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THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF REPETITION AS AN EXPRESSIVE PHENOMENON: EXPRESSIVE REPETITIVE PATTERNS IN ROMANIAN

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THE MORPHOSYNTAX OF REPETITION AS AN EXPRESSIVE PHENOMENON: EXPRESSIVE REPETITIVE PATTERNS IN ROMANIAN

Abstract. This paper aims to examine expressive phenomena from a morphosyntactic perspective. After delimiting how expressivity can be understood in terms of grammatical structures and functions, a subsection is dedicated to a particular family of morphosyntactic processes – those that involve various types of morphological or lexical repetition. While some languages have grammaticalized repetition as a means to realize fundamental functions (plural, aspect marking, etc.), others are free to use repetition for a plethora of expressive purposes. This can be seen in many European languages, which exhibit productive and dynamic expressive repetitive patterns.

Romanian has a rich inventory of repetitive patterns spanning all lexical categories (adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and nouns). Many are common among SAE, yet some are rather rare. This is the case of patterns such as A-A.DIM (new-new.DIM, 'brand new') that have double function: superlativization and expressivity (mainly hypocoristic). This pattern is also found in other Romance languages (*i.e.* Spanish), but otherwise it is isolated.

The inventory in this paper is not exhaustive, but it captures some of the most productive and frequently used expressive repetitive patterns in Romanian. Moreover,

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such a catalogue could never be complete, as expressivity is highly dynamic and relies on various factors, both linguistic and extra-linguistic.

Keywords: expressivity, morphosyntax, repetition, patterns

1. Introduction and outline

The term expressivity is commonly used with multiple meanings and appropriated differently depending on the theoretical framework that it might serve. While attempting to define expressivity from a morphosyntactic point of view, its nature as an interface phenomenon – with important semantic and pragmatic implications along with the grammatical aspects – cannot be ignored. The first core section of this paper aims to briefly provide a morphosyntactic definition of expressivity (section 2). By building on this theoretical hypothesis, the important role that morphology and syntax play in encoding and decoding expressive meaning should become more visible. Languages seem to possess grammatical instruments for expressing emotions and one of these instruments is repetition.

In Romanian, the language under scrutiny, various forms of repetition of lexical units bear expressive meaning. However, the functions and patterns of expressivity are not the same in all languages. After a brief comparative overview (section 3.1), repetition will be approached from the perspective of expressive morphosyntax (section 3.2). This will be followed by an inventory of expressive patterns with repetition in Romanian (section 4). Since expressivity is an open and dynamic category of meaning, this inventory does not aim to be, and cannot be exhaustive, but it includes the most frequent patterns, on basis of which some conclusions can be drawn (section 5, 6).

2. A morphosyntactic approach to expressivity

Expressivity is “a stylistic characteristic consisting of the manifestation of affectivity in language, through forms and constructions with connotative value, marked in relation to neuter, strictly denotative (descriptive), forms and constructions” (DTG 2023: 261). Four major perspectives can be

identified in this definition: the “manifestation of affectivity in language” is dealt with by cognitive studies; the connotative-denotative (descriptive) distinction, by semantics; and the idea of a “stylistic characteristic” can be linked to the fields of pragmatics or stylistics, which analyse discourse strategies. The fourth, however, is often neglected – the one that refers to “marked [...] forms and constructions”. Morphology and syntax are the linguistic levels that account for the formal aspects of linguistic constructions.

Moreover, the concept of expressivity is understood here “in a purely descriptive manner (with reference to the manifestations of the *expressive function* of language [see Jakobson's functions of language])” and not in an evaluative way (DTG 2023: 261). Therefore, expressivity is not a rare or exotic linguistic phenomenon, but on the contrary – “the expressive means through which a semantico-grammatical category is realized are more numerous and more varied than their grammaticalized equivalents”, which gradually enter general use, more or less successfully, some of them reaching the point of grammaticalization or lexicalization. An extensive demonstration of a similar reasoning can be found in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), in which they show that the metaphor is not just a high-register figure of speech, but a common conceptual mechanism that is used all the time by speakers, more often than not unconsciously. Analogously, expressivity should be looked at as more than just an artistic or stylistic endeavour. There is a vast inventory of “marked [...] forms and constructions”, which are used on a daily basis and help the expression of affective semantic content either independently or simultaneously with a denotative meaning, *i.e.* an observation made by the speaker about their observable universe. Instances where only one of the two uses – descriptive and expressive – is employed are rather rare (Gutzmann 2019).

From a morphosyntactic perspective, the patterns that will be accounted for are those ones that deviate from common usage just enough to stand out but not to an extent that they require a decoding effort that is too demanding on the part of the hearer (Grigoraş 2025). Therefore, a speaker could express semantic content that refers to the sphere of emotions, without being morphosyntactically expressive. Compare, for example, the unmarked utterances in (1) to those in (2):

- (1) a. Sunt fericit! (Romanian)
'I'm happy!'
b. Sunt foarte fericit!
'I'm very happy!'
- (2) a. Sunt în culmea fericirii!
'I'm on the highest peak of happiness!'
b. Sunt fericit de nu mai pot!
'I'm so happy that I cannot bear it anymore!'
c. Sunt fericit,fericit, fericit!
'I'm happy, happy, happy!'

From a morphosyntactic perspective, expressivity can be defined as an open class of alternative grammatical devices that are less frequently employed than the grammaticalized ones with similar functions, but used frequently enough in order to be easily understood and to efficiently convey, through language, emotional information or attitudes in relation to what is being talked about. The key observation is that expressive devices are often chosen instead of standardized and specialized morphosyntactical instruments or lexical items, because they allow for both descriptive meaning and an emotional stance to be encompassed in the same linguistic structure. For instance, a form such as Rom. *nou-nou* (new-new.DIM), meaning 'very new', could be preferred over *foarte nou* (very new), because the latter expresses only the superlative, without being able to show the speaker's stance to this qualification, whereas the first one marks both a superlative meaning and the speaker's stance.

Lastly, as can be deduced from the definition, an essential characteristic of expressivity is the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. Since they form an open and very diverse class, the patterns through which the expressive function is realized cannot be formally analysed in a unitary manner. The following sections of this paper analyse one family of expressive morphosyntactic phenomena – those that involve repetition – only to further prove how various alternative ways of expressing affectivity through language can be obtained using variations of a lexico-grammatical device.

