AN OVERVIEW OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE ASPECTS CONCERNING ROMANIAN

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Main issues

- A brief overview of gender in Romanian

- A focus on the feminine forms of role nouns

- A focus on non-binary forms in Romanian

0. GENDER IN ROMANIAN

AN OVERVIEW

ROMANIAN AS A GRAMMATICAL GENDER LANGUAGE AND A 'THREE-GENDER SYSTEM'

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
MASCULINE [+animate/ -animate]	artist interesant artist-∅ interesant-∅ 'interesting artist'	artiști interesanți artiști-i interesant-i 'interesting artists'
FEMININE [+animate/ -animate]	artistă interesantă artist-ă interesant-ă 'interesting house'	artiste interesante artist-e interesant-e 'interesting houses'
NEUTER (Note: With rare exceptions, the neuter class includes only inanimate nouns)	desen interesant desen-∅ interesant-∅ 'interesting drawing'	desene interesante castel-e interesant-e 'interesting drawing'

A THREE-GENDER SYSTEM BUT A BINARY GENDER OPPOSITION IN ROMANIAN

► Inflectional syncretism (agreement of nouns with participles, adjectives determiners):

❖ **masculine = neuter[SINGULAR]** (artist interesant-∅, desen interesant-∅)

❖ **feminine = neuter[PLURAL]**(artiste interesante, desene interesante)

► Romanian grammars describe the masculine singular as the 'unmarked form' or as the 'default form'

► Masculines can serve as bases for derived feminine nouns more frequently than feminines serve as bases for derived masculine nouns

MASCULINE PLURAL AGREEMENT FOR ANIMATE NOUNS IN STRUCTURES WHICH INCLUDE MASCULINE AND FEMININE NOUNS/PRONOUNS

- Artista și artistul sunt interesanți. ('The female artist and the male artist are interesting')
- the artist-fem and the artist-masc-pl are interesting-masc

- (Voi) sunteți interesanți. *(To addressees of all genders)* ('You are interesting')
- (you-pl) are interesting-masc-pl

- (Ele și ei) sunt interesanți. ('They are interesting')
- (they-fem & they-masc) are interesting-masc-pl"

- *Note: Romanian is a pro-drop language >>> subject pronouns are often omitted.*

PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS REGARDING GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN ROMANIAN

▶ **'Feminization'**

❑ Certain role nouns do not have feminine forms in Standard Romanian but only masculine forms (Aspect frequently underlined in present-day institutional guidelines)

▶ **Non-binary forms**

❑ Romanian has a 'three-gender system' but only a binary opposition (Aspect underlined by LGBTQIA+ organizations)

▶ **Feminine and non-binary forms**

❑ Plural agreement for groups of animate nouns of mixed genders (e.g. feminine + masculine) is in the masculine (Aspect occasionally underlined in institutional guidelines/ LGBTQIA+ organizations)

I. FEMININE FORMS

ROLE NOUNS

FEMINIZATION

Two categories of role nouns (according to reference grammars):

▶ role nouns which have both masculine and feminine forms in Present-Day Standard Romanian ('mobile nouns') = the majority of nouns designating professions and occupations in Romanian

▶ role nouns which have only masculine forms in Present-Day Standard Romanian ('epicene nouns') = a limited number of nouns in Romanian

PAIR FORMS: 'MOBILE' NOUNS AND 'MOTIONAL' SUFFIXES

"Animate nouns that formally differentiate the referents according to their sex or natural gender (i.e. have one form in the masculine, another in the feminine) are called mobile nouns", and the select a "motional suffix" (Maiden et al. 2021: 407)

▶ gender-marking suffixes are seen as 'motional suffixes', and regarded as 'lexical-grammatical' suffixes = marking both the feminine gender and the formation of a new word)

▶ Motional suffixes = include the frequent feminine inflection **- ă** and the rarer feminine inflection **-e**

❖ artist (M) – artist**ă** (F) (masculine base + feminine suffix **-ă**) 'artist'

❖ doctor (M) – doctor**iță** (F) (masculine base + feminine suffix –**iță**) 'doctor'

