

Verb Stranding and Argument Ellipsis in Chukchansi Yokuts

Brian Agbayani and John P. Boyle

1. Introduction and Background

There is current debate as to whether verb stranding ellipsis involves VP ellipsis (Goldberg 2005, Gribanova 2013a,b, and others) or internal argument ellipsis (Takahashi 2013, Landau 2018, 2020, and others). In this brief sketch, we report on verb stranding ellipsis in Chukchansi, a highly endangered Northern Valley Yokuts language of Central California (Collord 1968, Whistler & Golla 1986). The data include elliptical phenomena in multi-valent complex predicate environments, and the properties of ellipsis in these contexts suggest that Chukchansi makes extensive use of internal argument ellipsis, thereby providing additional evidence for argument ellipsis in verb stranding languages.

A simple example of an elliptical construction in Chukchansi is given in (1).

- (1) diʔiš-taʔ na-ʔ te:wīš-a, ʔohom' daʔ diʔiš-taʔ Nancy
make-NARR 1-NOM basket-ACC not PRT make-NARR Nancy.NOM
'I made a basket, but Nancy didn't make <a basket>.' (<...> = elided material)

As shown in the second clause of (1), ellipsis involves verb stranding, with realization of the subject and omission of internal argument(s).

Chukchansi, like other Yokuts languages, has a highly complex verb system (Newman 1944, Collord 1968). In multi-valent contexts, most predicate internal arguments in Chukchansi are marked with accusative case. These internal arguments include arguments in mono-clausal causative and desiderative contexts (2).

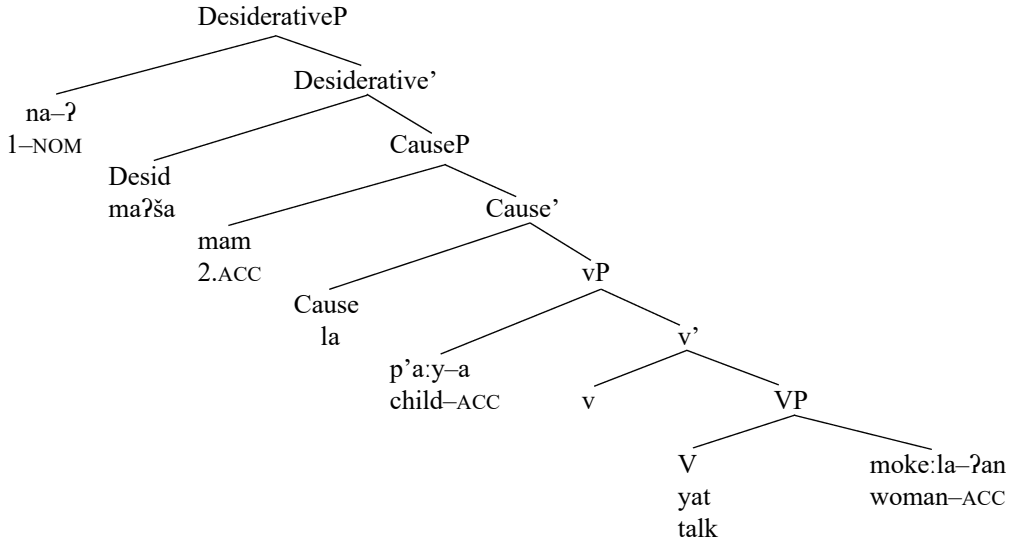
- (2) yat-la-maʔša-xo-n' na-ʔ mam p'a:y-a moke:la-ʔan
talk-CAUS-DESID-CONT-FAC 1-NOM 2.ACC child-ACC woman-ACC
'I want you to make the child talk to the woman.'

As in simple cases, there is a single TP layer in these multi-valent contexts,¹ with the highest argument marked Nominative. We represent the structure of the extended predicate in (3), through which the verb undergoes head movement in 'roll-up' fashion.

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¹ Subordinate clause contexts are typically gerundial and feature either genitive or null subjects (see Collord 1968).

