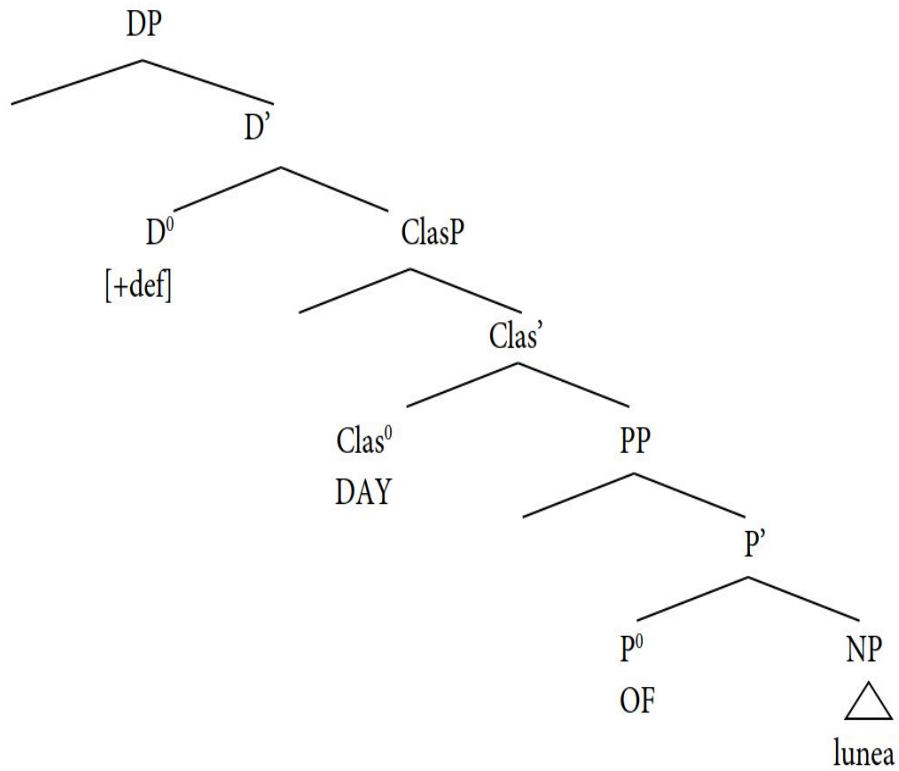
Monday

b. ZIUA DE luni

DAY OF Monday

a’. lunea (habitual)

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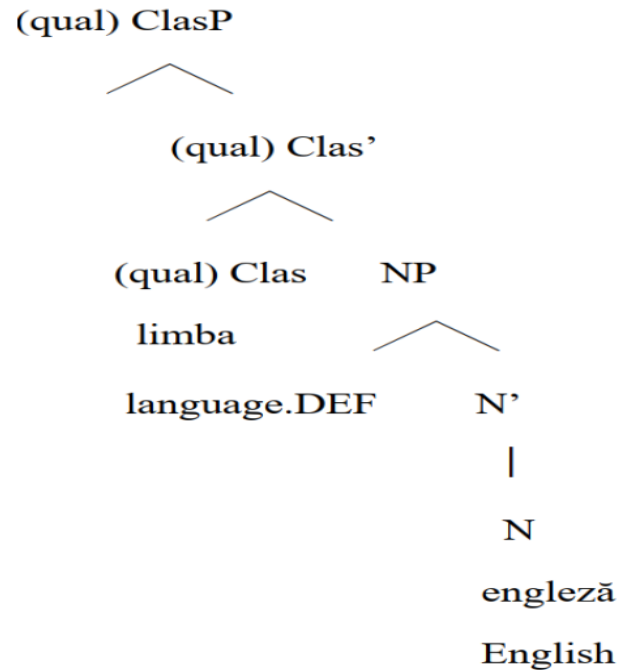
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(iii) Glossonyms – (complex) proper names of languages

(23) Vorbește limba engleză.

