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ROMANIAN GLOSSONYMS: PROPER NAMES OF LANGUAGES AND (SILENT) CLASSIFIERS

Abstract. The paper investigates Romanian proper names of languages, referred to throughout as glossonyms, and proposes a tripartite classification of such constructions. The first category of Romanian glossonyms is represented by structures of the type *limba română* / language.DEF.FEM Romanian.FEM / 'Romanian language', for which the paper proposes an analysis in terms of complex proper names (van Riemsdijk 1998; Cornilescu 2007), where *limba* 'language' functions as a classifier. The second category of Romanian glossonyms consists of complex proper names with covert classifiers, of the type *LIMBA română* / LANGUAGE Romanian / 'Romanian'. Finally, the third category is represented by *-ește* glossonyms, where the (nominalizing) suffix is syntactically active, signaling the presence of the same covert classifier. In the latter category, two other points are made in the paper. First, where ambiguity arises between two interpretations of *-ește* derivatives, i.e. the *like X* and the *language X* interpretations, two prepositions serve the purpose of disambiguation: *în* 'in' and *pe* 'on'. Second, the same prepositions are used to encode a temporally-bounded interpretation of the speaking event, as opposed to a generic / habitual one in the absence of the prepositions.

Keywords: glossonyms, complex proper names, classifiers, Romanian

1. Introduction

The central focus of the present paper is represented by proper names of languages in Romanian. Names of languages are usually referred to in

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the literature as glossonyms, glottonyms, or linguonyms. I will refer to names of languages throughout the paper as glossonyms. The different types of Romanian glossonyms are illustrated in (1) to (3).

(1) a. Vorbește *limba* *engleză*.
Speak.PRES.3SG language.FEM English.FEM
'(s)he speaks English'
b. Vorbește în *limba* *engleză*.
Speak.PRES.3SG. in language.FEM English.FEM
'(s)he is speaking English'

(1) is an example of a classified proper names, i.e. the glossonym *engleză* 'English' is used together with its classifier *limba* 'language', in a structure known as 'complex proper name' (see Cornilescu 2007; Tănase-Dogaru 2013). While (1a) is a generic/habitual sentence, (1b), which features the preposition *în* 'in', predicates a stage-level property, thus roughly corresponding to the English progressive.

The same contrast between individual-level and stage-level properties is exemplified in (2), but this time the classifier *limba* 'language' is non-overt, i.e. silent.

(2) a. Vorbește *engleză*.
Speak.PRES.3SG English.FEM
'(S)he speaks English'
b. Vorbește în *engleză*.
Speak.PRES.3SG. in English.FEM
'She is speaking English'

By far the most intriguing Romanian glossonyms are however those illustrated in (3). The constructions in (3) feature what is traditionally considered to be an adverbial suffix, i.e. *-ește*, which is generally paraphrased as 'in the manner of', 'like X' (see 4). However, in the case of glossonyms, the suffix *-ește* behaves like a nominal suffix and the derivatives themselves act as nominals (see also Chircu 2008).

(3) a. Vorbește *englezește*.
Speak.PRES.3SG English.ește
'(S)he speaks English'
b. Vorbește în *englezește*.
Speak.PRES.3SG in English.ește
'She is speaking English'

(4) A luptat *vitejește* / A intrat *hoțește*
Has fought hero.ește / Has entered thief.ește
'(S)he fought like a hero' / '(S)he entered like a thief'.

The central focus of the paper falls on constructions such as the ones exemplified in (3). The paper argues that, while constructions such as (1) and (2) contain a complex proper name, where the classifier is either overt, as in (1), or silent, as in (2), *-ește* glossonyms are structures where the suffix signals the presence of the silent classifier, while the suffix itself is syntactically active.

The paper is organized as follows. Section **2.** offers some theoretical background related to Romanian glossonyms. Section **3.** discusses structures of the type complex proper names, with overt and silent classifiers. Section **4.** focuses in on *-ește* glossonyms and proposes a syntactic analysis. Section **5.** gives the conclusions.

