Argument Ellipsis and Discourse-Agreement Features: A Southeast Asian Perspective

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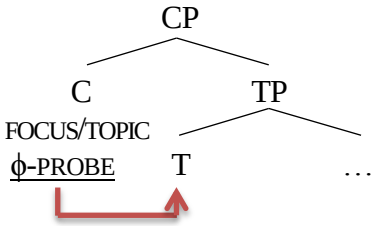
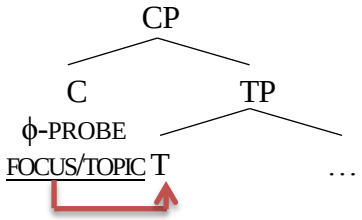
This paper investigates the distribution of argument ellipsis (AE) in two Southeast Asian languages – Javanese and Colloquial Singapore English (CSE) – and explores its implications for the design of agreement in natural language syntax. Miyagawa (2010) proposes that topic/focus in discourse-configurational languages has the computationally equivalent function of triggering movement as ϕ-agreement in agreement languages and implements this agreement-topic/focus parameter within the recent C-to-T inheritance model (Chomsky 2007, 2008; Richards 2007), as shown in (1) and (2).

(1) Agreement-Based Languages



(2) Discourse-Configurational Languages



Miyagawa (2013) extends this universal theory of agreement to AE in Chinese. Examples (3–4) show that null objects, but not null subjects, allow AE, as diagnosed by sloppy readings (Oku 1998).

(3)a. Zhangsan kanjian-le ta-de mama. b. Lisi ye kanjian-le *e*.
Zhangsan see-PERF he-MOD mother Lisi also see-PERF
'Zhangsan saw his mother.' 'Lisi also saw *e*.' (sloppy)

(4)a. Zhangsan shuo [$_{CP}$ ziji-de haizi xihuan Xiahong]. b. Lisi shuo [$_{CP}$ *e* xihuan Xiaoli].
Zhangsan say self-MOD child like Xiahong Lisi say like Xiaoli
'Zhangsan said that self's child liked Xiahong.' 'Lisi said that *e* liked Xiaoli.' (*sloppy)

Assuming Saito's (2007) hypothesis (see also Şener and Takahashi 2010 and Takahashi 2014) that AE is blocked by ϕ-agreement, Miyagawa argues that the asymmetry above falls out if Chinese has subject ϕ-agreement. The presence of ϕ-probe in Chinese is supported by the fact that long-distance construal of *ziji* 'self' is blocked by an intervening 1st/2nd subject, illustrated in (5–6). This blocking effect follows under the LF head-movement analysis of subject-oriented anaphors (Battistella 1989; Cole and Hermon 1990); *ziji* cannot refer to the matrix subject in (6), for the person value it receives in the embedded T clashes with the person value it receives in the matrix T.

(5) **Zhangsan$_i$** zhidao [**Lisi$_j$** dui **ziji$_{i/j}$** mei xinxin]. (embedded subject = 3rd person)
Zhangsan know Lisi to self NEG confidence
'Zhangsan$_i$ knows that Lisi$_j$ has no confidence in self$_{i/j}$.'

(6) **Zhangsan$_i$** zhidao **[{wo$_j$ /ni$_j$ }** dui **ziji$_{*i/j}$** mei xinxin]. (embedded subject = non-3rd person)
Zhangsan know I/you to self NEG confidence
'Zhangsan$_i$ knows that {I$_j$/you$_j$} has no confidence in self$_{*i/j}$.'

An important question which arises here is what happens to AE in languages which inherit the topic/focus feature as in (2). I provide data showing that Javanese AE exhibits the same subject-object asymmetry as Chinese AE, but this pattern is best explained by the inheritance of the topic feature. Firstly, Examples (7–8) illustrate that null objects, but not null subjects, exhibit AE in Javanese.

(7)a. Esti seneng guru-ne. b. Budi ya seneng *e*.
Esti like teacher-3SG Budi also like
'Esti likes her teacher.' '*Lit.* Budi also likes *e*.' (sloppy)

(8)a. Esti ngomong [$_{CP}$ guru-ne isa basa Prancis]. b. Budi ngomong [$_{CP}$ *e* isa basa Jepang]
Esti say teacher-3SG can French Budi say can Japanese
'Esti said that her teacher can speak French.' '*Lit.* Budi said that *e* can speak Japanese.' (*sloppy)

Secondly, the long-distance construal of the anaphor-like expression *nde'edewe* 'self' shown in (9) indicates that the impossibility of subject AE cannot be attributed to the presence of ϕ-probe under T.

