

## SPECIP IN ROMANIAN: PREVERBAL SUBJECTS AND INFORMATION-FOCI

*I(n)formation*-focus refers to the constituent 'containing' the new information contributed by the sentence, as identified by the question-answer pair test. I-focus is systematically distinguished from contrastive focus or topic; for definitions and more discussion, see [2] a.o.

**The problem:** The *immediately preverbal* position in Romanian *finite* clauses exhibits the following cluster of interrelated properties: **(I)** it is obligatorily filled, see **(5f)**; **(II)** it can be filled only by the SU(bject) or an i-focus **(5c)**; **(III)** if the SU and the i-focus are distinct, the SU and the i-focus are in complementary distribution with respect to this position: if one of them surfaces there, the other cannot **(5d-e)**; **(IV)** SU and i-focus fronting are in free variation: either of them is equally acceptable **(5a-b)**.

The *syntactic* interaction between i-focus fronting and SU fronting displayed by these generalizations was largely unnoticed in the previous literature on Romanian generative grammar. However, observations about the syntax of the SU can be found in [7] and [6] (which argue that SU fronting is not due to Nominative case, specificity or topic/focus features), while [4] proposes a preverbal focus position in Romanian based on wh-movement.

**The proposal:** I assume that in Romanian: **(i)** the lexical verb always moves and adjoins to the (highest) finite inflectional head, but not further; **(ii)** the immediately preverbal position is SpecIP; **(iii)** the SU case position is to the right of  $I^0$ , i.e. to the right of the surface position of the lexical verb. These assumptions are justified in [6], [1], [4] among others. The OT analysis (see [10]) freely imports minimalist insights (see [3]) to provide an integrated account of the facts.

I use four constraints. **(1) ObSpec:** *the specifier position of a projection has to be filled; assess one violation for each empty specifier* – see [9]. The next two constraints incorporate a checking mechanism. **(2) Check[i-foc] $X^0$ :** *a head with the feature [i-foc] has to be in a local spec-head relationship with an [i-foc] phrase, i.e. in a checking configuration. assess one violation for each [i-foc] head  $X^0$  not in a checking configuration.* **(3) Check[i-foc]XP** is the corresponding constraint for phrases with an [i-foc] feature. Finally, **(4) MinChain:** *minimize the distance between any two consecutive copies in a chain. If at least one segment of a maximal projection intervenes between two consecutive copies, assess one violation for that maximal projection*, e.g. the SU chain incurs one violation for the intervening vP projection in [<sub>IP</sub> SU ... [<sub>vP</sub> t<sub>SU</sub> ...]. The checking constraints trigger movement to establish a checking configuration, while MinChain prefers shorter movements (i.e. Min Link effects) or simply bans movement.

Romanian constraint ranking: {ObSpec, Check[i-foc] $X^0$ } >> MinChain >> Check[i-foc]XP.

I assume that  $I^0$  is the only non-nominal functional head that can have an [i-foc] feature in Romanian, but does not have to (the possibility of variation follows from the OT Richness of the Base). Suppose  $I^0$  has an [i-foc] feature. Since Check[i-foc] $X^0$  is ranked higher than MinChain, it licenses movement of exactly one i-focus phrase to SpecIP to check the [i-foc] feature on  $I^0$ . This movement also satisfies ObSpec, as SpecIP is now filled. Moreover, since MinChain is higher than Check[i-foc]XP, the phrasal [i-foc] features cannot trigger movement and multiple i-focus fronting is correctly ruled out (see examples in (6)). Suppose  $I^0$  does not have an [i-foc] feature. Then, Check[i-foc] $X^0$  is vacuously satisfied, but ObSpec is not. Since ObSpec is ranked higher than MinChain, it triggers movement – but the shortest possible one, i.e. SU movement, so that MinChain is minimally violated. In this way, we derive generalizations **(I)**, **(II)** and **(IV)**. Generalization **(III)** also follows: if either the SU or the i-focus moves to SpecIP, moving the other one incurs unmotivated violations of MinChain, hence it is suboptimal.

Finally, two typological predictions: the ranking MinChain >> {Check[i-foc] $X^0$ , Check[i-foc]XP} generates a language without i-focus fronting (e.g. English), i.e. a language with a 'weak' [i-foc] feature. The ranking Check[i-foc]XP >> MinChain generates a language in which all i-foci front.

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Notational conventions for the Romanian examples:

- All i-foci in Romanian are associated with a H(igh) tone, placed below the corresponding constituent. When the i-focus is non-initial, a H tone is associated with the leftmost constituent of the sentence due to the HL(ow) declarative intonational tune in Romanian; the L tone is rightmost (see [5]). I give the intonation patterns only for the first two examples.

- **Boldface** signals preverbal constituents. 'A<B' is interpreted as 'A linearly precedes B'.

- IND – indicative; PST – past; PPRT – past participle; ACC – Accusative Case; = – clitic boundary. There is no focus morpheme in Romanian.

(5) Pe cine a = chemat Ion în birou?  
*ACC.prep who aux.IND.PST.3SG = call.PPRT John in office?*  
 Who did John call in the office?

a. **Ion** l = a = chemat pe Petru în birou.  
 H H L  
*John ACC.3SG.MASC = aux.PST... = call.PPRT ACC.prep Peter in office*  
 (SU<verb<I-focus<adjunct)

b. **Pe Petru** l=a = chemat Ion în birou. (**I-focus**<verb<SU<adjunct).  
 H L

c. \***În birou** l=a = chemat Ion pe Petru. (\***Adjunct**<verb<SU<I-focus)

d. \***Ion pe Petru** l=a chemat în birou. (\***SU<I-focus**<verb<adjunct)

e. \***Pe Petru Ion** l=a chemat în birou. (\***I-focus**<SU<verb<adjunct)

f. \*L=a chemat Ion pe Petru în birou. (\***verb**<SU<I-focus<adjunct)

(5a-f – same translation) John called Peter in the office.

(6) Cine pe cine când a chemat?  
*Who ACC.prep who when aux.IND.PST.3SG call.PPRT ?*  
 Who called whom (and) when?

a. **Ion** l = a chemat ieri pe Petru, Maria ...  
*John ACC... = aux.PST call.PPRT yesterday ACC.prep Peter, Mary ...*  
 (single i-focus fronting)

b. ??**Ion pe Petru** l=a chemat ieri, Maria ... (double i-focus fronting)

c. ??/\***Ion pe Petru ieri** l=a chemat, Maria ... (triple i-focus fronting)

(6a-c – same translation) John called Peter yesterday, Mary...

References:

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