

ON RECENT *-BIL* DERIVATIVES IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract. The paper investigates a corpus of 72 recent *-bil* derivatives, used mainly in contemporary Romanian journalese (Croitor 2021). The paper shows that *-bil* adjectives in Romanian fall into two categories: fully eventive adjectives, characterized by the presence of by-phrases and/or adverbial event modifiers and fully stative adjectives, simply indicating a property of the referent (Oltra-Massuet 2013). A second result of the analysis is the fact that the boundary between the two identified classes is blurry, in the sense that *-bil* adjectives actually form a continuum from eventive adjectives to fully stative *-bil* adjectives (Wasak 2021). Thirdly, the productivity of *-bil* can be explained by means of usefulness, fashion, and nameability (Plag 2002).

Keywords: *-bil* adjectives; eventive adjectives; productivity; stative adjectives.

1. Introduction

Starting from an investigation of the corpus in Croitor (2021), which consists of recent suffixal derivatives in Romanian journalese, the paper argues that recent *-bil* derivatives in Romanian fall into two categories. One category designates eventive *-bil* adjectives, such as *parodiabil* 'parodiabile', while the second category designates stative adjectives, such as *instagramabil* 'instagrammable'.

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According to one of the most influential analyses of the *-ble* suffix in English recently, i.e., Oltra-Massuet 2013, the two categories can be distinguished by means of the possibility of licensing *by*-phrases and adverbial modifiers for eventive adjectives, and modification with ‘*very*’ for stative adjectives (see also Wasak 2021).

If one applies the two syntactic diagnostics to the Romanian corpus of *-bil* adjectives, it is immediately observable that, on the one hand, eventive *-bil* adjectives license adverbial modifiers (1), and stative *-bil* adjectives allow modification with *foarte* ‘*very*’ (2), on the other hand, as well as the superlative (3):

- (1) ... îl _____ face _____ pe Jung lesne *parodiabil*
 (Croitor 2022: 333).
 ... (it) CL.ACC.MASC.SG makes DOM Jung easily parody-ble
 ‘This makes Jung easily parodiable’
- (2) un alt _____ reel foarte *instagramabil*²
 a another reel very Instagram-ble
 ‘another instagramable reel’
- (3) Cele mai *instagramabile* restaurante din București³
 DEF more Instagram-ble restaurants from Bucharest
 ‘The most instagramable restaurants in Bucharest’.

The investigation of the corpus in Croitor (2021) reveals that most recent *-bil* derivatives in Romanian fall in the category of stative adjectives. However, many stative *-bil* derivatives may be coerced into having an eventive interpretation by turning the implicit external argument (see Roeper 1987), i.e., the *by*-phrase, into an overt one. For instance, in (1), the implicit argument can be made explicit by adding a *by*-phrase like ‘by anyone’. This seems to suggest that *-bil* adjectives form a continuum from eventive *-bil* adjectives to fully stative *-bil* adjectives.

² <https://www.instagram.com/mirrelevant1/>

³ <https://www.restograf.ro/cele-mai-instagramabile-restaurante-din-bucuresti/>

The paper is organized as follows: section 2. offers some theoretical background on adjectives derived with the *-ble* suffix in English and crosslinguistically; section 3. offers details about recently coined *-bil* adjectives in Romanian and proposes an analysis in terms of both syntactic tests and pragma-semantic interpretation; section 4. summarizes the main findings and gives some conclusions.

2. Background

Starting with the seminal work of Aronoff (1976), the literature on English suffixation has acknowledged that there are two types of *-ble* adjectives in English: a more idiosyncratic and often lexicalized *-ble*, e.g. *edible*, *reparable*, and a regular and transparent *-ble*, e.g. *eatable*, *repairable* (see also Wasak 2021).

Aronoff (1976) interpreted this distinction as indicative of the existence of two suffixes, a root-based *-ble* and a word-based *-ble*. In turn, Kayne (1981) assumed that the regular and transparent *-ble* would apply to roots in the syntactic component, while idiosyncratic *-ble* adjectives are created in the lexicon (see also Chapin 1967; Fabb 1984). In the same line of investigation, Volpe (2005) claims that regular *-ble* adjectives contain a verbalizing head (and consequently represent the domain of syntax), while idiosyncratic, lexicalized *-ble* adjectives lack such a verbalizing head (and are consequently formed in the lexicon).

Capitalizing on what has been said so far, *-ble* adjectives in English can be safely assumed to fall into two categories. Following Oltra-Massuet (2013) and Wasak (2021), these categories can be called high *-ble* adjectives and low *-ble* adjectives.

