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Noun Gender in Romanian, a Lexical-Semantic Category

Diana-Maria ROMAN¹

Abstract

The aim of our research is to prove the fact that the gender of Romanian nouns cannot and should not be considered a grammatical category, but a lexical-semantic category, since this part of speech has gender even at a lexical level, a category that also ascends to the immediately superior level: the grammatical one. In contemporary grammar treatises, numerous linguists argue that gender belongs to the axis of grammatical categories that are specific to the Romanian noun, along with number, case and determination. At the same time, it is not a novelty that the gender of nouns, at the level of this entire class in the Romanian language, even where the phenomenon of gender suffixation is involved, does not represent a flecional criterion for this lexical-grammatical class, which does not have distinct opposable forms that mark out the class in question, unlike in the case of pronouns, adjectives or numerals. The actualization of the gender category in nouns, compared to its materialization in the other parts of speech that feature it and in which its status is undoubtedly that of a grammar category, should be discussed in entirely different terms. The grammaticalization of gender that has three components – masculine, feminine and neuter – in the other parts of speech from the nominal group confirms the existence of this category in nouns, but does not entail its grammaticalization in this lexical-grammatical class. Asserting that the gender of nouns is a fixed, given category pertains to the semantics of the part of speech in question. The oppositions between the category members are achieved between different lexemes, hence, outside the flective, and not between different flecional units and/or subunits.

Keywords: *grammatical category; lexical-semantic category; motion; grammatical level.*

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1. Introduction

This study is based on a research on contemporary Romanian language, with a focus on grammar or morphosyntax, along synchronic rather than diachronic lines, aimed at reopening the discussion about, on the one hand, the existence of grammatical gender in the Romanian language, and on the other hand, the status of the gender of Romanian nouns. We consider that the central thesis of the research is topical, as it tables for debate the question of what the gender of Romanian nouns represents: is it a grammatical category, actualized or actualizable within the flective, or is it a lexical-semantic category manifested within the root, an implicitly non-flectional category?!

We believe that the impact of our analysis is becoming relevant because by debating these issues that are directly related to the system of the Romanian language, we can pertinently generalize the perimeter of interpretation to all the other languages in which gender is recognized as a grammatical category at the level of the system. The motivation underlying these premises can also be supported by the Romanian and foreign bibliographical material we have used.

2. Natural gender vs. grammatical gender

The emergence of the grammatical category of gender has, for a very long time, been the subject of numerous studies. A universally accepted solution is yet to be reached, as gender is one of the categories that have not been grammaticalized in many linguistic systems, others having relinquished it altogether.²

² A good example in this regard is Contemporary English, unlike Old English, In Old English, however, the gender of a noun depended on the forms that a noun assumed in the course of its declension, not on the sex or absence of sex in the person or thing denoted. (Nesfield, 1980, p. 309). In Old English, gender was a grammaticalized category because adjectives agreed in gender, number and case with the nouns they modified. Moreover, interrogative-relative pronouns had also masculine and neutral forms, but only in the singular (Pyles&Algeo, 1982, pp. 117-121). For example: sunne (sun) was feminine, word (word) was masculine, maegden (girl) was neuter etc., (Levițchi, 1971, p. 39), (Ștefănescu, 1988, p. 159), (Pyles&Algeo, 1982, pp. 110-111). On Contemporary English and aspects concerning the recognition or non-recognition of grammatical gender in the system of that language, see (Nesfield, 1980, p. 309), (Kufner, 1962, p. 68), (Pence&Emery, 1963, p. 201), (Hockett, 1967, pp. 222-223); (Levițchi, 1971, p. 39), (Duțescu Coliban, 1986, p. 154), (Ștefănescu, 1988, p. 24), (Quirk&Leech & Svartvik, 1980, p. 187).

