Bianca ALECU[1]
Monica VASILEANU[2]

CSF, NCSF. ROMANIAN ABBREVIATIONS IN ONLINE COMMUNICATION: EMERGING PATTERNS

Abstract. In Romanian, clippings (*i.e.* abbreviations of single words) and initialisms (*i.e.* reductions of multi-word units to their initials) constitute minor word-formation patterns that became increasingly productive in the 20th century. Abbreviation normally creates words belonging to nominal classes, *i.e.* nouns, adjectives, and numerals. However, the advent of online communication has brought about several new abbreviation patterns. Pitiriciu (2010) and Tăbăcitu (2022) have shown two main innovations: the clipping of verbs (e.g. *plicti < a se plictisi*) and consonant-based graphical abbreviations (e.g. *mn = mine*). In order to explore the patterns occurring in online communication, we analysed a corpus of comments published in two Romanian Reddit communities in the time span 2021-2024. Besides the already established types of clippings and initialisms, we observed several patterns which are specific to online communication. Among these, a new type of initialism stands out, represented by *csf* (< *ce să faci?* 'what can you do?') and *csz* (< *ce să zic?* 'what can I say?'), based on verb phrases, used both in verb slots and as discourse markers. Our study explores the forms and functions of these abbreviations, which are part of a bidirectional exchange of verbal resources between the oral and the online domains of interaction. The two habitual dialogic phrases (*Ce să faci? Ce să zic?*) initially circulated in casual or informal talk, and were abbreviated in the digital environment, where they

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[1] University of Bucharest, ORCID: 0009-0008-2192-6730, bianca-maria.alecu@litere.unibuc.ro.

[2] The "Iorgu Iordan – Alexandru Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics & University of Bucharest, ORCID: 0009-0006-9912-4813, monica.vasileanu@litere.unibuc.ro.

became clichés. Nowadays, *csf* occasionally occurs in spoken language as well. Our exploratory study suggests that the lexical resources of forum users are collectively modified to fully satisfy their communicative needs, considering the affordances and limitations of online interaction, leading to the emergence of new abbreviation patterns in Romanian.

Keywords: abbreviation, clipping, initialism, cliché, online communication

1. Introduction

The current article is an exploration into the abbreviation patterns observed in Romanian online communication, based on a corpus of Reddit comments published in two Romanian-language communities in recent years (2021-2024). Abbreviation processes have become increasingly productive throughout the 20th century, fulfilling both the need for economical communication and identitarian functions, with the rise of jargons and slangs (see below, 2.3). Online communication appears to catalyse the process, adding new patterns to the established ones. As has previously been documented (Cornbleet, Carter 2001; Crystal 2006), online communication is a hybrid of written and oral speech, drawing on resources from both modes in creating a new type of expression.

The structure of this article is as follows: first, we provide an overview of abbreviation processes and their place in morphology, focusing on clipping and initialisms (section 2.1). Then, we provide a brief account of established abbreviation patterns in Romanian (section 2.2.) and the innovations observed in Romanian online communication (section 2.3). After describing the particularities of our corpus and methodology (section 3), we present the main abbreviation patterns found in the corpus, highlighting a previously undiscussed type of initialism (section 4). In section 5, we focus on two case studies, discussing the formal and functional features of *csf* (section 5.1.) and *csz* (section 5.2).

2. Abbreviation in Romanian

Though hard to account for in morphological theories (see below 2.1), abbreviation processes fulfil a natural inclination for economy. In many

European languages, these processes became more productive from the late 19th century onwards, triggered by the need for more efficient technical vocabularies (Mattiello 2013: 64). Romanian followed the European trend: while in the mid-20th century Iordan (1947[1943]) regarded clippings and initialisms as artificial and unfit for Romanian, their productivity increased steadily towards the end of the century (Carabulea 1983; Stoichiţoiu Ichim 2006; Grossmann 2016). Moreover, with the advent of online communication, new patterns have emerged (see section 2.3), suggesting an ongoing transformation.

2.1. Non-morpheme-based subtractive processes: clipping and initialisms

The great productivity of affixation and compounding in European languages has favoured a 'building-block' view on word-formation: new words are generally formed by concatenating preexisting morphemes. In this approach, subtractive processes, in which new words are coined by shortening bases, are particularly problematic, for several reasons. First of all, linguists prefer to discuss existing forms rather than omitted material (Bauer 2006). Secondly, while some types of subtraction, such as back-formation, are morpheme-based, others cannot be accounted for in terms of 'building blocks', and have been cast out from the realm of morphology. For instance, Haspelmath (2002: 25) argues that acronyms, e.g. *NATO*, alphabetisms, e.g. *CD*, and clippings, e.g. *fridge*, are not formed by morphological means as the outputs do not display systematic meaning-sound pairings. Moreover, Haspelmath and Sims (2010: 40) state that, although these shortening-based outputs are new words, they fall outside the scope of morphology since the new words have the same meanings as their bases. Processes in which the output is not predictable from the input are labelled by Ronneberger-Sibold (2015) *word creation*, as opposed to *word formation*, which relies on productive rules, leading to predictable outputs. Dressler (2000) subsumes abbreviatory processes to extragrammatical morphology, an umbrella-term for various processes that belong to the area of interaction of the modules involved in processing language, with each process violating specific rules of morphology, prosody,

