

Light Verb Complement Deletion in Japanese and Phase Complement Ellipsis *

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1 Introduction

VP (vP) ellipsis in English has been one of the most studied phenomena in generative grammar (it is assumed that vP is elided by VP ellipsis in this paper, following Aelbrecht 2010 and Merchant 2013). There have been some discussions about whether Japanese has English-type vP ellipsis because Japanese allows (apparent) vP Ellipsis only in some limited cases. (2) shows that vP Ellipsis does not occur with native Japanese verbs including *tabe* ‘eat’, *oyog* ‘swim’, *nagur* ‘hit’, to name a few. (2b) deletes the vP *ringo-wo tabe* ‘eat an apple’ with *su* inserted to help morphological weakness of T *ta*, but this sentence is unacceptable in Japanese (Δ = ellipsis).

- (1) a. Hanako-wa [_{VP} ringo-o tabe]-ta.
H-TOP apple-ACC eat-PST
‘Hanako ate an apple.’

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- b. *Taroo-mo [_{VP} Δ] sita.
 T-also did
 ‘Taroo did, too.’

However, Fujii (2016) and Funakoshi (2020) argue that vP can be elided with some particles such as *dake* ‘only’, *sae* ‘even’, and *mo* ‘also’ in Japanese, like English vP ellipsis. (3) demonstrates that the (apparent) vP *hugu-wo sabaki-dake/sae/mo* ‘only/even/also cook a blowfish’ is deleted with PF-inserted *su* in (2b) anteceded by (2a), which does not degrade the acceptability of (2b).

- (2) a. Taroo-wa [_{VP} hugu-o sabaki-dake/sae/mo] sita.
 T-TOP blowfish-ACC cook-only/even/also did
 ‘Taroo only/even/also cooked blowfish.’
- b. Hanako-mo [_{VP} Δ] sita.
 H-also did
 ‘Hanako did, too.’

In contrast to the vP Ellipsis analysis for (2), this type of apparent VP-Ellipsis (AVPE) in Japanese should be argument ellipsis, considering the extraction possibilities of AVPE (Sakamoto 2021). Sakamoto (2021) argues that VP with a focus particle can undergo ellipsis as an argument because the VP is selected by a main verb *su* ‘do’.

Based on the discussion above, this paper has two aims: to scrutinize Sakamoto’s (2021) argument to assert that Japanese makes use of another type of ellipsis related to the verbal domain, Light Verb Complement Deletion (LVCD, or v Stranding Ellipsis), as observed in British English, and to explore its theoretical implications.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 summarizes Sakamoto (2021)’s argument regarding AVPE and points out empirical issues of his analysis in terms of the nominal property of vP with a particle, inanimate subjects, and extraction. Section 3 proposes the light verb complement deletion (LVCD) analysis for AVPE with a condition that phase complement ellipsis is driven by LF copy whereas other domains undergo PF deletion (Phase Complement Condition, PCC). This overcomes the empirical issues indicated in Section 2. In Section 4, the LVCD analysis is shown to be applicable to another ellipsis phenomenon, Sino-Japanese VP Ellipsis (Hayashi 2015, Kageyama 1993, 1999, etc.). Section 5 explores some consequences of PCC for vP Ellipsis in English, predicate ellipsis, and argument Ellipsis.

2 Argument Ellipsis Approach to AVPE

Sakamoto (2021) asserts that AVPE undergoes argument ellipsis in terms of extraction possibilities, with the assumption (3) following Saito (2006). (3) is necessary because (1b) would be acceptable without (3), as illustrated in (4) (with the strikethrough indicating ellipsis). (4) indicates that *si* ‘do’ (main verb) cannot select the vP *ringo-wo tabe* ‘eat an apple’ without a particle because the vP is not nominalized and cannot be chosen as an argument due to (3b).

- (3) a. vP is nominalized by a focus particle in Japanese.

- b. vP with a focus particle is taken as an argument by main verb *su* ‘do’ (which denotes the performance of an act) because *su* selects only a nominal argument.

(4) *Taroo-mo [_{VP} ~~PRO ringo-o tabe~~]-si (main verb) ta. (= (1b))

By contrast, vP with a particle is an argument of the main verb *su* because this particle nominalizes vP, as in (3a), which allows the vP to be selected by the verb. The vP with a particle can undergo argument ellipsis due to vP being chosen as argument, as schematized in (5).

(5) Hanako-mo [_{VP}[+N(ominalized)] ~~PRO hugu-o sabaki-dake/sae/mo~~] si (main verb) ta.

