CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO ROMANCE LINGUISTICS

SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE 33RD LINGUISTIC SYMPOSIUM ON ROMANCE LANGUAGES (LSRL), BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA, APRIL 2003

Edited by

JULIE AUGER
J. CLANCY CLEMENTS
BARBARA VANCE
Indiana University, Bloomington

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA

ON THE STRUCTURE OF SYNCRETISM IN ROMANIAN CONJUGATION

RONALD F. FELDSTEIN
Indiana University

0. *Introduction*

Romanian conjugation displays several cases of syncretism, in which two paradigmatic slots share the same grammatical desinence.[1] This syncretism occurs in both the present and imperfect tenses of the indicative, as well as in the subjunctive. In the present tense, syncretism occurs in the 1sg/3pl, the 3sg/3pl, and the 1sg/2sg forms; in the imperfect, the 1sg/1pl forms are always syncretic; number syncretism is always found in the 3sg/3pl of the subjunctive. I will claim that all such instances of syncretism should be divided into two categories, based on whether they are phonologically conditioned or not. When syncretism is phonologically conditioned, it will only apply to a specific phonological subset of verbs, while the nonphonological type applies across the board. In Romanian, the present-tense varieties of syncretism can be explained by phonological conditioning, once the appropriate underlying morphophonemic constructs and rules are established. On the other hand, the syncretisms of the imperfect and subjunctive are not phonologically conditioned and, as such, apply to every verb without exception.

Two recent publications attempt to analyze the syncretisms of Romanian conjugation: sections of a book by Stump (2001:213-215) and a paper by Bobaljik (2002:65-66). This chapter will show that both authors operate with structurally inadequate models of Romanian conjugation and syncretism, which leads them to make analytical errors. Their errors are mainly due to the fact that they do not distinguish phonologically conditioned, or variable syncretisms, from invariant syncretisms that have nothing to do with a

---

[1] This chapter represents Romanian sounds by means of orthographic symbols. Letters that should be specially noted are *ă* (equivalent to the mid central vowel *schwa*, i.e., [ə]), and *î*, which represents the high central vowel [ɨ]. The high vowels *i* and *u*, in postvocalic position (e.g., *dai, dau*) represent nonsyllabic [i̯] and [u̯]. The sequence *ea* represents the diphthong [e̯a]. The consonants *ş, ţ* represent [ʃ] and the affricate [ts], respectively.

particular phonological environment. These inaccuracies stem from the authors' reliance on textbook notions of the various subtypes of Romanian syncretism, which are traditionally, but incorrectly, said to be determined by conjugation type. Since these are not really errors made by Stump and Bobaljik per se, but are caused by the inadequacies of the traditional treatment of Romanian conjugation and syncretism, it becomes clear that the traditional approach needs to be modified.

This chapter will begin with a brief review of the basic facts about Romanian syncretism (section 1), where the traditional conjugations will be compared to the actual distribution of syncretic types. Next (section 2), a new segmentation and morphophonemic analysis of Romanian conjugation is offered, which resolves some of the difficult issues of Romanian syncretism. Phonologically conditioned syncretism will be treated as underlyingly non-syncretic; that is, it should be considered to be a superficial, or surface, syncretism, while the nonphonological variety remains as a deeper syncretism. Section 3 examines how Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002) rely on the textbook view of conjugation for their analyses of Romanian syncretism, and the flaws of this approach are pointed out. While some of these errors are due to not considering all the data, others stem from an inefficient segmentation of the verb stem and desinence. Section 4 looks at the issue of whether a surface perspective can offer any useful linguistic generalizations about Romanian syncretism.

Since the work of Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002) is relevant to this chapter only insofar as it illustrates the inadequacy of the traditional textbook approach to present-tense syncretism, as based on conjugational type, rather than stem phonology, I will not specifically comment on the other main issue they discuss—whether these syncretisms should be treated as rules of referral[2] (the notion that one paradigmatic cell is replaced with the other) or strictly as rules of impoverishment (the idea that both cells are neutralized with respect to a particular grammatical feature). Generally speaking, Stump opts for the use of rules of referral, while Bobaljik prefers to operate with the method of impoverishment. However, I would emphasize that one cannot even begin to make linguistic judgements about the merits of impoverishment versus referral without a more accurate notion of the structural units of Romanian syncretism.

---

[2] Bobaljik (2002:66) maintains that impoverishment can handle all of the cases of Romanian syncretism and that rules of referral (introduced by Zwicky 1985:372) are too powerful and unrestricted a mechanism. Stump (2001) opts for unstipulated syncretism (equivalent to impoverishment) in some instances, but posits rules of referral in others.

1. *Brief review of Romanian syncretism*

I maintain that present-tense syncretisms are a function of the phonological properties of the verb stem. The traditional system, as repeated by Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002), states that there are four basic conjugations, and that each conjugational type utilizes a different set of desinences (and syncretisms), unrelated to phonology. I claim that each of the traditional conjugations merely refers to a particular stem-final theme vowel, which can be considered a verbal formant. Furthermore, I propose that the underlying desinences are identical for all four of the so-called conjugations, and that the surface differences of conjugation are the result of the phonological interaction of the different stem-final themes with the unified set of desinences. In many cases, the traditional system of conjugation does a poor job of capturing what actually occurs, especially in the area of syncretism.

Table 1 lists the four traditional conjugational types. Type I has the theme vowel -*a* and usually has 3sg/3pl syncretism; types II, III, and IV have the theme vowels -*e*, -*ea*, -*i*, (and -*î*[3]) and most frequently have 1sg/3pl syncretism. Table 2 presents present-tense paradigms for these and other verbs.