syntax or segmental phonology. While being rule-breakers, extragrammatical operations, such as abbreviation, are not chaotic either. Plag (2003: 116-121) shows that name truncations and clippings conform not to morphological rules, but to prosodic templates, and proposes prosodic morphology as a more appropriate framework. Based on datasets from Italian, German, and English, Arndt-Lappe (2018) affirms that the prosodic templates are consistent across languages, and that the outputs of name truncation and clipping are to a certain extent predictable in terms of prosodic structure. Acronyms and initialisms, on the other hand, are less predictable, but also conform to some criteria for well-formedness, such as pronounceability, specificity, easy memorization, and analogy with previous formations (Mattiello 2013: 109-110).

Abbreviation processes have been labelled in various and sometimes confusing ways. While Steinhauer (2015) uses the term *clipping* to refer to the shortening of one or more words with no change in meaning, most linguists use it to designate single-word shortenings (Plag 2003; Bauer 2006, a.o.). Some authors distinguish *clipping* from *truncation*, while others use the terms interchangeably (see Steinhauer 2015). For Bauer (2006) truncation arises when a base-word is shortened prior to affixation, e.g. *nominee < nomin[ate] + -ee*, whereas clipping consists in shortening a word while preserving its denotation, e.g. *photo < photograph.* In Plag (2003) and Arndt-Lappe (2018), *truncation* is reserved only for shortening of personal names, while *clipping* refers to common words. The same meaning condition is briefly discussed by Plag (2003: 117), who observes that name truncations and word clippings usually express familiarity or a positive attitude, and suggests that pragmatic modulation may count as 'meaning'. Reductions of multi-word units to word initials are called *acronyms* if pronounced like a regular word (Bauer 1983; Haspelmath 2002; Mattiello 2013; Steinhauer 2015), e.g. *NATO* [neitoʊ]; in case the letters are pronounced with their alphabet values, e.g. *CD* [si:di:], the new words are labelled as *alphabetisms* (Haspelmath 2002; Haspelmath, Sims 2010) or *initialisms* (Mattiello 2013). Conversely, the cover-term for initial-based multi-word unit reductions oscillates between *alphabetism* (Mattiello 2013), *initialism* (Haspelmath 2002; Haspelmath, Sims 2010), and *abbreviation* (Plag 2003), with the latter also used as a synonym of *shortening*, thus designating the general process, regardless of types of input units (Dressler 2000; Mattiello 2013).

In the current paper, we use *clipping* to refer to single-word shortenings, and *initialism* for the reduction of a multi-word unit to the words' initials, regardless of its pronunciation.

2.2. *Abbreviation patterns in Romanian*

In Romanian, clipping (Rom. *trunchiere*) is regarded as a minor word-formation process (Carabulea 1983; Groza 2012[2004]). It was traditionally employed in creating hypocoristics from proper names or terms of address, e.g. *Nicu < Niculae*, *tușă < mătușă* 'aunt', and in spoken language, for economy, e.g. *jumate < jumătate* 'half' (Carabulea 1983).

The process became more productive as a result of language contact, as Romanian borrowed from French words such as *cinema* 'cinema', *taxi* 'taxi', *radio* 'radio', which had been "ready amputated" (Rom.: "amputate gata", Iordan 1947[1943]: 248). Iorgu Iordan (1947[1943]) still felt that clipping was a foreign process, unfit for the Romanian language. Yet, after half a century, Rodica Zafiu (1992) observed that the situation was changing. Romanian had borrowed a large number of clippings, alongside their source lexemes, e.g. *cinema* and *cinematograf* 'cinema', *porno* and *pornografic* 'pornographic', from French. The circulation of these pairs had Romanian speakers observing the clipping process and thus led to an increase in native clippings, mostly in colloquial language, e.g. *boșo < boșorog* '(slang) old man', *mate < matematică* 'mathematics', *re < reexaminare* 'reexamination'. Whether old or new, Romanian clippings follow two main prosodic templates, *i.e.* a heavy syllable, e.g. *prof < profesor* 'teacher', or a disyllabic trochaic foot, e.g. *toci < tocilar* 'nerd' (Avram 2023).

