

Case Alternation and Fragment Answers in Korean

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines case alternation in Korean fragment answers as a diagnostic for the type of identity—syntactic or semantic—required for ellipsis licensing. The empirical landscape reveals a systematic division between impossible and possible case alternations. In impossible alternations—such as in the active or passive voice, oblique versus non-oblique realizations in *spray/load* constructions, psych-verb alternations, and periphrastic causatives—case-mismatched fragments are uniformly disallowed, reflecting genuine differences in the underlying argument structure. Contrastingly, possible alternations—including direct causatives, *siphtha* “want” constructions, goal versus ditransitive alternations, inalienable possession, lexical passives, and embedded subject constructions—freely permit case mismatch, insofar as the alternations do not correspond to distinct argument-structural configurations but instead arise from morphological or derivational variation within a single structure. These patterns collectively demonstrate that ellipsis licensing in Korean is determined by syntactic identity at the level of the argument structure rather than by semantic equivalence or surface case uniformity. Korean fragment answers thus provide strong typological support for structural approaches to ellipses (Merchant 2001, 2013; Chung 2013), showing that fragment interpretation is tightly constrained by underlying syntactic configuration even in the presence of rich morphological variation.

Keywords: ellipsis, fragments, case alternation, argument structure, syntactic identity

1. Introduction

Ellipsis has long occupied a central place in linguistic theory, offering a privileged window into the interaction between syntax and semantics. A central and enduring question in this domain concerns the nature of identity required for ellipsis licensing: does ellipsis demand syntactic identity between the elided constituent and its

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antecedent, or can semantic equivalence alone suffice?

Under semantic approaches, ellipsis is licensed whenever the elided material is meaning-equivalent to, or entailed by, its antecedent. In contrast, syntactic approaches posit a stricter requirement—identity at a specific level of syntactic representation, often corresponding to argument structure or logical form.

This paper contributes to this debate by examining case (mis) matches in Korean fragment answers, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. *nwukwu-ka Chelswu-lul manness-ni?*
Who.-Nom C.-Acc met-Q
'Who met Chelswu?'
- b. *Yenghi-ka.*
Y.-Nom
'Yenghi met Chelswu.'
- c. **Yenghi-lul.*
Y.-Acc

The contrast between (1b) and (1c) shows that fragment answers in Korean are sensitive to case identity with their antecedents. To see why the fragment in (1c) is ruled out, consider the full clause from which the accusative-marked fragment *Yenghi-lul* 'Yenghi-Acc' would be derived. Assuming, following Merchant (2004), that case-marked fragments arise through movement followed by deletion, the relevant underlying structure would be as in (1c'):

- (1c') *Chelswu-ka Yenghi-lul mannesssta.*
C.-Nom Y-Acc met
'Chelswu met Yenghi.'

Crucially, however, (1c') instantiates a different argument structure from that of the antecedent clause in (1a). The thematic roles are reversed: *Yenghi* is the object rather than the subject. This mismatch in argument structure violates the syntactic identity condition on ellipsis, resulting in the ungrammaticality of the case-mismatched fragment in (1c).

A similar pattern is observed with active-passive alternations, as shown in (2).

- (2) a. *Saca-ka nwukwu-lul mwulesse-ni?*
 lion-Nom who-Acc bit-Q
 ‘Whom did the lion bite?’
- b. *Chelswu-lul.*
 C.-Acc
 ‘The lion bit Chelswu.’
- c. **Chelswu-ka.*
 C.-Nom
 ‘Chelswu was bitten by the lion.’
- d. *Chelswu-ka saca-hanthey mwulliesse.*
 C.-Nom lion-by was.bitten
 ‘Chelswu was bitten by the lion.’

If the fragment in (2c) were derived from the passive clause in (2d), its ungrammaticality would be unexpected under a purely semantic approach to ellipsis, since (2d) is truth-conditionally equivalent to the active antecedent in (2a). Nevertheless, the case-mismatched fragment *Chelswu-ka* is categorically ruled out. This contrast shows that semantic or truth-conditional equivalence is insufficient to license fragment ellipsis. Instead, ellipsis in Korean fragment answers requires syntactic identity at the level of argument structure: the elided clause and its antecedent must instantiate the same underlying configuration of thematic roles.

Yet Korean also permits case-mismatched fragments, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) a. *Chelswu-ka saca-hanthey eti-lul mwulliesse-ni?*
 C.-Nom lion-by where-Acc was.bitten-Q
 ‘Where (on him) was Chelswu bitten by the lion?’
- b. *elkwul-ul.*
 face-Acc
 ‘(His) face_{Acc}.’
- c. *elkwul-i.*
 face-Nom
 ‘(His) face_{Nom}.’

In (3b), the fragment bears the same accusative case as its correlate in the antecedent, conforming to the case identity requirement. In (3c), however, the fragment surfaces with nominative case, despite the antecedent containing an

accusative phrase. Such examples of case alternation in fragment answers challenge the strict syntactic identity condition and raise a central question: what kind of identity—syntactic, semantic, or otherwise—licenses ellipsis? Korean provides an especially revealing testing ground for this question, given its rich system of productive case alternations.¹⁾

The core of our proposal is as follows. Building on the observations of Merchant (2001, 2013), Chung (2013), Rudin (2019), den Dikken (2021), and Griffiths (2022), we argue that high ellipsis constructions—such as fragment answers—are subject to strict argument-structural identity conditions. In particular, no valency alternation is permitted between an antecedent and its elliptical counterpart.

In this respect, examples such as (2a) and (2d) illustrate that active and passive clauses do not share the same underlying syntactic structure, nor do the clauses in (1a) and (1c). As in English and many other languages, active and passive clauses in Korean are derived from distinct argument structures, despite their potential semantic or truth-conditional equivalence.

Throughout this paper, the term *underlying structure* refers specifically to the representation of argument structure, corresponding roughly to D-structure in Government-Binding theory, that is, the level at which thematic roles and valency relations are syntactically encoded.

While semantic and pragmatic conditions—such as focus, givenness, and relevance (Rooth 1992; Merchant 2001)—are indispensable for the interpretation of ellipsis, they are not sufficient for ellipsis licensing. Ellipsis also requires syntactic isomorphism, that is, formal structural identity between the elided clause and its antecedent. Although active and passive clauses may be truth-conditionally equivalent, their syntactic derivations differ, and this structural non-identity blocks the licensing of case-mismatched fragments such as (2c) and (1c). Fragment ellipsis therefore requires identity at the level of syntactic argument structure, rather than mere semantic equivalence.

By contrast, in examples such as (3), nominative and accusative realizations of the relevant NP occupy the same syntactic position, and the observed case alternation arises from a single underlying configuration subject to variable morphological realization. Consequently, case alternation in fragment answers is

1) Ahn and Cho (2006: 98-99) were among the first to note that case alternations in Korean fragments offer a nontrivial challenge to Jackendoff and Culicover's (2005) claim that fragments lack independent syntactic structure. However, that study did not undertake a systematic investigation of the conditions under which case alternation in fragments is possible or impossible.

permitted because ellipsis applies to a structure that is syntactically identical at an abstract level—specifically, at the level of underlying argument structure—despite surface morphological variation introduced by subsequent syntactic operations such as movement.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 examines contexts in which case alternation in fragment answers is disallowed, identifying the structural properties that enforce strict case identity. Section 3 turns to contexts in which case alternation is permitted, focusing on cases where surface case variation does not correspond to differences in underlying argument structure. Section 4 concludes by discussing the theoretical implications of these findings for the syntax-semantics interface and for our understanding of identity conditions in ellipsis.

2. Impossible Case Alternations

2.1. Active-passive alternations

In English, elided VPs and their antecedent VPs may differ in voice in *low ellipsis* environments such as VP ellipsis. That is, a passive VP may be elided under apparent identity with an active antecedent, and vice versa, as illustrated in (4).

(4) Active antecedent, passive ellipsis

- a. The janitor must remove the trash whenever it is apparent that it should be <removed>.

(Merchant 2013:78)

Passive antecedent, active ellipsis

- b. The system can be used by anyone who wants to <use it>.

