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When Differential Object Marking is Obligatory: Some Remarks on the Role of Case in Ellipsis and Comparatives

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Abstract

The identity condition in ellipsis has received a great deal of attention in formal studies, one of the most prominent topics of inquiry being its precise nature. This paper contributes to this debate by examining a rather ignored equative (equality comparative) context where unexpected differential object marking is obligatory irrespective of its canonical features. The data come from Romance (taking Romanian as a representative sample) and one Indo-Aryan variety, namely Nepali. We show that such marking poses a challenge to most theories examining the precise nature of the identity condition in ellipsis and comparatives. The answer we propose follows mixed theories (Mártin González 2016); crucially, we also show that (some types of) Case identity can be reduced to the requirement of certain structures to manipulate arguments instead of predicates (oftype). Our remarks are relevant to licensing of arguments and identity conditions that go beyond ellipsis.

When Differential Object Marking is Obligatory: Some Remarks on the Role of Case in Ellipsis and Comparatives

Monica Alexandrina Irimia

1 Introduction

The identity condition in ellipsis has received a great deal of attention in formal studies, one of the most prominent topics of inquiry being its precise nature. An important stream of research has put forward the conclusion that the identity requirement is *syntactic* (Ross 1969, Sag 1976, Williams 1977, Fox 2000, Takita 2015, a.o). Merchant (2001), on the other hand, has emphasized some problems with *syntactic* identity, proposing instead that the relevant condition pertains to the *semantic* component. And, yet more recently, mixed theories have also argued for the necessity of both *syntactic* and *semantic* identity. For example, both Chung (2013), as well as Mártin-González (2016) examine contexts where *syntactic* homomorphism must play a role, besides *semantic* identity.

This paper contributes to this debate by examining a rather ignored *equative* (equality comparative) context where unexpected differential object marking is obligatory. The data come from Romance (taking Romanian as a representative sample) and one Indo-Aryan variety, namely Nepali. These languages have robust differential object marking (DOM), which is normally subject to a conjunctive set of features (generally, *animacy* and *specificity*). The puzzle with equatives is that DOM becomes obligatory on the standard (Romance)/the antecedent (Nepali) irrespective of such canonical features, when the grammatical function is that of an object. For Romance, there are various tests indicating that the differential marker on the standard does not have an inherent or lexical nature but is rather regulated by some type of *syntactic* identity that must hold under ellipsis. However, such marker poses various problems to all types of theories examining the precise nature of this identity condition. Another challenge is how to unify the Romance and Nepali data, given that comparatives are *phrasal* in the latter. The answer we propose here follows mixed theories (Mártin-González 2016); crucially, we also show that (some types of) Case identity can be reduced to the requirement of certain structures to manipulate *arguments* instead of predicates (of type <e,t >). Our remarks are relevant to licensing of arguments and identity conditions that go beyond ellipsis.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 we first give a very brief overview of DOM in Romance and Indo-Aryan; this allows us to better situate the problem of equatives where canonical DOM features must be obligatorily overriden. We further present various diagnostics which indicate sensitivity of DOM to object grammatical function. Section 3 evaluates two theories about the role of Case in ellipsis, and shows they cannot derive the facts. In Section 4 it is proposed that mixed accounts can accommodate the data with some relevant changes which also allow us to better understand the nature of argumenthood in comparatives. Section 5 contains the conclusions.

2 When Differential Object Marking is Obligatory

DOM is a very common phenomenon cross-linguistically. It refers to a process whereby certain classes of objects are signaled morpho-syntactically (Comrie 1989, Aissen 2003, a.o). Descriptively, the features these special objects have are at the higher end of hierarchies or *Scales* of the type illustrated in (1) and discussed in detail by Aissen (2003). *Scales* capture the fact that pronouns, proper names, animates and specific DPs, etc. tend to require special encoding when used as objects:

(1)   a.   *Animacy* Scale: 1/2 >proper name >3 >human >animate >inanimate
        b.   *Specificity/Definiteness* Scale: pronoun >name >definite >specific indefinite >non-specific

The data we are addressing in this paper come from Romance (mostly Romanian) and Indo-Aryan (Nepali), where objects which are animate and specific (as well as pronouns, and proper names, etc.) can be signaled by dedicated adpositional marking. As mentioned in the introduction,

in these languages DOM normally makes use of conjunctive sets of features.[1]

