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ROMANIAN GRAMMAR: ITS PECULIARITIES FROM INDO-EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: In this paper, various grammatical characteristics in Romanian are discussed in comparison with other Indo-European languages. Each language family tends to show rather uniform characteristics, but Romanian is an exception. These peculiar grammatical features are analysed from a historical point of view, and it is claimed that Romanian has a mixture of archaic and modern features simultaneously, which can not be found in other Indo-European languages.

1. Introduction

In this paper, grammatical peculiarities of Romanian are discussed. When compared with other languages, Romanian exhibits a number of unique constructions, referred to as peculiarities in this paper. Romanian, as well as Baltic languages such as Lithuanian, is known to possess such peculiarities, but they are hardly given their deserved attention in previous research. In addition, previous research concerning Romanian grammar is generally synchronic. This creates a limit in explanation, since some clues may be hidden in the historical development. The aim of this paper is to indicate what possible cause for the peculiarities in Romanian can be. Various grammatical characteristics are studied both synchronically and diachronically.

This paper consists of three main parts: firstly, various grammatical characteristics of Indo-European (IE) languages are synchronically compared. Particular attention is paid to nouns (case, number and gender), verbs (tense, aspect, voice and mood) and word order (main and subordinate clause, flexibility of order). Secondly, the Romanian grammar is analysed in comparison with other modern IE languages, especially paying attention to other Romance languages. This analysis reveals several characteristics which are unique in Romanian. And thirdly, various features analysed in the first two parts are studied historically, including Latin.

Immediately below, a distribution of grammatical characteristics of IE languages is synchronically analysed.

2. Grammatical distribution of IE languages

All the IE languages are descendants of a common ancestral language, Proto-Indo-European (PIE). The degree of divergence among the modern IE languages is vast. There are various features to be analysed in order to illustrate this point, but let us take, for instance, the nominal system: some languages still preserve case marking, and others do not; in the Baltic languages, the number system is ternary, singular, plural and dual, but the rest of the IE languages have the binary, i.e. singular and plural. The gender system can be divided into three different groups: the first type has a ternary system among masculine, feminine and neuter, the second type a binary between masculine and feminine and the third type, no gender distinction at all. Table 1 illustrates this distribution of these features of the nominal in a selection of IE languages. What is

striking is that none of them share the same pattern, although they are all descendants of PIE.

Table 1. Distribution of nominal characteristics

	Case	Number	Gender
Lithuanian	√	SG/PL	MASC/FEM
Irish	×	SG/PL	MASC/FEM
English	×	SG/PL	×
German	√	SG/PL	MASC/FEM/NEUT
French	×	SG/PL	MASC/FEM
Sorbian	√	SG/PL/DUAL	MASC/FEM/NEUT
Macedonian	√	SG/PL	MASC/FEM/NEUT

Notes: √ = feature present; × = feature absent: SG = singular; PL = plural; DUAL = dual; MASC = masculine; FEM = feminine; NEUT = neuter

Let us take a look at two further characteristics, i.e. verbal system and word order. As for the verbal system, there are a number of features that could be analysed, but only tense, aspect, voice and mood are chosen for convenience. The greatest distinction in Table 2 is made morphologically, i.e. the distinction is based on the conjugation. However, there are some cases of periphrastic constructions. For instance, the passive voice is made periphrastically in IE languages (cf. Dryer 1982: 55; Haspelmath 1990: 29; Toyota 2003: 133-137). This is rather peculiar cross-linguistically, although some exceptions are found, e.g. Finno-Ugric. Another case is the evidential mood in Macedonian (cf. (1)b: note that the copula is often omissible in the third person when the participle is active in Macedonian). Apart from these cases, periphrastic constructions are not included, because our interests are in the difference in the basic grammatical organisation. The tense can be divided into two types, past vs. non-past and past vs. present vs. future. Every language has developed some methods to refer to future, but some of them are less integrated into the grammatical system than others, since the basic tense system is past vs. non-past type. The same goes for aspect: every language has periphrases to express various aspects, but they are significantly less crucial than the tense, except in some cases such as Sorbian and Macedonian. In these languages, the morphological marking of aspect is obligatory on the main verb. So the distinction is based on whether the aspectual marking is obligatory or not. Also, some features are considered intermediate. The reason for it is that a construction is either ambiguous (e.g. the passive) or it has alternative formation between morphological and periphrastic forms (e.g. future tense).

