Argument Ellipsis from a Cross-linguistic Perspective:  
An Interim Report

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1. Introduction


(1) a. Taroo-ga zibun-no hahaoya-o semeta.  
   Taroo-Nom self-Gen mother-Acc criticized  
   ‘lit. Taroo criticized self’s mother.’

   b. Hanako-mo e semeta.  
   Hanako also criticized  
   ‘lit. Hanako criticized, too.’

   c. Hanako-mo kanozyo-o semeta.  
   Hanako also her-Acc criticized  
   ‘Hanako criticized her, too.’

(2) a. Hanako criticized Taroo’s mother, too. (strict reading)
   b. Hanako criticized self’s (= Hanako’s) mother, too.’ (sloppy reading)

(3) Hanako-mo zibun-no hahaoya-o semeta (Kim 1999, Oku 1998, etc.)  
   Hanako also self-Gen mother-Acc criticized  
   ‘lit. Hanako criticized self’s mother, too’


Not every null argument is elliptic. (Oku (1998))

(4) Spanish null subjects = pro
   a. María cree que su propuesta será aceptada.  
   María believes that her proposal will-be accepted  
   ‘Maria believes that her proposal will be accepted.

   b. Juan también cree que e será aceptada.  
   Juan also believes that it will-be accepted  
   ‘Juan also believes that it will be accepted.’

The null subject in (4b) allows only the strict reading. (Oku (1998))

A question that arises immediately is why certain null arguments, such as null objects in Japanese, can be elliptic while others, such as null subjects in Spanish, cannot.

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Since null arguments themselves do not seem to show any overt clue to this difference, it is reasonable to relate it to some other visible property distinguishing the two languages.

Oku (1998) puts forth the idea that the availability of argument ellipsis is tied to the possibility of scrambling. Japanese allows argument ellipsis because it permits scrambling; Spanish disallows argument ellipsis because it is not a scrambling language.

The purpose of this study is to examine Oku’s (1998) hypothesis with data from more languages.

2. Some Backgrounds


Bošković and Takahashi (1998): Scrambling is due to the optionality of overt satisfaction of θ-feature checking (i.e. the weakness of θ-features à la Chomsky (1995)).

(5)  a. Taroo-ga Hanako-o semeta.
    Taroo-Nom Hanako-Acc criticized
    ‘Taroo criticized Hanako.’

    b. Hanako-o Taroo-ga semeta.
    Hanako-Acc Taroo-Nom criticized
    ‘lit. Hanako, Taroo criticized.’

(6) (= (5a)) (overt syntax & LF)

    TP
    / \     /
    Taroo T’
    / \     /
    VP T
    / \     /
    Hanako criticized

(7) (= (5b))

    a. (overt syntax)
    TP     b. (LF)
    / \     / \
    Hanako TP     _____
    / \     / \     / \
    Taroo T’     Taroo T’
    / \     / \     / \
    VP T     VP T
    |     /
    criticized Hanako criticized

(8) (= (1))

    a. Taroo-ga zibun-no hahaoya-o semeta.
    Taroo-Nom self-Gen mother-Acc criticized
    ‘lit. Taroo criticized self’s mother.’

    b. Hanako-mo e semeta.
    Hanako-also criticized
    ‘lit. Hanako criticized, too.’

Oku (1998): LF copying employed for reconstruction of elliptic sites (Williams (1977) etc.) serves as an instance of Merge satisfying a selectional requirement.
2.2. More on Argument Ellipsis in Japanese

Besides the possibility of sloppy interpretation, the availability of what we may call quantificational interpretation rather than E-type interpretation serves as an indication of ellipsis. (Shinohara (2004) and Takahashi (to appear))

(10) a. Taroo-ga taitei-no sensei-o sonkeisiteiru.
    Taroo-Nom most-Gen teacher-Acc respect
    ‘Taroo respects most teachers.’

b. Hanako-mo e sonkeisiteiru.
   Hanako-also respect
   ‘lit. Hanako respects, too.’

(11) a. Hanako respects the teachers Taroo respects, too. (E-type reading)

b. Hanako respects most teachers, too. (quantificational reading)

(12) a. John respects most teachers.

b. Mary respects them, too. (E-type reading only)

c. Mary does, too. (quantificational reading possible (or preferred))

(13) Hanako-mo taitei-no sensei-o sonkeisiteiru
    Hanako-also most-Gen teacher-Acc respect
    ‘lit. Hanako respects most teachers, too.’

