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# Romanian *plăcea* ‘like’: an alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat verb

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**Abstract:** In several Indo-European languages, including Romanian, predicates such as *plăcea* ‘like’ from Latin *placēre* ‘like, please’, are found selecting for a dative experiencer and a nominative stimulus, which appear to allow for two opposite, but equally neutral, word orders, i.e. dative-before-nominative and nominative-before-dative. This stands in stark contrast with topicalized datives, which are always focal in Romanian. We hypothesize that the two word orders with *plăcea* represent two diametrically-opposed argument structures, Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat, thus predicting that the dative behaves syntactically as a subject in Dat-Nom structures and the nominative as a subject in Nom-Dat structures. An inspection of seven subject tests, recently applied in the literature on Romanian, reveals that two of these do not distinguish between subjects and objects, while the remaining five confirm that either argument of *plăcea*, the dative or the nominative, passes the subject tests, with the other argument, the nominative or the dative, behaving as an object.

**Keywords:** Romanian; alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat predicates; argument structure; non-nominative subjects; subject tests; word order

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# 1 Introduction

The hypothesis that there are non-nominative subjects in the Romanian language was first suggested in the literature more than two decades ago (Rivero and Geber 2003, 2004). Several scholars have argued for the existence of dative subjects in Romanian in general (see references below), while more recently, Iliaia (2021, 2023) and Iliaia and Van Peteghem (2021), following Cornilescu (2009), demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt that the dative of the *mihi est* construction in Romanian behaves syntactically as a subject, with the nominative being a part of the predicate (Iliaia 2023: 207, see also Van Peteghem and Iliaia 2017). Iliaia and Van Peteghem (2021) and Iliaia (2020, 2021, 2023) establish this with a host of Keenan's (1976) well-founded subject tests, whereas earlier studies on Romanian are essentially based on only two tests, i.e. the raising-to-subject test (Alboiu 2007; Cornilescu 2009; Geber 2006, 2011; Rivero 2009; Rivero and Geber 2003, 2004), on the one hand, and word order (Giurgea 2017: 307–308), on the other hand. Following Iliaia (2021: 75, 246), Cornilescu and Tigău (2023) make similar claims for the dative of Dat-Nom verbs in Romanian, partly based on the same subject tests as established by Iliaia (2021, 2023) and Iliaia and Van Peteghem (2021).

Research on the subject behavior of oblique subjects in the languages of the world has been ongoing for almost five decades, starting with Andrews' (1976) and Thráinsson's (1979) early work on Modern Icelandic and Masica's (1976), Kachru et al. (1976) and Klaiman's (1980) work on the South Asian languages. Since then, a substantial body of work has been carried out on the behavioral properties of non-nominative subjects, showing beyond doubt that there are oblique subjects in several languages around the globe. These include Modern Faroese (Barnes 1986), Native American languages (Hermon 1985), Dravidian (Verma and Mohanan 1990), Dardic (Steever 1998), Japanese (Shibatani 1999), Greek (Anagnostopoulou 1999), Russian (Moore and Perlmutter 2000), Tibeto-Burman (Bickel 2004), Korean (Yoon 2004), German (Barðdal 2002, 2006, 2023: Ch. 6; Barðdal et al. 2019), Semitic (Landau 2009; Pat-El 2018), Cariban (Castro Alves 2018), Tsezic languages (Comrie et al. 2018), as well as several modern South-Asian languages (see Hock and Bashir 2016 for references).

Along with this strand of research, several scholars working on this issue have noted that at least some Indo-European languages have verbs selecting for a dative and a nominative argument which seem to allow for two word orders, i.e. dative-before-nominative and nominative-before-dative. Either word order appears to be equally neutral in the sense that one of the orders does not seem to be a topicalization of the other. Instead, the two opposite word orders are equally neutral in their own right. This phenomenon was first noted by Bernódusson (1982: 37–38) for Modern Icelandic, Barnes (1986) for Modern Faroese, Primus (1994: 67–68) for Modern

German, Allen (1995: 107–109, 114–117) for Old English, Barðdal (1998) for the early Scandinavian languages, Anagnostopoulou (1999: 69) for Modern Greek, Haspelmath (2001: 69) for Italian, and Elens, Somers and Barðdal (2024) for Old Icelandic. For Romanian, Iliaia (2021: 75, 246) and, following her, Cornilescu and Tigău (2023), argue for the existence of such alternating verbs in that language. Consider the examples in (1) below.

#### Dat-Nom

- (1) a. *Băiatului* *îi* *plăceau* *mult* *copiii*.  
 boy.the.DAT him.DAT.CL liked.3PL much children.the.NOM  
 ‘The boy liked the children very much.’

#### Nom-Dat

- b. *Copiii* *îi* *plăceau* *mult* *băiatului*.  
 children.the.NOM him.DAT.CL were.to.liking.3PL much boy.the.DAT  
 ‘The children were very much to the boy’s liking.’

In these examples, the Romanian verb *plăcea* ‘like’ occurs with a dative experiencer and a nominative stimulus. Both word orders are equally neutral in the sense that they are not information-structurally marked (see Section 2 below). In (1a) the dative occurs in clause-initial position, while the nominative is postverbal. In contrast, in (1b) the nominative occurs in clause-initial position, while the dative is postverbal. Observe, also, that the semantic roles of the two arguments, the experiencer and the stimulus, are kept constant across the morphological cases in these two examples. This behavior suggests that the Romanian verb *plăcea* ‘like’ may indeed be an *alternating verb* of the type discussed above for several other Indo-European languages.

In (2001a) Barðdal showed for Modern Icelandic that either argument of alternating verbs, the dative or the nominative, behaves syntactically as a subject, based on seven different subject tests in that language, although not at the same time, of course. When the dative occupies the preverbal position it behaves syntactically as a subject and the nominative as an object. Conversely, when the nominative occurs preverbally, it takes on the behavior of the syntactic subject, while the dative behaves syntactically as an object. This led Barðdal (2001a) to argue that the relevant verbs instantiate two diametrically opposite argument structures, i.e. a Dat-Nom and a Nom-Dat argument structure, with each of these being an argument structure in its own right. For this reason, we use the labels *Dat-Nom* and *Nom-Dat* here to represent the two argument structure constructions, while we use the terms *dative-before-nominative* and *nominative-before-dative* to refer to linear word order in specific examples.

More recently, Barðdal et al. (2014, 2019) and Barðdal (2023: Ch. 6) show that such alternating verbs also exist in Modern German on the basis of six subject tests in that language. In a series of articles following up on this issue, Somers and colleagues carry out a frequency study of the two word orders in both Icelandic and German, documenting that the dative-before-nominative and the nominative-before-dative word orders show approximately a 50–50 distribution when the two arguments are full NPs. This stands in stark contrast to, for instance, verbs like ‘thank’ which select for a nominative subject and a dative object, with which the nominative-before-dative word order is found in more than 95 % of the cases under the same conditions (Somers 2024; Somers et al. 2024a, 2024b; Somers et al. 2025).

In brand-new research, Cluyse et al. (2025) also argue for the existence of such verbs in Latin, in particular for the verb *placēre* ‘like, please’, again on the basis of six different subject tests valid for Latin. Note that Romanian *plăcea* ‘like’ is a direct descendant of Latin *placēre*, which, in turn, raises the question of whether Romanian *plăcea* may have inherited this alternating behavior from its Latin predecessor.

This article is devoted to the issue of whether or not *plăcea* ‘like’ is an alternating verb in Romanian, i.e. whether either argument, the dative or the nominative, may behave syntactically as a subject, while the other argument behaves as an object. In order to investigate this, we discuss six behavioral subject properties which have already been established as subject diagnostics in Romanian (cf. Cornilescu and Tigău 2023; Ilioia 2021, 2023; Ilioia and Van Peteghem 2021) and we compare these behaviors with the syntactic behavior of both the dative and the nominative of *plăcea*. These subject properties are the following: word order, control into infinitives, control into subjunctives, raising-to-subject from finite clauses, raising-to-subject from infinitives, and raising-to-object.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 starts with a brief introduction of the Romanian verb *plăcea* ‘like’ and its different argument structures. This includes a discussion of neutral word order as opposed to word order configurations which are information-structurally marked. We then continue, in Section 3, to a corpus study of the word order distribution found with *plăcea* across the two word order configurations, dative-before-nominative and nominative-before-dative. In Section 4, we provide a discussion of the concept of alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat predicates, including the relation between subject status and event structure. Before we dive further into the issue of subjecthood in Romanian, Section 5 provides a short overview of some of the subject tests that have been used in recent literature, which we argue do not distinguish between syntactic subjects and objects and can therefore not be employed. Section 6 presents the set of properties we use as diagnostics for subject status in Romanian, focusing in particular on several of Keenan’s (1976) well-established behavioral subject tests. We apply these tests to the two arguments of *plăcea* in order to examine the extent to which the dative and the nominative

behave syntactically as subjects, when placed in preverbal position. Section 7 summarizes the content of this article and our conclusions.

