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Argument Ellipsis via C-Probing in Japanese and Korean

Overview   Japanese and Korean exhibit **argument ellipsis** by which *arguments* can be *elided* following an overt antecedent (Oku 1998, Kim 1999). Recently, a structural constraint was suggested based on parallels between ellipsis and scrambling (Kim 2019). Extending this analysis, we argue that argument ellipsis abides by such a constraint since it involves a syntactic probing from C. This consists of i) *context scanning* for discourse and ii) *downward probing* for a to-be-elided argument, in a way analogous to Sigurðsson (2011).

Argument Ellipsis   The possibility of a sloppy reading has been the major diagnostics for argument ellipsis. In addition to this, Kim (2019) suggests that there also exists a structural constraint in play. See Korean (1-2):

(1)   Suho-ka   Mina-eykey chayk-ul   cwessta.
      Suho-NOM Mina-DAT   book-ACC gave
      "Suho gave Mina a book."

(2)   Suho-ka   Mina-eykey kep-ul   cwessta.
      Suho-NOM Mina-DAT   fear-ACC gave
      "Suho scared Mina." (*fear+give ! scare*)

Although (1-2) share the same DAT-ACC sequence, (1) is ditransitives and (2) is idiomatic. Crucially, they show an asymmetric behavior as to ellipsis. Consider (3A-B) following (1) and (4A-B) following (2):

(3)   A.   ˣHani-nun (   ) notu-lul   cwessta.
           Hani-TOP   note-ACC gave
           "Hani gave Mina a notebook."

      B.   ˣHani-nun Siwu-eykey (   ) cwessta.
           Hani-TOP Siwu-DAT   gave
           "Hani gave Siwu a book."

(4)   A.   ˣHani-to (   ) kep-ul   cwuessta.
           Hani-also   fear-ACC gave
           "Hani scared Mina as well."

      B.   *Hani-nun Siwu-eykey (   ) cwessta.
           Hani-TOP Siwu-DAT   gave
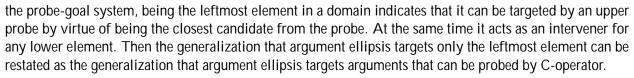   (intended) "Hani scared Siwu."

Both DAT and ACC can be elided in the ditransitive pattern, whereas only DAT can be elided in the idiom: see (4B). Kim (2019) attributes this asymmetry to a structural difference: two arguments are introduced by distinctive heads in ditransitives (Lee 2005), yet they are in a single VP for idioms (O'Grady 1998).

(5)   *ditransitives:* DAT *in vP vs.* ACC *in VP*
      [$_{VoiceP}$ NOM [$_{vP}$ **DAT** [$_{VP}$ **ACC** V] v] Voice]

(6)   *idioms:* DAT *and* ACC *in VP*
      [$_{VoiceP}$ NOM [$_{VP}$ **DAT ACC** V] Voice]

Based on this, a structural constraint was suggested: **only the leftmost element** of a syntactic unit can be elided. This unit corresponds to a *predication* domain (*à la* den Dikken 2006) and to a *linearization* domain (*à la* Fox & Pesetsky 2005). In particular, the latter accounts for the parallel between scrambling and ellipsis: both arguments can be scrambled over the subject in (1); yet only DAT, but not ACC, can be scrambled in (2). This is because the relative order established within XP has to be maintained after XP-linearization: DAT cannot scramble over ACC in (2), following (6). The two pieces of generalization are given in (7) and (8).

(7)   *Argument ellipsis targets the leftmost element*

      [$_{YP}$ aP ... [$_{XP}$ bP ... gP ...]
         ↑
        ˣELIDE

the probe-goal system, being the leftmost element in a domain indicates that it can be targeted by an upper probe by virtue of being the closest candidate from the probe. At the same time it acts as an intervener for any lower element. Then the generalization that argument ellipsis targets only the leftmost element can be restated as the generalization that argument ellipsis targets arguments that can be probed by C-operator.

(11) *Succeeded C-probing*
    [CP *Operator* [YP aP ... [XP bP ... gP]]]
                ✕C-PROBING

(12) *Failed C-probing*
                                    INTERVENER
                                       ↓
    [CP *Operator* [YP aP ... [XP bP ... gP]]]
                  *C-PROBING

In (11), *Operator* in [Spec,CP] is in charge of i) **context scanning** by which it retrieves a proper discourse referent, and ii) **downward probing** by which it establishes the connectivity with an eligible argument that is to be elided. Unlike null arguments of Germanic-type which are constrained by clause, the restriction for argument ellipsis is known to be much more lenient. In the present context, C-probing by *Operator* can be argued to be constrained by *predication* or *linearization* domains, here eligible ones being YP or XP.

Resultatives   This accounts for differences observed for Japanese and Korean resultatives as well. In both languages, two internal arguments denote the initial stage and the resulting stage with a change-of-state verb.

(13) *Japanese*
    mazyo-ga isi-o   hebi-ni   kaeta.
    witch-NOM rock-ACC snake-DAT changed
    "The witch turned a rock into a snake."

(14) *Korean*
    manye-ka tol-ul   paym-ulo bakkwessta.
    witch-NOM rock-ACC snake-RES changed
    "The witch turned a rock into a snake."

Interestingly, Korean is more restricted in allowing ellipsis of these arguments. When Japanese (15A-B) follows (13), both arguments can be elided. However, when Korean (16A-B) follows (14), only the first argument can be elided: the interpretation of *paym-ulo* 'into a snake' cannot be retrieved in (16B).

(15) A. ✕mahoutsukai-wa (   ) ari-ni   kaeta.
         wizard-TOP   ant-DAT changed
         "The wizard turned a rock into an ant."

(16) A. ✕mapepsa-nun (   ) kaymi-lo bakkwessta.
         wizard-TOP   ant-RES   changed
         "The wizard turned a rock into an ant."

     B. ✕mahoutsukai-wa kusa-o   (   ) kaeta.
         wizard-TOP   grass-ACC   changed
         "The wizard turned a grass into a snake."

     B. *mapepsa-nun phwul-ul (   ) bakkwessta.
         wizard-TOP grass-ACC   changed
         "The wizard turned a grass into a snake."

These arguments behave parallelly as to the possibility of scrambling as well: either argument can be scrambled over the subject in Japanese in (17); yet only the first argument can be scrambled in Korean in (18).

(17) a. ✕**isi-o**   mazyo-ga **t** hebi-ni   kaeta.
         rock-ACC witch-NOM   snake-DAT changed

(18) a. ✕**tol-ul**   manye-ka **t** paym-ulo bakkwessta.
         rock-ACC witch-NOM   snake-RES changed

     b. ✕**hebi-ni**   mazyo-ga isi-o   **t** kaeta.
         snake-DAT witch-NOM rock-ACC   changed

     b. ***paym-ulo** manye-ka tol-ul   **t** bakkwessta.
         snake-RES witch-NOM rock-ACC   changed

For Korean, both internal arguments are contained within RelatorP (Ko 2015). For Japanese, its structure seems to be different due to its *case*. The **dative** marking *ni* attaches to a noun that describes a result state (Sadakane & Koizumi 1995), in contrast with the designated **resultative** marking in Korean. Only the DAT one being a structurally assigned case, we assume that Japanese has a different structure from Korean for this type of resultatives, as each case is introduced in distinct domains. Then, the structures are as follows:

(19) *Japanese:* ACC *in VP vs.* DAT *in ApplP*
    [VP *rock-*__ACC__ [ApplP *snake-*__DAT__