

University of Diyala

College of Education for Humanities

Department of English language

A STUDY OF VERB GROUP ELLIPSIS IN ENGLISH

By:

Ismail Abbas Abdul-kareem

&

Sarah Samir Khudhayyer

Supervised

by

Prof. Khalil Ismail Rijia (Ph. D.)

2016 A.D

D. Z. Al-Sayid
[Signature]
1437 H
May 2016
[Signature]

Dedication :

To ...

Our guide and spark of hope and light in our life –
the prophet and messenger "the peace and prayers of God
be upon him"

To ...

The pearls our life , our parents.

To ...

The sweetest figures , our brothers and sisters.

Acknowledgements :

We would like to thank ALLAH for his guidance and careness in our life.

Our thanks are also to all the members in English Department especially our marvelous supervisor Prof. Khalil Ismail Rijia.

Table of contents :

n.	contents	Page
1.	Introduction	
2.	Verb group Vs. verb phrase	
3.	The verb group system	
4.	Verb group echoing Vs. auxiliary contrasting ellipsis	
5.	The passive auxiliary	
6.	Some interpretation rules	
7.	Conclusions	
8.	References	

1. Introduction :

One of the fundamental starting points of semiotactics as put forward by Carl Ebeling (1978 , 2006) is that language consists of form-meaning units, and that syntax concerns the interrelations between the meanings of the constituent forms. The goal of this paper is to investigate how one can deal within semiotactics with constructions where the relation between form and meaning is less straight forward. More specifically we will deal with the phenomenon of verbal " Ellipsis". What ellipsis is, and whether it exists at all, has been a topic of discussion for more than a century, but as a starting point we will adopt the following definition of ellipsis given by the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics (Matthews 1997 : 111) : " the omission of one or more elements from a construction, especially when they are supplied by the context.

In this paper, the researchers will give an analysis of various verbal elliptical phenomena known from the literature within the semiotactic framework set forth by Ebeling (1978 , 2006). In Ebeling's main work, syntax and semantics (1978) the term " Ellipsis" is used only once with respect to Dutch sentence like *zeik is een geldige reden voor verzuim* (literally, " sike is valid reason for absence ") (Ebeling 1978 : 282). Ebeling probably uses the term "Ellipsis" for this construction because his semantic – syntactic presupposes a participant (the person that is sike) which is not expressed by a form. The same construction is, however, analyzed somewhat differentially by Ebling in semitax is (2006 : 199 - 200) and the term " Ellipsis" is not used any more, probably because the idea of an omitted linguistic element which is usually associated with the term " Ellipsis" does not suit the theory of semiotactics very well.

It should be noted that we use the term " Ellipsis" merely for the sake of convenience without adhering to the theoretical point of view that it requires a linguistic form that is omitted. In the same vein , we will stick to the labels for different elliptical constructions commonly accepted in the general linguistic literature.

2. verb group Vs. verb phrase :

The concept of the verb group, as distinct from the verb phrase, is used by, among others, Halliday and Hasan (1976 : 167) who refer to it as the "verbal group".

The verb group is the complex of auxiliary (-ies) and main verb in a sentence without the latter's complementation, while the verb phrase is the main verb and its complementation. We may consider the following sentence:

- Sally has been working for kellogs for the last four weeks.

The verb group is has been working, while the verb phrase is work for kellogs for last four weeks.

The distinction is made here for the purposes of our analysis, so that we may examine the interesting regularities that concern only the verb group without the distraction of extensive complementation.

Elliptical gaps represent, of course , not only parts of verb groups but whole verb phrases :

A. Has Jane been working for kellogs for the last four weeks?

B. No, but Sally has Ø .

A question that eventually arises is that of how much of the complementation from a verb phrase is suppliable th the gap. This question is, however , incidental to the fundamental working of verb group ellipsis and may be discussed after we have intestigated the interesting questions involving the verb group. We may sometimes, nevertheless, in our discussion of the workings of verb group ellipsis, take for granted, without explanation, the supplying of certain items of complementation.

3. the verb group system :

The verb group may be usefully described as a five- part system (scott et al : 1968 : 102 – 6) in terms of i) the maximum and minimum number of elements that it may contain , ii) the manifestations (continues or discontinues) of these non- elements , iii) the other in which the elements are manifested and iv) the range of non- elliptical and elliptical possibilities. The first three of these points are covered in chart 1. A similar, though not identical, analysis may be found in Mitchell (1975 : 170) .

