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Phrasal Cluster Ellipsis in EkeGusii: Syntactic, Semantic and Pragmatic Perspectives

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the phenomenon of phrasal cluster ellipsis in EkeGusii, a Bantu language spoken in western Kenya. We analyze the syntactic structures that permit the omission of entire phrasal clusters, examine the contextual and pragmatic factors involved, and propose a theoretical model to account for these ellipses. Our findings contribute to the understanding of ellipsis phenomena in Bantu languages and offer insights for computational language processing.

KEY WORDS : Phrasal cluster ellipsis, Noun Class prefixes, tonal –stranding ellipsis, focus-driven ellipsis, PF-deletion theory, recoverability condition, phase based ellipsis, hybrid models (syntax+discourse), gapping, Bantu languages, syntactic reconstruction, sluicing,

Δ represents space for omission

1.0 . Introduction

Ellipsis in Linguistics refers to a sentence which its phonological form has been eliminated in discourse relative to the form that construction should have considering the meaning. There are many types of ellipsis but this paper concentrates on phrasal cluster ellipsis. The term "phrasal cluster ellipsis," as a specific linguistic concept, is likely a more recent development within the field of linguistics. The term "phrasal cluster ellipsis" is a more specialized concept within linguistics, referring to the omission of words or phrases within a verb phrase (VP) or other larger phrase, often involving elements like particles or prepositions based on identity condition as in (1) below.

. (1) A-ba-mura a-ba-taabe na a-ba-nyerere

AUG-1-PL-boy AUG-IPL-tall and AUG-CL1-slim

to-tag-et-e.

CLPL-want-PERF-FV

"Boys tall and slim we want"

. [IP [$_{DP}$ abamura abatambe [$_{v'P}$ ~~totagete~~ [$_{Bool}$ na [$_{IP}$ [$_{DP}$~~abamura~~ abanyerere

[$_{v'P}$ totagete]]]]]]

Phrasal cluster ellipsis targets more than one categorical element for deletion in either or both of the conjuncts. Ellipsis targets a predicate in the antecedent clause and will be referred to as VP-ellipsis, omission of an NP- will be referred to as NP-ellipsis, omission of an embedded clause leaving out a WH-phrase will referred to as sluicing, omission of a verb in coordinated clauses ifs referred to as gapping. While partial VP-ellipsis with a remnant phrase is referred to as pseudo gapping.

Analysis of any type of ellipsis follows on either on structural licensing as in

Merchant (2001,2004) in which he proposed that ellipsis is licensed by a syntactic head (e.g., a functional category like Tense or complementizer) that bears an E-feature (ellipsis feature). The elided material must be syntactically active but phonologically null, hence not pronounced. As in (1) above (ii) Lobeck (1995) argues that ellipsis requires an identity condition between the elided phrase and its antecedent governed by agreement features (e.g.,NP-ell[isis, I read three books and she reds four;;;;).

Semantic identity proposed by Chung et.al.(1995) emphasizes semantic/ pragmatic recoverability rather than syntactic identity. The elided material must be contextual inferable.

Phonetic form deletion (PF-deletion) approach was proposed by Ross (1969) and Lasnik (1999) treat ellipsis as a phonological deletion of a fully syntactic structure. The elided material exists in the syntax but silenced at the phonological level.

There are Hybrid models like that of, Golberg (2005) which combine both syntactic and semantic approaches, suggesting that ellipsis requires both structural licensing and semantic recoverability

Barros (2014) Proposes a Split identity condition hypothesis in which the remnant condition is new and requires that the remnant has a syntactic correlate in the antecedent with which it matches semantically. This approach will run into problems if interpretation requires a pragmatic approach meaning that it lacks the explanatory power to account for contextual enrichment that contribute to meaning making.

2.0 Objectives

This research paper seeks to identify and classify phrasal cluster ellipsis types in EkeGusii (e.g,. gapping, VP ellipsis NP ellipsis). It seeks to argue for a case of a hybrid model in analysis with an eye on how syntactic

constraints such as agreement morphology, word order govern ellipsis. We intend too, to examine the semantic and pragmatic cues for recovery of elided material.