The main reason why Sakamoto (2021) argues against the vP Ellipsis analysis proposed by Fujii (2016) and Funakoshi (2020) is that apparent VP ellipsis prohibits overt extraction from itself while vP Ellipsis does not. Consider (6). The NP *maguro-wo* ‘tuna’ in (6b) cannot be extracted from the deleted vP *hugu-wo sabaki-dake/sae/mo* ‘only/even/also cook a blowfish’.

- (6) a. Hugu-o₁ Taroo-wa [_{VP} PRO t₁ sabaki-dake/sae/mo] sita.
 Blowfish-ACC T-TOP cook-only/even/also did
 ‘Taroo only/even/also cooked blowfish.’
- b. *Maguro-o₂ Hanako-mo [_{VP} Δ] sita.
 Tuna-ACC H-also did
 ‘Hanako ate lunch.’

On the other hand, vP Ellipsis allows overt extraction from itself. (7) illustrates that the phonologically null vPs enable the *wh*-phrase *what* and the topicalized phrase *on Thomas* to move from them.

- (7) a. I don’t know on whom you can rely, but I know on whom you can’t [_{VP} Δ].
 b. On Matthew, you can rely. On Thomas, you can’t [_{VP} Δ]. (Thompson 2014: 25–6)

Sakamoto (2021) argues that unavailability of extraction from AVPE can be explained with an argument ellipsis analysis of AVPE because extraction is prevented from an argument ellipsis site, as demonstrated in (8). (8b), anteceded by (8a), elides the argument CP *Hanako-ga katta to* ‘Hanako bought’, from which the nominal argument *zassi-o* ‘magazine’ is extracted.

- (8) a. Hon-o₁ Taroo-wa Hanako-ga t₁ katta to itta ga,
 book-ACC T-TOP H-NOM bought C said but
 ‘Book₁, Taroo said that Hanako bought t₁.’
- b. *Zassi-o₂ Ziroo-wa [_{CP} Δ] itta.
 magazine-ACC Ziroo-TOP said
 ‘Magazine₂, Ziroo said [_{CP} Δ].’ (Saito 2007: 210)

However, his analysis is not impeccable. First, the nominal status of vP with a particle is doubtful. Japanese cleft sentences can place the NP with a particle *dake* ‘only’ in a focus position, as in (9a). However, (9b) shows that a vP with the particle cannot be, as Funakoshi (2020) states.

- (9) a. Taroo-ga t₁ tabeta no wa [NP ringo] dake₁ da.
 T-NOM ate NMLZ TOP apple only COP
 ‘It is only an apple that Taroo ate.’
- b. *Taro-ga sita no wa [vP ringo-o tabe] dake da.
 Taro-NOM did NMLZ TOP apple-ACC eat only COP
 ‘It is only eat an apple that Taro did.’

Moreover, a NP with a particle such as *sae* ‘even’ or *dake* ‘only’ can be passivized while a vP cannot, even with these particles, as in (10).

- (10) a. [NP Ringo dake-ga/sae] Taroo-niyotte tabe-rare-ta.
 apple only-NOM/even T-by was.eaten
 ‘An apple was eaten by Taroo.’
- b. *[vP Ringo-wo tabe]-dake/sae Taroo-niyotte sareta.
 apple-ACC eat-only/even T-by was.done
 ‘Eating an apple was done by Taroo.’

Second, it is questionable whether the *su* appearing in AVPE is a main verb. The main verb *su* meaning ‘perform an action’ requires agentive subjects instead of inanimate ones. Inanimate subjects are predicted not to occur in AVPE if *su* ‘do’ in AVPE is a main verb. This prediction is false, as shown in (11). The inanimate subject *sono uta* ‘the song’ is consistent with AVPE.

- (11) a. Ano uta-wa [vP ookuno kokumin-wo genkizuke]-sae sita ga,
 that song-TOP many people-ACC encourage-even did but
 ‘That song even encouraged a lot of people, but...’
- b. Zannennagara sono uta-wa [vP Δ] sinakatta.
 regrettably the song-TOP did not
 ‘Regrettably, that song didn’t [vP Δ].’

Finally, the extraction possibilities of AVPE contradicts argument ellipsis. As mentioned above, argument ellipsis prohibits overt extraction (Saito 2007, Sakamoto 2017, etc.). However, AVPE allows an unaccusative subject to be extracted from the ellipsis site, as (12) shows.¹ The NP *Ziro* is moved from the AVPE site.

¹ Note that passive movement from AVPE is banned, as Sakamoto (2021) correctly points out. I leave, for future research, the question why passive movement (a type of Raising to Subject movement) from AVPE is prohibited.

