An Argument for Argument Ellipsis from -sika NPIs
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Synopsis: Since Otani & Whitman’s (1991) work, it is well-known that sentences with null objects in Korean and Japanese allow the sloppy-identity reading (cf. Sag 1976, Williams 1977), as exemplified by the Japanese example in (1a), on a par with English VP-ellipsis examples like (1b) (throughout this paper, we will omit the strict-identity reading, which is always available). Then, Otani & Whitman propose, essentially following Huang (1987), that sentences like (1a) are in fact instances of VP-ellipsis, which targets the VP whose head, i.e. V, has been evacuated from it via V-raising. That is, the second conjunct of (1a) is claimed to have a structure like (2a). This nicely accounts for the similarity between (1a) and (1b). There have been proposed two alternatives to Otani & Whitman’s VP-ellipsis analysis, however. Oku (1998) and Kim (1999) independently propose that languages like Japanese and Korean have an ellipsis process Argument Ellipsis, which directly elides an argument. Thus, under the Argument Ellipsis approach, the second conjunct of (1a) has a structure like (2b), where the null-fledged NP is elided via Argument Ellipsis. On the other hand, Hoji (1998) argues that there exist phonologically null indefinite nouns in these languages, so that the relevant part of (1a) should have a structure like (2c), where ec-stub stands for the null indefinite noun. Under this analysis, the sloppy reading obtains because the situation which the sloppy reading describes is compatible with the situation described by (3), where the object in the second conjunct overtly realized as an indefinite noun without ziban ‘self’ (indicated by boldface).

The aim of this paper is to provide a support for the Argument Ellipsis approach, based on the novel observation regarding the behavior of the Negative Polarity Items with the suffix -sika ‘only’ (henceforth -sika NPIs) in Japanese. Specifically, we argue i) that Kim’s (1999) argument against the VP-ellipsis analysis is strengthened by the fact that if a -sika NPI is construed as an adjunct modifying another NP (cf. Aoyagi & Ishii 1994), it cannot be missing, in spite of the relatively free word order between -sika NPIs and modified NPs, and ii) that the Argument Ellipsis approach is superior to the null indefinite nouns approach since -sika NPIs can be null if they can be construed as genuine arguments, although -sika NPIs cannot be replaced by any indefinite nouns.

Observations: In Japanese, various constituents can be turned into an NPI if the suffix -sika is attached to them. For instance, the object ringo in (4a) is turned into a -sika NPI in (4b), and as an NPI, negation is required (henceforth -sika NPIs are underlined). Note that both (4a) and (4b) entails that Taroo ate an apple. In this respect, they are different from (4c), where only negation appears. Aoyagi & Ishii (1994) observe that a -sika NPI may co-occur with another NP which is modified by the -sika NPI, as in (5a) (modified NPs are put in boxes). As shown in (5b-d), their relative word order is relatively free. We will call sentences like (4b) argumental -sika NPI constructions, in which only argument -sika NPIs appear, and sentences like (5a-d), where modified NPs appear along with -sika NPIs, adverbial -sika NPI constructions, for ease of reference. Then, let us compare (6a) and (6b). (6a) involves the argumental -sika NPI constructions, and (6b) is a case of the adverbial -sika NPI constructions. Crucially, there is a significant contrast between (6a) and (6b). Furthermore, (6a) allows the sloppy reading, on a par with (1a). Note that the ungrammaticality of (6b) cannot be remedied if the second conjunct is changed so as to avoid awkwardness of repetition, as in (7).

Discussion: First, we argue that the contrast in (6) strengthens Kim’s (1999) argument against the VP-ellipsis analysis. One of his strong arguments comes from the part-whole construction in Korean (cf. Yoon 1989) in (8), where James-lul is a whole-NP and sili-lul ‘leg’ is a part-NP. Kim observes that when the whole-NP is missing, as shown in (9b), the sloppy reading obtains. If the null object in (9b) is derived via VP-ellipsis, (9b) should have the structure in (10a), where both the part-NP and the V have been evacuated from the ellipsis site, i.e. VP. However, since the part-NP cannot be moved out of VP and precede the whole-NP, as in (11), the VP-ellipsis approach fails to capture the fact that (9b) has the sloppy reading. Then, Kim proposes that in languages like Korean and Japanese an argument NP can be directly elided via Argument Ellipsis, as in (10b). With this in mind, let us turn to the Japanese cases. As we have seen in (5), the relative order between a -sika NPI and a modified NP is relatively free. In particular, the fact that the -sika NPI can follow the modified NP, as in (5b), suggests that -sika NPIs can stay with in VP. Thus, the VP-ellipsis analysis predicts that -sika NPIs can be elided even in the adverbial -sika NPI constructions, since the structure like (12) should be available. This prediction, however, is not borne out, as we have seen in (6b) and (7). Moreover, the grammaticality of (6a) suggests that ellipsis of a -sika NPI is in principle possible. Hence, the VP-ellipsis approach fails to capture the ungrammaticality of (6b) and (7). Note that this argument is a contraposition to Kim’s argument: In the case of the part-whole constructions in Korean, ellipsis is possible despite of the restricted word order, while in the case of the adverbial -sika NPI constructions in Japanese, ellipsis is not possible despite of the non-restricted word order. Hence, it completes Kim’s argument.

