

Mismatches and ellipsis: an experimental approach to prodrop in Romance Gapping

The standard assumption for ellipsis in general, and for Gapping (1) in particular, is the fact that a structural parallelism should hold between the elliptical sequence (= the gapped clause) and the full clause (= the source), cf. Hartmann (2000). This idea is captured by the so-called ‘connectivity effects’ (case and preposition marking, category identity, same number of remnants and correlates, same word order) and offers a strong argument for structural approaches (i.e. syntactic reconstruction).

(1) [Ion eats apples] [and Mary bananas].

This assumption was first challenged by Sag et al. (1985) who claimed that (i) the order of remnants in the gapped clause does not necessarily need to parallel that of their correlates in the source, provided that this order is licit in the grammar (2), and (ii) remnants may differ from their correlates with respect to their category, provided that each remnant matches some subcategorization frame of the verbal predicate in the source (3a-c).

(2) A policeman walked in at 11, and at 12, a fireman. (Sag et al. 1985)

(3) a. Pat has become [crazy]_{AP} and Chris [an incredible bore]_{NP}. (Sag et al. 1985)

b. *Pat has become [crazy]_{AP} but Chris [in good spirit]_{PP}.

c. Pat became {crazy / an incredible bore / *in good spirit}.

Crucially, however, syntactic asymmetries related to the number of remnants and correlates in Gapping have never been investigated in detail or empirically tested before. As Romanian and Spanish are prodrop languages, they allow us to better observe this kind of syntactic asymmetry in Gapping. In this paper, we show, based on experimental evidence from two acceptability judgment tasks on prodrop and Gapping in two Romance languages (Romanian and Spanish) that syntactic parallelism in Gapping constructions is less strict than has been traditionally assumed.

The acceptability judgment task used in our experiment is a crossed factorial design (2x2 design) with two factors (STRUCTURE and SUBJECT TYPE), each with two levels, giving rise to 4 conditions:

(4) Condition a: [+gapping] and [-prodrop]

Condition b: [+gapping] and [+prodrop]

Condition c: [-gapping] and [-prodrop]

Condition d: [-gapping] and [+prodrop]

A sample of the 24 sets of experimental items used in the four conditions is given in (5) for Romanian. We compared elliptical occurrences (conditions a-b) with non-elliptical ones (conditions c-d), in order to better control our two factors and to rule out other explanations (confounds) for any treatment effect that we might see. Each item was presented following a context sentence.

(5) *Context:* Ne-am făcut deja planul pentru weekend.

‘We have already planned our weekend.’

a. **Eu** voi merge la film, iar **sora mea** la muzeu.