- (12) Taro-wa₁ [_{VP} sono kado-de t₁ korobi sae sita]si Ziro-mo₂ [_{VP} Δ] sita.
 T-TOP the corner fall even did and Z-also did
 ‘Taro even fell down at the corner, and Ziro did, too.’ (Yuya Noguchi, p. c.)

(13) contains a summary of previous analyses of AVPE and their issues. vP ellipsis and argument ellipsis are insufficient to explain AVPE. The next section solves the issues by proposing a light verb complement deletion analysis of AVPE.

(13)	Overt Extraction	Nominal Property	Inanimate Subjects
vP Ellipsis	✓	✗	✓
Argument Ellipsis	✗	✓	✗ (main verb ‘do’)
Apparent VP Ellipsis	Δ (subject to raising)	✗	✓

3 Proposal

I propose (A) and (B) to solve the above issues. Before proceeding to my analysis, some notes need to be made on LF copy and PF deletion. I adopt the view that ellipsis is derived in two ways: LF copy and PF deletion (Chung et al. 1995, Thompson 2014, etc.). Syntactic objects, the phonological features of which have already been elided by Transfer in a previous derivation, are copied in LF by LF copy, as (14b) indicates (NS = narrow syntax). On the other hand, PF deletion elides the phonological features of syntactic objects in LF, as in (14c).

- (A) Light Verb Complement Deletion (LVCD)
 Japanese allows v complement (e.g. VP) to be deleted with the licenser *su* generated in v position.
- (B) Phase Complement Condition (PCC)
 Only the phase head (PH) complement (v* complement, etc.) undergoes LF copy, while the others (v head complement, etc.) are deleted by PF-Deletion.
- (14) a. I don’t know on whom you can rely, but I know on whom you can’t [_{VP} Δ].
 (Thompson 2014: 25–6)
- b. LF copy
 NS: I know you can’t [_{VP} Δ]
 PF: I know you can’t [_{VP} Δ]
 LF: I know on whom₁ you [_{VP} can’t rely t₁] ← LF copy of *can’t rely whom₁*
- c. PF deletion
 NS: I know on whom₁ you [_{VP} can’t rely t₁]
 PF: I know on whom₁ you [_{VP} ~~can’t rely t₁~~] ← PF deletion of *can’t rely t₁*
 LF: I know on whom₁ you [_{VP} can’t rely t₁]

Notice that LF copy prevents ellipsis sites from extracting syntactic objects with phonological features out of themselves because they lack phonological features when introduced to a derivation by LF copy.

Having set the stage, let me turn to (A) and (B). (A) says that AVPE is derived by VP deletion if *su* in AVPE is assumed to be a light verb following Tagawa (2009), as in (15).

- (15) a. Taroo-wa [_{VP} [_{VP} hugu-o sabaki-dake/sae/mo] si]ta.
 T-TOP blowfish-ACC cook-only/even/also did
 ‘Taroo only/even/also cooked blowfish.’
- b. Hanako-mo [_{VP} [_{VP} Δ] si]ta.
 H-also did
 ‘Hanako did, too.’

This approach deals with issues of the nominal property of VP with a particle, and those of the main verb *su*. The VP in (15) is a genuine VP, which lacks a nominal property. In addition, inanimate subjects can cooccur with AVPE in this approach, because AVPE does not suffer from selectional restrictions of the main verb *su*.

In addition, the current analysis correctly captures the extraction possibilities of AVPE. Assuming unaccusative (and passive) sentences lack phasehood (Chomsky 2000, 2001), AVPE is derived in two ways by (B): LF copy in transitive sentences and PF deletion in unaccusative sentences. This explains the asymmetry of availability of scrambling and raising to subject (the movement of unaccusative subjects), as shown in (16) and (17) respectively. (16) shows that the NP *maguro-o* ‘tuna’ extracted from the deletion site lacks phonological features due to LF copy in (16b), which excludes (6b).² By contrast, (17) illustrates that the NP *Ziro-mo* can be extracted from the deleted VP before the VP undergoes PF deletion. Thus, the current approach correctly describes the extraction patterns of AVPE.