Clipping is conceived as a primarily oral phenomenon, originating in baby talk (Carabulea 1983: 517). In writing, it occurs mainly in journalese, which is closer to spoken language (Stoichițoiu Ichim 2005[2001]: 38). Yet, some of the recent clippings suggest an inverse direction. For instance, in *gag* [gag] *< gagiu* [gaˈʤiw] '(slang) lover; man', the abbreviation is based on the spelling, not on the pronunciation of the source lexeme (Zafiu 1992: 125). Together, these findings suggest that the spoken-written language dynamics is bidirectional.

The clipping patterns differ according to the position of the deleted material. Back-clipping, *i.e.* deleting the final part of the word, is more frequent: *cas < casetofon* 'tape recorder', *dirig < diriginte* 'class master'. Fore-clipping is also attested, though more rarely: *ștou < miștou* 'cool'. In a handful of cases, the inner part of the word is deleted: *lent < locotenent* 'liutenant'. Neoclassical compounds are usually reduced to the initial combining form: *psihi < psihiatrie* 'psychiatry', *meteo < meteorologic* (Carabulea 1983; Zafiu 1992; Avram 2023). Some clippings display an extra vowel, which is not motivated by the phonetic structure of the bases. For instance, an extra *-ă* appears in *biblă < bibliotecă* 'library' and *circă < circumscripție* 'police station', allowing the outputs to preserve the feminine gender of the source-word. In *pluti < plutonier* 'warrant officer' and *libi < liberare* 'military discharge', the final vowel is an echo of hypocoristic names such as *Andi < Andrei, Cipi < Ciprian.* Either way, the clippings comprising additional vowels conform to the trochaic foot template (Zafiu 1992; Avram 2023).

Graphical clippings are often encountered in administrative writing and in special languages, e.g. *dl < domnul* 'mister', *șos. < șoseaua* 'highroad', *Ag < argint* 'silver', and retain mostly consonants (Avram 1990: 126; Groza 2012[2004]: 145). Since these forms are used only as graphical conventions, they should not be viewed as new words (see Steinhauer 2015). Yet, occasionally, some of these clippings find their way into spoken language as invariable items, e.g. *onor. < onoratul, onorata, onorații, onoratele* etc. 'distinguished' appears in oral phrases such as *onor călătorii* 'the distinguished travellers', *onor familiei* 'to the distinguished family' (Avram 1990: 126).

Likewise, initialisms (Rom. *sigle*) appear to be a modern innovation, linked to French, Italian, Russian, and, more recently, English models (Iordan 1947[1943]: 249; Stoichițoiu Ichim 2006: 120; Grossmann 2016: 2750). Iordan considered the process artificial, but capable of imposing a structural language change (Iordan 1947[1943]: 249). Stoichițoiu Ichim (2006) analysed a corpus of 800 initialisms and showed how formations of this type may be further subjected to affixation and compounding (e.g. *anti-NATO, NATOmania*), thus leading to their better integration in the language.

In Romanian works on word-formation, initialisms are considered a subtype of compounding involving clipping. The outputs of this mixed

word-formation process are called *compuse prin abreviere* (lit. 'compounds via abbreviation', FCLR I; Groza 2012[2004]: 147) or *acronime* (thus, in Romanian, the word has a different meaning from Engl. *acronym*, see above 2.1). Grossmann (2016) distinguishes several patterns based on the size of the clippings, as the outputs may be formed of:

a. initials: *STB < Societatea de Transport București* 'Bucharest Transportation Company';
b. initials + word fragments: *TAROM < Transporturi Aeriene Române* 'Romanian Air Transportation (Company)';
c. initial word fragments: *Oltcit*, 'brand of cars produced in the region of Oltenia' < *Oltenia + Citroën*;
d. fragments + whole words: *Apemin < Ape minerale* '(National Company of) Mineral Waters'.

Since in other approaches the patterns under b-d are considered blends (see Vasileanu, Niculescu-Gorpin 2022, Vasileanu, Niculescu-Gorpin, Radu-Bejenaru 2024), we shall only deal with initialisms in this paper.

2.3. Clippings and initialisms in Romanian cyberlanguage

The use of clippings and acronyms in Romanian is usually motivated by the need for economy (Iordan 1947[1943], Pitiriciu 2010, Tăbăcitu 2022). However, their rise is associated with other functions. As abbreviations create jargons and slangs, they become in-group markers (Carabulea 1983: 517; Pitiriciu 2010; Tăbăcitu 2022). Synchronization with international vocabulary and globalization also play a part (Stoichițoiu Ichim 2006; Pitiriciu 2010). More recently, the characteristics of online communication and instant messaging, where abbreviations allow fast responses, appear to trigger innovations in the realm of abbreviations (Pitiriciu 2010).