❖ creator (M) – crea**toare (F)** (masculine base + feminine suffix –**toare**) "creator"

A RICH LIST OF GENDER-GENDER MARKING SUFFIXES IN ROMANIAN

► "There is a rich inventory of motional suffixes:

► **-ă** [ə]: profesor.M 'male teacher' ~profesoară.F 'female teacher';

► **-că** [kə]: țăran.M 'peasant man' ~ țărancă. F 'peasant woman'; -

► **-ea** [e̯a]: mielușel. M 'little male lamb' ~ mielușea.F 'little female lamb';

► **-easă** [e̯asə]: boier.M 'boyar (man)' ~ boiereasă.F 'a boyar's wife';

► **-iță** [it͡sə]:primar. M 'mayor' ~ primăriță. F 'mayoress';

► **-oaie** [o̯aje]: comis.M 'equerry' ~comisoaie.F 'equerry's wife';

► **-toare** [to̯are]: cerșetor. M 'beggar' - cerșetoare. F 'female beggar';

► **-esă** [esə]: poet.M 'poet' ~ poetesă. F 'poetess'; -

► **-eză** [ezə]: steward.M 'steward' ~ stewardeză. F'stewardess');

► **-oi** [oi̯] : vrabie.F 'hen sparrow' ~ vrăbioi. M'cock sparrow';

► **-an** [an]: gâscă.F 'goose' ~ gâscan. M 'gander')." (Excerpt from The Oxford History of Romanian Morphology, Maiden et. al 2021: 407)

FREQUENCY AND CONNOTATIONS OF GENDER-MARKING SUFFIXES

▶ **-ă** – the most frequent suffix for feminine forms, and the most productive in Present-Day Romanian (This is a suffix perceived as 'neutral' by many Romanian speakers, see Mîrzea Vasile & Dinică 2019)

e.g. poet –poet**ă** (masculine base + suffix), ('male/female poet')

▶ -**esă, -easă** = pejorative connotations

e.g. poet – poet**esa** (vs. poet-poeta) (masculine base + suffix) ('male/female poet')

▶ **-iță** = diminutive

e.g. decan –decan**iță** (vs. decan – decană) (masculine base + suffix) ('male/female dean')

▶ -**oi** = augmentative

e.g. văduvă-văduv vs. văduvă – văduv**oi** (feminine base + suffix) (''male/female fox')

PAIR FORMS AND LEMMATIZATION IN PRESENT-DAY ROMANIAN DICTIONARIES

▶ The latest print edition of DEX (the most popular general-use dictionary of Romanian) usually lists masculine role nouns as headwords accompanied by suffixes for the feminine 'variants' (mostly ending in **-ă**):

▶ **DEX 2016 (print)**

▪ **poet, -ă,** *poeți, poete,* **s.m. și f**

▶ **vs.**

▶ **DEX (online)**

▪ **poet, poeți** substantiv masculin

▪ **poetă, poete** substantiv feminin

▶ The latest print edition of DOOM, 2021 (the most popular normative dictionary of Romanian) lists separate headwords for masculine role nouns and feminine role nouns

'EPICENE' ROLE NOUNS, DESCRIBED AS 'NON-PROTOTYPICAL FOR ROMANIAN'

► "The class of epicene nouns comprises animate, often non-human referents; such referents include animals (fluture 'butterfly' (M), țânțar 'mosquito' (M), omidă 'caterpillar', viespe 'wasp' (F)), elefant 'elephant' (M), zebră 'zebra' (F)). In modern vocabulary this class is continually being expanded through personal nouns that designate professions, jobs, and titles in prestige social fields traditionally held by males, for example cancelar 'chancellor', consilier 'counsellor', consul 'consul', deputat 'deputy', doctor (în științe) 'doctor (of science)', edil 'councillor', detectiv 'detective', manager 'manager', ofiţer 'officer', pilot 'pilot', prefect 'prefect', procuror 'prosecutor', rector 'rector', etc. **Although it is expanding in this way, the class of epicene nouns is non-prototypical for the Romanian vocabulary. Note, moreover, the clear tendency for the contemporary language to 'feminize' the terminology of modern professions and thereby to mark formally natural gender differences** (e.g. doctoră, doctoriţă '**lady** doctor', manageră '**lady** manager', ofiţeră, ofiţereasă '**lady** officer', rectoră, rectoriţă '**lady** rector')." (Excerpt from The Oxford History of Romanian Morphology, Maiden et al. 2021: 407)