(Merchant 2013:79)

By contrast, such voice mismatches are systematically disallowed in *high ellipsis* constructions, including sluicing and other clausal ellipses. As noted by Merchant (2001, 2013) and Chung (2006, 2013), sluicing—standardly analyzed as TP-ellipsis—exhibits a strict prohibition against active-passive alternation, as shown in (5)-(6).

(5) *Someone murdered Kelly, but we don't know by who <Kelly was killed>.

(Chung 2013:3)

- (6) a. Who examined the boy?
b. *By a psychologist
c. He was examined by a psychologist.

The parallel behavior of fragment ellipsis and sluicing indicates that ellipsis licensing is constrained not merely by propositional or truth-conditional equivalence, but by structural identity at the level of argument structure.

Merchant (2013) accounts for this contrast by proposing that the head responsible for voice lies outside the ellipsis site in low ellipsis (e.g., VP ellipsis), but inside the ellipsis site in high ellipsis (e.g., sluicing). Under this view, voice mismatches are permitted only when Voice is external to the ellipsis domain, and their unavailability in high ellipsis follows directly from the inclusion of Voice within the elided constituent. This distribution thus supports the conclusion that ellipsis identity is computed over syntactic structure.

However, den Dikken (2021) argues that such accounts—most notably Merchant's (2008, 2013) Voice-based analysis—are ultimately insufficient. In particular, den Dikken shows that English lacks a clearly identifiable syntactic or morphological [ACTIVE]/[PASSIVE] feature that could independently ground the relevant parallelism conditions. Differences in auxiliary selection, participial morphology, or internal-argument displacement therefore fail to explain the sharp contrast between VP ellipsis and larger ellipsis constructions.

Adopting a structural theory of predication (den Dikken 2006, 2020), den Dikken (2021) instead argues that active and passive clauses differ in the underlying directionality of predication. In active clauses, the subject asymmetrically c-commands the predicate (*canonical predication*), whereas in passive clauses the predicate asymmetrically c-commands the subject (*reverse predication*). Crucially, this distinction reflects a deep structural asymmetry rather than a superficial derivational alternation.

Related observations are made by Griffiths (2022), who argues that ellipsis licensing requires a fixed argument structure and does not tolerate valency alternations. Rudin (2019) further sharpens this view by restricting syntactic identity to the *argument domain*, roughly corresponding to the first phase (vP or small clause) in which argument structure is established, and proposing that identity conditions apply only within this subclausal domain. While Rudin locates this domain in vP, Anand et al. (2025) extend the same insight beyond verbal categories.

Building on these converging perspectives, we propose that the predicate targeted

Ellipsis is disallowed between (9a) and (9b) because the two clauses do not share an identical argument structure. As in Merchant (2013), one might attempt to analyze this contrast by positing a VoiceP and attributing the mismatch to the presence or absence of Voice within the ellipsis site. However, the Korean facts point to a different conclusion: lexical passive verbs enter the syntax with an argument structure already distinct from that of their active counterparts. The relevant mismatch thus arises from the lexical properties of the predicate itself, rather than from structural manipulation of VoiceP at the ellipsis site.

One might object that *Chelswu* in (9b) need not be base-generated in vP. However, the acceptability of (10) supports the view that *Chelswu-ka* indeed originates in the canonical argument-introducing position.

- (10) *Chelswu-ka kouylo mwulliessta.*
 C.-Nom intentionally was.bitten
 ‘Chelswu was bitten intentionally.’

The availability of the adverb *kouylo* ‘intentionally’—which selects for agentive or externally introduced arguments—strongly suggests that *Chelswu-ka* is base-generated in the standard subject position in which external arguments are normally introduced. This observation thus provides independent support for the claim that the passive subject in (9b) occupies an argument-structural position distinct from that of the object in the corresponding active clause.

Now consider (6a-b), which instantiate the passive antecedent-active fragment pattern.

- (11) a. *Chelswu-ka nwukwu-hantey t_{Chelswu} [VP mwulli]ess-ni*
 b. *Saca-ka t_{saca}[VP Chelswu-lul mwul]ess-ta.*

Here again, ellipsis is not permitted, because the two clauses do not share the same underlying argument structure. In (11a), the passive predicate licenses a single internal argument, with *Chelswu* originating as the argument introduced by the predicate *mwullita* ‘be bitten’. By contrast, in (11b), the active predicate *mwulta* ‘bite’ introduces both an external argument (*saca* ‘lion’) and an internal argument (*Chelswu*). This mismatch in valency and argument configuration violates the identity condition on ellipsis, thereby ruling out the active fragment under a passive antecedent.

A reviewer notes that fragments such as (12b) are not fully natural, although they are judged to be better than the clearly illicit fragments in (7b) or (8b).

- (12) a. Mwues-i Chelswu-lul nollakey hayss-ni?
 what-Nom C.-Acc frighten did-Q
 ‘What frightened Chelswu?’
 b. chentwungsoli-eyuyhay.
 thunder.sound-by
 ‘By the sound of thunder’

The marginal status of (12b) can nevertheless be analyzed in terms of underlying structural identity. As shown in (13), ellipsis is permitted precisely when the antecedent clause and the elided clause share the same argument structure.

- (13) a. Mwues-i Chelswu-lul $t_{\text{mwues-i}}$ [$\text{VP } t_{\text{Chelswu}}$ nolla]key hayss-ni
 b. Chelswu-ka chedwungsoli-eyuyhay [$\text{VP } t_{\text{Chelswu}}$ nolla]ssta

Crucially, (13a-b) contrast sharply with the examples in (11). In (13), both the antecedent clause and the clause containing the fragment instantiate the same vP/VP configuration, differing only in surface realization. Because the underlying argument structure is preserved, the identity condition on ellipsis is satisfied, and fragment ellipsis is accordingly licensed.

2.2. Oblique/non-oblique alternation in *spray/load* constructions

Korean fragment answers likewise prohibit alternation between oblique and non-oblique realizations of arguments in *spray/load* constructions. Consider the locative NP *thulek* ‘truck’, which participates in an oblique vs. non-oblique alternation in full clauses:

- (14) a. Inpwutul-i thulek-ey namwu-lul chaywessta.
 worker-Nom truck-onto wood-Acc loaded
 ‘The worker loaded wood onto the truck.’
 b. Inpwutul-i thulek-ul namwu-lo chaywessta.
 worker-Nom truck-Acc wood-with loaded
 ‘The worker loaded the truck with wood.’

While both sentences are fully acceptable as complete clauses, this alternation is disallowed in fragment answers, as shown in (15)-(16).

(15) Oblique antecedent, non-oblique fragment

- a. Inpwutul-i eti-ey namwu-lul chaywess-ni?
worker-Nom where-onto wood-Acc loaded-Q
'Where did the workers load the wood?'
- b. Thulek-ey.
truck-onto
- c. *Thulek-ul.
truck-Acc

(16) Non-oblique antecedent, oblique fragment

- a. Inpwutul-i eti-lul namwu-lo chaywess-ni?
worker-Nom where-Acc wood-with loaded-Q
'Where did the workers load the wood?'
- b. *Thulek-ey.
truck-onto
- c. Thulek-ul.
truck-Acc

These patterns indicate that the alternation between oblique (-ey) and non-oblique (-ul) realizations does not reflect mere morphological case variation. Rather, the two constructions instantiate distinct underlying syntactic configurations, differing in how internal argument roles are projected and licensed by the verb *chaywuta* 'load'. Because fragment ellipsis requires identity at the level of argument structure, switching between oblique and non-oblique realizations in fragment answers is systematically ruled out.

Further evidence for structural asymmetry comes from the distribution of measure phrases such as *panccum* 'about half.' As observed by Yeom (2024: 22), *panccum* can modify different constituents depending on the construction. In (17a), it can target either the locatum (*namwu* 'wood') or the location (*thulek* 'truck'), whereas in (17b) it can modify only the location.

- (17) a. Inpwutul-i thulek-ey namwu-lul panccum chaywessta.
worker-Nom truck-onto wood-Acc about.half loaded
'The worker loaded the truck onto with wood about halfway.'

