Toward canonical marking of core arguments in Romanian?
The case of *plăcea*

Mihaela Ilioaia
(Ghent University)

Keywords: subject, transitive, non-canonical, Romanian, SAE

This paper deals with the Romanian construction in (1), in which the psych verb *plăcea* 'please, like' shows two different configurations, one with a dative experiencer (1a), the other with a nominative experiencer (1b).

(1) a. **Îmi**   *place*   *de*   *vecin-a*   *mea*
   me.DAT   please.3SG   of   neighbor-the   my
   'I like my neighbor'

   b. **Colegi-i**   *mei*   *mă*   *plac*
   colleagues-the.NOM   my   me.ACC   like.3PL
   'My colleagues like me'

Recent studies suggest that Romanian, just like Spanish, have expanded its non-canonical marking of core arguments (Bossong 1998, Van Peteghem 2016, 2017, Author & Author 2021). For this reason, Bossong (1998) and Haspelmath (2001), who highlight the tendency of typical SAE languages developing toward canonical marking of core arguments, oppose Romanian to other Romance languages and group it instead with East-Slavic and Baltic languages. Indeed, both in Romanian and in Spanish, the dative domain expands itself and attracts, in addition to psychological verbs, several other verb classes, such as verbs of happening, cognition verbs, and even existential verbs (Melis & Flores 2013). Besides this expansion of non-canonical marking of core arguments one may expect a simultaneous regression of canonical marking in Romanian. This, however, is not borne out by (1b) above.

By means of a diachronic corpus study, the evolution of the two constructions with *plăcea* 'please, like' in (1a–b) is examined from their first attestation until present-day Romanian. The Romanian Web Corpus RoTenTen16 is used for the 21st c, alongside with a self-made corpus for the 16th to the 20th c of Romanian, containing approximately eight million words.

Interestingly, whereas a simple query in the corpus for the 21st c reveals that the transitive construction in (1b) occurs rather frequently in this period, the corpus for the older periods of Romanian did not return any example before the 19th c. This suggests that the construction in (1b) represents an innovation in Romanian, most probably under the pressure of the transitive syntax specific to SAE languages. The case of the Romanian *plăcea* is similar to some initial phase of the case of the English *like*, a situation in which, the new subcategorization frame has ousted the old one (Allen 1986).

It is argued in this paper, based on the case-study of *plăcea* 'please, like', that the tendency of SAE languages toward a transitive syntax, and hence, toward canonical marking of core arguments, contrary to all evidence, causes specific oblique structures to develop into canonical, transitive structures in Romanian. The question arises whether this is a generalized tendency in Romanian or a unique phenomenon limited to the verb under scrutiny. A more comprehensive study – involving a larger number of predicates – may contribute to a better understanding of the position of Romanian with respect to SAE languages.

References

Allen, Cynthia L. (1986), Reconsidering the history of "like". *Journal of Linguistics*. JSTOR 22(2). 375–409.

Bossong, Georg (1998), Le marquage de l'expérient dans les langues de l'Europe, in *Actance et valence dans les langues de l'Europe*, J. Feuillet (ed.), Berlin/New York: Mouton/de Gruyter, 259–294.

Haspelmath, Martin (2001), Non-canonical marking of core arguments in European languages, in A. Aikhenvald, R.M.W. Dixon & M. Onishi (eds.), *Non-canonical Marking of Subjects and Objects*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 53.

Melis, Chantal & Flores, Marcela (2013), On the historical expansion of non-canonically marked 'subjects' in Spanish, in *The diachronic Typology of Non-Canonical Subjects*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 163–184.

Van Peteghem, Marleen (2016) Verbs of pain and accusative subjects in Romanian, in *Atypical predicate-argument relations,* Amsterdam: Benjamins, 3–26.

Van Peteghem, Marleen (2017) Les structures de la douleur: sur le marquage de l'expérienceur dans les langues romanes, in *De la passion du sens en linguistique: a Danièle Van de Velde*, Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 439–463.