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## Expression of *SELF* in and through the Romanian Language

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### Abstract

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Romanian is a Romance language, characterised by several particularities that distinguish it from the other Romance languages.

Some of the particular features of this Romance language are the grammatical ways in which self is expressed; these particularities have important consequences that are reflected in literary expression and are explained from a grammatical standpoint.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the expression of self is extremely interesting in Romanian from the morphological and syntactical point of view.

In the first part of the paper, we will refer to the morphological particularities of Romanian with respect to the expression of self and we will consider the personal pronoun, the reflexive pronoun, the nominative case, the accusative case and the reflexive voice of Romanian verbs; the second part of the paper will detail the aspects reflected also in the Romanian syntax, presenting the subject and direct object syntactic functions.

We want to point out in this paper how the grammatical peculiarities of this Romance language contributes to the semantic and stylistic richness of the language in general and to the semantics and style of expression of self in particular; both situations are reflected in particular in the fictional style of the language.

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**Keywords:** Self; reflexive verbs; Romanian language; syntax; morphology.



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## 1. Introduction

Romanian is a Romance language, characterised by several particularities that distinguish it from the other Romance languages.

Some of the particular features of this Romance language are the grammatical ways in which *self* is expressed; these particularities have important consequences that are reflected in literary expression and are explained from a grammatical standpoint.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the expression of *self* is extremely *interesting, but also* extremely *controversial* in Romanian from the morphological and syntactical point of view.

The first part of this paper addresses the issue of ***reflexive constructions in Romanian***; here, we present the theoretical framework and the views of some authors, including the arguments on which they are based, with respect to ***the reflexive pronoun in Romanian, the reflexive voice and the valences of Romanian reflexivity***, out of the desire to outline an overall picture of the approached topic; the second part of the paper presents the way in which these elements may be interpreted and suggests *a solution* which we consider to be the most appropriate, with the least degree of ambiguity for the theory and especially for the practice of grammatical analysis.

## 2. Research Methodology

In our linguistic analysis, we used mixed-method approach which can illustrate with example how qualitative methods as bibliographical research, analysis, observation and interpretation can contribute to linguistic research.

## 3. Short History

In the old Romanian grammars, the reflexive pronoun is dealt with in the chapter on the personal pronoun or it is not treated as a different category of pronouns.

In *Elementa Linguae Daco-Romanae*, Samuil Micu and Gheorghe Șincai include the reflexive pronoun in the category of personal pronoun and give it the name of reciprocal pronoun, specifying that this pronoun is used in Romanian in the same situations as in Latin and its plural forms are homonymous with the singular ones (Micu & Șincai, 1780: 37-43).

Chapter II of the first part of Ion Heliade Rădulescu's book *Gramatica românească (Romanian Grammar)*, which was published in 1828, is dedicated to pronouns, and the simple forms of the personal pronoun include also the reflexive forms: *pe sine, se* for accusative, and *își* for dative (Rădulescu, 1828: 19-21).

The first edition, which was published in 1780 in Vienna, was written by S. Micu and only revised and supplemented by Gh. Șincai; the second edition was published in 1805 and it was authored by Gh. Șincai.

Timotei Cipariu, the author of *Gramatec'a limbei române (Romanian Grammar)*, which was published in two volumes entitled *Analitica (Analytics)* (1869) and *Sintentica (Synthetics)* (1877), states in volume II that the forms *mi, ti, si*, which are unstressed forms of genitive and dative, are also

called reflexive forms provided that the subject is the same person, and the verbs created with reflexive forms are also called reflexive (Cipariu, 1869, 1877: 166-168).

In *Gramatica română (Romanian Grammar)* of 1891, H. Tiktin introduced reflexivity in *Part II* entitled *Morphology*, i.e. in the chapters *Personal Pronouns*, *Reflexive Conjugation* and *Passive Voice*, and in *Part III* entitled *Syntax*, i.e. in the chapters *Attributive Adjective* and *Verb Complement*. This grammar also includes the reflexive pronoun in the personal pronoun category (Tiktin, 1891: 70-71; 126-130).

In *Gramatica elementară a limbii române (Elementary Grammar of the Romanian Language)* of 1897, Al. Philippide does not include the reflexive pronoun in the chapter dedicated to the personal pronoun, nor elsewhere. The forms *sine*, *își*, *și*, *șie*, *se* are mentioned, but no clarification as to their name or case is provided (Philippide, 1897: 58, 241).

In 1914, in *Gramatica limbii române (Romanian Grammar)*, Ioan Slavici mentions the reflexive pronoun as a different form of the personal pronoun, and its forms are called in today's grammar reinforcing adjectives (Slavici, 1914: 26-27).

