WHY *ON TABLE* IS *ON THE TABLE*?
Notes on the definite's article incorporation with prepositions in Romanian

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1.   *Introduction*

The aim of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, we present a descriptive overview of the use of the definite article with prepositions in Romanian. On the other hand, we provide a morpho-syntactic analysis of article 'drop' in the framework of minimalism.

The paper is organised as follows. In section 2 we introduce the data to be discussed. We compare Romanian examples to other Romance languages, to Albanian and to English. We also point out a few exceptions to the empirical generalization we shall observe. Section 3 is concerned with a brief examination of other cases of article omission representing a different phenomenon. In section 4 we discuss the conditions under which article drop takes place in Romanian. In this section we show that there are a number of necessary but not sufficient conditions competing with respect to article drop. Section 5 offers an analysis of this phenomenon in terms of economy and reduced functional structure. Finally, section 6 provides the conclusions of our research.

2.   *The data*

In a number of Balkan languages, like Romanian, Albanian and Bulgarian, the definite article may be realised as a suffix on the noun (1) or on a prenominal adjective (2) (Grosu 1994, Giusti 1993, Longobardi 1996, Dimitrova-Vulchanova & Giusti 1998, Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006).

(1)   a.   *parc-ul*   (Romanian)
              park-the
              'the park'
       b.   *trapezë-n*   (Albanian)
              table-the
              'the table'
       c.   *masa-ta*   (Bulgarian)
              table-the
              'the table'

(2)   a.   *înverzit-ul parc*   (Romanian)
              green-the park
              'the green park'
       c.   *i   bukur-i   dhe   i   madh-i qytet*   (Albanian)
              AGR beautiful-the and Agr big-the city
              'the beautiful and the big city'
       b.   *tservena-ta masa*   (Bulgarian)
              red-the   table
              'the red table'

2.1   *Definite article drop in Romanian*

As recently shown by Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006, the fact that the definite article may be suffixal in these languages raises fundamental questions with regard to the analysis of the functional category D(eterminer) and its relation with the lexical category N(oun)[1]. It also raises several problems regarding the structure, and consequently the analysis, of DPs when embedded in PPs.

More precisely, in Romanian, a non modified noun preceded by a preposition is necessarily used without the definite article.

(3) a. *Mă îndrept către   parc / *către   parcu-l*   (Romanian)
          me head towards park   towards park-the
          'I'm heading towards the park'
     b. *Ion a   împins maşina în prăpastie / *în prăpasti-a*
          John AUX pushed car-the in abyss   in abyss-the
          'John pushed the car into the abyss'

When the noun preceded by the preposition combines with an adnominal constituent (AP (4a), PP (4b) or a relative clause (4c)), the definite article is required. In the following examples the adnominal constituent is postnominal.

(4) a. *Mă îndrept către   parc-ul înverzit / *către   parc înverzit.*
          me head towards park-the green   towards park green
          'I'm heading towards the green park'
     b. *Ion   a   împins maşina în prăpasti-a din   mijlocul   pădurii   /*
          John AUX pushed car-the in abyss-the DE+in middle-the forest-the.GEN
          în prăpastie   din   mijlocul   pădurii.
          in abyss   DE+in middle-the forest-the.GEN
          'John pushed the car into the abyss in the middle of the forest'
     c. *Mă îndrept către   parc-ul   care   a   fost construit anul   trecut.*
          me head   towards park-the   which AUX been built   year-the last
          'I'm heading towards the park which was built last year'

The situation is identical when the adnominal constituent is prenominal[2].

(4') a. *Mă îndrept către   înverzit-ul parc / *către   înverzit parc.*
           me head towards green-the park   towards green   park
           'I'm heading towards the green park'
      b. *Ion   a   împins maşina în oribil-a   prăpastie / *în oribilă   prăpastie.*
           John AUX pushed car-the in horrible-the   abyss   in horrible abyss
           'John pushed the car into the horrible abyss'

Notice that the Romanian indefinite article, which is an indefinite word preceding the noun, i.e., proclitic, does not fall under this rule. In other words, the indefinite article may be present with a (non modified) noun governed by a preposition.

(5) *Mă îndrept către   un parc / către   un parc înverzit.*

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[1] For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, in terms of D lowering -to- Num(ber), see the Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006.