## 2 The Romanian verb *plăcea* ‘like’

The verb *plăcea* ‘like’ is one of the most frequently used psychological verbs in Romanian, derived from Latin *placēre*, which also means ‘like’ and sometimes ‘please’. This verb has preserved its original meaning and argument structure in Romanian until today. Similarly to its cognates in the other Romance languages (cf. Fr. *plaire*, It. *piacere*), the Romanian verb *plăcea* introduces a state event involving two participants, a dative experiencer and a nominative stimulus. The dative experiencer is either realized as a clitic only (2a), as a strong pronoun (2b), or as a full NP (2c). In the last two cases, the dative is obligatorily doubled by a clitic when it occurs in clause-initial position.

### Dative as a clitic

- (2) a. *Îi place istoria.*  
 him/her.DAT.CL likes.3SG history.the.NOM  
 ‘He/she likes history.’

### Dative as a strong pronoun

- b. *Mie îmi place istoria.*  
 me.DAT me.DAT.CL likes.3SG history.the.NOM  
 ‘I like history.’

### Dative as a full NP

- c. *Studentului îi place istoria.*  
 student.the.DAT him.DAT.CL likes.3SG history.the.NOM  
 ‘The student likes history.’

In examples (2a–c) above, the presence of the clitic is obligatory. Note, however, that this has not always been the case in Romanian, as is documented by Rivero (2009: 2) as early as for the first decennium of the 18th century. Although the absence of the clitic is considered archaic, one may still find instances of non-doubled datives in present-day Romanian. In our dataset, which contains 19 instances of non-doubled nominal datives (vs. 545 doubled datives), this appears to be confined to configurations where the dative is postverbal, i.e. occurring in the Nom-Dat construction, especially in examples where the dative expresses a generic meaning, as in (3) below (cf. also Geber 2011: 137–143).

### Dative not doubled by a clitic

- (3) *E adevărat că e lungă (telenovela), dar că place*  
 is true that is long soap.opera but that is.to.liking.3SG  
*tuturor femeilor, ... hai să fim serioase!*  
 all.DAT women.the.DAT let's SUBJ are.SUBJ.1PL serious  
 'It's true that it is long (soap opera), but that it is to all women's liking, ... let's be serious!'
- (7p.ro)

Turning to the stimulus, this argument may be realized either as a full NP or as a strong pronoun in the (unmarked) nominative case, as in the examples in (1) above, as a prepositional object (4a), a finite subordinate clause (4b) or a non-finite clause (4c). When the nominative stimulus refers to an already mentioned referent, as in (3) above, it remains unexpressed, since Romanian is a pro-drop language and does not have nominative clitics.

#### Dat-PP

- (4) a. *Îmi place mult de tine.*  
 me.DAT.CL likes.3SG much of you  
 'I like you a lot.'

#### Dat-Clause

- b. *Studentului îi place să înoate.*  
 student.the.DAT him.DAT.CL likes.3SG SUBJ swim.SUBJ.3SG  
 'The student likes to swim.'

#### Dat-Inf

- c. *Nimănui nu îi place a fi singur de Crăciun.*  
 nobody.DAT not him.DAT.CL likes.3SG to.INF be.INF lonely at  
 Christmas  
 'Nobody likes to be lonely at Christmas.' (literaturapetocuri.ro)

At this juncture, it is appropriate to mention that there appears to be a slight difference in the meaning of *plăcea* 'like' depending on whether it instantiates the Dat-Nom or the Nom-Dat construction, yielding the meaning 'like' in Dat-Nom constructions but 'be to sb's liking' in Nom-Dat constructions. This is essentially the same lexical meaning, only involving a difference in perspective, concomitant with the two argument structures. Hence, in the remainder of this article we gloss and translate *plăcea* as either 'like' or 'be to sb's liking', depending on our analysis of the relevant argument structure in each example.

Besides the argument structures involving a dative experiencer discussed above, *plăcea* ‘like’ has developed a new argument structure in Modern Romanian, where the two core arguments are canonically marked, i.e. the Nom-Acc case frame (cf. Iliaia 2022). An example is given in (5) below, where the experiencer *cineva* ‘somebody’ is encoded in the nominative case and the stimulus *te* ‘you’ in the accusative.

#### Nom-Acc

- (5) *Dacă cineva te place, va vedea numai ce e bun la tine.*  
 if somebody.NOM you.ACC.CL likes.3SG will.3SG see only what is good at you  
 ‘When somebody likes you, they will not see your flaws.’ (andreearaicu.ro)

This argument structure was first attested at the end of the 18th century and remains relatively rare until the present-day language (cf. Iliaia 2022).<sup>1</sup> This particular argument structure will not be further investigated here.

Turning now to the word order variation found with *plăcea* ‘like’ in (1) above, both word orders appear to be equally neutral in the sense that, according to native speakers, they are not information-structurally marked. For a comparison, consider the following two examples with the Romanian *mulțumi* ‘thank’, a verb which also selects for a nominative and a dative argument. The example in (6a) represents neutral word order in Romanian, with the nominative subject in first position and the dative object in postverbal position.

#### Nom-Dat

- (6) a. *Pacientul i-a mulțumit doctorului.*  
 patient.the.NOM him.DAT.CL has thanked doctor.the.DAT  
 ‘The patient thanked the doctor.’

#### Dative-before-nominative – contrastive focus

- b. *DOCTORULUI i-a mulțumit pacientul, și nu asistentei.*  
 doctor.the.DAT him.DAT.CL has thanked patient.the.NOM and not nurse.the.DAT  
 ‘It was the doctor that the patient thanked, not the nurse.’

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<sup>1</sup> Although this construction is not the focus of this article, we would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the suggestion that this new case pattern with the verb *plăcea* ‘like’ may be specific for a higher register of Romanian, being the literary counterpart of the Dat-Nom pattern. This will be further investigated in future research.

In contrast, the dative-before-nominative word order with *mulțumi* ‘thank’ in (6b) is only fully grammatical with a contrastive focus reading, as is evident from the translation into English with a cleft construction. In other words, even though the dative of *mulțumi* may precede the nominative, this does in no way represent neutral word order, as is the case with *plăcea* ‘like’ in (1) above.

To conclude, this comparison between the word order distribution of the nominative and the dative with *plăcea* ‘like’ and the nominative and the dative with *mulțumi* ‘thank’ has confirmed that an alternation in the word order between nominative and dative arguments is not a general property of all verbs selecting for such arguments. Instead, it appears to be specific for *plăcea*, as opposed to *mulțumi*. In Section 6 below we investigate whether and to which extent either argument of *plăcea*, the dative and the nominative, passes the subject tests in Romanian and thus whether *plăcea* may instantiate the two diametrically opposite argument structure constructions, Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat, a systematic alternation also documented in several of its Indo-European cousin languages. Before that, however, we present a corpus study of the word order distribution found with *plăcea* in present-day Romanian texts.

### 3 Corpus study of word order: *plăcea* ‘like’

Turning now to word order, there appears to be little consensus in the Romanian scholarship on which word order is neutral and which is restricted by information-structural considerations (Giurgea 2017; Nicolae 2019; Pană Dindelegan 2013, 2016; Vasilescu 2013: 537). Yet, based on a corpus of earlier periods of Romanian, Pană Dindelegan (2016; cf. also Nicolae 2019), argues that the canonical subject is mostly preverbal in main clauses, whereas in subordinate clauses more variation is found with regard to word order (cf. Pană Dindelegan 2013: 121, 2016: 112). Similar research for 20th century Romanian has confirmed this (Giurgea 2017: 292).

For the present-day language, the only study we are aware of is Iliaia (2023: 154–158), based on a dataset of 2,458 instances of argument structure constructions involving the Nom-Acc case frame of 28 canonically case-marked verbs with a nominative experiencer subject. The dataset includes tokens where the nominative is realized either by a strong pronoun or by an NP (662 examples, 26.9 %) as well as tokens where the nominative is a *pro*, hence, not realized (1,796 examples, 73.1 %).

Restricting our presentation here to the instances where both arguments are expressed, Table 1 shows that, among the 662 examples with the nominative subject realized by either a strong pronoun or by an NP, 95.8 % of the tokens have the subject in preverbal position while the subject occurs postverbally in only 4.8 % of the cases.



**Table 1:** The distribution between SO and OS for 28 Romanian experiencer verbs selecting for the Nom-Acc case frame, based on full NPs and strong pronouns.

	SO		OS	
NOM-ACC VERBS	634	95.8 %	28	4.2 %

Thus, Iliaia’s (2023) findings are in accordance with the conclusions of earlier studies, namely that nominative subjects tend to occur in preverbal position, whereas the object prefers the postverbal position.

Given this, we take SVO to be the canonical word order in Romanian. For the verb *plăcea* ‘like’, we predict that both the dative-before-nominative and the nominative-before-dative orders are SVO structures in Romanian, instantiating the two argument structures, Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat, respectively, instead of one of the word orders being a topicalization of the other.