2. Background. Romanian glossonyms

The aim of this section is to offer some background on Romanian (complex) proper names of languages, i.e. glossonyms. Section ***2.1*** discusses complex glossonyms involving an overt classifier. Section **2.2** looks at the syntactic structure of glossonyms involving a silent classifier, which will prove instrumental for the understanding of the behavior of *-ește* glossonyms in discussed in section **3**.

As already pointed out in the introductory section, Romanian glossonyms fall into three categories. The first category contains complex proper names of languages, where the classifier head is filled with lexical material, i.e. the overt classifier *limba* 'language' (5):

(5) a. *Limba* *engleză*
Language.DEF.FEMEnglish.FEM
a depășit-o
has overpowered.CL.FEM.ACC
cu mult pe cea franceză[2]
with much DOM DEF.FEM French.FEM
'English has overpowered French by far'.
b. Învață primele cuvinte
Learn.IMP first. PL.NEUTwords.PL.NEUT
în *limba* *engleză*[3]
in language.DEF.FEM English.FEM
'Learn your first words in English'.

The second category is represented by those glossonyms which do not contain overt lexical material in the classifier head (6):

(6) a. Doctor către pacienta care vorbește *rusa* […][4]
Doctor to pacient.DEF who speaks Russian.DEF
'Doctor to pacient who speaks Russian'
b. Doctorul care i-a reproșat
Doctor.DEF who CL.DAT.SG-has reproached
unei paciente că vorbește în *rusă* […][5]
a.DAT pacient that speak.PRES.3SG in Russian
'The doctor who blamed a patient for speaking Russian…'.

The third category contains glossonyms in *-ește* (7). According to the literature on Romanian glossonyms, it is the oldest way of expressing names of languages (see for instance Mîrzea Vasile 2012). More will be said about this in section **3**.

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[2] https://ibani.stirileprotv.ro/international/engleza-araba-sau-chineza-care-sunt-cele-mai-vorbite-limbi-de-pe-glob.html.

[3] https://carturesti.ro/info/100-de-cuvinte-in-limba-engleza-857189672?lang=en-US.

[4] https://realitatea.md/video-doctor-catre-pacienta-care-vorbeste-rusa-vreau-sa-iau-un-kalasnikov-si-sa-trag-reactia-spitalului-republican/.

[5] https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/doctorul-care-i-a-reprosat-unei-paciente-ca-vorbeste-in-rusa-a-fost-trimis-la-cursuri-de-etica-medicala-/32539335.html.

(7) a. Ne vorbește *franțuzește*[6]
Us speak.PRES.3SG French-ește
'(S)he speaks French to us'
b. Se vorbește în *franțuzește* și *englezește*[7]
REFL speak.PRES.3SG in French-ește and English-ește
'They speak French and English'

Having illustrated the three categories of glossonyms in Romanian, the next section will analyze the first category, i.e. complex proper names with an overt classifier head.

3. Complex proper names of languages

This section looks at the syntactic structure of glossonyms of the type in (5) and proposes that the syntactic structure of these glossonyms consists of a classifier – noun sequence, closely mirroring the structure of complex proper names (Cornilescu 2007; Tănase-Dogaru 2013).

The analysis likens glossonyms such as those in (5) to nominal constructions of the type in (8), which are known in the literature as restrictive appositives, qualificational nouns, descriptive proper names, complex proper names, qualitative classifiers (van Riemsdijk 199; Löbel 2001; Cornilescu 2007), in that both types of nominal constructions contain an overt qualitative classifier in the syntactic make-up (Cornilescu 2007; Tănase-Dogaru 2008, 2013).

(8) a. Profesorul Ionescu
professor.DEF Ionescu
'Professor Ionescu'

[6] https://istoriafilmului.ro/articol/primii-35-de-ani-ai-filmului-francez-cand-filmul-inca-nu-vorbeste/.