Conj.	Stem type (infinitive)	Examples
I	-*a*	*invita* "invite," *tăia* "cut," *sufla* "breathe," *da* "give"
II	-*ea*	*tăcea* "be silent," *umplea* "fill (variant)," *bea* "drink"
III	-*e*	*bate* "beat," *umple* "fill"
IV	-*i*	*sări* "jump," *coborî*, "descend," *sui* "climb," *suferi* "suffer," *şti* "know"

Table 1: *Traditional Romanian conjugations (Graur 1966:246)*

Infinitive	Conj. type	1sg	2sg	3sg	1pl	2pl	3pl
invita	I	*invít*	*invíţi*	***invítă***	*invitắm*	*invitáţi*	***invítă***
tăia	I	***tái***	***tái***	*táie*	*tăiém*	*tăiáţi*	*táie*
sufla	I	*súflu*	*súfli*	***súflă***	*suflắm*	*sufláţi*	***súflă***
da	I	***dáu***	*dái*	*dắ*	*dắm*	*dáţi*	***dáu***
tăcea	II	***tác***	*táci*	*táce*	*tăcém*	*tăcéţi*	***tác***
umplea	II	***úmplu***	*úmpli*	*úmple*	*úmplém*	*úmpléţi*	***úmplu***
bea	II	***beáu***	*béi*	*beá*	*bém*	*béţi*	***beáu***
báte	III	***bát***	*báţi*	*báte*	*bátem*	*báteţi*	***bát***
úmple	III	***úmplu***	*úmpli*	*úmple*	*úmplem*	*úmpleţi*	***úmplu***
sắrí	IV	***sár***	*sári*	*sáre*	*sărím*	*sắríţi*	***sár***
coborî	IV	*cobór*	*cobóri*	***coboáră***	*coborîmi*	*coboríţi*	***coboáră***
suí	IV	*súi*	*súi*	***súie***	*suím*	*suíţi*	***súie***
suferi	IV	*súfãr*	*súferi*	***súferă***	*suferím*	*suferíţi*	***súferă***
ştí	IV	***ştíu***	*ştíi*	*ştíe*	*ştím*	*ştíţi*	***ştíu***

Table 2: *Sample conjugations of verbs in Table 1, with syncretic cells marked in bold*

---

[3] Traditional grammar places theme vowels –*i* and –*î* in conjugation IV.

Table 2 shows that all of the verbs of a given conjugation type (i.e., I, II, III, IV) do not necessarily share the same pattern of syncretism. The following two reasons show why it is therefore wrong to maintain the traditional conjugation types when speaking of syncretism:

(i) Verbs of the same traditional conjugation type (i.e., with the same theme vowel) can have different patterns of syncretism. For example, *invita* "invite" has syncretism of the 3sg/3pl type. However, *tăia* "cut" has both the 1sg/2sg and 3sg/3pl types, while *da* "give" has the 1sg/3pl type, in spite of the fact that all of these stems end in the theme vowel –*a*. Although these verbs are ostensibly all of the same type, their different types of syncretism are due to the fact that the theme is not monosyllabic in the first two verbs, but is monosyllabic in the third (*da*); the monosyllabic stem causes the theme vowel to be stressed in all present forms, and conditions syncretism of the 1sg/3pl type, in spite of the –*a* theme. Furthermore, the second verb (*tăia*) has [i̯] ('yod') as its stem-final consonant, which causes an additional 1sg/2sg syncretism. In other words, phonology, rather than conjugational class, causes the specific pattern of present-tense syncretism.

(ii) Verbs of different traditional conjugations, often assumed to have different syncretic patterns, can actually have the same type of syncretism, if certain phonological conditions are met. For example, type I *invita* and type IV *sui* and *coborî* all share syncretism of the 3sg/3pl type. Phonologically, this is conditioned by the fact that all have back vowels either as the theme or immediately preceding the theme vowel, in spite of the fact that they do not belong to the same traditional conjugational classes.

In other words, the patterns of present-tense syncretism are predictable on the basis of the phonological shape of the stem, rather than the traditional conjugation class, so it is incorrect to identify particular syncretic types with the traditional conjugations. Table 3 demonstrates that each major type of present-tense syncretism can be correlated with a variety of different traditional conjugation types (i.e., theme-vowel classes).

For example, Table 3 shows that syncretism of the 1sg/3pl type can be manifested by verbs of all four conjugation types. Furthermore, each concrete manifestation of syncretism can be correlated to specific phonological properties of the stem. As illustrated, the 1sg/3pl syncretic form can end in the nonsyllabic glide [u̯], vocalic [u], or a consonant. In the first instance, the stem is monosyllabic and can have a theme vowel that cuts across the broad range of traditional conjugations I, II, and IV. These cases are not isolated exceptions, but defined phonological types.