Speak.PRES.3SG language.FEM English.FEM

‘(s)he speaks English’

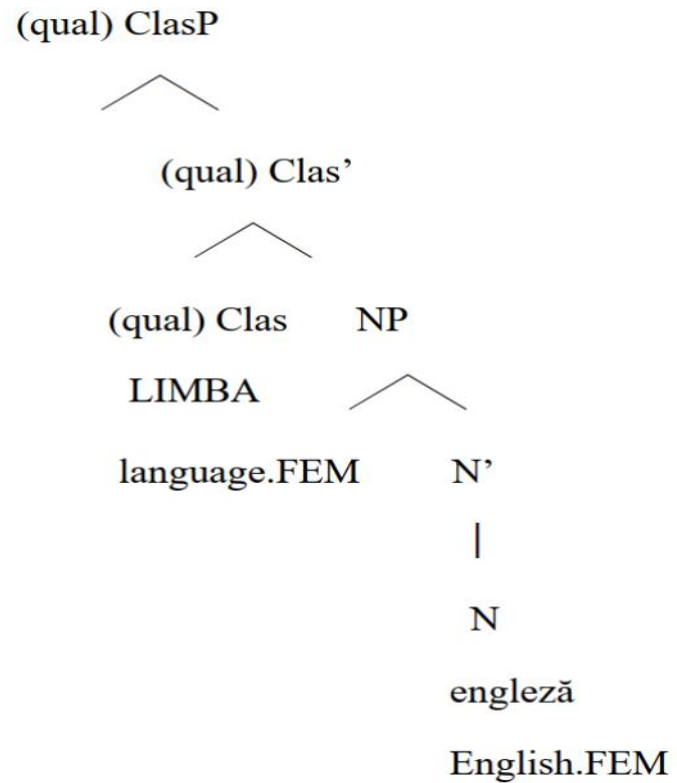


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(24) Vorbește engleză.

Speak.PRES.3SG English.FEM

‘(s)he speaks English’

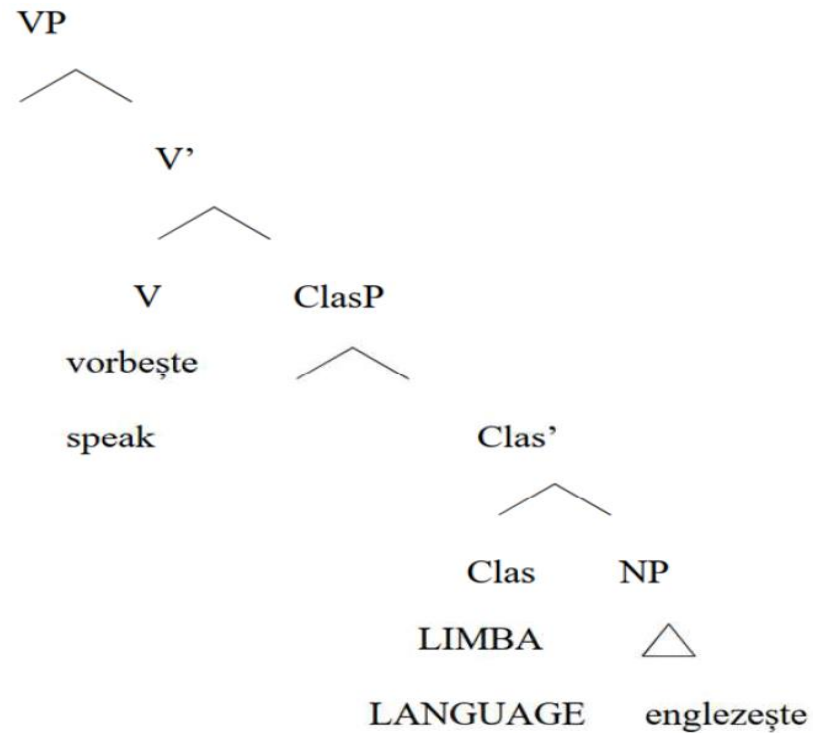


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(25) Vorbește englezește.

Speak.PRES.3SG English-*ește*.

‘(s)he speaks English’



Interim conclusions:

- Complex / descriptive proper names (of roles, years, months, hours, languages) are modelled after a classifier-noun sequence
- The classifier is either silent or overt

3. N1 (*of*) Proper N2. An analysis

3.1. The data

- 'negative' names of roles N1s + (*of*) + Proper name

(26) a. **Legionarul Sechila**, săltat de la Aeroportul Otopeni, încerca să plece din țară

Guardist.DEF Sechila, busted of at Airport.DEF Otopeni, try.IMPF to leave from country

'The Guardist Sechila, busted at Otopeni Airport, was trying to leave the country.'

