

# Romanian Participle: 3 Items with 1 Morphological Unit

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to reanalyze the relationship between the Romanian Participle and the Romanian Supine, two homophonous participial forms considered as different by Romanian grammarians. On the one hand, it can be shown that the “mixed” nature of the Supine is rather contextually dependent; therefore, this element can be considered to be a neutral form, categorized by the syntactic context. This strongly suggests an analysis in terms of under-specification, in the lines of Distributed Morphology, with category-less items. On the other hand, the fact that the same morphology is used in Supine and Participle contexts cannot be a simple coincidence. The base form should be one single element, i.e. one of the forms of the verbal root in Romanian, enlarged with the participial morpheme. We will suggest that this basic unit is unique for past Participle and Supine, supporting a view in which Romanian morphology is partly based on stems<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *The facts*

There are two syntactic uses of Perfect Participle crosslinguistically: a) the perfect verb formation (+HAVE): b) the passive verb formation (+BE). Romanian has a third use of the Perfect Participle: the “Supine”. The form of past participle in Romanian is used in three types of syntactic environments: nominal, adjectival and verbal. There is on the one hand a past participle, with verbal and adjectival uses:

- (1) a. am citit cărți  
have read books  
‘I have read books’
- b. cărțile sînt citit-e  
books are read-AGR

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<sup>1</sup> Romanian past participles are of the form: Root + Thematic Vowel [A/E/I/U] + T/S  
cînta – cîntat “sing”  
vedea – văzut see”  
merge – mers “walk”  
hotărî – hotărît “decide”  
iubi – iubit “love”

In the following, we will use -AT a shortcut for the participial morpheme.

On the other hand, traditional grammars take some of the contexts of the Romanian participle (preceded by prepositions) to involve a distinct form of the verbal paradigm, called *supine*, considered to have a mixed [+N, +V] nature (cf. (2)-(4)). In (2), the participial form appears in a nominal structure, in combination with a definite determiner, and the complement is assigned Genitive case. In (3), the supine follows an aspectual auxiliary, expressing the completion of an activity; in this case, it does not take an article, and requires the presence of a marker, a functional “preposition”, *de*. In (4), the supine is preceded by a subcategorized preposition in the complement position of a verb of motion (expressing the Goal).

A. nominal supine: D° + participle:

- (2) citit-ul cărți-lor  
reading-the books-GEN  
'the reading of the books'

B. verbal supine: preposition + participle<sup>2</sup>

B<sub>1</sub> participle without D°, obligatorily preceded by the "preposition" *de*:

- (3) am terminat de citit cărțile  
have finished to read books-the  
'I have finished reading the books'

B<sub>2</sub> participle without D°, preceded by a subcategorized preposition

- (4) mergem la pescuit de scoici  
go-2PL to fishing of mussels  
'we are going fishing mussels'

### 1.2. *The issue*

We are faced here with a theoretical puzzle, namely how to solve a case of « grammatical homonymy », how to treat this multi-functionality of a single morphological unit getting three different syntactic uses?

In the generative literature, some verbal nouns have been analyzed as "mixed categories" (+N, +V), for instance the Arabic *masdar* (Fassi Fehri 1991), the Welsh verbal noun (Rouveret 1993) as well as the English gerund. Is the supine also a verbal noun? In section 2, we will present evidence that this is not the case.

Moreover, we are faced with the problem of giving a status to the “participial morpheme”, in our case AT (see footnote 1). How should this element be treated? As we shall see in the following, it can be considered as an inflectional affix, deriving

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<sup>2</sup>The example in (3) illustrates the supine in aspectual constructions. The same form appears in copular structures, reduced relatives, Tough constructions, i.e. in predicative contexts. Besides the adjunct position, when it corresponds to a PP, as in (4), the supine is not equivalent to a subordinated CP; the Romanian complementation uses the indicative or subjunctive forms for subordination.

participles. But it can be part of derivational formations also. Is it the same element? Should we analyze it as a default, “decategorizing” affix? Since Aronoff (1994), the existence of forms like the Latin Supine is considered as evidence in favor of a “pure morphology”, with no meaning-form correspondence. Does this view extend to the Romanian Supine? Sections 3 and 4 will concentrate on these topics and try to give some insights.