Syncretic cells	Phonological manifestation of syncretisms
1sg/3pl present	1. Syncretic form ends in non-syllabic glide -*u̯* (theme vowels –*a*, -*ea*, -*i*): Monosyllabic stems, e.g., 1sg/3pl *dau, beau, ştiu* (infin. *da/bea,şti*) 2. Syncretic form ends in the vowel –*u* (theme vowels –*ea*, -*e*): Front-vowel theme preceded by [obstruent + liquid] cluster, e.g., 1sg/3pl *umplu* (infin. *umplea ~ umple*) 3. Syncretic form ends in zero (followed by pretheme consonant; theme vowels –*ea*, -*e*, -*i*): Non-monosyllabic stems, e.g., 1sg/3pl *tac, bat, sar* (infin. *tăcea/bate/sări*)
3sg/3pl present	1. Syncretic form ends in –*ă* (theme vowels –*a*, -*i*, -*î*)*:* a. Non-monosyllabic stem in non-front vowel -*a* or -*î*, preceded by nonalatal, e.g., 3sg/3pl *invită*, *coboară* (infin. *invita*, *coborî*) b. Polysyllabic stems in theme vowel -*i*, where present tense stress falls two syllables before the theme-vowel. e.g., 3sg/3pl *spríjină* "support," *súferă* "suffer" (infin. *sprijini/suferi*) 2. Syncretic form ends in –*e* (theme vowels –*a*, -*i*): a. Non-monosyllabic stem ending in palatal glide plus -*a* (-*ia*), e.g., 3sg/3pl *taie* "cut" (infin. *tăia*) b. Stems ending in a two-vowel sequence, the first of which is non-front, e.g., 3sg/3pl *suie* "climb" (infin. *sui*)
1sg/2sg present	Syncretic form ends in palatal glide (-*i*): Non-monosyllabic stem ending in palatal glide plus -*a* (-*ia*), e.g., 1sg/2sg *tai* "cut" (infin. *tăia*)
1sg/1pl imperfect	All verbs
3sg/3pl subjunctive	All verbs

Table 3: *Syncretic types in Romanian conjugation*

For example, several monosyllabic stems, whose only vowel is the stem-final theme (e.g., *da* "give," *sta* "stay," *bea* "drink," *vrea* "want," *şti* "know," etc.) all share the same syncretic pattern of 1sg/3pl, realized by the glide [u̯] (spelled *u*, e.g., 1sg/3pl *dáu, stáu, beáu, vreáu, ştíu*). The phonological reason is that the underlying -*u*, found in both the 1sg and 3pl, is changed to the glide when immediately following a stressed vowel, which is inevitably the case in monosyllabic stems. Therefore, the conditioning factor for this syncretic type has nothing to do with the traditional conjugation classes, but is directly related to the phonological feature of monosyllabicity. Thus, even a small sample of verbs should be sufficient to convince the observer of the direct causal role of stem phonology in determining the resulting syncretism.

Likewise, the syncretic pattern of 3sg/3pl is manifested by a final mid vowel: *-ă* (phonetically, [ə]) or *–e*. As in the case of 1sg/3pl syncretism, a wide variety of conjugational types can manifest this syncretism, all of which can be defined on the basis of the specific phonological properties of the stem. Thus, we see that non-monosyllabic stems with a basic non-front theme-vowel (*-a* or *–î*, phonetically [ɨ]) regularly have 3sg/3pl syncretism, but stems with basic front theme vowels only have this type of syncretism in narrowly defined conditions, such as when the front theme vowel is immediately preceded by a back vowel (e.g., infinitive *sui* "climb," 3sg/3pl *suie*) or is not contiguous to the present-tense stress (e.g., infinitive *sprijini* "support," 3sg/3pl *spríjină*).

Table 3 also displays the difference between the phonologically conditioned types of syncretism found in the present tense and the non-phonological types found outside the present tense. For example, in the imperfect, first person is syncretic for number and in the subjunctive third person has number syncretism. However, these syncretisms are not based on phonology and apply to all verbs. By definition, if a syncretic type pervades an entire grammatical category, such as the first-person syncretism of the Romanian imperfect, there will be no phonological subcategories that condition the presence or absence of the syncretism. Therefore, it is obvious that the number syncretisms found in both the imperfect and subjunctive are qualitatively different from those of the present tense, where phonological conditioning is the rule.

2. *A new segmentation and rule system*
2.1 *Segmentation of present-tense and imperfect desinences*

In this section, a new segmentation of Romanian verbs is proposed, with a unified set of grammatical endings. The variable realizations and syncretisms among the various verb stems are not caused by the fact that these stems lexically belong to a particular conjugation, but by the phonological interaction of the stem-final (theme) vowel and the ending. Each grammatical ending of the conjugational system is really a complex of three morphemes, representing the grammatical categories of tense, number, and person, in that order. Conjugation can be defined as the cyclical combination of the stem-final segment with each of the three components of the grammatical ending. The rules are morphophonemic, rather than strictly phonological, in that many of them only occur within the process of conjugation. There is no absolute neutralization of any of the posited grammatical morphemes. Each of the assumed morphemes surfaces in its basic form in at least some environments. In cases where certain morphemes (e.g., word-final *-u*) do not surface, this

occurs due to general phonological rules that exclude such occurrences.[4] My notation will show the basic stem followed by the '+' symbol, for example, *invita+*; components of the grammatical desinence are separated by hyphens. Zero morphemes are rendered with the symbol 'Ø,' and word-final position is indicated with the symbol '#.' Each zero morpheme is opposed by at least one instance of a non-zero.

	Tense	Number	Person		Tense	Number	Person
1sg	Ø	Ø	-u	1pl	Ø	-m	-u
2sg	Ø	Ø	-i	2pl	Ø	-t	-i
3sg	Ø	Ø	Ø	3pl	Ø	-u	Ø

Table 4: *System of present-tense endings*

	Tense	Number	Person		Tense	Number	Person
1sg	-à	-m	-u	1pl	-à	-m	-u
2sg	-à	Ø	-i	2pl	-à	-t	-i
3sg	-à	Ø	Ø	3pl	-à	-u	Ø

Table 5: *System of imperfect-tense endings*

The system of present- and imperfect-tense endings can be found in Tables 4 and 5. The middle morpheme position, that of number, significantly differs from the others, in that there is no basic phonological representation for the plural, although the singular can be treated as a consistent zero. In any case, it is assumed that some prior mechanism will make these morphemes available for conjugation in the way they are represented in Tables 4 and 5. The present-tense morpheme is a zero, and is opposed to the stressed vowel morpheme *-á* of the imperfect.[5] The *-á* does, in fact, surface in all forms of the imperfect. The process of commutation suggests a zero for the present, since certain

---

[4] One might question the assumption of a final *-u* for first person in the 1pl form, since it can never surface in this form for phonological reasons, that is, it can only be preceded by nasal *-m*, while a preceding [consonant + liquid] cluster is required for final *-u* to surface. However, both the parallelism with the 1sg and the possibility of an underlying final *-u* argue in favor of its underlying existence.