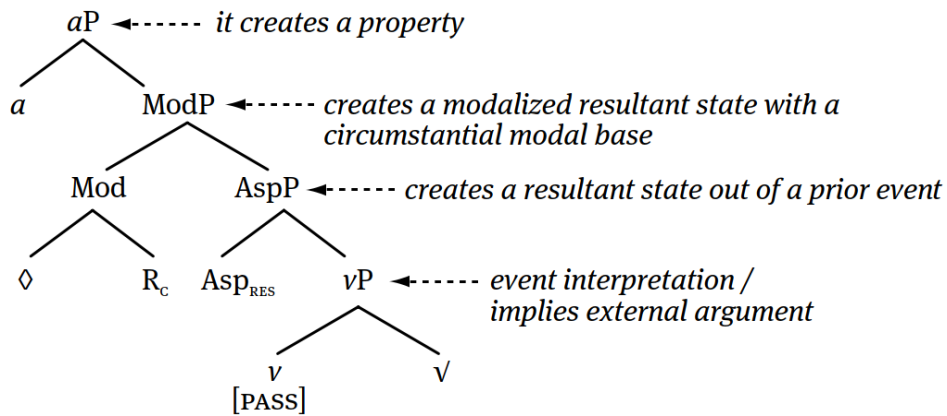
High *-ble* adjectives have an event reading, manifested by their ability of license by-phrases (3):

- (3) a. That is *deniable* by any intelligent person. (high *-ble*)
- b. This program is easily *modifiable* by the user. (high *-ble*)
- c. *That is not *available* by minors. (low *-ble*)
- d. *This room is easily *comfortable*. (low *-ble*) (Wasak 2021:160).

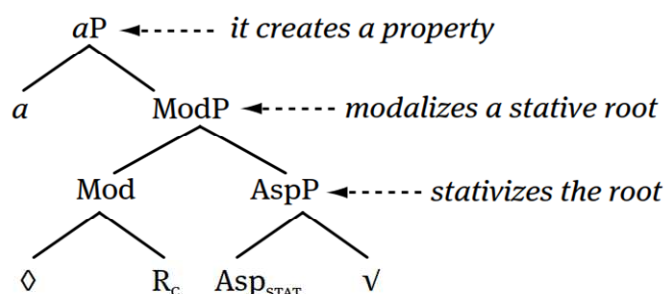
Low *-ble* adjectives have a stative interpretation, manifested by their ability to accept modification by *very* (4):

- (4) a. *very translatable/modifiable/obtainable (high *-ble*)
 b. very tolerable/perceptible/comfortable (low *-ble*).

High *-ble* adjectives (or potential, i.e. expressing possibility, such as *modifiable* or *translatable*) are derived in a regular fashion from a transitive verb. These adjectives have eventive properties in the sense that they can license a number of verbal-related phrases, thus containing more functional structure (Oltra-Massuet 2013: 18).



Low *-ble* adjectives are characterized by idiosyncratic properties, which may be semantic or morphological. According to Oltra-Massuet (2013), the group consists of adjectives which express a modality that differs from the regular possibility encountered with high *-ble* adjectives (necessity rather than possibility), as in *deplorable* or *admirable*. The group also contains adjectives that show some morphophonological irregularity, such as stress shift, as in *compáre* – *cómparable*, or root allomorphy, as in *apply* – *applicable* (Oltra-Massuet 2013: 19).



(Oltra-Massuet 2013: 19)

According to more recent investigations of the behaviour of the two types of *-ble* adjectives, such as Wasak (2021), English has a range of *-ble* adjectives which appear to share the features of both high and low *-ble* adjectives. As Table 1 shows (from Wasak 2021), highly lexicalized high *-ble* formations (*predictable*, *doable*) are often used with the prepositions *to* or *for* (rather than *by*) and they also accept *very* more readily than *easily* (Wasak 2021):

Table 1

Context frequency for *predictable*, *doable* and *discoverable*

	total COCA occurrences	<i>-ble</i> + <i>to/for</i>	<i>-ble</i> + <i>by</i> ¹	<i>very</i> + <i>-ble</i>	<i>easily</i> + <i>-ble</i>
<i>predictable</i>	8908	33	18	183	27
<i>doable</i>	1476	36	16	67	8
<i>discoverable</i>	235	2	19	1	12

Wasak (2021: 160)

On the other hand, *-ble* adjectives such as *forgettable*, *questionable*, or *palatable*, are possible with both *very* and *easily* but not with *by*-phrases:

- (5) a. The conflict was *very/easily forgettable* (??by everyone).
 b. The argument is not *very/easily questionable* (??even by the greatest doubters).
 c. This music is not *very/easily palatable* (??by the listener) (Wasak 2021: 161).