- (16) a. *Maguro-o₂ Hanako-mo [_{VP} Δ] sita. (= (6b))
 Tuna-ACC H- also did
 ‘Mina ate lunch.’
- b. LF: Hanako-mo maguro-o sabaki sae sita ← LF copy of *maguro-o sabaki sae*
- (17) a. Ziro-mo₂ [_{VP} Δ] sita. (= (12))
 b. NS: Ziro-mo₂ [sono kado-de t₂ korobi sae] sita. (Movement of *Ziro-mo*)
 c. PF: Ziro-mo₂ [~~sono kado-de t₂ korobi sae~~] sita. ← PF deletion of the VP

(B) also explains observations to do with extraction of British English *do* complement ellipsis (DCE; Aelbrecht 2010, Baltin 2012, etc.). An example of DCE is given in (18). Assuming *do* occupies *v* and VP is deleted in DCE (Aelbrecht 2010, Baltin 2012), (B) predicts that DCE has the same extraction pattern as AVPE. This prediction is borne out, as in (19) and (20). (19) demonstrates that a *wh*-phrase *which one* and a topicalized syntactic object *peanuts* cannot be moved

² LF copy might not include the extracted NP *maguro-o* ‘tuna’ in the first place.

from the deleted VP headed by a transitive verb selected by a phase head (v^*). In contrast, unaccusative and raising sentences, which contain a nonphase head (v) can extract the NP *Fred* from the VP ellipsis site.

- (18) John will [_{VP} visit Sally], and Fred will [_{VP} do [_{VP} Δ]]. (British English; Baltin 2012: 386)
- (19) a. *I don't know which puppy₁ you should adopt t₁, but I know which one₂ you shouldn't [_{VP} do [_{VP} Δ]].
 b. *Hazelnuts₁, I'll eat t₁; peanuts₂, I won't [_{VP} do [_{VP} Δ]]. (Thompson 2014: 243)
- (20) a. John₁ might die t₁, and Fred₂ might [_{VP} do [_{VP} Δ]] too.
 b. John₁ might seem t₁ to enjoy that, and Fred₂ might [_{VP} do [_{VP} Δ]] too.
 (Thompson 2014: 111–2)

Having laid out my analysis of AVPE, the next section focuses on the extension of my analysis to Sino-Japanese VP ellipsis (Kageyama 1993, Hayashi 2015).

4 Extension: Sino-Japanese VP Ellipsis

This section extends the current analysis to Sino-Japanese VP ellipsis (SJVPE; Kageyama 1993, Hayashi 2015). Japanese verbs originating from China (i.e. Sino-Japanese verbs) with a light verb *su* occupying a v head is argued to have vP ellipsis, as in (21) (Hayashi 2015). Hayashi (2015) claims that the vP undergoes ellipsis in (21b), with *su* insertion to save the morphological weakness of T in the same way as English vP ellipsis.

- (21) a. Taroo-wa [_{VP} [_{VP} Nihon-he kikoku] si]-ta.
 T-TOP Japan-to return do-PST
 'Taroo returned back to Japan.'
- b. John-wa [_{VP} Δ] {si}-nak-atta
 J-TOP do-NEG-PST
 'Ziroo didn't.'

However, SJVPE behaves differently from English vP ellipsis with regard to overt extraction. SJVPE prohibits overt movement from the elided VP headed by transitive verbs selected by a phase head (v^*), as shown in (22). The NP *Amerika-he* 'to the United States' cannot undergo extraction from the deletion site. This fact can be easily captured by LVCD analysis because ellipsis is derived by LF copy, which prohibits overt movement from an ellipsis site by definition.

- (22) a. Nihon-he₁ Taroo-wa [_{VP} [_{VP} t₁ kikoku] si]-ta.
 Japan-to T-TOP return do-PST
 'To Japan₁, Taroo returned back t₁.'

- b. *Amerika-he₂ John-wa [_{VP} Δ] {si}-nak-atta
 the United States-to J-TOP do-NEG-PST
 ‘To the U.S.₂, Ziroo didn’t.’

In addition, SJVPE allows raising to subject movement in passive and unaccusative sentences from a SJVPE site if the LVCD approach to SJVPE is on the right track. This prediction is verified by (23) and (24). The NPs (*seizika-no kuruma-ga* ‘politician’s car’ and *Ziro-mo*) in the passive sentence (23) and in the unaccusative sentence (24) are moved out of the SJVPE sites.

- (23) Ippanzin-no kuruma-ga₁ [_{VP} [_{VP} keikakutekini t₁ bakuha] sa]-reru yorimo
 People-GEN car-NOM deliberately explode do-PASS than
 seizika-no kuruma-ga₂ [_{VP} [_{VP} Δ] sa]-reru hou-ga harukani ariuru
 Politician-GEN car-NOM do-PASS NMLZ-NOM far likely
 ‘It is more likely that politician’s cars are blown up than ordinary people’s cars are.’
- (24) Taro-wa₁ [_{VP} [_{VP} sono kado-de t₁ tentou] si]ta si Ziro-mo₂ [_{VP} [_{VP} Δ] si]ta.
 T-TOP the corner-at fall did and Z-also did
 ‘Taro fell down at the corner and Ziro did, too.’