## 2. Mixed or underspecified?

There are several theoretical possibilities to account for this kind of mismatch. The “mixed” analysis mentioned above, in the line of a long grammatical tradition, tries to capture the property of a “participle” to “participate” in the verbal and in the nominal “nature” as well. One may wish to capture this property in the lexicon or in the syntax. In the lexicalist models such as HPSG, it is natural to assume that categories are in the lexicon, and to allow the existence (formation) of the appropriate number of lexical categories. Since case is assigned by the lexical head, there will be as many categories as there are case inflections in the domain of that category.

Another option is the one adopted in the framework of Distributed Morphology (Marantz (1997), Harley and Noyer (1998)). In this view, the items listed in the vocabulary have no category, categorization being contributed by the syntactic component. The insertion of an element in the appropriate syntactic context makes it a nominal, or verbal, or adjectival element. We take this option to be more satisfactory for Semitic roots, which give rise to verb as well as noun formation.

There is a clear connection between the syntactic behavior and categorization. Lexical categories, heads of syntactic projections, determine the internal structure of the projection (selection, projection, complement licensing), and the type of position in which the corresponding phrases will be inserted, as well.

For the case of the supine, there are empiric facts supporting an “underspecification”-type analysis. A criterion for the mixed character is the existence of two kinds of properties **in the same projection** and **in the same time**. For instance, the distribution would be nominal, as for the English gerund, which can appear in contexts excluded by non-nominal projections:

- (4) a. we were concerned about Pat’s watching television  
b. \*we were concerned about that Pat was watching television

The same type of projection is characterized by internal properties specific for verbs, i.e. Accusative case assignment and adverbial modification:

- (5) a. John’s building a spaceship  
b. I disapproved of Pat’s watching television  
c. Pat disapproved of my \*quiet/ quietly leaving before anyone noticed  
d. \*Pat disapproved that leaving

In (5)a-d, we give some other examples of mixed categories, manifesting a “griffon” behavior: a verbal head with hybrid properties – nominalized infinitive in Italian ((6)a), Spanish ((6)b), Old Romanian infinitives ((6)c) and Arabic masdar ((6)d):

- (6) a. il riverede un compagno d’armi  
the see-again a companion of arms  
‘the fact of seeing again a brother in arms’
- b. el haber-me-lo dicho  
the have-me-it said  
‘the fact that he told it to me’
- c. tăierea capul lui  
cutting-the head-the him  
‘the fact of cutting his head’
- d. quatl-u Zayd-in Muhammad-an  
murder-NOM Zayd-GEN Muhammad-ACC  
‘the murder of Muhammad by Zayd’

The behavior of the Romanian supine does not respect the mixed-behavior criterion; instead of showing hybrid properties **in the same time**, its verbal / nominal nature (or “ambiguity”, according to traditional grammars) manifests as contextually dependent. And indeed, we see that the supine combined with a determiner fails to assign accusative or nominative case. Its projection is completely reorganized according to the nominal pattern:

- (7) a. \*culesul mere  
picking-the apples  
‘apples picking’
- b. \*culesul Ion  
picking-the Ion  
‘Ion’s picking’

The problem in these examples is the fact that the arguments are not assigned case, which in Romanian corresponds to the morphological case, or to the insertion of a “preposition”. The problem disappears when the internal argument appears in the form of an NP in the Genitive or that of a PP adjunct:

- (8) a. culesul merelor  
picking-the apples-GEN  
‘apple’s picking’
- b. culesul de mere  
picking-the of apples  
‘the picking of apples’

As expected, the supine loses its ability to assign Accusative case when combined with a D° ((9)a), and does not assign Nominative case ((9)b):

- (9) a. \**pescuitul scoici*  
fishing-the mussels  
'the fishing of mussels'
- b. \**pescuitul Ion*  
fishing-the John  
'the fishing of John'

In this case, the internal argument appears as a Genitive DP ((10)a) or as an adjunct PP ((10)b):

- (10) a. *pescuitul scoicilor*  
fishing-the mussels-GEN  
'the fishing of mussels'
- b. *pescuitul de scoici*  
fishing-the of mussels  
'the fishing of mussels'

In the case of verbal supines, the licensing of the object (Accusative Case assignment) depends on a (semi)auxiliary.