In order to verify the aforementioned hypothesis, we have carried out a synchronic corpus study, providing word order statistics for the verb *plăcea* ‘like’, and as a control, also for the verb *mulțumi* ‘thank’, which is an unambiguous Nom-Dat verb. Thus, we have collected material for both verbs from the Romanian Web Corpus roTenTen16 (Jakubíček et al. 2013), which consists of 2.6 billion words. We have extracted a sample including the first 200 main clause tokens for each of the two verbs, where these occur with two arguments, a nominative and a dative, at a distance of zero-to-three words. We have only included tokens where the two arguments are represented as either full NPs or strong pronouns, with one of the arguments being preverbal and the other postverbal. Examples where either of the two arguments are pro-dropped are excluded for the simple reason that the arguments are not expressed in such examples, which in turn makes it difficult to exactly decide on their position in the clause.

Our findings for *mulțumi* ‘thank’ are shown in Table 2, establishing beyond doubt that *mulțumi* is a Nom-Dat verb in Romanian, as all 200 tokens exhibit the nominative-before-dative word order. However, as we discuss in Section 2 above, the reverse order, dative-before-nominative is not ungrammatical in Romanian, despite none such examples being among the 200 extracted tokens of *mulțumi* in our dataset. This may be validated with a quick Google query, which certainly yields examples of *mulțumi* ‘thank’ containing a topicalized strong dative pronoun in clause-initial position, of which two are shown in (7) below:

**Table 2:** The distribution of *mulțumi* ‘thank’ across the two word orders in Romanian, broken down on the basis of the lexical status of the argument.

		Dat-Nom		Nom-Dat	
MULȚUMI:	<b>pron-pron</b>	0	0 %	7	100 %
	<b>NP-pron</b>	0	0 %	0	0 %
	<b>pron-NP</b>	0	0 %	51	100 %
	<b>NP-NP</b>	0	0 %	142	100 %
	<b>Total</b>	0	0 %	200	100 %

**Dative-(before-nominative) – focus**

- (7) a. *Tot lui îi mulțumim pentru*  
 once.again him.DAT him.DAT.CL thank.1PL for  
*recomandarea numelui liniei noastre.*  
 recommendation.the.NOM name.the.GEN line.the.GEN ours  
 ‘It is him, again, whom we thank for recommending our product line.’  
 (sapunulcheia.ro)
- b. *Ei îi mulțumim pentru că ne-a condus tăcut*  
 her.DAT her.DAT.CL thank.1PL for that us.ACC has guided silently  
*către descoperirea caracterului acestor câini.*  
 toward discovery.the character.the.GEN these.GEN dogs  
 ‘It is her whom we thank for guiding us tacitly toward discovering the  
 character of these dogs.’  
 (allchino.ro)

Both (7a) and (7b) are clear examples of focus, as is evident by the use of the cleft in the translation of these examples into English and further corroborated by the use of the focus particle *tot* ‘once again’ in clause-initial position in (7a). Note that the nominative is pro-dropped in both cases, which is most likely the reason why this word order does not show up in the statistics in our corpus study, as it excludes pro-dropped arguments.

Turning to *plăcea* ‘like’, Table 3 shows that there is a strong bias towards the use of the dative-before-nominative word order, at the cost of the nominative-before-dative word order, in all configurations except when both arguments are pronouns. In that last configuration, the distribution between the two word orders is 87.5 % versus 12.5 %. Taken together, these numbers rather suggest that *plăcea* is a Dat-Nom verb and not necessarily an alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat verb, contrary to our claim that both word orders are neutral, as is the case in the example pair in (1).

Nevertheless, there is still a major difference between *plăcea* ‘like’ and *mulțumi* ‘thank’ in that dative-before-nominative orders with *mulțumi*, as in (6b) above, are

**Table 3:** The distribution of *plăcea* ‘like’ across the two word orders in Romanian, broken down on the basis of the lexical status of the argument

		Dat-Nom		Nom-Dat	
PLĂCEA:	<b>pron-pron</b>	6	85.7 %	1	14.3 %
	<b>NP-pron</b>	5	100.0 %	0	0.0 %
	<b>pron-NP</b>	144	98.6 %	2	1.4 %
	<b>NP-NP</b>	41	97.6 %	1	2.4 %
	<b>Total</b>	196	98 %	4	2.0 %

clearly topicalizations, while the four nominative-before-dative examples of *plăcea* from our corpus extract do not show any such behavior, although the nominatives are undoubtedly definite, yielding old information. These four examples are produced in (8) below:

**Nom-Dat**

- (8) a. *Râse ironic, știind că Kurt știa că ei nu îi plăceau lucrurile imense. Lucrurile mari. Și cu bun gust. Asta îi plăcea ei.*  
this.NOM her.DAT.CL was.to.liking.3SG her.DAT  
*Totuși, habar nu avea de ce le trebuiseră părinților ei un palat în loc de casă.*  
‘She laughed ironically, knowing that Kurt knew she didn’t like huge things. Big things. And tasteful. This was to her liking. Still, she had no idea why her parents needed a palace instead of a house.’ (darkmark.ro)
- b. *„Ruperea raportului” îi dă tipei senzația că nu te poate ține, că practic i-ai putea scăpa printre degete în orice moment.*  
*Asta le place la fete,*  
this.NOM them.DAT.CL is.to.liking.3SG DAT girls  
*deoarece sporește provocarea pe care o reprezintă pentru ea.*  
“‘Breaking the relationship” gives a girl the feeling that she can’t hold on to you, that you could practically slip through her fingers at any moment. This is to the girls’ liking because it increases the challenge you represent to them.’ (pdfcoffee.com)
- c. *Vântul de apus, care venea dinspre Derbyshire, zgâlțâia casele cu furie. Iar copacul se văita. Asta îi plăcea lui Morel.*  
this.NOM him.DAT.CL was.to.liking.3SG DAT Morel  
‘The westerly wind, coming from Derbyshire, was shattering the houses furiously. And the tree wailed. This was to Morel’s liking.’ (kupdf.net)

- d. *O asemenea tratare a accesoriilor îi plăcea*  
 one such treatment.NOM of accessories him.DAT.CL was.to.liking.3SG  
*nespus lui Barthes ... și nu putem nega ruptura provocată*  
 untold DAT Barthes  
*de această manieră de a lucra.*  
 ‘Such a treatment of accessories was very much to Barthes’ liking ... and  
 there’s no denying the rupture caused by this way of working.’ (romlit.ro)

According to our informal inquiries, native speakers agree that all four Nom-Dat examples of *plăcea* ‘like’ in (8) above represent neutral word order, as there are no specific information-structural restrictions at play here. These considerations, however, do not exclude either argument with *plăcea* from being focused, as this can be done with intonation in Romanian, irrespective of word order (cf. Göbbel 2003).

To conclude, while we have been unable to verify with corpus statistics that the two word order configurations with *plăcea* ‘like’, dative-before-nominative and nominative-before-dative, represent two different argument structures, i.e. Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat, we still maintain that the two word orders in Romanian are equally neutral with the verb *plăcea*. This we have shown through a comparison of unambiguous focalized dative objects in clause-initial position with the verb *mulțumi* ‘thank’, as opposed to the four nominative-before-dative orders of *plăcea* from our corpus extract, which all turn out to represent neutral word order. In fact, this calls for a meticulous investigation of how the two arguments of *plăcea* fare with regard to the subject tests in Romanian. Before that, however, a few words on the issue of subjecthood with alternating predicates are in order.

## 4 Alternating predicates and subject status

As already mentioned above, verbs exhibiting the Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat alternation have been documented in several Indo-European languages, both modern and ancient. In addition to Modern Icelandic, Modern Faroese, Modern German, Old English, Latin, and the history of the Scandinavian languages, Barðdal (2023: Ch. 3) presents data compatible with the hypothesis that alternating structures of this kind existed in Gothic, Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, Hittite and Old Russian, as well as in Modern Russian and Modern Lithuanian. We do not discuss these data any further here, but concentrate instead on the situation in present-day Romanian.

Having shown above that the alternation between the dative-before-nominative and the nominative-before-dative orders with *plăcea* ‘like’ are equally neutral in Romanian, the question arises as to why *plăcea* allows for this neutral word order alternation to begin with, while *mulțumi* ‘thank’, for instance, does not. We suggest

that the reason is that *plăcea* is force-dynamically neutral in the sense of Talmy's (1985, 1988) force-dynamics, while the same does not apply to *mulțumi*.

As outlined by Croft (1998, 2001, 2012), the assignment of subject and object status is a direct consequence of verbal semantics and the relevant force-dynamics involved. For instance, for a causative verb like *kill*, there is an initiator of the event, the killer, who exerts force on an endpoint of the event, the killed entity. Due to this inherent causative structure of *kill*, the initiator of the event, the one carrying it out, becomes the syntactic subject, while the endpoint of the event, the one acted upon, becomes the syntactic object. The verb *thank*, although not causative in the sense of *kill*, still has the same type of force-dynamics in that there is an initiator, the thanking person, who carries out the event, and there is an endpoint, the person being thanked. As a consequence, the thanking person becomes the syntactic subject, while the person being thanked becomes the syntactic object.