THE LABEL 'EPICENE' & AGREEMENT

▶ Traditional usage distinguishes 'common nouns' from 'epicene' nouns (Corbett 1991)

▶ Epicenes take only one agreement form

▶ The role nouns that Romanian reference grammar label as 'epicene' ('epicene masculines') take only agreement in the masculine:

1. *Decanul este capabil.*

   the dean-masc. is capable-masc.

2. **Decanul este capabilă.* (gender-agreement mismatch)

   the dean-masc. is capable-fem.

THE FEMINIZATION OF ROLE NOUNS IN ROMANIAN

▶ **Linguistic research**

Pețan 2003; Călărașu 2005; Stoichițoiu-Ichim 2012; Vintilă-Rădulescu 2010, 2013; Joița 2016;

Mîrzea Vasile & Dinică 2019

▶ **Media**

Zafiu 2004, 2013, 2021

▶ **Reference works for the general public**

Dragomirescu & Nicolae 2012

ROLE NOUNS AND REGISTER

▶ Role nouns tend to acquire feminine forms in contemporary colloquial Romanian even when recently borrowed:

❖ "vloggeriţa" (the vlogger, feminine form);

❖ "PR-iţa" (the PR, feminine form);

❖ "IT-ista" (the IT specialist, feminine form)

▶ Linguists have noted that the tendency of role nouns to become 'mobile' in Romanian is not new (comparisons with 19th-century Romanian), see Peţan 2003, Călăraşu 2005

▶ The pre-1990s Romanian context (*the Socialist Republic of Romania*) favoured the use of feminine forms in Standard Romanian for role nouns in the media, in educational contexts or in literary works, see Peţan 2003, Călăraşu 2005

A REGISTER DIFFERENCE CONCERNING ROLE NOUNS : THE FORMAL REGISTER AND THE 'UNMARKED' MASCULINE IN PRESENT-DAY ROMANIAN

► **However**, **the post-1990s** saw a rise in the use of masculine forms for role nouns in official documents/settings even when these role nouns already possessed long-employed feminine forms (masculine=default/neutral, 'unmarked'; 'neutralization' strategy; feminine forms perceived as familiar/pejorative, see discussion in Dragomirescu & Nicolae 2011):

► e.g.

► **Doamna profesoară** (Standard Romanian, formal and informal contexts) 'Ms. Professor-fem.'

► **Doamna profesor** (Standard Romanian, formal contexts, post-1990s) 'Ms. Professor-masc.'

► The present-day official register which lists job titles in Romanian (C.O.R., the Classification of Occupations, adopted in 1995) lists them in the 'unmarked' masculine form (with rare exceptions of 'traditional' female occupations, e.g. educatoare 'kindergarten teacher'; femeie de serviciu 'cleaning woman', also qtd. in Dragomirescu & Nicolae 2011) [Contrast the Romanian COR with the recent updates of the Moldovan CORM, the situation of Moldovan Romanian]

ROMANIAN SPEAKERS' PREFERENCE FOR THE MASCULINE FORM OF ROLE NOUNS IN THE FORMAL REGISTER (I)

▶ **Mîrzea Vasile and Dinică (2019)**

▶ The only Romanian study concerning the gender of role nouns that is based on a questionnaire, in which 389 Romanian speakers (81,6% identifying as female; 18.4% identifying as male) were asked to rate 9 role nouns, from acceptable to unacceptable on a scale from 1 to 5, in 74 sentences focused on female referents. The role nouns were randomly listed in feminine or masculine forms.

