

## ON SILENT *COLOR* IN ROMANIAN

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**Abstract:** The main aim of the present paper is to show that there is a silent noun *COLOR* in Romanian (following Kayne 2005), in constructions such as *stîlou e COLOR roșu* pen.DEF is *COLOR* red. Silent *COLOR* is a qualitative classifier, occupying therefore the head of the Classifier Phrase. This silent noun can thus be added to the inventory of silent nouns in Romanian, such as *NUMBER*, *AMOUNT* and *TYPE* (see Tănase-Dogaru 2008, 2009, 2013, Constantinescu & Tănase-Dogaru 2007).

**Keywords:** silent nouns, *COLOR*, qualitative classifiers

### 1. Introduction

The main aim of the present paper is to look at data such as (1) to (3). These data will be used to show that there is a silent noun *COLOR* in Romanian (apud Kayne 2005).

- (1) Mașina are culoarea roșie /roșu<sup>1</sup>.  
car.F-DEF has color.F-DEF red-F red-M  
'The car is red.'
- (2) Mașina e roșie.  
car.F-DEF is red.  
'The car is red'.
- (3) Mașina e de culoare roșie / \*roșu.  
car.F-DEF is of color red-F / \*red-M  
'The car is red'.

This silent noun can thus be added to the inventory of silent nouns in Romanian, such as *NUMBER*, *AMOUNT* and *TYPE* (Constantinescu & Tănase-Dogaru 2007, Tănase-Dogaru 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011, 2012):

- (4) Ce *NUMBER* de mașini are!  
what *NUMBER* of cars has  
'He has so many cars!'
- (5) Ce *AMOUNT* de ceai a băut!  
what *AMOUNT* of tea has drunk  
'He drank so much tea!'

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<sup>1</sup> Some color adjectives in Romanian do not show gender variation (e.g. *verde* 'green', *roz* 'pink', etc.). Color adjectives like *roșu* 'red' or *galben* 'yellow' do inflect for gender; however, both *culoarea roșu* color.F-DEF red-M and *culoarea roșie* color-F-DEF red-F are acceptable. This is taken as strong indication that *culoare* 'color' behaves as a classifier (overt or silent).

In the example in (1), the presence of the noun *culoare* ‘color’ is obligatory, and the relationship between *culoarea* and *roșie* is clearly one of modification. On the other hand, by comparing (2) and (3), one can easily notice that the noun *culoare* ‘color’ acts as a classifier (see Tănase-Dogaru 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2011, 2017, Tănase-Dogaru & Ușurelu 2015), which is either silent (2) or overt (3).

Kayne (2005) shows that color adjectives should be taken to invariably modify either the overt noun *color* or its silent counterpart COLOR (6):

(6) John bought a green COLOR car yesterday.

Moreover, in sentences like (7), Kayne (2005: 242) claims that the presence of the indefinite article is licensed by silent COLOR:

(7) John’s car is a bright green.

The present paper claims that the reverse is true about the functional element *de*, whose presence is licensed by overt *color* in sentences like (3).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 broaches the issue of silent nouns and briefly discusses the inventory of silent nouns in Romanian. Section 3 offers the syntactic analysis of constructions involving silent COLOR, capitalizing on the findings in Kayne (2005) and Español-Echevarría (2016). Section 4 briefly enumerates the main findings.

## 2. On silent nouns

Silent nouns are nouns which lack a phonetic matrix but are active in syntax in the sense that their presence can explain various syntactic phenomena. Silent nouns lack antecedents (Kayne 2005) and are semi-lexical in nature. In some cases, silent nouns occupy the head of the Classifier Phrase (Tănase-Dogaru 2007, 2008 a, b, 2009). Over the years, the inventory of silent nouns has been constantly enriched. The main representatives are NUMBER, AMOUNT, YEAR, HOUR (Kayne 2005, Tănase-Dogaru 2008, 2009), KIND (Leu 2004), TOKENS (van Riemsdijk 2005), GO (van Riemsdijk 2002), PLACE, TIME, PERSON (Corver 2008)<sup>2</sup>.

Silent nouns benefit from two main kinds of representations. They are usually conceived as empty elements, which are active syntactically but lack an associated phonological matrix (van Riemsdijk 2002, Kayne 2005) or undergo PF-deletion (Wyngaerd 1994). Alternatively, they may be seen as unpronounced elements which are base-generated as such, i.e. without phonological features (Her & Tsai 2014, 2015). In the words of van Riemsdijk (2017):

the main question boils down to the question of whether the silent element is thought to be part of the syntactic structure as a lexically specified element that is

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<sup>2</sup> A very interesting suggestion by Bleotu (2016) is that color verbs like *to yellow* may be seen as derived from either the noun *yellow* or the silent noun COLOR followed by the adjective *yellow* (Bleotu 2016: 145).

subsequently deleted (or not spelled-out), or whether it is a lexical item that has its own lemma in the mental lexicon but is specified there as being an element that lacks phonetic content (van Riemsdijk 2017: 243).