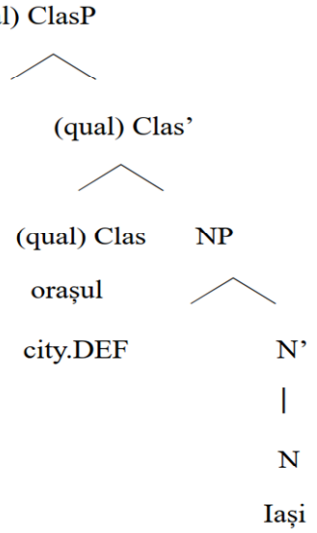
[7] https://www.incorectpolitic.com/luptatorii-anticomunisti-din-muntii-fagaras-asasinati-pe-14-15-octombrie-atacati-a-doua-oara-de-institutul-terorist-elie-wiesel/.

b. Regina Elizabeta
queen.DEF Elisabeth
'Queen Elizabeth'
c. Mătuşa Tamara
aunt.DEF Tamara
'aunt Tamara'
d. Oraşul Iaşi
city.DEF Iasi
'the city of Iași' (Cornilescu 2007: 63)

The examples in (8) contain proper names formed of a common noun + proper name. The descriptive noun, i.e. the second nominal in the structure designates a social role (kinship, profession, institutional role, etc.), or a sort of place (city, street, river, village, etc.), some other entity (a theatre, a planet, etc.) (see Cornilescu 2007). This second nominal functions as a qualitative classifier, which captures the intuition that a complete understanding of a proper name requires identifying the kind of entity that it names (Cornilescu 2007: 61).

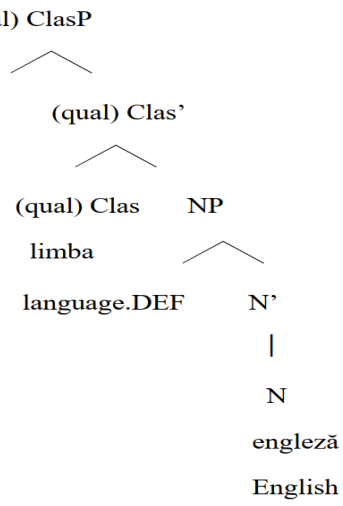
A simplified structure of a Romanian descriptive proper name is given in (9), where the (qualitative) classifier head is filled with lexical material which qualifies and classifies the descriptive noun N2.

(9)



In the same manner, the structure of a glossonym of the type *limba engleză* 'language.DEF English' may be argued to consist of a (qualitative) classifier head ranging over the second nominal, i.e. the proper name of the language (10).

(10)



Next, the section argues that structures with glossonyms of the type in (2), repeated here for convenience as (11), are structures where a silent classifier is present[8]. Therefore, the underlying structure for (11) is (12), where the glossonym agrees in gender with the silent classifier.

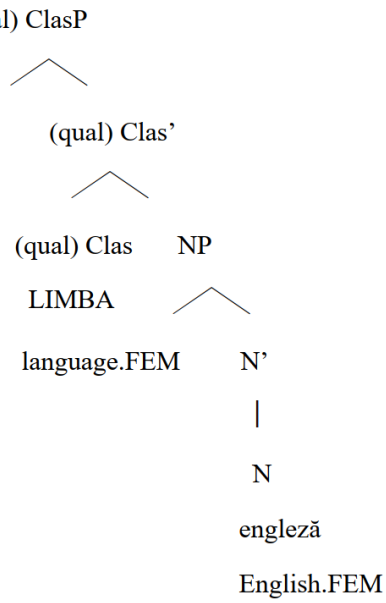
(11) Vorbește *engleză*.
Speak.PRES.3SG. English.FEM
'(S)he speaks English'

(12) Vorbește *LIMBA* *engleză*.
Speak.PRES.3SG. LANGUAGE.FEM English.FEM
'(S)he speaks English'

The syntactic structure of the glossonym in (11) is given in (13).