[2] Note that Romanian, unlike French or German , – among other languages – , does not have contracted forms of the (definite) article and prepositions.

me head   towards a park towards a park green
'I'm heading towards a (green) park'

The omission of the definite article is not sensitive to the PP's grammatical function. As shown by the following set of data, the PP may appear in various syntactic positions: preverbal subject in copular sentences (6), subcategorized PP (7), the so-called 'prepositional' direct object (8), modifier (9).

(6)   *Sub   masă este un loc   preferat   de copii   pentru a se   acunde.*
        under table is   a   place preferred by children for   to REFL hide
        'Under the table is children's favourite place to hide'

(7)   *Am   optat pentru preşedinte.*
        have   opted for   president
        'I opted for the president'

(8)   *L-am   văzut pe   profesor.*
        him-have seen ACC professor
        'I saw the professor'

(9)   *Comoara   a   fost îngropată în grădină.*
        treasure-the AUX been buried   in garden
        'The treasure has been buried in the garden'

Moreover, this phenomenon is not sensitive to the distinction between lexical (10) and the so-called 'functional' prepositions (see (8) above and (11)).

(10)   *Victima   a   fost prinsă   sub acoperiş.*
        victim-the AUX been trapped under roof
        'The victim has been trapped under the roof'

(11)   a.   *O   caut pe   secretară.*
                her$_{CL}$ look ACC secretary
                'I'm looking for the secretary'
        b.   *Dau cărţi   la copii.*
                give books to children
                'I give books to the children'

Another important observation regarding this phenomenon is that it occurs only with prepositions that assign Accusative Case, not with those that assign Genitive or Dative. In fact, this is a logical consequence of the fact that Romanian Genitive and Dative Case must be (morphologically) marked on the determiner (see Cornilescu 1993, Grosu 1998, Dobrovie-Sorin 2000a, 2001a), thus it must be overt.

(12)   a. *proteste împotriva discriminări-lor   / *împotriva discriminări* (Genitive)
           protests against discriminations-the.GEN /   against discriminations
           '(some) protests against discriminations'
        b. *succese   graţie effort-ului   / *graţie   efort*   (Dative)
           success thanks to effort-the.DAT / thanks to effort
           '(some) success thanks to the effort'

2.1.1 *Interpretation*

Since we are concerned with constructions that lack the definite article, we would expect them to have a non referential and / or at least an indefinite reading. In fact, it is to be noted that, despite the omission of the article, the constructions mentioned above necessarily have a referential and definite reading. This may be proved by the possibility of inserting a strong form of the (demonstrative) determiner.

(13)   *Mă îndrept către acest parc.*
         me head towards this park
         'I'm heading towards this park'

2.1.2 *Exceptions*

There are however two exceptions to this 'rule'.
The first one is represented by the nouns preceded by the preposition *cu* 'with' when it introduces an instrumental PP in a generic use.

(14)   *Medicul   operează   pacient-ul   cu   bisturiu-l[3].*
         doctor-the operates on patient-the with lancet-the
         'The doctor operates on the patient with a lancet'

The second one is represented by idioms preceded by the complex preposition *de-a* 'as'.

(15)   a.   *Copiii   se   joacă de-a   şcoal-a.*
               children-the REFL   play DE-A school-the
               'The children play at being at school'
         b.   *Copiii   se   joacă de-a   hoţi-i   şi   vardişti-i / detectivi-i.*
               children-the REFL   play DE-A burglars-the and policemen-the detectives-the
               'The children play at being burglars and policemen / detectives'

2.2 *Crosslinguistic data*

In what follows, we compare the Romanian data involving definite article omission with similar constructions in Albanian, certain Romance languages, and English.

2.2.1 *Albanian*[4]

The same phenomenon exists in Albanian: when the noun preceded by a preposition is not modified, the definite article cannot appear.

(16)   a.   *Vuri librin   mbi trapezë / * mbi trapezë-n.*
               put book-the on table   on table-the
               'He puts the book on the table'
         b.   *Unë   po   shkoj   në park / *në park-ut*
                I PRT.PROGR go   to park / to park-the
               'I'm going to the park'
         c.   *Unë   po   shkoj   në shkollë / kishë   // *në shkollë-n / kishë-n*
                I PRT.PROGR go   to school church   to school-the church-the
               'I'm going to (the) school / church'

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[3] Some speakers may use expressions like the following, i.e., without definite article: *tai cu foarfecă* "I cut with scissors", *tunde cu maşină (de tuns)* "He cuts (hair) with a hair clipper".
[4] I am grateful to Ion Giurgea and especially to Etleva Vocaj for helping me with these data.

d. *Thesari është groposur në kopësht / *në kopsht-in*
    treasure-the is buried in garden   in garden-the
    'The treasure is buried in the garden'

On the contrary, when the noun combines with an adnominal constituent, the presence of the definite article is obligatory. The following constructions contain postnominal constituents.