[5] I posit stressed *-ú* for the simple perfect. Due to space considerations and the fact that there is no syncretism in the simple perfect, the topic is not discussed in this chapter.

imperfect desinences are longer than the corresponding present-tense endings by one segment (e.g., *bateam* "beat$_{1SG/PL.IMPF}$" vs. *batem* "beat$_{1PL.PRESENT}$"). The consonantal desinences, which represent number in the first and second persons, regularly surface as such, except for the fact that 2pl basic *-t* is palatalized to *-ț*, due to its position before a word-final *-i*. In fact, unstressed word-final *-u* and *-i* are subject to the most variation. They survive intact only when preceded by a [consonant + liquid] cluster (e.g., *aflu*, *afli*); when preceded by a single consonant or another type of consonant cluster, the *-u* is deleted (e.g., 1sg *invit*), while the *-i* is reduced to a nonsyllabic glide (*i̯*), which often palatalizes the preceding consonant (e.g., 2sg *inviți*).

2.2 *Rules for vowel → mid and vowel deletion*

In the imperfect tense, first-person syncretism is not phonologically conditioned; I assume that it is grammatically assigned and appears as the input to the phonological rules, as shown in the identical first-person slots of Table 5. By contrast, the syncretic cells of the present tense come into existence due to the application of morphophonemic rules. Two specific types of morpho-phonemic rules are of particular importance for the generation of present-tense forms; their function will be the next major topic of discussion. Theme vowels all surface as mid at certain points in the present tense, even if they are high or low vowels in the basic stem. This suggests that there is a rule that lowers high vowels to mid and raises low vowels to mid. This is most obvious in the 3sg form, where the corresponding infinitives have high and low stressed vowels (cf. *invitá*, *sărí*), yet these vowels all surface in the present as unstressed vowels that have changed to mid (cf. 3sg *invítă*, *sáre*). Therefore, the first major sort of rule will require non-mid vowels to change to mid in particular environments. When the basic (unstressed) theme vowels totally fail to surface in certain present-tense forms (such as 1sg), even as changed to mid, we can observe that the following underlying desinential vowel surfaces instead, leading to the conclusion that a sequence of two underlying unstressed vowels experiences the deletion of one of these vowels. Since high and low stressed vowels (found in monosyllabic stems) do not undergo deletion in the 1sg, but instead cause the *-u* to become a glide (cf. *știu*, *dáu*), I assume that the deleted theme vowels experienced deletion before *-u* because they had first become unstressed mid vowels. In the 1sg, the vowel that survives the deletion (final *-u#*) is itself subject to later deletion, unless a [consonant + liquid] sequence precedes it (e.g., *invit*, but *suflu*). Therefore, the surface forms do not obviously demonstrate that a vowel sequence and a deletion have occurred. Yet, if we start from basic stems *invita+* and *sufla+*, deletion in both cases is the only

way to generate *invit* and *suflu*. In the 1sg form, all of the verb classes show a similar type of deletion. However, verbs are dramatically different in the 3pl and that is the key to solving the riddle of how syncretism is generated.

Since front-vowel themes (i.e., *-i* and *-e*) experience the same deletion in 3pl and 1sg, those two forms are syncretic. The results of the commutation process (shown in Table 4) indicate that the underlying grammatical endings of the 1sg and 3pl differ in that 1sg has an *-u* desinence in the person slot (i.e., in word-final position), while 3pl has an *-u* desinence of number, which occupies the desinential medial slot, not directly on the word-final boundary. Since front-vowel themes (*-e, -i*) both experience the identical deletion in these two instances (1sg and 3pl, e.g., *bat, sar*), I assume that these themes undergo the same rules for being deleted before *-u* in both positions. However, the back-vowel themes (both *-a* and *-î*) experience deletion only in the 1sg (e.g., *invit, cobor*), but not in the 3pl (*invită, coboară*), where they surface as nondeleted mid vowels. This indicates that the high front theme vowel (*-i*) generalizes mid-vowel height before any unstressed desinential vowel, regardless of whether it is in word-final position, but that the high and low non-front theme vowels (*-a, -î*) do not undergo the change to mid-vowel height before a nonfinal *-u* (such as in the 3pl), but do so only at the point in the cycle when they reach the word-final boundary.