(3)



2. Verb Stranding Ellipsis

Chukchansi exhibits verb stranding ellipsis. Verb stranding ellipsis has typically been analyzed either as resulting from VP (or other large-scale) ellipsis with V-raising (e.g., Goldberg 2005, Gribanova 2013a,b) or resulting from internal argument ellipsis (e.g., Takahashi 2013, Landau 2018, 2020). We report on data which suggest that verb stranding ellipsis in Chukchansi results from argument ellipsis, not verb stranding VP ellipsis. (4), repeated from (1), gives an example of ellipsis in a simple transitive environment. (5) gives an example of direct and indirect object ellipsis in a ditransitive environment. (6) is a desiderative construction, with ellipsis of both the desiderative argument and the internal argument of the verb root (elided arguments in <...> in the translations).

(4) diʔiš-taʔ na-ʔ te:wiš-a, ʔohom' daʔ diʔiš-taʔ Nancy
 make-NARR 1-NOM basket-ACC not PRT make-NARR Nancy.NOM
 'I made a basket, but Nancy didn't make <a basket>.'

(5) wan-taʔ na-ʔ moge:da-ʔan xata:š-i, ʔohom' daʔ wan-taʔ ma-ʔ
 give-NARR 1-NOM girl-ACC food-ACC not PRT give-NARR 2-NOM
 'I gave the girl food, but you didn't give <the girl> <food>.'

(6) ʔohom' taʔan diʔiš-maʔša-taʔ na-ʔ Nancy-in te:wiš-a,
 not PRT make-DESID-NARR 1-NOM Nancy-ACC basket-ACC
 hačʔa daʔ diʔiš-maʔša-xo-n' na-ʔ
 now PRT make-DESID-CONT-FAC 1-NOM
 'I didn't use to want Nancy to make a basket, but now I want <Nancy> to make <a basket>.'

The second-position particle *daʔ* in these cases introduces a polarity distinction, and indicates focus on the preceding element (Collord 1968: 104, Rhodes 2013, Camburn 2013). We identify the particle *daʔ* as a Pol(arity) head, and following McCloskey (for Irish) we posit PolP above TP, and we assume that the element immediately preceding *daʔ* occupies Spec, PolP.

(7) [_{PolP} ʔohom' [_{Pol} daʔ] [TP ...]]
 not

As shown in (4), (5) and (6) the subject is not omitted along with the internal arguments in Chukchansi verb stranding ellipsis.² We take this to indicate that there is no V raising above TP with TP ellipsis – *cf.*, McCloskey 2017, who applies this analysis to verb stranding responsive ellipsis in Irish. As reported in Rhodes 2013 and Camburn 2013, the order **verb – da?* is disallowed (for reasons that are unclear), suggesting V raises no higher than T and assuming PolP > TP. V is thus structurally lower than the polarity particle *da?*. We therefore conclude that Chukchansi does not make use of ‘large’ TP-sized ellipsis. In addition, as shown in (6), strict verbal identity – taken to be a hallmark of verb stranding VP ellipsis (see Goldberg 2005, though *cf.*, Gribanova 2013a) – is not imposed; the stranded V may differ inflectionally from the antecedent V.

An additional factor that bears on whether similar languages with complex verb systems have VP ellipsis (typically stranding the lexical verb stem) centers on whether the verb complex in these languages exhibits propositional syntax or if it is a lexical word (Richards 2009, LeSourd 2013 respectively). LeSourd (2013) argues that Richards’s (2009) cases for ellipsis (qua reduction of the verbal stem) in Maliseet–Passamaquoddy can be accounted for without ellipsis, arguing that the verb forms generated by putative ellipsis are independently occurring lexical items. LeSourd argues instead that the putative gaps are null pronouns that can alternate with overt pronouns given different forms of the verb. The evidence from Chukchansi suggests that ellipsis occurs within an environment where the verb complex has propositional syntax, in line with Richards’s (2009) proposal for Maliseet (though our analysis here has no bearing on Richards’s and LeSourd’s arguments regarding Maliseet *per se*). Consider (8):