[8] Silent classifiers have long been recognized to infuse the structure of *what-of* exclamative constructions, proper temporal names, *without of N* constructions, and bare partitive structures (see, for instance, Tănase-Dogaru 2024).

(13)



The section has argued that the structure of a glossonym like *limba engleză* 'language.DEF.FEM English.FEM' parallels that of complex proper name of the type *orașul Iași* 'city.DEF Iași', in that both contain an overt classifier head ranging over the proper name in the second nominal head. Secondly, it has been shown that the structure of a glossonym like *engleză* 'English.FEM' contains a silent classifier LIMBA 'language'.

The next section looks at *-ește* glossonyms in Romanian and argues that the suffix is syntactically active in the glossonym structure in the sense that it signals the presence of a silent classifier.

4. *-ește* glossonyms

The aim of the present section is to account for the syntactic structure and semantic characteristics of *-ește* glossonyms in Romanian. The perspective will be both synchronic and diachronic, in the sense that a look at the evolution of *-ește* nominals will prove instrumental for an adequate analysis of the glossonyms under discussion.

4.1. Previous approaches

Most, if not all traditional grammars of Romanian describe the suffix *-ește* as the oldest and most productive adverbial suffix in Romanian (see, for instance Haneș 1961; Popescu-Marin coord. 2007). Derivations using *-ește* are attested since the 16th century (Haneș 1961; Chircu 2008, 2017; Croitor coord. 2024, see the examples in (14)).

(14) *bărbătește curvește frățește îngerește greciește*
man-ește whore-ește brother-ește angel-ește Greek-ește
'like a man, like a whore, like a brother, like an angel, like Greeks / Greek language' (Croitor coord. 2024)

According to Romanian grammarians, the etymology of the suffix is a matter of some debate. At least three origins have been ascribed to *-ește*: the adjectival suffix *-esc* taking the Latin adverbial suffix *-e*; a reflex of the Latin suffix *-isce*; a borrowing of the Thracian instrumental suffix *-e* (see Croitor coord. 2024).

According to Iordan (1947: 174), *-ește* adverbs are more stylistically marked than their possible periphrases. For instance, if we compare (15a) to (15b), the *-ește* adverb is more attitudinal than its corresponding nominal paraphrase in (15b):

(15) a. înjură *birjărește*
Swear.PRES.3SG coachman-ește
'Lit: he swears like a coachman = He swears like a sailor'
b. înjură ca un birjar
Swear.PRES.3SG like a coachman
'He swears like a coachman' (from Iordan 1947: 174).

Adverbs derived by adding *-ește* to an adjectival or nominal base may have several interpretations: likeness (15), relation (16), conformity (17), to name the most relevant (see Haneș 1961:147; Croitor coord. 2024: 206):

(15) *bătrânește câinește americănește*
old man-ește dog-ește American-ește
'like an old man, like a dog, like an American'

(16) *bisericește* *etimologicește* *trupește*
church-ește etymology-ește body-ește
'from the point of view of the church / etymology / body'

(17) *creștinește* *firește* *omenește*
Christian-ește nature-ește human-ește
'what Christians do / in the way of the human nature is / what humans (ought to) do'.

It is the 'likeness' interpretation which is taken to have given rise to the structures that form the focus of this section, i.e. names of languages (18):

(18) a. *americănește*
American-ește
'language spoken by Americans'
b. *englezește*
English-ește
'English language'
c. *leșește*
Polish-ește
'Polish language'
d. *râmlenește*
Rome-ește
'language spoken in Rome'
f. *șvăbește*
Schwaben-ește
'language spoken by Schwaben' (Croitor coord. 2024: 206).

The next section focuses on *-ește* glossonyms in an attempt at shedding some light on their internal syntactic structure.