No such causal chain, as is found with *kill*, is a part of the event structure of experiencer verbs (cf. Barðdal 2023: Ch. 2). This is a consequence of the fact that experiencer verbs are susceptible to two different construals of the same experiencer event; either a construal in which the experiencer directs his/her attention towards a stimulus, resulting in the experiencer becoming a subject and the stimulus an object, or a construal in which a stimulus affects an experiencer, resulting in the stimulus becoming a subject and the experiencer an object. These two "opposite" construals are lexicalized through the two verbs, *fear* and *frighten* in English and other languages. With the verb *fear*, the experiencer is the subject and the stimulus the object, while with the verb *frighten*, the syntactic roles are reversed.

Shifting our attention to alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat verbs, these verbs select for a dative experiencer and a nominative stimulus and they are either stative or inchoative in nature (cf. Barðdal 2001a, 2023: 81–84; Somers 2021). As such, they are indeed force-dynamically neutral, as already mentioned. That is, these verbs are susceptible to either of the two construals referred to above, the *fear* construal or the *frighten* construal, although not at the same time, of course. As a consequence, alternating predicates may instantiate two diametrically opposed argument structure constructions, the Dat-Nom construction and the Nom-Dat construction. Such an analysis predicts that the dative should pass the subject tests when it occurs preverbally, just as much as the nominative should pass the subject tests when it is in preverbal position.

The remainder of this article is devoted to testing the hypothesis that the Romanian verb *plăcea* 'like' is an alternating verb of this type, instantiating two diametrically opposed argument structure constructions, Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat, to be corroborated by the fact that the dative in Dat-Nom structures and the nominative in Nom-Dat structures pass the subject tests applicable in Romanian. Before that,

however, a few words are in place on which syntactic property is, and which is not, a genuine subject test in Romanian.

## 5 Subject tests: non-applicability in Romanian

In this section we discuss a set of subject tests that are not applicable in Romanian, due to the nature of Romanian grammar. These are subject-verb agreement, deletion in imperatives, conjunction reduction, ellipsis in telegraphic style, and binding of reflexives. We address each of these below, to different degrees.

It is well known that canonical subjects in Romanian are encoded in the nominative case and trigger subject-verb agreement. However, these coding properties are not found with subject-like accusatives or datives in Romanian or in any other language for that matter. Rather, it has been argued in the literature on the Indo-European languages which exhibit non-nominative subjects that verb agreement is a property confined to nominative case marking, irrespective of whether this nominative is syntactically a subject or an object (cf. Barðdal 2023: 51–52; Barðdal and Eythórsson 2003a, 2003b; Eythórsson and Barðdal 2005; Sigurðsson 1990–91, 2004, *inter alia*). In other words, verb agreement is essentially a nominative test, not a test singling out syntactic subjects. As a consequence, non-nominative subjects either occur with a default 3rd person singular marking, as in examples (2–3) above, (cf. Corbett 1991: 204) or with 3rd person plural marking when the nominative argument is plural, as in the examples in (1) above. However, since verb agreement is confined to nominative arguments, be they syntactic subjects or objects, and is not found with oblique subjects, we do not discuss subject-verb agreement any further here.

One behavioral subject test, often discussed in the literature on subjecthood, deletion in imperatives, also turns out to be confined to nominative subjects, exactly like verb agreement, for the simple reason that non-nominative subjects are generally not agentive enough to occur in imperatives (cf. Barnes 1986: 25 on Modern Faroese, Rögnvaldsson 1996: 48 on Old Icelandic, and Barðdal 2006: 54 on Modern Icelandic and Modern German). Thus, this test will not be discussed any further here.

Finally, two additional behavioral subject tests, also repeatedly found in the discussion of subject status in the literature, are conjunction reduction and binding of reflexives. It turns out that neither of the two conclusively distinguish between subjects and objects in Romanian for reasons to be discussed in 5.1 and 5.2 below (cf. also Iliaia 2023: 161–166, 183–184). Thereafter, in Section 6, we proceed to the five subject tests that genuinely tease apart subjects from objects in Romanian.

## 5.1 Conjunction reduction

In their recent paper, Cornilescu and Tigău (2023: 28–29) argue for the validity of conjunction reduction as a subject test in Romanian. They introduce the example in (10) as an argument for their analysis (Cornilescu and Tigău 2023: 28), in which a clitic-doubled dative experiencer in a second conjunct is “reduced” on identity with the nominative subject of the first conjunct with the verb *plăcea* ‘like’:

### Dat-Nom

- (9) *Maria s-a căsătorit, dar nu-i plac deloc copiii.*  
 Maria REFL-has married, but not-her.DAT.CL like.3PL at.all children.the.NOM  
 ‘Maria got married, but doesn’t like children.’

Observe that the dative clitic of the “reduced” experiencer is obligatory, as is also noted by Cornilescu and Tigău (2023: 28). As a consequence, the dative experiencer is not “reduced”, meaning that (9) is not an example of conjunction reduction. Rather, on our account, (9) is an example of two coordinated clauses where the dative subject of *plăcea* ‘like’ is indeed expressed through the presence of the clitic.

In order to illustrate our point, consider the example in (10), also involving two conjoined clauses, where an accusative object, coreferential with the nominative subject of the first conjunct, is obligatorily expressed as a clitic, while a doubled NP accusative in its place would be ungrammatical:

- (10) *Maria s-a căsătorit dar noua familie a respins-o /\*pe*  
 Maria REFL-has married, but new.the family has rejected-her.ACC.CL /ACC  
***Maria.***  
 Maria  
 ‘Maria got married but her new family has rejected her.’

The example in (10) demonstrates that clitics function as arguments in conjoined clauses in Romanian and that full NPs are excluded on identity anyway in such structures. This is also confirmed by the ungrammaticality of (11) where the dative of *plăcea* ‘like’ is a full NP doubled by a clitic.

### Dat-Nom

- (11) *\*Maria s-a căsătorit, dar Mariei nu-i plac deloc*  
 Maria REFL-has married, but Maria.DAT not-she.DAT.CL likes.3PL at.all  
***copiii.***  
 children.the.NOM  
 Intended meaning: ‘Maria got married, but Maria doesn’t like children.’

In addition, the absence of an explicit subject in the conjoined clause in (12), which illustrates the Nom-Dat argument structure of *plăcea* ‘like’, can be analyzed as an instance of pro-drop.

### Nom-Dat

- (12) *Mâncarea a fost livrată la timp și i-a*  
 food.the has been delivered at time and her.DAT.CL-has  
*plăcut foarte mult Mariei.*  
 been.to.liking very much Mary.DAT  
 ‘The food was delivered on time and it was very much to Maria’s liking.’

Therefore, conjunction reduction is problematic for two different reasons: (a) the obligatoriness of the clitic in Dat-Nom constructions, and (b) pro-drop in Nom-Dat constructions. For these reasons, conjunction reduction and other tests like that, such as ellipsis in telegraphic style (cf. Reis 1982: 186 for German, and Barðdal 2006: 60–63 for Icelandic), cannot be safely applied in Romanian.<sup>2</sup>

## 5.2 Binding of reflexives

As in several languages, syntactic subjects may bind reflexives in Romanian. One such example is shown in (13) below:

- (13) *Ion<sub>i</sub> s<sub>-i</sub> a spălat.*  
 Ion REFL- has washed  
 ‘John washed himself.’

For the verb *plăcea* ‘like’, the fact that either the dative in (14a) or the nominative in (14b) may bind a reflexive might thus be taken as an argument for their respective subject status.

### Dat-Nom

- (14) a. *Fiecărui copil<sub>i</sub> îi place mama sa<sub>i</sub>.*  
 each.DAT child him.DAT.CL likes.3SG mother.the.NOM his.POSS  
 ‘Each child likes their mother.’

<sup>2</sup> See Iliaia (2023: 189) for a discussion of *plăcea* ‘like’ in examples involving telegraphic style. This test may be conclusively applied on the Dat-Nom argument structure of *plăcea* but is not relevant for the Nom-Dat argument structure, due to pro-drop.



**Nom-Dat**

- b. *Fiecare mamă<sub>i</sub> îi place copilului său<sub>i</sub>*  
 each.NOM mother him.DAT.CL is.to.liking.3SG child.the.DAT her.POSS  
 'Each mother is to their child's liking.'

In addition, Cornilescu and Tigău (2023: 29–31) claim that binding of certain anaphors like *propriu* 'own' is confined to the subject in Romanian. They present the following example to support their claim:

- (15) *Ion<sub>i</sub> i-a vorbit lui Petre<sub>j</sub> despre problemele lui propriu<sub>i/?j</sub>.*  
 Ion him.DAT.CL-has spoken DAT Peter about problems.the his own  
 'John talked to Peter about his own problems.' (Cornilescu and Tigău 2023: 29)

Cornilescu and Tigău argue that only the subject, *Ion*, but not the indirect object, *Petre*, may bind the anaphor *propriu* 'own' in this example, thus demonstrating that binding of *propriu* is a subject test in Romanian.

While we agree with Cornilescu and Tigău (2023) about the grammaticality judgment of the example in (15), the following examples, where *propriu* may be bound by a direct object in (16a) and an indirect object in (16b), show that binding is not confined to subjects in Romanian.

