Argument Ellipsis of Focused Phrase[*]

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1. Introduction

The aim of this work is to shed a new light on the discussion regarding argument ellipsis (AE) in Japanese with respect to focus, showing that not all the cases of focus prevents AE to take place.

This paper is organized in the following way. In Section 2, I will very briefly go over the basic properties of AE, focusing on the previous observation that the otherwise possible AE becomes impossible when focus (in a broad sense) is involved. Then, in Section 3, I will show that it is not the case that all the instances of focus prevent AE to take place, and that there are cases where focused phrases can undergo AE. In Section 4, I will provide a very brief account of the (im)possible AE of focused phrase. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Impossible Argument Ellipsis of Focused Phrase

As is well-known, the availability of null arguments such as in (1) to (4) is one of the distinguishing syntactic properties of Japanese.[1, 2]

(1) a. Kei-wa   jibun-no kuruma-o   kaizo-shita.   b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita.
         K.-TOP   self-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS   N.-also   remodel-TNS
         'Kei remodeled [self's car].'   'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

(2) a. Kei-wa   3-dai-no kuruma-o   kaizo-shita.   b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita.
         K.-TOP   3-CL-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS   N.-also   remodel-TNS
         'Kei remodeled [three cars].'   'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}quant.)

(3) a. Kei-wa   jibun-no musuko-to   asob-e-ru.   b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru.
         K.-TOP   self-GEN son-with   play-can-TNS   N.-also   play-can-TNS
         'Kei can play [with self's son].'   'Nao also can play __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

(4) a. Kei-wa   3-nin-no enji-to   asob-e-ru.   b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru.
         K.-TOP   3-CL-GEN k.g.-with   play-can-TNS   N.-also   play-can-TNS
         'Kei can play [with three kindergartners].'   'Nao also can play __.' (^{OK}quant.)

Such instance of null arguments is derived via an ellipsis operation as evidenced by the availability of sloppy and quantificational reading, and referred as *argument ellipsis* (AE), and has been analyzed in terms of LF-copying (Oku 1998a, b, Saito 2007, Sakamoto 2017, a.o.).[3] Under this analysis, the sentences in (1), for example, have the representations in (5) in LF; the antecedent argument *jibun-no kuruma* in (5)a is copied onto the elliptic site in (5)b.

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[1]   All the Japanese examples are transcribed in the *Hepberun (Hebon)* system Romanization. The translations in single quotes are intended to give the (rough) structure of the examples and are not meant to be the correct English translations.

[2]   See Sakamoto 2017: Ch.2 for the detailed review of Japanese null arguments, including arguments for the AE analysis. See also Sakamoto 2017 for the LF-copying analysis of AE.

[3]   See Shinohara 2006, Saito 2007, and Sakamoto 2017 for convincing arguments against PF-deletion analysis of Japanese AE.

(5) a. Kei-wa jibun-no kuruma -o   kaizo-shita. b.   Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita.
                                                                              ↑ (*LF-copying*)

One of the curious constraints on AE is that, when focus (in a broad sense) is involved, AE is not possible. There are two well-known cases. First, as discussed by Funakoshi (2012) and Oku (2013, 2016), among others, arguments (e.g., Case-marked NP/DP, PP, and CP) that are suffixed with focus particles cannot undergo AE yielding the intended interpretation. For example, (6)b can hardly (if not, cannot) mean *Nao also can play [only with self's son] (only > can))*.

(6) a. Kei-wa jibun-no musuko-to-dake asob-e-ru.   b. * Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru.
       K.-TOP self-GEN son-with-only   play-can-TNS   N.-also   play-can-TNS
       'Kei can play [only with self's son].'   'Nao also can play __.'

Note that when *-dake* is not attached to PP, as in (3) above, AE is possible. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the attachment of focus particle to argument, which is one instance of focus, prevents AE to take place.

In addition, as first observed by Sugisaki (2012), Wh-arguments, which is arguably another instance of focus-related element, cannot undergo AE as shown in (7) and (8).

(7) a. Kei-wa nani-o   kaizo-shita no? b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita no?
       K.-TOP what-ACC   remodel-TNS Q   N.-also   remodel-TNS Q
       'Q Kei remodeled [what].'   'Nao also remodeled __.'
(8) a. Kei-wa dare-to   asob-e-ru   no? b. * Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru   no?
       K.-TOP who-with play-can-TNS Q   N.-also   play-can-TNS Q
       'Q Kei can play [with who]?'   'Q Nao also can play __.'

Note that when the elided arguments are not Wh-phrase, as in (1) to (4) above, AE is possible. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the Wh, which is one instance of focus, prevents AE to take place.