The designations entrenched in linguistics since the stage of classical Indo-European languages – feminine, masculine and neuter – reflect, obviously, the association that traditional grammar established between biological sex and grammatical gender. Gender is one of the oldest categories that have managed, in time, to detach themselves from the lexis. It is, after all, *the category with the highest degree of concreteness and dependence on the meaning of words* (Wald, 1969, p. 94) because *it was born from the need to satisfy a need for communication*³ (Martinet, 1956, p. 85 apud Jordan&Manoliu, 1965, p. 118) and *for grouping together names of objects and phenomena into several classes, based on certain common traits they shared* (Introducere în lingvistică, 1972, p. 184, Budagov, 1961, p. 263).

In time, natural gender could no longer find a real correspondent in grammatical gender. The latter became a formal system, especially in the context in which one of its components, the neuter gender,³ was ousted from the Romance languages (with the exception of Romanian), as well as from the Celtic, Baltic, Slavic (Albanian) languages. By contrast, the neuter gender has been maintained in Greek or in the Germanic and in the other Slavic languages, whose systems have preserved the trichotomy of the gender category, as attested by the following plausible explanations: *Placing grammatical gender in agreement with natural gender would have required numerous linguistic changes, pertaining to the semantic substance, syntactic relations and expression. The effort would have been all the more costly since, at that stage of linguistic development, reorganizing the grammatical genders along the lines of the natural genders was not absolutely necessary in Latin.* (Jordan&Manoliu, 1965, p. 126)

The loss of this link between natural and grammatical gender is attested by the arbitrary manner in which one and the same meaning is organized, sometimes differently, varying, in any case, from one language to another, especially when it comes to inanimate objects and their names. (Budagov, 1961, p. 261) For example, the noun *spoon* is regarded as feminine both in Romanian and in Russian, but in German it is considered to be masculine. To complicate matters even further, the gender of a noun like *chair* varies in three different languages – in

³ Latin had evinced for some time a trend to abolish the neuter gender, by fusing it with the masculine. The Romance languages took that trend to completion, but in Romanian, that trend was more or less restrained, (Graur, 1963, p. 19). For an overview of the stages Latin went through towards absorbing this member of the neuter, see (ILR, 1978, p. 231), (Giurescu, 1982, p. 18).

Romanian, it is neuter, in Russian, it is masculine and in Spanish, it is feminine. (Budagov, 1961, p. 211)

2.1. The gender of nouns within language systems can be proved solely on the basis of syntagmatic and paradigmatic grammatical agreement

Regardless of the language to which we refer, the gender of nouns can be proved only on the basis of grammatical agreement.⁴ This is a generally valid assumption, along two complementary coordinates: both paradigmatic⁵ (noun substitutes – pronouns and numerals⁶ with pronominal⁷ value represent parts of speech that are in paradigmatic grammatical agreement with the noun) and syntagmatic (the adjectival class – qualifying and pronominal adjectives and numerals with adjectival value represent parts of speech that are in syntagmatic grammatical agreement with the noun),⁸ even though reference⁹ is sometimes made in the specialized literature only to the syntagmatic¹⁰ type of agreement:

⁴ For the first time in Romanian linguistics, G. Gruiță rigorously defines and develops the two concepts, paradigmatic agreement vs syntagmatic agreement, Gruiță (1981).

⁵ Paradigmatic agreement concerns the class of substitutes, i.e. pronouns and numerals with pronominal value, and is achieved in absentia, in the sense that the noun and its substitute, whichever the latter might be, alternately occupy the same position (Neamțu, 2005b).

⁶ In this paper, we accept the distinction between cardinal and ordinal numerals operated in GBLR, (2010, pp. 180-181).

⁷ To distinguish the values of cardinal and ordinal numerals, substantival value vs pronominal value vs adjectival value, cf. (Pană Dindelegan, 2003, pp. 75-86), (GALR, I, 2005, pp. 291-309).

⁸ Another part of speech that enters in syntagmatic grammatical agreement with the noun or, in fact, with the substantival form (the personal verb form may agree with the noun, but also with any of its substitutes) is the personal verb form, but it is not integrated in the adjectival class.