Table 2. Distribution of verbal characteristics of tense, aspect, voice and mood

	Tense	Aspect	Voice	Mood
Lithuanian	PST/PRS/FUT	PRFV/IMPFV	ACT/MID	INDIC/SUBJ
Irish	PST/PRS/FUT	×	ACT	INDIC/SUBJ
English	PST/PRS	×	ACT/PASS	INDIC
German	PST/PRS	×	ACT/(PASS)/MID	INDIC/SUBJ
French	PST/PRS/FUT	×	ACT/(PASS)/MID	INDIC/SUBJ
Sorbian	PST/PRS/(FUT)	PRFV/IMPFV	ACT/(PASS)/MID	INDIC/SUBJ
Macedonian	PST/PRS/(FUT)	PRFV/IMPFV	ACT/MID	INDIC/SUBJ/EVID

Notes: PST = past; PRS = present; FUT = future; PRFV = perfective; IMPFV = imperfective; ACT = active voice; MID = middle voice; PASS = passive voice; INDIC = indicative; SUBJ = subjunctive; EVID = evidential; × = feature absent; ( ) = feature intermediate

Macedonian (Graves 2000: 484)

(1) a. *Toj   padna*
       he   fall.down.AOR.3SG
       '[I saw when] he fell down.'
    b. *Toj   padnal*
       he   fall.down.PAST.PART.ACT.MASC
       '[I was told that] he fell down.'

Another characteristic to be analysed is the word order. It is often assumed that there are strict and flexible word orders. What we analyse here is the basic word order, i.e. the most common order, disregarding some exceptional cases such as inversion or cleft clauses. However, whether the order is flexible or not is also listed in Table 3, since it is useful in the later discussion in Section 4. In addition, the order differs in main and subordinate clause in some languages and the basic order for both clauses is listed. What is noticeable is that when the object comes at the end of the clause, the flexibility is normally rigid. The verb-final languages have flexible word order.

Table 3. Distribution of word order in the main and subordinate clause

	Main clause	Subordinate clause	Flexibility
Lithuanian	SOV	SOV	Flexible
Irish	VSO	VSO	Rigid
English	SVO	SVO	Rigid
German	SVO	SOV	Flexible/Rigid
French	SVO	SVO	Rigid
Sorbian	SOV	SOV	Flexible
Macedonian	SOV	SOV	Flexible

The verbal characteristics in Table 2 show that none of the languages have the same distribution of features, but the word order seems to show some uniformity, i.e. Lithuanian, Sorbian and Macedonian have identical features, and English and French do also.

3. Peculiarities of Romanian

The diversity we have seen so far can be made even more obvious once Romanian is involved. The characteristics of Romanian are listed in Table 4. Since it is an IE language, its grammatical characteristics are not supposed to be radically different from those in Table 1 to Table 3. The majority of characteristics are found in other languages, but what is clearly different is the mood: Romanian has presumptive, as exemplified in (2). This mood is often expressed in the conditional in other languages, but Rumanian has a different form for the conditional, as shown in (3). The meaning can be quite similar, in terms of reference to probability or uncertainty. These examples may appear to be similar to the evidential in Macedonian (cf. (1)), but the presumptive in Romanian is mainly concerned with the presupposition, not source of information or certainty. In addition to mood, word order is rather unique, since Romanian has the object at the end of the clause, and yet the word order is flexible.

(2) Romanian
    El   o   fi   foarte   fericit
    he   PRSP.3SG be.INF happy   extremely
    'He might be extremely happy.'

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(3) *Am   auzit   că   meciul   d   fotbal*
    PERF.1SG hear.PST.PRT that match   of   football
    s-ar   amâna
    REF.PRON-COND.3SG delay.INF
    'I heard that the football game might be postponed.'

Table 4. Distribution of grammatical characteristics in Romanian

Category	Characteristics	Romanian
Nominal	Case	√
	Number	SG/PL
	Gender	MASC/FEM/NEUT
Verb	Tense	PST/PRS/FUT
	Aspect	×
	Voice	ACT/(PASS)/MID
	Mood	INDIC/ COND/SUBJ/PRSP
Word order	Main clause	SVO
	Subordinate clause	SVO
	Flexibility	Flexible

Notes: PRSP = presumptive

Romanian belongs to the Romance languages. In Table 1 to Table 3, this family is represented by French. The characteristics between Romanian and French are also different, in particular with respect to case, gender, mood and word order flexibility. Taking a closer look at the selection of other Romance languages listed in Table 5, we can see that French shares a number of characteristics with other Romance languages. The distribution of characters seems to be identical among them, and they are also more or less identical to French except for the presence of the conditional. This shows that Romanian grammar is rather peculiar both within the Romance languages and in the IE languages.

