

A typology of elliptical constructions

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Elliptical constructions

Elliptical constructions are pervasive in natural languages ((Sanders 1977, Harries 1978, Mallinson & Blake 1981), but are understudied from a typological point of view, and seldom mentioned in linguistic atlases.

Our course will give an overview of the different kinds of elliptical constructions, with examples from a variety of European languages for which ellipsis has received detailed study. In particular, we will build on some recent corpus studies (Harbusch & Kempen 2011, Miller & Pullum 2012, Bilbiie 2013...).

We will also provide information about languages from other language families, e.g. Swahili, Hebrew, Japanese, for which ellipsis has been less studied, and present various tests to help identify different types of ellipsis in such languages.

Class 1 Anaphora and ellipsis

Missing complements interpreted as anaphora (prodrop languages).

- (1) Pegou o livro (He/She took the book) (Portuguese)
- (2) O Kim pegou o livro e colocou na mesa. (Kim took the book and put on table)

The difference between VP ellipsis (*Paul went to the store but Mary didn't.*) and VP anaphora (*Mary left. She did so because she was tired.*)

VP ellipsis with non verbal antecedents: nominal (*This letter deserves a response, but before you do...*), exophoric (to child about to touch hot stove: *Don't!*)

VP ellipsis is different from VP complement drop (*I can't read Chinese properly but I try.*)

Predicative ellipsis is similar to VP ellipsis (*Paul isn't sick but his sister is.*)

Verbless copular clauses (in Slavic, French-based creole etc) are not elliptical.

Clauses with a non verbal heads are not elliptical (*A quelle heure le concert?* 'at what time the concert?')

Elliptical clause: a syntactically incomplete clause (the target) combined with a complete clause (the source) which fully determines its interpretation.

Parellism constraints between full and elliptical clauses: tense, voice, negation, case etc...

Class 2 Verbal ellipsis

Gapping: at least the head verb missing, at least 2 remnants in the elliptical clause.

- (3) Paul went to Rome and the children to Paris.
 (4) The second ship is scheduled to be delivered in fall 1990 and the third in fall 1991. (wsj-47074)

Syntactic constraints on the remnants: ordering, case, adposition...

- (5) Ion oferă mere la trei dintre copii, iar Maria tuturor copiilor. (Romanian)
 (Ion gives apples to three of the children, and Maria all.DAT children.DEF.DAT)

Semantic (contrast) and pragmatic constraints (symmetrical discourse relations).

Limited to coordination, juxtaposition and dialogs.

The complete clause precedes the elliptical one in head initial languages (English, Romance...) but follows it in head final languages (Japanese)

Has been found in some Bantu languages (simakonde, kiswahili)(Manus & Patin 2012)

Comparative ellipsis

In languages with clausal comparatives: at least the head verb missing, 1 or more remnants

- (6) She's working more than his brother. (= than his brother is working)
 (7) I suspect that they have more to fear from us than we from them. (Mars attacks)

VP ellipsis: various languages (e.g. Portuguese, Irish, Hebrew, Swahili) have been argued to have a construction similar to English VPE, sometimes called "verb stranding VPE", except that the verb raises out of the VP before the latter is deleting. Various arguments have been offered to show that these are not simply cases of pro-drop as in (1)-(2) above. (Cf. Goldberg 2005).

- (8) O Kim pegou o livro? (Portuguese, Did Kim take the book)
 (9) Pegou. (Portuguese, Took. i.e. Kim took the book)
 (10) Mama a-li-tak-a ku-m-nunul-i-a m-toto vi-atu na baba a-li-tak-a pia.
 (Swahili, mother 1Su-Past-WANT-FV Infin-1Obj-BUY-Applic-FV 1-child 8-shoe and father 1Su-Past-WANT-FV also; i.e. Mother wanted to buy the child shoes and father wanted too.)

Class 3 Interrogative ellipsis (sluicing)

Both short main clause questions (e.g. in dialogs) and embedded questions are elliptical:

- (11) Er hat jemanden gesehen. (He has seen someone-acc) (German)
 (12) Wen? (=Wen hat er gesehen?) (Who-acc? [compare *Wem])
 (13) Aber ich weiss nicht wen (But I don't know who-acc. [compare *wem])

Typically, the elliptical interrogative must have the same case as in the corresponding non elliptical clause. This is shown by the above German examples as well as the following:

- (14) —Hasan birin-den borç al-miş-Ø. (Hasan-NOM one-ABL debt take-PST)

- (15) —Kim-den? (who-ABL) (Hasan borrowed money from someone. From whom?) (Ince 2012).

With prepositional complements languages vary as to whether the expected preposition must be present. A generalization has been proposed that this correlates with the possibility of preposition stranding, but this has been recently questioned (cf. e.g. Merchant 2001, Nykiel 2013).

- (16) Per har snakket med noen, men jeg vet ikke (med) hvem. (Norwegian, Per has talked with someone but I know not with who) (Merchant 2003)
 (17) Hvem har Per snakket med? (Norwegian: stranding possible, Who has Per with spoken with?)
 (18) I Anna milise me kapjon, alla dhe ksero *(me) pjon. (Greek, The Anna spoke with someone but not I.know with who) (Merchant 2003)
 (19) *Pjon milise me? (Greek: stranding impossible; Who she.spoke with?)
 (20) Adam regularnie dostaje prezenty od kogoś, ale nie wiem kogo/*kim. (Polish, Adam regularly gets presents from someone-GEN, but not I.know who.GEN/*who.INST: the preposition can be absent if the remnant is in the correct case, though Polish doesn't allow preposition stranding). (Nykiel 2013)

Short answers to *wh* questions are elliptical:

- (21) *Who went to the beach?*
 (22) *Paul.* (= Paul went to the beach)

Yes, no answers can be anaphors, with a clausal behaviour in Romance languages (*Je crois que oui*. 'I think that yes').

Class 4 Peripheral ellipsis (Right node raising)

At least one shared element in the left or right periphery:

- (23) *Some people liked, and some disliked the movie.*
 (24) *Yonde ageta hito to agenakatta hito-ga ita.*
 (read give people and give-not people-nom there-are) (Japanese)
 'There-were people-nom who-have and people who-have-not read.'

The shared element can be a verbal sequence (*Tonight a group of men -, tomorrow night he himself, would go out there somewhere and wait.* (brwn-12426)) or a word part (*These events took place in pre- or in post-war Germany?*)

Not limited to clauses (*It was a sweet - and an intelligent dog, SWB*), not limited to coordination: *Hong Kong's uneasy relationship with China will constrain – though not inhibit – long-term economic growth.* (wsj-30583)

The full clause follows the elliptical one in head-initial languages (English, Romance...) and follows it in head-final languages (Japanese).

Peripheral ellipsis must be distinguished from VP ellipsis (*I can and I will finish this book*) and null complement anaphora (Yatabe 2001).