August Scriban, in *Gramatica limbii românești (Morfologia) Pentru folosința tuturor (Romanian Grammar (Morphology) to be Used by Everybody)* of 1925, includes the reflexive pronoun in the personal pronoun category (Scriban, 1925: 79-86).

**In the current Romanian language**, as reflected in the school grammar taught from primary school through high school (a grammar still strongly anchored in the vision offered by the Academy's Grammar in 1966), the reflexive pronoun is the one that "replaces the object affected directly or indirectly by the action of the verb and which is identical to the subject of the verb" (GLR, 1966: 152) it has its own forms only for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, while for the other persons it borrows the dative and accusative forms of the personal pronoun; it has two cases, dative and accusative, and both numbers, singular and plural.

In *Gramatica limbii române (Romanian Grammar)*, GALR 2005, the reflexive pronoun appears in several chapters that refer to verb, verbal phrase, syntactic constructions, subject complement, possessive complement, anaphora. In the new grammar, the reflexive pronoun is approached in a new way, a transformational-generative manner, which stresses the heterogeneity of the Romanian reflexivity (GALR, 2005: 223-226).

As regards the approach to the reflexive pronoun in GALR 2005, our observations stop here because, without going into details that are not the purpose of this paper, we only want to mention that we do not consider the new theories to be applicable neither in the theory, nor in the practice of grammatical analysis (especially at the pre-university education level). We appreciate their modern character, but we dare to consider them, under many aspects, as not being part of our language and, on the other hand, if our observations will show anyway the heterogeneity of the issue in question, we do not see the use of complicated terminology such as: *syntactic reflexive clitic*, *asyntactic reflexive clitic*, *non-syntactic reflexive clitic* (GALR, 2005: 231).

#### 4. Reflexive Pronoun vs Personal Pronoun

In the grammatical practice of the current Romanian language, the confusion between the reflexive pronoun and the personal pronoun is still caused by the formal identity of these two types of pronouns, actually of clitics, in the first and the second person, singular and plural.

Therefore, the need for differentiation criteria is obvious. G. G. Neamțu proposes two criteria for the differentiation of these pronouns, which we consider particularly useful in the practice of grammatical analysis, because they reflect the essence of the theory and provide immediate *diagnosis* tools. The first criterion is the following: “If a given pronoun has the same person (and the same number) as the verb, then that pronoun is reflexive; if it has another person than the verb, then the pronoun is personal. (There are no exceptions)”; *the additional criterion* consists of putting the verb and the pronoun in the third person, and if *își* or *se* appear, then the pronoun is reflexive and vice versa (Neamțu, 2014: 106).

A preliminary conclusion is that, from a formal standpoint, the distinction between the reflexive pronoun and the personal pronoun does not raise special problems. We cannot say the same thing about the correct identification/interpretation of the grammatical role that these two pronouns have in different contexts, in other words when exactly are they *pronouns* and therefore assume a syntactic role, and when exactly are they *morphemes* and thus have no syntactic role, being *specialised grammar signs* of the reflexive voice. These are the two major issues which we detail below.

#### 5. Reflexive Pronoun and Reflexive Voice

The voice itself is a controversial grammatical category both in terms of definition and in terms of its location in grammar; some authors consider that its place is at the morphology level, while others claim that it is a syntactic category. The opinions and arguments go up to the point where some authors consider it to be totally questionable, non-existent.

*Voice* is, in general, a controversial grammatical category, both in terms of definition and in terms of its location/status/existence in the grammars and specialised works; *the reflexive voice* in particular has been and still is a controversial issue of Romanian grammar as is apparent from the very heterogeneity of views regarding verbs accompanied by reflexive pronouns.

From our point of view, although we have objections to the arguments, objections which we will not present here for objective reasons, we consider appropriate the restriction to two voices made by GALR 2005, namely the active voice and the passive voice. Some of the grounds on which we base this assertion are: the reflexive voice is an inconsistent category, whose definition is, to a too large extent, based on semantics, on the lexical meaning of words, thus resulting a large number of interpretations and the classification of the passive reflexivity as passive voice instead of reflexive voice. On the other hand, in numerous cases the *verb + reflexive pronoun* group has an obvious syntactic character (which we will illustrate in the following section), while in other situations, such as impersonal constructions, the relationship that the voice, by its very definition, requires between the subject and the action cannot be determined. In addition, when reflexive pronouns are considered morphemes, they are analysed grammatically as pronouns, but as pronouns which have form, case,

person, number, but no syntactic function, and this is, to say the least, unnatural: pronoun without syntactic function ...?!

