

Universitatea din București

**TEORIE ȘI METODĂ  
ÎN SINTAXA COMPARATĂ**

– Teză de abilitare în domeniul Filologie –

**Alexandru-Cosmin NICOLAE**

Conferențiar universitar doctor

*Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea din București*

Cercetător științific III doctor

*Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti”,*

*Academia Română*

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**Abstract (English)**

## **Theory and Method in Comparative Syntax**

A habilitation thesis in the domain of *Philology*,

submitted by Dr. Alexandru-Cosmin Nicolae

Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Bucharest

and

Researcher at the “Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti” Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian  
Academy

This habilitation thesis is devoted to the theoretical and methodological aspects related to the study of comparative syntax, with a focus on my individual and joint research projects. As comparative syntactic investigation has been on the research agenda for more than half a century, the literature and the thematic diversity of this domain are impossible to cover in an individual work as the one presented here. As such, the structure of my thesis reflects the main issues in the field of comparative syntax to which I have contributed from a theoretical, methodological or empirical perspective.

This thesis is structured into five chapters with a heterogeneous structure, accompanied by a corpus of historical sources, a special bibliography comprising my books, articles and chapters which are cross-referenced in the thesis, three appendices (Appendix 1 – Contributions to school grammar, descriptive and prescriptive grammar; Appendix 2 – Teaching activity; Appendix 3 – (Short term) activities and objectives), my academic profile as reflected by Google Scholar and the Romanian database *diacronia.ro*, and the list of abbreviations, symbols and conventions.

As stated, the five chapters of the thesis have a heterogeneous structure. In the first three chapters, my contributions to this field are preceded by a sketch of the status quo of the research theme discussed; the last two chapters actually represent a report of my research activity in two important areas of concern for comparative syntax:

variation in the nominal domain (chapter 4) and diachronic syntactic variation (chapter 5).

Chapter 1 (*Comparative syntax: preliminary issues*) lays out the objectives of comparative syntax, the main concepts employed in this discipline (*Universal Grammar*, principles, parameters, accidental variation, etc.) and the main methods of analysis in comparative syntactic study, each illustrated with relevant parameters. As personal contributions, I have included here (i) a discussion about how to construct reliable syntactic diagnostics and (ii) a conceptual distinction between *deep structural properties* and *surface analogy*, which I formulated in my 2019 monograph on *Word Order and Parameter Change in Romanian*.

The first part of chapter 2 (*The verb movement parameter*) interweaves the progress of generative grammar in continuously refining clausal structure with the parametric options available in the world's languages. Thus, languages are analysed both from a macrotypological perspective (V-to-C (V2) / V-to-I / V-to-*v*) and from the point of view of the different verb-movement microtypologies discussed in the literature (e.g. the fine-grained V-to-I movement options of the Romance languages; V2 grammars). The second part discusses my personal contributions to this theme: verb movement in modern Romanian; verb movement in analytic structures; the residual relaxed V2 grammar of old Romanian; low verb movement in old Romanian; complex predicates in the Romance languages.

Chapter 3 (*The head directionality parameter*) has a similar structure. I first make a sketch of the main issues concerning this theme: head directionality as the property of a system or of a given structure?, syntactic diagnostics for head-initiality / head-finality, and theoretical approaches to the head directionality parameter. I then highlight my contribution to this topic, which mainly consists in the identification of head final structures and discontinuous constituents in old Romanian; following recent literature (Ledgeway's work), I show not only that the existence of discontinuous constituents in a given grammar is the effect of the existence of head final structures in the respective grammar, but also that Romanian provides a missing

(empirical) link for understanding the steps by which constituents undergo left-branch extraction from DPs.

Chapter 4 (*Parameters of variation in the nominal domain*) focuses on my own research in this area. I present here my personal contributions to this field, and while there is no overall theoretical presentation of the issues of interest for syntactic variation in the nominal domain (due to the vastness of the research carried out since Abney's formulation of *the DP-hypothesis*), the themes discussed are placed in a perspective and their relevance is highlighted. The following themes are presented in this chapter: the syntax of definite DPs (the nature of the Romanian enclitic article; the two definite articles of Romanian; the *definiteness* parameter), the grammar of the genitive (a typology of Romanian genitival constructions; the nature of the possessive-genitival marker *al*), the internal structure of pronouns/pronominal DPs, and the synthetic-analytic parameter.

Before discussing my personal contributions to the field, in the beginning of chapter 5 (*Diachrony as a source of syntactic variation*) I make a plea for considering diachronic syntax one of the important subfields of comparative syntax (along with microvariation and other subfields). I argue that "the comparison of successive stages of the same language considerably reduces the variables that need to be controlled for (just like the comparison of closely related languages and dialects advocated in microcomparative syntax, see Kayne 2013), thus increasing the prospect of setting up valid correlations and generalizations" (*Preface to Word Order and Parameter Change in Romanian*). The themes discussed here are the following: major word order changes in the passage from old to modern Romanian, grammaticalization in the verbal domain (the grammaticalization of auxiliaries; the grammaticalization of the motion verb *veni* 'come'; the grammaticalization of a constraint on reflexive passives), clitic positions in old Romanian, and syntactic change and grammaticalization in the nominal domain (the low definite article construction, the diachronic specialization of demonstratives, the grammaticalization of the article *cel*, noun raising, and nominal ellipsis *vs* substantivization).