As to the question of tense (which is not part of scott et al's system) generally speaking it may be said to contrast with the modals , playing the same syntactic role as the modals in relation to the other parts of the verb group. We may consider the replacement of might by –s in the second of the following verb groups:

- He might have been attacked.
- He has been attacked.

It is difficult, however , to know how to treat cases where what appear to be modals are clearly combinations of a root with tense :

- Yesterday , we could see the hills.
- I asked him to Ø , but he would not Ø .

Quirk and Green Baum (1973) deal with the problem of verb group ellipsis in the context of " Ellipsis in Coordinated Clauses " (216 ff.).

They exemplify this phenomenon by means of the following sentences, which we have slightly adapted to my presentation of elliptical sentences:

- John will meet my family tonight and will Ø again tomorrow.
- John will cook the meals today and Barbara may Ø tomorrow .
- John may be questioning our motives , but Peter has not Ø

- George will take the course and Bob might Ø too .

Quirk and Green point out that " it is also possible to have the predication ellipted in the first clause, in which case it is realized in some subsequent clause " (263) .

- George will Ø , and Bob might, take the course.

A part from the first sentence, all the above – mentioned sentences contain auxiliary contrasting ellipses, which we will deal with later (see esp. 4) .

To turn now to what is possible and what is not in the verb group, we can see in chart that , with the obvious exclusive of 2 by intransitive verbs, a 5 4 3 2 1 verb group is possible. Clearly not all elements are obligatory. Of the maximum of five elements, 5 and 1 seem to be obligatory and 4 3 and 2 optional, producing a minimal verb group of 5 1.

There is no verb group with neither tense nor modality, gust as there is no verb group without a main lexical verb. (The case of the imperative verb from, which appears an exception to the requirement of the a 5 element, does not enter into this study as it affords no possibilities for verb group ellipsis)

The above constraints are, of course, " syntactic " and say nothing about the level of " overt manifestation " (Thomas 1979 : 59)

In an elliptical verb group, 1 is always unmanifested and all other verb group items except the first word of the particular verb group may be unmanifested. We say the first ' word ' rather than ' element ' as frequently the first word is not simply the manifestation of one element :

- He has been fired.
- You mean she has Ø .

Has is the partial manifestation of the full manifestation of tense.

As there is only a constraint to manifest the first word, the elliptical expression he has Ø , for example , can occur to represent a 5 4 1 , a 5 4 3 1 , a 5 4 2 1 or a 5 4 3 2 1 verb group (tense belonging to the 5 category) .

- Has he eaten yet? I think he has Ø
- Has he been eaten?
- Has he been being eaten?

Ignoring the incidental semantic oddness of the last two examples, we can see that the fact that only the first word need be manifested provides for great verbal economy.

We can note that while only the first word need be manifested, others may be manifested :

- Might anyone have been notified?
- Arthur might Ø .
- Arthur might have Ø .
- Arthur might have been Ø .

An elliptical verb group may, thus , manifest all its parts except the last word. The main verb + any affix that would, in an equivalent non-elliptical verb group , be attached to it.

4. verb group echoing Vs. auxiliary contrasting ellipsis :

From now on, when we talk of the auxiliaries, we shall be referring to the modals and tense, have (perfect) , be (progressive) and be (passive). The last three we recognize are only the partial manifestation of elements, being mutually value dependent on the respective affixes –ed , -en , -ing and ed – en. By saying that the auxiliary and the affix are mutually value – dependent , we mean that " each of them requires the other for constituting an element of significant choice " (Haas 1972 : 535) in spite of this value – dependence , however , the rules of verb group ellipsis are easiest stated if we view have , be (3) and be (2) as auxiliaries in their own rights requiring the stem + -ed –en , stem + -ing and stem + -ed –en form respectively of the verb group items that follow them (the terms ' stem').

+ -ed and stem + -ing come from George (1972 : 107). This is so because frequently the auxiliary is manifested while the affix is not:

A. Is anyone coming? B. Jack is O.

We may talk of such an elliptical verb group as a 5 3 Ø construction, with two manifested auxiliaries –present tense and be (3). Be (3) and be (2), in their elliptical use, are only distinguishable in a particular context.

In order to state further rules, we must distinguish between cases where the last manifested auxiliary of the elliptical verb group is a part of the relevant verb group. In the preceding sentence, in which case the remainder of the verb group in the preceding sentence will be supplied to the gap, and cases where the last manifested auxiliary is

new, in which case only the stem form of the main verb is supplied from the preceding sentence.

