

# Where to Draw Lines between Syntax and Pragmatics in Ellipsis: Licensing of Null Arguments and Adjuncts in Japanese\*

Tomoya Tanabe  
Hokkaido University

## 1 Introduction

A body of research has provided evidence that Argument Ellipsis (AE) is available in Japanese (Oku, 1998; Saito, 2007; Takahashi, 2020; Sakamoto, 2019, a.o). Still, a number of observations have been made that contexts in which null arguments are licensed are more limited than a simple AE analysis predicts. Thus, a number of proposals have been made that licensing of null arguments is constrained in particular ways in narrow syntax (Funakoshi, 2012, 2013; Saito, 2017, a.o). On the other hand, studies have also revealed that semantics and pragmatics play important roles in licensing of null arguments in Japanese (Tomioka, 2014; Oku, 2016; Kurafuji, 2019; Tanabe and Hara, 2021).

In addition, recent years have seen a surge of interests in the existence of null adjuncts in Japanese (Funakoshi, 2016; Oku, 2016; Tanabe and Kobayashi, 2024; Kobayashi et al., 2024; Kobayashi, 2024; Sato, 2024) and in other languages (Ahn and Cho, 2021; Landau, 2023; Park, 2023; Simpson, 2023). Since null adjuncts exhibit even more puzzling behaviors than null arguments, the studies have had significant implications to linguistic theories. This paper focuses on Japanese and explores the interfaces between syntax and semantics/pragmatics in licensing of null arguments and adjuncts.

## 2 Discourse condition on AE-licensing

One serious problem of the AE analysis concerns the scope interactions in ellipsis (see Funakoshi, 2012, 2013). For example, while the most salient interpretation of (1) is the wide scope reading of the disjunction (Goro, 2007), the relative scope relation seems to be reversed in (2), where the disjunctive object is null (Funakoshi, 2013; Tomioka, 2014).

- (1) Riko-wa supeingo-ka-furansugo-o hanas-anai. (<sup>OK</sup>OR>NEG, <sup>?</sup>NEG>OR)  
Riko-TOP Spanish-or-French-ACC speak-NEG  
lit. 'Riko doesn't speak Spanish or French.'
- (2) Ken-wa supeingo-ka-furansugo-o hanasu kedo, Riko-wa *e* hanas-anai. (<sup>??</sup>OR>NEG, <sup>OK</sup>NEG>OR)  
Ken-TOP Spanish-or-French-ACC speak but Riko-TOP *e* speak-NEG  
lit. 'Ken speaks Spanish or French but Riko doesn't speak.'

If AE of the object is licensed in (2), the elided clause should have the same interpretation as (1). Thus, it has been claimed that AE cannot derive the OR>NEG structure in (2) due to syntactic constraints (Saito, 2017; Maeda, 2019; Otani, 2021).

However, Tanabe and Hara (2021) point out that the difficulty of the OR>NEG reading is due to discourse factors. Specifically, the unavailability of the OR>NEG reading is dependent on the following context, where whether each person speaks at least one of the languages is the Question Under Discussion (QUD) in the sense of Roberts (2012).

- (3) QUD: Do Ken and Riko speak Spanish or French?  
Ken-wa supeingo-ka-furansugo-o hanasu kedo, Riko-wa *e* hanas-anai. (<sup>NOT</sup>OR>NEG, <sup>OK</sup>NEG>OR)  
Ken-TOP Spanish-or-French-ACC speak but Riko-TOP *e* speak-NEG  
lit. 'Ken speaks Spanish or French but Riko doesn't speak.'

The NEG>OR reading entails that Riko speaks neither languages, hence it provides a negative answer to the QUD. In contrast, the OR>NEG reading means that there is at least one language among Spanish and French that she does not speak. In other words, it may be the case that she speaks either one, but it is also possible that she speaks neither. In this respect, the OR>NEG reading does not provide an answer to the QUD, which makes the discourse incoherent.

Based on Tanabe and Hara (2021), I propose a pragmatic licensing condition on ellipsis as follows.

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- (4) Ellipsis is licensed iff the target phrase is in the background of a coherent discourse.

For reasons of space, I do not present a formal implementation of the idea and informally posit that a given discourse is coherent when the sentences provide answers to the QUD. Likewise, the notions of background and focus are also used in an informal way (see Kobayashi et al., 2024, for a formal implementation of the idea). For example, the analysis explains Sakamoto’s (2016) observation in (5). When the antecedent clause is also negated, the elided clause allows the OR>NEG reading. (5) satisfies (4) because unlike in (3), the OR>NEG reading provides an answer to the QUD, which is a negative question. Additionally, the disjunctive object is not in focus since the sentence is polarity focus in this discourse.