⁹ In certain Romanian grammar treatises, it is accepted that the pronoun or the numeral with pronominal value agrees with the antecedent noun, but not with the noun it substitutes in a given position (DȘL, 2005, pp. 230-231).

¹⁰ Syntagmatic grammatical agreement concerns the adjectival class, by which we understand any part of speech that agrees in gender, number and case, and the class of the verb in any of the personal verb forms. It is a type of agreement achieved *in praesentia*, the two morphological values being co-present. The adjectival form and the personal verbal form take certain categories of the main term: the adjectival form takes the gender, number and case of the substantival form with which it agrees, while the personal verb form takes the number and person of the substantival form with which it agrees, cf. (Neamțu, 2005b).

Ever since the Indo-European languages, the grammatical gender of nouns is not necessarily evinced by the form of the nouns themselves, but only by the words with an adjectival function that accompany them and that, for the most part, have three genders. (Brugmann, 1905, p. 374 apud Bujor, 1955, p. 54)

Moreover, *gender manifests itself grammatically in nouns only as regards the possibility of selecting a particular form of the determinant.* (Sinteze de limba română, 1984, p. 202) *It appears, in fact, that the appearance of gender in nouns and its development into a grammatical category, a category per se and a category of content at the same time, are related to and conditioned by the appearance of specific inflected forms which indicate the gender of pronouns and adjectives.*¹¹ (Neamțu, 2014, p. 445) Where agreement is not found between these classes of words, gender is absent as a grammatical category,¹² at the level of the entire system; hence, implicitly, the nouns of the language in question cannot be said to have gender.

The fact that the presence of gender in nouns is conditioned by the presence of gender in adjectives, pronouns and numerals with both pronominal and adjectival value indicates two lines of analysis: on the one hand, the grammaticalization¹³ of this category in the latter classes of words is a phenomenon that involves, in effect, the presence of grammatical gender within the entire system, at a general level: *English does not have a grammatical gender, which means that adjectives have no inflected forms that agree with the various grammatical categories of the noun.* (Zdrenghea, 1972, p. 257)

Hence, the opposition between languages in which gender is accepted [the Romance languages, the Germanic (German) or the Slavic languages (Russian, Serbian etc.) vs languages in which gender is not accepted (the Finno-Ugric (Budagov, 1961, pp. 260-261) and the Turkish-Tatar (Introducere în lingvistică, 1972, p. 186) languages) and in which grammaticalization is not compulsory in nouns.

¹¹ But also in cardinal and ordinal numerals, irrespective of their value (Neamțu, 2014, p. 445).

¹² Sextil Pușcariu accepts, for example, that Hungarian is a language in which nouns have only one gender: *In fact, there are languages, such as Hungarian, that know only nouns with one gender [...] and have only one form for adjectives.* (1976, p. 130)

¹³ By grammaticalization, we understand the following: *a unit of content may be considered a grammatical category only insofar as it has grammaticalized means of expression* (Sinteze de limba română, 1984, p. 201).

In those languages in which gender exists as a grammatical category, at the level of the content of the category, gender *can be said to have a direct*¹⁴ (*intrinsic*) referent only in the case of nouns and substantivized words.¹⁵ *With these parts of speech, gender is one of the compulsory components of the categorematic*¹⁶ *meaning of substantivity, as a structuring matrix of lexical meaning.*¹⁷ (Neamțu, 2014, p. 444) The situation is different for the adjectival class, in which gender *does not relate to the adjectival referent. (Taken in themselves, as ontological realities, characteristics, qualities... do not have/cannot have gender).* (Neamțu, 2014, p. 448) Hence, the well-known dichotomy between primary categories and formal categories,¹⁸ or between deictic categories and anaphoric categories.¹⁹

2.1.1. The gender of the Romanian noun in contemporary grammars

In what follows, our work aims at analysing the status that the category of noun gender has in the Romanian language. In terms of the form in which gender can be materialized, there are only two possible coordinates of this discussion: gender is either a grammatical category or a lexical-semantic category. The analysis itself requires that we should immediately refer to the hypostases of this category in all the other parts of speech that can actualize it.

