A Note on the Absence of VP Ellipsis in Korean:
With reference to the putative existence of the dummy ha verb

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We consider the question why Korean does not seem to allow VP ellipsis at all despite the fact that the language is known to allow other types of ellipsis such as sluicing, fragment answers, argument ellipsis, etc. We argue that on reasonable assumptions, it is actually predicted that the language does not allow the phenomenon in question. In particular, we argue that Korean does not have a counterpart of do-support (i.e., so-called ha-support) and that in most cases, this is responsible for the absence of VP ellipsis in the language.

1. Background

(1) a. John didn’t die, but Mary did [VP e].

   J.-nom not die-past-though M.-top past-dec
   ‘John didn’t die, but Mary did.’
   b. * John-un Mary-lul cohaha-n-ta. kuliko Tom-to n-ta.
   J.-top M.-acc like-pres-dec and T.-also pres-dec
   ‘John likes Mary, and Tom does too.’

- We suggest that this is basically the reason why VP ellipsis is impossible in Korean. However, if an equivalent of do-support is available in Korean, the problem posed by (2) will disappear and the construction in question will also be made possible. Hence, it is necessary to check whether the language has an equivalent of do-support and how it behaves.

(3) ha-support?
   J.-nom not die-past-though M.-top do-past-dec
   ‘John didn’t die, but Mary did.’
   b. * John-un Mary-lul cohaha-n-ta. kuliko Tom-to ha-n-ta.
   J.-top M.-acc like-pres-dec and T.-also do-pres-dec
   ‘John likes Mary, and Tom does too.’

(4) Key Assumptions & Proposals
   a. We use the term “VP ellipsis” to mean specifically “ellipsis of the complement of T.”
   c. There are only two kinds of the lexical ha verb in Korean: either light or heavy; there is no auxiliary/functional dummy ha.
   d. Given the absence of an equivalent of do-support, the derivation of VP ellipsis in Korean is expected to result in a stranded tense affix, which accounts for the unavailability of the construction in question.

1 Under the current theoretical framework, the complement of T to be elided would be vP rather than VP in many cases. We will not be concerned with this terminological detail and keep to the traditional designation.
Organization:
Section 2: Against the postulation of the dummy *ha* verb and apparent VP ellipsis
   – the long-form negation, the VP focus construction, and the light verb construction
Section 3: On other types of ellipsis argued to involve VP ellipsis
Section 4: VP ellipsis with auxiliaries
Section 5: Conclusion

2. Against the postulation of the dummy *ha* verb

- Ahn (1991) argues that in the long form negation construction in Korean, the *ha* verb following the negative particle *ani* is an instance of *ha*-support, equivalent of *do*-support in English (see also M. Park 1994, Hagstrom 1996).

(5) Chelswu-ka chayk-ul ilk-ci ani *ha*-ess-ta.
C.-nom book-acc read-c1 not do-past-dec
‘Chelswu did not read the book.’

normally, the verb stem combines directly with the tense morpheme in Korean.

(6) Chelswu-ka chayk-ul ilk-ess-ta.
C.-nom book-acc read-past-dec
‘Chelswu did not read the book.’

due to the presence of the morpheme(s) *ci ani*, the verb stem and the tense morpheme are separated, triggering *ha*-support.

- The so-called *VP focus construction* (along with light verb constructions) has also been argued to involve the dummy *ha* insertion (M. Kang 1988, K. Choi 1991, K. Park 1992, M. Pak 2001, S. Park 2009).

(7) Yenghi-ka ppalli ttwui-ki-nun ha-ess-ta.
Y.-nom fast run-ki-foc do-past-dec
‘Yenghi did run fast.’

Note that VP ellipsis is possible neither in long-form negation nor in VP focus construction.

(8) long-form negation
      J.-nom die-past-though M.-top not-do/ Neg-past-dec
      ‘John died, but Mary didn’t.’
      J.-top M.-acc like- though T.-top not-do/ Neg-pres-dec
      ‘John likes Mary, but Tom doesn’t.’

(9) VP focus construction
      J.-nom die-ki-foc do-past-though M.-top not do-past-dec
      ‘John did die, but Mary didn’t.’
   b. * John-un Mary-lul cohaha-ki-nun ha-ciman, Tom-un an ha-n-ta.
      J.-top M.-acc like-ki-foc do-though T.-top not do-pres-dec
      ‘John does like Mary, but Tom doesn’t.’
Absence of VP ellipsis in (8) and (9) hinges on functional head licensing of ellipsis. In other words, the *ha* verb in long form negation and VP focus construction is lexical (i.e., base-generated as main verb), it cannot properly license the deletion of its complement VP.

- Apparent VP ellipsis in light verb constructions (cf. S. Ahn 2002)

    C.-nom someone-acc assualt-past-dec Y.-also do-past-dec
    ‘Chelswu assaulted someone. Yenghi also did.’

    C.-nom English-acc study-past-dec Y.-also do-past-dec
    ‘Chelswu studied English. Yenghi also did.’

- The *ha* verb in the second sentences in (10) is a heavy *ha* verb, similarly to the *do* in (11).

(11) John did the homework.
    (cf. John-un swukcey-lul ha-ess-ta.)
    J.-top homework-acc do-past-dec
    ‘John did the homework.’

- The derivation of the second sentences in (10) involves either *pro* or argument ellipsis.

(12) Yenghi-to pro (or Ø) ha-ess-ta.