3.0 Theoretical Background

This study adopts a hybrid framework combining: syntactic licensing under the PF-deletion theory in which the elided material is generated in the syntax but deleted at the phonological form requiring structural parallelism as in Merchant (2001) semantic identity using the E-Giveness mechanism. Ellipsis is allowed if the antecedent entails the elided clause as in Merchant, (2004) in construction grammar, according to Goldberg (2006) ellipsis as a language specific construction licensed by grammarticallized patterns.

4.0 Research Methodology

Data discussed in this paper was elicited form 10 native speakers in Nyamira county. Other data was generated by the author who is a native speaker of the language.

Analysis, arguing in favour of a syntactic approach, ellipsis sites are identified using constituency tests such as coordination and substation. Under the semantic approach, discourse contexts are mapped to enabling recoverability using features such as anaphora and focus particles.

5.0 Discussions.

EkeGusii, a Bantu language spoken by 2, 05, 669 million people (GoK Census Report, 2009) census exhibits complex elliptical constructions particularly in coordination and discourse contexts. EkeGusii being an agglutinating language makes use of extensive use of affixes in word formation such as subject markers (SM), tense markers (TM), object markers (OM), reflexive markers (REFL), verb stems (VS), applicative suffix (APPL, aspect markers(ASP), causative markers (CAUS) passive markers (PASS) and final vowel (FV). SM, TM, VS, ASP send FV morphemes are usually marked as obligatory. The focus of this paper is on a particular type of ellipsis known as Phrasal cluster ellipsis in the chosen language.

5.1 Importance of studying ellipsis phenomena in Bantu languages

Phrasal cluster ellipsis refers to a situation in discourse when multiple phrases are omitted but recoverable in context. EkeGusii is a Bantu language, spoke in western Kenya. Bantu languages have rich agreement morphology which play a role in ellipsis including Phrasal Cluster ellipsis. By recommending a hybrid theoretical approach,

combining syntax, semantics and pragmatics, means that ellipsis involves agreement markers allowing omission. Semantic recoverability through E-giveness where the antecedent entails the elided material. Pragmatic factors like discourse context and shared knowledge too contribute to the omission of some material in a construction.

Bantu languages exhibit rich agglutinative morphology and complex noun class systems and prosody, making them ideal for testing theories of ellipsis in typologically diverse languages therefore redefining syntactic theories by showing how ellipsis interacts with agreement, noun classes and verb extensions. Many Bantu languages remain understudied in formal syntax therefore investigating PCE fills gaps in African linguistic research. Documentation of ellipsis patterns helps preserve endangered Bantu languages by deepening grammatical descriptions.

Several studies have explored the interaction between prosody and ellipsis in Bantu languages, highlighting how phonological phrasing influences elliptical constructions. Manus& Patin (2011) investigated the prosodic structure of ellipsis in Kiswahili, Shingazidja, and Simakonde. Their findings showed that elliptical constructions exhibit patterns suggesting a strong syntax-prosody interface in Bantu languages.

Downing & Riedel (2011) analyzed Bantu WH-questions, noting that ellipsis interacts with focus and tonal patterns, particularly in languages like Chichewa and Chimwiini.

Achiri-Tbaoh (2024) examined NP ellipsis in Bantu, noting that definiteness and specificity, that is, marked via noun class prefixes influence elliptical interpretations showing a close link between morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The above studies contribute to broader syntactic and typological theories. Merchant,s (2001) theory of ellipsis tested on Bantu languages gave evidence of PF-deletion under focus conditions.

5.2 NP cluster -ellipsis

Coordinate Cluster Ellipsis targets more than one categorical element for deletion in either or both of the conjuncts. In (7) below, ellipsis targets a predicate in the antecedent clause and a NP in the lower clause.

(7) a. A-ba-mura a-ba-taabe Δ na Δ a-ba-nyerere

AUG-1-PL-boy AUG-IPL-tall and AUG-CL1-slim

to-tag-et-e.