In addition to objects, subjects can be elliptic in Japanese. (Oku (1998))

(14) a. Taroo-wa zibun-no kodomo-ga Tanaka sensei-o sonkeisiteiru to omotteiru.
    Taroo-Top self-Gen child-Nom Tanaka Prof.-Acc respect that think
    ‘lit. Taroo thinks that self’s child respects Prof. Tanaka.’

b. Hanako-wa e Suzuki sensei-o sonkeisiteiru to omotteiru.
   Hanako-Top Suzuki Prof.-Acc respect that think
   ‘lit. Hanako thinks that respects Prof. Suzuki.’

(15) a. Taitei-no gakusei-ga Tanaka sensei-o sonkeisiteiru.
    most-Gen student-Nom Tanaka Prof.-Acc respect
    ‘Most students respect Prof. Tanaka.’

b. e Suzuki sensei-mo sonkeisiteiru.
   Suzuki Prof.-also respect
   ‘lit. Respect Prof. Suzuki, too.’
Argument ellipsis is so named to capture the fact that the ellipsis operation in question cannot apply to adjuncts. This follows from Oku’s (1998) analysis since Merge via LF copying must be motivated by θ-feature checking and hence should not apply to adjuncts.

(16) a. Taroo-ga kono riyuu-de taigakusita.  
    Taroo-Nom this reason-for dropped.out  
    ‘Taroo dropped out for this reason.’

b. Hanako-mo taigakusita.  
    Hanako-also dropped.out  
    ‘Hanako dropped out, too.’  
    = Hanako dropped out, too. / ≠ Hanako dropped out for this reason, too.

3. Testing the Correlation between Argument Ellipsis and Scrambling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Null Subjects</th>
<th>Null Objects</th>
<th>Scrambling</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Word Order</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>SVO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1. Scrambling Languages

3.1.1. Korean: both subjects and objects can be elliptic; no adjunct ellipsis.

    Chelswu-Nom self-Gen letter-Acc discarded  
    ‘Chelswu threw out his letter.’

b. Yengmi-to e peliessta.  
    Yengmi-also discarded  
    ‘lit. Yengmi threw out e, too.’ (sloppy reading allowed) (Otani and Whitman (1991))

    Chelswu-Nom most-Gen teacher-Acc respect Aux  
    ‘Chelswu respects most teachers.’

b. Yengmi-to e conkyenghako iss-ta.  
    Yengmi-also respect Aux  
    ‘lit. Yengmi respects e, too.’ (quantificational reading allowed)

(19) a. Chelswu-nun caki-uy ai-ka Yengmi-lul ttaeliessta-ko  
    Chelswu-Top self-Gen child-Nom Yengmi-Acc hit-Comp sayngkakhakoissta.  
    think  
    'Chelswu thinks that his child hit Yengmi.'

    Junho-Top Mina-Acc hit-Comp think  
    'Junho thinks that e hit Mina.' (sloppy reading allowed)
(20) a. Taytaswu-uy haksayng-tul-i ilpone-lul al-ko iss-ta.
Most-Gen student-Pl-Nom Japanese-Acc know Aux
‘Most students know Japanese.’
b. e Cwungkuke-to al-ko iss-ta.
Chinese-also know Aux
‘lit. e know Chinese, too.’ (quantificational reading allowed)

(21) a. Chelswu-nun i pangpep-ulo ikiessta.
Chelswu-Top this way-in won
‘Chelswu won this way.’
b. Mina-to ikiessta.
Mina-also won
‘Mina won, too.’ (= Mina won this way, too.)

3.1.2. Mongolian: both subjects and objects can be elliptic; adjuncts can be elliptic, too (?).

(22) a. Batu ø:ri-n bagshi-gi hundelzhubaina.
Batu self-Gen teacher-Acc respect
‘Batu respects his teacher.’
b. Gerle bas e hundelzhubaina.
Gerle also respect
‘lit. Gerle respects e, too.’ (sloppy reading allowed)

Batu three foreign.language-Acc know
‘Batu knows three foreign languages.’
b. Gerle bas e qidana.
Gerle also know
‘lit. Gerle knows e, too.’ (quantificational reading allowed)

Batu self-Gen child Refl English-Acc speak can that think
‘Batu thinks that his child can speak English.’
b. Gerle e Fransehel-gi helzhu qidahu gezhu bodozhubaina.
Gerle French-Acc speak can that think
‘lit. Gerle thinks that e can speak French.’ (sloppy reading allowed)

Three student Japanese-Acc know
‘Three students know Japanese.’
b. e Gitadhel-gi qidazhubaihu oqir bas medegdezhei.
Chinese-Acc know that also clear
‘lit. That e know Chinese is also clear.’ (quantificational reading allowed)

(26) a. Batu en arga ber dileb.
Batu this way in won
‘Batu won this way.’
b. Gerle bas dileb.
Gerle also won
‘Gerle won, too.’ (= Gerle won this way, too.)
3.2. Non-scrambling Languages

3.2.1. Basque: subjects cannot be elliptic but objects can; adjuncts cannot be elliptic.
(See also Duguine (2006), where an analysis of Basque null arguments in terms of ellipsis is proposed.)