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'

(27) 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
maximum 400 persons

‘That gangster of Mustață no longer attracts more than 400
persons around him.’

(28) 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 Bănescu**

PNL them calls DOM s. to him punish DOM mafioso.DEF of Bănescu

‘The National-Liberal Party calls on the inhabitants of Sălaj county to punish that mafioso who is Bănescu’.

(29) a. **Traficantul Maru**, legături periculoase cu cei mai violenți cântăreți de trap

Dealer.DEF Maru, connections dangerous with DEF more violent singers of trap

‘The dealer Maru (has) dangerous connections with the most violent trap singers.’

b. Cred că **traficantul** **ăla de Coldea** l-a și “prăfuit” bine

(I) think that dealer.DEF that of Coldea him-has and dusted well

‘I think that dealer of Coldea has had him beaten’

(30) a. **Teroristul** **A.L.** a folosit un pașaport fals românesc.

Terrorist.DEF A.L. has used a passport fake Romanian.

‘The terrorist A.L. used a forged Romanian passport’

b. Iar **terorista** **aia de Contras?** de unde are bănet?

Again terrorist.DEF.FEM that of Contras? Of where has money?

‘Is it that terrorist of a Contras again? Where does she have money from?’

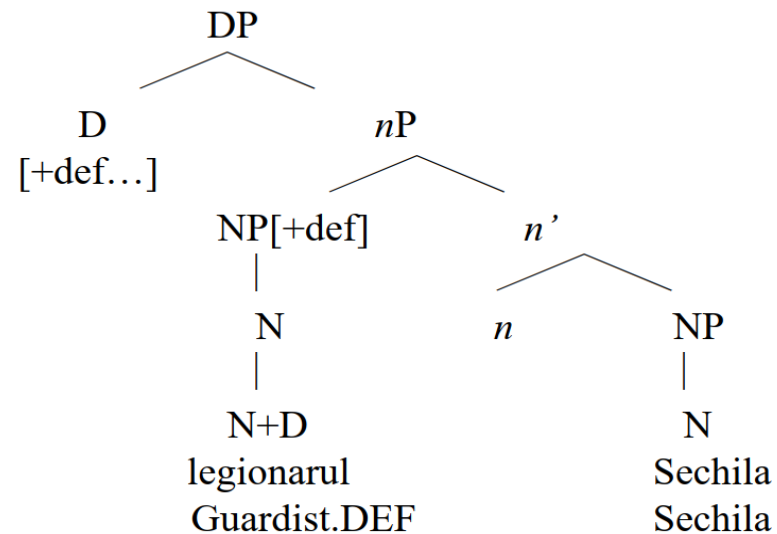
- (31) a. Cum a făcut bani **mercenarul Potra** în Congo
How has made money mercenary.DEF Potra in Congo
'How the mercenary Potra made money in Congo'
- b. E două clase peste **mercenarul de Oțele**
is two classes above mercenary.DEF of Oțele
'He is twice as good as that mercenary of a footballer Oțele'

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- 'negative' names of roles N1s + (*of*) + Proper name
- in the (a) variants → complex proper names, where N1 names or labels the entity denoted by N2; N1 is a 'profession/role' name
- in the (b) variants → evaluative binominals, where certain 'negative' features are transferred from the domain of N1 onto the domain of N2

3.2. 'negative' N1 + Proper N2

- structures where the N1 slot is filled by a 'negative' name or label of the entity denoted by the proper N2
- N1 is a qualifier / classifier of quality in a complex proper name structure



3.3. 'negative' N1 + of + Proper N2

- this construction shares the 'negative evaluation' dimension with the 'evaluative classifier construction' in Romanian = evaluative N1 classifiers used with human N2 referents (Tănase-Dogaru forth)