Although arguing in favor of one option for the representation of silent nouns lies behind the scope of the paper, the underlying assumption is that COLOR is silent, i.e. not spelled out, unless an adequate “verbalizer” is present in the structure<sup>3</sup> (see section 3.1).

## 2.1 The inventory of silent nouns in Romanian

### 2.1.1 NUMBER, AMOUNT, KIND

Following van Riemsdijk (2005) and Kayne (2005), Constantinescu & Tănase-Dogaru (2007) and Tănase-Dogaru (2008a, 2008b, 2009) propose that the Romanian *ce* ‘what’ exclamatives fall into two categories. One category of exclamatives involves the silent noun NUMBER (8) or AMOUNT (9):

- (8) Ce de băieți la petrecere! = Ce NUMBER de băieți la petrecere!  
 what of boys at party what NUMBER of boys at party  
 ‘There are so many boys at the party!’
- (9) Ce de vin a băut! = Ce AMOUNT de vin a băut!  
 what of wine has drunk what amount of wine has drunk  
 ‘He drank so much wine!’

The second category of *ce* exclamatives in Romanian involves the silent KIND/TYPE/SORT (10):

- (10) Ce băieți la petrecere! = Ce KIND băieți la petrecere !  
 what boys at party what KIND boys at party  
 ‘What boys there are at the party! (the boys are really handsome, tall, etc.)’

The distinction between the two categories is signaled by the presence vs absence of *de* ‘of’, which (in pseudopartitive constructions) is a partitive marker / abstract genitive case-assigner (Tănase-Dogaru 2011, 2012, 2017).

### 2.1.2 YEAR, HOUR, MONTH

Following van Riemsdijk (1998), Cornilescu (2007), Tănase-Dogaru (2021) proposes that “names” of years, months, and hours are to be analyzed on a par with complex proper names, in the sense that their syntactic structure possesses qualitative classifiers, which can be silent or overt.

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<sup>3</sup> An anonymous reviewer points out that concepts like “time”, “form”, “color” are very fundamental ones, which may play a role in their going silent in some contexts, in the sense that some units lend themselves more easily to silence than others. I fully agree with this intuition – silent nouns do represent fundamental concepts, like “time”, “number”, “form”, which can definitely be seen as a factor of silenthood.

Tănase-Dogaru (2013) argues that classifiers of quantity (11) and classifiers of quality (12) should be treated uniformly. Classifiers in Romanian belong to two distinct categories: classifiers of quantity or “massifiers” (as in (11)) and classifiers of quality or “count-classifiers”, as in (12), see (Cheng & Sybesma 1999). Both constructions are extended projections, where the first nominal, i.e. the classifier, is semi-lexical.

- (11) un strop de apă  
a drop of water
- (12) planeta Venus  
planet-DEF Venus  
'the planet Venus'

The syntactic structure of “names” of years (13), months (14), and hours (15) contains a qualitative classifier, which is either silent (the *a* variants in the examples) or overt (the *b* variants in the examples):

- (13) a. O a doua invazie a urmat în 480.  
a second invasion has followed in 480.  
'A second invasion followed in 480'. (CoRoLa<sup>4</sup>)
- b. Benedict s- a născut în anul 480.  
Benedict REFL has born in year-DEF 480  
'Benedict was born in the year 480'. (CoRoLa<sup>5</sup>)
- (14) a. în aprilie devine din nou un om liber.  
in April becomes from new a man free  
'in April he becomes again a free man' (CoRoLa<sup>6</sup>)
- b. în luna aprilie au loc expoziții și festivaluri  
in month-DEF April have place exhibitions and festivals  
'in the month of April exhibitions and festivals take place'. (CoRoLa<sup>7</sup>)
- (15) a. la unu  
at one  
'at 1 o'clock'
- b. la ora unu  
at hour-DEF one  
'at one o'clock'

<sup>4</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=%C3%AEn+anul+480&ql=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=%C3%AEn+480&ql=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=%C3%AEn+aprilie&ql=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

<sup>7</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=%C3%AEn+luna+aprilie&ql=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

The paper has so far taken a look at the inventory of silent nouns in Romanian, which includes NUMBER/AMOUNT and KIND/TYPE/SORT. Following van Riemsdijk (2003) and Kayne (2005), the paper has proposed that the inventory also contains the silent nouns YEAR, MONTH and HOUR. In what follows I cast a more in-depth glance at silent HOUR.

