

Case-Marking of Pronouns in Elliptical Constructions

Ela Krejčová

Akcent College, Prague

Abstract

This article deals with the use of pronouns in monophrasal answers and comparatives. First, it rebuts the proposal that monophrasals may be interpreted as ellipted it-clefts. Second, it refutes the conception of comparatives as prepositional phrases. Finally, it provides arguments to show that both constructions are best treated as environments with VP ellipsis. As structurally deficient settings, they lack any assigner that would mark the pronouns with case. Therefore, they create a suitable default case environment in which the unmarked objective form is applied, representing the value used under neutralization of case oppositions in English.

Keywords: subjective and objective pronoun forms, default case, monophrasal answers, comparatives, ellipted it-clefts, markedness

1 Introduction

The case category in English is often described as “dormant” (Sobin 32). This statement obviously does not refer to the concept of case in its abstract sense, but rather to the overt formal realization of particular grammatical relations. The remnants of the morphologically relatively rich Old English case category are only visible in the pronominal system. There are two sets of overt case pronoun forms¹ available, serving a range of syntactic functions.

Problems arise in a number of structures where case is assigned in “non-canonical contexts”. This article analyzes the use of pronouns in one such environment, namely in elliptical constructions. It states why these constructions create the non-canonical context for case assignment. Moreover, it presents potential interpretations of which type of ellipsis occurs, and determines which mechanisms case-mark the pronouns used in this type of environment. Finally, it argues that the objective marking may be seen as the outcome of

the default case. As this concept is essential for the discussion of case marking in elliptical constructions, it will be clarified in the following section.

2 The Concept of Default Case

Approaches toward the derivations of default values may differ within various theoretical frameworks, yet they share one substantial element. Default forms are usually considered the ones which are applied only if no other specifications match or if no other mechanisms are available.

The realization of default values in terms of matching specifications is demonstrated in Corbett (21), following Brown (1998 ctd. in Corbett 21). Using examples of two types of locatives in Russian, he concludes that all nouns in Russian potentially have a non-default case specification but only a few match with it completely. Where the matching fails, the form is specified by the default path. On a more general level, default case realization is applied only if the closest non-default case realizations cannot be carried out. In this aspect, the notion of default is similar to formal conceptions (Schütze, 2001) which consider default case realization a strategy functioning as a last resort when all other case assigning mechanisms fail to apply.

The conception of default case applied as a last resort is given in Schütze (2001). It is understood as a mechanism which is used in environments “where there is no case assigner for the DP² in question, nothing for it to match with” (Schütze 210). Default case is applied to “rescue” the stranded DP and mark it with case features. In other words, when the conditions for case assignment are not fulfilled, when for example the noun (or the pronoun) occurs in non-canonical case contexts (Chung and McCloskey, 1987: 188, ctd. in Schütze 208), then it will be marked by default case.

Another approach to default values relies heavily on the Jakobsonian concept of binary members of markedness oppositions, as postulated in Battistella (26–27). He establishes a set of tools that serve to diagnose the unmarked and marked member of an opposition. Some criteria are applicable only to lexical words; some of them, however, prove invaluable in determining the unmarked (default) values within the case opposition.

These criteria mainly relate to the distribution of marked and unmarked members and their ability to appear in a wide range of contexts and functions. While unmarked values generally exhibit greater flexibility in being used in a variety of contexts, marked values are restricted to a limited breadth of contexts (Battistella 26–27). Moreover, in contexts where the oppositions are neutralized, the default value is the one which is capable of substituting the marked value (Bresnan 13). However, the opposite direction does not hold.

The criterion of substitutability is connected to the notions of specification and under-specification of language features. The language system may be seen as composed of forms that have or lack specifications for certain features (for example person, number, case, gender), and forms which do not have to be specified for the feature at all. Such an example is represented by the second person pronoun *you* in English (Weerman, and Evers-Vermeul 320). The feature <number> is not expressed in this pronoun by any inflectional morphology or specific formal realization, yet the form *you* does not stand outside the system of pronominal paradigms which all have this feature overtly specified. In other words, the

second person pronoun *you* does not have specification for number, nor does it lack it, but it is underspecified for this feature (Weerman, and Evers-Vermeul 320).