Therefore, it seems that *-ble* adjectives in English form a continuum ranging from eventive *-ble* adjectives with very few adjectival features (*discoverable*) to fully stative *-ble* adjectives (*comfortable*). The aim of the following section is to take a look at recent *-bil* derivatives in Romanian and try to determine whether they form a continuum from the eventive to the fully stative adjectives.

3. *-bil* Adjectives in Romanian

-bil derivatives have benefited from solid lexical research in Romanian (for a comprehensive overview of the most relevant discussions of *-bil* derivatives in Romanian, see Chircu 2017).

As shown in Rădulescu-Sala (2015), the Latin suffix *-bilis*, corresponding to Modern Romanian *-bil*, was not inherited as such in Romanian; it was, however, reconstructed in the 19th century from the French and Italian *-ble* and *-bile* borrowings, respectively (see also Zafiu 2023). Some of these borrowings were not analyzable because the base of the derivation process was missing in Romanian; most of the borrowings were, however, transparent, Romanian having borrowed both the base and the affix (such as *a anula* ‘to annul’ – *anulabil* ‘annullable’, see Zafiu 2023). The suffix broke away from the analyzable borrowings and became very productive starting with the 19th century. Rădulescu-Sala (2015) shows that the derivation of new words using *-bil* started in the 19th century and reached peak productivity in the 20th century.

At present, Romanian registers three types of *-bil* adjectives: borrowings (French *capable* – Romanian *capabil* ‘capable’, see Zafiu 2023, English *customizable* – Romanian *customizabil*, see Chircu 2017: 300), calques (*citibil* ‘readable’), and derivatives. It is this last category that the analysis now turns to, aiming to show that *-bil* derivatives fall into two categories: eventive and stative.

3.1. *The Corpus*

The Croitor (2021) corpus consists of 1600 new derivatives (with various suffixes), which were collected from different internet sites between 2015

and 2020. The derivatives registered by the corpus are listed alphabetically; each entry contains the sense(s) of the derivatives, a few examples, morphological and etymological information. The methodology I employed for the purposes of the paper involved drawing up a list of 72 *-bil* derivatives, followed by the extraction of the syntactic tests mentioned in the present section.

Unambiguously eventive *-bil* derivatives in the corpus are distinguished by means of two main diagnostic tests: the presence of the external argument, i.e. the *by*-phrase (6) and the presence of time and manner adverbials, i.e. event modifiers (7) – (14).

(6) trebuie să fii *gășibil* de oricine
(you) must SBJV be find-ble by anyone
'you must be findable by anyone'

(7) garsonieră *ocupabilă* imediat
studio habit-ble immediately
'a studio you can move into on the spot'

(8) e perfect *arestabilă* pe loc
(she) is perfectly arrest-ble on place
'She is perfectly arrestable on the spot'

(9) *tranzacționabil* de Paște
transaction-ble of Easter
'marketable on Easter'

(10) greu *algoritmizabil*
tough algorithm-ble
'difficult to be algorithmized'

(11) *decodabil* fără dificultate
decode-ble without difficulty
'easily decodable'

- (12) foarte puțin *dezvoltabil*
 very little develop-ble
 ‘developable to a little extent’
- (13) lesne *parodiabil*
 easily parody-ble
 ‘easily parodiabile’
- (14) jazz uneori *dansabil* / un track perfect *dansabil*
 jazz sometimes dance-ble / a track perfectly dance-ble
 ‘jazz that one can sometimes dance to / a track that one can perfectly dance to’
 (Croitor 2021)

Unambiguously stative *-bil* derivatives are distinguished by means of five syntactic tests: the presence of adjectival modification, i.e. *foarte* ‘very’ (15), being part of a series of adjectives (16), the presence of gender and number agreement (17), occurrence in predicative position, which is indicative of the property denotation (18), and occurrence in a typically scalar environment, which is also indicative of an interpretation in terms of property-denotation (see Tănase-Dogaru 2008) (19):

- (15) foarte *angajabil*
 very hire-ble
 ‘very eligible’
- (16) a. *replicabil*, sexy, vizibil
 replica-ble, sexy, visible
 ‘replicable, sexy, visible’
 b. sistem *codificabil*, *exprimabil* și evenimential
 system codify-ble, express-ble and eventive
 ‘a codifiable, expressable and eventive system’
- (17) a. păduri *replantabile*
 forests.FEM replant-ble.FEM.PL
 ‘re-plantable forests’