The Romanian example in (2) a contains an animate object which is interpreted specific and is introduced by the DOM preposition *pe*.[2] Inanimate objects, on the other hand, do not normally accept DOM , irrespective of specificity (2) b. In (2) c we show that definite animates can be used without DOM. This indicates that, besides animacy, the relevant DOM factor is a certain type of specificity, and not definiteness (see Cornilescu 2000, and López 2012 for further discussion):[3]

(2)   Romanian

    a.   Am   găsit-o   **pe**   fată
         have-1.SG.INDIC.PRES found-CL.3.ACC.SG.F DOM girl[4]
         'I have found the girl.'

    b.   Am   găsit(*-o)   (***pe)** minge.
         have-1.SG.INDIC.PRES found-CL.3.ACC.SG.F DOM ball
         'I have found the ball.'

    c.   Am   găsit   fata.
         have-1.SG.INDIC.PRES found girl-DEF.F.SG
         'I have found the girl.'

Sensitivity to animacy is also active in Nepali. Here, specific animates are marked with the postposition *lai*, which is homophonous with the dative marker.[5] In (3) a we provide an example with a specific animate object which is differentially marked. (3) b has a DOM-less animate object, while in (3) c we see an inanimate which, for most speakers, is not well formed with DOM.

(3)   Nepali[6]

    a.   gai-**lai**   laura-le pit-na   thal-e
         cow-DOM stick-ERG beat-INF start-PST.3.PL
         'They started beating the cow.'   (Schikowski 2013: ex. 93 a)

    b.   gurun-haru bhaisi gai pani pal-chan.
         Gurung-PL buffalo cow also keep-NPST.3PL
         'The Gurungs also keep buffalo and cows.'   (Schikowski 2013: ex. 94 a)

    c.   raj-le   lekh-(***lai**) pad-cha.
         raj-ERG article-DOM read-PERF.M.SG
         'Raj read a specific/the book'

One challenge to descriptions of DOM in terms of features like *animacy, specificity*, etc., is that these restrictions can be lifted in various syntactic contexts. We are interested here in one relevant environment, namely that of *equatives* (equality comparatives).[7] The DOM equative has received little attention, many accounts not even mentioning it among taxonomies of DOM. In this paper we build and extend on the only (formal) account we are aware of, namely the one proposed very recently by Irimia (2016, 2017), and Irimia and Guardiano (2017).

In (4) a we illustrate a DOM equative in Romanian. Note that the standard must contain marking which is homophonous with DOM, although the DP is not animate nor interpreted specific. If DOM

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    [1]There is a vast literature on DOM in Romance, in both formal and descriptive traditions. Most of the contributions do not however address the data we are concerned with, and for reasons of space we cannot list them here. See especially Torrego (1998) and López (2012) for extensive discussion, and relevant references. Ichibashi (1993) and Schikowski (2013) contain a comprehensive picture of DOM in Nepali.

    [2]This preposition also functions as a locative marker, meaning 'on'.

    [3]For Romanian DOM see also Dobrovie-Sorin (1994), Cornilescu (2000), Mardale (2015), a.o.

    [4]Abbreviations are as follows: Acc = accusative, Cl = clitic, Def = definite, DOM = differential object marking, Erg = ergative, F = feminine, Indic = indicative, Inf = infinitive, M = masculine, N = neuter, NPst = non-past, Pl = plural, Perf = perfective, Pres = present, Pst = past, Sg = singular.

    [5]This postposition also has an independent locative or directional use (see Schikowski 2013 for examples).

    [6]Unless indicated otherwise, the Nepali examples come from native speakers of the Kathmandu variety.

    [7]See López (2012) and Ormazabal and Romero (2013) for other syntactic configurations where DOM obligatorily overrides 'canonical' features.

is omitted, the example becomes ungrammatical. And, as expected, if the (non-specific) inanimate is not found in an equative environment, it cannot accept DOM.[8]

(4) Romanian

    a. L-a   aruncat ca   *(**pe**) o   minge
        CL.3.SG.ACC.M-have.3.SG.INDIC.PRES thrown as/like DOM a.F.SG ball
        'S/he has thrown it as (one would throw) a ball.'

    b. A   aruncat (***pe**) o   minge
        have-1.SG.INDIC.PRES thrown DOM a.F.SG ball
        'S/he has thrown a ball.'