3. Repetition and expressivity

3.1. Functions and forms of repetition. A typological overview

In Romanian, the main function of repetition in speech is the expressive one:

- (3) a. prost-prost
 stupid-stupid
 'very stupid'
 b. merge și merge și merge...
 (he/she) walks and walks and walks...
 'he/she walks for a long time/distance'

However, repetition is found in various morphological and syntactic forms and at various degrees of grammaticalization and different roles in many of the world's languages. For example, reduplication, a type of morphological repetition is frequently found outside of SAE (Standard Average European).

“[R]eduplication is a much more pervasive phenomenon than someone coming from a Western European world view might imagine. Reduplication is very common throughout Austronesia (Pacific islands, Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar), Australia, South Asia, and many parts of Africa, the Caucasus, and Amazonia. In the Western Hemisphere, some language families are particularly amenable to reduplication (Salishan, Pomoan, Uto-Aztecan, Algonquian, Yuman, Sahaptian, Siouan, etc.) while others are not, such as Athabaskan and Eskimo-Aleut. Western Europe is one area where reduplication does not play a critical role in the morphology. However, many Indo-European languages in the east, which are in contact with other language families, do have reduplicative morphemes.” (Rubino 2013)

Reduplication can be total (4) or partial (5):

- (4) Tagalog (Rubio 2013)
 a. mag -isip
 verbalizing prefix-think
 'to think'
 b. mag-isip-isip
 'to think about seriously'

- (5) Pangasinan (Rubio 2001: 540)
- a. CV- toó "man", totóo "men"
 - b. -CV- amigo "friend", amimígo "friends"
 - c. CVC- báley "town", balbáley "towns"
 - d. C₁V- plato "plate", papláto "plates"
 - e. CVCV- manók "chicken", manómanók "chickens"
 - f. Ce- duég "carabao", deréweg "carabaos"

Languages that have grammaticalized repetitive devices mostly use them for essential functions, such as marking aspect or the plural number (Rubino 2005; Daniel 2012: 8). This is also the case for sign languages, which make extensive use of lexical and morphological repetition (Bergman, Dahl 1994; Pfau, Steinbach 2005, 2006; Sutton-Spence, Woll 1999; Wilbur 2005; Fischer 1973; Sandler 1990). Among the languages that were included in *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, 277 had productive total or partial reduplication, 34 had only total reduplication and 56 had no productive reduplicative patterns (Rubino 2013). European languages were included in the last category. However, lexical repetition does not lead only to distinctions such as number or aspect. Many European languages, in absence of fundamental grammatical consequences such as the above-mentioned, are free to use repetition for other purposes. Precisely because total reduplication does not regularly employ +PLURAL, +CONTINUOUS – for which there are specialized grammatical means – or any such value in the European languages, it can be used to convey other grammatical distinctions or semantic contents. Total reduplication is not, however, the only repetitive pattern found in European languages. Some patterns are more productive, while others have a narrower scope, being restricted to a relatively small lexical inventory – the resulting forms rather being lexicalized relics of no-longer-active patterns or simply idiosyncratic structures. Hence, these factors should also be taken into account when attempting to answer whether European languages have active reduplicative patterns or not. This paper aims to show that repetition in Romanian, as well as other European languages (Italian, Spanish, English, etc.), does have precise patterns and well-delimited roles within grammar.

(6) Romanian, Italian, Spanish, and English

a. prost- prost

b. stupido stupido

c. estúpido estúpido

d. stupid stupid

slowly slowly.DIM

'very/really stupid' + emotional stance (annoyance)

(7) Romanian and Spanish

a. încet- încetișor

b. suave suavecito

slowly slowly.DIM

'very slow' + emotional stance (annoyance or sensuality)

(8) My *hair* is *hairing* today.

'My hair looks very good today' + emotional stance (proud)

Since repetition is always an alternative way of expressing certain grammatical and semantic categories, for which specialized lexical or morphosyntactic instruments exist, it also always adds an expressive stratum to the denotation.

3.2. *The expressive status of repetition.*

Semantic non-redundancy via lexical redundancy

The grammar of a particular language and its typology are essential for interpreting repetitions. Compare the following:

(9) Malay

rumah-rumah

house-house

'houses' (The Oxford Guide to the Malayo-Polynesian Languages of Southeast Asia)

(10) Romanian

casă-casă

house-house

a. evaluative reading: 'big/beautiful house'

b. contrastive reading: 'a house, not an apartment'

In Malay, total reduplication is a grammatical rule that generates a plural. The resulting meaning is purely descriptive, independent of context, and unmarked affectivity-wise. By contrast, in Romanian, the simple repetition of the noun *casă* would be ungrammatical unless one of the two readings that add meaning is present. This semantic content is more imprecise, thus enabling multiple readings depending on the discourse context.

Potts (2007: 180) points out that “for expressives, the basic observation is that repetition leads to strengthening rather than redundancy”. On the other side, as far as descriptive language is concerned, formal (11) or even semantic (11b and 12) redundancy is ungrammatical or at least undesirable.

(11) a. În *în geantă *geantă este *este cheia *cheia.

In *in bag *bag there is *is key.DEF *key.DEF

'In the bag is the key.'

b. Cerul este senin și nu (este) înnorat. (GBLR 2016: 334)

Sky.DEF is clear and not (is) cloudy.

'The sky is clear and (is) not cloudy.'

(12) short brevity, to descend down

Therefore, in languages where there are no grammaticalized patterns that involve repetition and yet repetition is frequently used, a clear boundary between expressive and descriptive language may be observed. Exchanges such as the ones in (13) are possible in Romanian only because they exist within the expressive domain. The second occurrence of the noun *house* is not interpreted as superfluous in neither of the situations, but as an alternative means to convey additional expressive information.

- (13) a. A: Stă la *casă* sau la apartament?
 B: La *casă-casă*.
 A: 'Does he/she live in a house or in an apartment?'
 B: 'In an actual house, not in an apartment.'
- b. A: Ți place această *casă*?
 B: Păi asta e *casă-casă*!
 A: 'Do you like this house?'
 B: 'Well, this is a real/big/beautiful house!'

The apparent paradox of redundancy generating non-redundancy is, therefore, solved at the morphosyntax-semantics interface. Repetition in Romanian illustrates the clear-cut distinctions between the different compartments of language and the way in which these interact. Hence, when present, lexical redundancy – *i.e.* repetition of any kind – in Romanian must be interpreted as an alternative morphosyntactic instrument used for conveying expressive semantic content.