- b. versiunea *asociabilă*
version.FEM.DEF associable.FEM
'the associable version'
- c. concurență *atestabilă*
competition.FEM attestable.FEM
'attestable competition'
- d. construcții *demolabile*
constructions.FEM demolish-ble.FEM.PL
'constructions that are ready to be pulled down'
- e. documente *descărcabile*
documents.FEM download-ble.FEM
'downloadable documents'
- (18) a. acestea sunt *armonizabile*
These.FEM are harmonize-ble.FEM
'these are harmonizable'
- b. aportul lor este *chestionabil*
contribution.DEF their is questionable
'their contribution is questionable'
- c. vei fi *contactabil*
(you) will be contact-ble
'you will be contactable'
- d. DNA devine *desființabil*
DNA becomes dismantle-ble
'DNA becomes abolishable'
- (19) cât de *customizabil* e OS-ul Google?
how of customize-ble is OS-DEF Google?
'How customizable is the Google OS?'

Similarly, the list in (20) contains stative *-bil* derivatives:

- (20) *digitalizabil* 'digitalize-ble' / *dispersabil* 'disperse-ble' / *distractibil*
'distract-ble' / *echivalabil* 'equate-ble' / *editabil* 'edit-ble' / *efectuabil*
'effect-ble' / *etichetabil* 'label-ble' / *factibil* 'fact-ble' / *făcubil* 'do-ble' /
formulabil 'formulate-ble' / *fraudabil* 'fraud-ble' / *grațiabil* 'pardon-ble' /

habitabil ‘habit-ble’ / *implementabil* ‘implement-ble’ / *instagramabil* ‘instagram-ble’ / *indeplinibil* ‘achieve-able’ / *mituibil* ‘bribe-able’ / *omologabil* ‘approve-ble’ / *parașutabil* ‘parachute-ble’ / *pozabil* ‘photo-ble’ / *premiabil* ‘award-ble’ / *prevenibil* ‘prevent-ble’ / *reabilitabil* ‘rehabilitate-ble’ / *revizuibil* ‘review-ble’ / *rezervabil* ‘reserve-ble’ / *sanctificabil* ‘sanctify-ble’ / *speculabil* ‘speculate-ble’ / *standardizabil* ‘standardize-ble’ / *suspendabil* ‘suspend-ble’ / *șantajabil* ‘blackmail-ble’ / *trăibil* ‘live-ble’ / *uitabil* ‘forget-ble’ / *vopsibil* ‘paint-ble’ / *zugrăvibil* ‘paint-ble’ (Croitor 2021).

A great many of the stative *-bil* adjectives can be turned into eventive ones by adding the implicit agent (in the sense of Roeper 1987) (see example (6), repeated here for convenience as (21)):

- (21) *trebuie să fii gășibil de oricine* (Croitor 2021: 142)
 (you) must SBJV be find-ble by anyone
 ‘you must be findable by anyone’.

I take this to be indicative of the fact that *-bil* adjectives are arranged on a cline, from fully eventive (characterized by the presence of the *by*-phrase and/or adverbial event modifiers) to fully stative (simply indicating a property of the referent). It is however clear that most *-bil* adjectives migrate towards the fully stative end of the continuum.

The same can be seen in the case of the adjectives in (22), what I call the ‘lovable’ type.

- (22) a. *iubibil*⁴
 love-ble
 ‘loveable’
 b. *giugiulibil*⁵
 smooch-ble
 ‘smoochable’

⁴ <https://dictionar-urban.ro/termen/iubibil>

⁵ <https://jurnalul.ro/cultura/muzica/dan-teodorescu-iubibila-inseamna-sa-fii-mangaibil-a-giugiulibila-si-alintabila-615398.html>

- c. *alintabil*⁶
pamper-ble
'pamperable'
- d. *mângâiabil*⁷
carress-ble
'carressable'
- e. *îmbrățișabil*⁸
hug-ble
'hugable'
- f. *pupabil*⁹
kiss-ble
'kissable'.

This section has shown that a number of syntactic criteria can be employed in order to classify *-bil* adjectives in Romanian. Eventive *-bil* adjectives are distinguished by their ability to be modified by time and place adverbials, as well as by the presence of the external argument, which surfaces in the syntax as a by-phrase. Stative *-bil* adjectives are identified by means of the presence of adjectival modification, i.e. *foarte* 'very', the presence of gender and number agreement, occurrence in predicative position, and occurrence in a typically scalar environment, the last of which are indicative of an interpretation in terms of property-denotation. It has also been shown that *-bil* adjectives are arranged on a continuum from fully eventive to fully stative, while stative *-bil* adjectives can be coerced into having an eventive interpretation by means of making the implicit agent overt. The next section aims at offering a tentative explanation as to the productivity of *-bil* adjective in contemporary Romanian.