On the one hand, the gender of this part of speech is a grammatical category, alongside²⁰ case, number and determination²¹: *In*

¹⁴ Regarding the pronoun and the numeral with pronominal value, referential reference is made indirectly to the referent of the noun; hence, the dichotomy between a direct referent and an intermediate referent) (Neamțu, 2005b).

¹⁵ Specifically, we refer to the entire substantival class, by which we understand nouns, pronouns, numerals, substantivized words (Drașoveanu, 1997, pp. 251-252).

¹⁶ For the trichotomy lexical meaning vs categorial meaning vs instrumental meaning, which generates the trichotomy lexematic words vs categorematic words vs instrumental words, see (Nica, 2011, pp. 291-296).

¹⁷ For a classification of the words of the Romanian language from a logical-semantic perspective, see (Neamțu, 2005a).

¹⁸ For the opposition primary categories vs formal categories, see (Neamțu, 2005b).

¹⁹ For the opposition deictic categories vs anaphoric categories, see (Wald, 1969, p. 110), (Gruiță, 1981, pp. 11-24).

²⁰ There are also opinions in Romanian linguistics according to which the noun also has the grammatical category of person (Vlad, 1970, pp. 275-283), (Diaconescu, 1970, pp. 197-198)

the domain of nominal inflexion (noun, adjective, numeral), the grammatical categories that are realized are gender, number and case. (SMLRC 1967, p. 57) The noun is a part of speech characterized through the morphological²² categories of number, case, gender and determination. (Sinteze de limba română, 1984, p. 209) In addition to this, the morphological categories of the noun are: gender, number, case. (Toma, 1996, p. 149) Similarly, at the morphological level, the component elements of the class of nouns are characterized through the grammatical categories of gender, number and case. (Dimitriu, 1999, p. 57) In any case, in the noun of which it is a part, the inflectional morpheme has the main function of expressing the grammatical categories of gender, number and case. (Dimitriu, 1999, p. 73)

By the same token, *the inflection of nouns in Romanian is realized according to the grammatical categories of gender, number and case. (Dimitriu, 1999, p. 121) The morphological categories of the noun are gender, number and case. (Avram, 2001, p. 43) All of the four grammatical categories of the noun (gender, number, case, determination) are realized through inflection [...], (Negoi, 2011, p. 5) like the gender of the other morphological values in the nominal group: In the Romanian language, there are the following grammatical categories: gender, number, case and person. (Zdrenghea, 1970, p. 8)*

In the same way, *the grammatical behaviour of the parts of speech is governed by various grammatical categories, such as gender, number and case. (Sinteze de limba română, 1984, p. 198), In the Romanian language, there are the following grammatical categories: gender, number, case. (Bejan, 1997, p. 14), The grammatical categories in the Romanian language recognized by the majority of the specialists are gender, number and case. (Dimitriu, 1999, pp. 12-13) Last but not least, grammatical categories are fundamental morphological notions expressed through inflection; in the Romanian language, these are gender, number and case. (Avram, 2001, p. 36)*

²¹ For accepting the category of determination as a grammatical category of the noun, see (GALR, I, 2005, p. 63). In this paper, the grammatical category of determination has only two members, definite determination vs indefinite determination (Neamțu, 2014, pp. 270-281).

²² The manner of defining gender in nouns as a morphological category, in the above quotations, can only be analysed from an inflexional perspective, because morphologically it can only refer to morphology, and morphology, if we are to didactically separate it from syntax, *studies, by force of tradition, inflection (= read the flective), the grammatical categories of flexible parts of speech, in other words, everything that pertains, in grammatical terms, to the word level. (DȘL, 2005, p. 328)*

What all these definitions suggest is that regardless of the part of speech in which gender is actualized, gender must be, by definition, a grammatical category.