3. Possible Argument Ellipsis of Focused Phrase

What had gone unnoticed is that it is not the case that all the instances of focused phrase cannot undergo AE. First of all, what is of significance is that, the typical instance of AE are legitimate/ grammatical answers to the Wh-questions in (7)a and (8)a. In fact, (1) and (2) can be appropriate answers to (7)a, and (3) and (4) can be appropriate answers to (8)a, respectively. (1) to (4) are reproduced below as (9) to (12) with appropriate notation where the phrase in the capital letters indicate it is phonologically focused because the phrase that corresponds as the answer to the Wh-phrase – call it 'Ans(wer)-phrase' – must be accompanied by a prosodic prominence exhibiting Focus Prosody (see, for example, Nishigauchi and Hidaka 2013 for Japanese). Note in addition that the Ans-phrase is semantically focused (Jackendoff 1972, Rooth 1992, Dayal 1996, a.o.) to begin with. This makes it sure that Ans-phrase is a focused phrase, and hence the grammaticality of (9) to (12) means that a focused phrase can undergo AE, contra the previous findings. Note also that (6) still remains ungrammatical as an answer to (7)a. This then indicates that that whatever mechanism that makes (i) arguments with a focus particle and (ii) Wh-phrase ineligible to AE is not at work for (iii) Ans-phrase.

(9) a. Kei-wa JIBUN-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita.
    K.-TOP   self-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS
    'Kei remodeled [self's car].'

   b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita.
      N.-also   remodel-TNS
      'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

(10) a. Kei-wa 3-DAI-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita.
     K.-TOP   3-CL-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS
     'Kei remodeled [three cars].'

    b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita.
       N.-also   remodel-TNS
       'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}quantificational)

(11) a. Kei-wa JIBUN-NO MUSUKO-TO   asob-e-ru.
     K.-TOP   self-GEN son-with   play-can-TNS
     'Kei can play [with self's son].'

    b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru.
       N.-also   play-can-TNS
       'Nao also can play __.'   (^{OK}sloppy)

(12) a. Kei-wa 3-NIN-NO ENJI-TO   asob-e-ru.
     K.-TOP   3-C-GEN L k.g.-with   play-can-TNS
     'Kei can play [with three kindergartners].'

    b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru.
       N.-also   play-can-TNS
       'Nao also can play __.'   (^{OK}quantificational)

Ans-phrase is in fact is not the only possible case, and there are at least two other possible cases; (i) focused phrase in the so-called in-situ focus construction (Hiraiwa and Ishihara 2002, 2012), (ii) focused phrase non-locally associated with *-dake* 'only' attached to the TP (Kishimoto 2006).

As discussed by Hiraiwa and Ishihara (2002, 2012), in what they call as an 'in-situ focus' construction where a clause is headed by the complementizer *-no* and followed by the optional copula *-da*, focused elements must bear a prosodic prominence (much like that of Ans-phrase). As can be seen in (13) to (16), it is possible for the focused phrase in in-situ focus construction to undergo AE.

(13) a. Kei-wa JIBUN-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita-no(-da).
     K.-TOP   self-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS-C-COP
     'Kei remodeled [self's car].'

    b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita-no(-da).
       N.-also   remodel-TNS-C-COP
       'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

(14) a. Kei-wa 3-DAI-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita-no(-da).
     K.-TOP   3-CL-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS-C-COP
     'Kei remodeled [three cars].'

    b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita-no(-da).
       N.-also   remodel-TNS-C-COP
       'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}quantificational)

(15) a. Kei-wa JIBUN-NO MUSUKO-TO asob-e-ru-no(-da).
       K.-TOP self-GEN son-with play-can-TNS-C-COP
       'Kei can play [with self's son].'
   b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru-no(-da).
       N.-also play-can-TNS-C-COP
       'Nao also can play __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

(16) a. Kei-wa 3-NIN-NO ENJI-TO asob-e-ru-no(-da).
       K.-TOP 3-CL-GEN k.g.-with play-can-TNS-C-COP
       'Kei can play [with three kindergartners].'
   b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru-no(-da).
       N.-also play-can-TNS-C-COP
       'Nao also can play __.' (^{OK}quantificational)

Association with focus involving *-dake* which is attached to TP is another case where a focused phrase can undergo AE. As discussed by Kishimoto (2006), a focus particle *-dake* can attach to TP, in addition to other various projections, e.g., NP/DP, PP, CP, etc. What is of interest is that when *-dake* attaches to TP, as Kishimoto points out, it can be locally associated with not only TP, but also what is contained within TP, e.g., arguments. So, in addition to the dominant reading where *-dake* associates with TP, *-dake* can also be associated with any arguments, be it the subject or the object (unless it is not marked by a topic marker *-wa*[4]).[5] And as can be seen in (17) to (20), it is possible for the focused phrase associated with *-dake* attached to TP to undergo AE.