4. Expressive repetitive patterns in Romanian

Before putting together an inventory of some expressive morphosyntactic patterns that involve repetition, it is useful to delimit the understanding of the term *repetition* that will be further used. A broad definition, suitable for this approach, states that repetition means the "[re]occurrence of a linguistic unit two or more times, either in immediate proximity or at a certain distance, in identical or partially identical form, within a broader linguistic sequence" (DTG 2023: 541). Therefore, repetition does not only refer strictly to the lexical or morphological phenomenon of reduplication.

All the patterns that will be described in the following subsections employ the term repetition in a broad sense of some lexical items that encompass referential and/or grammatical content, as well as expressive content – the speaker's stance with respect to the things being uttered – that is more or less context-dependant. These patterns will be analysed in terms of the constraints upon the lexical items that they can be applied to and their grammatical behaviour.

4.1. Expressive repetition of adjectives and adverbs

When analysing adjectival and adverbial patterns, expressivity should be always linked to degree and intensity. Hence, any choice to express a degree of intensity in a non-standard manner falls in the sphere of the "subjective", sometimes of the "stylistic", which explains the large and ever-increasing number of expressive degree devices and the difficulty of setting a precise limit between the grammaticalized and the lexico-stylistic ones (GBLR 2016: 216). In Romanian, the absolute superlative can be realized either through simple reduplication, or through a special pattern that implies reduplication and affixation with a suffix that is homonymous with the diminutive one.

4.1.1. A-A: *rău-rău*, *repede-repede* (bad-bad, quickly-quickly)

From a formal point of view, the following aspects may be noticed:

- Reduplication (*rău-rău*, *tare-tare*)

This pattern is based on the process of doubling the base adjective or adverb.

- Double agreement (*rea-rea*)

If the structure is of adjectival nature, the two constituents must agree with the governing NP. Thus, the only grammatical forms are those like the ones in (14a) and not any possible combinations, since they would violate the agreement.

- (14) a. *rea -rea*, *răi -răi*
bad.FEM.SG.- bad.FEM.SG., bad.MASC.PL.-bad.MASC.PL.
rele -rele
bad.FEM.PL.-bad.FEM.PL.
'very bad'
- b. **rău -rea*, *rea -răi*
bad.MASC.SG.-bad.FEM.SG., bad.FEM.SG.-bad.MASC.PL.

This reduplicative pattern generates structures with different semantics depending on the class that they belong to:

– Scalar As

Since the semantic result of this pattern is a marked absolute superlative, it is necessary that the As it is applied to be scalar. The scalar As thus marked not only become superlatives, but they are also given the ability to express an additional affective stance (15).

– Non-scalar As

However, when reduplication is applied to other types of As, the semantics is not a superlative anymore, but the strengthening of the semantic content (16a) or, in other cases, a contrastive reading (16b). The reading is highly dependent on the conversational background, hence the speaker can use it to move the focus onto a certain semantic component. In other words, reduplication can be used as a focus device.

- (15) câine rău-rău; vorbește repede-repede
 dog bad-bad; (he/she) speaks quickly-quickly
 'very bad dog'; 'He/she speaks very quickly.'

- (16) a. ciobănesc german-german
 German-German Shepherd
 'a dog that perfectly illustrates some stereotypes associated with Germans or with the breed' or 'a thoroughbred German Shepherd'
 b. Vorbește românește -românește.
 He/she speaks Romanian-ly-Romanian-ly.
 'He/she speaks in a strong Romanian accent or in a specifically Romanian manner/style' or 'He/she speaks very clean standard Romanian, without foreign words or dialectal elements.'

4.1.2. A-A.DIM: *rău-răuţ*, *repede-repejor* (*bad-bad.DIM*, *quickly-quickly.DIM*)²

The prototypical example that should be kept in mind throughout the analysis of these constructions is *nou-nouţ* (17).

- (17) *nou-nouţ*
new-new.DIM
'very/brand new'

Two aspects are readily obvious here:

- Reduplication (*nou-nouţ*)

Reduplication underlies this pattern. The two terms that make up the resulting structure must have the same root (18).

- (18) *nou -nouţ* and *gol -goluş*
new-new.DIM empty-empty.DIM
but not **nou -goluş* nor **gol -nouţ*
new-empty.DIM empty-new.DIM
'brand new' and 'really empty'

- Suffix Homonymous to the Diminutive Suffix (*nou-nouţ*)

The affix *-uţ* is referred to as a 'suffix homonymous to the diminutive suffix' rather than simply as a 'diminutive suffix', because here *-uţ* has a different functional role. The suffix does not have to be only *-uţ*; there are also other suffixes such as *-uleţ* (19), *-el* (20) or *-işor* (21).

- (19) *întreg-întreguleţ*
full-full.DIM
'very full '

- (20) *singur-singurel*
alone-alone.DIM
'very alone'

² This subsection is a translated and abridged version of a paper that is forthcoming in a volume at Bucharest University Press.

- (21) încet-încetișor
 slowly-slowly.DIM
 'very slowly'

– Double agreement (*nouă-nouță*)

If the basis is an adjective, this third characteristic may be noticed. This phenomenon manifests itself throughout the entire inflectional paradigm³ of adjectival structures such as *nou-nouț* (22) or *gol-goluț* (23). Forms without the double agreement, such as *nou-nouță* (24), which do not conform to the literary norm, often occur in spoken language to the detriment of double agreement structures.

- (22) *nou-nouț*(M.SG), *noi-nouți*(M.PL), *nouă-nouță*(F.SG), *noi-nouțe* (F.PL)

- (23) *gol-goluț*(M.SG), *goi-goluți*(M.PL), *goală-goluță*(F.SG), *goale-goluite* (F.PL)

- (24) *mașină nou*(M.SG)-*nouță*(F.SG)
 'brand new car'

On the basis of these three characteristics, a general reduplication and affixation function, which is the underlying pattern of *nou-nouț* and *gol-goluț*, may be deduced. The expression of the superlativization function will be henceforth represented like this: $f(a) = a + (a + \text{suffix homonymous to the diminutive suffix})$. For instance, for *nou*, $f(nou) = nou + (nou + -uț) = nou-nouț$.