- (16) a. *Victor<sub>i</sub> l-a omorât pe sculptor<sub>j</sub> cu statuia proprie<sub>i/j</sub> /*  
 Victor him.ACC.CL-has killed ACC sculptor with statue own  
*lui proprie<sub>i/j</sub>.*  
 his own  
 'Victor killed the sculptor with his own statue.'  
 b. *Profesorul<sub>i</sub> a dat fiecărui<sub>j</sub> student<sub>j</sub> propriul său<sub>i/\*j</sub> exemplar*  
 teacher.the has given each.DAT student own.the his.POSS copy  
 'The teacher gave each student their own copy.'

In (16a), either the subject, *Victor*, or the object, *sculptor* 'the sculptor', may bind the anaphor *proprie* 'own', while in (16b) it is only the indirect object, *fiecărui student* 'each student', that binds *propriul* 'own'. Therefore, binding with *propriu* 'own' is not a conclusive subject test in Romanian, as it only shows that the binding argument occurs in a higher syntactic position than the anaphor. As such, binding will not be further applied here.

## 6 The status of *plăcea* 'like' as an alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat verb

The subject tests relevant for Romanian have been established on the basis of Keenan's (1976) behavioral properties of subjects. These include raising-to-object,

raising-to-subject out of infinitives, raising-to-subject out of subjunctives, and control, i.e. the ability to be the controlled argument in infinitives and subjunctives. A similar set of diagnostics was convincingly applied by Illoaia and Van Peteghem (2021) and Illoaia (2021, 2023: Ch. 8) to argue that subject-like accusatives and datives in non-canonical subject constructions pattern with canonical nominative subjects in this language (cf. also Cornilescu and Tigău 2023).

Following the suggestions of Illoaia (2021: 75, 246), we investigate below to which extent the two arguments of the verb *plăcea* ‘like’, i.e. the dative and the nominative, pass the behavioral subject tests when occurring in preverbal position. This we do in order to establish whether or not the Romanian verb *plăcea* is an alternating verb, instantiating two diametrically opposed argument structures, the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat constructions.

We start with two different control constructions in Romanian (6.1), i.e. control into infinitive complement clauses and control into finite clauses. We then proceed to raising-to-subject out of infinitives and out of subjunctives in 6.2 and raising-to-object in 6.3.

## 6.1 Control of implicit subjects with non-finite verb forms

The term *control* refers to the relation between the unexpressed subject of non-finite clauses, in Romanian infinitives or gerunds, and its antecedent in the main clause. The non-finite form may either occur as a verb complement or in an adjunct clause. When it occurs as a complement, this antecedent can be the subject, the object, or it can be an unexpressed referent retrievable from the context, also referred to as *arbitrary* control in the literature (Barbu 2015; Comrie 1984; Landau 2013, among others). Put differently, control is the phenomenon obtained when a matrix verb shares an argument with its non-finite complement, which is then left unexpressed.

- (17) a. John intends [to \_\_\_ buy ice cream]. Subject control  
 b. John orders Sam [to \_\_\_ buy ice cream]. Object control  
 c. It is so nice [to \_\_\_ buy ice cream]. Arbitrary control

In (17a) above it is the subject, *John*, which is coreferential with the unexpressed subject of the infinitive clause, *buy ice cream*, in (17b) it is the object *Sam*, while in (17c) we get a generic reading involving a referent retrievable from the context as being the controller of the unexpressed subject in the infinitive, *buy ice cream*. Observe that the object of *buy*, in this case, *ice cream*, is not controlled in structures of this type; only the subject is. Some examples of control verbs in Romanian are the following (cf. Cotfas 2016c: 78–80):

- Subject control: *reuși* 'manage', *îndrăzni* 'dare', *încerca* 'try'
- Direct object control: *ajuta* 'help', *convinge* 'persuade'
- Indirect object control: *(re)aminti* 'remind', and *impune* 'impose'

This empirical behavior of the subject of infinitive complement clauses, to be obligatorily controlled in such constructions, is the essence of the control test, evident from the fact that this test does not apply to objects. As for the syntactic role of the controller in the matrix clause, this syntactic role is immaterial to the test, since arguments bearing different grammatical roles may be coreferential with the relevant unexpressed subject.

It is generally acknowledged in the literature that the ability to be the controlled argument in control infinitives is not confined to nominative subjects but is also found with oblique subjects. This has been documented in languages like Modern Icelandic (Sigurðsson 1989, 2004), Modern Faroese (Barnes 1986; Barðdal 2023: 96), Modern German (Barðdal 2002, 2006, 2023: Ch. 6; Barðdal et al. 2019), Modern Romanian (Iliaia 2021, 2023; Iliaia and Van Peteghem 2021), Modern Russian (Moore and Perlmutter 2000), Old Norse-Icelandic (Barðdal and Eythórsson 2003a, 2012; Eythórsson and Barðdal 2005; Rögnvaldsson 1991, 1995, 1996), Old Swedish and Old Danish (Barðdal 2023: Ch. 4), Gothic (Barðdal and Eythórsson 2012), Early Middle English (Cole et al. 1980), Old Saxon (Barðdal 2023: Ch. 4), Old French (Mathieu 2006), Ancient Greek (Barðdal et al. 2023; Danesi et al. 2018) and Latin (Barðdal et al. 2023; Cluyse et al. 2025), to give some examples from Indo-European languages.

In addition to control into infinitives, several scholars have argued that in Balkan languages, as well as in Romanian, the subjunctive may also be accounted for in terms of control, even though it is a finite form. This phenomenon is known as *finite control* in the literature (cf. Iliaia and Van Peteghem 2021, among others). Finite control has been documented in several Balkan languages, including Greek (Iatridou 1988; Krapova 2001; Philippaki-Warbuton and Catsimali 1999; Roussou 2001; Terzi 1992, 1997; Varlokosta and Hornstein 1993), Albanian (Dobrovie-Sorin 2001; Terzi 1992; Turano 1994), Romanian (Comorovski 1985; Dobrovie-Sorin 1993, 2001; Farkas 1985), Bulgarian (Krapova 1999, 2001), and Serbo-Croatian (Zec 1987). For an overview of the history of the Romanian infinitive and its relation with the subjunctive, we refer the interested reader to Iliaia (2023: 168–171), as this will not be discussed further here.

We now proceed to control into complement infinitives (6.1.1) and into complement subjunctive clauses (6.1.2).

### 6.1.1 Control into complement infinitive clauses

Consider the following attested example demonstrating that in complement infinitive clauses the subject of the infinitive is left unexpressed, while its direct object must be expressed in its canonical object position.

- (18) a. *Un simplu ajutor<sub>i</sub> de tipograf a reușit*  
 a simple apprentice of pressman has managed  
*a imita —<sub>i</sub> la perfecție stilul marelui*  
 to reproduce.INF Ø.NOM at perfection style.the.ACC great.the.GEN  
*autor.*  
 author  
 ‘A simple apprentice has managed to reproduce flawlessly the style of the great author’ (nemira.ro, here cited from Iliaia 2023: 83)
- b. \**Un simplu ajutor<sub>i</sub> de tipograf a reușit*  
 a simple apprentice of pressman has managed  
*a imita el/ ajutorul la perfecție stilul*  
 to reproduce.INF he/ apprentice.the at perfection style.the.ACC  
*marelui autor.*  
 great.the.GEN author

The example in (18a) shows that the nominative subject of the non-finite *imita* ‘reproduce’ is left unexpressed, due to being the controlled argument, while the object *stilul marelui autor* ‘the style of the great author’ is found in the same position as in ordinary finite clauses. As is indicated by the asterisk in (18b), however, the presence of a strong pronoun, *el* ‘he’, coreferential with the subject of the matrix verb, is entirely ungrammatical in Romanian. There is thus no doubt that Romanian distinguishes between the behavior of subjects and objects in control infinitives, exactly as other languages do.

We now turn to the verb *plăcea* ‘like’ in Romanian in order to demonstrate how the two arguments, the dative and the nominative, fare with regard to this subject test.

#### Dat-Nom

- (19) a. *Ștefan<sub>i</sub> s-a străduit a-î<sub>i</sub> plăcea*  
 Ștefan.NOM REFL-has strived to-him.DAT.CL like.INF  
 [\*lui<sub>i</sub>] *mâncarea iute.*  
 him.DAT food.the.NOM hot  
 ‘Ștefan has strived to like spicy food.’

- b. *E frumos în sânul naturii. Petrecând acel timp puțin, dar prețios alături de persoane<sub>i</sub> care cunosc la perfecțiune semnificația noțiunii „odihnă” și excelează în a le<sub>i</sub> plăcea [*\*persoanelor<sub>i</sub>*] tot excel in to them.DAT.CL like.INF persons.the.DAT all.NOM*  
*ce ține de frumos și adevărat!*  
 which contains of beautiful and true  
 'It's beautiful in the bosom of nature. Spending that little but precious time with people who perfectly know the meaning of "rest" and excel in liking everything that is beautiful and true!' (stefanutalexu.eu)

In (19a–b) above, the embedded infinitive *plăcea* 'like' occurs with a nominative NP and a dative experiencer which is realized by a clitic.