Therefore, due to rule ordering, if a basic *-a* theme has not yet been raised to mid, it will not be deleted before a following *-u* desinence; rather, the *-u* desinence itself will be deleted and only later will the *-a* reach the word-final position and be raised to mid, surfacing as *-ă* (cf. 3pl *invită*). If, on the other hand, an *-i* theme gets lowered to mid even before being combined with desinential medial *-u*, the sequence *-e-u-* will ensue and the first vowel will be subject to deletion, first yielding a form such as *bat-u#*, which later loses the final *-u* and surfaces as 3pl *bat*, syncretic with 1sg. Thus, at each cycle of conjugation (stem + tense, stem + number, and stem + person), there will be rules for changing theme vowels to mid-vowel height and then for deleting vowels in the sequence of theme vowel plus vocalic desinence, as follows:
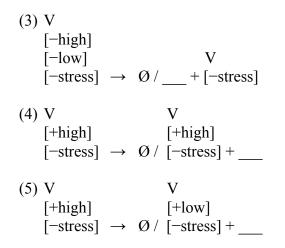
(i) Any unstressed front-vowel theme (regardless of frontness or backness) becomes mid before an unstressed desinential vowel. This rule can take the form (1), where the '+' symbol refers to the stem-desinence boundary:

(1) V
   [−back]   [−high]   V
   [−stress] → [−low] /___ + [−stress]

(ii) An unstressed theme vowel becomes mid before a word-final vowel or zero desinence. This can be represented as in (2):

(2) V   [−high]
   [−stress] → [−low] /___+ (V) #

(iii) An unstressed mid vowel is deleted when it precedes an unstressed desinential vowel; an unstressed high desinential vowel is deleted when it is preceded by a non-mid (high or low) vowel. In rule form, this will be as in (3) through (5):

(3) V
   [−high]
   [−low]   V
   [−stress] → Ø / ___ + [−stress]

(4) V   V
   [+high]   [+high]
   [−stress] → Ø / [−stress] + ___

(5) V   V
   [+high]   [+low]
   [−stress] → Ø / [−stress] + ___

Notice that all of these rules apply to sequences of unstressed vowels. The rules for vowel→mid and vowel deletion do not operate as such when the verb stem is monosyllabic and the theme is stressed, which is why verbs such as *da* and *sta* are often treated as irregular.[6] In this case, deletion rule (5) does not apply. Instead of being deleted, the *-u* is changed to the corresponding glide [u̯]. This explains why the 3pl of first-conjugation *da* is *dau* (with final [u̯]), but the 3pl of *invita* is *invită*, with deleted *-u*.

---

[6] Present-tense stress assignment is by default in the verbs under discussion. The last preconsonantal vowel gets the default stress, unless there is no such vowel, which explains why a polysyllabic stem (e.g., 3pl *invítă*) has pretheme stress, but a monosyllabic stem (e.g., 3pl *dáu*) has a stressed theme vowel (see Feldstein 1994-1995:239-245).

2.3 *Summary of rules applied to 3pl forms*

The cyclical operations in the critical present 3pl form, at the morphemes of tense, number, and person, for the basic input *invita+Ø-u-Ø#, bate+Ø-u-Ø#,* and *sari+Ø-u-Ø#* can be briefly summarized as follows:

(i) In the present tense, the first desinential position (tense morpheme) is a zero, so no vowel combinations occur.

(ii) Theme vowel → mid: When the second position (number) is reached, the unstressed high front-vowel theme becomes mid, that is, *i → e*; *sar-i+u+Ø# → sar-e+u-Ø#*. Back-vowel themes are exempt from this rule, since they only change to mid when the following desinence is word final. In this case, the notion of 'word final' is abstract, since a zero occupies the final position.

(iii) Vowel deletion: An unstressed mid vowel is deleted before a high vowel: *sar-e+u-Ø# → sar-é+u-Ø# → sar+u-Ø#*. When a low vowel is followed by a high vowel, it is the high vowel that gets deleted: *invita+u-Ø# → invita+ú-Ø# → invita+Ø#*.

(iv) Next, at the third(-person) morpheme, the theme vowel → mid rule calls for all unstressed theme vowels to become mid when preceding a word-final desinence: *invita+Ø# → invită-Ø# → invită*.

(v) Eventually, a postlexical rule calls for the deletion of final *-u*, unless it is preceded by an [obstruent + liquid] cluster: *sar+u-Ø# → sar+u# → sar*.

To recapitulate, both 1sg and 3pl both contain an *-u* morpheme, but differ in that the 1sg *-u* is in the third slot, while the 3pl *-u* is in the second slot. Theme *-i* becomes mid at the second slot and theme *-e* is mid to begin with, but theme *-a* becomes mid only at the third slot. This accounts for the different syncretisms of the so-called I versus the other conjugations of Romanian.

In order to further clarify the process of how the rules of theme → mid and vowel deletion derive the present-tense forms, Tables 6 through 8 illustrate the step-by-step process for three different theme vowels (*-a, -e, -i*) in the 1sg, 3sg, and 3pl forms. The other non-front-vowel theme (*-î*) behaves like *-a*.

RONALD F. FELDSTEIN

1. Basic input	invita+Ø-Ø-u#	bate+Ø-Ø-u#	sari+Ø-Ø-u#[7]	
2. Tense cycle	invita+Ø-u#	bate+Ø-u#	sari+Ø-u#	Elimination of zero tense morpheme
3. Number cycle	invita+u#	bate+u#	sari+u#	Elimination of zero number morpheme
4. Person cycle	(a) invitə+u#	---------	sare+u#	Unstressed theme vowel → mid preceding word-final desinence
	(b) invitə́+u #.	bate̸+u#	sare̸+u#	Deletion of unstressed mid [e/ə] before desinential vowel
5. Postlexical:	invit	bat	sar	Loss of -u# unless blocked due to preceding [consonant + liquid] sequence
Orthographic form	*invit*	*bat*	*sar*	

Table 6: *Derivation of the verbs invita, bate, and sări in 1sg (vacuous rule applications are shown with dotted lines)*

