

Argument ellipsis in Zazaki: a problem for the anti-agreement theory

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Introduction: This paper argues against the anti-agreement theory of argument ellipsis, according to which the availability of argument ellipsis (AE) in a language is determined by the presence or absence of ϕ -agreement with arguments (Saito 2007). Drawing on evidence from the split ergative language Zazaki (Northwestern Iranian), I show that null objects may undergo AE, and that null subjects may not, regardless of whether the subject or the object agrees with the verb. I propose an alternative analysis of subject-object asymmetries in Zazaki AE in terms of the topicality of subjects in the language, a factor that was argued by Sato (2016) to play a role in the availability of AE in languages that lack overt ϕ -agreement. Although Sato allows for both agreement and an operator-variable topic chain to block AE, I conclude that agreement does not block AE.

The anti-agreement theory of argument ellipsis: Many languages permit *argument ellipsis* (AE). In such languages, null possessed or quantificational NPs permit sloppy and quantificational interpretations that are unattested with overt pronouns, thus suggesting an analysis in terms of ellipsis (Takahashi 2008). One prominent theory that attempts to explain the distribution of AE in the world's languages is Saito's (2007) *anti-agreement theory*, according to which AE of some argument will only be possible in a language if nothing undergoes ϕ -agreement with that argument. This theory correctly predicts that languages like Japanese, which lack verbal agreement with any argument, permit ellipsis of both subjects and objects. What's more, Şener & Takahashi (2010) and Sato & Karimi (2016) show that the anti-agreement theory correctly predicts that objects, but not subjects, may undergo AE in Turkish and Persian, respectively, due to the fact that these languages possess subject-verb agreement.

Argument ellipsis in Zazaki: Zazaki (Northwestern Iranian) permits argument ellipsis: null possessed objects may receive sloppy or quantificational readings, in which the entity or quantified NP in the ellipsis site has a different referent from the one in the antecedent sentence. This stands in contrast with sentences with an overt pronoun, which only allow strict or referential (E-type) readings.

(1) Sloppy readings with null object but not with overt pronoun

- a. Muhsin malım-ē xo vën-en-o
Muhsin teacher-ez.3.sg.m self see-pres.ind-3.sg.m
'Muhsin sees his teacher'
- b. Rıza ki vën-en-o c. Rıza ki ey vën-en-o
Rıza also see-pres.ind-3.sg.m Rıza also 3.sg.obl see-pres.ind-3.sg.m
'Rıza also sees' (strict/sloppy) 'Rıza also sees him' (strict only)

(2) Quantificational readings with null object but not with overt pronoun

- a. Muhsin hirē malım-an dawet k-en-o.
Muhsin three teacher-obl.pl invitation do-pres.ind-3.sg.m.
'Muhsin will invite three teachers'
- b. Rıza ki dawet k-en-o c. Rıza ki inan dawet k-en-o
Rıza also invitation do-pres.ind-3.sg.m. Rıza also 3.pl.obl invitation do-pres.ind-3.sg.m
'Rıza will also invite' (Quant / E-type) 'Rıza will also invite them' (E-type only)

(3) No sloppy readings with null subjects

- a. Muhsin-i vat ke dost-ē xo oda ken-o pak
Muhsin-obl.sg.m said that friend-ez.sg.m self room do-3.sg.m. clean
'Muhsin said that his friend cleans the room'
- b. Rıza-y vat ke banyo-y k-en-o pak
Rıza-obl.sg.m said that bathroom-obl.sg.m do-pres.ind-3.sg.m clean
'Rıza said that cleans the bathroom' (strict only)
- c. Rıza-y vat ke o banyo-y ken-o pak
Rıza-obl.sg.m said that he/she bathroom-obl.sg.m do-3.sg.m clean
'Rıza said that he cleans the bathroom' (strict only)

(4) No quantificational readings with subjects

- a. Muhsin-i vat ke hirē telebe-y İngılızki wanen-ē
Muhsin-obl.sg.m said that three student-dir.pl English read-3.pl
'Muhsin said that three students study English'

- b. R1za-y vat ke Fransızki wanen-ē c. Reza-y vat ke ē Fransızki wanen-ē
 R1za-obl.sg.m said that French read-3.pl R1za-obl.sg.m said that 3.pl French read-3.pl
 ‘R1za said that study French’ (E-type only) ‘R1za said that they study French’ (E-type only)

Zazaki is *split ergative*: the verb agrees with the subject in the imperfective aspect, but with the *object* in the perfective aspect. The anti-agreement theory predicts that AE should not be possible with objects in the perfective aspect, but should be possible with subjects. This is because the verb agrees with the object, but not with the subject. However, *this prediction is not borne out*. The object may undergo AE, but the subject may not, just like in the imperfective aspect.