The values that can be assigned to the variable *a* or, in other words, the morphological and lexical conditions that allow inclusion in the domain – the complete set of accepted inputs – of function *f* must also be examined:

– The Lexical Category

Function *f* has been illustrated above for the word *nou* ('new'). Analogously, it can be applied to other roots, with at least one occurrence each in the CoRoLa corpus (25). Another structure listed

³ As seen in DOOM³ [the third edition of *The Ortographic, Orthoepic and Morphologic Dictionary of Romanian*].

in DOOM3 and attested in the corpus is *încet-încetişor* (21), rooted in the adverb *încet* ('slowly'). Another two examples formed from adverbial roots, found in the CoRoLa corpus, are *bine-binuţ* (26) and *fain-făinuţ* (27). Therefore, the variable of function *f* has been attributed *a*, because it shows the first essential condition. The word that undergoes this grammatical process must be either an adjective or an adverb.

- (25) *gol-goluţ* ('very empty'), *plin-plinuţ* ('very full'), *slab-slăbuţ* ('very thin'), *simplu-simpluţ* ('extremely simple'), *mic-micuţ* ('very small'), *alb-albuţ* ('very white'), *singur- singurel* ('really alone')

- (26) *bine-binuţ*
'very well'

- (27) *fain-făinuţ* (used regionally in Transylvania)
'very well'

– Number of syllables

The root can only be monosyllabic (*nou*, *fain*) or disyllabic (*sin.gur*, *în.cet*). Consequently, structures with longer words such as **interesant-interesănţel* (28) are ungrammatical.

- (28) **interesant-interesănţel*
'very interesting'

– Semantic and derivational properties

The adjective or the adverb must be scalar, since the **semantic result** of *f(a)* is 'very *a*'. For instance, the semantic result of *f(nou)* is *foarte nou* ('very new'). Therefore, if a word does not accept the absolute superlative, it means that it cannot go through the process described by function *f*. Thus, *a* must be a scalar adjective or adverb. Moreover, if *a* is an adjective, it must be a qualifying adjective – not a relational one (**magazin sătesc-sătesculeţ*) (29) or reference-modifying (**fost-fostuţul ministru*) (30); the last two types of adjectives do not accept degree markers (GBLR 2016: 217-219; GR 2013: 417-420).

(29) *magazin sătesc-sătesculeț
 *'very rural store'

(30) *fost-fostuțul ministru
 *'very former minister'

Taking into consideration the lexical and morphological properties that form function f , as well as the conditions that the variable a has to meet, a more nuanced generalisation may be proposed: $f(a) = a + (a + \text{suffix homonymous to the diminutive suffix})$, where the semantic result is 'very a ' with a being any gradable adverb or qualifying adjective that allows for diminutive suffixation and has a phonetic body of no more than two syllables.

The semantic result ('very a ' or even more so⁴) alongside the special realisation are enough reasons for placing function f under the general label of *expressive morphology* (Fortin 2011: 9). [...] The affix in the formula of function f can be regarded as a connotative affix, similar to those in Spanish (Fortin 2011: 137) (*infra* 3.2). Therefore, it has a double role: to mark the intensity – absolute superlative – and also to indicate a certain stance of the speaker towards the object or the action described by $a/f(a)$.

Two other difficulties in the analysis of these structures are worth delving into:

A. The Double Agreement of Adjectival Structures. Usage and Norm

An important discrepancy between usage and norm is the absence of the double agreement in everyday speech, when the variable a in $f(a)$ is assigned a qualifying adjective as its value. In a previously published article (Grigoraș 2024), I have identified three main causes for speakers choosing structures such as *mașină nou-nouță* rather than conforming to the norm and saying *mașină nouă-nouță*.

⁴ As previously mentioned, the result has a distinct semantic mark, that of a 'maximum point' + hypocoristic stance.

The first cause is the influence of another linguistic pattern, which is more frequent in speech and has a more transparent structure: compounds such as *nou-venit*, *nou-născut* etc., in which the first element does **not** inflect, because it is an adverb, not an adjective (ADV-ADJ), making the agreement easier.

A second possible cause is the feeling of redundancy that inhibits the double agreement. The repetitive and relatively difficult internal/deep structure of these constructions is the result of the three characteristics: reduplication, suffix homonymy to the diminutive suffix, and double agreement (one internal and one enclitic agreement). All of these contribute to structures such as *noi-nouţi*, *goi-goluţi* or *goale-goluţe* being deemed as redundant.

A third cause could be the length of the phonetic body of the adjectival root. The non-standard usage is less probable for a $f(a)$ when a is disyllabic. For instance, if $a = \text{sin.gur}$, then $f(a) = \text{singur-singurel}$. Structures such as **singur-singurică*/**singur-singurea*, **singur-singurei* or **singur-singurele* are impossible in Romanian, as opposed to other vernacular versions of inflectional forms – sometimes even more frequent, as seen in the following table that uses data from the CoRoLa corpus:

Tabel 1

Standard vs non-standard forms.
Data for the two most frequent A-A.DIM structures

		Standard form	Occurrences	Non-standard form	Occurrences
nou-nouţ	F.SG.	<i>nouă-nouţă</i>	23	<i>nou-nouţă</i>	139
	M.PL.	<i>noi-nouţi</i>	8	<i>nou-nouţi</i>	15
	F.PL.	<i>noi-nouţe</i>	54	<i>nou-nouţe</i>	87
gol-goluţ	F.SG.	<i>goală-goluţă</i>	16	<i>gol-goluţă</i>	5
	M.PL.	<i>goi-goluţi</i>	8	<i>gol-goluţi</i>	0
	F.PL.	<i>goale-goluţe</i>	5	<i>gol-goluţe</i>	1

Source: Grigoraş 2024

There is a fourth cause that relates only to the structure *nou-nouţ* and that will also be invoked later in this paper: the high degree of lexicalization, given by its frequent use. This explains why the ratio (occurrences of standard

inflectional forms of *nou-nouț*)/(occurrences of non-standard inflectional forms of *nou-nouț*) is subunitary, while the ratio (occurrences of standard inflectional forms of *gol-goluț*)/(occurrences of non-standard inflectional forms of *gol-goluț*) is superunitary, as seen in the table above. In other words, the speakers' tendency is to use *nou-nouț* not complying to the norm, whereas structures like *gol-goluț* or *singur-singurel* are rather used in a literary manner, with double agreement. Therefore, it is possible that *nou-nouț* has developed an idiosyncratic usage that ignores the adjectival nature of the first term, simplifying the structure. It can be observed that, statistically, *nou* and *nou-nouț* are noticeably more frequently used than *gol* and *gol-goluț* respectively.