1. Basic input	invita+Ø-Ø-Ø-#	bate+Ø-Ø-Ø#	sari+Ø-Ø-Ø#	
2. Tense cycle	invita+Ø-Ø#	bate+Ø-Ø#	sari+Ø-Ø#	Elimination of zero tense morpheme
3. Number cycle	invita+Ø#	bate+Ø#	sari+Ø#	Elimination of zero number morpheme
4. Person cycle	(a) invitə+Ø#	---------	sare+Ø#	Unstressed theme vowel→mid preceding word-final desinence
	(b) invitə#.	bate#	sare#	Elimination of zero person morpheme
Orthographic form	*invită*	*bate*	*sare*	

Table 7: *Derivation of the verbs invita, bate, and sări in 3sg*

---

[7] I recognize the basic stem as *sari+*. The root vowel of the infinitive appears as the mid vowel [ə] (*ă*, i.e., *sări*), due to the fact that it is unstressed. When stressed, the vowel is *a*, as in 1sg/3pl *sar*, and 3sg *sare*. However, the rules for raising unstressed vowels do not directly bear on the issues of syncretism that are the focus of this chapter.

1. Basic input	invita+Ø-u-Ø#	bate+Ø-u-Ø#	sari+Ø-u-Ø#	
2. Tense cycle	invita+u-Ø#	bate+u-Ø#	sari+u-Ø#	Elimination of zero tense morpheme
3. Number cycle	(a) ---------	---------	sare+u-Ø#	Unstressed front vowel → mid before vocalic desinence
	(b) ---------	baté+u-Ø#	saré+u-Ø#	Deletion of unstressed mid before vocalic desinence
	(c) invita+u̯-Ø#	---------	---------	Deletion of vocalic desinence after (non-mid) theme vowel
4. Person cycle	(a) invitə+Ø#	---------	---------	Unstressed theme vowel→mid preceding word-final desinence
	(b) invitə#.	bat+u#	sar+u#	Elimination of zero person morpheme
5. Postlexical	---------	bat	sar	Loss of -*u*# unless blocked due to preceding [consonant + liquid] sequence
Orthographic form	*invită*	*bat*	*sar*	

Table 8: *Derivation of the verbs invita, bate, and sări in 3pl*

3. *Romanian syncretism as depicted by Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002)*

Having presented a system that treats phonological syncretism as underlyingly nonsyncretic, I return to examining the questionable statements of Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002) on the topic of Romanian syncretism.

3.1 *Present-tense 1sg/3pl syncretism*

Stump (2001:213) introduces this type of syncretism by stating that, "in Romanian, verbs belonging to any but the first conjugation have present indicative paradigms in which the 1sg form is identical to the 3pl form." However, as noted earlier, first-conjugation verbs with monosyllabic stems can indeed have this type of syncretism, for example, 1sg/3pl *dau/stau*. It is only necessary that they fulfill a specific phonological condition: First-conjugation verbs with this syncretism must have a theme vowel that is consistently stressed in the present tense. Therefore, the issue is not an abstract grammatical assignment called 'first conjugation,' but the phonological fact of whether a theme vowel -*a* is stressed or unstressed in the 1sg and 3pl forms in question. In other words, the reason is phonological, rather than morphological. I understand the 3pl to contain an underlying -*u* desinence that is retained as a

glide after a stressed theme vowel -*a*, but that gets deleted after an unstressed -*a* theme (cf. first-conjugation 3pl with stressed theme vowel *dau, stau* vs. first-conjugation 3pl with unstressed theme vowel *invită, suflă*). In spite of the possible surface deletion after the unstressed theme vowel -*a*, I regard the basic 3pl desinence to be -*u*. Stump attempts to apply a rule of referral to the 1sg/3pl syncretism, declaring the 1sg -*u* to be the independent entity, with the 3pl as dependent. This ignores the important fact that, in every instance where the 3pl lacks the -*u*, this absence is attributable to a phonological deletion, such as that which occurs after an unstressed theme vowel -*a*. Bobaljik (2002:66) criticizes Stump's declaration of 1sg as having a more inherent -*u* ending than the 3pl when they are syncretic, on the basis of the fact that the imperfect tense has a constant -*u* in the 3pl, but he does not point out the difference between phonologically conditioned syncretisms and those that have no such phonological restriction. In fact, both Stump and Bobaljik appear unsure about the precise nature of the -*u* desinence, since it can appear in both 1sg and 3pl, and is subject to a variety of phonological restrictions in both paradigmatic slots. Ultimately, Bobaljik concludes that the -*u* is simply a default form, due to "this rather scattered distribution of the -*u* suffix" (2002:66). The solution I proposed in section 2 claims that both 1sg and 3pl contain an -*u* component, but that the two forms differ in that 1sg has this desinence directly on the word-final boundary, while 3pl has it preceding a zero element. In the case of 1sg, I would claim that the -*u* signals first person, but that it represents plural number in the 3pl.

Table 2 shows that the present paradigms of *bate* and *umple* can have 1sg/3pl syncretism, with surface realizations of both -Ø and -*u*, respectively. While Stump (2001) does not even mention the option of zero in his discussion of this type, Bobaljik (2002) states that it is a special property of the 1sg/3pl syncretism, calling it 'metaparadigmatic.' However, such multiple realizations are quite common among the phonologically conditioned syncretisms of Romanian, that is, they are not confined to just one type. For example, the 3sg/3pl type of syncretism, normally associated with the first conjugation, also has two realizations, depending on whether a semivowel [i̯] precedes the theme-vowel, since the usual schwa fronts to *e* when preceded by [i̯] (e.g., *tăia* is realized as *tăie* in both 3sg and 3pl, as shown in Tables 2 and 3). Therefore, Bobaljik's so-called metaparadigmatic option occurs not only for 1sg/3pl, but also for 3sg/3pl.