A similar observation can be made about Nepali (see also Irimia 2017 for a more detailed discussion) with the difference that DOM is needed on the antecedent, as opposed to the standard.[9] Thus, many native speakers mention that the example in (5) a would be ungrammatical without DOM, even if the DP is not animate nor interpreted specific/definite.[10]

(5) Nepali

    a. raj-le   lekh-*(**lai**) upanyash jastai   pad-cha.
        Raj-ERG article-DOM novel   as/like read.PERF.3.SG
        'Raj read an article (as he/one would read) a novel.'

    b. raj-le   lekh-(***lai**) pad-cha.
        Raj-ERG article-DOM read.PERF.3.SG
        'Raj read a specific/the article.'

Also note that in both Romance and Nepali the differential marker is only possible when the antecedent has the grammatical function of object. We make this point clear in the next subsection, where we emphasize the structural nature of DOM.

2.1 DOM in Equatives Signals Structural Case

We saw above that, in Romance, equative DOM affects the standard. This fact, corroborated with the adpositional nature of DOM could lead to the reasonable hypothesis that what looks like differential marking is maybe some type of lexical marking. That would entail that the comparative marker (the Romanian *ca*) assigns some type of lexical Case to the standard. However, this assumption can be easily dismissed by examining contexts in which the comparison affects other types of arguments, for example indirect arguments or external arguments. Romanian proves very useful in this respect as DOM is not homophonous with the dative (the dative is inflectional, as seen in (6) below), and cannot extend to external arguments. We give below an example containing a dative argument in the antecedent. In these contexts, the standard can *only* take dative case. DOM or the nominative are strictly ungrammatical:

(6) Romanian (Irimia 2016, ex. 4)

    I-au   dăruit cadouri ca **unui**   rege/***un**   rege/***pe** un rege.
    CL.3.SG.DAT.M-have given gift.PL   as/like a.DAT.SG king/a.NOM.SG king/DOM a   king
    'They have given gifts to him as (one would give gifts) a king.'

Grammatical function tracking is sufficient to demonstrate both the structural nature of DOM as well as the clausal (non-phrasal) status of the equative in Romanian (and other Romance languages,

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[8]Similar examples are found in other Romance languages, among which Sardinian, Sicilian, Neapolitan, Spanish, Argentinian Spanish, etc. See Irimia and Guardiano (2017) for examples and details.

[9]As shown later in the paper, (equality) comparatives appear to have a lexical nature in Nepali. See Napoli (1983), and Bhatt and Takahashi (2011), a.o. for an extensive discussion about phrasal comparatives.

[10]As is well known, in (some) Indo-Aryan varieties it is difficult to test whether postpositional DOM gives rise to definite or specific interpretations, or both. See Butt (1993), Masica (1982), Singh (1994), Mohanan (1995), for relevant details, a.o.

where similar diagnostics are valid).[11]

Turning now to Nepali, we notice that 'non-canonical' DOM is also sensitive to grammatical function, but this time in the matrix clause. We provide below an example of an equative where what is compared are two external arguments in the perfective. As is well known, Indo-Aryan languages have aspect-based ergativity (Masica 1991, a.o.). In Nepali, all human agents must be marked with the egative case in the perfective aspect. As expected under a non-lexical assumption regarding DOM in equatives, in sentences like (7), the differential marker becomes ungrammatical:

(7)   Nepali (Irimia 2016 ex. 8, Irimia 2018: ex. 6)

raj-**le/*lai**   mary jastai pachau-cha.
Raj-ERG/DOM Mary like   cook-PERF.3.SG.M
'Raj cooked like Mary.'

To resume, what we see in these instances is differential marking which is normally associated with objects but which does not respect what are otherwise canonical conditions for this type of morphology. We have also seen undeniable evidence that the marking has a structural nature. There are however non-trivial differences between Romance and Nepali, as seen in (8). In the former languages, DOM is only possible on the standard and not on the antecedent (if the antecedent is non-specific, inanimate, etc.), while in Nepali DOM cannot affect the standard:

(8)   Romanian

a. *Aruncă   **pe**   un   măr   ca o   minge.
      throw-1.SG.INDIC.PRES DOM a.A.N.SG apple as a.F.SG ball
      'He throws an apple as (if it were) a ball.'