Therefore, we believe that Romanian reflexive pronouns should be considered pronouns at all times, the verbs which they accompany should be classified under the active voice and, syntactically, reflexive pronouns should have the appropriate syntactic functions, namely either direct object in accusative, or indirect object in dative, or dative pronominal attribute. We believe that such a solution would meet the requirements of a unified and coherent grammatical analysis; in addition, it would reflect its usefulness especially in the school theory and practice. Next, we intend to argue the sustainability of these statements.

## 6. Reflexive Pronoun or Morpheme? Syntactic Valences

The grammatical interpretation of these concepts is not uniform, there is no solution unanimously accepted by the experts in the field, which is why there are obvious repercussions on both the grammar theory and the grammar practice in the pre-university education where, in certain alternative textbooks, the authors opt for four voices: active, passive, reflexive and active pronominal. The *active pronominal* voice is an error whose first effect is the violation of the reflexive voice's definition and thus the non-inclusion of the verbs accompanied by an intrinsic reflexive pronoun into this voice, which is why we believe, for example, that the definition given in the seventh grade textbook authored by Anca Șerban și Sergiu Șerban is unacceptable: "The verbs in the reflexive voice show that the grammatical subject performs the action. Its participation is intense and sometimes the action affects the one who performs it." (Șerban, Șerban, 1999: 61) (!?)

As regards the grammatical interpretation of reflexive pronouns, there are three directions. According to the first direction, all reflexive pronouns in dative and accusative are considered to be morphemes of the reflexive voice, the reflexive voice is considered to be a grammatical category, and the reflexive pronouns fall into this grammatical category with analytical achievement. According to the second direction, which is based on the uniqueness of functions in subordination, all reflexive pronouns in dative and accusative are actual reflexive pronouns. According to the third direction, which is the most widely accepted one, reflexive pronouns are considered to be pronouns in some situations and morphemes in others, depending on the grammatical meanings developed by the *reflexive pronoun + verb* groups. When the forms *își, și, și-, -și, -și-, se, se-, -se, s-, -s* are attached to reflexive, dynamic, eventive, impersonal and passive verbs, they become marks of the reflexive voice, they become signs, which is why they lose their syntactic role, and when they are attached to objective and reciprocal pronominal verbs, they remain pronouns.

In conclusion, a reflexive pronoun is a morpheme when it marks the reflexive voice; in all other illustrated situations, it is a pronoun with all its related attributes and, depending on context, it may have three syntactic functions: direct object, indirect object, dative pronominal attribute.

## 7. Results

In this paper, we wanted to point out how the grammatical peculiarities of the Romanian language contribute to its semantic and stylistic richness in general and to the semantics and expression of self in particular; many times both situations are reflected in particular in the fictional style of the language.

Our results point by point are:

- ▶ From a formal standpoint, the distinction between the reflexive pronoun and the personal pronoun does not raise special problems;
- ▶ A problematic issue is the correct identification/interpretation of the grammatical role that these two pronouns have in different contexts, in other words when exactly are they *pronouns* and therefore assume a syntactic role, and when exactly are they *morphemes* and thus have no syntactic role, being *specialised grammar signs* of the reflexive voice;
- ▶ *Voice* is, in general, a controversial grammatical category, both in terms of definition and in terms of its location/status/existence in the grammars and specialised works;
- ▶ The *reflexive voice* in particular has been and still is a controversial issue of Romanian grammar as is apparent from the very heterogeneity of views regarding verbs accompanied by reflexive pronouns;
- ▶ We consider appropriate the restriction to two voices made by GALR 2005, namely the active voice and the passive voice, for the following reasons:
  - I. the reflexive voice is an inconsistent category, whose definition is, to a too large extent, based on semantics, on the lexical meaning of words, thus resulting a large number of interpretations and the classification of the passive reflexivity as passive voice instead of reflexive voice;
  - II. in numerous cases the *verb + reflexive pronoun* group has an obvious syntactic character, while in other situations, such as impersonal constructions, the relationship that the voice, by its very definition, requires between the subject and the action cannot be determined;
  - III. when reflexive pronouns are considered morphemes, they are analysed grammatically as pronouns, but as pronouns which have form, case, person, number, but no syntactic function, and this is, to say the least, unnatural: pronoun without syntactic function ...?!
- ▶ For these reasons, we believe that Romanian reflexive pronouns should be considered pronouns at all times, the verbs which they accompany should be classified under the active voice and, syntactically, reflexive pronouns should have the appropriate syntactic functions, namely either direct object in accusative, or indirect object in dative, or dative pronominal attribute. We believe that such a solution would meet the requirements of a unified and coherent grammatical analysis; in addition, it would reflect its usefulness especially in the school theory and practice.

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