3.2 *Present-tense 3sg/3pl syncretism*

As mentioned earlier, Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002) identify 1sg/3pl syncretism with the traditional non-first conjugation types. Following this pattern, they identify the other major type of present-tense syncretism (3sg/3pl) with the first conjugation. Yet, there are several verb classes that do not have the first-conjugation theme vowel -*a*, yet do have this type of syncretism (see the 3sg/3pl section of Table 3). They are not just inexplicable irregulars, but clear cases of phonological subtypes, whose environments create the conditions for this particular type of syncretism. In the first place, even theme vowel -*a* has a phonological restriction on its use with 3sg/3pl syncretism: This theme vowel cannot belong to a monosyllabic stem and have constant stress in the present; otherwise, it has 1sg/3pl syncretism, for example, *da/sta*. Theme vowels outside the first conjugation (i.e., other than -*a*) can also regularly have 3sg/3pl syncretism, as long as they are either back vowels (such as -*î*, e.g., *coborî* "descend"), front vowels that are immediately preceded by a back vowel (e.g., *sui* "climb"), or when there is an underlying stress mark two syllables to the left of the theme[8] (*sprijini* "support," *suferi* "suffer").

Stump (2001:213-214) states that 3sg/3pl syncretism presents "a rule of -*ă* suffixation which expresses third person but is insensitive to differences of number." This raises objections from the perspective of the morphophonemic system I introduced earlier. In the first place, I regard the -*ă* ([ə]) simply as a raised theme vowel, followed by a zero ending, rather than as a present-tense desinence on its own. Second, when the very same 3sg -*ă* happens to be the final vowel of a stressed monosyllabic stem (stressed *dắ*) there is no 3sg/3pl syncretism (3sg *dắ* vs. 3pl *dáu*). These are just the sorts of grammatical conclusions that should not be made with such a broad brush when they are restricted to particular phonological environments.

3.3 *Present-tense 1sg/2sg syncretism*

In addition to the other and more widespread syncretisms of the present tense, there is also the minor and restricted 1sg/2sg syncretism, which is not mentioned by either Stump (2001) or Bobaljik (2002). It is phonologically conditioned when verbs have a [i̯] consonant that precedes the theme vowel, for example, 1sg/2sg *tai* "cut," shown in Table 2 . This syncretism never appears alone and must co-occur with 3sg/3pl syncretism, producing a double syncretism within a single present-tense paradigm (e.g., 1sg/2sg *tai*, plus

---

[8] For more details on the relationship of this stress pattern to Romanian conjugation, see Feldstein (1994-1995:240).

3sg/3pl *taie*). It does not combine with the 1sg/3pl type; if it did, it would produce a situation of syncretism across three cells. This may indicate that a single tense paradigm can tolerate two syncretic pairs on the surface, but not a syncretic triplet.

3.4 *Imperfect 1sg/1pl and subjunctive 3sg/3pl*

The structure of the imperfect-tense syncretism lacks any phonological conditioning. Therefore, it occurs throughout all verb types and there is no instance in which Romanian distinguishes 1sg and 1pl in the imperfect. In all of the present-tense instances looked at hitherto, the phonological conditioning goes along with the fact that each type is found with a delimited number of verb stems, which can be defined phonologically.

The syncretic situation of the Romanian subjunctive was not mentioned in the discussions of either Stump (2001) or Bobaljik (2002). It has unique syncretic properties in the Romanian system of verbal syncretism, perhaps due to the fact that it is the only instance of a mood opposition. In the first two persons, there is syncretism between the present indicative and subjunctive, which could be treated as impoverishment, based on the absence of a mood opposition outside the third person. In the third person, the mood opposition is present, but the subjunctive 3sg is the same as the 3pl in all verbs, regardless of stem phonology. Therefore, on the basis of no phonological conditioning and invariant number syncretism, the imperfect first-person and subjunctive third-person syncretisms are structurally similar. Both stand in stark contrast to the present, in which there is no invariant number syncretism. The only invariant syncretic cell (i.e., having obligatory syncretism) in the present tense is that of the 3pl. Since the 3pl present is always syncretic with either 1sg or 3sg, one can say that the number syncretism is also an invariant of the 3pl present, although it can take the form of combined person/number syncretism in the case of 1sg/3pl, or pure number syncretism, in the case of 3sg/3pl. The common denominator for present, imperfect, and subjunctive is that each paradigmatic instance contains two forms that suppress number, while expressing either present, imperfect, or subjunctive meanings.

4.   *Do patterns of surface syncretism contribute anything?*

The proposed system of segmentation (Tables 4 and 5) and rules (Tables 6-8) posits basic shapes for the grammatical morphemes of tense, number, and person, and establishes rules that can derive the seemingly capricious patterns of Romanian syncretism. However, this approach does not necessarily exclude an analysis of what the surface phenomena reveal, which may show another

side of the functioning of the syncretic system.[9] In other words, even though the syncretism is not underlying, there may be an inner logic to the rules, which leads to surface patterning. The main lines of surface syncretism can be summarized as follows. The 3pl is obligatorily syncretic in the present, but all three persons of the singular (1sg/2sg/3sg) are optionally syncretic, depending on the phonology of the particular verb stem. One of two syncretisms must occur in every present-tense paradigm: either 1sg/3pl or 3sg/3pl. Therefore, since only first- and third-person forms are found within the set of obligatory types, second person is excluded when there are only two syncretic present-tense cells. However, if a second syncretism occurs (normal for stems with a palatal glide preceding the theme vowel, e.g., *tăia*), one syncretic pair must pertain to the third person (3sg/3pl), while the other (1sg/2sg) excludes third person. The optional second syncretic pair (1sg/2sg) is thus notable in that it is the precise opposite of the obligatory form that must always be syncretic in the present (3pl), since this optional type is defined as non-third person and non-plural in number. In other words, there is a negative correlation between the two syncretic patterns (3sg/3pl and 1sg/2sg) that can co-occur in the same paradigm.

