

An experimental approach to case marking in Romanian elliptical comparatives

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Ellipsis has been the most studied in relation to coordination, as coordination has been assumed to be the privileged syntactic context (or even the only possible one) for elliptical constructions. A typical example is the gapping construction (Ross 1967), which is traditionally analyzed as restricted to coordination, as illustrated by the contrast (1a)-(1b). However, gapping may occur in comparatives (1c).

- (1) a. Robert played piano **and** John violin.
b. *Robert played piano {**whenever/because**} John violin.
c. Robert played piano better **than** John violin.

Lechner's (2004) hypothesis is that elliptical processes targeting comparatives obey the same conditions as elliptical processes involved in coordination. We therefore expect gapping to behave the same in both syntactic contexts. However, we show (based on several pieces of evidence, e.g. TAM mismatches, gapping directionality, case marking mismatch, asymmetric extraction, narrow scope of semantic operators, obligatory ellipsis, etc.) that this hypothesis cannot be maintained with respect to gapping in Romanian, as constraints on gapping in comparatives are less strict than what is generally observed with gapping in coordination.

In this paper, we particularly concentrate on case marking (mis)match in Romanian gapped comparatives in order to illustrate the limits of introspective informal judgments as the sole source of data and to show the importance of more formal methods, which provide more reliable and richer data. In theoretical linguistics, the large majority of examples are constructed data, based on introspective acceptability judgments. This leads very often to significant variation in acceptability judgments across speakers and sometimes even to contradictory data. Therefore, Van Peteghem (2009) considers that in gapped *decât*-comparatives, if the first remnant is a pronominal subject, it always bears the nominative case (2a), as is the case in gapped coordinations. On the other hand, Pană-Dindelegan (2013) notes that the subject remnant in *decât*-comparatives always allows a case alternation (2b): it may bear not only nominative (cf. *derived-case comparatives*), but also accusative case (cf. *fixed-case comparatives*), the latter case being the result of a grammaticalization process.

- (2) a. Ea lucrează mai mult acasă **decât** { $tu_{NOM}/*tine_{ACC}$ } la serviciu. (Van Peteghem 2009)
'She works more at home than you at the office.'
b. Eu sunt mai bucuros azi **decât** { $tu_{NOM}/tine_{ACC}$ } ieri. (Pană-Dindelegan 2013)
'I am happier today than you yesterday.'

In order to tease apart these contradictory data, we present an experimental study on the alternation between nominative and accusative case with pronominal remnants in Romanian, showing the relevance of the semantic factor of animacy: there seems to be a preference for accusative marking when the subject remnant is not followed by an animate remnant (3a), whereas the nominative seems to be the only strategy which is available when both remnants are animate (3b).

- (3) a. Ana iubește geografia mai mult **decât** { $tine_{ACC}/tu_{NOM}$ } istoria.
'Ana likes geography more than you history.'
b. Ana îl iubește pe Ion mai mult **decât** { $tu/??tine$ } pe Dan.
'Ana loves Ion more than you Dan.'

We ran an acceptability judgment task, using a 2x2 factorial design (experimental factors: CASE and ELLIPSIS, each with two values). We built 24 experimental items, 12 with animate and 12 with inanimate nouns. For each item, there are four conditions, as illustrated in (4) for inanimate and in (5) for animate remnants. The conditions (c) and (d) served us as control items:

ungrammatical control in (c) vs. grammatical control in (d). The rating scale was 1-7. We had 56 participants who did the task on the IbexFarm platform.

(4) [-animate]

a. [+accusative, -verb]

Ana iubește geografia mai mult **decât** tine_{ACC} istoria.

b. [-accusative, -verb]

Ana iubește geografia mai mult **decât** tu_{NOM} istoria.

c. [+accusative, +verb]

Ana iubește geografia mai mult **decât** iubești tine_{ACC} istoria.

d. [-accusative, +verb]

Ana iubește geografia mai mult **decât** iubești tu_{NOM} istoria.

(5) [+animate]

a. [+accusative, -verb]

Ana îl iubește pe Ion mai mult **decât** tine_{ACC} pe Dan.

b. [-accusative, -verb]

Ana îl iubește pe Ion mai mult **decât** tu_{NOM} pe Dan.

c. [+accusative, +verb]

Ana îl iubește pe Ion mai mult **decât** îl iubești tine_{ACC} pe Dan.

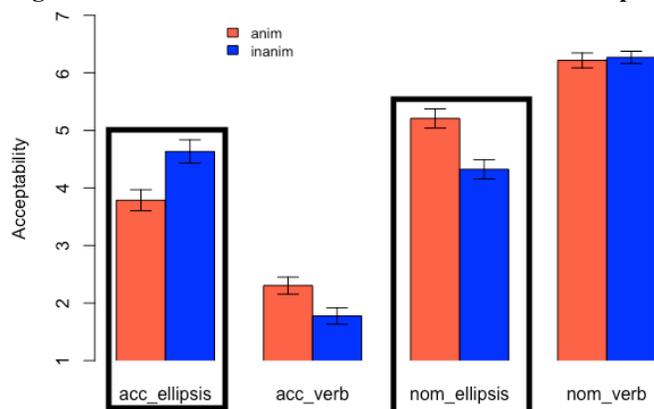
d. [-accusative, +verb]

Ana îl iubește pe Ion mai mult **decât** îl iubești tu_{NOM} pe Dan.

The experimental results confirm our hypothesis: there is indeed a case alternation (*pace* Van Peteghem 2009), which is not free (*pace* Pană-Dindelegan 2013), but rather conditioned by a more general semantic constraint of animacy. Both linear mixed-effect and cumulative link models on our participants' acceptability ratings reveal a significant interaction between ellipsis, case, and animacy ($p < .001$, see also Figure 1). Overall, our study shows the importance of experimental methods, which provide more reliable and richer data (Wasow & Arnold 2005, Gibson & Fedorenko 2013, Sprouse et al. 2013).

In order to deal with this conditioned case alternation, we built on the fragment-based analysis of gapping proposed for Romance gapping in coordination (Abeillé *et al.* 2014, Bîlbîie 2017), without postulating a syntactic ellipsis as assumed by reduction approaches (Lechner 2004). The 'connectivity' effects, when they are observed, can be explained without appealing to a syntactic reconstruction mechanism; e.g. case marking may be licensed non locally (cf. Nykiel & Kim *to appear*) by appealing to a cue-based retrieval mechanism, which is at work in sentence parsing (Parker *et al.* 2017).

Figure 1. Animate vs. inanimate distinction in the 4 experimental conditions



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