CLPL-want-PERF-FV

"Boys tall and slim we want"

(Δ= totagete)

(Δ= abamura)

The pragmatic resolution of (7) above is that the contextual information that is being shared in both conjuncts is about the attributes of the subjects which are the focus. What is elided in the second conjunct is not focused

therefore does not violate the FEG condition. Recoverability of meaning is contextually inferred giving the construction a pragmatic resolution. Pragmatic parallelism condition is compiled because what is deleted is topical as per Merchants (2001) E-GIVENess condition.

In (8) below, deletion occurs in both conjuncts

(9) *Onserio Nabo a-ra-abe* Δ *na nd-eenga* Δ *n-are o-mo-kori*

Onsero May CL1-MOD-be and FOc-suppose FOC-is AUG-CL1-doer

e-gaasi o-m-uya

Cl-work CL1-good

'Onserio may be and supposedly is a good worker'

(Δ=omokori egasi omuya Δ=Onserio)

The coordinator brings together the attributes of the subjects from both conjuncts. The contextual information is recovered from the shared information about the subject. It has the pragmatics of BAE and RNR in its resolution. BAE constructions have antecedents whereas RNR does not.

The example in (2) below involves the deletion of the object *engoko* in the first conjunct and the equivalent subject in the second conjunct.

(2) [$_{IP}$ [$_{BOOLP}$*Mochama n- a- bwat -et -e* ~~*engoko*~~] [$_{BOOL}$ *na*

Mochama Foc-CL1-catch-PERF-FV ~~chicken~~ and

[$_{IP}$ ~~*Mochama*~~ *n- a- nyeny-et- e e-ngoko*.]

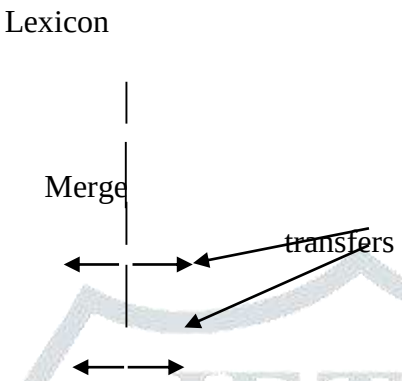
Mochama FOC-CL1-slaughter- PERF-FV 9SG-chicken

'Mochama caught ~~a chicken~~ and ~~Mochama~~ slaughtered a chicken.'

Such a case of mixed-ellipsis can be accounted for by invoking the notion of deletion at the articulatory-perceptual interface after the application of the coordination rule. The sentence in (2') is well-formed in the C-I interface but undergoes further morphological transformations before it is externalized as in (2) above. The derivation involves the move of a copy of the object (*engoko*) *chicken* to the ellipsis site in first conjunct, covertly, in the C-I interface for interpretation. The deletion of the constituents involves two distinct processes: the subject of the second conjunct is deleted by matching the syntax of the first conjunct with the second, as is the case of the deletion in the first conjunct, though the latter violates the Antecedent constraint. The semantic interpretation of the backward deleted elliptical constraint involves raising whereas for the second elliptical element there is no movement involved. Hence the construction involves two distinct deletion processes occurring simultaneously. In such case, assuming a case in which the first conjunct IP phase sliding down in order to license the deletion of the subject in

the second conjunct, and the second conjunct doing so to license the deletion of the object in the first conjunct is not only expensive derivationally but also counterintuitive.

In the current Minimalist structure after every merge move there is a multiple spellout refered to as transfers illustrated below.



When constructing coordinated sentences, the system is allowed to access the lexicon again once a CP has been constructed. After the construction of the first constituent XP, the construction of another can access the lexicon which will be another phase since the same cyclic merge moves in the antecedent clause will also apply. According to Chomsky, phases define impenetrable domains to movement, hence the phase impenetratability condition. In other words a complete clause requires no more material if it has satisfied the EPP and other conditions. In the case of elliptical sentences the the antecedent clause is already set as a complete phase.