Nepali

b. *raj-le   lekh   upanyash-**lai** jastai pad-cha.
      Raj-ERG article novel-DOM   like   read.PERF.3.SG.M
      'Raj reads an article/articles as (if it/they were) a novel.'

Two important questions are the following: i) what condition forces DOM obligatoriness in these contexts? ii) is the condition uniform for Romanian (Romance) and Nepali? In the next section we briefly review some accounts proposed for phenomena related to Case identity in ellipsis, and show that they cannot derive these unexpected DOM facts.

3 Case Identity in Ellipsis

One conclusion we can draw from the Romanian (Romance) data is that equatives might require a certain type of Case identity, which would not otherwise be surprising for ellipsis. The vast literature on ellipsis under sluicing has documented a Case identity restriction as early as Ross' (1969) pioneering resarch. Recent research has further formalized this requirement. We will be briefly reviewing here two accounts which are directly relevant to our data, namely Chung (2013) in Subsection 3.1 and Takita (2015) in Subsection 3.2.

3.1 Chung (2013) - Syntactic Identity in Sluicing

In an article dedicated to the problem of identity in ellipsis, Chung (2013) has concluded that semantic identity is not sufficient and that *limited syntactic identity* is also necessary. The contexts Chung (2013) examines come from sluicing and are mainly related to Voice mismatches, as in (9):[12]

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[11]Irimia (2016), as well as Irimia and Guardiano (2017) provide yet other tests which strengthen this conclusion, for example the presence of more than one standard, or standard negation which is not dependent on a negative binder in the matrix (see the papers for the actual examples and more detailed analysis).

[12]Following custom notation, we use angled brackets to indicate copies that are left unpronounced (after a raising operation, etc.), while strikethrough is reserved for material which is not overt as a result of ellipsis.

(9)   a. *Someone murdered Joe but they don't know who by. ⟨he was murdered⟩.
       b. *Joe was murdered, but they don't know who. ⟨murdered him⟩.

As Chung (2013) correctly points out, the ungrammaticality of these examples cannot be due to the lack of *Semantic Identity*, more specifically the lack of entailment relations between the antecedent and the elided material. The Semantic Identity Constraint has been formulated by Merchant (2001) who takes it to derive from two over-arching conditions - *Focus Condition on Ellipsis* and *E-GIVENness* as defined in (10) and (11):

(10)   *Focus Condition on Ellipsis* (Merchant 2001: 38)
        A constituent alpha can be deleted only if alpha is e-GIVEN

(11)   *E-GIVENness* (Merchant 2001:31)
        An expression E counts as e-GIVEN iff E has a salient antecedent A, and modulo ∃-type shifting,
        (i) A entails F-clo(E), and
        (ii) E entails F-clo(A)

Calculating the entailments for both the antecedent TP (TP_A) and the elided TP (TP_E) in (9a) we obtain the following:

(12)   a. TP_A = F-clo(TP_A) = ∃x.x murdered Joe
        b. TP_E = F-clo(TP_E) = ∃x.he was murdered by x

As *he* in (12a) refers to *Joe*, TP_A entails F-clo(TP_E) and TP_E also entails F-clo(TP_A). Thus the two domains entail each other, and TP_E counts as e-GIVEN predicting the example in (9a) to be grammatical, contrary to fact.

The ungrammaticality must thus lie somewhere else, and Chung (2013) shows that it is a matter of the *syntactic* identity not being respected. More than one syntactic condition is active. On the one hand, the *argument structure* of the active predicate *murder* is not identical to that of the passive voice of the same predicate. And, on the other hand, other contexts also make it clearer that *Case identity* must also be respected. For example, in (13) below the PRO subject either receives PRO dedicate (Nominative) Case (Martin 1996, a.o.) or is Caseless (Chomsky and Lasnik 1993), while the lexical subject in the elided component has Nominative Case.

(13)   *Having to compromise is inevitable, but they have no idea who. ⟨has to compromise⟩.