▶ **Results:**

▶ Overall, Romanian speakers showed a preference for the masculine forms of role nouns as "acceptable", although there was a significant number of speakers that listed the feminine forms as "acceptable"

ROMANIAN SPEAKERS' PREFERENCE FOR THE MASCULINE FORM OF ROLE NOUNS IN THE FORMAL REGISTER (II)

▶ **Mîrzea Vasile & Dinică (2019)**

 Respondents were also asked to give a description of their job

▶ **Results :**

 73% of the female respondents gave a job description which involves the masculine form;

 36% a job description involving a feminine form

 e.g. *Sunt notar.* (female referent, masculine form)

 "I am a public notary."

FURTHER ISSUES AND QUESTIONS CONCERNING ROLE NOUNS

► **Limitations of Mîrzea Vasile & Dinică 2019:**

❑ Before the task, the respondents were given the cue that the sentences occur in "official contexts"

❑ In the Romanian education system, Romanian speakers are subject to frequent testing which involves choosing the "correct" form = a standard form which sometimes differs from everyday usage (speaker prescriptivism)

❑ The questionnaire used Google Forms, in a fill-in format ('formal' choices)

❑ A significant number of the respondents were academics or students ('academic contexts')

► See also Dragomir (MA thesis, in progress): With a female referent, Romanian speakers tend to use the masculine form for prestigious roles (political, executive, scientific, academic), and the feminine form for roles involving fields such as manual labour, caretaking or cooking in translations from English into Romanian of short bio texts

ROMANIAN PUBLIC FIGURES STRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVITY AND OF FEMININE FORMS FOR ROLE NOUNS

► "Corect este „ministră" și „președintă"! Cuvintele au fost recunoscute oficial de Academia Română!!", a scris Alina Gorghiu în postare care conține șase semne ale exclamării."

► "It is correct to say minister (feminine form) and president (feminine form)! The words were officially recognized by the Romanian Academy! (…) (Alina Gorghiu, Romanian Minister of Justice)"

► Alina Gorghiu: Corect este "ministră" și "președintă"! Cuvintele au fost recunoscute oficial de Academia Română!! (g4media.ro)

RECENT CHANGES IN THE MEDIA REGARDING CERTAIN ROLE NOUNS NOT FORMERLY USED IN THE FEMININE

▶ "**Prim-ministrul** Viorica Dăncilă" ("the prime-minister Viorica Dăncilă", **masculine form, female referent**) 2018

▶ "**Prim-ministra** Franței, Elisabeth Borne", 2023 ("the French prime-minister, Elisabeth Borne", feminine form, feminine referent) https://www.g4media.ro/prim-ministra-frantei-elisabeth-borne-a-calificat-partidul-reunirea-nationala-rn-condus-de-marine-le-pen-drept-mostenitorul-lui-petain-dictatorul-fascist-din-perioada-1940-1944.html

▶ "Laura Sitaru, **decanul** Facultății de Limbi și Literaturi Străine", 2024 ("the dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures", masculine form, female referent)

▶ "**Decana** Facultății de Administrație Publică, Diana Iancu, premiată de American Society for Public Administration (ASPA)", 2024 ("the dean of the Faculty of Public Administration, Diana Iancu, awarded by ASPA", masculine form, female referent)

STANDARDIZATION: CODIFICATION IN DICTIONARIES

▶ The most recent revised edition of the most significant normative dictionary of Romanian (DOOM 2021) lists among its revisions to the previous edition the addition of a number of feminine forms concerning nouns regarding titles and professional occupations (https://doom.lingv.ro)

DOOM 2nd ed. (2005)	DOOM 3d ed. (2021)
-	+ detectivă (rar) s. f. (detective, feminine)
-	+ dramaturgă (rar) s.f (playwright, feminine)
decană	decană s.f. (female dean)
-	+ ministră (colocv.) s. f. (minister, feminine)
senatoare	senatoare s.f. (senator, feminine)

A GROWING NUMBER OF FEMININE FORMS FOR ROLE NOUNS IN ROMANIAN

► Colloquial Romanian = the continued tendency to use pair forms for role nouns ('standardization from below') ['mobile nouns']

► Standard Romanian, the normative dimension= normative dictionaries continue to include feminine forms for role nouns absent from previous editions (<>'standardization from above' <>)