(5) Sloppy readings permitted with objects in perfective

- a. Muhsin-i dost-ē xo di-y b. R1za-y ki di-y
 Muhsin-obl.sg.m friend-ez.3.pl self saw-3.pl R1za-obl.sg.m also saw-3.pl
 ‘Muhsin saw his friends yesterday’ ‘R1za also saw’ (strict/sloppy)

(6) Quantificational readings permitted with objects in perfective

- a. Muhsin-i hirē malım-i dawet kerd-i b. R1za-y ki dawet kerd-i
 Muhsin-obl.sg.m. three teacher-dir.pl invitation did-3.pl. R1za-obl.sg.m also invitation did-3.pl
 ‘Muhsin invited three teachers’ ‘R1za also invited’ (Quant/E-type)

(7) No sloppy readings for subjects in perfective

- a. Muhsin-i vat ke dost-ē xo oda kerd-e pak-e
 Muhsin-obl.sg.m said that friend-EZ.sg.m self room did-3.sg.f. clean-sg.f
 ‘Muhsin said that his friend cleaned the room’
 b. R1za-y vat ke banyo kerd-e pak-e
 R1za-obl.sg.m said that bathroom do-3.sg.f clean-sg.f
 ‘R1za said that cleans the bathroom’ (strict only)

(8) No quantificational readings for subjects in the perfective

- a. Muhsin-i vat ke hirē țeleb-an İngılızki wend
 Muhsin-obl.sg.m said that three student-obl.pl English read.3.sg
 ‘Muhsin said that three students study English’
 b. R1za-y vat ke Fransızki wend
 R1za-obl.sg.m said that French read.3.sg
 ‘R1za said that study French’ (E-type only)

These data are also problematic for Otaki’s (2014) claim that only languages with non-fusional case morphology permit AE. This is because, as the glosses above reveal, Zazaki case morphology is, in fact, fusional: case, number, and gender are all expressed in a single morpheme.

An alternative: I propose, following Saito’s (2015) treatment of the unavailability of AE with Japanese *wh*-words and Sato’s (2016) account of subject-object asymmetries in AE in Colloquial Singapore English, that subjects in Zazaki are in an operator-variable chain with the topic position. Such an analysis is in line with Zazaki’s preference for definite subjects, a property that also holds of subjects in Mandarin (Sato 2012) and Turkish (Aygen 1999). This explains the unavailability of AE in subject position in Zazaki while avoiding the problematic predictions of the anti-agreement theory.

Conclusion: In this paper, I have demonstrated that the anti-agreement theory makes incorrect predictions about the availability of argument ellipsis in Zazaki; although the anti-agreement theory predicts that objects, but not subjects, should permit AE in the imperfective aspect, while subjects, but not objects, should permit it in the perfective aspect, Zazaki permits object AE, and disallows subject AE, regardless of which argument agrees with the verb. I have proposed that it is not agreement, but topichood, which blocks subject AE in Zazaki. Although previous approaches that invoke topichood as a possible factor blocking AE also permit agreement to block AE, the Zazaki data presented here present an argument in favor of eliminating agreement as a factor conditioning the availability of AE in languages that permit it.

Selected References: Otaki, K. (2014). Ellipsis of Arguments: Its Acquisition and Theoretical Implications. Saito, M. (2007). Notes on East Asian argument ellipsis. *Language Research*, 43(2), 203-227; Sato, Y. (2016). Remarks on the Parameters of Argument Ellipsis: A New Perspective from Colloquial Singapore English. *Syntax*, 19(4), 392-411; Sato, Y., & Karimi, S. (2016). Subject-object asymmetries in Persian argument ellipsis and the anti-agreement theory. *Glossa* 1(1); Şener, S., & Takahashi, D. (2010). Ellipsis of arguments in Japanese and Turkish. *Nanzan Linguistics*, 6, 79-99.