Kayne (2005: 258) notes that in the English example (16), HOUR acts as a silent classifier:

- (16) It's six.  
It's six HOUR

French (17) differs from Italian (18) with respect to time, in that the classifier *heures* 'hours' must be overt in French:

- (17) Il est six heures.  
it is six hours  
'It's six o'clock.'  
(18) Sono le sei.  
are the six  
'It's six o'clock.'

In Italian, the corresponding noun can be present, although this is less usual:

- (19) Sono le ore sei.  
are the hours six  
'It's six o'clock.'

In the view of Kayne (2005), the obligatory presence of the classifier in French is related to the presence of the definite article *le* in Italian (18) versus its absence in French (17) (Kayne 2005: 259).

In Romanian, the most common way of telling the time (20) patterns with the English example in (16):

- (20) E șase.  
is six  
'It's six o'clock.'

HOUR is overt in examples such as (21):

- (21) a. De la ora șase dimineața am plecat.  
of at hour-DEF six morning-DEF have left.  
'I left at six o'clock in the morning.'

(CoRoLa <sup>8</sup>)

<sup>8</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=ora+6&q|=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

- b. Era dimineața la ora șase.  
 was morning-DEF at hour-DEF six  
 ‘It was six o’clock in the morning.’

(CoRoLa<sup>9</sup>)

Like Italian, Romanian also has the variant in (22), in which case the overt classifier surfaces in the plural:

- (22) pe la orele șase am facut un mic popas  
 on at hours-DEF six have made a small stop  
 ‘at about six o’clock we had a short break’

(CoRoLa<sup>10</sup>)

To briefly conclude what has been said so far, the catalogue of silent nouns in Romanian accommodates NUMBER/AMOUNT, KIND/TYPE/SORT, YEAR, MONTH, and HOUR. Section 3 analyzes silent COLOR in Romanian and proposes that this silent element acts as a qualitative classifier.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 Kayne’s (2005) COLOR

The first to identify a silent noun COLOR is Kayne (2005). In his 2005 proposal, color adjectives invariably modify either the overt noun *color* or its silent counterpart COLOR, as in (23):

- (23) John bought a green COLOR car yesterday.

(Kayne 2005: 242)

In (23), the presence of the indefinite article *a* is licensed by silent COLOR. In the context of a plural noun (24), COLOR does not license *a*, nor does overt *color* (25):

- (24) \*John has a green cars.  
 (25) They bought (\*a) different *color* cars.

(Kayne 2005: 242)

Kayne relates the presence of silent COLOR to silent NUMBER in the sense that just like NUMBER requires the presence of a specialized adjective like *few* or *many*, COLOR requires the presence of specialized color adjectives:

<sup>9</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=ora+6&ql=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

<sup>10</sup> <https://korap.racai.ro/?q=orele+6&ql=cosmas2&cutoff=1>

- (26) John's suit is of a bright green color / a widely discussed color.  
 (27) John is wearing a bright green suit. = a bright green COLOR suit  
 (28) John is wearing a widely discussed suit. ≠ John is wearing a suit of a widely discussed color.

(Kayne 2005: 243)

Silent COLOR has no antecedent, i.e. it does not require an overt instance of *color* elsewhere in the sentence or previous discourse. Kayne (2005: 243) notes that there is a weaker sense in which COLOR does have an antecedent, residing in the feature [+color], which characterizes color adjectives like *green* and *red*.

Following these intuitions, it seems safe to assume a silent COLOR in Romanian (28-29).

- (28) Mașina e color roșie.  
 car-DEF is COLOR red  
 'The car is red.'  
 (29) Mașina e *de* culoare roșie.  
 car-DEF is of color red  
 'The car is red in color.'

The next section takes a few steps towards clarifying the role of *de* 'of' in the structures (28)-(29). The section shows that the (overt) noun *culoare* 'color' acts as a classifier noun, whose presence is triggered by the functional element *de* 'of'.