(17) a.   *Vuri libri-n mbi trapezë-n që bëri gjyshi.*
        put book-the on   table-the that made grandfather
        'He puts the book on the table grandfather made'
     b.   *Unë   po   shkoj   në park-ut me pemë të larta /*
         I PRT.PROGR go   to park-the with trees   big
    *në park me pemë të larta
        to park with trees   bigs
        'I'm going to the park with big trees'
     c.   *Unë   po   shkoj në shkollë-n   e çunave / kishë-n   ortodokse /*
         I PRT.PROGR go to school-the of boys   church-the orthodox
    *në shkollë e çunave / kishë ortodokse
     to school   of   boys   church orthodox
        'I'm going to the boys school / orthodox church'
     d.   *Thesari   është groposur në kopsht-in   për   të cilin më fole   /*
        treasure-the is   buried in garden-the about it   me spoke
    * në kopësht për   të cilin më fole
     in garden   about   it   me spoke
        'The treasure is buried in the garden about you spoke to me about'

2.2.2 *Other Romance Languages and English*
The phenomenon above described does not exist in other languages we have examined. Several Romance languages, like French, Italian, and Spanish, but also Germanic languages, like English, show a different behaviour with respect to the use of the definite article after prepositions. This is to say that the definite word preceding the noun, i.e., proclitic, may not fall when embedded in a PP.

(18) a.   *Je me dirige vers le parc / * vers parc.*   (French)
     b.   *Je me dirige vers le parc avec de grands arbres.*
     c.   *Je me dirige vers le vieux parc.*

(19) a.   *Mi dirigo verso il giardino / *verso giardino*   (Italian)
     b.   *Mi dirigo verso il giardino con fiori.*

(20) a.   *Juan se ha escondido detrás de los árboles / *detrás de arboles.*   (Spanish)
     b.   *Juan se ha escondido detrás de los arboles verdes.*

(21) a.   *We are heading towards the park / *towards park.*   (English)
     b.   *We are heading towards the park with big trees.*

3.   *Circumscribing the phenomenon*
The cases described so far must be distinguished from other cases of absence of determiner.

3.1   *Article omission with bare nouns*

These cases are encountered in all the languages mentioned above. It is to be noted that the following examples characterize exclusively the nominal domain, i.e., they appear only as adnominal modifiers in complex nominal structures or compounds. Of particular importance is the fact that no type of determiner is allowed with these nouns (most of them being mass or uncountable nouns), which are necessarily interpreted as indefinite and generally denote properties (of individuals) (Milner 1982, Kolliakou 1999, Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2003, Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin 2005, Mardale 2005).

(22) a. *o rochie de mireasă / *de o / această / mireas-a*   (Romanian)
          a dress of   bride / of a / this   / bride-the
          'a wedding dress'
      b. *un pahar de cristal / *de un / acest / cristalu-l*
          a glass of crystal / of a / this / crystal-the
          'a glass of crystal'
      c. *o casă fără   uşi / *fără   nişte / aceste / uşi-le*
          a house without doors / without some / these / doors-the
          'a house without doors'

(23) a. *une robe de mariée / *d'une / cette / la mariée*[5]   (French)
      b. *un verre en cristal / *en un / ce / le cristal*
      c. *une maison avec jardin / *avec un / ce / le jadin*
      d. *des fenêtres sans volets / *sans des / ces / les volets*

(24) a. *un bicchiere di cristallo / *di un / questo / il cristallo*   (Italian)
      b. *un abito da sposa / *da una / questa / la sposa*
      c. *una casa con giardino / *con un / questo / col (con + il) giardino*

(25) a. *un vestido de novia / *de una / esta / la novia*   (Spanish)
      b. *una casa con jardín / con ventanas / *con un / este / el jardín*
      c. *una copa de cristal / *de un / este / el cristal*
      d. *una mesa de madera / *de una / esta / la madera*