This is why the extraction pattern of SJVPE further supports the current analysis.

5 Some Notes on the Phase Complement Condition

This section explores the consequences of the condition (B) and shows that (B) correctly describes the extraction patterns of vP ellipsis, predicate ellipsis, and argument ellipsis. First, vP ellipsis in English allows extraction from itself freely. This follows from (B), assuming vP ellipsis deletes vP instead of VP, following Aelbrecht (2010) and Merchant (2013). Since vP is not in phase complement, vP ellipsis is always derived by PF deletion and permits free overt extraction from itself.

Second, predicate ellipsis, which deletes the complement of a Pred head occupied by *be*, bans extraction from itself, as shown in (25). The NP *who* cannot move from the deleted AP in (25b). Assuming a Pred head constitutes a phase (Citko 2014), (B) correctly rules out (25). This is because the elided AP is always LF copied by (B) due to being in complement of a Pred head.

- (25) a. Mary should [_{Pred} P be [_{AP1} friendly]], and John should [_{Pred} be [_{AP2} Δ]], too.
 b. *I know who₁ John should be more friendly with t₁, but I don’t know who₂ Mary should [_{Pred} be [_{AP} Δ]]. (Kasai 2024)

Finally, nominal argument ellipsis also prohibits extraction from deletion sites, as (26) demonstrates. (26A2ii) shows that the PP *darekara-no* ‘from whom’ cannot be extracted from the NP deleted by argument ellipsis. This fact follows from (B) as well, with the following two assumptions: a K(ase) head constitutes a phase (Takahashi 2011, Narita 2014), and argument ellipsis is K head complement ellipsis (Saito 2023), as in (27). (27) observes that phase complement ellipsis is derived by LF copy, which prevents extraction from nominal argument ellipsis sites.

- (26) A1: Dare-kara₁-no Taro-wa [_{NP} t₁ tegami]-o sute-ta no?
 who-from-GEN T.-TOP letter-ACC discard-PST Q
 ‘From whom₁, did Taro discard [_{NP} a letter t₁]?’
- B: Bill-da yo
 B-PRES SFP
 ‘Bill.’
- A2: (i) Zyaa, dare-kara₂-no Ziro-wa [_{NP} t₂ tegami]-o sute-ta no?
 then who-from-GEN Z-TOP letter-ACC discard-PST Q
 ‘Then, from whom₂, did Ziro discard [_{NP} a letter t₂]?’
- (ii) *Zyaa, dare-kara₂-no Ziro-wa [_{NP} Δ] sute-ta no?
 then who-from-GEN Z-TOP discard-PST Q
 Then, from whom₂, did Ziro discard [_{NP} Δ]?’ (Sakamoto 2017: 96)
- (27) [_{KP} [_{NP} ...tegami (LF copy)] K (= o, phase head)]

6 Conclusion and Remaining Issues

This paper has argued, by looking into AVPE and SJVPE, that Japanese has the light verb complement deletion observed in British English. Previous literature on AVPE had some issues dealing with the nominal property of VP with a particle, inanimate subjects in AVPE, and the extraction possibilities of AVPE. The LVCD approach resolves these issues. Moreover, the current analysis provides an answer as to why SJVPE prohibits extraction from itself with transitive verbs selected by a phase head (v*), while passive and unaccusative sentences enable SJVPE to extract a subject base-generated in a verb complement from a SJVPE site. Furthermore, the phase complement condition (PCC) is shown to explain a wide variety of extraction patterns of ellipsis phenomena, including vP ellipsis, predicate ellipsis, and (nominal) argument ellipsis.

However, there are some remaining issues. First, can the phase complement condition be extended to other ellipsis phenomena, for example, sluicing? If sluicing deletes the C phase complement, that is, TP (Merchant 2001), PCC will make a wrong prediction that sluicing cannot extract a *wh*-phrase, contrary to fact. There are some possibilities to refine PCC with regards to sluicing. One is to seek somehow a way to restrict the condition to vP and the nominal domain. Another is that sluicing does not involve *wh*-movement (cf. the in-situ deletion approach to sluicing; Abe 2015, Kimura 2010). Second, is the current approach empirically superior to the other approaches to restrict movement from ellipsis (e.g. the derivational ellipsis approach; Aelbrecht 2010, Baltin 2012, Sakamoto 2020, etc.)? (I do not handle this issue here because I focused on the validity of the LVCD approach in Japanese rather than building an explanatory theory of extraction from silence.) Finally, what is the source of PCC if the condition is empirically correct?³

³ Refer to Kasai (2025) for the antilocality approach to derive the condition.

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