Argument ellipsis, topicality, and a theory of null anaphora
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What is argument ellipsis (AE)?

Sloppy identity in null arguments (e.g., Japanese; Otani and Whitman 1991; a.o.)

   ‘John gave a letter to his mother.’
   Mary-also letter-DAT-gave
   ‘Mary, too, gave a letter to her, mother.’

Argument ellipsis (Oku 1998; Kim 1999; Saijo 2007; Sakamoto 2017, 2018, 2020; a.o.)

- Ellipsis directly applies to NPs (whether PF-deleted or LF-copied)
- Observed in Korean, Chinese, Turkish, ASL, etc. (See Sakamoto 2017, 2020)

Questions

1. What syntactic mechanism underlies the licensing of AE?
2. How does AE relate to radical pro-drop (and other ellipsis phenomena)?

Parallelism with topicalization

AE and topicalization show parallelism w.r.t. wh-phrases (see Mizuno forthcoming)

- A higher in-situ wh-phrase blocks both ((3)-(4) vs. (5)-(6))
- This implies that AE induces a topic-related A-dependency

Proposal: ‘AE = Topic deletion’

Arguments move to Spec, TopicP and are elided at PF

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{1.} & \quad \text{John-wa tegami-o watasita.} \\
\text{2.} & \quad \text{Mary-mo watasita.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

- Topicalized arguments are elided under identity with the topic in discourse
- (7) refines Fujiwara (2020), who argues that AE involves some A-movement

Prediction: ‘What cannot be topicalized cannot be elided’

- The literature has documented restrictions on what is eligible for AE
- ‘AE as deleted topics’ provides a unified explanation

1. Wh-phrase

- Wh-phrases cannot be elided (Sugisaki 2012; Iwaki 2013)
  ‘John bought this? Also tell me what Bill bought, too.’
- Wh-phrases cannot be topicalized (Kuno 1973; Miyagawa 1987)
  lit. ‘As for what, did John buy?’

2. Downward-monotonic (DM) quantifiers

- DM quantifiers cannot be elided (Tomita 2016; Kurfürst 2019)
- (10) Kyōnen-wa [30 paasento miman-no] gakusei-ga ukattā. last-year-top30 percent-less than GEN student-NOM passed.
  ‘Last year, less than 30% of the students passed.’
- Kotoshi-no siken-de mo ukattā. this-year GEN exam-DAT also passed
  ‘This year, too, (less than 30% of the students) passed.’
- DM quantifiers cannot be topicalized (Grohmann 2006; Constant 2014)
- (11) [30 paasento miman-no] gakusei-wa ukattā. 30 percent-less than GEN student-TOP passed
  lit. ‘As for less than 30% of the students, they passed.’

3. Focus sensitive operators

- Focus operators like ‘da-ke (only)’ cannot be elided (Oku 2016, Sato 2020)
  ‘John only drank tea.’ Bill too drank (only tea).
- ‘da-ke’ cannot be topicalized (but see also Partner and Yabushita 1998)
  tea-only ACC drunk John-NOM drank POL
  lit. ‘As for only tea, John drank it.’

4. Exceptional NPI

- Exceptional NPI ‘sika’ cannot be elided (Iwaki 2013; but see also Takita 2011)
  ‘Yesterday, no one but John came. Today, too, (no one but John) came.’
- ‘sika’ cannot be topicalized (see Tomika 2007 for related discussion)
- (15) [John-sika-wa ko-katta.
  John-sica-top come-NEG-PAST
  lit. ‘As for no one but John, he came.’

A unified view on AE and radical pro-drop

Languages that attest AE also attest radical pro-drop (Saito 2007; Sakamoto 2017)

  John-top Bill-NOM praised Mary also praised
  ‘John praised Bill. Mary praised (Bill), too.’

Consequence of the proposal: Topicality governs both AE and radical pro-drop:

- Radical pro-drop as ‘Topic-Deletion’ (Tsai 1976; Huang 1984)
- AE and radical pro-drop can be unified in this respect

Speculation: AE and radical pro-drop differ in how Spec, TopicP is filled

(17) a. [TopP γ ... t ...] ... (AE)
   b. [TopP (α) ... t ...] ... (Radical pro-drop)

- AE: movement to Spec, TopicP + deletion
- Radical pro-drop: base-generation of silent topic + coreference

AE:

Radical pro-drop:

- Island-sensitive (Fujiwara 2020)
- Island-insensitive (Nakama 1987)
- Interacts with wh (see (3))
- Doesn’t interact with wh (18)
- Targets type (e, t) (Botič 2018)
- Targets type e

  lit. ‘Which boy gave a letter to Taro?’
- b. [Dono yosi-ga tegami-o watasita ka] mo osiete.
  which girl-NOM letter-DAT-gave also tell
  ‘Also tell me which girl gave a letter (to Taro) as well.’

Remaining issues

- Why does AE involve movement while radical pro-drop doesn’t?
- Some argue that VP-ellipsis involves topicalization (Johnson 2001; Aelbrecht and Haegeman 2012; Funakoshi 2012; a.o.). Does topicality govern ellipsis in general?