Syntactic derivations proceed in incremental chunks, what is being referred to as phases with separate lexical arrays (Epstein, *et al.,* 1998). A phase therefore can be understood to be a construction which has completed a lexical numeration and has been passed to the interfaces. Anything being added to it is resisted by the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) (Chomsky 1999/2000) and the only space left is at the edge, Spec position through successive-cyclic movement as illustrated in (3) below in English followed by (3) in EkeGusii.

(3) [$_{CP}$ who $_{i}$ did-C [$_{IP}$ John [*v*P t_i [$_{VP}$ tk [$_{VP}$ kiss t_i]]]]] (Chomsky 1986)

(3) Niingo moraa arengereretie timanyeeti korende moraa narenegereti omonto

[CP Niingo [IPMoraa narengerertie omonto [CP ~~niingo~~ korende ~~niingo~~ [IP timayateti gose ningo]]]

Moraa is thinking about someone but I do not know who

The derivation in (3) above is referred to as cyclic derivation meaning that with each successively higher clause that is CP/IP) forms a separate cycle in the derivation of the entire sentence. The analysis above shows that it is not possible to have successive-cyclic movement step if there is no phase.

Minimalist ideas are presented in form of phases. Chomsky (2000, 2001) states that derivations proceed from one phase to the next with each phase in small chunks exhibiting phonetic and semantic properties. Syntactic computation must derive from structures that are legible both at the phonetic form and logical form since phases are assumed to bear propositional properties at the interface level. The phase theory sees phonetic form and logical form as constant levels of representation for sentence meaning but where for each phase so far created, it is submitted for phonetic and logical form interpretation.

The argument above in relation to human language production is that during numeration different lexical items come with their meanings, during the merge process these items pass through the concerned interfaces with all levels of language being involved. Phonological, morphological and syntactical activities occur between the interfaces; this is why it is said that the phonetic and logical form is not constant. Interpretations continue to change as lexical items continue to be stringed in a sentence. This study will seek to establish how the theory accounts for semantic and pragmatic interpretation when language is used in context.

Abney (1986) proposes utilizing licensing structure as a more concrete representation for parsing. According to him, it allows for more efficient processing yet maintains "the spirit of abstract grammar". The notion of licensing requires that every element in a structure be licensed by performing some syntactic function, that any structure with unlicensed elements is ill formed. Theta role assignment is taken as an example of licensing and assumes that the properties of a licensing relation should mirror those of theta assignment, namely, that it be unique, local and lexical. The uniqueness property of theta assignment requires that an assignment receives one and only one theta role. Correspondingly, licensing is unique; an element is licensed via exactly one licensing relation. Locality demands that theta assignment and correspondingly licensing, take place under a strict definition of government. Theta assignment is lexical in that it is the properties of the theta assigner which determine what theta assignment relations to obtain. It is the licensor that determines what sort of elements it licenses.

There is evidence to the phrase that the highest phrase is a phase and that ellipsis is phase governed and that only phases and complements of phase heads can be elided. Though there is no straightforward empirical evidence that phases and complements of phase heads can undergo ellipsis. It has been proven in Gengel (2009) and Takahashi (2011), among others that ellipsis of (a cluster) or phase complements is possible. Sluices provide clear evidence of this as illustrated in (4) below.

(4) *Mokeira na-ror-a omo-nto korende ti-many-et-i gose* Δ [$_{CP}$ *niingo*

Mokeira 1SG–see- PST 1SG person but Neg-know PERF FV if who

*(*Δ = [$_{IP}$ ~~*monto-ki na-rora*~~*]]*)

"Mokeira saw somebody but i don't know who".

(4) above involves IP ellipsis which is a complement of the CP

There is also evidence on VP ellipsis in EkeGusii as illustrated in (5) below.

(5) *Amache nabo ako-rusi-a ama-roba kwane na* [$_{CP}$ *kwao boigo*

Water *can SM- take-FV 5PL-soil my farm and your farm also*

(Δ=[$_{IP}$ ~~*ama-che nabo a-korusi-a ama-roba.*~~]])

"Water can erode my garden, it also erode yours".