### 3.2 COLOR as a classifier

Following Español-Echevarría (2016), who discusses adjectival modification in Malay, the section makes the claim that in examples such as (29), *culoare* acts as a classifier noun, which "gets verbalized" by the relative marker *de*. In Malay, color adjectives, such as *merah* 'red', can directly combine with the head noun (30), while evaluative adjectives, such as *baik* 'good', require the occurrence of the complementizer *yang*<sup>11</sup> in order to modify the head noun (31):

- (30) kasut merah itu  
 shoes red the/this  
 'the red shoes'

<sup>11</sup> The complementizer status of *yang* is confirmed by the fact that it occurs in relative clauses (1), as well as by the fact that it heads +*wh* CP (2):

- (1) Wanita yang sedang berjalan itu memakan apel.  
 Women COMP PROG walk the/this eat apple  
 "The women who are walking are eating apples."  
 (2) Siapa-kah yang membeli buku itu?  
 who Q COMP buy book the/this  
 "Who bought the book?"

(Wong 2008: 111, quoted in Español-Echevarría 2016: 150)

- (31) sebuah buku yang baik  
 a-CLF book COMP good  
 ‘a good book’

(Español-Echevarría 2016: 147)

The two patterns of adjectival modification are taken to be an instance of the distinction between direct (30) and indirect modification (31), in the sense of Cinque (2010). Given the complementizer status of *yang*, Español-Echevarría (2016) claims that indirect modification in Malay always involves a (reduced) relative clause.

Intersective adjectives (belonging to different lexical classes, such as color, shape, material or origin) directly modify a nominal projection, as in (32)-(35):

- (32) meja bulat itu                    SHAPE  
 table round the  
 ‘the round table’
- (33) kasut hijau itu                    COLOR  
 shoes green the  
 ‘the green shoes’
- (34) pelajar Melayu itu                ORIGIN  
 student Malay the  
 ‘the Malay student’
- (35) meja kayu itu                    MATERIAL  
 table wood the  
 ‘the wooden table’

(Español-Echevarría 2016: 151-152)

Intersective adjectives can also be introduced by means of a relative clause, as in (36)-(39). In this case, this relative clause, with the complementizer *yang*, must contain a classifier noun, *bentuk* ‘form’, *warna* ‘color’, *bangsa* ‘race’ and *jenis* ‘type/sort’, which gets verbalized by the verbal prefix *ber-*.

- (36) meja yang ber-**bentuk** bulat itu  
 table COMP VRB-**form** round the  
 ‘the round table’
- (37) kasut yang ber-**warna** hijau itu  
 shoes COMP VRB-**color** green the  
 ‘the green shoes’
- (38) pelajar yang ber-**bangsa** Melayu itu  
 student COMP VRB-**race** Malay the  
 ‘the Malay student’
- (39) meja yang ber-**jenis** kayu itu  
 table COMP VRB-**type** wood the  
 ‘the wooden table’

(Español-Echevarría 2016: 152-153)



Therefore, in Malay, intersective modifiers always involve a classifier noun, which may be silent, as in (32)-(35), or phonetically overt, as in (36)-(39).

In Romanian one can notice the same kind of complementary distribution between direct modification by intersective adjectives (40a, 41a) and reduced relative clauses (40b, 41b):

- (40) a. masa verde  
table-DEF green  
'the green table'
- b. masa de **culoare** verde  
table-DEF of color green  
'the green table'
- (41) a. masa rotundă  
table-DEF round  
'the round table'
- b. masa de **formă** rotundă  
table-DEF of shape round  
'the round table'

In the *b* examples above, the overt classifier is triggered by *de* 'of', which may also introduce in Romanian fully-fledged relative clauses (42):

- (42) masa de mi-ai cumpărat-o<sup>12</sup>  
table-DEF of me have bought  
'the table which you bought for me'

In Malay, the relation between the classifier (dimensional noun) and the head noun is taken to be mediated by a possessive locative relation (Español-Echevarría (2016: 160):

- (43)
- 
- meja Poss/Loc nP <Theme>  
table bulat bentuk  
round form  
Θ-POSSESSOR/LOCATION

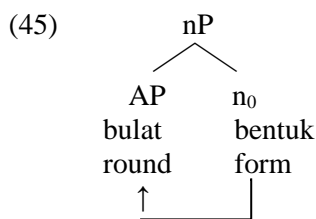
This is so because *ber-* is also able to denote a possessive relation between the base nominal and the external argument of the resulting verb:

<sup>12</sup> The use of *de* in such contexts is dialectal, i.e. not generally used in standard, literary Romanian.

- (44) Orang kaya itu berkereta besar.  
 man rich the/this VRB-car big  
 ‘This rich man has a big car.’

(Español-Echevarría 2016: 159)

As far as the relation between dimensional nouns and adjectives is concerned, Español-Echevarría (2016: 161) proposes that dimensional nouns contain a SORTAL interpretable feature which makes the adjective an argument of this type of nouns:



In the framework proposed by Español-Echevarría (2016) intersective modification involves not only a silent noun, but also a possessive relation between the silent noun and the head noun. This possessive/locative relation seems to be the source of the HAVE/BE alternation in (46):

- (46) a. Masa e (de culoare) verde.  
 table-DEF is (of color) green.  
 ‘The table is green.’  
 b. Masa are culoarea verde.  
 table-DEF has color-DEF green.  
 ‘The table has the color green.’