► Standard Romanian, official Romanian documents/settings= the tendency to use 'unmarked' masculine forms prevails, although there have been recent changes in various documents, guidelines and in legal forms according to the European Parliament guidelines (**fluctuating usage**)

'NATURAL' AS A KEYWORD

▶ Attitudes of those rejecting feminine forms for role nouns include keywords such as: "**artificial", "rigid", "not natural"** (Mîrzea Vasile & Dinică 2019)

▶ "…având în vedere că formarea femininului de la masculin este un proces **firesc, în spiritul limbii române**, direcția prin care s-ar putea impune formele de feminin ar fi de la norma la uz, și nu invers, cum se întâmplă în cazul altor variante normate." (Mîrzea Vasile & Dinică 2019:520)

▶ …given that the formation of the feminine from the masculine is a **natural** process, **in the spirit of the Romanian language**, the direction in which these feminine forms might impose themselves is from norm to usage, and not the other way round, as is the case of other normed variants (My translation, my emphasis)

▶ "the romantic model" (Geeraerts 2008, language as the expression of an individual identity)

II. NON-BINARY FORMS IN ROMANIAN

Recent proposals and attitudes

RECENT PROPOSALS: LGBTQIA+ organizations, gender activists

- Accept, MozaiQ (gender-inclusive guidelines on websites/social media)

- Gender Talk 2020-2021, podcast (the most detailed discussion on the linguistic inclusion of non-binary persons by LGBTQIA+ activists)

- growing presence of non-binary forms in a limited number of more mainstream publications but not in popular publications or the national media

- Such gender-inclusive proposals are only briefly mentioned on popular print or broadcast media channels, with an emphasis on their negative portrayal

- reference grammars, normative dictionaries or descriptive/prescriptive linguistic texts focused on Romanian do not take such discussions/proposals into account;

- linguistic research: Vișan, forthcoming in F. Pflazgraf, "Public Attitudes Towards Gender-Inclusive Language", Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter

RECENT PROPOSALS MEANT TO MAKE NON-BINARY PERSONS VISBILE

AGREEMENT OF PARTICIPLES, ADJECTIVES, DETERMINERS

▶ **- attaching -x to lexical roots in order to avoid –masculine and feminine forms in both the singular and the plural (the most discussed strategy regarding Romanian)**

▶ -using already existing possessive pronouns and possessive determiners that do not mark the possessor's gender in Romanian

PRONOUNS are less discussed in Romanian but recent suggestions include:

▶ -using proper names instead of pronouns

▶ -using the English pronoun **'they'** [English as a model, borrowing vs. translation]

▶ -using the neopronoun "**iel**" (spelt differently but pronounced homonymously with the masculine singular of the personal pron in Rom, *el*) [French as a model; borrowing vs. translation]

A RECENT EXAMPLE OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE, MARCH 2024

▶ „În căutarea unei forme neutre de gen în limba română, mai multe grupuri și **activistx** queer propun folosirea terminației în „x", care să înlocuiască terminațiile genizate pentru substantive, adjective sau pronume." (Istodor 2024, qtd. on Facebook by Accept, My emphasis)

▶ activist**x**= -x added to the masculine base of the Romanian noun activist (instead of the masculine plural **activiști,** employed for mixed-gender groups)

▶ In search of a gender-neutral form in Romanian, several groups of queer activistx have proposed employing the ending –x, which should replace the gendered endings of nouns, adjectives or pronouns (My translation, my emphasis)

▶ Către o limbă română mai queer? Forma neutră de gen cu terminația în „x" – Cutra

▶ (Queering Romanian? The gender-neutral form ending in –x)

A RECENT DISCUSSION, MARCH 2024

▶ Istodor 2024, in *Cutra* (a queer feminist magazine) = post shared on social media by Accept (the most prominent LGBTQIA+ association in Romania) regarding the discussion of –x as a marker of gender-inclusive language in an essay entitled "Queering Romanian? The gender-neutral form ending in –x":