This obligatoriness of the clitic has been one of the impediments to considering the control test in Romanian a reliable subject test, as the presence of the clitic means that a non-nominative subject is not left *entirely* unexpressed. Some alternative analyses of the clitic have been suggested in the literature, such as the clitic being a verbal affix serving as an agreement marker (Monachesi 2000: 8), or the clitic being a case marker (cf. Cornilescu and Tigău 2023; Manoliu-Manea 1987). These analyses amount to the same, namely that the clitic is not an argument in its own right. Similar analyses have been proposed for Spanish (Enrique-Arias 2000; Ormazabal and Romero 2007), Macedonian (Franks 2007), and for Semitic languages (Khan 1984). This would explain why experiencer dative clitics must be present even in constructions where a dative subject should be left unexpressed, as in control constructions (cf. Geber 2011: 72).

However, we argue that the clitic is an argument, which in essence means that dative subjects are, again, not left entirely unexpressed in control constructions. This, we argue, is of no relevance here, as it is the ability to be the controlled argument that is the subject property in Romanian, irrespective of whether this controlled argument is left unexpressed or not. In addition, control may have different representations in different languages. In English and Icelandic, being the controlled argument in control constructions results in the subject being left unexpressed, while in clitic-doubling languages like Romanian, the clitic must be expressed.

Therefore, in Romanian, obligatory control of the dative clitic constitutes major evidence for a subject analysis of the dative, and hence an object analysis of the nominative in these Dat-Nom structures. The facts are the exact converse in (20) below:

## Nom-Dat

- (20) a. *Marius<sub>i</sub> a reușit a-i<sub>j</sub> plăcea —<sub>i</sub> lui Ion<sub>j</sub>.*  
 Marius has managed to-him.DAT.CL be.to.liking.INF Ø.NOM DAT Ion  
 ‘Marius managed to be to John’s liking.’
- b. *Femeia<sub>i</sub> a încercat a-i<sub>j</sub> plăcea —<sub>i</sub>*  
 woman.the.NOM has tried to-him.DAT.CL be.to.liking.INF Ø.NOM  
*soțului<sub>j</sub> ei.*  
 husband.the.DAT hers  
 ‘The woman has tried to be to her husband’s liking.’

In these examples, the nominatives, *Marius* and *femeia* ‘woman’, control the implicit nominative stimulus of *plăcea* ‘like’, exactly as is the case with the canonical nominative subject in (18) above. In contrast, the datives, *lui Ion* ‘John’ and *soțului ei* ‘her husband’ are expressed, exactly as dative objects are in Nom-Dat structures. The presence of the dative clitic in the subordinate clause is, this time, due to clitic doubling.

To conclude, the data presented in this section speak for an alternating analysis of the verb *plăcea* ‘like’, as either the dative experiencer or the nominative stimulus may be the controlled arguments in control infinitives in Romanian, while the other argument, the nominative stimulus or the dative experiencer, behaves syntactically as an object. In other words, the data presented here support a Dat-Nom argument structure analysis of the examples in (19) and a Nom-Dat argument structure analysis of the data in (20) above.

## 6.1.2 Control into complement subjunctive clauses

We now proceed to control into subjunctive clauses, generally referred to as *finite control* in the literature on the Balkan languages (see references in Section 6.1 above). Consider the example in (21a), which shows that a nominative subject must be left unexpressed in such structures, while (21b) shows that a corresponding example with the nominative subject spelled out is ungrammatical.

- (21) a. *Mihai<sub>i</sub> a încercat să-l invite*  
 Mihai.NOM has tried SUBJ-him.ACC.CL invites.SUBJ.3SG  
 —<sub>j</sub> *pe Cezar.*  
 PRO.NOM ACC Cezar  
 ‘Mihai tried to invite Cezar’
- b. \**Mihai<sub>i</sub> a încercat să-l invite*  
 Mihai.NOM has tried SUBJ-him.ACC invites.SUBJ.3SG  
 \**el<sub>i</sub> pe Cezar.*  
 he ACC Cezar

At first sight, (21a) above could be seen as an instance of pro-drop. However, the fact that the subject is obligatorily interpreted as being coreferential with the subject of *încerca* 'try', shows that it is controlled by the subject of the main clause.

This example shows that there is no difference between control into infinitives and control into subjunctive clauses in Romanian, as the nominative subject of *invita* 'invite' in (21a), is obligatorily controlled and must remain unexpressed, exactly like the nominative subject of *imita* 'reproduce' in (18a) above, as both are coreferential with the subject of the matrix clause.

Moving on to the verb *plăcea* 'like' and its two arguments, the dative and the nominative, the examples in (22a–b) below show that it is the dative clitic arguments that are obligatorily controlled by the subjects *Stefan* and *sotia ta* 'your wife'. In other words, the dative arguments in (22a–b) behave in the same way as the dative clitics in (19) above. At the same time, the nominatives in (22a–b) behave as the accusative object in (21a).

#### Dat-Nom

- (22) a. *Ștefan s-a străduit să-î placă*  
 Ștefan REFL-has strived SUBJ-him.DAT.CL likes.SUBJ.3SG  
 [\*lui<sub>i</sub>] **mâncarea iute.**  
 him.DAT food.the.NOM hot  
 'Stefan has strived to like spicy food.'
- b. [*soția<sub>i</sub> ta*] *n-a dat doi bani (sau EURO) pe cizmele de PESTE 200 EUR din DE,*  
*în schimb a îndrăznit să-î placă [\*ei<sub>i</sub>]*  
 has dared SUBJ-her.DAT.CL likes.3SG her.DAT  
*o pereche din România, auzi, tu, din ROMANIA!*  
 a pair from Romania  
 '[Your wife] didn't give a dime (Euro) about the over 200 euro boots from Germany, instead, she dared to like a pair from Romania, hey, you, from ROMANIA!'  
 (forum.anticonceptionale.ro)

Regarding the Nom-Dat construction, the examples in (23) below show that the unexpressed nominative subjects of *plăcea* 'like' are the controlled arguments in their respective subjunctive clauses, on identity with *Marius* and *Căin* in the matrix clause. In contrast, the datives, *lui Ion* and *lui Dumnezeu*, are the syntactic objects, doubled by a dative clitic.

**Nom-Dat**

- (23) a. *Marius<sub>i</sub> a reușit să-i placă —i*  
 Marius has managed SUBJ-him.DAT.CL is.to liking.SUBJ.3SG Ø.NOM  
*lui Ion.*  
 DAT Ion  
 ‘Marius managed to be to Ion’s liking.’
- b. *Este ca și cum Cain<sub>i</sub> a încercat să-i placă*  
 Cain has tried SUBJ-him.DAT.CL is.to liking.SUBJ.3SG  
*—i lui Dumnezeu nu oferind o jertfă cu vărsarea sângelui,*  
 Ø.NOM DAT God  
*ci aducându-I rodul muncii sale, rodul pământului.*  
 ‘It is as if Cain tried to be to God’s liking not by offering a blood sacrifice, but by bringing Him the fruit of his labor, the fruit of the ground’  
 (ro.agodman.com)

To conclude, these example pairs show that either argument of *plăcea* ‘like’, the dative experiencer or the nominative stimulus may pass the subject tests, in which case the other argument, the nominative or the dative, behaves syntactically as an object. These findings corroborate our hypothesis that the verb *plăcea* selects for two diametrically opposed argument structure constructions, i.e. Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat, in Romanian.

**6.2 Raising-to-subject**

One clear property of syntactic subjects in many languages is their ability to “raise” to the subject position. This typically occurs with verbs meaning ‘appear’, ‘look’, and ‘seem’ (cf. van der Auwera and Noël 2011), but also with aspectual verbs like ‘begin’ (Barðdal 2001b) and even some modal verbs, although this varies from verb to verb and from language to language. In other words, raising-to-subject is generally found with verbs which do not select for a subject of their own.

In Romanian, raising-to-subject typically occurs with verbs such as *începe* ‘start’ (24a) or *parea* ‘seem’ (24b).

**Raising-to-subject**

- (24) a. *Clara începe a citi o carte.*  
 Clara begins to read.INF a book  
 ‘Clara begins to read a book.’



- b. *Ștefan pare a accepta înfrângerea.*  
 Ștefan seems to accept<sub>INF</sub> defeat.the  
 'Ștefan seems to accept his defeat.'

In (24a–b) the raised subjects are the nominative *Clara* and *Ștefan*, which are the subject arguments of the non-finite verbs *citi* 'read' and *accepta* 'accept', but occur here as the subjects of the matrix verbs 'begin' and 'seem'.

The term *raising* has its origins in generative grammar: the relevant verbal argument is assumed to "raise" from the subject position of the non-finite verb to the subject position of the finite verb. For our purposes, it is immaterial whether or not any literal "raising" has taken place. What matters here is the fact that the argument corresponding to the subject of the lower verb, when that same verb occurs in ordinary finite clauses, is the argument that takes on the subject behavior of the matrix verb when occurring in raising-to-subject constructions.

Subject-to-subject raising has been used in the literature to argue for the existence of non-nominative subjects in Romanian by several scholars, such as Rivero and Geber (2003, 2004), Geber (2006, 2011), Alboiu (2007), Rivero (2009), Cornilescu (2009), Cotfas (2016a, 2016b, 2016c), Iliaia and Van Peteghem (2021), Iliaia (2023: 180), and Cornilescu and Tigău (2023). Generally, raising is assumed to take place when the unexpressed subject of the non-finite verb – in most languages infinitives – takes on the properties of the matrix verb. However, due to the rareness of infinitive clauses in Romanian, structures of this type are rather infrequent in this language.