All of these concepts prove fruitful when diagnosing marked values within the *subjective-objective* case opposition. Following Battistella (1990) and Wales (1996), it will be argued that the objective form is the unmarked member of the case opposition. The unmarked case values will be viewed as the ones which are assigned by the last resort strategy. However, the application of default case is not seen strictly in terms of the failure of all other case assigning mechanisms, but is viewed as a complex phenomenon, determined by a set of syntactic, prosodic and focus parameters.

These parameters involve such criteria as structural deficiency, inability to be phonologically reduced (see Quinn 66) and occurrence in rhematic positions. These factors are inseparable and must be satisfied, otherwise the application of default case will crash. On the other hand, if all requirements are met, the unmarked case form is applied, acquiring its specific prosodic and syntactic properties.

3 Data and Methodology

This article uses data taken from two sources. The first one is represented by the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The second source was a survey which was distributed to 212 Americans in three age groups. The first age group consisted of speakers younger than 25. The second group was made up of respondents from the age of 26 up to 50, and the last group involved language users older than 51.

The pronoun usage in elliptical constructions was tested on survey items in which the respondents were supposed to cross out the option that they did not favor (see also Quinn, 2005 for New Zealand English). An example of such a task is demonstrated below in (1).

- (1) *Speaker 1: Who is coming to the party?*
Speaker 2: Lisa.
Speaker 1: Just she/her?

The main issues which were to be addressed involved:

- (a) the preferences of subjective and objective forms in the given environment
- (b) the degree of variability within the paradigm of a certain pronoun
- (c) differences in the choice of the pronoun forms across age groups

For the purpose of this article, a few examples will be provided to reflect general tendencies in the usage of pronouns in a certain type of environment. Such a description will serve as a starting point for discussing the types of ellipsis occurring in these constructions and for finding the best candidate fulfilling the function of a case assigner.

4 Elliptical Constructions

Elliptical constructions are structures which are characterized by the lack of a tensed verb. Pronouns are used in monophrasal answers, alone as in (2), or with a focalizing particle, as in (3), and in (1), repeated here in (4).

- (2) *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? Them (pointing to the door). My neighbors.* (survey data)
- (3) *You guys gave me that title, **not me**. I appreciate it, though.* (COCA, SPOK, NBC_Today, 2008, 081021)
- (4) *Speaker 1: Who is coming to the party?
Speaker 2: Lisa.
Speaker 1: Just her?* (survey data)

This type of structure exhibits a fairly consistent patterning in terms of its pronoun usage. Despite the fact that the pronoun functions as subject (see all examples), it takes the objective form.

Statistical data analysis shows that objective forms are generally favored across the three age groups in all tested items involving pronouns or pronouns with a focalizing particle. Representative samples are provided in Tables 1–2 below, summarizing the number of occurrences of subjective and objective forms used in the sentences stated in (2) and (4). Table 3 demonstrates the preferences for the objective forms in elliptical constructions that consist of the negative particle *not* and the first person singular pronoun, appearing in corpus data.

Table 1 Preferences *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? They/Them.*

Survey Item	Age	They (%, number of respondents)	Them
<i>Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? They/ Them (pointing to the door). My neighbors.</i>	<25	19.2% (24)	80.8% (101)
	26– 50	21.57% (11)	78.4% (40)
	51–	39.9% (11)	60.7% (17)
Total		22.5% (46)	77.5% (158)

Table 2 Preferences *Who is coming to the party? Just she/Just her?*

Survey Item	Age	She (%, number of respondents)	Her
<i>Who is coming to the party? Just she/Just her?</i>	<25	2.4% (3)	97.6% (121)
	26–50	7.7% (4)	92.3% (48)
	51–	17.9% (5)	82.1% (23)
Total		5.9% (12)	94.1% (192)

Table 3 *Not I versus not me*

	COCA spoken section (number of speakers)
<i>not I</i>	15
<i>not me</i>	294

The data shown in Tables 1–3 demonstrate that subjective and objective pronouns exhibit a certain degree of variability. They also indicate that age represents a significant factor shaping the distribution of subjective and objective pronoun forms. Subjective forms,

perceived as standard ones (Quirk 339), tend to appear proportionally more frequently in the language use of respondents older than 25 than of those in the first age group.