B. Possible Explanations for These Structures and Their Usage

Two hypotheses can be put forward:

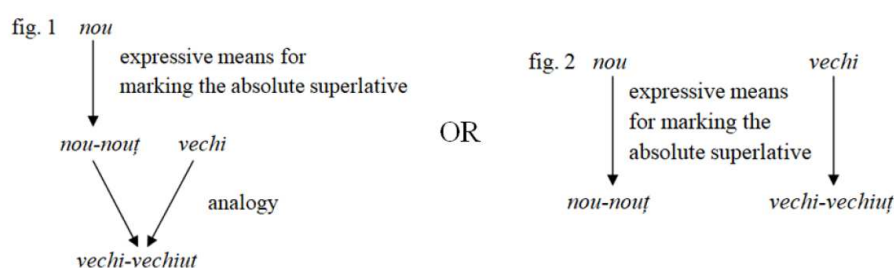


Figure 1. Two possible explanations for A-A.DIM structures
(Grigoraș 2024)

If *nou-nouț* is assumed to be the standard construction that exists in this form in the mental lexicon, then judging by fig. 1, all the constructions such as *vechi-vechiuț* ('very old') or *fain-făinuț* should be possible words, with transparent structure and meaning but which do **not** exist independently in the mental lexicon of the speaker. They are generated analogously with each occurrence based on the pattern of *nou-nouț*. However, fig. 2 argues that all forms (including the more frequently used *nou-nouț* and *gol-goluț*) are results of the superlative function *f*.

At least two counterarguments against the hypothesis in fig. 1 may be considered. The first concerns the legitimacy of the presumption of the existence of a standard form (*nou-nouţ*), based only on the frequency of its occurrences in speech. In the absence of considerably older attestations for *nou-nouţ* than for any other similar construction, or of an explanation of the origin of this construction in this exact form, it cannot be stated with certainty that *nou-nouţ* is a model that enabled the emergence of all the other forms. Another counterargument is that this pattern does not exist only in Romanian. A typological (comparative) approach could prove to be more suitable than an intralingual diachronic explanation. By following this path, we obviously eliminate the possibility of a sole standard structure, acknowledging the existence of a pattern applicable to a vast set of lexical units. In Spanish, the diminutive suffixes have varied expressive usage⁵ (Fortin 2011: 138). For instance, the function *f* is identical – $f(a) = a + (a + \text{suffix homonymous to the diminutive suffix}) -$, the semantic result is the same ('very *a*') and the constraints for the variable *a* are also similar. For adjectival *a*: $a = \text{nuevo}$, $f(a) = \text{nuevo nuev(ec)ito}$ (cf. *nou-nouţ*), $a = \text{solo}$, $f(a) = \text{solo solito}$ (cf. *singur-singurel*) and for adverbial *a*: $a = \text{suave}$, $f(a) = \text{suave suavecito}$ (*încet-încetişor*).

Conversely, the frequency in use of *nou-nouţ* can be used as a counterargument against hypothesis 2. It is difficult to say whether a possible yet unattested construction such as *mic-mititel* ('very small'), for example, is formed using the function *f* or by analogy with *nou-nouţ*. For that reason, these structures should be understood as being generated through a mixed process. Even if *nou-nouţ* has a high degree of lexicalisation – and thus its own entry in the mental lexicon – this does **not** entail that it cannot be formed spontaneously using function *f*, also existent in the lexicon, as happens with all the other analogous constructions. Therefore, fig. 2 illustrates the most plausible scenario, that of an active and productive grammatical process in present-day Romanian. Fig. 2 also explains the double agreement (that is often lost due to the atomic, non-decomposable actualization of *nou-nouţ* directly from the lexicon, instead of generating it in accordance with the rules of function *f*).

⁵ In Spanish, diminutive suffixes can be used for expressing depreciation, appreciation, hypocorism, intensification, exactness, attenuation, or approximation.

4.2. Expressive repetition of verbs

4.2.1. *V (și) V (și)... (și) (iar/tot) V: merge (și) merge (și)...*

It is well known that Romanian has not grammaticalized the progressive/continuous aspect. This reading is obtained either through the imperfect tense, or can be realized periphrastically by means of other lexical elements, such as the prototypical verb *a continua* ('to continue') or adverbs like *(în)continuu* ('continuously'):

- (31) El continuă să meargă/merge încontinuu.
'He continues to walk.'

The pattern that will be analysed bears expressive content along with the simple marking of the continuous aspect. It implies the repetition of the verbal predicate, with or without the repetition of *și* ('and'), also allowing for the insertion of adverbs such as *iar* ('again') *tot* ('still') before the last element of the repetition, in order to better convey durativity. Here are some of the possible configurations:

- (32) a. El merge, merge, merge, merge...
He walks, walks, walks, walks...
b. (Și) merge și merge și merge și merge...
c. Merge, merge și iar merge.
d. Merge, merge, tot merge...

From a syntactic perspective, the grammatical nature of *și* needs to be discussed. Is it rather a conjunction or an adverb, as both options are available in Romanian? The possibility of its absence without any semantic or syntactic consequences could indicate that it is more of an adverb. Moreover, the *și*-s between the verbs are obviously not true copulas, since they do not link multiple predicates. Another argument against the conjunction hypothesis is the possibility of placing it before the first element of the repetition (32a). This initial *și* does not seem to be any different from the ones that follow. However, the fact that the only available position for *și* when it occurs just once is before the last element of the repetition could be interpreted

in two ways – either as proof it is after all a conjunction, since this is also the distribution of the conjunction *și* inside enumerations in Romanian (33); or as identical behaviour to the adverbs *iar* (32c) and *tot* (32d). What is unequivocal is that the *și* inside this pattern has both conjunctive and adverbial properties and that it is grammaticalized with a specific function and semantics within this expressive pattern.

- (33) a. El merge, merge, merge și merge.
b. *El și merge, merge, merge, merge.

From a lexico-semantic perspective, some constraints and effects of the usage of this pattern might be noticed. First, the expressive markedness of the structure increases as the number of times the verb is repeated grows – (34b) is more expressive than (34a). Oftentimes, in oral speech, this repetition is accompanied by a specific intonational contour and by elongated vowel pronunciation.

- (34) a. El merge, (și iar) merge.
b. El merge, merge, merge, merge, (și iar) merge.