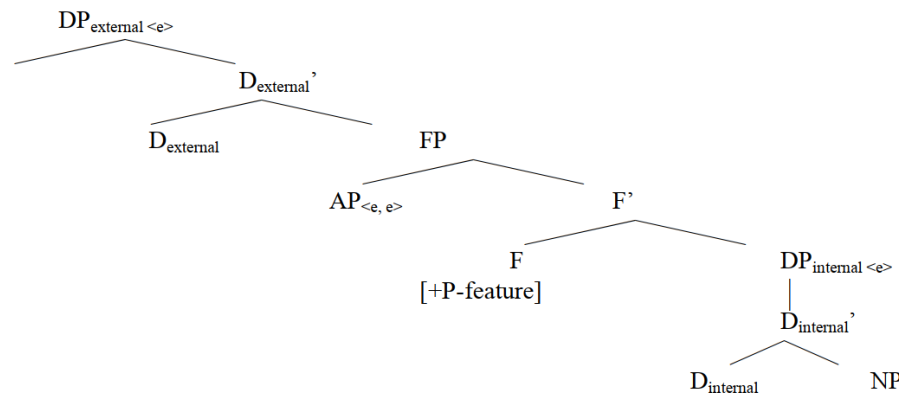
- (32) a. o **jigodie de om** ne-a vândut pe toți
 a distemper of man us-has sold DOM all
 'a scumbag of a man sold all of us'
- b. e o **dulceață de om**
 is a jam of man
 'He is a sweetness of a man'

- the first nominal in the structures in (32) is a classifier, similar in behavior to the classifier in pseudo-partitive structures.
- N1 classifiers that place human referents at the ‘bad’ end of the good/bad axis: *jigodie* “distemper”, *japiță* “tramp”, *javră* “cur”, *canalie* “scoundrel”, *bestie* “beast”, *gunoi* “trash”, *diavol* “devil”, *drac* “devil”, *rahat* “shit”, *curvă* “whore”
- N1s that place human referents at the “extremely good” end of the good/bad axis: *dulceață* “sweetness”, *scumpete* “sweetness”, *drăgălășenie* “cuteness”, *drăguțenie* “cuteness”, *înger* “angel”, *minune* “wonder”, *grădină* “garden”, *bestie* “beast”
- these nominal elements are semantically bleached; they simply serve to insert the human referent N2s at the extreme ends of a good / bad axis

Assumptions:

- The DP is a phase
- Phases have peripheries = edge domains devoted to the checking of (quantificational) P-features (Butler 2004, McNay 2005, 2006, Cornilescu & Nicolae ms.)
- Chomsky (2000): the set of UG features includes P(ragmatic)-features, which may play a role in the derivation
- Such P-features are [+quantificational], [+modal], [+evaluation], [+emphasis], etc. Prenominal adjectives in Romanian, for instance, merge only if they check such a feature (Cornilescu & Nicolae ms.)

- Research on the DP periphery has exploited the DP/CP analogy, assuming that there are DP-internal Topic and Focus phrases (cf. Rizzi 1997, Giusti 1996, Ihsane and Puskas 2001, Aboh 2004, a.o.).
- Laenzlinger (2005) defines the d^* -periphery as a split-D area, between a lower $D_{\text{determination}}$ which checks agreement, and a higher D_{deixis} , responsible for referential interpretation.
- the functional projections that check P-features are supposed to be contained between the inner and the outer D



The d^* -periphery is the syntactic space between the outer D_{external} and the inner D_{internal} , containing FPs that check P-features. For instance, d^* -periphery adjectives focus on modal subjective evaluation, (contrastive) topic/focus, specificity, or other judgments by the speaker (Cornilescu & Nicolae 2011, 2025 ms.)

(32) a. un **simpatic** [n^* fost prim-ministru]

a nice former prime minister

b. aceste **fenomenale** [n^* şapte legi]

these phenomenal seven laws

- these adjectives are also typically the same (nominalized) adjectives appearing in evaluative / qualitative binominal constructions