In sum, the data provide convincing evidence that objective forms occur outside their prototypical functions, i.e. they are not objects of a verb or a preposition, yet they are marked as objective. It needs to be determined which potential sources for the objective marking on pronouns are available in this environment. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

5 Case Assigning Mechanisms in Elliptical Constructions

Objective forms are most commonly assigned by verb or preposition government, as shown in (5)–(6). In both examples the pronouns occur in structural positions directly dependent on their case assigner that marks them as objective – in (5) the lexical verb *bought* fulfills this function, in (6) the case assigner of the pronoun *her* is the preposition *for*.

- (5) *The Republicans got together and **bought him** some candies for Valentine's Day. We have a shot of them.* (COCA, SPOK, CNN_Brown, 2010, 100215)
- (6) *She has a message **for her** birth mother.* (COCA, SPOK, CNN_News, 2011, 110115)

It is obvious that none of these options is available in elliptical constructions. There is neither a transitive verb, nor a preposition which could assign the objective case to a pronoun. Therefore, it is not clear which case assigning situation these constructions represent.

To our knowledge, there are two possible interpretations, dependent on which part of the construction is considered ellipted. One of the proposals presented in the literature (e.g. Hoekstra ctd. in Schütze 211) claims that the superficially omitted part is an ellipted it-cleft, as demonstrated in (7). The other possible explanation interprets the verbal phrase *helped me with that heavy suitcase* as the ellipted part, as illustrated in (8).

- (7) *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? They/Them.
Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? It was [they/them] who helped me with that heavy suitcase.*
- (8) *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? They [helped me with that heavy suitcase].*

Determining which type of ellipsis occurred is relevant to the discussion of the possibilities of case assigning mechanisms applied in this context. If the interpretation in (7) were plausible, the process of assigning case to a pronoun would be identical to the one applied in it-clefts and other structures where pronouns appear in postcopular positions, as in (9).

- (9) *The ice bucket girl **was me**.* (COCA, SPOK, NPR_ATC, 2006, 20060214)

Consequently, the verb *be* would become a candidate for a case assigner³ and its case marking properties would have to be rebutted or proved. The following subsections explore

both options, showing that there is good reason to refute the interpretation of elliptical constructions as ellipted it-clefts.

5.1 Elliptical Constructions as Ellipted It-Clefts

The first piece of evidence refuting the interpretation of elliptical constructions as ellipted it-clefts is based on Schütze's statement that quantificational expressions cannot occur in it-clefts (Schütze 211). Similarly, Bara (5), who lists a wide range of phrases and elements which may be focused in a cleft, states that "the only problem arises with the universally quantified NPs". Therefore, these statements give our analysis a clear direction. It needs to be tested whether universal quantifiers can appear in elliptical constructions (see also Schütze 211). If this is the case, then, logically derived from the restriction imposed on their occurrence in it-clefts, their mere existence in elliptical constructions would be a reliable counter-argument to the conception of elliptical constructions as ellipted it-clefts.

Before starting our "hunt" for universal quantifiers in elliptical constructions, another comment has to be made. As is generally the case with generalizations in linguistics, there are examples that do not conform to the general rule and other stipulations have to be made. This is also true about the occurrences of universal quantifiers in it-clefts. In her analysis of information and identificational foci, Cohan (79) gives an example of a universal quantifier whose occurrence in a cleft is acceptable in a given context, as demonstrated in (10). Therefore, based on her extensive analysis (which goes beyond the scope of our discussion), she reformulates the imposed restriction, stating that universal quantifiers are incompatible with certain semantic types of focus constituents rather than it-clefts in general (Cohan 79).