Grammatical aspect⁶ plays an essential role in the selection and interpretation of the verbs that undergo this expressive pattern. The prototypical verbs which occur are activities, which are durative and atelic: *a merge* ('to walk'), *a vorbi* ('to talk'), *a privi* ('to watch'), etc. However, the patterns can also be applied to:

– States

States are non-agentive and, generally, their Experiencer subject has no control over the action. When they undergo the pattern, their usual meanings change. For instance, (35a) illustrates a playful/rude method for expressing the idea of somebody being overweight. Here *to be* no longer has an existential meaning. In (35b), the verb *to know* does not employ the property of the subject to know a certain piece of information, but the specific moments when he/she is capable of

⁶ The framework used for this classification is the one proposed by Z. Vendler (1967).

giving the right answer and does so. The continuous state of knowing, true at any point, is recategorized as an iterative-event state.

- (35) a. Baritonul este și este și este...
 'The baritone is and is and is...'
 b. Mihai știe, știe, știe(, până nu mai știe).
 'Mihai knows, knows, knows (until he doesn't anymore).'

– Accomplishments

The result of using an accomplishment predicate in such structures is that, by placing the focus on the duration, the speaker aims to eliminate the final point. Thus, the action, even in the presence of an object, becomes *de facto* atelic. Another interpretation could be the iterative one, case in which the accomplishment is recategorized as a multiple-event state.

- (36) Cântă, cântă și tot cântă cântecul (dar nu-l mai termină).
 'He sings, sing and sings the song (but he just won't finish it).'

– Achievements and semelfactives

Mutatis mutandis, the multiple-event state recategorization takes place the same way in this case.

- (37) a. Toată ziua găsește, găsește, găsește, încât până seara nu mai are nimic de căutat.
 'All day long he keeps finding, finding, finding, until by evening there is nothing left to look for.'
 b. Strănută, strănută și nu se mai oprește.
 'He keeps sneezing, sneezing, sneezing and he just won't stop.'

4.2.2. *V ce/cât V și...: spune ce spune și...*

As opposed to the previous pattern, this one is characterized by a tighter configuration. The only variable element is the relative pronoun – either *ce* or *cât*, with the latter being slightly more duration-orientated. The semantic content can also be analysed in a single manner. Compare:

- (38) a. Spune ce spune și tot ca el face.
'He says what he says/ He says one thing, and still does what he pleases.'
- b. Lucrează cât lucrează și tot nu izbândește.
'He works and works, yet still does not succeed.'
- c. Face ce face și până la urmă reușește.
'He does what he does and in the end he succeeds.'

The structures of the type *și tot (nu)* or *și până la urmă (tot nu)* ('yet/and still (+ negation)') that follow the repetition could have also been mentioned for the previous pattern, but it is only the pattern that is analysed in this subsection that always co-occurs with such structures. This is due to the mandatory antonymy relation that is set between the repeated verb and the following predicate. In the *V ce/cât V și...* pattern's matrix there is a presupposition that the action described by the repeated verb is either (a) false or true for a short period of time only, due to the subject attempting but failing to act in a certain direction, or (b) supposed to be true by the subject, even though the speaker knows that it is false.

Agentivity is an important feature of the repeated verb, since this pattern is mostly used to express doubt with respect to the actions of a certain subject towards a (pretended) goal. However, there are also exceptions such as the following, where the subject is an Experiencer and not an Agent:

- (39) Omul trăiește cât/ce trăiește și moare.
'One lives as long as one lives, and then dies.'

4.2.3. *Când/dacă V, V OR când/dacă V^{TRANSITIVE}₁ V₂, V₂:*
când promite, promite OR când promite că sună, sună

This pattern is characterized by the presence of a subordinate clause introduced by *când* ('when') or *dacă* ('if').

- (40) a. Când promite, promite.
'When he promises, he promises.'
b. Dacă promite, promite.
'If he promises, he promises.'
c. Când promite ceva, promite, nu se joacă.
'When he promises something, he promises it, he doesn't fool around.'

The element that is repeated in the main sentence relies on the type of verb that is the predicate of the sentence introduced by *când/dacă*. If V_1 is intransitive, then it is the one that will be repeated. If there is a complex V_1P , then the whole VP can (but does not have to) be copied (41a). Conversely, if V_1 is transitive and governs a subordinate clause whose predicate is V_2 , then only V_2P will be copied in the main sentence (41b,c). If the whole V_1P is repeated (41d), the stress goes on the first verb, usually a *dicendi* verb, thus enabling a different reading: the speaker questions the fulfilment of the action described by V_2 .

- (41) a. Când tace, tace, când vorbește la telefon, vorbește la telefon.
'When he's silent, he's silent, when he talks on the phone, he talks on the phone.'
b. Când zice că face ce a promis în campania electorală, face ce a promis (în campania electorală).
'When he says that he'll do everything he promised during the campaign, he'll do everything he promised (during the campaign).'
c. Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier.
'When I want to whistle, I whistle.'
d. (?) Când zice că face, zice că face.
'When he says he'll do it, he says he'll do it.' → 'He only says it, but he will not act on it.'

Orally, this pattern is uttered with a specific intonational contour – descending for the *când/dacă* V sequence and ascending and stressed on the second occurrence of the V.

4.2.4. The expressive anti-repetition. A special metadiscursive situation.

The last pattern with verbal repetition that will be discussed is one that has been analysed before by Gabriela Pană Dindelegan (2003), and which includes a metadiscursive adjunct, with a topicalising function, expressed as a verb in the supine. The verb is repeated as predicate immediately after, as in (42a). In the majority of cases, the sentence headed by the finite verb is succeeded by one introduced by an adversative conjunction.

The pattern is also possible with adjectives. This triggers a concessive reading ('even though she is old...') and the mandatory presence in the right vicinity of an (apparently) semantically-opposite prediction from the repeated adjective's (42b,c).

- (42) a. De cântat cântă foarte bine (dar dansează prost). → de V_1 , V_1
'As for singing, they sing very well (but they dance poorly).'
- b. De deştept, e deştept, dar cu politeţea nu stă prea bine. → de Adj_1 ,
este Adj_1
'As for being smart, he is smart, but politeness is not his strong suit.'
- c. Bătrână, bătrână, dar poate să alerge prin parc. → Adj_1 , Adj_1
'As for being old, she is old, but she can still run in the park.'