(26) a. *a mother without child (cf. she is without child)*   (English)
      b. *a car with / without driver / *without a / this / the driver*
      c. *a house in marble / a piece of marble*
      d. *a man of steel*

Let us also point out that the Romanian preposition *cu* 'with', which normally combines with a noun followed by the definite article (see the section § 2.1.2., ex. (14)), does not license a D either in examples of this second type:

(27) a. *o casă cu grădină tropicală / *cu grădin-a tropicală*
          a house with garden tropical   with house-the   tropical
          'a house with a tropical garden'
      b. *o pălărie cu boruri largi   / *cu boruri-le largi*
          a hat   with brims large.PL   with brims-the large.PL
          'a broad-brimmed hat'

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[5] Those examples are acceptable with a different (partitive) interpretation.

Interestingly, the presence of an adnominal constituent / modifier does not induce the realization of a determiner (as opposed with what happens with the article drop described in § 2).

(22') a.   *o rochie de mireasă africană* (Romanian)
          a dress of   bride African
          'an African wedding dress'
      b.   *un pahar de cristal de Boemia*
          a glass of crystal of Bohemia
          'a glass of bohemian crystal'
      c.   *o casă fără   uşi de lemn*
          a house without doors of wood
          'a house without wooden doors'

(23') a.   *une robe de mariée africaine* (French)
      b.   *un verre en cristal de Bohème*
      c.   *une maison avec jardin tropical*
      d.   *des fenêtres sans volets verts*

(24') a.   *un bicchiere di cristallo bianco / di Boemia* (Italian)
      b.   *un abito di sposa africana*
      c.   *una casa con giardino tropicale*

(25') a.   *un vestido de novia africana* (Spanish)
      b.   *una casa con jardín tropical / con grandes ventanas*
      c.   *una copa de cristal francés / de Bohemia*
      d.   *una mesa de madera de roble*

(26') a.   *a house with tropical garden* (English)
      b.   *a car with / without cyber driver*

3.2.   *Article omission with certain spatial PPs*
According to Stvan 1998, 2006, these cases are characterised by the presence of a special type of null determiner. Three types of interpretation may be associated to these cases – the two first being pragmatically conditioned: (i) Familiarity Implicature; (ii) Activity Implicature and (iii) Generic use.

(28) a.   *a merge la şcoală / la biserică / la teatru* (Romanian)
          to go   at school at church   at theatre
          'to go to school / church / theatre'
     b.   *a fi în puşcărie / în spital*
          to be in prison   in hospital
          'to be in prison / hospital'

(29) *shkoj në shkollë / në kishë* (Albanian)
        go   at school   at church
        'to go to school / church'

(30) a.   *to go to school / to church* (English)

b.　　*to be in jail*
c.　　*to be on campus*

(31)　*otiva na utchilishte / na tcheva*　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Bulgarian)
　　　　go to school　　to church
　　　'to go to school / church'

We will not analyse these cases here[6]. It is clear that the phenomenon is different from the one described in § 2. above, although some implicational relation may hold between the two phenomena : if a language has Article Drop in general, it will also have article drop with prepositions, but not conversely.

4.　*The suffixal nature of the Romanian definite article:　necessary or sufficient condition?*

One question that arises when examining the data in section 2 is whether the drop of the definite article takes place in all the languages that have suffixal definite articles. In other words, *is suffixal status necessary and / or sufficient condition*?
A partial answer can be supplied if we look at Bulgarian (32) – (32'), where the definite article, in spite of its suffixal status, always appears after the preposition.

(32)　a.　　*Otpraviam se kîm　masa-ta / *kîm　masa*
　　　　　　 head　　me towards table-the　towards table
　　　　　　 'I'm heading towards the table'
　　　b.　　*Otivam kîm　　tchekva-ta / *kîm　　tchekva*
　　　　　　　go　towards church-the　towards church
　　　　　　 'I'm heading towards the church'
　　　c.　　*Otivam kîm　　utchilishte-to / *kîm　　utchiliste*
　　　　　　　go　towards　school-the　towards school
　　　　　　 'I'm heading towards the school'