(17) a. Kei-wa JIBUN-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita-dake(-da).
       K.-TOP self-GEN car-ACC remodel-TNS-only-COP
       'Kei remodeled only [self's car].'
   b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita-dake(-da).
       N.-also remodel-TNS-only-COP
       'Nao also remodeled only __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

(18) a. Kei-wa 3-DAI-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita-dake(-da).
       K.-TOP 3-CL-GEN car-ACC remodel-TNS-only-COP
       'Kei remodeled only [three cars].'
   b. Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita-dake(-da).
       N.-also remodel-TNS-only-COP
       'Nao also remodeled only __.' (^{OK}quantificational)

(19) a. Kei-wa JIBUN-NO MUSUKO-TO asob-e-ru-dake(-da).
       K.-TOP self-GEN son-with play-can-TNS-only-COP
       'Kei can play only [with self's son].'
   b. Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru-dake(-da).
       N.-also play-can-TNS-only-COP
       'Nao also can play only __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

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[4] See Kishimoto 2006 for why topic-marked arguments cannot undergo association with focus *-dake* attached to TP.

[5] Although not pointed out by Kishimoto (2006), I note here that when *-dake* attached to TP focuses phrases other than TP, what is focused needs to bear a prosodic prominence (much like that of Ans-phrase and focused phrase in an in-situ focus construction). Without it, only the TP-focused reading is possible.

(20) a.   Kei-wa 3-NIN-NO ENJI-TO asob-e-ru-dake(-da).
         K.-TOP 3-CL-GEN k.g.-with   play-can-TNS-only-COP
         'Kei can play only [with three kindergartners].'
    b.   Nao-mo _____ asob-e-ru-dake(-da).
         N.-also   play-can-TNS-only-COP
         'Nao also can play only __.'   (^{OK}quantificational)

4. What Makes Argument Ellipsis of Focused Phrase (Im)Possible?

To summarize so far, I have shown that, contrary to the previous observation, not all the cases of focus prevents AE to take place; while (i) arguments with a focus particle and (ii) Wh-phrase are impossible to undergo AE, (iii) Ans-phrase, (iv) focused phrase in an in-situ focus construction, and (v) focused argument associating with focus particle *-dake* attached to TP which is contained within TP are possible to undergo AE. Then, the obvious research question is: what makes (i) and (ii) impossible to undergo AE and (iii) to (v) possible to undergo AE? Due to a space limitation, in this paper, I confine myself to merely suggest a possible direction to solve the issue (leaving the rigorous analysis to another occasion[6]). This is stated in (21).

(21) a.   Focused phase that must be licensed by syntactic movement cannot undergo AE.
    b.   Focused phase that can be licensed without syntactic movement can undergo AE.

For what makes AE of focused phrase (i) and (ii) impossible, I would like to assume Oku's 2016 movement-based analysis, which he claims obligatory movement to Foc-related projections (sentence-medial FocP for (i) and sentence-peripheral CP for (ii)) prevents AE to take place.[7]

For what makes AE of focused phrase (iii) to (v) possible,[8] I claim that because these focused phrases does not undergo any forced movement to be focused, and hence they can undergo AE. AE of focused phrase can take place in a usual fashion just as depicted for AE of unfocused phrase in (5). Thus, the sentences in (9) involving AE of Ans-phrase reproduced here as (22), for example, have the representations in (23) in LF; the focused antecedent argument *JIBUN-NO KURUMA* in (23)a is copied onto the elliptic site in (23)b.

(22) a.   Kei-wa JIBUN-NO KURUMA-O kaizo-shita.
         K.-TOP self-GEN car-ACC   remodel-TNS
         'Kei remodeled [self's car].'
    b.   Nao-mo _____ kaizo-shita.
         N.-also   remodel-TNS
         'Nao also remodeled __.' (^{OK}sloppy)

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[6]   See Yamashita 2018 for the labeling analysis, where it is argued that focused phrase licensed by syntactic movement (i.e., internal merge) yielding labeling via a prominent feature sharing involving focus prevents AE to take place.

[7]   See Oku 2016 for the actual analysis that that makes (i) and (ii) impossible to undergo AE.

[8]   All these three possible cases of AE of focused phrase have one property in common: phrases (must) bear prosodic prominence, i.e., Focus Prosody. It seems, however, unlikely to take Focus Prosody has a special magic that makes focused phrase to undergo AE. This is so, because Wh-phrase in (Tokyo) Japanese exhibits Focus Prosody (Deguchi and Kitagawa 2002, Ishihara 2002, Kitagawa 2005, a.o.) as well, but as we have seen, it cannot undergo AE (Sugisaki 2012).

(23) a.　Kei-wa　│JIBUN-NO KURUMA│-o　kaizo-shita.　b.　Nao-mo ＿＿＿＿ kaizo-shita.
　　　　　　　　　└────────────────────────────────────┘↑　(*LF-copying*)

5.　Conclusion

　　In this paper, I have shown empirically that, contrary to the previous observation, focused phrases can undergo argument ellipsis (AE). Descriptively speaking, those focused phrases that can be licensed its focus without syntactic movement to FocP can undergo AE. I hope that the present discussion paves the way to better understand the nature of mechanism that lies behind AE in Japanese (and other languages that allow it) and ellipsis phenomena in general.

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