Nonetheless, in addition to the scarce cases of raising from infinitive clauses, Romanian has been shown to allow subject raising out of subjunctive clauses (Alboiu 2007; Cotfas 2016a, 2016b; Cornilescu and Tigău 2023; Geber 2006, 2011; Iliaia 2021, 2023; Rivero 2009; Rivero and Geber 2003, 2004; Iliaia and Van Peteghem 2021) and even out of indicative clauses (Cornilescu and Tigău 2023; Geber 2011).

We now proceed to raising-to-subject out of finite clauses (6.2.1) and to raising-to-subject out of infinitives (6.2.2).

### 6.2.1 Raising-to-subject out of finite clauses

Geber (2011: 14–16), Cotfas (2016b, 2016c), and, more recently, Cornilescu and Tigău (2023: 36–37) argue that Romanian patterns with Portuguese in allowing subjects to raise out of indicative clauses, while it patterns with Greek when it allows subjects to raise out of subjunctives.

### Raising out of subjunctive

- (25) a. *Victor poate / trebuie / începe să deseneze foarte bine.*  
 Victor can / must / begins SUBJ draws.SUBJ.3SG very well  
 ‘Victor can / must / is beginning to draw very well.’ (Cotfas 2016c: 91)

### Raising out of indicative

- b. *Băieții par că au călătorit ieri.*  
 boys.the seem.3PL that.IND have.3PL traveled yesterday  
 ‘The boys seem to have traveled yesterday.’ (Geber 2011: 16)

Geber (2011: 73–75), among other scholars, argues that the subject-like dative of psychological verbs may also be raised to subject and she considers this behavior as evidence of the subject status of the dative. However, Geber (2011: 73–75) and Illoaia and Van Peteghem (2021: 275) point out that in present-day Romanian only full NP datives may be raised to subject and not dative clitics (26a). Instead, dative clitics must remain in situ, attached to the embedded verb (26b). Hence, raising-to-subject is confined to examples with a full NP dative or a strong pronoun in Romanian, doubled by a clitic attached to the subjunctive verb, as in (26c):

### Non-raised clitics

- (26) a. *Pare să-i placă muzica.*  
 seems.3SG SUBJ-him.DAT.CL likes.SUBJ.3SG music.the.NOM  
 ‘S/he seems to like music.’

### \*Raised clitics

- b. *\*Îi pare să placă muzica.*  
 him.DAT.CL seems.3SG SUBJ likes.SUBJ.3SG music.the.NOM  
 Intended meaning: ‘S/he seems to like music.’

### Raised dative NP

- c. *Lui Ion pare să-i placă muzica.*  
 DAT Ion seems.3SG SUBJ-him.DAT.CL likes.SUBJ.3SG music.the.NOM  
 ‘Ion seems to like music’

Remarkably, in earlier periods of Romanian the dative clitic could raise together with a full NP dative or a strong pronoun, as shown in (27) below, stemming from an original non-translated text from the end of the 18th century.

### Clitic raising

- (27) *mie -m începe a plăcea poeticul.*  
 me.DAT-me.DAT.CL starts to like.INF poetry.the.NOM  
 ‘I start to like the poetry.’ (1760–1820, Budai Deleanu)

Consider now the following attested example of the dative experiencer with *plăcea* ‘like’ being raised to subject out of a subjunctive clause (28), an example which sounds perfectly natural to native speakers.

### Dat-Nom = dative raising out of a subjunctive clause

- (28) *Naturii pare să-i placă simetria.*  
 nature.the.DAT seems.3SG SUBJ-her.DAT.CL likes.SUBJ.3SG symmetry.NOM  
 ‘Nature seems to enjoy symmetry.’ (ziare.com)

One may take such examples as clear-cut evidence for the subject status of the dative with *plăcea* ‘like’ in Romanian. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Iliaia and Van Peteghem (2021: 276), other elements may also precede the matrix predicate, including both indirect object datives (29a) and direct object accusatives (29b).

### Indirect object datives

- (29) a. *Lui Ion pare să-i fi dat un cadou mai frumos decât Anei.*  
 DAT Ion seems.3SG SUBJ-him.DAT.CL be.SUBJ.PAST given a gift  
 more beautiful than Ana.DAT  
 ‘To John s/he seems to have given a nicer gift than to Ana.’  
 (Iliaia and Van Peteghem 2021: 276)

### Direct object accusatives

- b. *Pe Marius pare să-l fi invitat mai devreme.*  
 ACC Marius seems.3SG SUBJ-him.ACC.CL be.SUBJ.PAST invited more  
 early  
 ‘Marius, s/he seems to have invited earlier.’  
 (Iliaia and Van Peteghem 2021: 276)

However, Iliaia and Van Peteghem (2021: 276) argue that the above-illustrated dative indirect object and accusative direct object are not in subject position, but in focus position, which is not the case with the dative argument of *plăcea* ‘like’ in (28) above. This is evident from the fact that dative experiencers may be realized as bare quantifiers (30b), which excludes a focus interpretation, exactly like with ordinary nominative subjects, shown in (30a).

**Non-focused nominative subjects**

- (30) a. *Nimeni nu pare să înțeleagă ceva.*  
 nobody.NOM not seems.3SG SUBJ understands.SUBJ.3SG something.ACC  
 ‘Nobody seems to understand something.’

**Non-focused dative experiencers of *plăcea* ‘like’**

- b. *Nimănui nu pare să-i placă Chelsea.*  
 nobody.DAT not seems.3SG SUBJ-him.DAT.CL likes.SUBJ.3SG Chelsea.NOM  
 ‘Nobody seems to like Chelsea.’ (alexradescu.ro)

This is contrary to indirect object datives (31a) and direct object accusatives (31b) which cannot occur as bare quantifiers in clause-initial focus position.

**Non-focused indirect object datives**

- (31) a. *??Nimănui nu pare să-i fi dat un cadou.*  
 nobody.DAT not seems.3SG SUBJ-him.DAT.CL is.SUBJ.past given a gift  
 Intended meaning: ‘(S)he doesn’t seem to have given anybody a gift.’

**Non-focused direct object accusatives**

- b. *??Pe nimeni nu pare să-l fi invitat mai devreme.*  
 ACC nobody not seems.3SG SUBJ-him.ACC.CL is.SUBJ.past invited  
 more early  
 Intended meaning: ‘(S)he doesn’t seem to have invited anybody earlier.’

These examples confirm Geber’s (2011, based on Dumitrescu and Masullo 1996) claim that quantifiers may not occupy a focus position in Romanian (see also Cardinaletti 2004; Rizzi 1982, 1986 on related languages), showing once and for all that dative experiencers of *plăcea* ‘like’ may be raised to subject in raising-to-subject constructions in this language.

Consider now the following examples of the nominative stimulus of *plăcea* ‘like’ being raised to subject:

**Nom-Dat = nominative raised out of a subjunctive clause**

- (32) a. *Modelul respectiv pare să-i placă foarte mult juratei emisiunii.*  
 model.the.NOM concerned seems.3SG SUBJ-her.DAT.CL is.to.liking.SUBJ.3SG  
 very much jury.the.DAT program.the.GEN  
 ‘The model seems very much to be to the jury of the TV show’s liking.’  
 (wowbiz.ro)

**Nom-Dat = nominative is a bare quantifier**

- b. *Nimic nu pare să-i placă cu adevărat.*  
 nothing.NOM not seems.3SG SUBJ-her.DAT.CL is.to.liking.SUBJ.3SG with really  
 ‘Nothing really seems to be to her liking.’ (goodreads.com)

Observe that the raised nominative stimulus in (32b) is realized as a bare quantifier, which excludes a focus reading of this example. This shows that the nominative stimulus of *plăcea* ‘like’ may be raised to subject in raising-to-subject constructions in Romanian.

To conclude, in this section we have shown not only that raising-to-subject is a genuine subject test in Romanian, as indirect objects can only be fronted when focalized, but also that both the dative experiencer and the nominative stimulus of *plăcea* ‘like’ behave as syntactic subjects with respect to this test, although not at the same time, of course. These facts indeed suggest that the Romanian verb *plăcea* is an alternating verb instantiating two diametrically opposed argument structures, the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat constructions.

**6.2.2 Raising-to-subject out of infinitive clauses**

Turning to raising-to-subject out of infinitive clauses, consider the following attested example of the dative experiencer with *plăcea* ‘like’ being raised to subject out of an infinitive clause.

**Dat-Nom**

- (33) *În plus moldovencei pare a-i plăcea foarte mult*  
 in plus Moldavian.the.DAT seems.3SG to-her.DAT.CL like.INF very much  
*ceea ce face și ...*  
 that what does and  
 ‘In addition, the Moldavian woman seems to really like what she does  
 and ...’