- (11) a. *am de cules mere*  
have to pick apples  
'I have to pick apples'

This observation leads to the idea that the supine cannot assign itself a case to its complements. In the case of the nominal projection, this is done by the presence of the nominal determination. Indeed, in Romanian, the incorporated determiner bears the case inflection. Within the nominal projection, the supine combines with semi-auxiliaries, forming a verbal complex, which, as a whole, is responsible for case-licensing of the complements. The result is not a "mixed" projection because the different properties of the supine do not manifest in the same time, in the same projection, but in different projections. The supine changes its projection type as it changes its morphological properties.

There is an apparent exception to this generalization, represented by the supine inside a PP projection, in which the Preposition is selected by the main verb or has an autonomous lexical meaning (such as Goal), in the case of adjuncts. In traditional grammars, this prepositional supine is considered to be verbal (Accusative-Case Assigner). It is the essential argument of traditional grammars for the view that the supine keeps its verbal properties in this kind of contexts.

- (12) *am plecat la cules mere*  
have gone at picking apples  
'I'm going to pick apples'

On the basis of this type of examples, traditional grammars take the view that the supine is a case-assigner when it is introduced by a Preposition. This view is nevertheless contradicted by the fact that, when the supine is preceded by lexical sub-categorized Prepositions, the prepositional accusative becomes impossible for the object of that supine. This shows that in fact the Accusative Case is not assigned by the supine:

- (13) \*am renunțat la invitat pe Ion / pe acest om  
have renounced to invite PE-ACC Ion / PE-ACC this man  
'I renounced to invite Ion / this man'

This is even more striking if we compare the supine with another non-finite form of the Romanian verbal system, the infinitive, which is perfectly compatible with prepositional Accusative Case:

- (14) am renunțat la a invita pe Ion / pe acest om  
have renounced to invite PE-ACC Ion / PE-ACC this man  
'I renounced to invite Ion / this man'

Another important remark is that in prepositional contexts, the object is always strictly adjacent and rather non-determined, whereas in ordinary verbal constructions, the object allows determination, quantification etc, and can be separated from the verb by temporal modifiers:

- (15) a. \*am plecat la cules multe mere / \*toate merele  
have gone to pick many apples / all apples-the  
'I am going to pick many apples / all the apples'
- b. \*am plecat la cules imediat mere  
have gone to pick immediately apples  
'I am going to pick immediately apples'

Therefore, it seems that a direct object in such supine constructions manifests a special behavior, to be distinguished from the regular behavior of a direct object in an ordinary verbal construction. The suggestion that we would like to make here is that this behavior is due to the fact that the structure is frozen, and relies probably on a composition of the type N-N, generated by lexical rules (as compounds). An argument in this sense is given by the existence of structures of the type in (16), appearing in enumerations or other particular contexts (like titles or labels), where the model of composition is possible with participles:

- (16) n-am uitat nimic: cumpărat bilete, făcut bagaje...  
not have forget anything: buying tickets, packing bags....  
'I didn't forget anything: buying tickets, packing bags...'

We will then set apart the contexts with a supine introduced by a lexical Preposition (sub-categorized or semantically selected), as being particular formations, resulting from the application of a lexical rule like compounding.

Nowadays Romanian tends to favor the construction with *de*-insertion instead of the direct one with the Accusative object. The perspective that we have, if we look at productive supine structures, is that of an element whose verbal-nominal nature is not “double” or “mixed”, but clearly context-dependent, distinguishing this form from “true” verbal nouns.

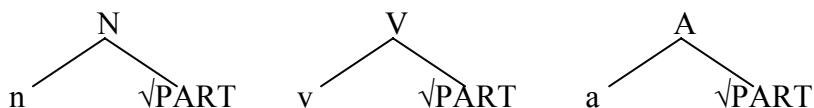
### 3. Elements for an analysis

#### 3.1. *The main point*

If this view is correct, we have to admit that the Romanian supine has a well differentiated behavior, not [+N] AND [+V], but [+N] OR [+V]. It is not a mixed category, but something that can accept to become a verb and a noun as well. An analysis that seems to impose itself is the “under-specification” analysis, proposed in the Distributed Morphology framework. The Participle fills a cell in the verbal system, at a morphological level, and has no categorial features, being categorized by the syntactic context.