- (8) ʔohom’ na-ʔ taʔan diʔiš-maʔša-la-xo-n’ Nancy-in te:wīš-a, hačʔa
 not 1-NOM PRT make-DESID-CAUS-CONT-FAC Nancy-ACC basket-ACC now
 daʔ na-ʔ diʔiš-maʔša-la-xo-n’
 PRT 1-NOM make-DESID-CAUS-CONT-FAC
 Lit: ‘I didn’t used to cause Nancy to want to make a basket, but now I cause <Nancy> to want to make <a basket>.’

(8) involves a highly complex verb in a verb stranding ellipsis environment, and it reveals an important difference between the patterns exhibited in Chukchansi and Maliseet: In (8), as in all cases of Chukchansi verb stranding ellipsis, the verb complex is not morphologically reduced in the second clause. With Richards’s analysis of Maliseet in mind, the lack of morphological reduction in the Chukchansi verb complex potentially puts into question the ellipsis of any phrase larger than the omitted argument(s).

Ellipsis applies freely as long as a contrast is established with elements in the target and antecedent clauses. This includes temporal, polarity, inflectional, and external argument contrasts as in (4), (5), and (6), as well as a contrast in one or more of the internal arguments as in (9), (10), (11) and (12) (contrasting arguments in **bold**; argument targeted for ellipsis underlined):

- (9) wan-taʔ ma-ʔ **moge:da-ʔan** xata:š-an, ʔohom’ daʔ wan-taʔ ma-ʔ **ta:**
 give-NARR 2-NOM **girl-ACC** food-INS not PRT give-NARR 2-NOM **DEM**
nočʔo-ʔon³
boy
 ‘You gave **the girl** food, but you didn’t give **that boy** <food>.’

² Null subjects are allowed in tensed clauses (whether ellipsis applies or not), but only 3rd person subjects may be null. We assume that the null subject in these cases is *pro* (see also Takahashi 2013 who similarly points out that null subjects cannot be elliptical and must be *pro*).

³ An analysis in which ‘that boy’ is focus fronted out of the VP is excluded here, since any moved focused element should appear immediately preceding the polarity particle *da?* (Collord 1968, Camburn 2013, Rhodes 2013). The indirect object ‘that boy’ must therefore still be inside of VP, with omission of just the instrumental object ‘food’.

- (10) wan-ta? ma-? nan xata:š-an, ?ohom' da? wan-ta? ma-? ?ilk'-an
 give-NARR 2-NOM 1.ACC food-INS not PRT give-NARR 2-NOM **water-INS**
 'You gave me **food**, but you didn't give <me> **water**.'
- (11) yuguš-la-ta? ma-? **nan** min ha?e:hi,
 wash-CAUS-NARR 2-NOM **1.ACC** 2.GEN clothes
 ?ohom' da? yuguš-la-ta? ma-? **Nancy-in**
 not PRT wash-CAUS-NARR 2-NOM **Nancy-ACC**
 'You made **me** wash your clothes, but you didn't make **Nancy** wash <your clothes>.'
- (12) yuguš-la-ta? ma-? nan **min ha?e:hi**,
 wash-CAUS-NARR 2-NOM 1.ACC **2.GEN clothes**
 ?ohom' da? yuguš-la-ta? ma-? **p'a:y-in ha?e:hi**
 not PRT wash-CAUS-NARR 2-NOM **child-GEN clothes**
 'You made me wash **your clothes**, but you didn't make <me> wash **the child's clothes**.'

Crucially, in each case both the omitted and remnant arguments are inside the extended predicate (3).⁴

Additionally, strict and sloppy readings are available with omission of the object, characteristic of ellipsis contexts (Fiengo & May 1994).