Online communication implies the use of abbreviations for efficiency reasons: the user of digital environments attempts to formulate their message in the most convenient way possible, considering the technological affordances of the environment. While the economic principle of discourse planning originates in the general view on informal conversation, we believe that

online interaction puts a spin on this. More precisely, online interaction has been dependent on the technological affordances of electronic media: for instance, conversing through SMS at the turn of the century employed many abbreviations because of the character limit and other physical features of the devices. Abbreviations and other form of short-hand used in text or online communication have been considered a cornerstone of what makes online communication different from oral and written communication, in their canonical forms (for more on this, see Cornbleet, Carter 2001; Herring 2004; Crystal 2006[2001], and, more recently, Zappavigna 2012; Heath 2018; McCulloch 2020).

For Romanian, Pitiriciu (2010) analysed a corpus of MIRC conversations and identified three types of abbreviations: regular clippings, *i.e.* observing the patterns described in the literature, clippings specific to cyberlanguage and initialisms. Regular clippings preserve the initial segments of a word, e.g. *pers* < *persoană* 'person', *pub* < *publicitate* 'advertising'. Cyberlanguage-specific clippings are based on consonant preservation (e.g. *ln* < *lene* 'lazyness', *scz* < *scuze* 'sorry', *trb* < *trebuie* 'must'), symbolic interpretation of certain letters (e.g. *q* in *faqt* < *făcut* 'done'), and abbreviations of words which are bound in speech (e.g. *crek* < *cred că* 'I think that', which in spoken language is pronounced as a single word ['krekə]). Initialisms comprise both borrowings (e.g. *DND* < *do not disturb*) and native formations (e.g. *nb* < *noapte bună* 'good night'). Based on a larger web corpus, Tăbăcitu (2022) also registers verb clippings, which are ambiguous since they may stand for several verb forms and even for several words: *plicti* < *plictisit, plictisitor, plictisi, plictiseală, supi/supă* < *supărat, supăra, supărare*.

The examples in Pitiriciu (2010) and Tăbăcitu (2022) include a number of innovations. While traditionally clipping was reserved to nominal classes, *i.e.*, nouns, adjectives and numerals (FCLR I; Carabulea 1983; Zafiu 1992), online communication displays examples of clipped verbs, e.g. *cit* < *citesc* 'I am reading', *iub* < *iubesc* 'I love'. In fact, all parts of speech may undergo abbreviation in online communication, even function words, e.g. *s t intrb* < *să te întreb*. Initialisms, which were normally used as nouns or, more rarely, adjectives (FCLR I; Stoichiţoiu Ichim 2006: 188-190), extend now onto verb phrases and may function as stand-alone utterances: *cmf* < *ce mai faci*.

Since the studies of Pitiriciu (2010) and Tăbăcitu (2022) are based on written corpora, they cannot assert the emergence of new abbreviation patterns in the word-formation system of Romanian, as the aforementioned examples appear to be only graphical abbreviations. Yet, there are a few clues that young people are starting to incorporate such innovations in their speech. Members of Generation Z surveyed by Vasileanu (2023) confessed that they used initialisms specific to online communication, e.g. *LOL, OMG*, in their everyday conversations, and considered this a characteristic of their generation's language. Cojocaru (2020) mentions the case of *OMG*, which started as an online discourse marker and has found its way into spoken communication, with both English and adapted to Romanian pronunciation (*i.e.* both [əʊ.emˈdʒiː] and [omiˈgi]). Thus, for the moment, it appears that only borrowed initialisms have found their way into spoken language, and only the ones functioning as discourse markers, whereas all the other new abbreviation patterns have remained confined to written communication.

Based on the findings summarized above, we decided to analyse a corpus of Reddit threads, to see whether any other new patterns were to be found, and, if this should be the case, to observe their structural features and behaviour in interactions.

3. Corpus data and methodology

Our research is focused on the formal and functional attributes of abbreviations found in a corpus of approximately 2,300 online comments extracted from Reddit threads. These threads were published in two Romanian-language communities of Reddit during a three-year period (2021-2024). The two communities are Reddit Romania[3] (c. 1 million members, established in 2005) and Reddit CasualRO[4] (c. 230.000 members, established in 2021). Reddit Romania focuses on general topics related to living in Romania, Romanian history, everyday life, and politics. Discussing politics is forbidden by the ground rules of the more recent CasualRO community. This community aims to be a space for casual, informal talk

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[3]   Available at https://www.reddit.com/r/Romania/, last accessed 25.06.2025.

[4]   Available at https://www.reddit.com/r/CasualRO/, last accessed 25.07.2025.

on everyday life. The corpus served as base for an interdisciplinary analysis developed during a PhD project looking into online discursive practices in Romanian communities of Reddit (Alecu 2025). In this project, abbreviations are viewed as a lexical affordance created in a techno-discursive environment. In addition to the qualitative analyses developed in this project, we employed an ethnographic observation of the communities in which lexical resources are created and used.