In the DM framework, the categorization supposes the contribution of functional categories as *n*, *v*, *a*. For our purpose, all that we need to say is that by simply placing a lexical underspecified item in a typical verbal, nominal or adjectival position, this category acquires verbal, nominal or adjectival properties:

(17)



According to the view of Distributed Morphology, there are no categorial features at the “Vocabulary” level. The participle would then be a single uncategorized item competing for several syntactic contexts.

What is less clear is which label to put on the participial form itself. In DM, there are category-neutral “Roots”, and there are affixes with features competing for a specific value to express. The analysis that we would like to propose is that the Participle, here above PART, is itself category-less. Or, it is not really a Root, in the sense of “simple”, but it is rather constructed from a verbal root and the participial affix. We shall now try to find a solution to this puzzle.

#### 3.2. *The proper category-less level of abstraction*

There are several theoretical views that are coherent with the existence of a un-categorial level of grammatical representation. Baker (2003), for instance, considers that categories are given by syntax. According to him, the categorial identification is done by the syntax in the following way:

- A Noun – has a referential index
- A Verb – has a specifier
- An Adjective – by default: it is –N, -V

In his system, however, the Participle is not really discussed; it is considered a 'verbal adjective' without further investigation.

Schütze (2003) takes the participial suffix as being category-changing, creating Participles from Verbs. This makes them derivational affixes. As for the Participle, it is considered as not being (really) a Verb; it does not carry Voice, but only (lexical?) aspect. So, the Participle is a de-categorized Verb. This, however, takes in fact the Participle to be a distinct category.

Aronoff (1994) discusses the problem of the (English) Participle, which, according to him, illustrates the “morphomic” level; being purely morphological, this element is appropriate for the very different syntactic constructions of past and passive. Another argument for the “morphomic” level discussed by Aronoff (1994) is the existence of the Latin “third stem”, realized in participle, Supine, and future active participle. In this case, a single stem, also a “morpheme”, is used in various syntactic environments. The supine was a verbal noun; derived from a participial stem (from a synchronic point of view), it was an item that allowed nominal inflection (Case marking) and appeared as Goal adjunct with verbs or adjectives:

- (18) a.      eo lusum  
              'go playing'
- b.      mirabile visu  
              'wonderful to see'

The argument in favor of a verbal noun analysis comes from the possibility of case marking on the Direct Object by the supine, and the co-occurrence of the nominal inflection on it. According to Aronoff (1994), the supine should be treated as the manifestation of the same *Stem* (in the strict morphological sense, at the “morphomic” level) as the one of the Participle, even if the values (aspect, voice) of the categories derived from this stem are different (the supine does not admit the passive interpretation in Latin). The same stem is used to derive a number of deverbal nouns in Latin, such as *pictura*, derived from *pingo*, *pict-*. In this way, Aronoff (1994) builds an argument for the view that the morphologic level should be kept distinct from syntax, semantic or phonology; morphemes do not encode (grammatical) meaning since, in the cases illustrated, they do not always have the same value.

Indeed, the same Thematic element appears in very different formations, like the active future participle, meaning “those which will V” and in the supine, denoting the activity without further specifications, and in the past participle, denoting a (resulting) state.

#### Active Future Participle

- (19) mor-it-uri   te salutant  
      'die-Th-FUTP you salute'



Supine

- (20) eo                    pisc-at-um  
      'go1sg                fish-Th-ACC'

It could also be interesting to note that, putting aside any attempt to diachronically explain the existence of the Romanian supine (in other words, the large use of the participial stem), the Romanian supine and the Latin supine present rather similar distributions, i.e. the expression of the goal or of the point of view.

We are not able to propose, at this moment, an analysis for both Latin and Romanian, but we may simply retain Aronoff's suggestion for Romanian, that a single stem is at work in the two cases. This stem can be used as a base as well for verb as for noun formation. In sum, none of these forms is basic; they are all derived from a single "sound form" – a stem.