⁶ <https://jurnalul.ro/cultura/muzica/dan-teodorescu-iubibila-inseamna-sa-fii-mangaibil-a-giugiulibila-si-alintabila-615398.html>

⁷ <https://jurnalul.ro/cultura/muzica/dan-teodorescu-iubibila-inseamna-sa-fii-mangaibil-a-giugiulibila-si-alintabila-615398.html>

⁸ <https://tiniminitoys.ro/flamingo-gigant-din-plus-melissa-doug.html>

⁹ https://www.instagram.com/p/B9odt_HnQ2J/

3.2. More on the Productivity of Romanian *-bil*

As argued throughout, *-bil* is very productive in contemporary Romanian (especially *journalese*). Plag (2002: 55-57) defines the concept of productivity as being the property of an affix to be used to create new complex words. The notion is related to the speaker's ability to form novel forms which do not violate word-formation rules. With respect to the problem of how complex words are stored in the mental lexicon, *frequency* has a significant role: highly frequent forms (regular or not) are stored as "whole words" ("the whole route" model (23a)). Infrequent complex words are stored by individual subcomponents (the 'decomposition route' 23b) (Plag 2002: 61).

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| (23) a. [ək'septəb(ə)l] | b. ['aktəbəl] |
| <i>acceptable</i> | <i>actable</i> |
| whole word route | decomposition route |
| acceptable | act-able |

In the view of Plag (2002), the productivity of newly-coined words is restricted by three main factors: nameability, usefulness, and fashion. It is readily observable that new *-bil* derivatives in Romanian observe the nameability requirement (Plag 2002: 73-78), in the sense that *-bil* encodes simple and general concepts: "which can be X-ed". It is therefore one of the preferred suffixes for new coinages especially in *journalese*.

Usefulness basically refers to economy principles (see also Vochița 2021). Again, it is easily observable that recent *-bil* derivatives are economical (24):

- (24) a. *spălabil*
washable ("which can be washed") (Chircu 2017: 296)
- b. *ștergibil*
deleble ("which can be deleted") (Chircu 2017: 296)
- c. *prăjibil*
fryable ("which can be fried") (Chircu 2017: 297).

As for the fashion requirement, *-bil* is favoured by contemporary Romanian journalese precisely because it is ‘fashionable’, as the examples in (25-27) point out:

- (25) Cioloş se vrea *prezidenţiabil*. Fritz e mai bun?¹⁰
 Cioloş REFL wants president-ble. Fritz is more good?
 ‘Cioloş wants to become president. Is Fritz better?’
- (26) Ştefan Mandachi cere să fie arestată *puşcăriabila* de Budeanca.¹¹
 Ştefan Mandachi asks SBJV be arrested prison-ble of Budeanu.FEM
 ‘Ştefan Mandachi asks that the prison-worthy of Budeanu should be arrested’
- (27) Logitech a lansat un mouse *tunabil*¹²
 Logitech has launched a mouse tune-ble.
 ‘Logitech has launched a tunable mouse.’

This section has looked at the productivity of *-bil* adjectives in contemporary Romanian. It has been shown that Romanian journalism and social media favor *-bil* adjectives due to their being economical and ‘fashionable’.

4. Conclusions

The paper has looked at a corpus of 72 recent *-bil* derivatives, used mainly in contemporary Romanian journalese. It has shown that *-bil* adjectives in Romanian fall into two categories: fully eventive adjectives (characterized by the presence of the *by*-phrase and/or adverbial event modifiers) and fully stative (simply indicating a property of the referent). A second result of the analysis is that *-bil* adjectives form a continuum from

¹⁰ dw.com.ro., <https://www.dw.com/ro/ciolo%C8%99-se-vrea-preziden%C8%9Biabilfritz-e-mai-bun-%C8%99i-de-cine-ar-mai-trebuie-s%C4%83-se-team%C4%83/a-56683802>

¹¹ stirileromanilor.ro, <https://stirileromanilor.ro/stefan-mandachi-cere-sa-fie-arestata-pu-scariabila-de-budeanca-borfasa-asta-frustrata-pentru-laturile-vomitatie-zilnic/>

¹² www.curierulnational.ro/15.04.2015, in Chircu (2017: 299)

eventive adjectives to fully stative *-bil* adjectives. Thirdly, the productivity of *-bil* can be explained by means of *usefulness*, *fashion*, and *nameability*.

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