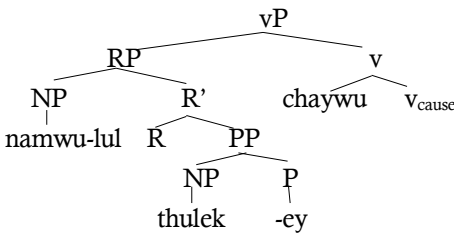
- 1) ✓ The worker loaded the truck half full.
 - 2) ✓ The worker loaded half of the wood.
- b. Inpwutul-i thulek-ul namwu-lo panccum chaywessta.
 worker-Nom truck-Acc wood-with about.half loaded
 ‘The worker loaded the truck with wood about halfway.’
- 1) ✓ The worker loaded the truck half full.
 - 2) ✗ The worker loaded half of the wood.

As these interpretations show, (17a) allows both a result-oriented interpretation (‘the truck ended up being about half full’) and a theme-quantity interpretation (‘about half of the wood was loaded’). By contrast, (17b) permits only the result-oriented interpretation. This interpretive asymmetry provides independent evidence that the two constructions differ in underlying argument structure.

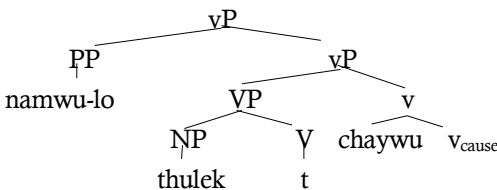
Building on Borer (1994, 2005), Ritter and Rosen (1998), Hale and Keyser (2002), and Folli and Harley (2020), Yeom (2024) argues that in constructions like (17a), both the locatum and the location are genuine arguments introduced within a Result Phrase (ResP). In contrast, in constructions like (17b), only the location is an argument of the verb, while the locatum is introduced as an instrumental phrase rather than as an internal argument. This structural difference explains both the observed interpretive asymmetry and the restriction on case alternation in fragment answers discussed above.

Yeom (2024:25-26) proposes that the *-ey* variant in (17a) and the *-lo* variant in (17b) instantiate the distinct structures schematized in (18a) and (18b), respectively.

(18) a. *-ey* variant



b. *-lo* variant



Given these structural differences, oblique antecedents paired with non-oblique fragments in (15a-b) are ruled out because they fail to satisfy the requirement of argument-structural identity. Likewise, non-oblique antecedents combined with oblique fragments in (16a-b) are also illicit for the same reason: in neither case do the antecedent and the fragment share the same underlying syntactic configuration within the argument-structural domain.²⁾

Comparable alternations are also found in so-called *spray* constructions (Yeon 2003:194-200):

- (19) a. John-i chaykphyoci-ey kemunsayk-ul chilhayssta.
 J.-Nom book.cover-Loc black-Acc painted
 ‘John painted black on the book cover.’
 b. John-i chaykphyoci-lul kemunsayk-ulo chilhayssta.
 J.-Nom book.cover-Acc black-Inst painted
 ‘John painted the book cover in/with black.’

As in the load alternation, fragment answers resist alternation across these two structural types:

- (20) Oblique antecedent, non-oblique fragment
 a. John-i eti-ey kemunsayk-ul chilhayss-ni?
 J.-Nom where-Loc black-Acc painted-Q
 ‘Where did John paint black?’

2) There is also notable speaker variation. As one reviewer observes, fragments such as (15b) and (16c) are judged to be better than the clearly illicit fragments in (7b) and (8b). This contrast appears to correlate with the (un)availability of case stacking, as illustrated in (i).

- (i) a. ??Inpwutul-i thulek-ey-lul namwu-lul chaywessta.
 worker-Nom truck-onto-Acc wood-Acc loaded
 ‘The worker loaded wood onto the truck.’
 b. ??Inpwutul-i thulek-ey-lul namwu-lo chaywessta.
 worker-Nom truck-onto-Acc wood-with loaded.
 ‘The worker loaded the truck with wood.’

For some speakers, the sentences in (i) are acceptable. If this judgment is correct, the oblique and non-oblique variants may be analyzed as sharing a single underlying argument structure. Most analyses of case stacking in Korean assume a common underlying syntactic structure, attributing the surface realization of stacked case markers to additional syntactic or post-syntactic operations (Gerdtts and Youn 1988, 1990, 1999; Youn 1990, 1998; Yoon 1996, 2004; Schütze 1996, 2001; Levin 2017; Ahn and Cho 2024). The acceptability of the stacked form in (i) suggests that both case markers can co-occur on a single syntactic position. Under this analysis, fragment ellipsis becomes possible, since the identity condition on ellipsis is satisfied at the level of underlying argument structure.

- b. Chaykphyoci-ey.
book.cover-Loc
- c. *Chaykphyoci-lul.
book.cover-Acc

(21) Non-oblique antecedent, oblique fragment

- a. John-i eti-lul kemunsayk-ulo chilhayss-ni?
J.-Nom where-Acc black-with painted-Q
'Where did John paint in black?'
- b. Chaykphyoci-lul.
book.cover-Acc
- c. *Chaykphyoci-ey.
book.cover-Loc

The same structural asymmetry is reflected in the distribution of the measure phrase *panccum* 'about half,' as shown in (22).

- (22) a. John-i chaykphyoci-ey kemunsayk-ul panccum chilhayssta.
J.-Nom book.cover-Loc black-Acc about.half painted
1) ✓John painted about the half (of the paint) onto the wall.'
2) ✓John painted the paint to cover about half of the wall.'
- b. John-i chaykphyoci-lul kemunsayk-ulo panccum chilhayssta.
J.-Nom book.cover-Acc black-Inst about.half painted
1) *John painted about the half (of the paint) onto the wall.'
2) ✓John painted the paint to cover about half of the wall.'

As in the load alternation, *panccum* can modify both the locatum and the location in (22a), but only the location in (22b). This interpretive restriction confirms that the two variants instantiate distinct argument-structural configurations, rather than merely differing in surface case marking.

Accordingly, the unavailability of case-mismatched fragments in (15)-(16) and (20)-(21) follows directly from our general claim: ellipsis requires structural identity at the level of argument structure, not merely propositional or morphological equivalence. In both *spray* and *load* constructions, the oblique and non-oblique variants differ in how internal arguments (locatum vs. location) are encoded, and fragment answers cannot alternate across these structurally distinct configurations.

2.3. Psych-verb alternations

Korean psych-verbs provide further evidence that case alternation is fundamentally constrained by argument structure, not mere morphological variation. Following Belletti & Rizzi (1988), psych-verbs cross-linguistically fall into at least three structural classes:

Class I: experiencer-subject, stimulus-object (e.g., Italian *temere* ‘fear’).

Class II: stimulus-subject, experiencer-object (e.g., *spaventare* ‘frighten’).

Class III: stimulus-subject, experiencer-dative (e.g., *piacere* ‘please’).

Korean provides clear evidence for both Class I and Class III:³⁾

(23) a. Yeunghi-ka saca-lul mwusewehayssta.

Y.-Nom lion-Acc feared

‘Yeunghi feared a lion.’ (Class I)

b. Yeunghi-eykey saca-ka mwusewessta.

Y.-Dat lion-Nom was.frightening

‘To Yeunghi, a lion was frightening.’ (Class III)

Fragment answers reveal that these two classes differ syntactically in ways that preclude case alternation under ellipsis:

(24) Nominative stimulus antecedent, accusative fragment

a. Yeunghi-eykey mwe-ka mwusewess-ni?

Y.-Dat what-Nom was.frightening-Q

‘To Yeunghi, what was frightening?’

b. Saca-ka.

lion-Nom

c. *Saca-lul.

lion-Acc

3) Lee’s (1976) seminal study elucidates the intricate relationship between case marking and argument structure, emphasizing how the interaction between the experiencer and the stimulus governs the distribution of nominative and accusative cases. Crucially, Lee demonstrates that this alternation is not purely syntactic but reflects deeper distinctions in causative orientation and event structure—specifically, whether the psychological state arises from internal experience or external causation.

(25) Accusative stimulus antecedent, nominative fragment

a. Yeunghi-ka mwe-lul mwusewehayss-ni?