In (5) an IP complement of the CP is elided.

Data (4) and (5) are an illustration that complements of CPs can undergo ellipsis in EkeGusii. This is some kind of contextual approach to phases on which the highest projection in the extended domain of a lexical category counts as a phase.

5.3 Phrasal Cluster Ellipsis, Right Node Raising

Phrasal cluster ellipsis involves the overlap of forward and backward conjunct reduction in which elements from two coordinated conjuncts. It depicts characteristics from two other types of ellipsis namely, Gapping which involves forward conjunct reduction and RNR which only targets a single constituent for backward conjunct reduction. (6) below exhibits the characteriscs defined above:

(6) *Onserio Nabo a-ra-abe* Δ *na nd-eenga* Δ *n-are o-mo-kori*

Onsero May CL1-MOD-be and FOC-suppose FOC-is AUG-CL1-doer

e-gaasi o-m-uya

Cl-work CL1-good

'Onserio may be and supposedly is a good worker'

In (6') the representation has two gaps which need to be resolved. The gap in conjunct one involves the movement of the predicate, given as nabo arabe' (Omokori egasi(onserio) &arabe' (omuya)**,** to the front of the representation in line with the covert movement of the predicate to the CP in the syntax in order to C-command it as an antecedent. The identity involved is partial, because the first conjunct is modalized by the auxilliary, *nabo* 'may', whereas the second conjunct involves a propositional attittude, *ndeenga* 'I suppose', which is an expression of the speaker's epistemic state.

5.4 Phrasal Cluster Ellipsis- VP ellipsis

In this type of PCE involving a verb, a phrasal or word cluster is omitted from a sentence but remains structurally and semantically recoverable from context as in (7) below.

Moraa a- gend -a ko-gor -a e-sukari na Mongina e-chumbi

Moraa 1psgl PST go fv ifn buy fv NCL 5 sugar and Mongina NCL5 salt

Moraa went to buy sugar and Mongina went to buy salt

Moraa agenda kogora esukari na Mongina Δ .echumbi

Δ- *agenda kogora*

In (7) above a VP cluster of *agenda kogora* is elided in the second clause

There are theoretical implications since here elided cluster matches the antecedent structurally.

Phrasal cluster ellipsis is a contested phenomenon in syntax, with key debates centering on its licensing conditions., structural requirements and theoretical modelling. According to Merchant (2001) PCE requires strict syntactic parallelism. Culicover & Jackendoff (2005) present a discourse pragmatic view arguing that PCE is licensed by contextual recoverability not just syntax. Fiengo & May present a structural identity hypothesis, stating that the elided material must be structurally identical to its antecedent. Whereas each approach carries some weight, it is evident that language does not operate an one level, in interpretation of any expression, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels must act in tandem, the reason why we recommended a hybrid theory in this paper.

6.0 Conclusion

From the above presentation, phrasal cluster ellipsis is a productive but constrained phenomenon, heavily influenced by agreement, prosody and discourse**.** It brings together the syntax of RNR which involves failure of antecedent relation with ellipsis site and BAE which obeys the antecedent relation with the ellipsis site. In RNR, it is not possible to elide part of a word as EkeGusii has no compound words. Deletion of focal elements in RNR is dictated by interface conditions. In EkeGusii sluices are not realized via WH- movement as is the case in English

From the above discussions, it's evident that PCE is governed by morph syntactic and prosodic constraints. This is because bantu languages exhibit agreement-driven ellipsis where subject and object markers license gaps. Prosodic phrasing plays a crucial role in with elliptical constructions often aliening with phonological phrase boundaries as in Manaus& Patin (2011, Zerbian (2006))

VP-ellipsis is attested but constrained by verb morphology (Bevis (2021) and that NP ellipsis is common with noun-class prefixes often retained.

It is evident that Merchant (2001) PF-Deletion theory finds support in Bantu languages but with modification due to agreement and focus interactions.

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