Expressivity is, however, greater when the pattern is violated – *i.e.* when V_2/Adj_2 is different from V_1/Adj_1 (this only works with the first two subtypes of this pattern (43c)). The implicature resulting from this expressive anti-repetition in examples such as (43a) and (43b) is that 'as far as V_1/Adj_1 is concerned, the property that they describe cannot be attributed to the subject': The subject does not sing well (43a), or the subject is not smart (43b) respectively. This result is only natural since the metadiscursive element introduces the topic of the conversation, but afterwards the sentence is not at all related to that topic. Expressivity comes from disrupting the expectations of the hearer, who can recognize the pattern and is surprised by its violation.

- (43) a. De cântat, dansează frumos.
'As for singing, they dance very well.'
- b. De deştept, e frumos.
'As for being smart, he is handsome.'
- c. *Bătrână, tânără, dar...
'Young, old, but...'

4.3. Expressive repetition of nouns

4.3.1. N -N: *casă-casă*

This pattern can occur with two readings. The first one is evaluative, through which a judgement of value about a feature of the discussed object is added using reduplication, therefore making it stand out from the group of identical elements denominated generically by a common noun. For instance, the repetition of the word *casă* in (44) moves the focus from the object itself to a certain positive attribute that is evaluated by the speaker ('big/beautiful house').

- (44) A: Cum e casa nouă a Alexandrei?
B: Și-a luat o *casă-casă*!
A: 'How is Alexandra's new house like?'
B: 'She got herself a really nice house!'

The second reading is the contrastive or the reductive one. By means of repetition, the speaker is able to adjust efficiently the extension of the term, more often than not in the direction of narrowing it. Example (45) shows the way in which a noun such a *professor*, which is often used for all academic ranks in common language, is disambiguated and reduced to its stricter meaning, by repeating it.

- (45) A: Domnul Popescu este conferențiar (sau profesor)?
B: E profesor-profesor.
A: 'Is Mr Popescu an associate (or statutory) professor?'
B: 'He is a professor of the highest rank.'

The first of the two nouns can appear without an article or with a proclitic undefined article, but the second one can only appear without an article, bound to the first noun.

- (46) A: Și-au luat o *casă* sau un apartament?
B: Și-au luat o *casă*-*o *casă*.
A: 'Did they buy a house or a flat?'

4.3.2. *Tautology. N.(IN)DEF(-i/e/este) N.INDEF:**salariul e/este salariu, salariu-i salariu, salariul salariu*

In this section tautology is not referred to as a figure of speech, but as a common phenomenon that is in everyday speech to highlight certain semantic components of nouns by means of cyclic definition. The formal relation $x = x$ (*love is love*) encodes a mediated attributing of a quality to x on the basis of the fact that it is x and it is known to have certain properties: $x = y = x$. The quality y is not expressed overtly, but implied and it may vary depending on the context in which it is uttered, making repetition a handy instrument for expressing emotions that are complex and that can change over time:

(47) *Iubirea e iubire.*

'Love is love.'

- a. If the speaker has been, for instance, recently cheated on, his utterance can be understood as 'love (the way I feel it now) is hurtful, because that is what love is like generally'.
- b. If the speaker is happily in love, his utterance might better be understood as 'love (the way I feel it now) is beautiful, because that is what love is like generally'.

The tautologic reduplicative pattern has extended forms, that use the linking verb *a fi* (*to be*) (48a,b) and a contracted form, without the copula (48c). Notice also the possibility of this structure being followed by adversative sequences (48b) – the mechanism is similar to those discussed in verbal patterns:

(48) a. *Trebuie să-l ajut la nevoie, că prietenii sunt prieteni.*

'I have to help him when he's in need, because friends are friends.'

- b. *Prietenia-i prietenie, dar sunt și niște limite.*

'Friendship is friendship, but there are some limits too.'

- c. *"moșia moșie, funcția funcție, coana Joița, coana Joița"* (Caragiale, *O scrisoare pierdută*)

'The estate's an estate, the position's a position, Madam Joitica's Madam Joitica.'

4.3.3. *N-N.DIM: doină-doiniță*

This pattern is morphologically and semantically similar to the A-A.DIM pattern. Since it is no longer the case of scalar grammatical items, there is no superlativization function for these structures, but the hypocoristic one remains. These constructions are often found in vocative position (but not exclusively – see (49a)).

- (49) a. "I- aș cânta doina, doiniță" (Eminescu, *De-aș avea*)
 To her I would sing doină.DEF, doină.DIM.DEF
 'I would sing lovely ballads to her'
- b. înger-îngerășul meu
 angel-angel.DIM.DEF mine
 'my beloved guardian angel'

4.3.4. *N.DEF N.PL.GEN: frumoasa frumoaselor*

The *N.DEF N.PL.GEN* pattern is included in the typology of expressive degree-marking devices in the GBLR (2016: 217) under the label of 'syntactic structures with genitive and repetition'. Indeed, the semantic result of *frumoasa frumoaselor și credincioasa credincioaselor* (Mihail Sadoveanu, *Divanul persan*) is a relative superlative: 'the most beautiful and the most faithful'. However, this pattern has not been placed among the adjectival and adverbial – which have the grammatical category of degree, unlike nouns – patterns for two reasons.

Firstly, even though the basis is apparently an adjective (*deștept* 'smart', for instance), the result is structurally made of two nouns (*deșteptul deștepților*), the first one having a definite article and the second one modifying the latter while having a genitive case form.

Secondly, these structures do not form with only adjective-derived nouns (50a), but also with primary nouns (50b). The meaning is the same: 'the best individual x out of a group of elements X or the highest in a hierarchy'. This also explains why the semantic result is not an absolute superlative as for adjectival and adverbial structures, but a relative one. Hence, it is possible that when generated, these structures start from the noun already, and not from the base-adjective.

- (50) a. frumoasă ('beautiful') → frumoasa frumoaselor
credincioasă ('faithful') → credincioasa credincioaselor
deştept ('smart') → deşteptul deşteptilor
b. zână ('fairy') → zâna zânelor
stea ('star') → steaua stelelor
stăpân ('master') → stăpânul stăpânilor

Another frequent expressive use of such structures is the ironic one. Constructions such as *deşeptul deşteptilor* rather mean the opposite ('the most stupid').

4.3.5. *N de N: chef de chef*

This pattern is semantically similar to the previous one, as it has the function of a relative superlative and can be used ironically (though not as frequently). Moreover, one more common point could be that here there also exists a genitival type of relation, but one that is expressed analytically, as used to happen more frequently in old Romanian. Compared to the synthetic genitival structures, those discussed in this subsection tend to favour actual nouns (51a), but can be obtained from adjective-derived nouns too (51b).

