A corpus study of the Romanian periphrasis *a fi pe cale*

The main goal of this paper is to show, based on a corpus study, that the so called progressive periphrasis *a fi pe cale* 'to be on the way / to be about' in Romanian (which is a suppletive periphrasis, cf. Haspelmath 2000's criteria) is in fact a polysemantic aspectual marker, expressing three aspectual meanings: the **avertive** (1a), the **proximative** (1b) and the **progressive** (1c).

(1) a. Încă o butelie de gaz **a fost pe cale să explodeze** în capitală.
  'Another gaz cylinder **was on the verge of explosing** in the capital.'
  b. Ea își dorea să îl poată ruga să mai rămână câteva zile, dar [...] fetele ei **erau pe cale să sosească**.
  'She wanted to be able to ask him to stay a few days, but [...] her daughters **were about to arrive**.'
  c. Toți vorbesc și românește, **fiind pe cale de a se româniza**.
  'All of them speak Romanian too, **being going to become** Romanian.' (roTenTen16)

Avertivity is a complex grammatical category – recently discovered and highlighted for Australian, Amazonian and Papua New Guinea languages (Aikhenvald 2014) – which, unlike simple grammatical categories, involves not a single, but all three domains of TAM (Kuteva 1998, 1999) : namely, **aspectuality** - *imminence*, **temporality** - *pastness*, **modality** - *counterfactuality*. Unlike avertivity, the **proximative** is a purely aspectual gram which refers to the pre-phase of the event, denoting the imminence (Kuteva 1998), wheareas the **progressive** is a subcategory of the imperfective aspect, denoting an incomplete situation (Comrie 1976).

The interplay between these different meanings has never been explored for this periphrasis, which is very frequent in Romanian ; therefore, this is the first quantitative and qualitative corpus study on the Romanian construction *a fi pe cale*, which enables us to describe in detail the understudied grammatical category of avertivity, among other categories.

As we are interested both in syncronic and diachronic analysis, our data are extracted from: (i) roTenTen16 corpus (almost 2.6 billion words; delivered by Sketch Engine) for the syncronic perspective; and (i) an electronic collection of texts made available by the Romanian Academy, for the diachronic perspective. We manually annotated all our extracted data for various parameters: morphosyntactic (*auxiliary time* and *mood*, *perfectivity* vs. *imperfectivity*, etc.), semantic (*Aktionsart, dynamicity, scalarity, telicity, animacy, negative lexemes*, etc.), and pragmatic parameters (*presence* vs. *absence of implicatures, cancellability* vs. *reinforcement of the counterfactual implicature*, etc.).

We resume some of our preliminary results from this corpus study:
(i) The diachronic corpus was essential for undersanding the dynamic evolution of the Ro. *a fi pe cale*; this is a recent periphrasis, its aspectual meanings appear at the first half of the 20th century and show an evolution path from the proximative to the avertive.
(ii) The perfectivity vs. imperfectivity criterion allows us to observe that the avertive is not restricted to the perfective use in Romanian.
(iii) According to Aktionsart, we observe that the progressive meaning (which is the classical label for this kind of periphrasis) has low frequency in our corpus and is restricted to durative non-agentive verbs.
(iv) As for the proximative meaning, the periphrasis a *fi pe cale* combines with ponctual events (including those expressing a change of state).

Selected references

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