In addition to the 2021-2024 corpus used for surveying the abbreviation patterns, we decided to search for more recent examples from 2025 comprising two initialisms analysed as case studies in section 5: *csf* (Rom. *ce să faci?* 'what can you do?') and *csz* (Rom. *ce să zic?* 'what can I say?'), since change occurs at a fast pace in the online environment. We have manually extracted comments featuring these forms using the search bar of the current Reddit interface. However, other forms connected to our key-words were extracted for the analysis, such as graphic variants (*CSF*) or more complex structures (*csf, ncsf*, an abbreviation of Rom. *ce să faci, n-ai ce să faci*, 'what can you do? There's nothing you can do').

Since we focus on the formal and functional properties of these abbreviations, we consider the immediate context of production, which, in the digital environment of Reddit, is the comment in which the particular form we investigate is used. However, considering the interactional architecture of Reddit, we highlight the fact that comments are created in threads initiated by users on certain topics. The comments we analyse in the following sections are decontextualized on a discursive level, *i.e.* they are taken out of threads and used for attesting different forms or for comparing different properties of the same lexical resource.

The ethics of researching online communication have evolved with the proliferation of social media platforms and environments (Calude 2025). We have followed the general guidelines provided by the British Association of Applied Linguistics (BAAL 2021) and the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR 2020). There are several perks of researching public online data, such as one can find on Reddit. Accessing, manipulating and storing forum data is relatively easy, especially in qualitative analyses. We have taken multiple measures in preventing ethical concerns, among which we may mention: rendering comments anonymous; omission of sensitive, private information disclosed in comments by the user. Reddit data is available online to both registered members and the general public.

Users who publish posts and comments agree to their online products being visible and accessible. Comments and posts may be deleted by the users themselves or by moderators.

4. Results: Abbreviation patterns in Romanian online communication

The present section presents a classification of the clipping and initialisms observed in the 2,300 comments Reddit corpus. Online communication employs the resources of regular written communication, but also fosters specific patterns, based on the technological affordances. Thus, our data contain both established and cyberlanguage-specific abbreviations. Inside each of these classes, we distinguish clippings from initialisms, and try to assess their circulation in spoken language.

Established abbreviations comprise patterns observed in Romanian previous to the advent of online communication. According to the status of the bases, these abbreviations may be divided into:

(a) *established clippings*, with some purely graphical, e.g. *dl < domnul* 'mister', *max < maxim, maximum* 'maximum', *pt, ptr < pentru* 'for', *Ct < Constanța, ap. < apartament* 'apartment', whereas other clippings have been noted in the literature as occurring in spoken language as well, e.g. *psiho < psihologie* 'psychology', *bac < bacalaureat* 'school-leaving exams';

(b) *established initialisms*, occurring in various types of texts outside the online environment, e.g. *AVC < accident vascular cerebral* 'stroke', *PFA < persoană fizică autorizată* 'self-employed'. Among these, some examples appear as merely graphical: *AC < aer condiționat* 'air conditioning'.

Abbreviations specific to cyberlanguage comprise those patterns which have only been observed in online communication. Among these, the following categories may be distinguished:

(a) *graphical clippings*, characterized by the preservation of consonants only, continuing the pattern of established clippings, e.g. *mn < mine* 'me', *cv < ceva* 'something', *cineva* 'someone', *xp < experiență*

'experience', *ms* < *mersi* 'thanks'. English borrowings occur as well, e.g. *pls* < *please*. Some of these abbreviations are morphologically ambiguous and may also include verbs, e.g. *vb* < *vorbă, a vorbi* '(to) talk'. Only in a handful of examples do the clippings preserve vowels as well, thus retaining continuous segments, e.g. *prop* < *proprietate* 'property', *sal* < *salut* 'hello'. Although these are pronounceable, we could not attest them in spoken language.

(b) *combinations of graphical clippings and initials*, which occur mostly in taboo language: *plm* < *pula mea* 'my dick', *smr* < *să moară ...* '... should die', *i.e.* 'I promise'. We could not establish their circulation in spoken language. When accessing YouTube videos which comprised the abbreviations in the title, we found that the spoken form was uttered in full, unabbreviated. Thus, this mixed pattern may act as a ban-avoiding strategy in the online environment, to escape the algorithms detecting curse words.

(c) *borrowed initialisms*, e.g. *btw* < *by the way*, *IRL* < *in real life*, *LOL* < *laugh out loud*, *smh* < *shaking my head*, *pov* < *point of view*, *idk* < *I don't know*. Some of these are genre- or platform-specific items. For instance, *LE* (< *later edit*) may occur only on platforms that allow editing the original message. *OP* < *original poster* appears to be Reddit-specific, since it refers to the person who posted the original message in the thread (for details about the Reddit architecture, see 3). *TL;DR* (< *too long; didn't read*) stands out in this category for the preservation of the original punctuation marks. This initialism is added at the beginning of a sentence which sums up the message below. Most of them are only part of the graphical code specific to cyberlanguage, but, as mentioned in section 2.3, *LOL* appears to be used in spoken language as well.