On the other hand, this category has three members, masculine, feminine and neuter,²³ the latter term in this series representing a feature that individualizes Romanian in relation to the other Romance languages: *Romanian is the only Romance language that has the neuter gender.* (Rosetti, 1957, p. 408) The number of genders is identical also in the other classes of the nominal group.²⁴

In examining all these statements, we can notice that gender, as a category, as a common trait, must be analysed along two coordinates, as regards: the expression of gender within nouns and the expression of gender within the other morphological values that form the nominal group, as follows:

Within the noun, the opposition between the members of the category is realized thus: *fată (girl) vs băiat (boy) vs tren (train); fete (girls) vs băieți (boys) vs trenuri (trains).*

Within the adjectival group²⁵ (any part of speech which has adjectival value, implicitly also pronominal adjectives, as well as cardinal and ordinal adverbs with pronominal value) – *fată drăguță (nice girl) vs băiat drăguț (nice boy) vs tren drăguț (nice train); fete drăguțe (nice girls) vs băieți drăguți (nice boys) vs trenuri drăguțe (nice trains) ; această fată (this girl) vs acest băiat (this boy) vs acest tren (this train); aceste fete (these girls) vs acești băieți (these boys) vs aceste trenuri (these trains); prima fată (first girl) vs primul băiat (first boy) vs primul tren (first train);*

²³ We shall not delve, in this paper, in the diachronic and synchronic controversy surrounding the Romanian neuter.

²⁴ The category of gender that has three members, masculine, feminine and neuter, is not specific only to the noun, as most grammar treatises inventory it. The neuter gender is maintained both in the other morphological values of the substantival class and in the adjectival class (Neamțu, 2014, p. 446).

²⁵ By adjectival form we understand every word that agrees in gender, number and case. We refer, in fact, only to syntagmatic grammatical agreement, when both the substantival and the adjectival are co-present, as terms, one Tr – the substantival, the other, Ts – the adjectival, within intra-sentence subordinate phrases, exclusively of the adjectival type. The Romanian language also actualizes a syntagmatic agreement of the verbal type, when the personal verb form, as Ts, agrees in number and person with a substantival Tr, irrespective of its morphological value.

primele fete (**first** girls) vs *primii băieți* (**first** boys) vs *primele trenuri* (**first** trains).

Within the group of substitutes,²⁶ whether they be pronouns or numerals with pronominal value – (*fată*) (*girl*)→**alta** (*other*), **aceasta** (*this*), **prima** (*first*) etc. vs (*băiat*) (*boy*)→**altul** (*other*), **acesta** (*this*), **primul** (*first*) etc. vs (*tren*) (*train*)→**altul** (*other*), **acesta** (*this*), **primul** (*first*) etc.; (*fete*) (*girls*)→ **altele** (*others*), **acestea** (*these*), **primele** (*first*) etc. vs (*băieți*)(*boys*)→**alții**, (*others*), **aceștia** (*these*), **primii** (*first*) etc. vs (*trenuri*) (*trains*)→**altele** (*others*), **acestea** (*these*), **primele** (*first*) etc.

From the above examples, it is quite obvious that unlike the gender of the other morphological values in the nominal group, the gender of nouns cannot be a grammatical category that clearly entails an inflectional change, seen as the common trait of grammatical categories: *The flexible parts of speech undergo formal alterations through which are expressed the fundamental morphological notions known as grammatical categories.* (GLR, I, 1963 p. 18), *The changes words undergo through inflection are grouped into several types, which are known as grammatical categories.* (Graur, 1973, p. 35) *We are taking into account the fact that the existence, in a word, of one or several grammatical categories imposes, in that word, several formal changes known as inflection.* (Dimitriu, 1979, p. 36). In the same way, *Grammatical categories are fundamental morphological notions expressed through inflection.* (Avram, 2001, p. 36), *The formal changes in the words that make up variable or flexible lexical-grammatical classes depend on these grammatical categories.* (Iacob, 2002, p. 19).