- (5) *QUD: Do Ken and Riko not speak Spanish or French?* (OR>NEG)  
 Ken-wa supeingo-ka-furansugo-o hanasa-nai si, Riko-mo e hanasa-anai. (OK<sub>OR>NEG</sub>, NOT<sub>NEG>OR</sub>)  
 Ken-TOP Spanish-or-French-ACC speak-NEG and Riko-ALSO e speak-NEG  
 lit. ‘Ken does not speak Spanish or French, and Riko doesn’t speak, either.’

### 3 Licensing of null adjuncts

The currently heated discussion on the syntax of Japanese null adjuncts was provoked by Oku’s (1998) observation in (6). Oku (1998) reports that the second clause of (6) does not seem to have the Adjunct-Inclusive (AI) reading (Oku, 1998).

- (6) Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e kuruma-o araw-anak-atta. (?? AI reading)  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP car-ACC wash-NEG-PST  
 lit ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wash a car.’

By contrast, (7) shows that the AI reading is available if the object is elided along with the adjunct (Funakoshi, 2016).

- (7) Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e e araw-anak-atta. (OK AI reading)  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP wash-NEG-PST  
 lit ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wash.’

Funakoshi (2016) argues that the contrast is explained if we assume that the elided clause in (7) (but not (6)) is derived via V-stranding VP-ellipsis (VSVPE) as depicted in (8); VP is elided after V raising (see also Hayashi and Fujii, 2015).

- (8) [<sub>TP</sub> Subject [<sub>VP</sub> Adjunct Object <sub>t<sub>V</sub></sub>] V-T]

Further, Funakoshi claims that the observation in (9) supports the VSVPE analysis. The AI reading is obtained with an overt object when it is contrastively focused. Funakoshi analyzes the elided clause of (9) as in (10), in which the contrastively focused object moves out of VP to a focus position (see also Simpson et al., 2013; Simpson, 2023).

- (9) Yuki-wa teineini sono-kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e KONO-kuruma-o arat-ta. (OK AI reading)  
 Yuki-TOP carefully that-car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP this-car-ACC wash-PST  
 lit. ‘Yuki washed that car carefully but Mamoru washed this car.’

- (10) [<sub>XP</sub> Subject [<sub>FocP</sub> Object [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> Adjunct <sub>t<sub>Object</sub></sub> <sub>t<sub>V</sub></sub>] ] ] ]

On the other hand, Oku (2016) suggests that the observations in (7) and (9) are explained by Kuno’s (1982) discourse principle in (11), which penalizes ellipsis of only one of the two (or more) recoverable materials (see also Landau, 2023).

- (11) *Ban Against Partial Discourse Deletion*  
 If discourse deletion of recoverable constituents is to apply, apply it across the board to nonfocus constituents. Nonfocus constituents which are left behind by partial discourse deletion will be reinterpreted, if possible, as representing contrastive foci (Kuno, 1982, p. 84–85).

In a nutshell, the AI reading is not obtained in (6) because (11) is violated; a recoverable non-focused object is retained, whereas the other recoverable element, namely the adjunct is elided. In contrast, the AI reading is available in (7) since the non-focused object is also null, and in (9), the overt object is focused, hence it cannot be elided to begin with.

However, Funakoshi (2016) rejects the line of discourse-pragmatic analysis. Funakoshi (2016) rebuts that the pragmatic analysis does not explain a series of examples instantiated by (12) (see examples (26) and (27) in Funakoshi (2016, p. 122–123)). The elided sentence in (12) does not seem to have the AI reading even though (11) is not violated; the object and the predicate are not recoverable from the antecedent, hence retention of them does not violate (11).

- (12) Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e sara-o huk-anak-atta. (?? AI reading)  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP dish-ACC wipe-NEG-PST  
 lit. ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wipe the dishes.’

At the first glance, (12) seems to show that licensing of null adjuncts is better captured by the VSVPE analysis. Yet, once the discourse condition in (4) is taken into account, it turns out that (12) does not support the VSVPE analysis. The question is in what context(s), do the sentences form a coherent discourse? Notice that it is not easy to set up a natural context where the sentences are interpreted in a coherent discourse. Consider one likely context in (13). We immediately notice that the second clause is unacceptable in that it does not contribute to resolving the QUD. That is, the QUD asks what Mamoru did carefully, but the sentence provides only the information about what he did not do carefully.

(13) *QUD: What is it that Yuki and Mamoru did in a careful manner?*

Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, #Mamoru-wa teineini sara-o huk-anak-atta.  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP carefully dish-ACC wipe-NEG-PST  
 ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wipe the dishes carefully.’

Now, (14) is one possible context where the example can be interpreted in a coherent discourse. With this context in mind, it is actually not impossible to get the AI reading. In (14), the condition (4) is satisfied. The AI reading provides an appropriate negative answer to the QUD, and the sentences are polarity focus, hence the adjunct is in the background.