Y.-Nom what-Acc fear-Q

‘What did Yeunghi fear?’

b. *Saca-ka.

lion-Nom

c. Saca-lul.

lion-Acc

As the contrasts in (24)-(25) show, case mismatches are ungrammatical in fragment answers. Each psych-verb class enforces its own argument-structural configuration, which must be preserved under ellipsis. The Class I verb *mwusewehata* ‘fear’ requires an experiencer subject and an accusative stimulus, while the Class III verb *mwusepta* ‘be frightening’ takes a dative experiencer and a nominative stimulus. These distinct case frames reflect distinct syntactic derivations and cannot alternate freely in fragments.

The Korean facts thus reinforce Belletti & Rizzi’s (1988) insight that psych-verbs are not structurally uniform across languages. The unavailability of case-mismatched fragments shows that fragment ellipsis in Korean is sensitive to argument-structure class, not merely to semantic equivalence across propositions. This, in turn, supports the broader claim that ellipsis licensing requires syntactic identity at the level of argument structure—a pattern consistent with findings from other languages (Merchant 2013; Chung 2013). Consider (26).

(26) a. [_{VP} Yeunghi-ka [_{VP} saca-lul mwusewehay]]ssta (23a)

b. [_{VP} [_{VP} Yeunghi-eykey [saca-ka mwusewe]]]ssta. (23b)

As shown in (26), the two psych-verb constructions instantiate distinct argument structures—the first with an experiencer subject and a theme object, the second with a stimulus subject and a dative experiencer. Because their underlying syntactic configurations differ, ellipsis between the two is not permitted.

2.4. Periphrastic causative constructions

Korean periphrastic causatives also exhibit case alternations, with the causee marked either dative or nominative, as shown in (27).

- (27) a. Chelswu-ka Yenghi-eykey ppalley-lul hakey hayssta.
 C.-Nom Y.-Dat laundry-Acc do made
 ‘Chelswu made Yenghi_{Dat} do the laundry.’
- b. Chelswu-ka Yenghi-ka ppalley-lul hakey hayssta.
 C.-Nom Y.-Nom laundry-Acc do made
 ‘Chelswu made Yenghi_{Nom} do the laundry.’

Despite this surface alternation, fragment answers again reveal strict case matching between the antecedent and the fragment:

- (28) Dative antecedent, nominative fragment
- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-eykey ppalley-lul hakey hayss-ni?
 C.-Nom who-Dat laundry-Acc do made-Q
 ‘Who did Chelswu make do the laundry?’
- b. Yenghi-eykey.
 Y.-Dat
- c. *Yenghi-ka.
 Y.-Nom

- (29) Nominative antecedent, dative fragment
- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-ka ppalley-lul hakey hayss-ni?
 C.-Nom who-Nom laundry-Acc do made-Q
 ‘Who did Chelswu make do the laundry?’
- b. *Yenghi-eykey.
 Y.-Dat
- c. Yenghi-ka.
 Y.-Nom

The ungrammaticality of the mismatched fragments in (28c) and (29b) indicates that nominative and dative causees are not interchangeable case variants but correspond to distinct argument-structural configurations. Specifically, the dative causee is introduced as an argument of the matrix causative predicate, while the nominative causee is licensed within the embedded clause.

This distinction has been independently argued by Kang (1986) and Park (1994a), who show that dative causatives are three-place predicates (involving a matrix subject, a dative causee, and an embedded theme), whereas nominative causatives

involve only two arguments, with the causee functioning as the embedded subject. Supporting evidence comes from VP-fronting, which is possible only with dative causatives, as shown in (30):

- (30) a. [ppalley-lul hakey]_i Chelswu-ka Yenghi-eykey t_i hayssta.
 b. *[t_j ppalley-lul hakey]_i Chelswu-ka Yenghi-ka_j t_i hayssta.

The contrast in (30) confirms that the two constructions differ in argument structure, not merely in surface case marking. Consider (31):

- (31) a. Chelswu-ka [Yenghi-eykey [pro ppalley-lul ha]key] hay]ssta.
 b. Chelswu-ka [Yenghi-ka ppalley-lul ha]key] hay]ssta.

In (31a), *Yenghi* functions as an argument of the matrix verb, whereas in (31b) it does not. Consequently, fragment ellipsis, which requires syntactic identity between the antecedent and the elided clause, does not permit mismatches across these causative types.

We also observe a further case alternation involving *Yenghi*, shown in (32).

- (32) Chelswu-ka Yenghi-lul ppalley-lul hakey hayssta.
 C.-Nom Y.-Acc laundry-Acc do made
 ‘Chelswu made Yenghi_{Acc} do the laundry.’

In this environment, case-mismatched fragments are possible, as in (33) and (34).

(33) Dative antecedent, Accusative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-eykey ppalley-lul hakey hayss-ni?
 C.-Nom who-Dat laundry-Acc do made-Q
 ‘Who did Chelswu make do the laundry?’
 b. Yenghi-lul.
 Y.-Acc

(34) Accusative antecedent, dative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-lul ppalley-lul hakey hayss-ni?
 C.-Nom who-Acc laundry-Acc do made-Q
 ‘Who did Chelswu make do the laundry?’

- b. Yenghi-eykey.
Y.Dat

The availability of these case-alternated fragments follows from the argument-structural identity illustrated in (35):

- (35) a. Chelswu-ka [Yenghi-eykey [pro ppalley-lul ha]key] hay]ssta.
b. Chelswu-ka [Yenghi-lul_i [pro_i/t_i ppalley-lul ha]key] hay]ssta.

In both (35a) and (35b), *Yenghi* is an argument of the matrix predicate. Because the antecedent and the elided clause share the same underlying argument structure, the identity condition on ellipsis is met. As a result, the fragments in (33)-(34) are fully licensed.⁴⁾

2.5. Interim conclusion

Across active-passive alternations, oblique vs. non-oblique alternations in spray/load constructions, psych-verb classes, and periphrastic causative constructions, the evidence converges on a single generalization: fragments in Korean require strict syntactic identity with their antecedents. Case mismatches are ungrammatical whenever they correspond to genuinely distinct underlying argument structures, rather than to superficial morphological alternations.

In other words, ellipsis licensing in Korean is structurally constrained. When apparent case variation reflects a difference in the syntactic configuration of arguments—as in active vs. passive, locative vs. accusative, or dative vs. nominative causees—fragment ellipsis fails. By contrast, as shown in later sections, morpho-

4) As a reviewer observes, VP-fronting with the structure in (35b) is judged to be worse than with (35a), as illustrated in (i-ii):

- (i) ??ppalley-lul hakey Chelswu-ka Yenghi-lul hayssta.
(ii) ppalley-lul hakey Chelswu-ka Yenghi-eykey hayssta.

This contrast is fully compatible with the proposed analysis. Under our proposal, both accusative- and dative-marked causees are in principle possible when the causee is an argument of the matrix causative predicate. However, in the case of accusative marking, the causee may alternatively be analyzed as an external argument of the embedded causative, given the structural ambiguity associated with (35b). As a result, in (i) the VP-fronted configuration leads to degradation, plausibly because it induces a violation of the Proper Binding Condition via the trace or copy created by the stranded accusative-marked causee. By contrast, (ii) is correctly predicted to be well-formed, since no such violation arises when the causee is realized as a dative argument of the matrix predicate.

logical alternations that occur within a single argument-structural template (e.g., Dative/Accusative alternation in ditransitives) do permit fragment identity. This distinction captures a central principle of the Korean data: fragment ellipsis is sensitive to argument-structural identity, not to surface form or semantic equivalence.

3. Possible Case Alternations

Following prior cross-linguistic work showing that identity of argument structure plays a crucial role in licensing clausal ellipsis in English, we have sought to explain the unavailability of certain case-alternating fragments in Korean. Although case mismatches are generally disallowed in fragment constructions cross-linguistically, Korean provides notable exceptions in which case-alternating fragments are in fact permitted.

The distribution of both available and unavailable case-alternating fragments across the constructions examined in this section can be treated uniformly in terms of argument-structure identity. Our goal here is not to supply a full set of independent diagnostics for each construction. Rather, we propose that the possibility of case alternation itself indicates that structures with different surface case marking may nonetheless share the same underlying argument structure, thereby satisfying the syntactic identity condition required for ellipsis.