Table 5. Distribution of grammatical characteristics in a selection of Romance languages

Characteristics	Catalan	Italian	Portuguese
Case	×	×	×
Number	SG/PL	SG/PL	SG/PL
Gender	MASC/FEM	MASC/FEM	MASC/FEM
Tense	PST/PRS/FUT	PST/PRS/FUT	PST/PRS/FUT
Aspect	×	×	×
Voice	ACT/(PASS)/MID	ACT/(PASS)/MID	ACT/(PASS)/MID
Mood	INDIC/COND/SUBJ	INDIC/COND/SUBJ	INDIC/COND/SUBJ
Main	SVO	SVO	SVO
Subordinate	SVO	SVO	SVO
Flexibility	Rigid	Rigid	Rigid

4. Historical explanation for peculiarities

How can these peculiarities be explained? One reasonable source of information is the historical development of Romanian. The Romance languages have developed from Latin. Judging from Table 5, the degree of development is more or less uniform in most languages in this family. Table 6 illustrates the grammatical characteristics of Latin. By comparing this table with languages in Table 5 and French in Table 1 to Table 3, it is

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obvious that case marking, the neuter gender and aspect marking have disappeared in all the languages, and in French, the conditional mood, too. In addition, the daughter languages have gained the passive and the rigid SVO word order. When it comes to Romanian, the changes do not seem to be as drastic as the ones in other Romance languages. Compare Table 6 with Table 4. Romanian has lost the aspectual marking, but gained the passive and the presumptive mood. The word order has changed into SVO, but its flexibility is still present. So judging from the comparison to other Romance languages and to Latin, it is reasonable to claim that Romanian has preserved more old characteristics from Latin than have other Romance languages.

Table 6. Distribution of grammatical characteristics in Latin

Category	Characteristics	Latin
Nominal	Case	√
	Number	SG/PL
	Gender	MASC/FEM/NEUT
Verb	Tense	PST/PRS/FUT
	Aspect	√
	Voice	ACT/MID
	Mood	INDIC/ COND/SUBJ
Word order	Main clause	SOV
	Subordinate clause	SOV
	Flexibility	Flexible

One may consider that these changes have happened independently of each other, but some are closely connected. For instance, word order and case marking are dependent on each other: there are two basic types regarding the word order, i.e. a topic-prominent type and the subject-prominent type (cf. Li and Thompson 1976). The topic prominent type has a highly topical element in the clause initial position, whether it is a subject or an adverbial, and the word order is relatively free. In the subject-prominent type, the grammatical subject and the high topicality are identical. In the case of the historical change of the IE languages, older languages had the topic-prominent type, which in some cases has changed into the subject-prominent one. This is why languages with rigid word order have SVO as the basic order, since SOV represents an earlier stage of the flexible order. In addition, the subordinate clause tends to preserve the older word order (cf. Givón 1979: 83ff). A case in German (cf. Table 3) clearly shows that the earlier SOV order from Proto-Germanic or even from PIE is well-preserved in the subordinate clause, but the main clause has developed a new order. Having a rigid order also triggered another development, i.e. the loss of case marking. There is a clear co-relation between the absence of case marking and rigid word order in the IE languages, e.g. the clause elements are clearly distinguishable according to the rigid word order. In a free-word order or topic prominent language, this is not possible since any word can theoretically occupy any place in a clause and some system of identifying the doer and the recipient of an action is required and this was done by the case.

The passive in IE languages are derived from the earlier perfective/resultative aspectual construction (cf. Davis 1986; Toyota 2003; Toyota and Mustafović 2006). This aspect in IE languages is commonly expressed with the periphrastic construction involving the copula and the past participle form of a verb. This is why the periphrastic passive is found mainly in the IE languages (cf. Section 2). In English, for instance, the passive has grammaticalised, but in most IE languages, it has not. However, some hints of its future development can be detected and these languages will eventually

develop the fully grammaticalised passive. This is why many languages have the parentheses over the passive in Table 2, Table 4 and Table 5. In terms of aspectual change, the earlier form is replaced by others. The most common case is the change of auxiliary: the earlier copula is replaced by 'have' in Germanic and Romance languages, or it is simply omitted in Slavic languages. In spite of these new forms, the older passive survived and it became re-analysed as the passive. The construction with the copula survived and it became re-analysed as the passive. The passive subject is known to be highly topical (cf. Givón 1983). The identity of the subject as the most topical element in a clause is not easily done in the topic-prominent languages, and thus the word order type has to be based on the subject prominence. This is also why the older IE languages lack the passive, since they are all topic-prominent languages. The period when the passive emerged and the formation of the rigid word order, thus, the subject-prominence, coincide in some Germanic languages like English, i.e. ca. 1500. So the passive cannot be explained in terms of the aspectual changes alone.