(d) *Romanian initialisms*: *nb* < *noapte bună* 'good night', *cmz* < *ce mai zici?* 'what's up?'. Some of these were coined with a recognizable English model, e.g. *AMC* < *acel moment când* 'that moment when', originating in memes (Alecu 2025b), whereas others are native shortenings of frequent conversational formulas, e.g. *cf* < *ce (mai) faci?* 'how are you'. This category of native cyberlanguage-specific initialisms has been noted in Pitiriciu (2010) as a merely graphical means of abbreviation. As noted above (section 2.3), these native

formations are also innovative from a grammatical point of view, since they are also formed from verb phrases and may function as such (see below examples 4b and 6b).

The case of *csf, ncsf < ce să(-i) faci, n-ai ce să(-i) faci* 'oh well, what can you do?' is particularly interesting, as it abbreviates not one, but two verb phrases. It also maintains the punctuation of the original. Moreover, this native initialism appears to have emerged in spoken language as well. *Csf, n-ai csf* is the title of a song released in 2017 by Ana Banciu, a Romanian singer[5], who pronounces the abbreviated form *csf* as [kisifi].

Since the last category is a novelty in Romanian, with a new example of cyberlanguage emerging in spoken communication, we shall discuss it more in-depth in the following section, with two case-studies: *csf* and *csz < ce să zic?* 'what can I say?'. We shall observe their formal variability, their grammatical properties and their pragmatic functions.

5. Case studies

Our formal and functional analysis focuses on two case studies of phrasal abbreviation (*csf* and *csz*). For each of them, we propose a hypothesis about its origin, we observe its formal variation and discuss its specific pragmadiscursive functions. The two initialisms occur both syntactically integrated (e.g. *n-am csz* 'I don't have anything to say') and loosely attached, like discourse markers (e.g., *Csz bravo ție* 'what can I say, good for you'). Although our analysis is qualitative and not quantitative in nature, we may observe that *csf* is more frequently used than *csz*. Thus, we believe that *csf* is the model for coining *csz*, which further developed to fulfil specific pragmatic functions, e.g. marking insincere speech acts (see below 5.2). Although we treat the two initialisms in separate subsections, we believe that their connection remains strong.

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5   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owi3xPYFTc0, last accessed 20.06.2025.

5.1. *Csf*

The abbreviated form *csf* stands for the Romanian phrase *ce să faci?* 'what can you do?'. This interrogation is more often than not used rhetorically to convey a reserved discursive stance and (usually placid) resignation.

In our corpus, this abbreviated form is often found in the more complex structure *csf, ncsf*, which stands for Rom. *ce să faci, n-ai ce să faci* ('what can you do? There's nothing you can do'). In our opinion, this extended oral formula is originally a dialogic construction, displaying the adjacency pair question-answer. After this pair became a routine in oral conversation, it was reduced to a monologic expression employed rhetorically. There are multiple graphical variants of this expression, such as: *Csf, Ncsf; CSF NCSF; Csf n-ai CSF; csf?/ncsf* and others. This attests to the wide spread of this formula, as well as its origin in oral interaction. The abbreviated forms *csf* and *csf, ncsf* are morphologically ambiguous, since the pronominal and verbal elements may stand for the first or second person: *ce să fac* ('what can I do') vs *ce să faci* ('what can you do?'). This juxtaposition is disambiguated in oral interaction. However, we attest to the fact that the addresative *csf, ncsf* has a wider spread in both oral and digital discourses, having become a lexical resource and a discursive cliché.

Most instances of *csf* and its variations act as discourse markers of resignation or irony (1a). Apart from being used as a lexical resource within digital interaction, the abbreviation is mentioned, turned into an abstract category representative of discursive clichés (1b).

(1) (a) Evident că am de gând să votez cu varianta cea mai decentă [...] *Csf ncsf*, asta e România din păcate.
'Of course I'll vote for the most decent candidate [...] *What can you do*, this is Romania unfortunately.'

(b) politicienii nu se ating de subiectul asta fiindca si-o fura de la babele cainofile. subiectul o sa se lase cu un fel de *csf, ncsf.*
'politicians don't mess with this subject because they're getting their ass kicked by dog-loving grannies. the whole subject is gonna end wih a kind of *what can you do? There's nothing you can do about it.*'

On a formal level, *csf* may appear as a stand-alone marker (2a), or in a reduplicated form (2b). If reduplicated in a more reflexive discourse, the disambiguation of the phrase may also function with the first-person verbal form (2c). This interpretation may be supported by the implicit emotional content of the comment (the concern for self-disclosure and potential reprobation).