- (13) ?ohom' yuguš-ta? na-? nim ha?e:hi, Nancy da? yuguš-ta?
 not wash-NARR 1-NOM 1.GEN clothes Nancy.NOM PRT wash-NARR
 'I didn't wash my clothes, but Nancy washed <my/Nancy's clothes>.'

The availability of both strict and sloppy readings is an indication that the absent object is not a null pronominal (pro), but rather an elided argument (see Oku 1998 for Japanese).⁵

Furthermore, a low-adjoined VP-level adverb may remain in the target clause, exhibiting concord with the inflected verb.⁶ In the following examples the adverb modifies the root *yuguš-* (wash) with the meaning 'want <me> to really [wash <the clothes>]' and does not modify the desiderative having the meaning of 'really [want <me> to wash <the clothes>]'. Thus, the adverb is adjoined low but unaffected by ellipsis, even in (15), where both the desiderative argument *nan* (me) and the object of 'wash' *min ha?e:hi* (my clothes) have gone missing.

- (14) yuguš-ma?ša-ta? ma-? nan me:jin-ma?ša-ta? min ha?e:hi,
 wash-DESID-NARR 2-NOM 1.ACC really-DESID-NARR 2.GEN clothes
 ?ohom' da? yuguš-ma?ša-ta? Nancy nan **me:jin-ma?ša-ta?**
 not PRT wash-DESID-NARR Nancy.NOM 1.ACC **really-DESID-NARR**
 'You wanted me to really (= thoroughly) wash your clothes, but Nancy didn't want me to **really** wash <your clothes>.'
- (15) yuguš-ma?ša-ta? ma-? nan me:jin-ma?ša-ta? min ha?e:hi,
 wash-DESID-NARR 2-NOM 1.ACC really-DESID-NARR 2.GEN clothes
 ?ohom' da? yuguš-ma?ša-ta? Nancy **me:jin-ma?ša-ta?**
 not PRT wash-DESID-NARR Nancy.NOM **really-DESID-NARR**

⁴ We remain neutral with respect to whether argument ellipsis is due to PF deletion (e.g., Takahashi 2013) or LF copy (e.g., Sakamoto 2016, Sato 2020).

⁵ Elided arguments tend to be surface anaphors (in the sense of Hankamer and Sag 1976), whose interpretation relies on a linguistic antecedent, and not on topicality (thus allowing a non-specific indefinite to be elided; see Landau 2018). For future work we hope to explore this property in Chukchansi argument ellipsis.

⁶ Concord between the adverb and the inflected verb reflects the scope of the adverb: the lower the scope of the adverb, the more inflectional material is copied onto the adverb from the verbal complex (Adisasmito-Smith et al. 2015). Thus, in (15)/(16) *me:jin-ma?ša-ta?* 'really-DESID-NARR' is under the scope of desiderative and (narrative past) tense.

‘You wanted me to really (= thoroughly) wash your clothes, but Nancy didn’t want <me> to **really** wash <your clothes>.’

The manner adverb *me:jin-* is not affected by ellipsis in the target, suggesting that the size of the elided material is no bigger than the omitted arguments themselves. And, as expected under argument ellipsis, when the adverb is present only in the antecedent clause, it is not interpreted in the target (Landau 2020).

- (16) yuguš-ta? Nancy **me:jin-ta?** ha?e:hi, ?ohom’ da? yuguš-ta? na-?
 wash-NARR Nancy.NOM **really-NARR** clothes, not PRT wash-NARR 1-NOM
 ‘Nancy really (=thoroughly) washed the clothes, but I didn’t wash <the clothes>.’

The target in (16) can only mean that no clothes were washed, not that clothes were washed, just not thoroughly.

3. Conclusion

In this sketch, we have presented new evidence for argument ellipsis in Chukchansi Yokuts. The data include elliptical phenomena in multi-valent complex predicate environments, violations of strict verb identity, and adverb behavior in verb stranding ellipsis contexts. These hitherto unstudied properties of Yokuts grammar may provide additional evidence for internal argument ellipsis in verb stranding languages.

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