- (10) *And they'd still make LOTS of money. But they WOULDN'T take the second greediest position.*

- a *Everybody (only) wanted [ALL the money]*
b *It was [ALL the money] that everybody wanted. (Cohan 79)*

Therefore, our analysis will begin with a careful selection of universal quantifiers which indisputably cannot function as focus constituents in it-clefts.

An example of such a universal quantifier is represented by *nobody*. The following example in (11a) shows that this quantifier can be used as an elliptical response to the question in (11). However, it cannot function as a focus of an ellipted cleft (see Schütze 211), as illustrated in (11b). The unacceptability of this quantifier in this particular environment serves as a strong counter-argument to the conception of elliptical constructions as ellipted clefts and proves it wrong.

- (11) *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase?*

- a *Nobody [helped me with that heavy suitcase].*
b **[It was] nobody [who] helped me with that heavy suitcase.*

However, problems associated with testing which type of ellipsis occurred by using the quantifier *nobody* arise in other types of elliptical constructions because the usage of the quantifier *nobody* is restricted to certain contexts. The degree of its acceptability in elliptical constructions varies from sentence to sentence. Whilst it is possible to replace pronouns with this quantifier in elliptical constructions which consist only of the pronoun itself, as shown in (11a), the interchange is rather limited in ellipted structures with focus adverbs, as seen in (12).

- (12) *Speaker 1: Who is coming to the party?*
Speaker 2: Lisa.
*Speaker 1: Just she/her? */Just nobody? Just somebody?*
**Just everybody?*

Clearly, the quantifying expressions in (12) cannot co-occur with the focus adverb *just*. However, this is mainly because of their mutual semantic incompatibility. Universal quantifiers refer to all (or no) representatives of the set, therefore they presuppose exhaustiveness (Cohan 67). These presuppositional properties conflict with the meaning of adverbs such as *just*, contributing presupposition of partitiveness to a sentence. Consequently, having conflicting presuppositional properties, it is not surprising that their ability to collocate is restricted and context-sensitive. Therefore, our analysis needs to look for different evidence.

It may be found in the environment involving additive particles (such as *also*, *even*, *too*). This type of focus particle is infelicitous with it-clefts (Cohan 78). This “infelicitousness can be attributed to the incompatibility of the meaning of additive particles with aspects of the meaning of [...] it-clefts” (Cohan 78). More specifically, Cohan links the mutual incompatibility of additive particles and it-clefts with their conflicting presuppositions contributing to the meaning of a sentence. Based on her data and the data of other linguists (Bush, and Tevodoradze, 1999 ctd. in Cohan 78), Cohan claims that clefts contribute the presupposition of exhaustiveness to the discourse.

This becomes obvious in cases where coordinated noun phrases become the focus of the cleft. While example (13) shows that the sentence containing focalized coordinated objects (a) entails sentence (b), example (14) demonstrates that such entailment does not hold in it-clefts.

- (13) a *Mary bought a hat and a scarf.*
 b *Mary bought a hat.*
- (14) a *It was a hat and a scarf that Mary bought.*
 b *It was a hat that Mary bought.* (modified from Cohan 68)

This aspect of the meaning of clefts clashes with the “additive” component of the meaning of particles such as *also*, *too*, *even*, etc. This conflict of their presuppositional properties leads to their mutual incompatibility, as demonstrated in (15).

- (15) *It was ?also/*even a hat that Mary bought.* (modified from Cohan 68)

This finding proves valuable for our analysis of elliptical constructions. A context in which an additive particle appears in an elliptical construction is needed. If the occurrence of additive particles is not ruled out in ellipted constructions, then the claim that elliptical constructions are ellipted it-clefts can hardly be grounded.

Such a context was created in (16) and (16'). In both examples, the additive particle *even* is used. Nevertheless, the difference in acceptability between the examples is substantial. While its usage in (16) is perfectly acceptable, it is definitely not in (16') where this additive particle is used in an it-cleft. Therefore, the theory considering the ellipted part an ellipted cleft is rather challenged by the mutual incompatibility of additive particles and it-clefts on one hand, and, on the other hand, by the mutual compatibility of additive particles and elliptical constructions.