(2) (a) În alte țări europene demos ar fi considerat social democrat dar *csf* când la noi [X] e considerată progresivă
'In other European countries demos would be considered [a] social democrat [party] but *what can you do* when here [X] is seen as progressive'

(b) Daca soferii de utilaje mari sunt prosti si tot incearca sa intre, *csf, csf.*
'If drivers of large technical machines are stupid and keep forcing the entry, *what can you do, what can you do.*'

(c) Am râs și sunt sigur că și colegii mei o să râdă dar dacă dau share la asta mă dau de gol că pierd vremea pe reddit. *Csf csf*
'I laughed and I'm sure my colleagues would laugh as well but if I share this I'll reveal the fact that I'm wasting my time on reddit. *What can I do, what can I do*'

In the overwhelming majority of cases, *csf, ncsf* is used as a fixed formula, having only graphic variants. Users may feel the need of spreading out the negative verbal form, as in *csf n-ai csf*, in an attempt to make explicit the lack of possibility ('there is *nothing* you can do'). This means that the phrase functions in a fixed form. However, a 2025 comment features an instance of an English noun used to address the interlocutor, intercalated in the fix formula: "csf **man**. n-ai csf" (*what can you do **man**, there's nothing you can do*).

The abbreviation is sometimes used in relation to other formulae of conveying resignation, such as *aia e* (*it is what it is*; see also Păsărar 2024 for its online use) or *mda* (*myeah*) (Alecu 2025a: 236). Some comments (3) reproduce oral speech by featuring discourse markers from colloquial Romanian (*na*) or colloquial English (*you know*):

(3) Ahaha. *Na csf*, dacă aș fi fost... [...] Dar *csf* când nu stai nici la camin [...] cam complicat la inceput *u kno* [Comment published in 2025]
'Ahaha. *Well*, *what can you do*, if I were... [...] But *what can you do* when you don't have a place at the dorm [...] it's a bit complicated in the beginning *u kno*'

Discursive markers are a functional category of verbal elements that serve various purposes, such as marking stance and positioning, structuring the verbal output, marking ideational relations, and managing interaction. Following Schiffrin's (1987) seminal study, researching discourse markers has become a prominent endeavour in pragmatics and discourse analysis. Researchers offer various definitions, criteria and taxonomies of discourse markers (Schiffrin 1987; Fraser 1988, 1999; Crible, Degand 2019; Traugott 2020, a. o.). Both *csf* and *csz* function in the rhetorical domain, which renders the speaker's beliefs and attitudes towards what is said and the context of interaction (Crible, Degand 2019: 12). Other short forms like borrowed initialisms (*tbf, to be fair*) or modified adverbials (*welp*) have been found to act as "digital discourse markers" in Romanian Reddit interactions (Alecu 2024a).

Identifying the precise emotions or stances conveyed in online comments may be rather speculative. However, based on the contextual information, we believe *csf* and its expanded version *csf, ncsf* are used mainly to convey resignation (4a), disappointment (4b) or general chagrin (4c). Of course, all of these negative emotions are placed on a spectrum and may cover a wide array of discursive stances.

(4) (a) [...] și fix atunci a venit controlul. Am plătit suprataxa și aia a fost, *csf*...
'[...] and right then I had to show the bus ticket. I paid the fee and that was it, *what can you do*...'
(b) îi trist în ce stadiu e România dar *csf*
'the state Romania is in is sad but *what can you do*'
(c) "daca statul nu-si asuma un rol de dadaca full-time pentru copii nu vad cum ar creste natalitatea." Asta nu se va intampla, deci *csf*!
'"if the state does not start to act as a full-time nanny for children I don't see how the natality rates would grow" This will never happen, so *what can you do*!'

5.2. *Csz*

Csz stands for *ce să zic?* ('what can I say?'), another interrogative sentence that has become an oral cliché. It is also used rhetorically to convey resignation, frustration, or passive acceptance. Two graphical variants may be found for this abbreviation based on the use of capitalization (*CSZ, csz*). In contrast to *csf* and its variant *csf, ncsf*, we found no traces of disambiguating *csz* as a second-person verbal form in an addresative construction (**ce să zici?*, 'what can you say?'). However, in (5), *csz* stands for Rom. *ca să zic*, 'that is to say', 'so to say'. For the study of online abbreviations, this example shows how immediate linguistic context is used to suggest a different disambiguation to the canonical interpretation.

(5) încearcă să porți o discuție cu el mai... heart to heart, *csz* așa [Comment published in 2025]
'try to have a conversation with him... a heart to heart one, *so to say*'

There are instances of a more complex construction *csz, ncsz*, which stands for *ce să zic, n-am ce să zic* ('what can I say? there's nothing I can say'). We believe it to be created by analogy with the formula *csf, ncsf*. It is also possible that *csz, ncsz* reproduces a similar transition from a dialogic routine (question-answer) to a rhetoric monologic expression. However, *csf, ncsf* is far more popular in online interaction, which supports the creation of an analogous expression. As with the original, the negative expression may be abbreviated (6a) or (partially) spelled out (6b) in order to explicit its meaning.