▶ "Caracterul de experiment al limbajului cu „x" se reflectă și în faptul că unele persoane fie folosesc, fie sunt deschise la a folosi și alte forme care să indice neutrul. Forma cu „x" nu devine reglementată, impusă, obligatorie. Mai degrabă, putem vorbi despre un proces de explorare colectivă pentru a regândi regulile." (The **experimental** nature of the –x-base language is also illustrated by the fact that some persons either use or are open to using other gender-neutral forms. The –x form does **not** become **regulated**, **imposed**, **obligatory**. Rather, we can talk of a collective **exploration** process in order to **rethink** the rules), My translation, my emphasis

▶ exploratory nature = post-structuralist; non-heteronormative language policy; intervention on the discursive rather than on the structural linguistic level (Motschenbacher 2014)

A FOCUS ON ATTITUDES: REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

- ▶ The Accept post of Istodor 2024 = reframed as traditional language policy, as an attempt at an intervention on the structural linguistic level (see Motschenbacher 2014)

- ▶ Limba română s-ar putea schimba pentru exprimarea neutră de gen. Noile formulări de limbaj incluziv (antena3.ro) [Romanian may change in order to express gender neutrality. The new gender-inclusive forms], My translation, my emphasis

- ▶ Asociațiile LGBT cer modificarea limbii române prin introducerea formei neutre de gen cu „x" la finalul cuvintelor | Digi24 [LGBT associations demand the introduction of the –x based gender-neutral form at the end of words], My translation, my emphasis

- ▶ A news report on a popular broadcast channel, subsequently shared on Social Media:

- ▶ https://www.tiktok.com/@observatorantena1/video/7346570723424587040

("Linguists say that this change is forced, wrong, and that it has failed in other languages")

LINGUISTS' ATTITUDES: 'NATURAL' ROMANIAN

► "Lingviștii spun că modificarea e forțată, greșită și că în alte limbi a eșuat"

► (Linguists say that this change is **forced**, **wrong**, and that it has **failed** in other languages)

► Language ideology (see Irvine and Gal 2000):

► - **erasure** of the keyword "exploratory" regarding the proposal; erasure of the keyword "queer"

► - **fractal recursivity** = normative/non-normative = grammatical/ungrammatical= right/wrong

► -**iconizatation** 'not normal' language = 'not normal' group

► AN EXPERT OPINION:

► "Din punct de vedere lingvistic **este o glumă** pentru că nu putem schimba limba așa cum vrea cineva sau altcineva (...)**nu e firească, nu e normală** și din punct de vedere fonetic nici nu este posibil să rostești **așa ceva**..."(Adina Dragomirescu, the head of the Linguistics Institute of the Romanian Academy) (From a linguistic point of view **it is a joke** because you cannot change language as this person or that person might want (...) it's **not natural, not normal**, and from a phonetic point of view it is not even possible to utter **such a thing**..., My translation, my emphasis)

CONCLUSIONS

▶ More feminine forms for role nouns are gaining currency in the formal register >> Normative dictionaries and the national media (standardization; verbal hygiene)

▶ The proponents of non-binary forms in Romanian stress the "exploratory", "experimental" nature of their proposals (post-structuralist position, non-heteronormative language policy)

▶ Non-binary forms are not only not taken into account but represented by leading specialists (most of them formed in the structuralist tradition in Romania), policy makers or the mainstream media as **"unnatural", "ungrammatical", "forced" or as "ideologically motivated"**

▶ Yet modern 'autonomous' linguistic models taken to be 'natural' are based on similar ideological mechanisms to those that underlie normative/prescriptive concerns (see Woolard 1998)

▶ It becomes essential to examine the labels and keywords in reference grammars that are taken as repositories of 'established' linguistic facts

FURTHER RESEARCH

▶ **Need for research concerning Romanian attitudes to and ideologies concerning gender-inclusive language**

▶ **Need to focus on 'translation' and 'cultural appropriation' dimensions (Romanian/English; Romanian/French; Romanian/Romance languages)**

▶ **Need for corpus research**

  ▶ - a focus on diachrony

  ▶ - a focus on register differences

  ▶ - varieties of Romanian (Romanian vs. Moldovan Romanian)

▶ **Need for more experimental research focussing on:**

  - the effects on speakers of the masculine that reference grammars label as 'unmarked'

  - pair forms and their effects on speakers

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