(32')　a.　　*Otpraviam se kîm　tservena-ta masa.*
　　　　　　 head　　me towards　red-the　　table
　　　　　　 'I'm heading towards the red table'
　　　b.　　*Otivam kîm　　tchekva-ta do teatîr-a.*
　　　　　　　go　towards church-the near theatre-the
　　　　　　 'I'm heading towards the church near the theatre'
　　　c.　　*Otivam kîm　　utchilishte-to na Andrei.*
　　　　　　　go　towards　school-the　of Andrew
　　　　　　 'I'm heading towards Andrew's school'

The Bulgarian data clearly show that a suffixal definite article is *not sufficient* for article drop. This generalization is also suggested by the fact that article omission is impossible with modification (4).
This leaves open the hypothesis that the suffixal status of the definite article is a *necessary condition* on article drop, since the definite article does not fall in those languages in which it is not a suffix (see (18) – (21) *supra*). The fact that the Romanian indefinite article, which is proclitic, does not fall either (5) may be viewed as evidence in favour of this view.

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[6] For more details concerning the analysis of this type of data, see also Baldwin & alii 2006.

To sum up, let us consider the hypothesis that the definite article omission in Romanian (and Albanian) is subject to at least two constraints: first, *the status of the article*; second, *modification*.

Given the facts presented so far, a number of issues have to be addressed: (i) what is the licensing mechanism for the lack of the definite article with prepositions?; (ii) why must the definite article appear when the noun combines with a modifier?; (iii) why is the definite reading allowed?
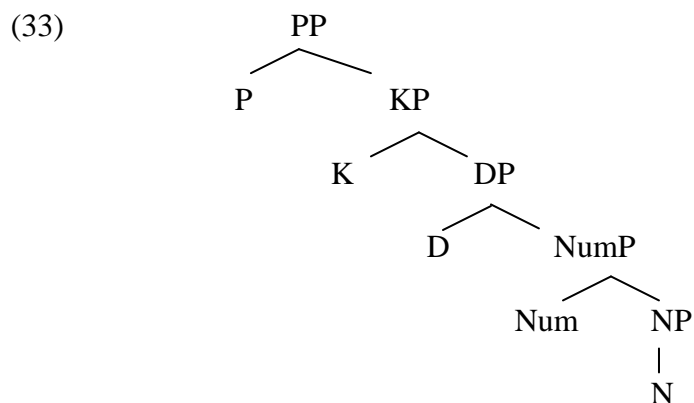
5. *Analysis*

To answer these questions, we suggest that the definite article drop with prepositions in Romanian (and Albanian) can be analysed as a special case of incorporation.

Since Baker 1988, Farkas & de Swart 2003, among others, we know that incorporation is characterized by special morpho-syntactical features which correlate with a special semantics. As shown by these authors, incorporated elements may exhibit (one of) the following features: (i) they have reduced functional structure; (ii) they are restricted to special positions; (iii) they are restricted to special interpretations.

In the next subsections, we demonstrate that prepositional constructions lacking the definite article are characterized by the properties we have cited, especially by the features (i) and (iii).

5.1 *DP structure*

We assume the following hierarchical structure for the nominal projections preceded by a preposition (adapted from Barrie 2006, Barrie & Spreng 2006 proposed for German). More precisely, we assume a structure in which the lexical projection of the noun is dominated by three functional projections: the Num(ber) projection, the D(eterminer) projection and the Case projection. It is clear that there may be another (functional) projections – e.g. AgrP – , but they are not relevant for our discussion.