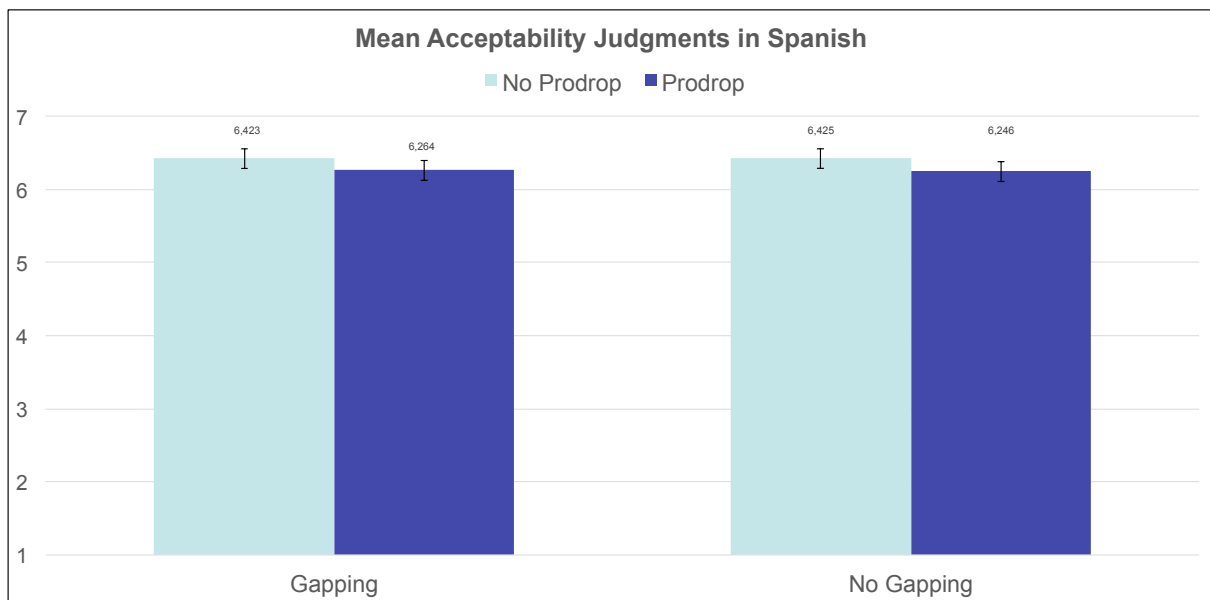
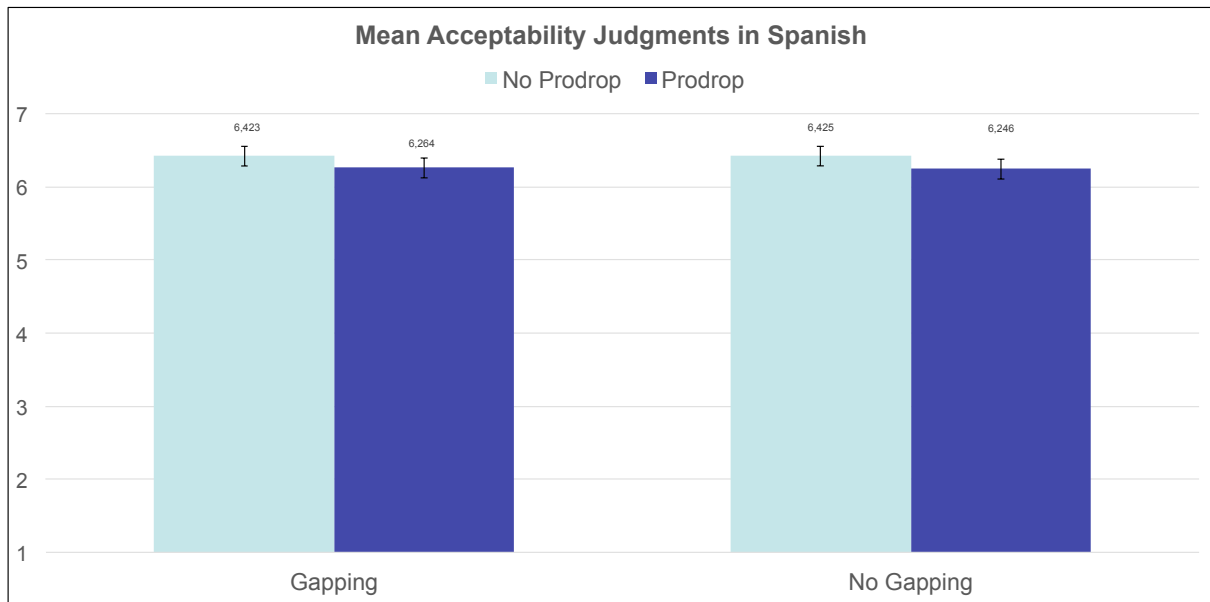
‘I will go to the cinema and my sister to the museum.’

b. Voi merge la film, iar **sora mea** la muzeu.

c. **Eu** voi merge la film, iar **sora mea** va merge la muzeu.

d. Voi merge la film, iar **sora mea** va merge la muzeu.

In the histograms below, we present the results from 68 Romanian native speakers and 67 Spanish native speakers. Overall, they show that prodrop is natural and acceptable in both languages, regardless of whether it occurs in a construction with Gapping or with a full clause. These results support the assumption that syntactic parallelism in Gapping is not as strong as commonly assumed (*pace* Hartmann 2000). Therefore, the syntactic parallelism constraints invoked by the structural approaches on ellipsis must be reconsidered.



Our results fit very well with a construction-based analysis of Gapping (with semantic reconstruction of ellipsis), as proposed by Abeillé *et al.* (2014) and Bîlbîie (2017) for Gapping in French and Romanian, and by Ginzburg & Sag (2000) for fragments in general. The only syntactic constraint at work stipulates that each remnant of the target must match a possible subcategorization of the verbal predicate in the source. Otherwise, they may differ from their correlates with respect to their category, position or surface realization. The overall construction is a particular type of asymmetric coordination with the main conjunct as being non-elliptical and verbal, and the gapped one as fragmentary and non-verbal.

References: Abeillé, A., Bîlbîie, G. & F. Mouret 2014. A Romance perspective on gapping constructions. In H. Boas & F. González-García (eds.), *Romance Perspective on Construction Grammar*. John Benjamins. 227-267. // Bîlbîie, G. 2017. *Grammaire des constructions elliptiques: Une étude comparative des phrases sans verbe en roumain et en français*. Language Science Press. // Culicover, P. & R. Jackendoff 2005. *Simpler Syntax*. Oxford University Press. // Ginzburg, J. & I.A. Sag 2000. *Interrogative investigations: The form, meaning and use of English interrogatives*. Stanford: CSLI Publications. // Hartmann, K. 2000. *Right node raising and gapping. Interface conditions on prosodic deletion*. John Benjamins. // Sag, I.A., Gazdar, G., Wasow, T. & S. Weisler 1985. Coordination and how to distinguish categories. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 3, 117-171.