Reconsidering clausal argument ellipsis in Japanese

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1. Takahashi (2018): The aim of this paper is to reconsider three arguments for the ellipsis approach to null clausal complements provided in the literature. Let us first examine Takahashi’s (2012, 2018) intriguing argument based on (1). Following Hiraiwa and Ishihara (2012), Takahashi assumes that the focused phrase of the cleft construction like Ginny-ni in (1) is derivationally associated with the gap in the presupposed clause via movement. Thus, (1b) is analyzed as (2), where the trace of Cho Chang-ni is included in the elided CP. This analysis naturally captures the facts that Cho Chang is marked with Dative Case because it is based-generated as an argument of the predicate atta ‘met’, which can assign Dative Case. Takahashi’s crucial assumption is that the source of Case of the focused phrase should be atta ‘met’. However, this assumption is worth reconsidering. Note that (1a) can also be followed by (3), where it is obvious that there is no verb which can assign Dative Case. Dative Case is still available to Mary, however. This is the case with the so-called topic-comment structure like (4), which is widely available in Japanese, in general. (4) also fails to involve any Dative assigning verb. It is plausible that (1b) is analyzed in terms of topic-comment structure in the same way as (3) and (4), in other words, the availability of Dative Case of the focused phrase is due to the mechanism peculiar to the topic-comment structure, which would undermine Takahashi’s motivation for the ellipsis of the clausal argument in question. In fact, there is another piece of evidence which casts a doubt on the ellipsis approach. In (5), the null object in the third sentence, indicated by e, can be interpreted as ‘his/her advisee can get admission.’ However, neither the first sentence nor the second sentence fails to provide an appropriate antecedent. Thus, the ellipsis approach would face the identity problem.

(1) a. [Ron-ga [Harry-ga e atta to] syoogensita no]-wa Ginny-ni da.
   Ron-Nom Harry-Nom met that testified C-Top Ginny-Dat be ‘It was Ginny that Ron testified that Harry met.’
   b. Hermione-ga e syoogensita no]-wa Cho Chang-ni da.
      Hermione-Nom testified C-Top Cho Chang-Dat be ‘lit. It was Cho Chang that Hermione testified e.’ (Takahashi 2018: (12))

(2) [Hermione-ga [Harry-ga e, atta to] syoogensita no]-wa Cho Chang-ni, da.
(3) Hermione-no syoogen-wa Cho Chang-ni da.
   Hermione -Gen testification-Top Cho Chang -Dat be ‘lit. Concerning John’s testification, it is to Mary.’
(4) Kono hon-wa Hanako-ni da.
   this book-Top Hanako-Dat be ‘This book is for Hanako.’
(5)Taroo-no, sindookyookan-ga karo-ga nyuugakukyoka-o moraeru to omotta no-wa Uconn-kara da.
   Taroo-Gen adviser-Nom he-Nom admission-Acc can-get that thought C-Top Uconn-from be ‘It is from Uconn that Taroo’s adviser thought that he could get admission.’
   Hanako-no sindookyookan-ga kanojyo-ga nyuugakukyoka-o moraeru to omotta no-wa UCLA-kara da.
   Hanako-Gen adviser-Nom she-Nom admission-Acc can-get that thought C-Top UCLA-from be ‘It is from UCLA that Hanako’s adviser thought that she could get admission.’
   Dotira-no sindookyookan-mo e sukosimo omowanakatta no-wa MIT-kara da.
   Both-Gen adviser-also at-all thought-not C-Top MIT-from be

2. Sakamoto (2019): Let us consider another argument for extraction out of the elided clausal argument, provided by Sakamoto (2019). He argues that Quantifier Raising (QR) can also take place out of elided clausal arguments.