3.1. Direct causative construction

Direct causative constructions in Korean also exhibit case alternation on the causee, which may appear with either dative (*-eykey*) or accusative (*-lul*) marking, as illustrated in (36).⁵⁾

- (36) a. Emma-ka ai-eykey os-ul iphiessta.
mother-Nom child-Dat clothes-Acc dressed
'The mother dressed her child.'
- b. Emma-ka ai-lul os-ul iphiessta.
mother-Nom child-Acc clothes-Acc dressed
'The mother dressed her child.'

5) For detailed analyses of direct causatives, see Kang (1986), Park (1994), Jo (2020), among others.

In this configuration, case mismatches between a *wh*-antecedent and its fragment answer are fully acceptable, as shown in (37)-(38).

(37) ✓ Dative antecedent → Accusative fragment

- a. Emma-ka nwukwu-eykey os-ul iphiess-ni?
mother-Nom who-Dat clothes-Acc dressed-Q
'Who did the mother dress?.'
- b. ai-lul.
child-Acc
- c. ai-eykey.
child-Dat

(38) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Dative fragment

- a. Emma-ka nwukwu-lul os-ul iphiess-ni?
mother-Nom who-Acc clothes-Acc dressed-Q
'Who did the mother dress?'
- b. ai-lul.
child-Acc
- c. ai-eykey.
child-Dat

The availability of both (37b) and (38c) indicates that the dative-accusative alternation on the causee does not reflect a difference in argument structure. Instead, the two case markers are alternative morphological realizations of a single underlying syntactic position, as represented in (39).

- (39) a. [_{VP} Emma-ka [_{VP} ai-eykey os-ul ip]hi]essta
b. [_{VP} Emma-ka [_{VP} ai-lul os-ul ip]hi]essta

Further evidence comes from case stacking, illustrated in (40).

- (40) Emma-ka ai-eykey-lul os-ul iphiesta.
mother-Nom child-Dat-Acc clothes-Acc dressed
'The mother dressed her child.'

The possibility of *-eykey-lul* stacking shows that both dative and accusative morphology can co-occur on the same NP, supporting the view that the causee is base-generated in one structural position, with the surface case determined by morphological realization rules.

Under standard case-stacking analyses (Yoon 1996, 2004, 2005; Jo 2001), the dative marker reflects inherent/lexical case (or a postpositional element) associated with the NP's initial merge position, whereas accusative (and nominative) are structural cases marking surface licensing. This distinction explains why both *ai-eykey* and *ai-lul* are acceptable as fragments: the ellipsis site maintains syntactic identity, and the case alternation reflects morphological variation, not a difference in underlying argument structure.

3.2. The *siphtha* 'want' construction

The Korean desiderative construction with *siphtha* 'want' provides another instance of case alternation that does not reflect a structural difference. *Siphtha*-complements permit alternation between nominative and accusative marking on the embedded object.

In simple transitive clauses, by contrast, the object bears accusative case only, as shown in (41).

- (41) Matrix transitive (no alternation)
 Chelswu-nun sakwa-lul/*-ka mekessta.
 C.-Top apple-Acc/-Nom ate
 'Chelswu ate an apple.'

When the same predicate is embedded under *siphtha*, however, both nominative and accusative case-marking are available on the object, as illustrated in (42).

- (42) Embedded infinitival object under *siphtha*
 a. Chelswu-nun sakwa-ka mek-ko siphessta.
 C.-Top apple-Nom eat-Ger wanted
 'Chelswu wanted to eat an apple.'
 b. Chelswu-nun sakwa-lul mek-ko siphessta.
 C.-Top apple-Acc eat-Ger wanted
 'Chelswu wanted to eat an apple.'

Unlike the active-passive or oblique-non-oblique alternations discussed in §2, this nominative-accusative alternation is freely reflected in fragment answers, allowing case mismatches between the antecedent and the response:

(43) ✓ Nominative antecedent → Accusative fragment

- a. Chelswu-nun mwe-ka mek-ko siphess-ni?
C.-Top what-Nom eat-Ger wanted-Q
'What did Chelswu want to eat?'
- b. sakwa-ka.
apple-Nom
'(He wanted to eat) an apple.'
- c. sakwa-lul.
apple-Acc
'(He wanted to eat) an apple.'

(44) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Nominative fragment

- a. Chelswu-nun mwe-lul mek-ko siphess-ni?
C.-Top what-Acc eat-Ger wanted-Q
'What did Chelswu want to eat?'
- b. sakwa-lul.
apple-Acc
- c. sakwa-ka.
apple-Nom

The acceptability of both (43c) and (44c) shows that the nominative-accusative alternation on the embedded object does not correspond to distinct argument structures. Rather, both cases are morphological realizations of the same underlying syntactic position—that of the embedded object of *mekta* 'eat.'

Kim and Maling (1998) argue that the alternation arises within a single structural representation, where nominative and accusative reflect different case-licensing mechanisms available in the infinitival domain: nominative is licensed via agreement with the matrix predicate *siphtha*, while accusative is licensed via case inheritance from the embedded verb. Under this view, both variants share an identical argument structure.

- (45) a. [_{VP} Chelswu-nun [_{VP} [_{CP} pro sakwa-ka mek-ko]] sipha]yessta
 b. [_{VP} Chelswu-nun [_{VP} [_{CP} pro sakwa-lul mek-ko]] sipha]yessta.

This account straightforwardly explains the fragment data: because ellipsis identity is computed at the level of syntactic structure, rather than at the level of morphological case, fragments may surface with either nominative or accusative marking—regardless of which case the antecedent clause employs.⁶⁾

In short, *siph*a-constructions exemplify possible case alternations, where morphological variation in case-marking reflects licensing flexibility within a single structure, rather than structural divergence. This sharply contrasts with the “impossible” alternations in §2—such as active vs. passive or oblique vs. non-oblique—which involve genuine differences in argument structure and therefore disallow case-mismatched fragments.

3.3. Goal NPs: Locative/accusative alternation

Korean goal nominals provide another clear example of morphological case alternation that does not correspond to a difference in argument structure. The goal NP may bear either locative (*-ey*) or accusative (*-lul*) case, without any change in core meaning, as shown in (46).

(46) Locative/Accusative alternation in goals

- a. Chelswu-ka hakkyo-ey kassta.
 C.-Nom school-Loc went
 ‘Chelswu went to school.’
- b. Chelswu-ka hakkyo-lul kassta.
 C.-Nom school-Acc went
 ‘Chelswu went to school.’

6) Numerous analyses have been proposed for case alternation in *siph*a constructions. Chang and Cho (1991) were among the first to address this phenomenon, arguing that nominative case assignment triggers head movement from a lower predicate to the higher verbal head position. This movement, they claim, is motivated either by the root \sqrt{siph} or by a semantically bleached embedded predicate (Kim & Maling 1998). In contrast, Choi (2009) and Jung (2011) attribute the alternation to structural differences in the size of the selected complement clause, dispensing with any additional mechanism. More recently, Sim (2018) proposes that the case alternation in *siph*a constructions should be analyzed as an instance of prolepsis. The observed permissibility of case mismatches in fragment answers appears to lend support to analyses such as Chang and Jo (1991) and Kim and Maling (1998), which posit a single underlying representation for the alternating forms.

Unlike the impossible alternations discussed in §2 (e.g., active-passive or oblique-non-oblique), this alternation freely extends to fragment answers, allowing case mismatches between the antecedent and the fragment, as shown in (47)-(48).

(47) ✓ Locative antecedent → Accusative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka eti-ey kass-ni?
C.-Nom where-Loc went-Q
'Where did Chelswu go?'
- b. hakkyo-ey.
school-Loc
'(He went to) school_{Loc.}'
- c. hakkyo-lul.
school-Acc
'(He went to) school_{Acc.}'

(48) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Locative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka eti-lul kass-ni?
C.-Nom where-Acc went-Q
'Where did Chelswu go?'
- b. hakkyo-ey.
school-Loc
- c. hakkyo-lul.
school-Acc

The grammaticality of both (47c) and (48b) indicates that locative and accusative goals do not correspond to distinct argument-structural configurations. Instead, they are best analyzed as morphological variants derived from syntactic operations—such as movement—that produce alternative surface forms from a single underlying goal position.

