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# Grammatical and contextual alternatives in Romanian\*

## Focus, alternatives and clitic doubling

In the framework of Alternative Semantics (Rooth 1985, 1992) focus generates alternatives to the focused expression which are relevant at the level of focus interpretation (focus sensitive particles, question answer-pairs, contrast etc.).

The set of alternatives generated by focus can be derived by replacing the focused expression by all individuals of the same type. Of course, in order to derive the right semantics one usually has to contextually restrict the alternative set. Crucially, however this restriction is at the discourse level (contextual) and not at the sentence level (grammatical).

Here I discuss data from Romanian involving the presence or absence of clitic doubling which seem to involve an additional restriction on the alternative set concerning gender at the sentence level. First I present the data, second I discuss the theoretical consequences and finally I present some difficulties encountered in experimentally testing the contrast.

## Left dislocation and clitic doubling in Romanian

For Romance languages exhibiting clitic doubling it is generally assumed that left-dislocation is accompanied by a resumptive pronoun if the dislocated element is topicalized and that the resumptive pronoun is not present if the left dislocated element is focused. In Romanian for animate left-dislocated direct object and for inanimate direct objects that are topicalized a clitic pronoun is obligatory but for focused inanimate direct objects it is unclear whether a clitic pronoun is necessary or not:

- (1) *Ce s-a întâmplat cu mașina?*  
What happened with the car?  
*Mașina am lovit -o. Topic Verb Clitic*  
The car.FEM have.1.Sg crashed CL.3.SG.FEM  
'As for the car, I have crashed it.'
- (2) *Ce ai lovit, mașina sau autobuzul?*  
What did you crash, the car or the bus?  
*[Mașina]<sub>F</sub> am lovit (-o). Focus Verb (Clitic)*  
the car.FEM have.1.SG crashed CL.3.SG.FEM  
'I crashed the car.'

## Theoretical implication

The theoretical implication of the condition presented in (3) and (4) is that clitic doubling imposes a grammatical restriction on the alternatives generated by focus. In case the clitic pronoun is present in (3) and (4) the generated alternatives are all referred to by feminine nouns and hence the focus presupposition is only partly satisfied by the contextually given alternatives. Therefore it seems that leaving out the clitic pronoun in (3) has pragmatic reasons.

This means that in Alternative Semantics grammatical alternatives should be considered at a separate level.

## Conditions of clitic doubling with focus in Romanian

Based on informants and own intuition I suggest that the following conditions play a role in determining whether a clitic pronoun appears after a left-dislocated, focused direct object or not. Note that the presence of a clitic pronoun seems generally better for many speakers and the impact of some of the conditions are more clear-cut than others:

+Clitic Pronoun	- Clitic Pronoun
Animate DO	Inanimate DO
Definite DO	Indefinite DO
[+DOM]	[-DOM]
Animate S	Inanimate S
DO highly affected	DO not highly affected
Not modified DO	Modified DO
S & DO have different gender	S & DO have same gender
Contextually available alternatives to the focused DO have the same gender as DO	Contextually available alternatives to the focused DO have the different gender than DO

In this talk I shall focus on the last condition. I illustrate the observation in the contrast between (3) and (4). Note that for some speakers (3) is significantly better than (4).

Context for (3) and (4): Two maids whose job is to wash every piece of clothes in a hotel by hand and therefore are very much interested in anything that may happen to clothes in that particular hotel, are vividly discussing an accident in the kitchen:

- (3) Q: *Ce a murdărit supa vărsată, bluza sau pantalonul bucătăresei?*  
What did the spilled soup dirty, the blouse or the trousers of the cook?  
A: *Supa vărsată bluza bucătăresei a murdărit, și nu pantalonul.*  
soup.FEM spilled blouse.FEM cook.FEM.GEN has dirtied, and not trousers.MASC  
'The spilled soup dirtied the blouse of the cook and not the trousers'
- (4) Q: *Ce a murdărit supa vărsată, bluza sau fusta bucătăresei?*  
What did the spilled soup dirty, the blouse or the skirt of the cook?  
A: *?Supa vărsată bluza bucătăresei a murdărit, și nu fusta.*  
soup.FEM spilled blouse.FEM cook has dirtied, and not skirt.FEM  
'The spilled soup dirtied the blouse of the cook and not the trousers'

## Experimental difficulties

While in discussion with (at least some) informants the contrast is confirmed, the contrast seems very hard to test experimentally.

## First experiment

In the first experiment 26 native speakers have been asked to judge the acceptability (magnitude estimation) of items with different lexicalizations for the following factors:

[± CL] [± Gender match between focused DO and contextual alternatives] = GM [± Explicit negation of the other alternative] = NEG

The items have been given in question-answer pairs, and there were a significant number of fillers. The tendency of the results are in line with our expectations, since if there is no gender match [-GM] the difference between [+CL] and [-CL] is smaller, but they are not statistically significant (p>0.05)

	[+Neg]		[-Neg]	
	[+GM]	[-GM]	[+GM]	[-GM]
[+CL]	16,2	6,2	19,3	29,6
[-CL]	-30,2	-7,1	-5,4	10,2

## Second experiment

In the second experiment I tested whether the presence or the absence of a clitic pronoun with left dislocated elements in ambiguous sentences in which the S and DO share gender helps to disambiguate the argument structure. The sentences had the following word order:

Topic, Focus Verb (CL) = Subject Object Verb (CL) or Object Subject Verb (CL)

The assumption is that if the presence of a clitic pronoun is optional with focused elements and obligatory with topicalized elements, than if the clitic is absent, people would rather choose the focused element as direct object, while if the clitic is present, the speakers would rather choose the topical element as direct object. Our expectation has not been confirmed, since speakers systematically accepted SOV but rejected OSV word order regardless of clitic doubling.

## Third experiment

Under construction. The method is self paced reading. The hypothesis is that reading sentences having clitic doubling takes longer if the contextual alternatives do not share gender.

## Literature

Rooth, Mats 1985. Association with Focus. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Rooth, Mats 1992. A Theory of Focus Interpretation. Natural Language Semantics 1, 75-116.

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This research has been conducted at the University of Stuttgart in the SFB 732 "Incremental specification in context" in the Project C2 "Case and referential context", funded by the DFG. I would like to thank Klaus von Heusinger for a huge amount of help with this research, Elsi Kaiser, Udo Klein, Manfred Krifka and Manuel Leonetti for helpful discussion and Daniele Panizza for help in the experimental design.