4.2. From adverbs to nouns: **-ește** *glossonyms*

Most Romanian linguists have acknowledged the nominal nature of *-ește* glossonyms (see, for instance, Haneș 1961), whether they prefer to call them

adverbs with nominal value (Mîrzea Vasile 2012), adverbs with nominal usage (Croitor coord. 2024), adverbs equivalent with nominals (Haneș 1961). For example, Haneș (1961) distinctly articulates the intuition according to which, in certain contexts, glossonyms in *-ește* are nominal; moreover, the study shows that they are paraphrasable as containing the nominal *limba* 'language' (see (19), from Haneș 1961: 146).

(19) a. scris în românește = "scris în limba română"
written in Romanian-ește written in language Romanian
'written in Romanian' 'written in the Romanian language'
b. tradus din românește
translated from Romanian-ește
= "tradus din limba română"
translated from language Romanian
'translated from Romanian' 'translated from the Romanian language'

One of the few studies that deals in a more extensive manner with *-ește* glossonyms also appropriately insists on their nominal value (Mîrzea Vasile 2012).

Drawing data from a large corpus, Mîrzea Vasile (2012) observes that many new *-ește* formations (see 20) are modelled after an expressive model, in the sense that they select a well-known property of a type of person or animal (Mîrzea Vasile 2012: 100; see also Chircu 2011; Zafiu 2001):

(20) *avocățește, cizmărește, cronicărește, piratерește*
lawyer-ește, shoemaker-ește, chronicler-ește, pirate-ește
'lawyer-like, shoemaker-like, chronicler-like, pirate-like'.

As for glossonyms proper, the category includes names of languages proper (21a), names of dialects (21b), names of specialized languages (21c):

(21) a. *englezește franțuzește*
English-ește French-ește
'English language' 'French language'

b. *moldovenește* *muntenește*
Moldova-ește Wallachia-ește
'Moldovan dialect' 'Wallachia dialect'
c. *străinește* *păsărește*
foreigner-ește bird-ește
'foreign language' 'artificial, ludic language'
(Mîrzea Vasile 2012: 102).

Historically, the evolution of Romanian glossonyms follows the route from *-ie* derivatives (22) to *-ește* derivatives and expressions of the type *language + adj*. *-ește* derivatives encroached upon the *-ie* territory at the end of the 19th century (see Mîrzea Vasile 2012), presumably because the pattern *like X* was extremely active.

(22) Asta se cheamă pe *românie* […] (in Mîrzea Vasile 2012: 103)
This REFL calls on Romanian
'This is called in Romanian'

Some amount of ambiguity between the interpretation *like X* and *language X* still exists in contemporary Romanian. In an example like (23), the *-ește* derivative is ambiguous between the reading *like English people* or *using the English language*, while the lexicalized expressions in (24) exploit the *like X* pattern.

(23) Salută *englezește*.
Greet.PRES.3SG English-ește
'(S)he greets people like English people do / using English'

(24) a. A șters-o *englezește*.
Has wiped-it English-ește
'(S)he took French leave.'
b. Sărută *franțuzește*.
Kiss.PRES.3SG French-ește
'(S)he engages in French kissing'

The kind of ambiguity in (23) is usually resolved by inserting the prepositions *în* 'in' or *pe* 'on' (unless the verb is itself non-ambiguous, i.e. of the type *a vorbi* 'speak', *a citi* 'read', *a traduce* 'translate', etc.).

(25) Salută în / pe *englezește*.
Greet.PRES.3SG in / on English-ește
'(S)he greets people in English'

As already hinted in the introduction, in present-day Romanian, the preposition *în* 'in' has another, equally important role – it signals that the speaking event is unfolding and that it is also temporally bounded, thereby encoding progressive aspect (26)[9]:

(26) Ne e și jenă când îl vedem pe Napoli că
Us is and shame when him see.PRES.PL DOM Napoli that
se duce la interviuri și vorbește în românește […][10]
REFL goes at interviews and speaks in Romanian
'We are embarrassed whenever we see Napoli going to interviews and using Romanian'.