- (49) a. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} hakkyo-ey V]]
- b. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} hakkyo-lul V]]
- c. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} hakkyo-ey-lul V]]

Further support for this conclusion comes from case stacking, which permits both case markers to appear simultaneously, as shown in (50).

(50) Case-stacked goal

Chelswu-ka hakkyo-ey-lul kasse.
C.-Nom school-Loc-Acc went
'Chelswu went to school.'

The coexistence of the three surface forms—Locative (-ey), Accusative (-lul), and stacked (-ey-lul)—is expected if the goal NP occupies a single syntactic position, with the observed variation in case marking arising from case-assignment mechanisms triggered by syntactic operations, rather than from distinct underlying representations of argument structure.⁷⁾

In sum, both the fragment data and the case-stacking evidence converge on the same conclusion: the co-occurrence of locative and accusative marking on goal NPs reflects their derivation from a single underlying syntactic structure. Accordingly, case-mismatched fragments are grammatical precisely because the requirement of syntactic identity under ellipsis is met, despite differences in surface case morphology.

7) One reviewer raises the following point. In (i) and (ii), which illustrate stacked locative case, accusative-marked fragments are not permitted:

- (i) Chelswu-ka uyca-ey ancassa.
C.-Nom chair-on sat
'Chelswu sat on the chair.'
- (ii) a. Chelswu-ka eti-ey ancass-ni?
C.-Nom where-Loc sat-Q
'Where did Chelswu sit?'
b. uyca-ey/uyca-ey-lul/*uyca-lul
'On the chair.'

One might treat this as irrelevant, given that the corresponding declarative sentence *Chelswu sat the chair* is ungrammatical in Korean. However, under the assumption that fragment answers may alternate in case while occupying the same syntactic position, the reviewer's observation raises a legitimate question: why does (i) permit the stacked form *uyca-ey-lul* but not the bare accusative *uyca-lul*?

- (iii) *Chelswu-ka uyca ancassa.
C.-Nom chair sat
'Chelswu sat on the chair.' (Choi 2009:65)

Example (iii) provides a clue. The ungrammaticality of (iii) suggests that the issue is not that accusative and locative NPs fail to occupy the same syntactic position. Rather, the problem arises because the locative marker *-ey* is obligatory with verbs like *anca-* 'sit'; its omission renders the structure ill-formed independently of any considerations about case alternation. In other words, the absence of *uyca-lul* as a fragment in (ii) is best attributed to the lexical requirement that the locative argument of *anca* must bear the postposition *-ey*, not to any deeper argument-structural incompatibility. The stacked variant *uyca-ey-lul* is allowed precisely because it preserves this obligatory locative morphology.

3.4. Dative/accusative alternation in ditransitives

In Korean ditransitives, the goal or recipient argument may appear with either dative (*-eykey*) or accusative (*-lul*) case, without altering the core argument structure. This alternation is illustrated in (51).

(51) Dative/Accusative alternation in ditransitives

- a. Chelswu-ka Yeunghi-eykey chayk-ul cwuessta.
C.-Nom Y.-Dat book-Acc gave
'Chelswu gave a book to Yeunghi.'
- b. Chelswu-ka Yeunghi-lul chayk-ul cwuessta.
C.-Nom Y.-Acc book-Acc gave
'Chelswu gave Yeunghi a book.'

Unlike the impossible alternations discussed in §2, this alternation is fully productive and transparently reflected in fragment answers, permitting case mismatches between the antecedent and the fragment, as shown in (52)-(53).⁸⁾

(52) ✓ Dative antecedent → Accusative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-eykey chayk-ul cwuess-ni?
C.-Nom who-Dat book-Acc gave-Q
'To whom did Chelswu give a book?'
- b. Yeunghi-eykey.
Y.-Dat
- c. Yeunghi-lul.
Y-Acc

(53) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Dative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-lul chayk-ul cwuess-ni?
C.-Nom who-Acc book-Acc gave-Q
'Whom did Chelswu give a book?'

8) According to Jung and Miyagawa (2004) and Kim (2015), the patterns in (35a) and (35b) correspond to the Prepositional Dative Construction (e.g., John gave a book to Mary) and the Double Object Construction (e.g., John gave Mary a book) in English, respectively. Kim (2015) further develops an asymmetric analysis of Korean ditransitives, aligning with Bruening's (2010) approach and opposing Harley's (1997, 2002) symmetric theory. This type of analysis predicts that case mismatches should be ungrammatical in fragment answers—contrary to empirical observation.

- b. Yeunghi-eykey.
- c. Yeunghi-lul.

The acceptability of both (52c) and (53b) demonstrates that the so-called dative construction and double-accusative construction are not distinct argument structures.⁹⁾ Rather, they represent alternative morphological realizations of the same underlying syntactic configuration.

- (54) a. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} Yeunghi-eykey chayk-ul cwu]]essta
 b. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} Yeunghi-lul chayk-ul cwu]]essta

Additional evidence comes from case stacking on the goal NP (*Yeunghi-eykey-lul*), which indicates that the recipient occupies a single syntactic position that can host more than one morphological case. The alternation between *-eykey* and *-lul* thus reflects morphological flexibility in case assignment, not structural divergence. Because the underlying argument structure remains identical, case-mismatched

9) One reviewer presents the sentences in (i) and asks how the grammatical contrast between them might be explained, assuming that the two sentences share the same underlying structure:

- (i) a. Chelswu-ka hakkyo-ey kipwukum-ul cwuessta.
 C.-Nom school-Dat donation-Acc gave
 'Chelswu gave a donation to the school.'
- b. ??Chelswu-ka hakkyo-lul kipwukum-ul cwuessta.
 C.-Nom school-Acc donation-Acc gave
 '(Lit) Chelswu gave the school a donation.'

The source of the degraded status of (ib) requires further investigation, and a definitive explanation goes beyond the scope of the present discussion. Nevertheless, the unavailability of case-mismatched fragments, illustrated in (ii), aligns with the general direction of our analysis.

- (ii) a. Chelswu-ka eti-ey kipwukum-ul cwuess-ni?
 C.-Nom where-Loc donation-Acc gave-Q
 'Where did Chelswu give a donation?'
- b. *Hakkyo-lul.
 school-Acc
- c. Hakkyo-ey.
 Hakkyo-Loc

The contrast between (iib) and (iic) suggests that only the locative realization of the goal argument participates in fragment ellipsis. Given our proposal that ellipsis licensing requires syntactic identity at the level of argument structure, the impossibility of *hakkyo-lul* follows naturally: if the accusative-marked goal in (ib) does not reflect the same underlying structural configuration as the locative goal in (ia), then the fragment in (ii) cannot be rescued by morphological alternation alone. Thus, even though the precise source of (ib)'s ungrammaticality remains open, the fragment data in (ii) remain consistent with—and indeed support—the broader argument-structure-based analysis advanced in this paper.

fragments are possible: ellipsis operates over a syntactically uniform structure, and surface case variation does not violate the identity requirement.

This pattern stands in sharp contrast to English, where the double-object construction (*John gave Mary a book*) and the *to*-dative construction (*John gave a book to Mary*) are associated with distinct structural representations. The English alternation involves well-documented asymmetries in binding, scope, and idiom formation (e.g., *give Mary hell* vs. *give hell to Mary*), all of which point to separate argument structures.

In Korean, however, such asymmetries are absent: the recipient position is structurally uniform, and its surface case marking (Dative vs. Accusative) is determined by case-assignment mechanisms triggered by syntactic operations, rather than by distinct underlying configurations of argument structure. Consequently, fragment ellipsis in Korean permits case mismatches because the identity condition applies at the level of argument structure, not at the level of morphological case realization.

3.5. Inalienable possession: Lexical passive of body parts

Korean lexical passives involving inalienable possession—most notably those with body-part nouns—offer yet another instance of morphological case alternation in the absence of any underlying structural divergence. In such constructions, the possessum NP (e.g., *face*) may surface with either accusative or nominative case, as shown in (55).¹⁰

(55) Acc/Nom alternation in body-part passives

- a. Chelswu-ka saca-hanthey elkwul-ul mwullyessta.
C.-Nom lion-by face-Acc was.biten
'Chelswu's face was bitten by the lion.'
- b. Chelswu-ka saca-hanthey elkwul-i mwullyessta.
C.-Nom lion-by face-Nom was.biten
'Chelswu's face was bitten by the lion.'

