

## The Acquisition of Argument Ellipsis and its Constraints in Japanese

Koji Sugisaki  
Mie University

One of the well-known characteristics that distinguish Japanese from languages such as English is the availability of null arguments in finite clauses. The object and the subject of a finite clause are null in (1b) and in (2b) respectively, but the sentences are completely grammatical. In sharp contrast to the English counterpart in (3b) that contains an overt pronoun or the Spanish counterpart in (3b) that contains a null subject, the Japanese examples in (1b) and (2b) allows the sloppy-identity interpretation, as well as the strict-identity interpretation (e.g. Otani & Whitman 1991, Oku 1998).

- (1) a. Mary-wa zibun-no neko-o oikaketa.  
*Mary-TOP self-GEN cat-ACC chased* 'Mary<sub>1</sub> chased her<sub>1</sub> cat.'  
 b. John-mo \_\_\_\_\_ oikaketa.  
*John-also chased* Lit. 'John also chased \_\_\_\_.'

**Null Object =  $\sqrt{\text{Mary's cat}}$  (strict),  $\sqrt{\text{John's cat}}$  (sloppy)**

- (2) a. Mary-wa [ zibun-no teian-ga saiyo-sare-ru to ] omotteiru.  
*Mary-Top self-Gen proposal-Nom accept-Pass-Pres that think*  
 'Mary<sub>1</sub> thinks that her<sub>1</sub> proposal will be accepted.'  
 b. John-mo [ \_\_\_\_\_ saiyo-sare-ru to ] omotteiru.  
*John-also accept-Pass-Pres that think*  
 Lit. 'John also thinks that \_\_\_\_ will be accepted.'

**Null Subject =  $\sqrt{\text{Mary's proposal}}$  (strict),  $\sqrt{\text{John's proposal}}$  (sloppy)**

- (3) a. Mary<sub>1</sub> chased her<sub>1</sub> cat.  
 b. John also chased it. *it =  $\sqrt{\text{Mary's cat}}$ , \* $\sqrt{\text{John's cat}}$*   
 (4) a. Maria cree [ que su propuesta será aceptada ] y  
*Maria believes that her proposal will-be accepted and*  
 'Maria<sub>1</sub> believes that her<sub>1</sub> proposal will be accepted and ...'  
 b. Juan también cree [ que \_\_\_\_\_ será aceptada ].  
*Juan too believes that will-be accepted*  
 Lit. 'Juan also believes that \_\_\_\_ will be accepted.'

**Null Subject =  $\sqrt{\text{Maria's proposal}}$  (strict), \* $\sqrt{\text{Juan's proposal}}$  (sloppy)**

In order to account for the availability of the sloppy-identity interpretation for null arguments in Japanese, Oku (1998), Saito (2007), and Takahashi (2008) (among others) proposed that Japanese allows ellipsis of argument DPs, as illustrated in (5).

- (5) a. John-mo ~~zibun-no~~ ~~neko-o~~ oikaketa.  
 (=1b) *John-also self-GEN cat-ACC chased*  
 b. John-mo [ ~~zibun-no~~ ~~teian-ga~~ saiyo-sare-ru to ] omotteiru.  
 (=2b) *John-also self-Gen proposal-Nom accept-Pass-Pres that think*

Building on Chomsky's (2000) system of agreement, Saito (2007) suggests that the availability of *Argument Ellipsis* in Japanese stems from the absence of obligatory agreement in this language (cf. Kuroda 1988). More specifically, adopting the LF-Copying

Analysis, Saito argues that in English/Spanish-type languages that have agreement, argument DPs cannot undergo LF-Copy, since they have already established an agreement relation (with T or *v*) in the antecedent clause and hence cannot participate in agreement after they are copied into the second sentence. In Japanese-type languages, however, the corresponding derivation converges, since the copied DP need not establish an agreement relation.

Saito's (2007) parametric proposal predicts that if Japanese has a construction in which arguments must participate in agreement, Argument Ellipsis should be disallowed in that construction. A relevant case is provided by *wh*-questions. According to Chomsky (2000), *wh*-phrases must undergo agreement with an interrogative Complementizer even in *wh*-in-situ languages like Japanese. Then, such an obligatory agreement relation with C should block *wh*-phrases from undergoing Argument Ellipsis. The examples in (6) demonstrate that this is indeed the case: The null-object sentence (6b) can only be interpreted as a Yes/No question and never as a *wh*-question.

- (6) a. Mary-wa                      nani-o                      tabemasita              ka?  
       *Mary-NOM*                      *what-ACC*                      *ate*                      Q  
       'What did Mary eat?'  
       b. Dewa,              John-wa              \_\_\_\_\_              tabemashita              ka?  
       *then*              *John-TOP*                      *ate*                      Q  
       'Then, did John eat something?' / \* 'Then, what did John eat?'

Turning to child language, Hyams (2002) observes that agreement errors are extremely rare in the acquisition of "rich" agreement languages (such as Italian and Catalan). Then, we can reasonably speculate that children acquiring agreementless languages like Japanese would also be sensitive to the absence of overt agreement from the early stages of acquisition. Since we have reasons to believe that the property that is allegedly connected to Argument Ellipsis is acquired early, the parametric proposal by Saito (2007) should make the prediction in (7a). In addition, since the ban on eliding *wh*-phrases directly follows from the properties of UG (the obligatory agreement relation between a *wh*-phrase and an interrogative C), we obtain the prediction in (7b).

(7) Predictions for Child Japanese:

- a. Japanese-speaking preschool children should have knowledge of Argument Ellipsis.
- b. Japanese-speaking preschool children should have the knowledge about the constraint that *wh*-phrases cannot undergo Argument Ellipsis.

In my presentation, I report results of the experiments which evaluated the validity of the predictions in (7). The results demonstrate that (i) Japanese-speaking four-year-olds permit the sloppy-identity interpretation for null objects, and also that (ii) children do not interpret null-object questions as object *wh*-questions. These findings in turn suggest that Japanese-speaking four-year-olds already have the knowledge of Argument Ellipsis, as well as the knowledge about its constraints. These findings are consistent with the view that the availability of Argument Ellipsis and its constraints directly follow from principles and parameters of UG.