(forum.softpedia.com)

The dative, *moldovencei* ‘the Moldavian’, which belongs to the infinitive *plăcea* ‘like’, occurs here as the subject of the semantically “vacuous” *parea* ‘seems’, while the nominative object is realized as a subordinate clause, headed by *ceea ce* ‘what’. For a corresponding example with a nominative of *plăcea* being raised out of an infinitive, see (34) below:

**Nom-Dat**

- (34) *Modelul*      *respectiv*   *pare*      *a-i*      *plăcea*      *foarte*  
 model.the.NOM   concerned   seems.3SG   to-her.DAT.CL   be.to liking.INF   very  
*mult*   *juratei*      *emisiunii.*  
 much   jury.the.DAT   program.the.GEN  
 ‘That specific model seems very much to be to the jury of the TV show’s  
 liking.’

In (34) the nominative *modelul* ‘model’ of the infinitive *plăcea* ‘like’ occurs here as the subject of the finite verb *părea* ‘seem’, while the dative *juratei emisiunii* ‘jury of the tv show’ behaves syntactically as the object, occurring in the canonical object position. It should be noted here that both (33) and (34) sound perfectly natural to native speakers of Romanian.

In addition, both the dative and the nominative of *plăcea* ‘like’ may be realized as bare quantifiers, a property confined to subjects and excluding a fronted focus reading, as we show in the preceding section for raising-to-subject out of finite clauses.

**Non-focused dative experiencer of *plăcea* ‘like’**

- (35) a. *Nimănui*   *nu*   *pare*      *a-i*      *plăcea*   *foarte*   *mult*  
 nobody.DAT   not   seems.3SG   to-him.DAT.CL   like.INF   very   much  
*ceea ce face.*  
 that   what   does.3SG  
 ‘Nobody seems to really like what (s)he does.’

**Non-focused nominative stimulus of *plăcea* ‘like’**

- b. *Nimic*      *nu*   *pare*      *a-i*      *plăcea*      *cu*   *adevărat.*  
 nothing.NOM   not   seems.3SG   to-her.DAT.CL   be.to liking.INF   with   really  
 ‘Nothing really seems to be to her liking.’

Taken together, we have shown in this section that either argument of *plăcea* ‘like’, the dative or the nominative, may be “raised” to subject out of infinitives, exactly as with raising-to-subject out of finite clauses. As such, there can be no doubt that the verb *plăcea* is an alternating verb in Romanian, instantiating either the Dat-Nom or the Nom-Dat construction.

**6.3 Raising-to-object**

Turning to the fifth subject-test, raising-to-object, the examples in (36) stem from Cornilescu and Tigău (2023: 31), demonstrating the empirical facts of raising-to-object

in Romanian. Compare the finite structure in (36a) with the raising-to-object structure in (36b):

- (36) a. *Am văzut cum Ion a spart geamul.*  
 have.1SG seen how John has broken window.the  
 'I saw how John broke the window.'
- b. *L-am văzut pe Ion cum a spart geamul.*  
 him.ACC.CL-have.1SG seen ACC John how has broken window.the  
 'I saw John, how [he] broke the window.'

In (36a) the nominative subject *Ion* 'John' stays in its normal position in the subordinate clause, here immediately following the relative adverb *cum* 'how'. When raised to object, the nominative subject turns into an accusative *pe Ion* in (36b), behaving as the direct object of the finite verb, thus occurring in between the finite verb, *am văzut* 'have seen', and the relative adverb *cum* 'how'. As such, (36b) appears to be a good example of raising-to-object in Romanian.

Consider now the following examples with *plăcea* 'like':

**Dat-Nom = example without raising:**

- (37) a. *Eu văd că lui Ion îi place mâncarea.*  
 I.NOM see.1SG that DAT Ion him.DAT.CL likes.3SG food.the.NOM  
 'I see that Ion likes the food.'

**Dat-Nom = dative raising out of subjunctive:**

- b. *Eu îl văd pe Ion că-i place mâncarea.*  
 I.NOM him.ACC see.1SG ACC Ion that-him.DAT.CL likes.3SG food.the.NOM  
 'I see Ion liking the food.'

**Nom-Dat = example without raising:**

- (38) a. *Eu nu văd ca Ioan R să-i placă lui K.I.*  
 I not see.1SG that Ioan R SUBJ-him.DAT.CL  
 is.to.liking.SUBJ.3SG DAT K.I.  
 'I don't see that Ioan R would be to K.I.'s liking.'

**Nom-Dat = nominative raising out of subjunctive:**

- b. *Nu de alta, dar nu-l văd eu pe Ioan R. să-i placă lui K.I.*  
 not of other but not-him.ACC see.1SG I ACC  
 Ioan R. SUBJ-him.DAT.CL is.to.liking.SUBJ.3SG DAT K.I.  
 'Not for nothing, but I don't see Ioan R be to K.I.'s liking.'

In examples (37–38) above, the (b) examples are instances of raising-to-object based on the (a) examples which represent neutral word order, Dat-Nom in (37a) and Nom-Dat in (38a). The dative argument of *plăcea* ‘like’, *lui Ion*, from (37a) clearly occurs, when raised, in the accusative case, *pe Ion*, in (37b), between the finite verb *văd* ‘see’ and the complementizer, *că* ‘that’. The same is true for the nominative argument from (38a), *Ioan R.*, which also occurs in the raising-to-object position in (38b), in between the finite verb and the conjunction *să* ‘that’.

To conclude, we agree with Cornilescu and Tigău (2023: 31) on the validity of the raising-to-object test in Romanian. In addition, the data presented in this section corroborate an alternating analysis of the verb *plăcea* ‘like’, since either the dative or the nominative may be “raised” to object in raising-to-object constructions, while the other argument behaves as a syntactic object, staying in its canonical object position in the lower clause.

## 7 Summary and conclusions

The hypothesis launched and argued for in this article is that the Romanian verb *plăcea* ‘like’ is an alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat predicate instantiating two diametrically opposed argument structures, i.e. the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat argument structure constructions, and that this behavior is inherited from its Latin ancestor, *placēre* meaning ‘like, please’. This hypothesis may be directly derived from the event structure of this type of experiencer predicates which are stative or inchoative in nature; in other words, they are force-dynamically neutral. As a consequence, two types of event construals are available to these verbs, involving i) the experiencer directing his/her attention to the stimulus, and ii) the stimulus affecting the experiencer. The former type of construal yields a Dat-Nom argument structure, while the latter type yields a Nom-Dat argument structure construction for verbs like *plăcea*.

This hypothesis, that *plăcea* ‘like’ is an alternating Dat-Nom-/Nom-Dat predicate, makes certain predictions about the syntactic behavior of the two arguments, namely that either argument, the dative or the nominative, may behave syntactically as a subject and the other argument as an object, although not at the same time, of course. When the verb *plăcea* instantiates the Dat-Nom argument structure, it is the dative that takes on subject behavior, while the nominative behaves syntactically as an object. In contrast, when *plăcea* instantiates the Nom-Dat argument structure construction, it is the nominative that behaves syntactically as a subject and the dative as an object.

In order to verify these predictions, we have carried out a word order study for *plăcea*, ‘like’, also including *mulțumi* ‘thank’ as a control. Thus, we have extracted 200



main clause examples of *plăcea* and *mulțumi* from the Romanian Web Corpus roTenTen16, examples where both arguments, the dative and the nominative, are expressed in order to determine their internal word order and their relative frequencies. Our findings, indeed, corroborate a subject analysis of the dative in Dat-Nom constructions, while at the same time, the few instances of nominative-before-dative orders are clearly not topicalizations, but represent neutral word order. This stands in stark contrast to the word order distribution found with *mulțumi* 'thank', with which the dative-before-nominative orders are clearly topicalizations, thus not representing neutral word order. These facts call for a further scrutiny of the available subject tests in Romanian, recently suggested in the literature (cf. Cornilescu and Tigău 2023; Iliaia 2021, 2023; Iliaia and Van Peteghem 2021).

Furthermore, we have found that two of the suggested subject tests, conjunction reduction and binding of reflexives either do not distinguish between subjects and objects or are problematic in other respects and are thus not applicable. First, not only may subjects bind reflexives, but also indirect and direct objects. For this reason, we have not relied on binding as a subject test here. Second, conjunction reduction is also problematic, on the one hand, due to the obligatoriness of the clitics, and, on the other, due to the pro-drop property of Romanian, yielding examples allegedly representing conjunction reduction as equally well explainable as pro-drop. The pro-drop property of Romanian also rules out the applicability of the test involving ellipsis in telegraphic style.

In contrast, we have argued that the subject tests safely applicable in Romanian are: control into infinitives, control into subjunctive clauses, control into adjunct gerund clauses, raising-to-subject and raising-to-object. We have shown here that uncontroversial syntactic subjects, pattern with ordinary nominative subjects, in that they pass these tests while the object stays in its position, exactly like objects do in finite clauses. Applying these five subject tests on the two arguments of *plăcea* 'like' also reveals that our hypothesis that *plăcea* is an alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat predicate in Romanian is borne out, as either argument, the dative or the nominative, passes these five subject tests. Moreover, when the dative behaves as a syntactic subject, the nominative takes on object behavior, and vice versa, when the nominative behaves as a subject, the dative takes on the behavior of object.

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