Another manner in which the ambiguity between the *like X* and the *language X* interpretations is resolved, this time in colloquial registers, is adopting the modern pattern *silent classifier + name of language*. In (27b), to avoid the ambiguity triggered by the *-ește* derivative, the copywriters chose a pattern that sounds similar to *franceza* 'French', *engleza* 'English', etc. (see also Chircu 2023):

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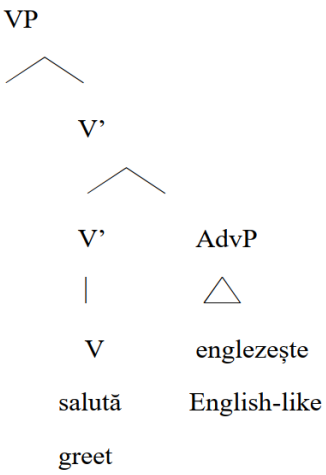
[9] The contrast between the (prepositional) temporally-bounded interpretation and the habitual / generic interpretation is sometimes used for stylistic reasons by Romanian authors. For instance, in the fragment below, the first glossonym involves the temporally-bounded interpretation, while the second and the third, where no preposition is present, have a generic / habitual interpretation, therefore serving as a direct means of characterization: *Și ce le-o mai fi zicând când o ia* ***pe franțuzește****. Vorbește* ***franțuzește*** *și înjură* ***românește***... (Serghi 2020: 118) 'I wonder what he might be saying to them when he turns to French. He speaks French and swears in Romanian'.

[10] https://www.prosport.ro/fotbal-intern/cum-a-invatat-andrea-compagno-limba-romana-si-cu-ce-i-a-impresionat-atacantul-italian-pe-oamenii-din-staff-ul-lui-fcu-inca-de-la-primele-sale-zile-in-banie-exclusiv-19517072.

(27) a. Vorbești *afacerește*[11].
Speak.PRES.2SG business-ește
'You speak business-like/You speak the language of business'
b. Vorbești *afacereza*?[12]
Speak.PRES.2SG LANGUAGE business.
'Do you speak the language of business?'.

Making way towards a syntactic representation for the sentences in (23-25), I propose that in (23), with the adverbial *like X* interpretation, the *-ește* suffix is syntactically inert, being adjoined to the VP in an ordinary adjunct-like configuration:

(28)

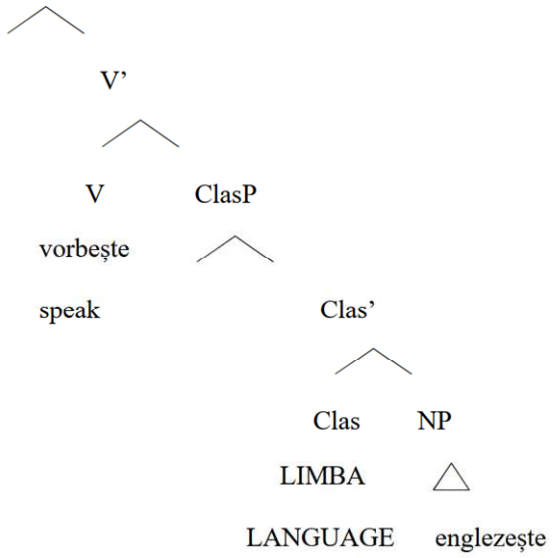


[11] Zafiu (2001) mentions two colloquial/slang *-ește* names of special 'languages': *șmecherește* 'slick-ește' and *mișțocărește* 'scoffer-ește'. These alternate with their adjectival counterparts, however, in order to avoid ambiguity between the *like X* and the *language X* interpretations.
a. Vorbește *șmecherește*.
Speak.PRES.3SG slick-ește
'(S)he speaks in the manner of slick people / the language of slick people.'
b. Vorbește *șmechereasca*.
Speak.PRES.3SG LANGUAGE slick
'(S)he speaks the language of slick people'

[12] https://tarifecontabilitate.ro/vorbesti-afacereza/.