(33) a. simpaticul de Janibazil

nice.DEF of Janibazil

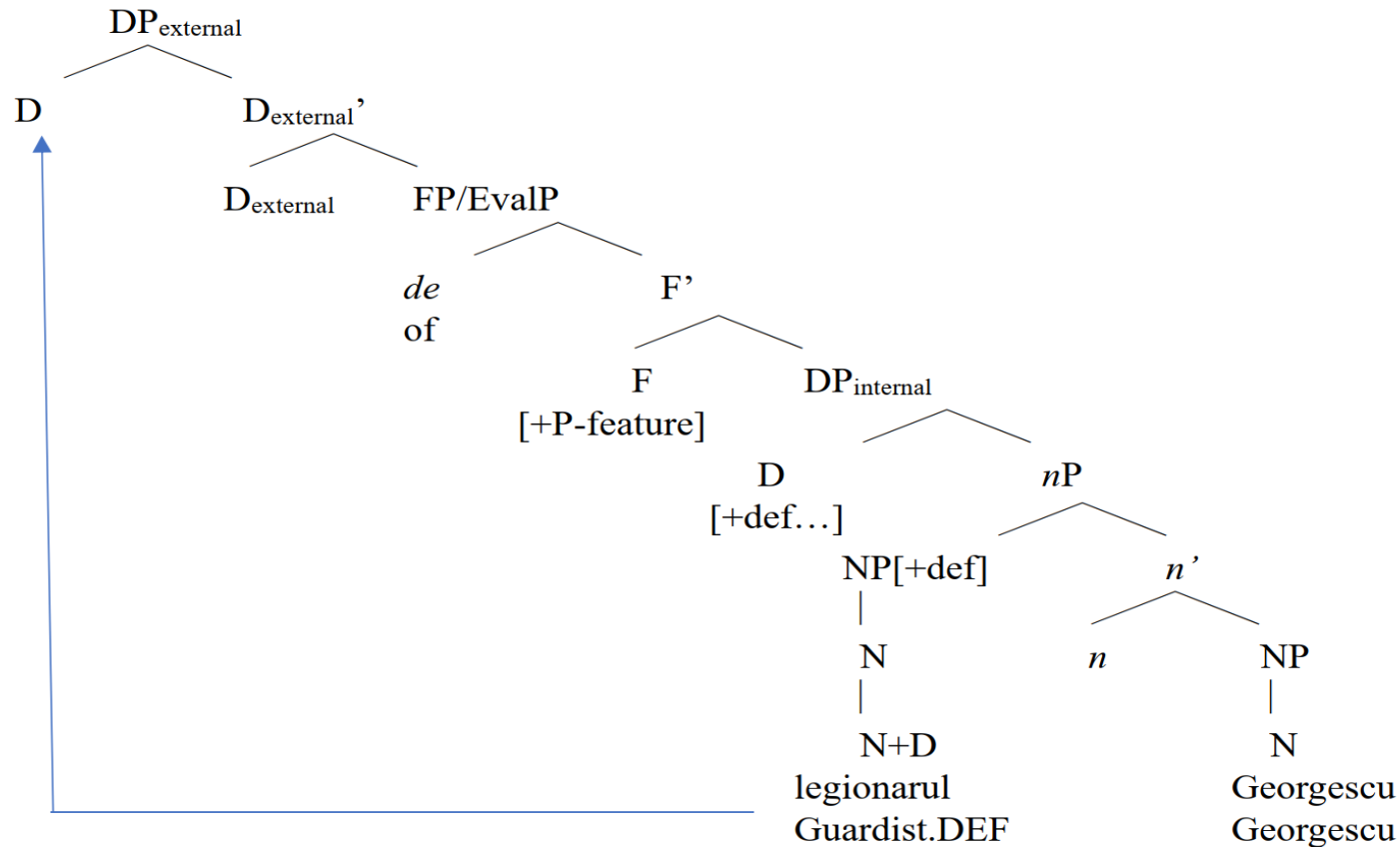
‘that nice Janibazil’

b. fenomenalul de Nicușor

phenomenal.DEF of Nicușor

‘that phenomenon of Nicușor’

- these nominalized adjectives and the (scalar) names of 'negative' roles in (26) to (31) have in common the checking of P-features like subjective evaluation (and other judgments by the speaker)



4. Conclusions

- The pattern 'negative' N1 + Proper N2 is basically a classifier + noun structure, where the classifier is a classifier of quality or a qualifier; the structure behaves syntactically as complex descriptive proper name. This is seen as further evidence in favor of the view that classifiers of quantity and classifiers of quality are not in an either-or relation.
- The pattern 'negative' N1 + *of* + Proper N2 is a binominal evaluative / qualitative construction, where *de 'of'* signals P-features. The checking of these P-features, essentially evaluation by the speaker, is done by moving N1 from D_{inner} to D_{outer} .

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THANK YOU!

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