Therefore, we would like to apply the same view to Romanian Participle and Supine, which, as we saw, are homophonous. The advantage would be that we would unify two categories of the non-finite verbal system of Romanian that seem to have all in common. But in this case, we would rather like to say that a single morphological element, categorially neutral, is used to build a Noun (the Supine), a Verb (in combination with an Auxiliary, as seen above), or an Adjective. This is the analysis proposed above, and it goes somehow in the same direction as Aronoff's discussion.

One further question to ask is whether Romanian morphology can be considered to be based on stems, and if the Participle is a stem. Such a view could be supported by the fact that the –AT formation is also used in derivation. –AT can also attach to non-verbal roots

Root +V → V-at (categorially neutral element)

- (21) Mîncat 'eating', cîntat 'singing', citit 'reading', mers 'walking'

Root +N → [Adj] (state of someone who has...)

- (22) Sprîncenat 'eye-browed', migdalat 'almond-ed'

–AT could be considered also as participating in the derivation of agent Nouns. The idea that it would be the realization of the same stem is however contradicted by the variation illustrated in (23)d-e. However, the correspondence between the participle and the stem of agent Nouns is stable for the "regular" classes of verbs.

Root + t +-or → agent Nouns

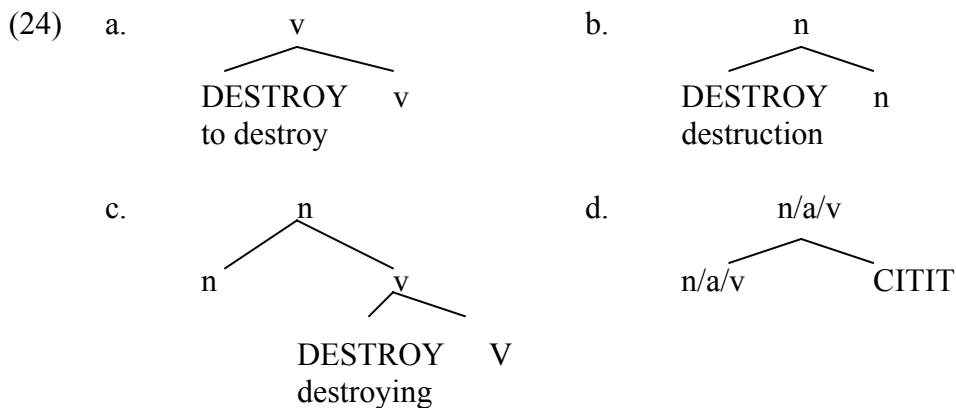
- (23) a.        cînta 'sing'– cîntăt-or 'singer'  
      b.        măguli 'flatter'– măgulit-or 'flatterer'  
      c.        hotărî 'decide'– hotărît-or 'decisive'  
      d.        vedea 'see'– văzut – văzător - \*văzutor  
      e.        merge – mers – mergător - \*mensor

There are, we think, reasons to treat the participial form as one of the *stems* of the verb in Romanian. This could be a rather peculiar use of the notion of *stem*, which should be used for “what remains when all affixes are set apart”. In our case, contrary to Latin, there are no affixes going with the nominal vs. verbal or adjectival status<sup>3</sup>. But we could assign the status of a stem to the part which is common to all these syntactic uses mentioned above, and it would correspond to “what remains when the categorial features are set apart”.

#### 4. What we need to add to Marantz's (1997) model

Let us sketch now a way of making sense of all the intuitions above. We will assume that the most qualified model which could account for the facts outlined in this paper is Distributed Morphology, as depicted in Marantz (1997). The only inconvenient would be that our participles are in the same time basic and constructed (see above, section 2). In order to make the machine work, let us assume that word formation starts with ROOTS, but at the level of pure forms (the "morphomic" level), stem alternation can apply. For instance, Romanian verbs are derived either from a perfective (participial) or from an imperfective stem (infinitive). In English, this alternation is manifested by the two possible forms of an abstract ROOT as DESTROY: destroy vs. destruct.

Then, neutral categories, ROOTS in Marantz's system, morphologically mapped into stems in our system, are combined with nominal, adjectival, verbal heads. In our case, that of Romanian Participle, these heads do not have phonological content. Put differently, we assume that the difference between the formation of Romanian Participle / Supine and that of English Gerund is that -ING is a nominal head, whereas -AT is not. We illustrate hereafter the different type of word-formation corresponding to the Gerund and to the Supine; all of them take place in the syntactic component, according to Distributed Morphology.