   Taro-NOM Tokyo-GEN-like all-GEN city-GEN-thing-ACC lively be that not said ‘Taro did not say [that all the cities are lively like Tokyo].’ (Sakamoto 2019: (32))
   b. Ziroo-mo e iwanakatta. Neg » ∨; ∨ » Neg (Sakamoto 2019: (34))
   The ECM subject subete-no mati(-no-koto)-o can take wide or narrow scope with respect to negation. He argues that the ECM subject stays in the embedded clause because it follows the adverb Tokyo-no-yooni ‘like Tokyo,’ which modifies the embedded predicate. He observes that when (6b), where the complement of the verb is
missing, follows (6a), the former exhibits the same ambiguity. If the missing object is a full-fledged CP which undergoes ellipsis, the availability of the ambiguity is readily captured in the same way as that of (6a).

It is still suspicious that the relevant ECM subject is in the embedded clause. It is still possible to say that the ECM subject is base-generated in the matrix clause (Hoji 1990) and the relevant adverb Tooyoo-no-yooni is scrambled across the ECM subject in the matrix clause. If this analysis is on the right track, the relevant scope ambiguity can be captured without recourse to the QR out of the elided clausal argument. In fact, some other adverbs clearly show that ECM subjects are in the matrix clause. In (7), the adverb sekai-de itiban precedes the embedded subject. When the latter is marked with nominative, the relevant adjunct modifies the embedded predicate. In contrast, when the embedded subject is marked with accusative, it is impossible to obtain the interpretation where the adjunct modifies the embedded predicate. The relevant interpretation becomes available if Mary-o precedes the relevant adjunct in (8), which suggests that the ECM subject stays in the matrix clause.

(7) John-ga sekai-de itiban Mary-ga/o majime da to omotta.

‘John thought that Mary was the most earnest in the world.’

(8) John-ga Mary-o sekai-de itiban majime da to omotta.

3. Takita (2018): Takahashi (2013) argues that null arguments in Japanese exhibit the parallelism observed in VP-ellipsis in English shown in (9), where the third interpretation (long-distance sloppy reading) is unavailable (see Fiengo and May 1994). Crucially, when the antecedent clause involves a long-distance sloppy reading, a long-distance sloppy reading is also available in the second clause, as shown in (10). Takita (2018) argues that null clausal arguments also show a similar parallelism. The relevant example is given in (11), where the long distance sloppy reading is not available in the second sentence. Based on this unavailability, Takita concludes that null clausal arguments undergo ellipsis. However, it seems that the unavailability of the long distance sloppy reading has nothing to do with the covertness of the clausal argument. In fact, even if the null argument is replaced with the overt clausal argument zibun-ga kasikoi to ‘that self is smart’ in (11), it seems to be hard to obtain the relevant long distance sloppy reading. I speculate that the long distance sloppy reading is syntactically available in (11) but some pragmatic factors make it difficult. There are cases which do not show the relevant parallelism like (12), where the long distance sloppy reading is available, although the antecedent clause involves a local sloppy reading. Thus, Takita’s argument is not a compelling argument for the ellipsis approach to null clausal arguments.

(9) Max saw his mother, and Oscar said that Harry did e, too.

(i) Oscar said Harry saw Max’s mother. (strict reading)  (ii) Oscar said Harry saw Harry’s mother. (local sloppy reading)  (iii) * Oscar said Harry saw Oscar’s mother. (long-distance sloppy reading)

(10) (I didn’t know that Bill was a bigamist.)

Mary just said he’s married to her, and Sally said he is e, too. (e = married to Sally)

(Takita 2018: 8, adapted from Fiengo and May 1994: 106)


‘lit. Mary1 said [that self1 is smart]. John2 thinks [that Sue3 did not say e].’ (e = that self2/3 is smart)

(Takita 2018: 9-10)

(12) Yamada-sensei-wa [zibun-no ronbun-ga omosiroi to] mizukara itteita.

Yamada-prof.-Top self-Gen paper-Nom interesting that  by.himself said

‘lit. Prof. Yamada1 said that self1’s paper was interesting by himself. Prof. Tanaka2 said that his student3 said e.’ (e = self2’s 2/3 paper was interesting)