

The search for Verb-stranding VP Ellipsis in isiXhosa

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Abstract

Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VPE) refers to a type of ellipsis in which a verb phrase is elided but the meaning of the elided VP is still available from a linguistic antecedent found in the surrounding discourse. There are two types of VPE: English-type VPE in which the whole VP is elided and Verb-stranding VPE in which the rest of the VP is elided, leaving the verb stranded. For Verb-stranding VPE, it is widely acknowledged that before such deletion takes place the verb moves to a higher position (e.g., T0 or Asp0) due to some independent reason, and is therefore stranded when VP is elided.

In Bantu languages like Swahili, Ndendeule, Chingoni and Kikuyu, it has been argued that there exists Verb-stranding VPE the verb moves to I0 in a tensed clause and thus survives ν P ellipsis (Ngonyani 1995, 1996a b, 1998; Ngonyani & Githinji 2006 and Goldberg 2005). IsiXhosa (S.40) exhibits a version of Verb-stranding VPE, i.e. the object is elided, leaving the verb overt, as illustrated in (1):

- (1) U-John u-fund-a isi-Xhosa, na-ye u-Mary u-ya-si-funda-a ~~{isi-Xhosa}~~.
1a-John 1sm-study-fv 7-Xhosa and-1 1a-Mary 1sm-prs-7om-study-fv 7-Xhosa
'John studies isiXhosa and Mary does too.'

However, through examining the components of the ν P and their syntactic position, we discover that isiXhosa does not have Verb-stranding VPE and that ν P-internal constituents can be elided only if they move out of ν P. The evidence for this conclusion is (i) that ν P-internal constituents, including the object, ν P-internal adverbials and locative arguments are prohibited from being elided and (ii) the constituents that can be elided/dropped are actually dislocated into an ν P-external position before VPE takes place, as illustrated below.

- (2) U-John u-fund-a i-si-Xhosa,
aug-1a.John sm1-study-fv aug-7-Xhosa
na-ye u-Mary u-ya-si-fund-a ~~{i-si-Xhosa}~~.
and-1 aug-1a.Mary sm1-dis.prs-om7-study-fv aug-7-Xhosa
'John studies Xhosa and Mary does too.'
- (3) *U-John u-fund-a i-si-Xhosa,
aug-1a.John sm1-study-fv aug-7-Xhosa,
na-ye u-Mary u-(ya)-fund-a ~~{i-si-Xhosa}~~.
and-1 aug-1a.Mary sm1-(dis.prs)-study-fv aug-7-Xhosa
Intended: 'John studies Xhosa and Mary does too.'

Here it shows that while object-marked DPs can be deleted, non-object-marked DPs cannot. If it is the case that in a Verb-stranding VPE construction the verb moves out of ν P prior to the object DP being deleted, we have to ask why deletion of the DP in (3) is not permitted. A number of studies on object-marking in Bantu languages have suggested that object-marked DPs are dislocated to a ν P-external position (Van der Spuy 1993, Adam 2010, Cheng & Downing 2009 and Zeller 2012, 2014, 2015) and that their mention in an utterance is optional – and thus can be deleted in surface syntax. On the other hand, non-object-marked DPs remain

inside the vP where they would be legitimate candidates for deletion in a verb-stranding VPE construction. The fact that such DPs cannot be deleted is instructive: it suggests that deletion of material inside the vP is not permitted in isiXhosa.

Keywords: IsiXhosa; Verb Phrase Ellipsis; Verb-stranding VPE; Dislocation