(27) a. Jon-ek esan du bere ama-k Miren ikusi duela.
    Jon-E say Aux his mother-E Miren see Aux (E for ergative)
    'Jon says his mother has seen Miren.'

b. Peru-k esan du e Arantza ikusi duela.
    Peru-E say Aux Arantza see Aux
    'lit. Peru says e has seen Arantza.' (sloppy reading not allowed)

(28) a. Ikasle asko-k goxokiak jan zituzten.
    student many-E candies eat Aux
    'Many students ate candies.'

b. e garagardoa ere edan zuten.
   beer also drink Aux
   'lit. e drank beer, too.' (quantificational reading not allowed)

    Jon-E his mother see Aux
    'Jon saw his mother.'

b. Peru-k aldiz ez zuen e ikusi.
    Peru-E however Neg Aux see
    'lit. However, Peru did not see e.' (sloppy reading allowed)

    Jon-E politician many criticize Aux
    'Jon criticized many politicians.'

b. Miren-ek ere e kritikatzen zituen.
   Miren-E also criticize AUX
   'lit. Miren criticized e, too.' (quantificational reading allowed)

    John-E book slowly read Aux
    'John read a book slowly.'

b. Miren-ek ere e irakurri du.
   Miren-E also read Aux
   'lit. Miren read e, too.' (≠ Miren read a book slowly, too.)

3.2.2. Chinese: subjects cannot be elliptic but objects can; adjuncts may or may not.

(32) a. Zhangsan shuo ziji de haizi xihuan Xiaohong.
    Zhangsan say self of child like Xiaohong
    'Zhangsan said his child liked Xiaohong.'

b. Lisi shuo e xihuan Xiaoli.
    Lisi say like Xiaoli
    'lit. Lisi said e liked Susan.' (sloppy reading not allowed)
(33) a. Daduoshu xuesheng zunjing Zhangsan. 
    Most student respect Zhangsan. 
    ‘Most students respect Zhangsan.’

b. e ye zunjing Lisi. 
    also respect Lisi 
    ‘lit. e respect Lisi, too.’ (quantificational reading not allowed)

(34) a. Zhangsan bu xihuan guanyu ziji de yaoyan. 
    Zhangsan not like about self of rumor 
    ‘Zhangsan does not like rumors about himself.’

b. Lisi ye bu xihuan e. 
    also not like 
    ‘lit. Lisi does not like e, either.’ (sloppy reading allowed) (Otani and Whitman (1991))

(35) a. Zhangsan kanjian-le daduoshu de Xianggang mingxing. 
    Zhangsan see-Asp most of Hong.Kong star 
    ‘Zhangsan saw most Hong Kong stars.’

b. Lisi ye kanjian-le e. 
    also see-Asp 
    ‘lit. Lisi also saw e.’ (quantificational reading allowed)

(36) a. Zhangsan yinwei zhege yuanyin cizhi-le. 
    Zhangsan for this reason resign-Asp 
    ‘Zhangsan resigned for this reason.’

b. Lisi ye cizhi-le. 
    also resign-Asp 
    ‘Lisi resigned, too.’ (?? when taken to mean “Lisi resigned for this reason, too.”)

4. Some Finishing Thoughts

(I) The data in Korean and Mongolian are consistent with the proposed correlation between 
    argument ellipsis and scrambling.

(II) The correlation is partially confirmed in Basque and Chinese, where null subjects cannot be 
    elliptic.

(III) A remaining question is why null objects in Basque and Chinese can be elliptic.

(IV) A potential solution is to assume that elliptic null objects in Basque and Chinese arise not 
    from argument ellipsis but from (some sort of) VP-ellipsis, as originally proposed by Huang 
    (1991) for Chinese. V-stranding VP-ellipsis has been proposed for a number of languages 
    including Irish (McCloskey (1991)), Hebrew (Doron (1999)), etc.

(37) Hebrew (Doron (1999))

Q: Šalaxt etmol et ha-yeladim le-beit-ha-sefer? 
    send[Past2Fsg] yesterday Acc the-children to-house-the-book 
    ‘Did you send the children to school yesterday?’

A: Šalaxti. 
    Send[Past1sg] 
    ‘lit. I sent.’
(38) TP (the analysis of elliptic null object constructions in Basque and Chinese)

Subject T'  
T  VP₁  
Subs  V₁  
V₁  VP₂  
Adverb V₂'  
V₂  VP₃  Ø  
Object