The HAVE/BE alternation is found in other Romance languages, such as Spanish (47). Similarly to the Romanian examples, the preposition *de* and the possessive verb are in complementary distribution, which suggests that the preposition has been incorporated into the verb (see Español-Echevarría 2016):

- (47) a. \*(De) qué color es esta mesa?  
 \*(of) what color is this table  
 ‘What color is this table?’  
 b. (\*De) Qué color tiene esta mesa?  
 (\*of) what color has this table  
 ‘What color is this table?’

(Español-Echevarría 2016:161)

It is now time we took stock of the results so far. The paper has shown that COLOR acts as a classifier, silent without *de* and overt with *de*. Secondly, color names have been shown to modify COLOR. Thirdly, the prepositional element *de* acts in a fashion similar to a complementizer.

### 3.2. COLOR as an intrinsic silent element

Her & Tsai (2014, 2015) propose a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic silent elements. Intrinsic silent elements do not add any meaning to the structure they are embedded in (48a), while extrinsic silent elements do, which makes them illicit by definition (48b)

- (48) a. She is the baby's FEMALE mother.  
 b. She is the baby's LOVING mother.

(Her & Tsai 2014: 784)

Her & Tsai (2015) argue that Kayne's *a green COLOR car* involves an intrinsic silent element that cannot be syntactically justified in the interest of economy. Moreover, it is seen as internal to English (Her & Tsai 2014: 790).

However, while in English *a* is licensed by silent COLOR, different languages have different licensers (see the Malay and Romanian cases above), which proves that (at least in these languages) COLOR is not only intrinsic but also licit. In the same vein of thought, Sigurdsson (2004) argues that language has innate structures which possess meanings irrespective of whether or how they are expressed at PF, which Sigurdsson (2004) calls Perceptible Form. Sigurdsson (2004: 243) formulates the Silence Principle, which legitimizes a range of silent elements, silent nouns included:

- (49) Languages have meaningful silent features; any meaningful feature may (in principle) be silent.

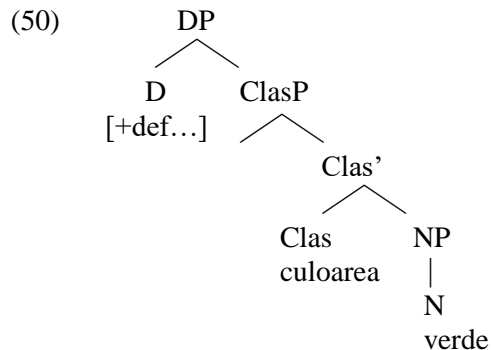
The mere fact that in Romanian one can have the contrast in (50) serves to show that COLOR is present in the structure:

- (50) a. Verdele este asociat cu natura.<sup>13</sup>  
 green-DEF is associated with nature-DEF  
 'Green is associated with nature'  
 b. Culoarea verde este reprezentarea universală a siguranței.<sup>14</sup>  
 color-DEF green is representation-DEF universal of safety-GEN  
 'The color green is the universal representation of safety.'

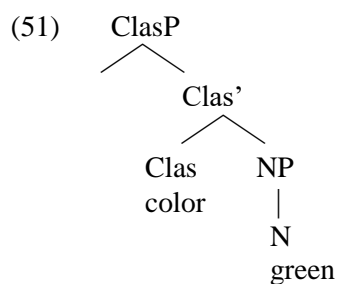
Therefore, the syntactic structure for (50b) is the one given below (from Cornilescu 2007), where the noun *culoarea* color-DEF acts as a qualitative classifier:

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.tekabijoux.ro/descopera/culori/verde>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.tekabijoux.ro/descopera/culori/verde>.



While (50) gives the syntactic structure of the construction with the overt classifier *culoare* ‘color’, (51) shows that the classifier is silent in contexts like *Mașina e verde* car-DEF is green.



#### 4. Conclusions

The paper has argued that silent COLOR can (and should be) added to the inventory of silent nouns in Romanian. Silent COLOR acts as a qualitative classifier, while *de* ‘of’ acts as a “verbalizer” of the classifier (similar to the Malay *ber-*), in the sense that it triggers its overt realization. Thus, what Sigurdsson (2004) calls “the Silence Principle” finds additional evidence in Romanian silent nouns.

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