Last, but not least, *In the tradition of European grammars, grammatical values (meanings) in a given language have clear inflectional marks and, depending on them, numerous classes of lexemes (= parts of speech) change their form during inflection.* (DȘL, 2005, p. 94), *Grammatical categories are grammatical meanings/values which find a repeatable inflectional mark for a numerous class of words also depending on which classes of lexemes change their form through inflection.* (GBLR, 2010, p. 5)

Thus, the grammatical category is assimilable to inflection or, more precisely, the grammatical category is, at the expression level, inflection itself: *A morphological process specific to a particular morphological type of languages: inflectional languages, consisting in the attachment, to the invariable part*

²⁶ For the status of pronouns and numeral with pronominal value as substitutes of the noun, see (GALR, I, 2005, p. 291).

of a word, of one or several grammatical affixes,²⁷ so as to mark, in speech, the different grammatical categories. (DȘL, 2005, p. 216) A grammatical category is actualized in the fleective:²⁸ a component of the structure of a flexible word which, if added to the invariable root, varies through inflection, marking the grammatical categories specific to the morphological class to which the word belongs, (DȘL, 2005, p. 216) as a generic term.²⁹ Therefore it is appropriate to refer to a grammatical category as a category that actualizes itself in the fleective; thus, a grammatical category is a fleective category.

This point of view, which considers the gender of nouns as a category realized outside the fleective, is not unique in the grammar treatises. The manner in which gender is defined³⁰ by many authors as a fixed, given category confirms our working hypothesis: *The gender of nouns is not a morphological category, because it is fixed; every noun has a single gender.* (Diaconescu, 1961, p. 164), *In the Romanian language, gender differences in the noun do not constitute a morphological category, manifested in the fleective, because the gender of nouns is fixed. That is why, in the formal analysis of nouns, we cannot separate the morpheme (= read the fleective) of gender* (SMLRC, 1967, p. 72) or *As regards the category of gender, we believe that, except for the agreement, discussed above, gender is not a grammatical meaning. [...] In pairs of the type băiat-fată,*

²⁷ By which we understand grammatical affixes (DȘL, 2005, p. 33). In the Romanian grammar, the term affix appears quite frequently as a morpheme, referring to two distinct realities, from the point of view of the content: *A morphematic element in the structure of a derivative word or of a flexible word that is attached to the root either with a morphological role or in order to realize the fleection, hence, for marking grammatical categories (here, fleective grammatical categories), or with a lexical role, for creating new words from bases existing in the language. Affixes may be derivative, when they are components of derivative words, bearing lexical information, and grammatical, when they are components of flexible words, bearing morphological information.*

²⁸ In most treatises on the grammar of the Romanian language, the term fleective constantly appears as an exclusively grammatical morpheme. Moreover, at the level of expression, it comprises both synthetic and analytic forms (DȘL, 2005, p. 48), (Sinteze de limba română, 1984, p. 208), (Coteanu, 1985, p. 105).

²⁹ The fleective is a carrier of exclusively grammatical meaning; unlike in the case of the affix, there is no distinction at the level of the content it carries, as it is essentially a grammatical morpheme.

³⁰ The gender of Latin nouns has been defined in the same terms: *Nouns are flexible words and, since each has its own gender, masculine, feminine, neuter, inherited from the recent phase of Indo-European, it changes its form depending on its number and case.* (Bujor&Chiriac, 1971, p.23) The same thing happened with the Romance languages: *Like in the Romance languages, gender was usually fixed.* (Jordan&Manoliu, 1965, p. 125).

sudor-sudoriță,³¹ it is often believed that gender is a meaning, because the masculine-feminine difference overlaps the difference of sex. Against this interpretation, we must draw attention to the fact that the difference of sex (and, generally, everything pertaining to natural gender) is not expressed through a gender-morpheme (= read gender flective) that can take multiple values. [...] Choosing a gender is not at the speaker's discretion, unlike in the case of choosing a number or a case; the attempt to change the gender of a noun will either fail or give rise to another word (Stati, 1965, p. 868).