(14) *QUD: Did Yuki and Mamoru do what they should do in a careful manner?*

Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e sara-o huk-anak-atta. (?AI reading)  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP dish-ACC wipe-NEG-PST  
 lit. ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wipe the dishes.’

(15) instantiates a more natural discourse context, which makes the same point.

(15) Context: Yuki and Mamoru are elementary school kids. Yuki was supposed to wash a car and Mamoru was supposed to wipe dishes on that day. Their homeroom teacher reports how they were doing to their parents.

*QUD: Did Yuki and Mamoru do what they should do in a careful manner?*

- a. Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o ara-te-masi-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e sara-o hui-te-mas-en-desi-ta.  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-ASP-POL-PST but Mamoru-TOP dish-ACC wipe-ASP-POL-NEG-COP-PST  
 lit. ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wipe the dishes.’ (OKAI reading)
- b. Mamoru-ga hui-ta ato-no sara-wa nurete-masi-ta.  
 Mamoru-NOM wipe-PST after-GEN dish-TOP wet-POL-PST  
 ‘The dishes that Mamoru wiped were wet.’

The current analysis straightforwardly accounts for data like (9). The AI reading is obtained in the context in (16). Since the object-focus clauses are naturally interpreted as answers to the QUD, the backgrounded adjunct can be elided.

(16) *QUD: Which car did Yuki and Mamoru wash carefully?*

Yuki-wa teineini sono-kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e KONO-kuruma-o arat-ta.  
 Yuki-TOP carefully that-car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP this-car-ACC wash-PST  
 lit. ‘Yuki washed that car carefully, but Mamoru washed this car.’ (OKAI reading)

## 4 Exploring the role of syntax in licensing of null adjuncts

I showed that licensing of null arguments and adjuncts must satisfy condition (4): the target of ellipsis must be backgrounded in a coherent discourse. Yet, important questions remain as to the role of syntax in licensing of null adjuncts.

Firstly, it has recently been a subject of debate whether semantic recovery of missing adjuncts require syntactically represented null adjuncts. As is standard in generative literature on ellipsis, structural approaches posit that the meaning of unexpressed adjuncts is recovered through the mapping of phonetically null syntactic structure of adjuncts onto their semantic representations (Funakoshi, 2016; Oku, 2016; Sato and Hayashi, 2018; Kobayashi, 2020, 2024; Sato and Maeda, 2021; Tanabe and Kobayashi, 2023, 2024). On the other hand, scholars such as Ahn and Cho (2021) and Landau (2023) claim that the meaning of missing adjuncts is recovered via a purely pragmatic process called *Pragmatic Enrichment* in the sense of Recanati (2010), which does not require null adjuncts in syntax.

However, such a non-structural, purely pragmatic approach, faces a crucial problem pointed out by Simpson (2023):

(17) The pragmatic-enrichment approach to null-adverbial interpretations has no plausible way to account for the cross-linguistic variation found with such interpretations, since general processes of pragmatic enrichment can be assumed to be equally available to speakers of all languages and are not parametrizable in the way that specific syntactic phenomena such as verb movement may be (Simpson, 2023, p. 445–446).

Sato (2024) concurs with Simpson (2023) and presents cross-linguistic investigations into null object constructions and

VP-ellipsis constructions (see also Simpson et al., 2013). Based on the results, Sato also argues that the cross-linguistic variations concerning the availability of AI readings are unexplained by the purely pragmatic approach.

On the other hand, if the structural approach is correct, a question arises as to how null adjuncts are derived. To this day, two possibilities have been proposed. One approach is to assume that null adjuncts are derived via an application of *Adjunct Ellipsis (AdjE)* to adjuncts as in (18) (Oku, 2016; Kobayashi, 2020, 2024; Tanabe and Kobayashi, 2023).

(18) [TP Subject [TP [VP ~~Adjunct~~ [VP Object V] ] T] ]

However, until very recently, the prevailing assumption since Oku (1998) was that ellipsis can target arguments but it cannot target adjuncts (Takita, 2011; Sugisaki, 2013; Hayashi and Fujii, 2015; Funakoshi, 2016; Sato and Hayashi, 2018; Abe, 2019; Takahashi, 2020; Sato and Maeda, 2021, a.o). It is perhaps for this reason that a body of studies have argued that null adjuncts are derived via ellipsis of larger phrases that contain them rather than by applying ellipsis to the adjuncts themselves (Funakoshi, 2016; Hayashi and Fujii, 2015; Sato and Hayashi, 2018; Sato and Maeda, 2021). For instance, the VSVPE analysis of Funakoshi (2016) is repeated below as (19); VP containing the adjunct is elided after V-raising.