On the other hand, in a sentence that employs an *-ește* glossonym with a verb of saying, the suffix is syntactically active, in the sense that it allows the glossonym to be embedded under a Classifier Phrase whose head hosts the silent classifier LANGUAGE, thus signaling a true 'name of language' interpretation[13]:

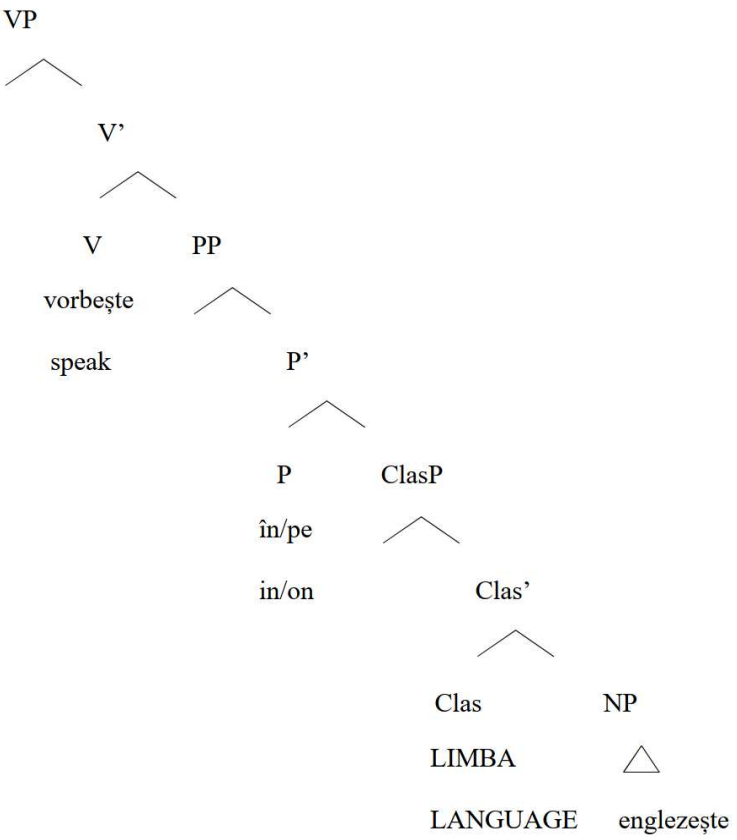
(29)



Finally, in a sentence like (25), the classifier phrase is itself embedded in a prepositional phrase headed by the prepositions *în* 'in' or *pe* 'on'.

[13] Alternatively, one could conceive of the head of the classifier phrase as hosting the suffix *-ește*; the noun is incorporated in the classifier head by a mechanism similar to Matushansky's (2006) m-merger. For an account of *-adă* nominals that assumes a similar mechanism, see Tănase-Dogaru (2022).

(30)



To briefly conclude the section, the analysis of *-ește* glossonyms has shown that the suffix, while inert in the *like X* interpretations, is syntactically active in the case of names of languages, in the sense that it signals the presence of a silent classifier in the syntactic structure. The section has also shown that, in those contexts where ambiguity between the *like X* and the *language X* interpretations still survives, the said ambiguity is resolved by the insertion of the preposition *in* or *on*.

5. Conclusions

The paper has investigated Romanian glossonyms by proposing a tripartite classification of such constructions. The first category of Romanian glossonyms is represented by structures of the type *limba română* /

language.DEF.FEM Romanian.FEM / 'Romanian language', which have been analyzed as complex proper names, where *limba* 'language' functions as a (n overt) classifier. The second category consists of complex proper names with covert classifier, of the type *LIMBA română* / LANGUAGE Romanian / 'Romanian'. Finally, the third category is represented by *-ește* glossonyms, where the (nominalizing) suffix is syntactically active, signaling the presence of the same covert classifier.

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