10) Since the 1980s, numerous studies have examined case alternation in lexical passives of body-part constructions (Kang 1986; Hong 1990; Kim 1990; Maling and Kim 1992; Cho 2000, among others). Although none of these works explicitly address fragment constructions, they uniformly predict the possibility of case mismatches in fragments, as they assume a single underlying structure for case alternation.

As with other possible alternations discussed in §3, fragments allow case mismatches between the antecedent and the response:

- (56) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Nominative fragment
- a. Chelswu-ka saca-hanthey eti-lul mwulließ-ni?
 C.-Nom lion-by where-Acc was.bitten-Q
 ‘Where (on him) was Chelswu bitten by the lion?’
 - b. elkwul-ul.
 face-Acc
 ‘(His) face_{Acc}.’
 - c. elkwul-i.
 face-Nom
 ‘(His) face_{Nom}.’

- (57) ✓ Nominative antecedent → Accusative fragment
- a. Chelswu-ka saca-hanthey eti-ka mwulließ-ni?
 C.-Nom lion-by where-Nom was.bitten-Q
 ‘Where (on him) was Chelswu bitten by the lion?’
 - b. elkwul-ul.
 face-Acc
 - c. elkwul-i.
 face-Nom

The grammaticality of both (56c) and (57b) indicates that accusative and nominative marking on the possessed body-part NP in lexical passives are morphological variants of a single underlying syntactic configuration. The body-part NP occupies one argument position—typically within an inalienable possession structure linked to the external subject—while the surface case variation results from subsequent syntactic operations applied to that same base structure. Because the argument position is identical across the two case options, case-mismatched fragments are fully licensed: the syntactic identity requirement on ellipsis is satisfied at the level of argument structure.

- (58) a. [VP [DP.... elkwul-ul] mwulli]essta
 b. [VP [DP..... elkwul-i] mwulli]essta

This pattern stands in sharp contrast to the “impossible alternations” discussed

in §2—such as active vs. passive and oblique vs. non-oblique—where case differences reflect genuinely distinct argument structures. In those configurations, case-mismatched fragments are ungrammatical precisely because the antecedent and the fragment fail to share the same syntactic configuration.

In inalienable-possession passives, by contrast, both case forms instantiate the same underlying syntactic relation between the possessor and the possessed NP; the only difference lies in surface case morphology introduced by later syntactic processes. As a result, case alternation is possible without violating ellipsis identity.

3.6. Embedded subjects: Nom/acc alternation

Certain Korean predicates permit their embedded subject to surface with either accusative or nominative case. A representative example involves the predicate *sayngkakhata* ‘think,’ as shown in (59).

(59) Embedded subject alternation

- a. Chelswu-ka Yenghi-lul papo-lako sayngkakhanta.
 C.-Nom Y.-Acc fool-C think
 ‘Chelswu considers Yeunghi a fool.’
- b. Chelswu-ka Yenghi-ka papo-lako sayngkakhanta.
 C.-Nom Y.-Nom fool-C think
 ‘Chelswu thinks Yeunghi is a fool.’

In (59a), the embedded subject (*Yenghi*) is realized with accusative case, while in (59b) it surfaces with nominative case. Despite the case difference, the propositional meaning is the same.

Importantly, this case alternation is also reflected in fragment answers, allowing cross-case mismatches between the antecedent and the fragment, as shown in (60)-(61).

(60) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Nominative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-lul papo-lako sayngkakhani?
 C.-Nom who-Acc fool-C think-Q
 ‘Who does Chelswu consider a fool?’
- b. Yeunghi-lul.
 Y.-Acc
- c. Yeunghi-ka.
 Y.-Nom

- (61) ✓ Nominative antecedent → Accusative fragment
- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-ka papo-lako sayngkak-ha-ni?
C.-Nom who-Nom fool-C think-Q
'Who does Chelswu think is a fool?'
 - b. Yeunghi-lul.
Y.-Acc
 - c. Yeunghi-ka.
Y.-Nom

The acceptability of both (60c) and (61b) likewise indicates that nominative and accusative marking on the embedded subject do not reflect distinct underlying syntactic configurations. Rather, they are morphological realizations resulting from different syntactic operations applied to a single underlying argument structure.

A widely adopted analysis (Kim & Maling 1998; Yoon 2004) treats the accusative variant in (62a) as the result of raising the embedded subject into the matrix clause, where it is licensed as a matrix object. The nominative variant in (62b), by contrast, reflects the in-situ configuration, in which the embedded subject remains within the embedded clause and receives nominative case from the lower predicate.

- (62) a. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{CP} Yeunghi-lul papo-lako] sayngkakha]nta
b. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{CP} Yeunghi-ka papo-lako] sayngkakha]nta

From the standpoint of ellipsis licensing, what is crucial is that both variants originate from a single syntactic source, with case variation arising through alternative derivations involving movement. Because the argument structure remains constant, the syntactic identity condition on ellipsis is satisfied, thereby permitting case-mismatched fragments.¹¹⁾

This pattern aligns the embedded-subject alternation with other permissible case alternations discussed in §3—such as the dative/accusative alternation in ditransitives (§3.2), the *siphtha* 'want' construction (§3.3), and the goal alternation (§3.4). In all these environments, surface case morphology varies without any corresponding divergence in underlying argument structure, demonstrating that

11) Numerous insightful studies have examined how object case is assigned to the subject argument of embedded clauses, focusing on case alternation in this construction (Ahn and Yoon 1989; Kim 1990; J.M Yoon 1991; Lee 1991; Park 1994b; Wechsler and Lee 1995; Hong 1997; H. Park 2001; Ahn 2002; Kim and Kim 2003; Ahn and Cho 2025, among others). To the best of our knowledge, these works uniformly assume a single underlying structure prior to the application of case alternation, thereby predicting the possibility of case mismatches in fragment answers.

fragment ellipsis in Korean is constrained by argument-structural identity, not by morphological uniformity.

3.7. Inalienable possession in object position: Genitive/accusative alternation

In Korean inalienable possession constructions (IPC), an object-position possessor can surface with either genitive (*-uy*) or accusative (*-lul*) case. This alternation is illustrated in (63).

(63) Gen/Acc alternation in inalienable possession

- a. Chelswu-ka Swuni-uy son-ul capassta.
C.-Nom S.-Gen hand-Acc grasbbed
'Chelswu grabbed Swuni's hand.'
- b. Chelswu-ka Swuni-lul son-ul capassta.
C.-Nom S.-Acc hand-Acc grasbbed
'Chelswu grabbed Swuni (by the) hand.'

As with other "possible" alternations, fragments permit case cross-matching between the antecedent and the fragment answer:

(64) ✓ Genitive antecedent → Accusative fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-uy son-ul capassni?
C.-Nom who-Gen hand-Acc grasped-Q
'Whose hand did Chelswu grab?'
- b. Swuni-uy.
'Swuni's_{Gen.}'
- c. Swuni-lul.
'Swuni_{Acc.}'

(65) ✓ Accusative antecedent → Genitive fragment

- a. Chelswu-ka nwukwu-lul son-ul cap-ass-ni?
C.-Nom who-Acc hand-Acc grasped-Q
'Whose hand did Chelswu grab?'
- b. Swuni-uy.
- c. Swuni-lul.

The availability of case-mismatched fragments strongly suggests that genitive and accusative possessors in IPCs are morphological alternants of a single underlying syntactic configuration.

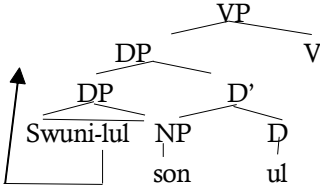
- (66) a. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} [Swuni-uy son-ul] cap]]assta
- b. [_{VP} Chelswu-ka [_{VP} [Swuni-lul son-ul] cap]]assta

Under this view, the possessor and the possessed body-part form a single DP constituent, and the difference between genitive and accusative marking is a matter of syntactic case realization, not a reflection of distinct argument-structural configurations.

The fact that case mismatches are possible in fragments of inalienable possession constructions has important implications for their underlying structure. A large body of work has examined syntactic and semantic properties of IPCs, and proposals can be broadly divided into two types: constituent analyses and non-constituent analyses.