To summarize, all of the present-tense syncretisms can make either positive or negative reference to second or third persons, but never first person, as follows, based on the common denominator of each of the syncretic types:

(i)   3sg/3pl (*invită*) has the common denominator of third person.
(ii) 1sg/3pl (*bat*) has the common denominator of non-second person.
(iii) 1sg/2sg (*tai*) has the common denominator non-third person.

Conversely, the past-tense syncretism (of the imperfect) is diametrically opposite to the lack of first-person reference in the present tense. Past-tense syncretism is obligatorily defined as first person (1sg/1pl, e.g., *invitam*), precisely the type that is excluded in the present. Therefore, we can state that none of the varieties of present-tense syncretism ever make explicit reference to first person, while past-tense syncretism can only make explicit reference to the first person. As noted earlier, present-tense syncretism comes about as a

---

[9] An anonymous reviewer wondered how I can first propose underlying forms to derive syncretic forms and then say that the surface is also of interest. I do claim that both the derivation and the surface are interesting structures from differing points of view, much as one might construct both a grammar for the speaker and the listener, or study both morphophonemic and phonetic patterns in a language. One might recall that Roman Jakobson, who wrote the pioneering generative study of the Russian verb (Jakobson 1948), also devoted many studies to the subject of the surface patterning of syncretisms (e.g., Jakobson 1958).

result of phonological rules, while in the imperfect, the syncretism appears to be imposed by the morphological component, prior to the functioning of the phonological rules. Curiously, if the 1sg/1pl imperfect syncretism had not been assigned by the grammar, there would have been an invariant phonological syncretism in the imperfect, of the type 1sg/3pl, since the imperfect-tense morpheme (stressed *á*) would combine with either the third-position *-u* of the 1sg or the second-position *-u* of the 3pl in the same way; that is, *invitau* would not only be the 3pl form (as it actually is), but would have been a 1sg/3pl syncretic form, if it were not for the nonphonological imposition of the 1sg/1pl syncretism. However, if 1sg/3pl syncretism were to exist in the imperfect, there would then be no special oppositional role of the first person, as excluded from the present but obligatory in the past. One can only speculate about the conspiratorial role of the grammatical system in its imposition of non-phonological first-person syncretism in the imperfective. Stump (2001) and Bobaljik (2002) differ in their explanations of the unusual fact that imperfect syncretism is realized by the marked plural, rather than the unmarked singular (Bobaljik 2002:65). My system of segmentation suggests the view that the language opted for a marked and nonphonological choice (1sg/1pl), due to the fact that the phonology would have yielded an imperfect-tense syncretism not strictly of the first-person type, which would have gone against the overall grammatical strategy of syncretism (i.e., absence of present-tense reference to first person, but imperfect reference only to first person).

The syncretism of the subjunctive mood manifests structural similarities to both the present and the imperfect. It is like the present in its syncretism of the third person (3sg/3pl, e.g., *invite*, *bată*); yet, it has the pattern of the imperfect in its single, constant number syncretism within a single grammatical person (third), the only number in which the subjunctive is opposed to the present tense.

5. *Conclusion*

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate some of the complexities and systematic properties of Romanian conjugational syncretism, particularly when it is phonologically conditioned in the present tense. Two recent linguistic discussions of Romanian syncretism were shown to contain inaccuracies, due to the fact that they follow the traditional view of linking syncretism to conjugational class. It was demonstrated that one cannot accurately deal with syncretism in terms of the traditional conjugational types. Phonologically conditioned syncretism, as found in the Romanian present tense, is structurally very different from the nonphonological type, as found in the imperfect. As an

alternative to the traditional conjugational types, a new morphophonemic system was proposed in which verb stems, including the theme vowel, all cyclically combine with a tripartite desinential complex. As shown, this system is capable of generating the correct syncretic forms and can help to explain how syncretism arises in the structure of the language. Thus, this chapter has indicated the inadequacies of previous analyses and suggested a systematic alternative for the analysis of Romanian syncretism. Finally, a surface-oriented analysis of syncretism was explored, which might serve to complement the analysis of underlying forms. Both the underlying morphophonemic forms and the surface forms constitute a complex structure that has yet to be fully understood in all of its ramifications.

REFERENCES

Bobaljik, Jonathan David. 2002. "Syncretism Without Paradigms: Remarks on Williams 1981, 1994". *Yearbook of Morphology 2001* ed. by Geert Booij & Jaap van Marle, 53-85. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Feldstein, Ronald F. 1994-1995. "Accentul verbului în limba româna [The accent of the verb in Romanian]". *Dacoromania* 1:1-2.75-96.

Graur, Al., ed. 1966. *Gramatica limbii române* [Grammar of the Romanian Language], vol. I. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România.

Jakobson, Roman. 1948. "Russian Conjugation". *Word* 4:5.155-167.

Jakobson, Roman. 1958. "Morfologičeskie nabljudenija nad slavjanskim skloneniem [Morphological observations on Slavic declension]". *American Contributions to the Fourth International Congress of Slavists*, 127-156. The Hague: Mouton.

Stump, Gregory T. 2001. *Inflectional Morphology: A theory of paradigm structure.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zwicky, Arnold M. 1985. "How to Describe Inflection." *Proceedings of the eleventh annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society: 16-18 February, 1985* ed. by Mary Niepokuj, 372-286. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society.