(33)

```
                PP
              /    \
            P        KP
                   /    \
                 K        DP
                        /    \
                      D        NumP
                             /     \
                           Num      NP
                                    |
                                    N
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5.1.1 *Case marking*

Since the lack of the definite article does not occur with prepositions that assign Genitive or Dative Case (see (12) *supra*), but only with those that assign Accusative, we consider that Accusative Case is the default (or at least a 'weak') Case in these constructions. The main argument in favour of this view is that Romanian Accusative Case is identical to the Nominative Case[7], i.e., the nominal form which is found in dictionaries.

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[7] The distinction between Nominative and Accusative is visible with certain forms of the pronouns, but not with 'true' nouns.

Consequently, we assume that the Case is not checked in these constructions. In other words, we assume that Case and its projection, i.e., KP are absent. This is to say that *P and DP are adjacent*.

5.1.2 *Number marking*

Another fact that signals a reduced functional structure concerns number marking. It is to be noted that the lack of D with the definite interpretation takes place generally when the noun is marked for singular. When the noun is marked for plural the indefinite interpretation is not excluded, even obligatory.

(34) a.   *Am   vorbit despre filme.*   (Romanian)
              AUX talked about   movies
              'We/I talked about movies'
    b.   *Am   pus romanele   pe rafturi.*
              AUX put novels-the on shelves
              'We/I put the novels on shelves'
    c.   *Am   ascuns cărțile   sub   dulapuri.*
              AUX hidden books-the under cupboards
              'We/I have hidden the books under cupboards'

Since this phenomenon seems to be restricted to singular forms, we assume that singular features represent the default number marking. In other words, similarly to Case marking, we assume that Num may not be checked and that its projection, i.e., NumP may be absent.

This can be considered as an additional (but not sufficient) condition on the incorporation of D into P.

5.2   *M-merger / incorporation*

The facts described above suggest that the definite determiner can incorporate into the preposition under certain conditions: (i) lack of KP, (ii) lack of modification and (iii) 'weak', i.e., suffixal status. The lack of NumP may be viewed as a fourth condition.
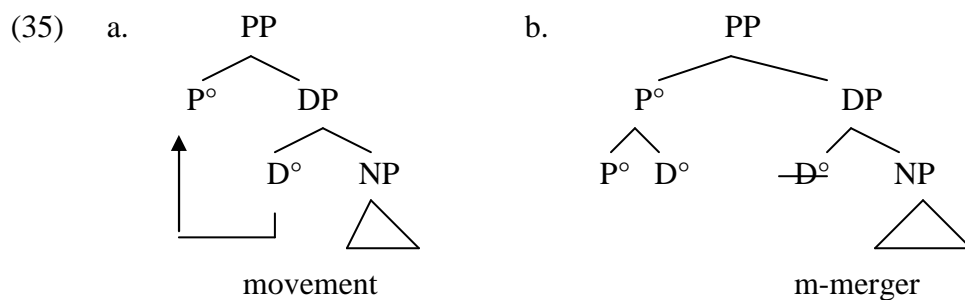
According to Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea 2006, the suffixation of the definite article is to be analysed as Lower D-to-Num° (comparable to Affix-Hopping, i.e., Lower I-to-V / v in English – see Embick & Noyer 2001).

If indeed, Num° is not projected in the relevant examples, then D-Lowering cannot apply (since the position which it must lower is absent). This forces it to incorporate into the next higher projection, which is the preposition.

As for the technical details of this analysis, we may use the morpho-syntactic mechanism of *m-merger*[8] (Matushansky 2006) to formalize the article 'drop' with prepositions. This mechanism takes place at PF level and is defined for two heads in a particular configuration (35). It consists of the following two operations: (i) movement of the attracted head, i.e., the 'weak' one – here the suffixal article – , to the attracting head, i.e., the 'strong' one – here the preposition –, and (ii) m-merger. The result of m-merger is a single syntactic head which contains the features of both initial heads.

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[8] Morphological merger.

(35) a.   PP   b.   PP
           ╱╲   ╱╲
         P°   DP   P°   DP
              ╱╲   ╱╲   ╱╲
            D°   NP   P° D°   ~~D°~~   NP
                 △   △
           movement   m-merger

M-merger cannot take place under modification, since modification depends on a 'rich' functional structure, i.e., on the projection of D, among others. Consequently, the determiner cannot be attracted by the preposition, because it must project the DP-level in order to ensure the entire functional structure of the nominal construction.

On the other hand, the lack of the definite article may be understood as a question of economy of language. More precisely, if a language may express a certain sense by using a minimal structure, i.e., a reduced (functional) structure, it does. In other words, there are languages which have the possibility to express a referential and definite reading without lexicalizing the definite article. It may be the case of Romanian (and Albanian). Certainly, this leads to a fresh analysis of the others elements in the structure (e.g. the preposition which probably exhibits definiteness features).

6.   *Concluding remarks*
We suggested that the lack of the definite article with prepositions in Romanian can be accounted for by analysing it as a type of incorporation which takes place under strict conditions: (i) lack of modification, (ii) weak status of the article, i.e., suffixal status, (iii) strict locality, i.e., incorporated D is obligatorily linearly adjacent to its host category P and are phonologically fused.
These cases of article incorporation must be distinguished from other cases of article omission (e.g. adnominal PPs taking a bare noun complement, certain spatial PPs).

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