Let us turn to the second point. The fact that a -sika NPI can be missing as in (6a) if it can be construed as an argument is unexpected under the null indefinite noun approach, because if the gap in the second conjunct of (6a) (repeated as (13a)) is replaced by an overt indefinite noun, the sentence degrades, as shown in (13b). In order to make the sentence perfect, -sika must be attached to the indefinite noun, as in (13c). However, if we extend the possible interpretations of null elements so as to include that of -sika NPI, it becomes impossible to capture the difference between (14a) and (14b). On the other hand, the Argument Ellipsis approach can explain the contrast found in (6a-b) without further complication. Observing that pure adjuncts cannot be subject to Argument Ellipsis, Oku (1998) proposes that Argument Ellipsis targets only arguments (see also Saito 2008 for further evidence). Then, it naturally follows that a -sika NPI can be elided if it is construed as an argument. Moreover, it also follows that the null element in (14b) cannot have the interpretation of a -sika NPI because there is no appropriate antecedent for licensing Argument Ellipsis.

To sum up, based on the observation regarding the behavior of -sika NPIs we have provided a support for the
general line of research against the VP-ellipsis analysis of the null argument phenomena, and in particular, argued that there is a case where the Argument Ellipsis approach is superior to the null indefinite noun approach.

(1) a. Taroo-wa [zibun-no tegami-o] sute-ta-si, Hanako-mo [e] sute-ta
   Taroo-Top self-Gen letter-Acc discard-Past-and Hanako-also discard-Past
   ‘(lit.) Taroo discarded his (= Taroo’s) letter, and Hanako also discarded [e] (= Hanako’s letter)’

b. Taroo discarded his letter, and Hanako did [e], too ([(e) = discard Hanako’s letter]


(3) Taroo-wa [zibun-no tegami-o] sute-ta-si, Hanako-mo tegami-o sute-ta
   Taroo-Top self-Gen letter-Acc discard-Past-and Hanako-also letter-Acc discard-Past
   ‘Taroo discarded his letter, and Hanako also discarded a letter’

   Taroo-Nom apple-Acc eat-Past   Taroo-Nom apple-only eat-Past/eat-Neg-Past
   ‘Taroo ate an apple’
   ‘(lit.) Taroo ate only an apple’

c. Taroo-ga ringo-o tabe-nak-atta

d. Ringo-sika kudamono-o tabe-nak-atta

(5) a. Taroo-ga ringo-sika kudamono-o tabe-nak-atta
   Taroo-Nom apple-Acc eat-Past    Taroo-Nom apples-Acc eat-Past/eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(lit.) Taroo ate only his (= Taroo’s) apple, and among seeds, Hanako bought only apples’

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(intended) Among fruits, Taroo ate only his apples, and among fruits, Hanako also ate [e] (= only Hanako’s apple)’

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(intended) Among fruits, Taroo ate only his apples, and among fruits, Hanako also ate [e] (= only Hanako’s apple)’

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(lit.) Taroo ate only his (= Taroo’s) apple, and Hanako also ate [e] (= only Hanako’s apple)’

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(intended) Among fruits, Taroo ate only his apples, and among fruits, Hanako also ate only apples’

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also fruits-Acc eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(intended) Among fruits, Taroo ate only his apples, and among fruits, Hanako also ate only apples’

(7) a. Jerry-nun [caki-uy ai]-lul phal-ul ttayli-ess-ta
   Jerry-Top self-Gen child-Acc arm-Acc hit-Past-Ind ‘Jerry hit his child on the arm’

b. Kulena Sally-num [e] tali-ul ttayli-ess-ta
   but Sally-Top arm-Acc hit-Past-Ind ‘(lit.) But Sally hit [e] (= Sally’s child) on the leg’

(10) a. [TP Subj part-NP, whole NP|V+T] b. [TP Subj |V+T| whole NP| part-NP| V+T] T

(11) *Sally-num tali-ul [caki-uy ai]-lul ttayli-ess-ta
    Sally-Top leg-Acc self-Gen child-Acc hit-Past-Ind ‘Sally hit her child on the leg’

(12) [TP Subj Obj|+ sika-NPI|whole NP| V+T+Neg]

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(lit.) Taroo ate only his (= Taroo’s) apple, and Hanako also ate [e] (= only Hanako’s apple)’

   Taroo-Top self-Gen apple-only eat-Neg-Past-and Hanako-also apple-Acc eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(lit.) Taroo ate only his apple, and Hanako also didn’t eat an apple’

   Taroo-Top it apple-only eat-Neg-Past Taroo-Top eat-Neg-Past
   ‘(lit.) Taroo didn’t eat [e] (= it)’