(9) **Esti$_i$** ngerti nek **{aku/kowe}** nukokke **Siti$_j$** buku tentang **nde'e** **dewe**.
Esti AV.know COMP I/you AV.buy.APPL Siti book about self 3SG
'*Lit.* Esti$_i$ knows that {I/you} bought Siti$_j$ a book about herself$_{i/j}$.'

I propose that the subject ellipsis in Javanese is blocked by the topic feature inherited from C to T. The topic feature requires that the missing subject be topic and hence definite, excluding the sloppy interpretation from this position. There are two straightforward arguments in favor of this inheritance (Cole et al. 2002). Firstly, the subject position in Javanese must be definite, as shown in (10), a pattern that follows if the position is reserved for topic. Secondly, Javanese allows *wh*-in-situ for all positions (e.g. direct objects, possessors, indirect objects), except for the subject position: (11). Again, this restriction is explained if the subject position hosts a topic and excludes *wh*-phrases which bear focus.

(10)a. * **[$_{NP}$ Wong lanang]** gek turu.
person male PROG sleep
'A boy is sleeping.'

b. **[$_{NP}$ Wong lanang kuwi]** gek turu.
person male DEM PROG sleep
'That boy is sleeping.'

(11)a. Tono wis ngambung **sapa**?
Tono PAST AV.kiss who
'Who did Tono kiss?'

b. ***Sapa** meh mangan apel?
who FUT AV.eat apple
'Who will eat the apple?'

CSE, a nativized variety of English spoken in Singapore with robust Sinitic substratum, provides further evidence for the topic-agreement analysis, but with an important twist. CSE exhibits the subject-object asymmetry like Chinese and Javanese (see (12–13)), but importantly, Sato (2014) notes that the asymmetry persists irrespective of the surface manifestations of ϕ-agreement.

(12) a. David like(s) his school.
b. John also like(s) *e*. (sloppy)

(13) a. David say [$_{CP}$ his mother speak(s) Teochew].
b. Wait lah, John say [*e* speak(s) Hookien]. (*sloppy)

This pattern is explained if subjects in CSE are marked as topic, as predicted by the inheritance of the topic feature. Indeed, CSE exhibits properties of topic-prominent languages (Li and Thompson 1976) such as the absence of expletives which are replacd in CSE by *got*, robust presence of topic chains and Chnese-style hanging topic constructions and extensive use of topic-markers such as *wise* and *right* and discourse particles such as *ha* and *hor*, as illustrated in (14) (Bao 2001; Tan 2009; Sato and Kim 2012). Most importantly, as a prototypical correlate of topic-prominent languages, CSE observes the definite subject restriction, like Javanese, as shown in (15).

(14) a. **Got** people in the classroom. 'There are people in the classroom.'
b. [As a reponse to the question 'Can you cycle now?'] Yeah, ***e*** can cycle, not very well, but ***e*** can cycle, ah. ***e*** knocked myself against the pillar, but then ***e*** managed to pick up cycling.
c. **Local food**, you must try chicken rice.
d. As for filters **wise**, get a UV filter./ Your homework **ha/hor/la**, you better do *e*.

(15) a. **People** come already. Come greet them! (definite; *indefinite)
b. **Clothes** dry already. (definite; *indefinite)

Given the relavance of the topic-feature and the presence of agreement inflections, I propose that in CSE, both ϕ-probe and topic-feature are inherited from C to T, an option recently explored for Spanish by Jiménez-Fernández (2010). Under this hybrid view, CSE is both an agreement-based and a discourse-configurational language so that the inheritance of the ϕ-probe and the topic feature accounts for the agreement morphology and the lack of subject AE, respectively.

In sum, I have presented novel arguments from Javanese and CSE to show that not only the ϕ-agreement, but also the discourse-configurational topic feature, plays a crucial role in governing the distribution of AE. This result supports Miyagawa's (2010, 2013) hypothesis that ϕ-agreement and topic (and focus) are two manifestations of the universal computational system of agreement.

Selected References [1] Miyagawa, S. 2010. *Why agree? Why move? Unifying agreement-based and discourse-configurational languages*. MIT Press. [2] Miyagawa, S. 2013. Surprising agreements at T and C. Ms., MIT. [3] Oku, S. 1998. *A theory of selection and reconstruction in the minimalist perspective*. Uconn diss. [4] Saito, M. 2007. Notes on East Asian argument ellipsis. *Language Research* 43.