

# Merge, Selection, and Ellipsis-Resistant Constituents

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## 1. Introduction: an issue

It has been generally assumed, since Oku (1998), that Adjunct Ellipsis (AdjE) is not possible in Japanese (Takita 2011, Sugisaki 2013, Funakoshi 2016, Sakamoto 2017, etc.). The representative example to demonstrate this point is ones in which a manner adjunct is deleted in a negation sentence as in (1). Having (1a) as the antecedent sentence, the most natural interpretation of (1b) is that Hanako didn't wash a car at all, and the manner adjunct inclusive reading as in (1b-ii) is extremely difficult to obtain.

- (1) a. Taroo-wa teineini kuruma-o araw-ta. 'Taro washed a care carefully.'  
Taro-TOP carefully car-ACC wash-PST  
b. Hanako-wa [e] kuruma-o araw-nak-atta. i. 'Hanako didn't wash a car (at all)'  
Hanako-TOP car-ACC wash-NEG-PST ii. \*'Hanako didn't wash a car carefully.'

However, it has also been claimed that the adjunct inclusive reading (hence, AdjE) is possible in examples such as (2b).

- (2) a. Taroo-wa zibun-no burasi-de sono kuruma-o araw-ta. 'Taro washed that car with his brush.'  
Taro-TOP self-GEN brush-with that car-ACC wash-PST  
b. Hanako-wa [e] kono kuruma-o araw-ta. 'Hanako washed this car (with her brush).'  
Hanako-TOP this car-ACC wash-PST (see Oku 2016)

In this paper, I argue for the following:

- (3) a. AdjE is an available operation in Japanese.  
b. The fact in (1b)-type examples can be reasonably accounted for by means of the proper treatment of manner adverbs with respect to negation.

In Section 2, I present the defocusing requirement for Ellipsis, and in Section 3 I examine the semantic property of manner adverbs under negation, which explains the type of AdjE in (1b). Section 4 suggests that the source of the argument-adjunct asymmetry under negation is whether they are semantically selected by the predicate or not. Section 5 is the conclusion.

## 2. Defocusing Requirement for Ellipsis

One natural and reasonable semantic/discourse precondition for ellipsis is that the elided constituent must be defocused.

- (4) Defocusing Requirement:  
Ellipsis/Deletion presupposes the defocusing of the target constituent. (see Tancredi 1992)

For instance, although Argument Ellipsis (AE) is available in Japanese (Oku 1998, Saito 2007, Takahashi 2008, etc.), when the target constituent must be focused, AE is impossible (Ikawa 2013, Sugisaki 2012, Saito 2017, Oku 2013). Consider (5):

- (5) a. John-wa nani-o tabe-ta no? 'What did John eat?'  
John-TOP what-ACC eat-PST Q  
b. Bill-wa [e] tabe-ta no? Lit. 'Bill ate [e]?' \*'What did Bill eat?'  
Bill-TOP eat-PST Q (Possible only as a polarity question: 'Did Bill eat something?')

Given that a *wh*-phrase is inherently focused in the sentence, it is naturally accounted for why (5b) does not have the AE reading: it is against the defocusing requirement (4). Now let us closely examine the semantic nature of manner adjuncts under negation.

## 3. Argument-Manner Adjunct Asymmetry under Negation

Let us first look at (6) where the verb *tabe* 'eat' takes an object argument.

- (6) a. Taroo-wa pizza-o tabe-ta. 'Tao ate the pizza.'  
Taro-TOP pizza-ACC eat-PST  
b. Hanako-wa [VP pizza-o tabe]-nak-atta. 'Hanako didn't eat the pizza.' (The whole VP is the focus of Neg)  
Hanako-TOP pizza-ACC eat-NEG-PST

→ Argument Ellipsis

- b'. Hanako-wa [VP -pizza-o tabe]-nak-atta  
Hanako-TOP -pizza-ACC- eat-NEG-PST

The most natural interpretation of (6b), as far as I can see, is that the whole VP is negated and crucially (6b) does *not*

implicate that Hanako ate something else. In other words, it is difficult to interpret (6b) in such a way that the verb *tabe* ‘eat’ is outside of the scope of negation and that the object *pizza* alone is the scope of negation. In this case, AE in (6b’) retains the same interpretation as (6b). That is, the ellipsis of the part of the focus of negation (i.e., the object argument alone) is somehow tolerable. Having this in mind, let us next consider (7) where the verb *tabe* ‘eat’ has no object but is accompanied with a manner adjunct *yukkuri* ‘slowly.’

- (7) a. Taro-wa *yukkuri* *tabe*-ta. ‘Taro ate slowly.’  
 Taro-TOP slowly eat-PST
- b. Hanako-wa [<sub>VP</sub> *yukkuri* *tabe*]-nak-atta. ‘Hanako didn’t eat slowly.’ (Only *yukkuri* is the focus of Neg)  
 Hanako-TOP slowly eat-NEG-PST
- Adjunct Ellipsis
- b'. Hanako-wa [<sub>VP</sub> *yukkuri* *tabe*]-nak-atta Lit. \*‘Hanako didn’t eat slowly.’  
 Hanako-TOP slowly eat-NEG-PST (Adjunct inclusive reading is not possible)

Notice here that the most natural interpretation of (7b) is that Hanako actually ate something but not at a slow speed. Namely, the sole focus of negation in (7b) is the manner adjunct and the verb *tabe* ‘eat’ is not under the scope of negation. Now, since the manner adjunct *yukkuri* ‘slowly’ is focused and the verb is defocused, deleting the (focused) adjunct alone and retaining the (defocused) verb is clearly against the defocusing requirement of ellipsis in (4).<sup>1</sup> Hence, adjunct ellipsis under this type of condition is not possible. If this line of reasoning is on the right track, it naturally follows that the adjunct inclusive reading in (2b) is easily available. Nothing prevents the defocusing of the manner adjunct in this case.<sup>2</sup> Next, let us briefly consider what would be the possible source of this argument-manner adjunct asymmetry observed in (6) and (7).

#### 4. Argument / Manner Adjunct Asymmetry

Why is the object (argument) NP in (6b) not the sole locus of negation (the whole VP is negated) but the manner adjunct in (7b) is? Let me suggest that the crucial difference is whether they are selected ( $\theta$ -marked) or not. The selected object is an indispensable element for a transitive verb to be semantically complete; the object-verb set makes a natural semantic unit. Hence, when negated, the whole VP as a unit is the locus of negation. In contrast, adjuncts are optional elements and thus, once introduced in the structure, they function as a semantically salient element. A manner adjunct, for instance, is semantically the most salient among the VP members. This is why, when it appears in a negation sentence, a manner adjunct functions as the sole focus of negation, which in turn makes impossible the ellipsis of this type of adjunct under negation.

#### 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I demonstrated that the typical example to show the adjunct ellipsis is impossible has a specific reason for the impossibility: that is, manner adjuncts inherently function as the sole focus of negation in a negated sentence. Therefore, adjunct ellipsis in general is available in Japanese (contra what has generally been assumed in the field).

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<sup>1</sup> The same generalization is proposed in Kuno’s (1982) Pecking Order of Deletion Principle. See also Oku (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Tanabe (2021) argues that subject-oriented adjuncts (which are not under the scope of negation) can be easily elided, which provides another support for the claim developed in this paper.