- (16) a *Everybody acted as I wanted to, even my boss.*
b *Even him? What a surprise!*

- (16') a *Everybody acted as I wanted to, even my boss.*
b **[It was] even him [who acted as you wanted to]? What a surprise!*

The conception of elliptical constructions as ellipted clefts can thus be disregarded. The other option – considering monophrasal answers to be instances of VP ellipsis – yields more promising results. This potential interpretation will be discussed in the following section.

5.2 Elliptical Constructions as Instances of VP Ellipsis

The other possibility of interpreting elliptical constructions is to take them as instances of VP ellipsis. This process is demonstrated in examples (17)–(18).

- (17) *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? They [did]. My neighbors.*

- (18) *Speaker 1: Who is coming to the party?*
Speaker 2: Lisa.
Speaker 1: Just she [is coming]?

The treatment of these examples as ellipted verbal phrases does not violate the pragmatic constraints associated with ellipsis. The ellipted part may be easily recoverable from the context, as seen in (17')–(18'). Examples also show that once the VP is overtly present in a sentence, the use of objective forms is ruled out.

- (17') *Who helped you with that heavy suitcase? *Them did. My neighbors.*

- (18') *Speaker 1: Who is coming to the party?*
Speaker 2: Lisa.
*Speaker 1: Just *her is coming?*

The link between the two linguistic phenomena – the surface VP omission and the objective case marking on pronouns – is somewhat expected if one assumes that the objective

forms are applied via default case. The ellipsis of a verbal phrase makes monophrasal answers a structurally deficient environment in which “there is no case assigner for the DP in question, nothing for it to match with” (Schütze 210). The stranded pronouns are rescued by being assigned the unmarked case value, which is represented by the objective form in English (see Section 2).

This form fulfills all the criteria related to the assignment of the unmarked value. It exhibits greater flexibility to appear in a variety of contexts and functions. The use of objective forms in elliptical constructions proves that these pronouns are able to occur outside the structural positions directly dependent on their case assigner. Moreover, they demonstrate that they have the potential to be used in functions that are characteristic of the other member of the case opposition (as in 2–4).

Finally, objective forms used in monophrasal answers exhibit those prosodic and focus properties which are shared by pronouns appearing in other default case environments (Quinn 66). First of all, they function as focalized constituents. Consequently, they cannot be phonologically reduced or contracted (Quinn 66), as shown in (19).

(19) *Who is coming to the party? Lisa. Just her? Just*’er?*

Because monophrasal answers create a context in which all of the syntactic and prosodic requirements imposed on the application of the default case are satisfied, they represent a good example of environments where the unmarked case value is capable of substituting the marked value, which leads to the neutralization of case oppositions.

5.3 Comparatives

It has been stated that monophrasal answers are to be regarded as instances of VP ellipsis. In other words, any environment interpretable as a structure with surface VP omission should have the default case potential. It will be argued that comparative phrases also represent constructions with VP ellipsis and the objective forms of pronouns are outcomes of the default case.

The corpus data analysis shows that pronouns used in comparative phrases occur in both case forms (see in 20–21).

(20) *You know, my sister was six years younger **than I**, but she was like a big sister!*
(COCA, SPOK, CBS_48 Hours, 2005, 20050709)

(21) *She could not do what -- I did bad. But she would do worse **than me**, I think, by reading that piece she wrote.* (COCA, SPOK, Fox_Hannity, 2009, 090714)

The data also demonstrate that preferences for subjective and objective pronouns differ within the paradigms of individual pronouns. Subjective forms are mostly popular with the first person singular pronoun, and disfavored with the first person plural pronoun. Moreover, it may be stated that the style (written versus spoken) influences the choice of a pronoun form as the written discourse shows a relatively higher proportion of subjective forms. The overall ratio of pronouns in *than* constructions is presented in Table 4, as well as the number of occurrences across all pronominal paradigms.

