
Case encoding in Romanian elliptical comparatives: the role of animacy and differential object marking

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Our main goal is to experimentally assess the case marking alternation (nominative vs. accusative) on the subject remnant in Romanian gapped comparatives (1), to illustrate the limits of introspective informal judgments as the sole source of data and to show the importance of experimental methods. The contradictory data obtained from informal introspective judgments make opposite predictions with respect to the syntactic analysis of gapped comparatives (a deletion-based analysis, if only nominative is allowed, cf. Van Peteghem 2009 vs. a fragment-based analysis, if there is indeed a case alternation, cf. Zafiu 2013).

- (1) a. Ana iubește geografia mai mult **decât** {_{t_{NOM}/t_{ineACC}}} istoria.
'Ana likes geography more than you history.'
b. Ion adoră fetele mai mult **decât** {_{e_{NOM}/m_{ineACC}}} băieții.
'Ion adores girls more than you boys'
c. Ion o admiră pe_{DOM} asistentă mai mult **decât** {_{e_{NOM}/m_{ineACC}}} pe_{DOM} anestezistă.
'Ion admires the nurse more than I the anaesthetist.'

We conducted an acceptability judgment task, that allowed us to tease apart the previous conflicting judgments. The results show that there is indeed a case alternation (*pace* Van Peteghem 2009), which is not free (*pace* Zafiu 2013), but rather conditioned by the animacy of the second remnant (significant interaction between ellipsis, case, and animacy: $p < .001$). We did a post-hoc analysis by taking into account the marking of the animate object (simple NPs (1b) vs. differentially object marked NPs (1c)), and we observed that the marking of the second remnant plays a role too (at the conference, we will present the results of a second acceptability judgment task dealing with the marking of the animate object).

We propose an explanation in terms of processing (cf. Sag et al. 1985): gapping is more acceptable if both remnants are clearly dissociated by a linguistic mean, e.g. case marking or different semantic type. From a theoretical perspective, the case alternation on the subject remnant challenges the deletion-based syntactic analysis and argues for a constructionist approach in terms of fragments.

References: • Sag, I.A., G. Gazdar, T. Wasow & S. Weisler (1985). Coordination and how to distinguish categories. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 3, 117–171. • Van Peteghem, M. (2009). Sur le subordonnant comparatif dans les langues romanes. *Langages* 174, 99–112. • Zafiu, R. (2013). Comparative constructions. In G. Pană-Dindelegan (ed.), *The Grammar of Romanian*. Oxford University Press. 503–510.