Chung (2013) proposes that the following *Syntactic Identity Constraint*, which contains two conditions is necessary for the implementation of ellipsis in sluicing:

(14)   *Syntactic Identity in Sluicing* (Chung 2013: 30)
        a.   *Argument structure Condition*: If the interrogative phrase is the argument of a predicate in the ellipsis site, that predicate must have an argument structure identical to the corresponding predicate in the antecedent clause
        b.   *Case Condition*: If the interrogative phrase is a DP, it must be Case-licensed in the ellipsis site by a head identical to the corresponding head in the antecedent clause

Going back to our data, both *Semantic Identity* as well as Chung's (2013) *Syntactic Identity* have problems in explaining the obligatoriness of DOM. While we saw in (6) and (7) that grammatical function tracking must be respected, *Srict Case Identity* will give rise to ungrammaticality. That is, differential marking cannot be forced on the antecedent of Romance equatives (on DPs which do not carry the relevant features) or on the standard of the Nepali ones:

(15)   Romanian
        a. *Aruncă   **pe**   un   măr   ca **pe**   o   minge.
           throw-1.SG.INDIC.PRES DOM a.N.SG apple as DOM a.F.SG ball
           Intended:'He throws an apple as (if it were) a ball.'

Nepali
b. *raj-le   lekh-**lai**   upanyash-**lai** jastai pad-cha.
    Raj-ERG article-DOM novel-DOM   like   read.PERF.3.SG.M
    Intended:'Raj reads an article/articles as (if it/they were) a novel.'

There is also a problem with the identity at the argument structure level. Under most analyses of DOM, transitive sentences containing arguments that are differentially marked do not have the same argument structure as sentences where arguments are not differentially marked (see also López 2012 for more details). In most Indo-Aryan languages, in fact, objects which are not differentially marked are subject to (semantic) incorporation and thus will behave like predicates. Thus, under a strict argument structure identity the Nepali data will be automatically predicted to give rise to ungrammaticality.

The problem with presupposing *semantic identity* is also evident. Under Merchant's (2001) formulation of the relevant conditions in (10) and (11), it will have to be the case that the antecedent and the elided material entail each other in equative comparatives. However, although a notion of entailment is relevant in these examples, it must be formulated in some other terms. Obviously, throwing an apple *does not* entail throwing a ball, just like reading an article *does not* entail reading a novel. The problem with equatives does not however imply that Chung's (2013) and Merchant's (2001) accounts do not hold at all. There is an important caveat here - the facts these two authors discuss come from *sluicing*, while the equative data under discussion do not involve *wh-* elements. It could simply be that ellipsis outside sluicing is subject to distinct constraints. In the next section we briefly review an account, namely Takita (2015), which also addresses ellipsis in environments which do not contain *wh*-material.

3.2 Takita (2015) - Case Identity is the Only Necessary Condition

Takita's (2015) proposal is that some of the problems raised by both Merchant (2001) as well as Chung (2013) can be solved under the assumption that the only relevant condition for ellipsis is a certain type of *Case-oriented syntactic identity*. The author also demonstrates that this modification can account for a larger set of ellipsis phenomena, besides sluicing. That the argument structure identity condition is not respected in all deletion configuration is demonstrated by VP-ellipsis contexts where voice mismatches are possible. The two examples in (16), originally examined by Merchant (2013:78-79) prove this observation:

(16)   a.   The janitor must remove the trash whenever it is apparent that it should be⩽removed⩾.
        b.   The system can be used by anyone who wants to ⩽use it⩾.

The condition Takita (2015) introduces is the following:

(17)   *Case-oriented syntactic identity* (Takita 2015: ex. 24)
        If a DP is extracted from an ellipsis site, and if the head that Case-licenses the DP is contained in the ellipsis site, the Case-licensing head in the ellipsis site must have an identical head in the antecedent that Case-licenses the correlating DP

Given that the Romance DOM equatives involve ellipsis, we can test this condition. There is also strong evidence that these Romance equatives, although clausal, have reduced structure. The interpretations native speakers provide for examples like (4a) indicate that such configurations make use of so-called *evasion* strategies. As discussed by Elliott (2013), or Thoms (2013), evasion strategies are necessary when strict syntactic and semantic parallelism cannot be obtained between the antecedent and the constituent undergoing ellipsis, as it would violate other principles of grammar.[13]

The two evasion strategies seen with the Romance examples are: i) reduced syntactic structure (absence of C, T projections) in the comparative which forces obligatory mismatched temporal/aspectual interpretations (i.e. readings of the type 'as one would throw a ball'); ii) copular clause ('as if it were a ball'). Thus, the comparative in (4a) is based on one of the structures below:

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[13]See Irimia and Guardiano (2017) for possible sources of grammaticality violations.