Table 4

COCA	number of occurrences (spoken)	number of occurrences (written) ⁴
than I/than me	53/129	239/493
than she/her	5/23	104/50
than he/him	10/35	115/100
than we/us	5/22	21/100
than they/them	5/20	40/50

The fluctuation in the use of pronominal forms may be approached in two different ways. First, it can be attributed to the fact that the status of the expression *than* (and similarly *as/but/like*) fluctuates between a conjunction and a preposition, as proposed in a number of linguistic books and grammar manuals (Dekeyser 215, Leech and Svartvik 219). In other words, comparative phrases have an ambiguous syntactic status, oscillating between structures with VP ellipsis and prepositional phrases. Subjective forms occur in elliptical constructions, objective forms in prepositional phrases. The prepositional status of *than* makes this expression capable of having case assigning properties and gently resolves the issue of objective marking on pronouns in this type of construction.

This interpretation is *indirectly* supported by Sobin, who states that “sentences [...] where a reflexive form is required, make it clear that the DP position following *than* wants to be accusative” (49). In his example, presented here in (22), it is shown that the *than herself* part is a typical accusative position because it triggers reflexivization of a pronoun if the coreferentiality with the particular noun phrase (e.g. *Mary* in 22) is fulfilled. Example (23) demonstrates that prototypical prepositions do not block the reflexivization effect.

(22) *Mary*_i can't be smarter than herself_i/*she_i/*her_i. (Sobin 49)

(23) *Mary*_i can't be happy about herself_i/*she_i/*her_i.

Nevertheless, regarding the comparatives as prepositional phrases and assigning *than* case marking properties imposes certain problems.

First, it does not provide any explanation of why this environment exhibits fluctuation of pronominal forms. Pronouns directly dependent on prepositions do not fluctuate. This is shown in Table 5 where the general tendencies of the pronoun usage in PPs are reflected, with the preposition *of* representing other prototypical prepositions.

Table 5 Occurrences of Subjective Forms in PP Environment

<i>of</i> + Subj Pronoun	Occurrences
of I	1 ⁵
of he	5
of she	0
of we	0
of them	0
TOTAL	6

Hence it may be questionable whether the fluctuating status of *than* represents the *real* motivation for case variation, or whether it is a consequence of the variable pronoun usage.

Quite aside from resolving this chicken or egg dilemma, it would also be difficult to explain why reflexivization of pronouns is triggered even in those cases where coreferentiality does not apply. This is illustrated in (24) where the subject (*He*) refers to a different person than the pronoun *myself*. On the other hand, example (25) demonstrates that reflexivization is hindered with prototypical prepositions. Therefore, these structures ought to represent two syntactically different environments.

(24) *He's a youngish man, scarcely older **than myself**...* (COCA, FIC, Bloxham M. F., *The Night Battles*, 2008)

(25) **He likes studying syntax **with myself**.*

On the other hand, adopting the other approach and treating comparatives as instances of VP ellipsis (26) seems more fruitful for various reasons.

(26) *...You know, my sister was six years younger **than I** [was], but she was like a big sister!* (COCA, SPOK, CBS_48 Hours, 2005, 20050709)

First of all, regarding comparatives as elliptical constructions makes them a suitable environment for the application of the default case. As a default-case context, they allow the use of reflexives in positions where other default-case settings do and non-default-case environments do not. Therefore, examples of non-standard usages of reflexives similar to the ones in comparatives are also found in monophrasal answers, as shown in (27)–(28).

(27) *Your family lives in Austin? **Just myself**, these days.* (COCA, Analog Science Fiction@ Fact, Schembrie Joe, *The Caves of Ceres*, 2007)

(28) *Where's the pressure come from, Tara? LIPINSKI: Definitely **just myself**. GUMBEL: Really? LIPINSKI: It's really not any other person or anybody. It's just me wanting to do my best* (COCA, SPOK, CBS Public Eye, 1998, 19980128)

Regarding comparatives as elliptical constructions can also handle the preferable use of objective pronominal forms. Similar to (2)–(4), objective forms result from the default case marking which applies in contexts where no case assigners are available. Comparatives fulfill this condition since they lack the overt realization of VP.