In the same way, *Grammatically, gender manifests itself in nouns only in terms of the possibility to select a particular form of the determinant, but it does not represent a criterion of inflection: the gender of a noun is fixed*³² (Sinteze de limba română, 1984, p. 202) or, in the last academic treatise: *Nouns fall into three classes of gender: masculine, feminine or neuter. Gender is inherent, hence fixed, which means that the noun does not shift from one gender to another.* (GBLR, 2010, p. 50).

3. The gender of Romanian nouns is not a grammatical category, but a lexical-semantic category

Analysing the statements above, we may infer the following:

On the morphematic level, the noun does not have or cannot release a gender flective, either in the form of a flectional unit, or in the form of a flectional subunit.³³ The oppositions between the members of the category of gender are realized in the stem (root),³⁴ i.e. outside the flective. It is, thus, a flectionless category, the noun being elevated from

³¹ The question whether the phenomenon of motion might cancel out the flectionless character of the Romanian gender has been repeatedly raised by various scholars (Diaconescu, 1970, p. 83), (Iordan&Robu, 1978, p. 372), (Găitănar, 1998, p. 40), (Iacob, 2002, p. 18), with whose viewpoints we disagree. For arguments stating that, in the case of motion, mobile nouns are different words, gender remaining a flectionless category (LRC, 1985, p. 115), (GALR, I, 2005, pp. 66-67), (GBLR, 2010, p. 50). Moreover, not even the conversion of adjectives into nouns should raise any doubts concerning the fact that the gender of nouns is a fixed and flectionless category. This phenomenon is particularly productive in Romanian, *as one and the same adjective can produce two nouns, one masculine and one feminine.* (GALR, I, 2005, p. 175)

³² Gender is approached in exactly the same terms in (LRC, 1985, p. 111), (GALR, I, 2005, p. 63).

³³ For the dichotomy flectional unit vs flectional subunit, see (Neamțu, 2005a).

³⁴ For the differences between stem and root, see (Iacob, 2002, pp. 8-9).

the lexical level to the immediately superior level – the grammatical level,³⁵ with a certain, fixed, given gender.

This point of view has already been confirmed by various scholars: *Like in the Romance languages, gender was usually fixed, being dictated by the lexical, thematic element (in Latin) (Iordan&Manoliu, 1965, p. 125), Gender is reflected either through the stems (= read roots) (the case băiat-fată), or through motional suffixes (the case sudor-sudoriță), and the latter should be dealt with together with all the other derivational suffixes. (Stati, 1965, p. 868).*

In the same way, *In all the nouns (except for the mobile ones), gender is realized as a lexical-grammatical meaning and belongs to the semantic level of the root (Iacob, 2002, p. 18) or From a morphematic (formal) point of view, it is flexible in relation to the grammatical categories of number and case; gender is determined by content, more rarely by form (only in the case of mobile nouns) (Iacob, 2002, p. 29). Last, but not least, In the noun, gender is generally a stable semantic component of the root, every noun having a certain gender, as a lexical unit. Most of the objects of the extralinguistic world are grouped according to natural gender or sex, but many inconsistencies may arise between natural gender and grammatical gender. (Iacob, 2002, p. 39)*

Given the obvious lack of any gender inflection signs, more precisely, given the absence of the gender flective,³⁶ the gender of Romanian nouns will be known (recognized) through the other parts of speech in the nominal group – adjectives, pronouns, numerals, lexical-grammatical classes that know the category in question and actualize it in the flective.

Thus, the gender of the Romanian nouns is a grammatical category either as a result of paradigmatic grammatical agreement (in the case of noun substitutes), or as a result of syntagmatic grammatical agreement (in the case of the adjectival class). The role of these morphological values becomes significant especially when the noun has the common gender.³⁷

³⁵ For the thesis that Romanian has, in fact, only three levels, phonetic, lexical and grammatical, see (Drașoveanu, 1997, p. 25).