(6) (a) Când nu ai bani de botox/silicoane/acid dar tot nu știi cum să ieși în evidența [...] *Csz. Ncsz.*
'When you don't have money for botox/implants/injections and you still don't know how to stand out [...] *What can I say. There's nothing to say*.'

(b) [...] nu prea am văzut bărbați care să îmi placă fizic în România [...] *Csz n-am csz.*
'[...] I haven't seen guys that I like physically in Romania [...] *What can I say. There's nothing to say*.'

In our corpus, *csz* is often associated with expressive speech acts. Users may thank (7a), congratulate (7b), express regret (7c, d) (for more examples, see Alecu 2025a: 238-239). In these cases, using *csz* may act as a stance marker that indicates sincerity in expressing feelings, belief and opinions. However, if the intention of the user is insincere, *csz* marks an ironic/*non-bona fide* performance of the speech act. In either case, *csz* is used to modify the illocutionary force of the utterance, by amplifying it (the stance of being left 'speechless') or modulating it (in the case of irony).

(7) (a) *Csz* mersi
　　　 '*what can I say?* thanks'
　 (b) Bravo ție, *csz*
　　　 'Well done, *what can I say?*'
　 (c) Păcat, *csz*
　　　 'It's a pity, *what can I say?*'
　 (d) Vai ce tragedie *csz*
　　　 'Oh, what a tragedy, *what can I say?*'

Using *csz* in the performance of an insincere speech act may also be associated with a conventionalized expression, like Rom. *Casă de piatră!* ('all the best to the newlyweds!', lit. 'have a house [as sturdy as one] of stone'). The disambiguation of *csz* is to be found in the interactional and epistemic contexts: user A posts a picture with their new car, boasting about its features. Example (8) is a reply to this original post, conveying an ironic stance based on the humorous juxtaposition between getting married and getting a new car. The expressive act is, thus, insincere. In this context, the abbreviation *csz* is a stance marker.

(8) Da mă echivalează și cu o nevastă mașina ce ai. Casă de piatră *csz*
　　 'Yeah man, the car is just like getting a wife. All the best to the newlyweds, *what can I say*'

Modulating stance in the online environment may also employ conventional markers of intention, like /s, which stands for sarcasm. In (8) we find *csz* used in association with /s, which is a digital contextual cue for *non-bona fide* intention. Although /s is conventionally associated with sarcastic comments, Romanian data shows that it is used for multiple *non-bona fide* conversational phenomena,

like verbal irony, fantasy scenarios and co-constructed humorous interactions (Alecu 2024b, see also Alecu 2025a: 183-198).

(9) m-ai convins să votez cu [X] cu răspunsurile astea gata prost eu *csz* /s
 [Comment published in 2025]
 'you convinced me to vote for [X] with your replies, that's it, I'm the stupid one *what can I say* /s'

6. Conclusions

Abbreviation processes, such as clipping and initialisms, have long been considered marginal or even outside the scope of word-formation. Yet, their increasing productivity throughout the 20th and 21st centuries suggests that they are part of an attention-worthy language change. The advent of online communication has led to the emergence of new patterns, with verb clippings (e.g. *plicti* < *plictisi*) and consonant-based clippings (e.g. *mn* < *mine*), which we could not attest in spoken language, though the first type is pronounceable. Our corpus exploration added an emerging pattern, *i.e.* native initialisms from verb phrases, which may be used as such or as discourse markers. The latter category has been explored more in-depth in two case studies, *csf* (< *ce să faci*) and *csz* (< *ce să zic*), by discussing their forms and functions, and observing their evolution. The two initialisms originate in casual conversation formulas, but most likely *csf* was shortened first and *csz* was coined analogically. The two clichés occur mostly as stance markers: while *csf* usually expresses resignation, disappointment and sadness, *csz* indicates an insincere performance of an expressive speech act. Moreover, *csf* was attested as occurring in spoken language as well, suggesting that the new pattern is not only a sign in the internet graphical code, but part of a swift language change.

Our research highlights the role of online interaction in language change, considering the development of new abbreviation patterns in Romanian (most likely after English models) and their swift, but arguable impact on the Romanian word-formation system. Abbreviations are important and "efficient" lexical resources in the online world, since they convey sufficient information within the interactional context while satisfying the user's needs for convenient discourse planning in the context of technological affordances. Moreover, in

time, the appeal for shortening words moves into the social dimension, since "being in the know" in terms of what abbreviations stand for is a discursive marker of belonging to a community of practice.

CORPUS

Anexă, în Bianca Alecu, 2025a, *Interacțiunea în forum: perspective lingvistice,* București, Editura Universității din București – Bucharest University Press, 305-345.

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