When used in default case contexts, pronouns should also fulfill a set of phonetic and focus properties defined in section 2. They should occur in rhematic positions and lack the ability to undergo phonological reductions or contractions. Example (29) demonstrates that these requirements are met satisfactorily. Therefore, comparatives create a suitable environment in which objective forms take on the functions of subjective forms and represent the form “used under neutralization of oppositions within a language” (Bresnan 13).

(29) *He is better than him. /*'im/*'m*

The application of the default case relates only to non-standard usage. The use of subjective forms, as reflected in Tables 1–4, is often considered “prestigious” (Emonds, 1986). It is not part of natural grammar of a speaker as it usually does not affect the whole paradigm but only “infects” some parts of it with “grammatical viruses” (Sobin 48). These viruses, “parasitic on the normal system”, extend to other domains only “modestly” (Sobin 48).

Obviously, it is too simplistic to claim that the use of subjective forms is restricted only to the paradigms of certain pronouns. Table 4 brings convincing counter-evidence. Yet, it seems plausible to argue that the use of subjective forms is governed by extralinguistic factors rather than by the internal rules of grammar. The data convincingly show that the use of subjective forms is determined by the age of respondents. They appear more frequently in the language of respondents belonging to the second and third age group than in the language of speakers in the first age group. And it is the group ranging from 26 to 50 and older that exhibits consistent preference for standard forms also in other default-case contexts⁶.

Finally, the “virus-theory” is supported by occasional instances of subjective forms in functions where objective forms should occur. This is illustrated in (30) where the subjective form *he* is used to function as object of the previous clause. Not surprisingly, these hypercorrections are most likely to be committed by respondents who belong to the second or third age groups, as figures in Table 6 demonstrate.

- (30) *Speaker 1: Do you think anybody will object to this proposal?*
Speaker 2: There might be somebody... In particular him.
Speaker 1: You mean Richard Knecht?
Speaker 2: No, not he/him. I meant Kevin Douglass.

Table 6

Age	not he	not him
< 25	2.4%	97.6%
25 – 50	7.69%	92.31%
51–	7.14%	92.86%
Total (Average)	4.39%	95.61%

6 Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show that monophrasal answers and comparatives are best described as environments with VP ellipsis. As structures with the superficial omission of a case assigner, they create a suitable environment for the application of default case value, which is represented by the objective form in English. This form is able to occur in structural positions not directly dependent on its case assigner and to take functions of the other member of the case opposition. Nevertheless, subjective forms have not become extinct in this type of construction and their use only demonstrates that the extralinguistic factors and the application of internal rules of grammar interact with each other and cannot be treated as isolated phenomena.

Notes

¹ Leaving aside the genitive forms *my*, *mine*, which many linguists do not consider to be realizations of the genitive case. For example Hudson claims that the “*my/mine* distinction operates the same way as *no/none*” (383), therefore these two forms should belong to the same category. Then, he shows that, based on their distribution, they should be considered determiners (see also Quirk 1985); therefore they cannot be marked for case as case is associated only with personal pronouns.

² Determiner Phrase (pronouns and nouns in English)

³ The verb *be* is not entirely excluded from functioning as a case assigner. For example, in Polish it has the potential to assign the instrumental case.

⁴ All instances involve pronouns functioning as subjects in structures where a verb does not follow the pronoun. The figures for the first person singular subjective pronoun show its occurrences only when followed by a comma as there were no instances of its usage at the end of the sentence.

⁵ The figures in the column show the pronoun usage in prototypical PP positions (as in 6). Pronouns in other tested PP environments (including prepositions *with*, *without*) yielded similar results.

⁶ The use of subjective and objective pronouns in default-case contexts was analyzed in my dissertation thesis entitled *Variation in the System of Personal Pronouns in Contemporary American English*.

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Address:
Akcent College
English Department
Bitovská 5
140 00 Prague 4
Czech Republic
elakr@email.cz