

On the typology of verb-stranding ellipsis: focus, identity, and movement

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In this talk, I investigate differences in the expression of narrow focus on the verb in verb-stranding ellipsis (VSE) constructions, in which a morphosyntactically complex verb is extracted out of an elided constituent. The degree to which matching of the verb to its antecedent is enforced in VSE is the subject of ongoing scrutiny, with languages falling into two groups: those where narrow focus on the verb licenses mismatches,¹ and those where strict matching appears to be systematically required, whatever the discourse structure of the expression.² Representative examples of VSE in Russian verb-stranding TP ellipsis (1) and Uzbek (2) demonstrate this contrast.

- (1) Russian: mismatch of contrasting verbs in VSE is permitted (Gribanova, 2017)
 - a. Našël li Paša knigu v biblioteke, i žurnal v stolovoj?
find.PST.SG.M Q Paša book.ACC in library.PREP and magazine.ACC in cafeteria.PREP
'Did Pasha find a book in the library, and a magazine in the cafeteria?'
 - b. Net, ne našël, a poterjal.
No, NEG find.PST.SG.M but lose.PST.SG.M
'No, he didn't find (...), he lost (...).'
- (2) Uzbek: mismatch of contrasting verbs in VSE is not permitted (Gribanova, 2020)
 - a. *Kecha bu spektakl' qiziqarli tuyil-gan e-d-i, lekin bugun,
yesterday this performance interesting appeared-PTCP E-PST-3 but today
bo'l-d-i.
become-PST-3
intended: 'Yesterday this performance had **appeared** interesting, but today, it **became** [interesting].'
 - b. Kecha bu spektakl' qiziqarli tuyil-gan e-d-i, lekin bugun,
yesterday this performance interesting appeared-PTCP E-PST-3 but today
qiziqarli **bo'l-d-i.**
interesting become-PST-3
'Yesterday this performance had **appeared** interesting, but today, it **became** interesting.'

I argue for a particular interpretation of the landscape of this variation, integrating recent work on Lithuanian (Portelance, 2020) and Uzbek (Gribanova, 2020), and pushing back against the idea that obligatory matching between verbs and their antecedents is enforced only in languages where focal pitch accent on the verb is prohibited for independent reasons (Landau, 2020; Thoms, 2018; Merchant, 2018). These works make the case that the strict matching requirement in e.g. Irish VSE lends itself to an explanation that rests on the observation that Irish verbs in VSO configurations generally cannot bear the pitch accent associated with narrow or verum focus (Bennett et al., 2019). By contrast, I show that Uzbek verbs are not subject to such limitations, and freely express the phonological reflexes of narrow focus in both full sentences and in argument ellipsis constructions, which are on the surface very similar — sometimes almost indistinguishably so — from VSE. The strict matching requirement on verbs in Uzbek VSE is therefore not amenable to the explanation for Irish elaborated in Merchant 2018, and remains in need of an independent explanation.

¹As in Russian (Gribanova, 2017), Hungarian (Lipták, 2013), European Portuguese (Santos, 2009), and Greek (Merchant, 2018), among others.

²As in Irish (McCloskey, 2011, 2012, 2017), Scottish Gaelic (Thoms, 2016, 2018), Uzbek (Gribanova, 2020), Lithuanian (Portelance, 2020). I leave aside claims about Hebrew, given that recent work by Landau (2018, 2020) has argued in favor of an argument ellipsis analysis, and has shown that identity restrictions on the verb are not enforced after all, despite earlier claims to the contrary (Goldberg, 2005a,b).

I sketch an approach to the differences in matching behavior in VSE across languages that leverages recent advances in our understanding of head movement (Harizanov and Gribanova, 2019), wherein there is a bifurcation in head movement types — corresponding to a syntactic operation and a postsyntactic operation — with concomitant differences in empirical behavior. When phrasal material is extracted from ellipsis sites (e.g. in sluicing), violations of lexical identity of the extracted material are permitted under focus of that material (Schuyler, 2001; Merchant, 2001).

(3) I know which cats John owns ⟨which cats⟩, but not which dogs ~~he owns~~ ⟨which dogs⟩.

This is usually attributed to a licensing condition on ellipsis (Rooth, 1992; Heim, 1997; Merchant, 2001) that invokes an identity relation between the elided constituent and a linguistic antecedent, and which takes distinct variables inside the ellipsis domain and its antecedent to be identical for the purposes of this relation. The availability of syntactic type of head movement in a language like Russian³ therefore gives rise to the same behavior that we find with phrasal movement out of ellipsis sites — lexical identity of the extracted material is not enforced.

To explain the VSE behavior of a language like Uzbek, I explore the possibility that postsyntactic head movement — implemented in Harizanov and Gribanova 2019 as Lowering (Embick and Noyer, 2001) and its upward counterpart, Raising — can lead to the expectation that strict identity will be required of all of the components of the raised verb which originate inside the ellipsis site.⁴ This expectation holds if the identity relation is established by checking a syntactic structure (or its corresponding LF), separate from the application of the postsyntactic head movement — for the purposes of ellipsis licensing, it will look as if the parts of the verb are simply *in situ*, and they will be forced to match with their antecedent.

Finally, I set out to integrate this approach with recent theoretical developments that bear directly on the interaction of focus — on the semantic and the prosodic side — with the identity relation in ellipsis licensing. Merchant 2018 points out that in phrasal (A-)movement, reconstruction of mismatched material into the ellipsis site is acceptable, resulting in lexically mismatched material inside the ellipsis site and its antecedent. This follows from a theory of the identity relation that permits focus inside the ellipsis site (Merchant, 2001), so long as the phonological reflex of that F-marking can be appropriately expressed, e.g. on a copy of the moved element that is outside the domain marked for ellipsis. I work through what this set of conclusions should mean for VSE in a language like Uzbek, where (a) head movement is, by hypothesis, postsyntactic, but (b) unlike in Irish, this postsyntactic movement *does* permit F-marking to be expressed on the postsyntactically moved verb. If F-marking inside the ellipsis site does not violate the ellipsis identity condition, and the F-marking can still be expressed, then the explanation for the ungrammaticality of Uzbek verb mismatching (2a) must result from the fine-grained derivational timing of focus expression, the ellipsis identity condition, and postsyntactic head movement.

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³See Gribanova 2017 for arguments that there is a syntactic head movement step in the derivation of certain verb-initial polarity focus expressions in Russian. Those word orders feed VSE with TP ellipsis.

⁴A version of this idea was first pursued in Schoorlemmer and Temmerman 2012, though the idea there was that postsyntactic head movement was a crosslinguistic truth which, correspondingly, led to the expectation that strict verbal identity should also be found consistently across languages.

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