(see also 6 below) the former we may refer to as verb group echoing ellipsis and the latter as auxiliary contrasting ellipsis:

A. Might anyone be coming? B. Jeff might Ø.

A. Has anyone been eating? B. Jane has Ø.

A. Is anyone being paid? B. Jack is Ø.

Auxiliary contrasting :

A. Has he visited India? B. No, but he might Ø

A. Might you be visited India? B. I already have Ø (ed).

A. Should not you study? B. I am Ø (ing).

We may note that the mere supplying of the stem form does not produce an acceptable verbalization in the case of the non- modal auxiliaries , in the way that it does in the case of the modal auxiliaries. An affix is also required.

If the non- modal auxiliaries are less normal in their auxiliary contrasting ellipsical use than they are in their verb group echoing ellipsical uses, preferring , in contrasting uses, main verb repetition or the use of do , this may be because speakers and listeners are sensitive to the degree of complexity of verbally completing an ellipsical sentence from the linguistic context , where this is possible. It is simple to supply affixed forms, such as been eating , that have occurred (however complex they may be) while it is more complex to supply stem forms that have occurred and created new affixes

because a modal auxiliary only requires the stem from of the verb group item that follows , the operation of verbal completion is equally simple in both verb group echoing and auxiliary contrasting elliptical uses and indeed both uses seem equally normal.

We have made the distinction between verb group echoing and auxiliary contrasting ellipsis in term of the last manifested auxiliary. A verb group echoing ellipsis may have auxiliaries that are new occurring before the repeated auxiliary (or , in the case of tense , simultaneously with it) :

A. Is anyone eating? B. John was Ø .

A. Are you feeling better? B. No, but I should be Ø soon

A. Was anyone eating? B. John might have been Ø .

The various contrasts between tense and between tense and modality, and the addition of the auxiliary have (with its related affix) do not affect the echoing nature of the responses, which all have be (3) as their last manifested auxiliary (tense may be thought of as preceding the non-modal auxiliary , with which it is forced to combine in the same word as syntactically it belongs to category 5 , along with the modals).

The be Ø constructions of the responses echo the be + stem + -ing constructions of the questions and so to the gaps may be supplied the remaining stem + -ing forms.

5. The passive auxiliary :

We have distinguished in 4 above between the modal auxiliaries which require the stem form of what follows and the non- modal auxiliaries , which require an affixed form of what follows. The latter we have said , seem to be slightly less susceptible to auxiliary contrasting elliptical uses , preferring , where they are new , either the repetition of the main verb or the use of the pro- verb do , in order that their required affixes may be manifested.

The passive auxiliary be (2) is similar to have (4) and the progressive be (3) in that it is mutually value – dependent on an affix – ed –en. Because a transformation from active to passive involves a different relation between syntactic position and semantic roles (or , in Fillmor's terms , cases – 1968) however the auxiliary contrasting use of be (2) not only tends to be avoided , it seems to be ruled out:

- A. I have never hit anyone.
- B. * I was Ø yesterday.

This sequence of sentences with the suggested interpretation seems distinctly implausible.

Fowler states : " Even if the form required is identical with that elsewhere expressed. It cannot be understood if the voice is different " (1926 : 134). His example of a deviant use of ellipsis is :

* though the house of Lords word have revised the Bill as no doubt it could be Ø with advantage.

The above may occur as some kind of performance error conditioned by the homophony of revised belonging to have and revised belonging to be , the possibility of having the passive

participle understood is even less if only the stem form of the main verb has been expressed. We may give another example of a deviant use of ellipsis from Fowler:

* our officials will manage matters as they ought to have been Ø .

The question of form is , however , secondary to the major question of the switching of the syntactic position – semantic role correspondence.

It is perhaps worth noting , as a further distinction between the passive auxiliary and the other auxiliaries that the pro-verb do is not an alternative to the gap in the language system. It was done yesterday can only have an interpretation involving do as main verb , not as pro-verb.

The verb group echoing use of a be (2) Ø construction is perfectly normal :

A. I hope no one was hurt.

B. Let was Ø I am afraid.

Not only is the affixed form suppliable , but the syntactic position – semantic role correspondence of the grammatical subject is maintained.