(18)   *Evasion strategies for DOM comparative structures* (Irimia and Guardiano 2017, ex. 24)
   a.   [....as [$_{Top}$ Obj $Top_{[CaseAcc]}$ [~~$_{VP}$ V <Obj>~~]]]]
   b.   [....as [$_{Top}$ DP $Top_{[CaseAcc]}$ [~~$_{SC}$ be <DP>~~]]]

The structure in (18a) does not contain T or C projections, thus the (adequate) accusative case cannot be licensed. In (18a) the copular clause does not contain Case licensing projections. However, as many recent discussions have concluded (Belletti 2004, Aelbrecht and Haegeman 2013, a.o.) ellipsis structures contain low Topic head. The assumption Irimia and Guardiano (2017) make is that the low Topic inherits the Case assigning capacity from the Case licenser in the antecedent, and thus it acts as a last resort Case licenser. This also matches an intuition about DOM, as expressed in accounts following *Kayne's Generalization* (Kayne 1975, Jaeggli 1982), namely that DOM signals the presence of a secondary, last-resort licenser in configurations where the main licenser is not available.[14] Thus, an object in the comparative will be marked as accusative.[15]

Going back to Takita (2015), we can conclude that our examples *do not* contain a Case-licensing head in the ellipsis site. Thus, an identical head in the antecedent that Case-licenses the correlating DP is not expected. And we indeed do not see an identical Case licenser in our data - we showed in (15) a that non-canonical DOM results in ungrammaticality if used on *both* the antecedent and the standard. But a problem still remains: if Case identity is not required, why is differential marking *obligatory* on objects? Note that DOM is a type of accusative. Thus the puzzle is the following - why isn't it possible for the standard to receive default, inherent or lexical Case? This last part is not predicted or derived under the condition in (17). Moreover, we cannot predict the Nepali patterns either, where we noticed that ellipsis is not applicable, and DOM is needed on the antecedent. These conclusions demonstrate that DOM equatives make an excellent theoretical and empirical contribution related to the limits of comparative configurations and their nature. In the next section we present our analysis, arguing that the problem of equatives is that they need to operate on *arguments*, as opposed to predicates.

4 Argumental Status in DOM Comparatives

Irimia and Guardiano (2017) propose to solve the Romance dilemma mentioned above by assuming that while *Semantic Isomorphism* indeed takes priority, in certain contexts it cannot be obtained without a relevant level of *Syntactic Isomorphism*. This result finds a correlate in Mártin-González (2016), who introduces the following two Conditions:

(19)   *Id(entity) Source* - Mártin-González (2016: 57)
         The Id(entity)-source is the syntactic structure in the ellipsis site that respects the necessary degree of syntactic and semantic identity with regards to the antecedent or to an alternate structure obtained through evasion strategies

(20)   *Syntactic Integration* - Mártin-González (2016: 57)
         An element A is syntactically integrated in a structure B iff A can substitute for a member of B or can be merged to a member of B without violating any principles of grammar

Building on these observations, Irimia and Guardiano (2017) propose that a Non-Strict Case constraint is be applicable to DOM comparatives:

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[14]Under *Kayne's Generalization* prepositional DOM arises as a last resort licenser when a clitic is assumed to absorb the Case licensing capacity of V. Although there are numerous counterarguments to *Kayne's Generalization* based on dissociations between clitics and DOM, these do not affect us here. What we want to strengthen is that the intuition that DOM signals secondary licensing in the absence of a regular licenser is useful and can account for the data under discussion. As Irimia (2018) points out, there are various instances where secondary licensing is needed in the absence of clitics. See also Kalin (2017) for a distinct interpretation of the idea that DOM is equated to secondary licensing.

[15]The presence of a Topic head as a secondary licenser also matches other accounts for DOM, both in descriptive and formal traditions, which connect DOM to discourse specifications (Leonetti 2008, Iemmolo 2010, Darlymple and Nikolaeva 2011, a.o).