³⁶ The Romanian noun, as a flexible part of speech, is inflectionally actualized. No more than three grammatical categories are materialized in it: number, case and determination.

³⁷ The common gender is not a singular case in Romanian; it can also occur in the systems of other languages.

With the acceptance of this direction, we consider it injudicious to define the category of the gender of the Romanian nouns as a grammatical category that is, on the one hand, similar to the substantival categories of number or case³⁸ and, on the other hand, like the gender, the number or the case of the other parts of speech within the nominal group.³⁹

Instead, we wish to propose another definition: gender is a lexical-semantic category. This is attested by the fact that gender is realized in different stems (roots), carrying lexical meaning (as opposed to the flective, which carries, by contrast, grammatical meaning)⁴⁰ and being largely dependent on the semantics of these stems (roots): *Gender is, in nouns, a semantic category and is partly semantic by nature. It is a semantic category because every noun has, as a lexical unit, a certain gender – a stable semantic component. It is semantic by nature because it reflects, at least in part, i.e. in some of the nouns, the linguistic interpretation of certain characteristics pertaining to the objects of the extralinguistic world.* (Irimia, 1997, p. 44) or *Gender belongs to the semantic level of the root.* (Irimia, 1997, p. 44)

4. Conclusions

In an attempt to synthesize the contributions of our research, we may conclude that:

The Romanian language has the grammatical category of gender: its existence is proved, beyond any doubt, both by the syntagmatic grammatical agreement of the noun substitutes and by the syntagmatic grammatical agreement of the adjectival class with it.

These undisputed realities do not condition and do not impose, in fact, under any circumstances, the grammaticalization of this category for the noun too, hence, its actualization within the flective, but only confirm it, implicitly, both at the level of this part of speech and at the level of the Romanian language system.

³⁸ For considerations on the number and case of Romanian nouns as grammatical categories, see (GALR, I, 2005, pp. 77-78).

³⁹ For general considerations on gender, number, the case of pronouns, adjectives and numerals (regardless of their values) as grammatical categories, see (Zdrenghea, 1970, p. 8), (Bejan, 1997, p. 14).

⁴⁰ *On the basis of the solidarity between content and form, each of the two components is equipped with a meaning. Since the meaning of the flective is grammatical – the grammatical meanings [...], it follows that the meaning of the root must be lexical, by all means different from zero, because grammatical categories [...] cannot be applied to a zero significance [...]* (Neamțu, 2014, p. 99).

The gender of nouns in the Romanian language cannot be considered, based on the arguments already invoked, a grammatical category, actualized within the flective, but only a lexical-semantic and, implicitly, non-flectional category.

The Romanian noun actualizes four categories, all of them directly dependent on the ontological content of this morphological value: on the one hand, three grammatical categories – number, case and determination (when the noun is determined definitely and indefinitely), and on the other hand, a lexical-semantic, implicitly non-flectional category, actualized within the root of the noun.

Generalizing, in any language that has grammatical gender, this category, in the case of the noun, should be considered as such and designated accordingly.

The gender of all the other parts of speech, integrated in the Romanian nominal group – pronouns, adjectives, numerals – is a grammatical category, actualized in the flexion of those parts of speech, along with the number and the case,⁴¹ these categories being generally expressed syncretically.⁴²

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⁴¹ We are not referring here to situations in which the category of person is actualized in the case of pronouns and pronominal adjectives that have it, a category with an ambiguous status in terms of both content and expression.

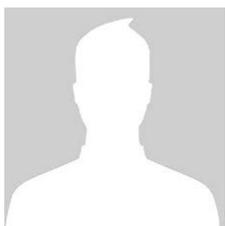
⁴² For a different meaning of the concept of syncretism, see (GALR, I, 2005, p. 71).

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