<sup>3</sup> There are, of course, marks of agreement in gender and number when the Participle is in an adjectival position, but no marks of declension for the Supine use.

## 5. Is -AT (simply) an empty morpheme?

What -AT is, then? The answer, in Aronoff's terms, would be that -AT is an empty thematic morpheme and we have already seen the arguments (section 2). We may have some arguments for taking this morphological piece as the expression of (lexical) Aspect. Participial stems, as we will argue below, encode (telic) Aspect. If this is correct, the view of Aronoff (1994) about the complete absence of semantic-grammatical value for the participial stem could be challenged, at least for Romanian Participle. The thematic affix -AT seems to keep a certain value in Romanian, which we take to be an aspectual one.

-AT encodes a [+ Telic] feature in Perfect Participle and Supine, in periphrastic (aspectual) constructions, but also in event nominalizations.

In some cases, the aspectual value of the participial stem can be changed, for instance in some periphrases with supine expressing completion, a value that has also to do with telicity. See for example (25), where the action of reading has to be completed, or the movement to reach its goal:

- (25) a. am de citit acest articol pînă mîine  
have to read this article till tomorrow  
'I have to read this article till tomorrow'
- b. am de mers la piață  
have to go to market  
'I have to go to the market place'

There are also event nominalizations in which the Telicity is encoded:

- (26) a. cititul ziarului de dimineață  
reading-the newspaper-GEN of morning  
'the reading of the newspaper in the morning'
- b. ?cititul de dimineață  
reading-the of morning  
'reading in the morning'

The Supine nominal, however, can be atelic, in examples like the following:

- (27) cîntatul este un dar  
singing-the is a gift  
'singing is a gift'

Those are contexts with a generic reading, the supine denotes a generic event, and the aspectual value is shifted to the iterative-habitual reading.

In other derived nouns, the Participial stem is associated with a state or with a result reading. An apparent counterexample to the idea that -AT encodes telicity could be seen in -tor derived agent Nouns, which are active, non telic. In those examples too, there is an aspectual component which is habitual. Take for instance *mîncător* 'eat-er', *mergător* 'walker', *dansator* 'dancer'; it is reasonable to say that you have to do some dance (to have some dancing experience) in order to be a 'dancer'.

We may assume, then, that the Supine/Participle stem encodes Aspect; its basic value could be considered to be telicity. Some contexts, however, may involve shifting to an iterative-habitual reading.

As for the Voice value, this stem is considered to be Voice-ambiguous in the Romanian literature. This may go in the sense of Aronoff (1994)'s discussion referred to above. But in fact, Supine's properties lead to think that it is rather a non-active form (maybe a middle). The active reading is not possible unless the supine has nominal properties, i.e. in the prepositional context discussed above. In the other cases, if it does not have a clear passive reading (which holds for the supine reduced relatives), the active reading is associated with an arbitrary reading of the subject.

However, for the topics addressed in this section, further research is needed.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present paper, we proposed an analysis according to which the participle, ROOT+AT *by itself* is not [+N], [+V]. We have outlined the fact that participles need syntactic supporters – functional elements, i.e. auxiliaries or determiners, in order to receive a category. The (Stative and Resultative) Participle, the verbal "Supine", "Supine" Event Nouns in Romanian are all syntactic realizations of an aronoffian "3<sup>rd</sup> stem".

The AT-Stem (or PART, or the 3<sup>rd</sup> stem) simply combines with different functional layers attributing categories: a, n or v. We do not assume that AT is itself a, n or v.

Stems are categorially neutral and accessible to inflection and to derivation. This leads to the triple use of the Romanian Participle known as the Past Participle / Supine parallelism in Romanian. We think that the view of the grammar which could fit the facts discussed in this paper is the one outlined in Distributed Morphology, where the notion of "mixed categories" is not needed. In such a framework, it is possible to have an analysis in which a single morphological piece corresponds to three linguistic units. The only device that we would have to add is that sound forms of ROOTS, i.e., stems, are categorially neutral and represent starting points in word formation.

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