

An ellipsis analysis of discontinuous DPs in Georgian

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Discontinuous (split) DPs are problematic for standard syntactic accounts as they appear to be an instance of subextraction out of islands. This paper examines the structure of discontinuous DPs in the understudied Georgian language, which provides unique insight into the construction in question because of the interaction of split DPs and case concord in the language. Based on evidence from this interaction, the paper proposes that Georgian split DPs are made up of two morphosyntactically autonomous DPs, one of which is elliptical.

Data: Georgian is an SOV language with a dedicated preverbal focus position and an extensive postverbal periphery. In continuous DPs, case concord is obligatory on certain constituents of the DP (including numerals, pronominal possessor, quantifiers, and some adjectives) but disallowed on others (nominal possessors, demonstratives, and the remaining adjectives), as illustrated in (1) (all data from original fieldwork). However, when the DP is discontinuous, all modifiers, including this latter group, must enter into case concord with the head noun, as illustrated in (2).

- (1) tʃem-ma did-ma dzayl-ma Giorgi-s sam q'avisper dzayl-s ukbina
1SG.GEN-ERG big-ERG dog-ERG Giorgi-GEN three.DAT brown.DAT dog-DAT bit
'My big dog bit Giorgi's three brown dogs.'
- (2) Maya-s c'ign-i (patara-(*m)) bitʃ-ma uq'ita (patara-*(m))
Maya-DAT book-NOM small-ERG boy-ERG bought small-ERG
'The small boy bought Maya a book.'

Previous analyses: The proposal put forth by Ott (2015) for German involves a symmetric merge analysis in which discontinuous DPs are a result of two predicatively-related nominal constituents undergoing symmetric merge, which then forces one of these two move, stranding the other. This analysis is based on data from German that show restrictions on what modifiers can be split from a head noun. Given that Georgian lacks any such restrictions, it is unlikely that the details of this proposal would capture the Georgian facts. The second existing proposal, put forth by Cavar&Fanselow 2000 for German and Nash 2002 for Georgian, analyzes discontinuous DPs as two instances of the same DP, each undergoing ellipsis (3). This proposal fails to explain why case concord is obligatory in one of the elliptical DPs but not in the other.

- (3) [_{DP} ~~Modifier~~ N] ... [_{DP} Modifier ~~N~~]

Proposal: The proposed analysis for Georgian is that split DPs in fact have two full noun phrases, but that the lower one is elliptical, and has a null noun in the ellided lower DP. This null noun bears case; due to the phonological nullness of the noun, though, the case is perceived to be on the preceding modifier, simulating case concord. This analysis makes correct predictions with respect to split DPs with multiple modifiers preceding the head noun. (4). The crucial piece of evidence for this analysis comes from nominal ellipsis (5)–the other context in Georgian in which case concord appears to involve modifiers that in continuous DPs do not participate in case concord.

- (4) [NP] ... [Modifier NULL.NP-*case*]

- (5) bitʃ-i Maya-s did c'ign-s atslevs, magram Giorgi patara-*(s)
 boy-NOM Maya-DAT big.ACC book-ACC brought but Giorgi.NOM small-ACC
 'The boy brought Maya a big book, but Giorgi (brought her) a small (one).'

Assuming that the syntax cannot anticipate the phonological process of ellipsis, it is not possible to posit that case concord obligatorily occurs on all modifiers within a DP that is about to undergo ellipsis. Rather, it appears that Georgian resembles English in having an obligatory element in nominal ellipsis (*one* in the English *Mary bought a red car and John bought a blue one*), with the difference being that the Georgian element is null.

This proposal also correctly predicts the differing form of the dative case for certain modifiers. While in the ergative and nominative cases most modifiers take an overt suffix (*-m(a)* and *-i*, respectively), in the dative they take a null suffix. Nevertheless, they take the overt suffix *-s* in split DPs, as illustrated in (6).

- (6) did-ma dzayl-ma (sam-∅/-*s) dzayl-s ukbina (sam-*∅/-s)
 big-ERG dog-ERG three-DAT/-DAT dog-DAT bit three-DAT/-DAT
 'The big dog bit three dogs.'

Under the present proposal, this observation is explained by the fact that the case on the postverbal modifier is in fact the case on the null head noun (nouns always take the overt *-s* in the dative). Proposals following previous analyses would have to posit two forms of the dative for each modifier that patterns with *sam* 'three' from above, and would be forced to stipulate that one occurs in the context of continuous DPs, the other in discontinuous DPs. The present proposal thus accounts for the facts of Georgian case concord and explains why certain modifiers do not enter into case concord in continuous DPs but appear to do so in discontinuous DPs.

Crucially, split DPs in Georgian are only grammatical when one part of the split is in the preverbal focus position, and the other is either postverbal (contrastive focus) or sentence-initial (topic). These three positions are all different in information structure, suggesting that Georgian split DPs arise when there is a mismatch in discourse features between two parts of the DP. Such mismatches in information structure are also claimed to motivate discontinuity phenomena such as floating quantifiers (Valmala 2008) and word order alternations in small clauses in languages like Spanish and Greek (Jiménez-Fernández & Spyropoulos 2013) exist. Thus, if the present analysis is correct, it contributes additional support for a discourse-mismatch approach to discontinuities crosslinguistically and suggests the other kinds of discontinuities should also be examined for evidence of ellipsis.

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