- Conclusion: in sentences with a *ha* verb without the object and a lexical verb, we may be dealing with a heavy *ha* verb plus a null argument *pro* or argument ellipsis. Thus, there is no evidence for VP ellipsis here.

If this is correct, the long form negation and VP focus construction (and light verb construction) may not be used as evidence for the existence of *ha*-support in Korean, which in turn is consistent with the conclusion in the previous section that VP ellipsis in Korean is ruled out by the ban on stranded affixes.

3. Other Types of Ellipsis Involving VP Ellipsis

- Researchers like Otani & Whitman (1991) propose that a sentence like the second sentence in (13) is derived as in (14), via VP ellipsis (following V movement to T) (see also Huang 1991).

    J.-top self-gen letter-acc throw away-past-dec M.-also discard-past-dec
    ‘John threw his letters away, and Mary did too.’

(14) 

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   TP
  /   \      T'
 DP   VP
     /       \
   DP   V
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If this is correct, the long form negation and VP focus construction (and light verb construction) may not be used as evidence for the existence of *ha*-support in Korean, which in turn is consistent with the conclusion in the previous section that VP ellipsis in Korean is ruled out by the ban on stranded affixes.
However, Oku (1998) points out that if VP ellipsis were available in Japanese, then the sentence in (16) would be predicted to have an equivalent reading of (15), contrary to fact.² (See also M. Park 1994, Oku 1998, S. Kim 1999, Saito 2007, Takahashi 2008; cf. Hoji 1998.)³

(15) John won this way, and Mary did too.

(16) Taroo-wa kono hooho de katta. Hanako-mo Ø katta.
     T.-top this way in won H.-also won
     ‘Taro won this way. Hanako also won.’ (Oku 1998)

(17) a. (15) = ‘Mary also won this way.’
    b. (16) ≠ ‘Hanako also won this way.’

     C.-top this-way-in win-past Y.-also win-past
     ‘Chelswu won this way. Yenghi also won.’

(18) does not tell us anything about how Yenghi won. This is exactly the same as (16). Thus, Otani & Whitman’s VP ellipsis analysis of (13) may not be maintained in Korean.

Crucially, this means that an example like (13) does not lead us to postulate VP ellipsis in Korean.

4. VP ellipsis with auxiliaries

- We have narrowly defined the term “VP ellipsis” as ellipsis of the complement of T. However, there are instances of VP ellipsis where the elided element is not the immediate complement of T.

(19) a. Mary might have written and John might have Ø too.
    b. John is leaving, but Mary’s not Ø. (Lobeck 1995)

Auxiliaries and negation in Korean behave quite differently from their English counterparts in ways that make them irrelevant to the discussion of VP ellipsis.

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² Based on this, the researchers cited in the main text argue for an alternative analysis of sentences like (9), where what is elided is simply the object DP, not VP containing it. The phenomenon in question is dubbed by these researchers as “argument ellipsis.” We will not go into this here. See the works cited in the main text.

(i) a. John studies English hard, and Mary does (study English hard), too.
    b. John came home early, but Mary didn’t (come home early).

(ii) a. Mary-ka palli tali-ko John-to *(ppalli) tali-n-ta.
     M-Nom fast run-Conj J-also  fast run-Pres-Decl
     ‘Intended: Mary runs fast and John does too.’
     M-Nom such reason-for leave-Past-Conj J-also such reason-for leave-Past-Decl
     ‘Intended: Mary left for such a reason and John did too.’
    J.-top book-acc read-UL ability be present-dec
    ‘John can read the book. (More literally: John has the ability to read the book.)’
    J.-top rice-acc eat-UL KES-cop-dec
    ‘John will have a meal. (More literally: John is one that is to have a meal.)’

\[\text{If we elide the VP, the defective nominal elements } swu \text{ ‘ability’ and } kes \text{ ‘thing’, which always require a modifier, will be left without a prenominal modifier.}\]
\[\text{Here, the relevant modifier is the elided VP itself.}\]

    J.-top ability be present-dec
    J.-top KES-cop-dec

(22) Chelswu-nun chayk-ul an ilk-ess-ta.
    C.-top book-acc not read-past-dec
    ‘Chelswu didn’t read the book.’
    (cf. * Chelswu-nun an chayk-ul ilk-ess-ta.)

\[\text{Regarding negative sentences, there seem to be two cases to consider: first, if the VP is elided (no matter whether it is with or without the object), the negative particle } an \text{ ‘not’, which has been argued to be a verbal proclitic (M. Park 1994), and also the tense morpheme will be stranded, as illustrated in (23a); alternatively, if we resort to the putative ha-insertion to support these elements, as illustrated in (2bb), we will face the same situation as that discussed in Section 2.}\]

    C.-top book-acc not past-dec
    C.-top book-acc not do-past-dec

5. Conclusion

(24) summary and implications
a. Given the absence of an equivalent of do-support in Korean, the derivation of VP ellipsis in Korean is barred.
b. Apparent VP ellipsis in Korean is an instance of the heave ha verb constructions in conjunction with null object arguments (pro or argument ellipsis).
c. The ha-support analysis in the long form negation, the VP focus construction, and the light verb construction gains no supports due to the lack of VP ellipsis in these constructions.

\[\text{The exact structural status of the defective nominal elements } swu \text{ and } kes \text{ is not entirely clear at the moment. But this does not seem to affect our discussion.}\]
Selected References