(19) [TP Subject [~~VP Adjunct Object~~  $t_V$ ] V-T]

Yet, as correctly pointed out by Takahashi (2006, 2014) and Saito (2007, 2017), the impossibility of AdjE, if real, raises a question of why ellipsis is constrained in that way.

In fact, Tanabe and Kobayashi (2024) critically point out that the long-standing assumption on the ban on AdjE is actually dubious and demonstrate that null adjuncts are widely observed in syntactic contexts where VSVPE is unavailable. To name just one instance, consider (20). The adjunct *oya-no tame-ni* ‘for other people’ is unexpressed in (20b), but it naturally allows the AI reading. (20c) is compatible only with the AI reading. Hence, if (20b) did not have the AI reading, (20c) would sound contradictory.

- (20) a. Kazuya-wa kotosi [oya-no tame-ni] iti-en-mo tukaw-anak-atta.  
 Kazuya-TOP this.year parents-GEN sake-DAT one-yen-even spend-NEG-PST  
 ‘Kazuya did not spend even one yen for other people this year.’  
 b. Ooganemoti-ni nat-ta ato-demo iti-en-mo tukaw-anak-atta. (<sup>OK</sup>AI reading)  
 super.rich-DAT become-PST after-even one-yen-even spend-NEG-PST  
 lit. ‘Even after he became super rich, he did not spend even one yen.’  
 c. Zibun-no tame-nara hyakuman-en demo tameraw-azu tukat-ta kedo.  
 self-GEN sake-if one.million-yen even hesitate-NEG spend-PST though  
 ‘He spent even a million yen for himself without hesitation, though.’

(20b) cannot be analyzed as a case of VSVPE in (21)=(10) with a focus movement of the object because the object *iti-en-mo* ‘even one yen’ is not contrasted with the one in the antecedent (20a).

(21) [XP Subject [FocP Object [TP [~~VP Adjunct~~  $t_{Object}$   $t_V$ ] V-T] ] ]

Moreover, the VSVPE analysis cannot explain the AI reading in (20b) even if the minimizer *iti-en-mo* ‘even one yen’ is focused in some sense, and it moves out of the VP to a focus position as in (22). This is because such an analysis makes a wrong prediction with respect to NPI licensing. If the NPI undergoes focus movement out of the scope of negation (highlighted in gray), it should not be licensed by NEG which does not c-command it.

(22) \* [XP Subject [FocP NPI [TP [~~NegP~~ [~~VP Adjunct~~  $t_{NPI}$   $t_V$ ]  $t_{V-NEG}$ ] V-NEG-T] ] ]

Thus, as long as the structural approach is correct, (20) supports the AdjE analysis in (23); ellipsis applies to the adjunct.

(23) [XP Subject [TP [~~NegP~~ [VP ~~Adjunct~~ NPI V] NEG] T] ]

As a matter of fact, Japanese may not be alone in having AdjE. Collins (2015, 2017) propose an AdjE analysis of null adjuncts in English and Woo Park and Kwan Park (2018) and Park (2022, 2023) propose an AdjE analysis in Korean.

However, as discussed in Tanabe and Kobayashi (2024), if AdjE is in principle available in Japanese (or in natural languages in general), a question remains as to how the contrast between (24) and (25) is explained. Both satisfy the discourse condition in (4); the targets of ellipsis are in the background of a coherent discourse, and yet there seems to be a clear contrast between (24) and (25) regarding the possibility of including the elided phrase in the interpretation.

- (24) QUD: Did Yuki and Mamoru wash a car in a careful manner?  
 Yuki-wa teineini kuruma-o arat-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e kuruma-o araw-anak-atta. (??AI reading)  
 Yuki-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST but Mamoru-TOP car-ACC wash-NEG-PST  
 lit ‘Yuki washed a car carefully, but Mamoru didn’t wash a car.’

(25) QUD: Did Yuki and Mamoru give a car to their father?

Yuki-wa titioya-ni kuruma-o age-ta kedo, Mamoru-wa e kuruma-o age-nak-atta.  
Yuki-TOP father-DAT car-ACC give-PST but Mamoru-TOP car-ACC give-NEG-PST  
OK: ‘Yuki gave her father a car, but Mamoru didn’t give his father a car.’

One may take the contrast as evidence that AE exists as a syntactic mechanism which derives null arguments, whereas there is no such operation as AdjE, and hence recovery of missing adjuncts is more severely restricted by discourse factors.

However, if this is the case, cases like (20) where VSVPE is not an option must be accounted for by a non-structural approach. As mentioned above, such approaches inevitably face problems pointed out by Simpson (2023) and Sato (2024). Given this, I leave further investigations into AdjE for future research, but I suggest that before concluding on the impossibility of AdjE, we must carefully investigate the interfaces of syntax and semantics/pragmatics with the other module, namely the PF component of grammar. The first step toward this direction was taken by Kobayashi et al. (2024).

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