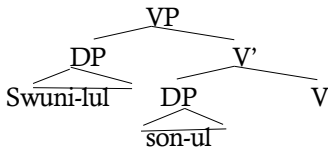
On a constituent analysis, the possessor and the possessum form a single nominal constituent. In (63b), for example, the two accusative nominals—*Swuni-lul son-ul* ‘Swuni-Acc hand-Acc’—are taken to constitute one DP, with the possessor generated inside the DP and potentially moving out at a later stage. A schematic version is given in (67).

(67) Constituent Analysis (Cho 2000; see also Yang 1972, Choe 1987, Ura 1996)



By contrast, a non-constituent analysis holds that the possessor and the possessum are not part of the same DP but instead function as two independent arguments of the verb. In this view, both *Swuni-lul* and *son-ul* are licensed separately by the verbal predicate, as in (68).

(68) Non-Constituent Analysis (Kim 1989, 1990; Yoon 1990; Sim 2004; Tomioka & Sim 2005)



The two competing analyses of inalienable possession make contrasting predictions regarding fragment case mismatches. Under the constituent analysis, genitive and accusative possessors—as in (63a-b)—derive from the same underlying argument structure. This approach correctly predicts that case-mismatched fragments should be possible, since both cases are morphological realizations of a single syntactic position.

Under the non-constituent analysis, by contrast, the two constructions are associated with distinct argument structures: the genitive possessor is embedded within the possessum NP, while the accusative possessor is generated as a separate argument in the matrix clause. If this were correct, fragment case mismatches would be unexpected, as the ellipsis site would lack structural identity with its antecedent.

The facts concerning case-mismatched fragments are straightforwardly accounted for under a constituent analysis in which the possessor and possessum form a single unified syntactic constituent at the underlying level. The observed case alternation reflects alternative case-licensing mechanisms—genitive within the nominal domain and accusative within the clausal domain—rather than any difference in argument-structural representation.

3.8. Inalienable possession in subject position: Genitive/nominative alternation

Korean also exhibits case alternation in subject-position inalienable possession constructions, where the possessor may surface either as genitive or as nominative, as in (69).¹²⁾

12) Not all multiple nominative constructions have genitive counterparts. For relevant discussion, see Ura (1996), Kim & Kim (2002), Vermeulen (2005) and Yoon (2007, 2009, 2015), Ahn & Cho (2023) among others.

(69) Gen/Nom alternation in subject IPCs

- a. Chelswu-uy apeci-ka pwucata.
C.-Gen father-Nom rich
'Chelswu's father is rich.'
- b. Chelswu-ka apeci-ka pwucata.
C.-Nom father-Nom rich
'Chelswu's father is rich.'

As with object IPCs (§3.6), fragment answers allow cross-case mismatches between antecedent and fragment:

(70) ✓ Genitive antecedent → Nominative fragment

- a. Nwukwu-uy apeci-ka pwuca-ni?
who-Gen father-Nom rich-Q
'Whose father is rich?'
- b. Chelswu-uy.
C,-Gen
'Chelswu's (Gen).'
- c. Chelswu-ka.
C.-Nom
'Chelswu (Nom).'

(71) ✓ Nominative antecedent → Genitive fragment

- a. Nwukwu-ka apeci-ka pwuca-ni?
who-Nom father-Nom rich-Q
'Whose father is rich?'
- b. Chelswu-uy.
C.-Gen.
- c. Chelswu-ka.
C.-Nom

The grammaticality of both (69c) and (70b) indicates that genitive and nominative possessors in subject IPCs are morphological alternants derived through alternative syntactic derivations from a single underlying source. On this view, both surface forms originate from a structure in which the possessor and possessum together form

a single nominal constituent.

- (72) a. [_{VP} [_{DP} Chelswu-uy apeci-ka] pwuca]ta
b. [_{VP} [_{DP} Chelswu-ka apeci-ka] pwuca]ta

This pattern accords with the constituent analysis of inalienable possession (Cho 2000; Yang 1972; Choe 1987; Ura 1996), which posits that the possessor and the possessum are structurally unified within NP. Under this account, the genitive possessor in (69a) and the nominative possessor in (69b) share the same syntactic configuration, with surface case determined at the point of case licensing—either within the NP domain or via agreement with the predicate.

By contrast, a non-constituent analysis—one that treats the two forms as reflecting distinct argument-structural configurations (e.g., a raised possessor versus an external argument)—would incorrectly predict that case-mismatched fragments should be ungrammatical. The fragment data therefore extend the evidence from object IPCs (§3.7) to subject IPCs, showing that inalienable possession in Korean constitutes a structurally unified phenomenon. Once again, case alternation does not indicate any underlying syntactic divergence; rather, it reflects a single argument-structural configuration realized through variable morphological marking, the precise mechanics of which we set aside here for reasons of space.¹³⁾

4. Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined case alternation in Korean fragment answers to address the fundamental question of what kind of identity—syntactic or semantic—licenses ellipsis. The empirical patterns reveal a clear and systematic divide between impossible and possible case alternations. Crucially, this divide shows that fragment licensing is constrained by a strict syntactic identity condition: case alternations are

13) As a reviewer notes, it remains unclear why case stacking is unavailable in inalienable possession constructions and in configurations involving embedded subjects (and in some other environments). One plausible explanation is that independent constraints restrict case stacking in these contexts. As argued in Ahn (1988), nominative, accusative, and genitive case markers in Korean belong to the same class of functional or morphological categories and therefore cannot co-occur within a single projection. By contrast, locative and dative markers are lexical postpositions belonging to a distinct category, which allows them to stack with structural case markers. This categorical distinction provides a natural account of the (im)possibility of case stacking observed in the present paper, without requiring differences in underlying argument structure.

permitted only when the antecedent and the fragment share the same underlying syntactic structure. These findings demonstrate that semantic equivalence alone is insufficient for fragment ellipsis and underscore the central role of syntactic identity in regulating fragment formation in Korean.

The *impossible* alternations discussed in §2—including active/passive alternations, oblique vs. non-oblique alternations in *spray/load* constructions, psych-verb class alternations, and nominative vs. dative causee alternations in periphrastic causatives—systematically prohibit case mismatches between the antecedent and the fragment. Although the paired constructions may be semantically or truth-conditionally equivalent, they instantiate genuinely distinct argument structures and project different underlying syntactic configurations. Fragment ellipsis in these environments therefore fails, confirming that ellipsis is licensed only under strict syntactic identity and that mismatches across argument-structural types necessarily yield ungrammaticality.

By contrast, the *possible* alternations examined in §3—including direct causatives, *siphtha* ‘want’ constructions, locative/accusative goal alternations, dative/accusative alternations in ditransitives, lexical passives with body-part nouns, embedded-subject alternations, and inalienable possession constructions (both object- and subject-IPCs)—freely allow case mismatches between the antecedent and the fragment. Crucially, these alternations do not involve distinct argument-structural configurations. Rather, they reflect morphological variation in the realization of a single syntactic position. Because the underlying syntactic structure is preserved, the identity condition on ellipsis is satisfied, and fragment answers remain fully licensed despite surface case variation.

Taken together, these results show that fragment ellipsis in Korean is tightly constrained by syntax. Semantic or truth-conditional equivalence alone is insufficient to license fragments, as illustrated by active-passive alternations. At the same time, syntactic identity must be distinguished from surface case uniformity: when case alternation reflects alternative morphological realizations within a single argument structure, cross-case fragments are entirely acceptable.

Korean therefore provides a particularly revealing testing ground for theories of ellipsis. Its rich and productive system of case alternations demonstrates that fragment interpretation is sensitive to argument-structural identity rather than to surface morphology or semantic equivalence. Cross-linguistically, these findings offer strong support for structural approaches to ellipsis (Merchant 2001, 2013; Chung 2013), while sharpening the notion of identity in ellipsis: what must be identical is the argument-structural configuration, not necessarily its morphological realization.

Future research may extend this line of inquiry to other ellipsis constructions—such as sluicing, gapping, and VP ellipsis—and to languages with different case systems, thereby further clarifying the general principles by which syntactic structure constrains ellipsis across languages.

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