- (51) a. băiat ('boy') → băiat de băiat
chef ('party') → chef de chef
boss → boss de boss
b. barosan ('boss') → barosan de barosan
şmecher ('trickster') → şmecher de şmecher

It is visible from the examples that this pattern is primarily used in an argotic register. It can also be found – with a great degree of lexicalization – in structures such as *neam de neamul lui/ei/lor*, meaning 'no one in the history of his/her/their family'.

- (52) Neam de neamul lui n-a văzut așa ceva.
'No one in the history of his family has seen such a thing.'

4.3.6. *N.PL-N.PL: valuri-valuri*

The last pattern that will be analysed differs from the previous ones due to its special grammatical function. Expressivity has been defined from a morphosyntactic perspective as the alternative means through which speakers can express emotions or attitudes with respect to what is uttered, other than through specialized grammaticalized instruments and functional units. The main function of the *N.PL-N.PL* pattern is quantification. Additionally, this pattern is used to show the speaker's attitude (amazed/surprised/happy/displeased) towards a multitude of identical objects indicated by the base-noun of the structure. The following examples show how the indefinite quantification is realized:

- (53) a. "valuri-valuri de căldură" (Lavinia Braniște, *Sonia ridică mâna*)
 'waves – waves of heat'
 'many heatwaves'
 b. Borcanul s-a spart și s-a făcut bucăți -bucăți/ bucăți -bucățele.
 Jar.DEF broke and turned into piece.PL-piece.PL/piece.PL-piece.DIM.PL
 'The jar broke and turned into tiny little pieces.'

The focus in the example in (53) is not only on the multitude of some objects (the shards), but rather on the fragmentariness – an initial object that has generated a subset. This is what triggers the speaker's reaction. The diminutive suffix in the structure *bucăți-bucățele* is not at all hypocoristic – it conveys the speaker's evaluation of the pieces: not only are they many, 'but they are also really tiny'.

5. A few notes on the expressive (repetitive) patterns and their dynamics

As anticipated at the beginning of the previous section, this paper only contains an overview of some expressive repetitive patterns in Romanian, along with some morphosyntactic and semantic observations. This inventory could have been enriched with other patterns too, but, after analysing the corpus, only the most frequent and productive ones were chosen. Some of them have not been included on basis of similarity with already-discussed patterns. Noun-based metadiscursive repetitive patterns fall into this category.

N.DEF ca N.DEF, dar... (N.DEF as/like N.DEF, but) (54a) is mainly used in oral communication to change the topic of the conversation. One particularly frequently used structure of this sort is *toate ca toate* ('everything is fine and all/all things aside/be as it may') (54b), which is an idiom based on the indefinite pronoun *toate* (all.FEM.PL).

- (54) a. Examenele ca examenele, dar ce facem cu licenţa?
'Exams are one thing, but what are we going to do about the thesis?'
b. Toate ca toate, dar ar trebui să rezolvăm problema aceasta acum.
'That is as may be, but we should solve this problem now.'

Other structures have not been taken into account, either because of their (now-)isolated character, or because of the repetition being purely functional (55c) or part of a lexicalized item or an idiom (55a,b,d), which is not the result of a productive pattern.

- (55) a. leu-paraleu
'very brave (like a lion)'
b. Minciuni, minciuni, minciuni, de trei ori minciuni!
'Lies, lies, lies, three times lies!'
c. şi..., şi...; fie..., fie...; ori..., ori...
'both..., and...'; 'either,... or...'; 'either..., or...'
d. nici prea-prea, nici foarte-foarte
'not too much, not too little'

It is worth taking a closer look at the example in (55a), as it perfectly illustrates the fact that the morphosyntactic inventory of expressivity is open and dynamic. The *N-para.N* **OR** *N/V şi paraN/V* pattern used to be productive as long as the Greek *para-* prefix was productive as a means for augmentation/superlativization (*trăsnet şi paratrăsnet*, 'strong lightning' (Şăineanu 1929); *a ajuns inspector şi parainspector*, 'he became a highly ranked inspector'; *a stăruit şi parastăruit*, 'he insisted for a long time' (Scriban 1939)), but in present-day spoken Romanian it is no longer so. The structure *leu-paraleu*, the only one attested in the two main dictionaries (DOOM³ and DEX), is a relic of a derivational pattern that has now become dormant. Expressivity is a dimension of language that is highly sensitive to the passing

of time, hence the strong diachronic variations. Once certain expressive structures wear out, either they become devoid of expressive nuances, changing meaning or even function, or are simply abandoned and replaced by new ones.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, expressivity has been defined, from a morphosyntactic perspective, as an open class of alternative grammatical devices that occur much less frequently than the grammaticalized ones with similar functions, but are used frequently to be understood easily and to convey efficiently through language emotional information or attitudes in relation to what is being talked about. A key-observation about expressive devices is that they are often chosen instead of standardized and specialized morphosyntactical instruments or lexical items, because they allow for both descriptive meaning and an emotional stance to be encompassed in the same linguistic structure.

This paper has also argued that languages that do not have grammaticalized repetition (in contrast to Austronesian languages and sign languages, which use reduplication extensively) can integrate repetition in expressive patterns that specialize in conveying certain semantic contents and/or emotional attitudes of the speaker. In Romanian, since repetition is not fundamentally grammaticalized, it can be used for other less stable and productive purposes compared to grammaticalized phenomena, but still efficient and relatively frequent in communication.

The above-analysed patterns are undoubtedly not the only ones that exist in present-day spoken Romanian. Only the most frequent and productive ones have been chosen and discussed in accordance with the theoretical hypotheses that have been put forward in the first sections of the paper.

Future research possibilities are extremely broad. First, expressivity and repetition can be further studied cross-linguistically and from a wide variety of perspectives, aside from the grammatical one – cognitive, psycholinguistic, neurolinguistic, sociolinguistic, semantic, pragmatic, etc. All of these could improve our current understanding of human language.

Secondly, expressivity can be approached within the system of each language. This paper has examined only a tiny fraction of the morphosyntactic expressive patterns in Romanian. Repetition is by no means the only access route through which expressivity could be examined. Third and finally, as previously demonstrated (*infra* section 4), the study of these phenomena can be extended in diachrony. Expressivity is particularly dynamic and it relies on many linguistic and extralinguistic factors, therefore it can make a fruitful topic for future interdisciplinary approaches.

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