(21)   *Non-strict Case Licensing Condition* - Irimia and Guardiano (2017: 19)
         Case licensing is necessary in ellipsis structures but does not need to respect a strict identity
         requirement. Relevant licensing is imposed as to permit the calculation of entailments
         necessary for the implementation of ellipsis

Irimia and Guardiano (2017) also show that the Condition in (17) is imposed as a result of the
reduced sentential structure in the equative. The reasoning goes along these lines - if the syntactic
object in the comparative is not Case marked, it will not be licensed, leading to ungrammaticality.
One option to escape ungrammaticality is to undergo incorporation with the predicate in the embed-
ded comparative. However, if it undergoes incorporation it will be subject to comparative deletion,
and will be left unpronounced at PF. Thus the comparative will be left without a standard, leading to
ill-formedness. Another possibility is to receive lexical Case. But even if the relevant licenser were
present in the embedded comparative, the result of lexical Case will probably be just a predicate NP
(see especially de Hoop 1996, Chung and Ladusaw 2003). The configuration in the matrix clause, on
the other hand, contains a predicate and an argument. Thus, a situation in which an argument enters
into a comparison relation with a predicate will have to be repaired. The hypothesis entertained in
Irimia and Guardiano (2017) is that exceptional DOM signals the presence of a licenser which can
turn a predicate into an argument.

4.1 DOM Equatives from Romance to Nepali

A problem still remains however - the account Irimia and Guardiano (2017) propose for Romance
cannot be applied to Nepali. First, the ellipsis explanation does not go through, as the Nepali equa-
tives do not have a clausal nature, but are rather lexical. Second, the 'exceptional' differential marker
is never possible on the standard, only on the antecedent. The puzzle posed by Nepali is thus more
complex than the Romance one. In the following lines we will preliminarily show that the gist
of Irimia and Guardiano's (2017) account can be extended to Nepali, once the structure and the
integration relations holding in phrasal comparatives are better understood and specified.

Going back to the observations in previous section, it appears that the problem with Romance
equatives is that comparison must be established between two objects with argumental status. Al-
though in Romance we see the differential marker on the standard, the antecedent must also have
special properties. For example, it cannot be a bare noun. This is seen in (22) from Romanian:

(22)   *Aruncă   ***mere/merele**   ca pe   mingi.
         throw-3.SG.INDIC.PRES apple.PL/apple.DEF.PL as DOM ball.PL
         'He throws apples as (if they were) balls.'

Given these remarks, it becomes clear that the antecedent must also have a certain type of
structure in order to establish comparison at the *argument* level. This observation, combined with
the uncontroversial assumption that DOM indicates argumenthood (see Torrego 1998, López 2012
among many others) gives a hint into the Nepali patterns. In Nepali, just like in Romance, the
antecedent must be an argument. The only difference is that Romance languages have a richer DP
structure which permits more strategies to obtain an argument in the object position - for example
definite morphology,[16] specific indefinites, generics, etc. As further discussed in Irimia (2017),
in Nepali, argument status can only be obtained through differential marking, most probably via
licensing by a Topic head, as in the simplified structure in (23) for the sentence in (5a). This forces
the spell-out of the differential marker on the antecedent.

(23)   ...[$_{Top}$ article TOP [$_{As-P}$ novel as [$_{VP}$ <article>read]]]

Thus we propose that the relevant condition is the following:

(24)   In functionally reduced configurations, comparison can only be established between ele-
         ments of the same type (either arguments or predicates). Under comparison between argu-
         ments, the arguments must be *licensed* in both the antecedent and the standard.

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[16]That definites require licensing in Romance has been noticed since Belletti (1988).

A last resort Topic head can transmit its Case licensing capacity, as well as linking to the discourse such that the relevant entailment relations are established. In Nepali, the argument in the comparative is presumably licensed by the comparative head, and thus behaves like an argument. But it cannot transmit its licensing to the antecedent, which must also be an argument. Thus the DP in the matrix must be licensed *as an argument*. Its licensing is done through a low Topic head.

5 Conclusions

This short paper has addressed some novel data from equatives which involve obligatory DOM irrespective of canonical features usually associated with this type of morphology. The analysis proposed builds on mixed theories of ellipsis (Chung 2013, Mártin-González 2016) and argument realization in comparatives. However, it is also shown that such accounts must be further modified. The relevant condition behind obligatory DOM is the requirement to establish comparison at *argument* level. In some contexts argumenthood can only be obtained by the presence of a Topic head, which also signals obligatory DOM. The discussion also makes a contribution to a better understanding of differential marking and its connection to licensing by Topic heads.

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