The interactions of these historical changes are generally true to most IE languages, but not Romanian. The puzzle that Romanian can pose is that the word order has changed into a newer type, but this has happened alone without involving changes of the case marking system or turning into the rigid word order. The passive seems to be emerging (cf. (4)), but due to the rather flexible word order, the topicality may not be necessarily given to the subject. How could this be possible? One possible explanation is concerned with the geographic location of Romanian speakers: they share borders with speakers of Slavic languages (Serbian, Bulgarian, Ukranian, etc.), which have a flexible word order. Nichols (1992: 10-11) argues that word order tends to be consistent in areas, though not families. So according to this argument, the order in Portuguese may be different from Romanian, since they are geographically far apart. This may explain the oddity of the word order in Romanian. Since word order has some effect on other constructions as we have seen in this section, it may be one reason for the peculiarity of Romanian.

However, geographic location may explain only certain peculiar features but not everything. Consider, for instance, the presence of the neuter in Romanian? It is true that Romanian as well as Slavic languages use the neuter, thus, the influence of geographic proximity may be a factor in this similarity. However, Romania also shares a border with Hungry. Hungarian does not have the grammatical gender at all, and if the geographical explanation is accurate, one would expect Hungarian to have the neuter, too. Considering such exceptions for geographical approach, another possible explanation seems to be related to archaicness of Romanian. It seems that the development of Romanian is slower than the other Romance languages, and various features observable in modern Romanian are residues of older constructions, since historical change is a gradual process (cf. Harris and Campbell 1995: 261). For instance, Romanian and Old French share similar grammatical characteristics. Compare Table 7 with Table 4 and Table 5. Old French still preserves the SOV order in the subordinate clause, but not in the main clause, and the neuter gender is lost. Romanian preserves the neuter gender, but the word order is SVO in both main and subordinate clause. Old French naturally differs from other modern Romance languages, in respect to case marking, word order in the subordinate clause and the flexibility of word order, along with the lack of passive and mood distinction. However, although there are some differences, Old French and Romanian are reasonably similar in terms of the grammatical structure, and in turn, both Old French and modern Romanian are more similar to Latin than other modern Romance languages are. In this respect, it is possible

to consider that Romanian is an archaic living language, and this is why this language has peculiar grammatical features in comparison with other Romance languages. In other words, the peculiarities are mere residues of archaic constructions.

Romanian

(4) a. Paul   a   spart   vaza
       Paul.NOM have.3SG break.ST.PRT vase
       'Paul broke the vase.'

    b. Vaza a   fost   spart   de carre Paul
       he   have.3SG be.PST.PRT break.PST.PRT by   Paul.ACC
       'The vase was broken by Paul.'

Table 7. Distribution of grammatical characteristics in Old French

Category	Characteristics	Romanian
Nominal	Case	√
	Number	SG/PL
	Gender	MASC/FEM
Verb	Tense	PST/PRS/FUT
	Aspect	×
	Voice	ACT/MID
	Mood	INDIC/SUBJ
Word order	Main clause	SVO
	Subordinate clause	SOV
	Flexibility	Flexible

The divergence within a single language family may not be so unique to the Romance languages. It is worth mentioning that a similar situation can be found in the Germanic languages. German, for instance, has a number of archaic constructions (e.g. case marking, the neuter, SOV order in the subordinate clause and the underdevelopment of the passive, cf. Table 1 to Table 3). English, on the other hand, has developed further away from Proto-Germanic. Old English preserved many of the grammatical characteristics of its ancestor, and it shares many constructions in common with languages from the same period (ca. 650 to 1100), such as Old-High-German, Old Norse, etc. The development from Old English onward went on much quicker than that in other languages. This resulted in a situation where English is the most developed Germanic language, and the German the least developed one. So the divergence within a single language family can happen, and this is best illustrated through historical analysis.

5. Summary

In this paper, a number of IE languages have been analysed, paying particular attention to grammatical characters of nouns (e.g. case, number and gender, cf. Table 1), verbs (e.g. tense, aspect, voice and mood, cf. Table 2) and word order (e.g. order of main and subordinate clause and flexibility, cf. Table 3). Languages chosen as samples belong to different generic classification in the IE languages, and they show divergence in the distribution of characters. Romanian, a Romance language, also has a different distributional pattern, but it also differs within the Romance languages. Romanian exhibits various peculiar grammatical patterns (cf. Table 4), in particular, the change in word order, i.e. the newer SVO order is used in Romanian, but this change does not involve the loss of the case marking system or the formation of a rigid word order.

It has been argued that the peculiarities of Romanian are mainly due to its archaicness. Languages all go through historical changes, and some languages change more rapidly than others. Romance languages in general seem to change rather uniformly (cf. Table 5), except, of course, Romanian. It may be due to its geographical location sharing borders with Slavic speaking countries, but Romanian still preserves various features of Latin much better than other Romance languages. So the peculiarities of Romanian are, as argued in this paper, better considered to be due to the archaicness of its grammatical system. There are various signs that Romanian grammar is still evolving, such as the emergence of the passive (cf. (4)), but as it is, Romanian grammar is archaic, which creates its peculiarities.

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