Just as the auxiliary contrasting use of be (2) Ø constructions are ruled out , so is the auxiliary contrasting use of any other auxiliary in the context of a passive construction. We may provide further examples of deviant uses of ellipsis :

A. Has the cheese been eaten? B.* I am Ø (ing) at the moment

A. Has the cheese been eaten? B. * No, but I might Ø.

6. some interpretation rules :

What we supply and what we do not is frequently decided by the sheer grammatical impossibility of supplying certain verb group items:

A. Have you even been attacked?

B. I was Ø yesterday.

This verb group echoing use of a be Ø construction only allows attacked to be supplied from the preceding sentence. The other auxiliary have is , along with its related affix –en , grammatically repudiated (the term is from Halliday and Hasan 1976 : 93). Such an interpretation rule is clearly formally statable in terms of the 5 4 3 2 1 system. What is supplied to a verb group echoing construction can at most be , owing to grammatical construction the remainder of the verb group after the auxiliary of the preceding sentence that is repeated.

There is the further point concerning verb group echoing constructions that a maximal verb group echoing interpretation will be assigned wherever possible , in preference to a shorter auxiliary contrasting interpretation which may also be , grammatical speaking , possible :

A. I do not know anyone who might have been working for ICI.

B. Sally has Ø .

An echoing interpretation will be assigned in preference to the auxiliary contrasting interpretation Sally has worked for ICI , which could be assigned by supplying the stem form work for ICI and creating the required –ed affix.

This rule cannot be attributed to the complexity of creating an affix , as the same rule holds in the case of the modal auxiliaries:

A. Might anyone have eaten it ?

B. Mary might Ø .

An auxiliary contrasting 5 1 interpretation will not be assigned where a 5 4 1 verb group echoing interpretation is possible. (this rule is stated with one reservation concerning stress placement, which we shall discuss in 7 below)

A rule concerning auxiliary contrasting ellipsis is that these will be assigned auxiliary + 1 interpretation whatever the nature of the verb group construction in the relevant preceding sentence :

A. Has he ever visited Kalutara?

B. No, but he will Ø soon.

A 5 1 interpretation seems the only possibility here. We cannot supply the 4 1 construction of the preceding sentence even though he will have visited Kalutara soon would be an acceptable sentence. Have is not, along with its affix –ed , gram matically repudiated, in the sense that it was in our first example of this section. It is, however , repudiated by the established contextual rule of verb group ellipsis.

To be sure of a 5 4 1 interpretation, B could reply as follows:

A. Has he ever visited Kalutara?

B. No, but he will have Ø soon.

The appearance of have after will gives us a verb group echoing ellipsis.

We have noted here that a modal, though it belongs to the same auxiliary category as tense and may replace it in an otherwise identical construction, will not be taken, on its own, as echoing the auxiliary category 5, where the slot was filled by tense in the preceding sentence.

This suggests that it is not just the category that must be repeated but the identical member of the category that must be repeated, before a maximal verb group echoing interpretation may be assigned. This is borne out also by examples involving two models:

A. Might he have visited Colombo?

B. No, but he will Ø.

A. Will you be going to Negombo?

B. I should Ø.

A. (?) will you be going to Kandy?

B. I might Ø.

The first two examples fairly clearly make our point, while the last example seems to provide us with a blend of two possibilities, as far as verbal determinacy is concerned. There is perhaps no need to distinguish in an elliptical sentence between the similar meanings associated with might go and might be going. At any rate to be sure of a 5 4 1 or 5 3 1 interpretation in the above cases, Be world have to reply with a 5 4 Ø (he will have Ø) or 5 3 Ø construction (I should be Ø. I might be Ø) respectively.

The rule where by auxiliary + Ø constructions receive auxiliary + 1 interpretations in their auxiliary contrasting uses also holds in the case of non – modal auxiliaries :

A. Will you be eating lunch soon ?

B. I just have Ø (-en)

A 4 3 1 interpretation , as opposed to the assigned 4 1 interpretation in only feasible where the be (3) auxiliary is repeated :

A. Will you be eating lunch soon?

B. I just have been Ø.

In this case we have an echoing use of the be (3) Ø construction.

7. Conclusions:

If we are to adopt an analysis where restrictions on ellipsis are derived from the head that licenses the elision, than we might be able to explain some of the facts above. There are some more general implications that the above hypothesis makes with regard to what gets elided.

It has been observed in previous work that VP ellipsis is subject to constraints on form both inside and outside of the ellipsis site.

Rooth (1992's) discussion of Fiengo X may (1994) summarizes this view succinctly.

Fiengo X may identify two relations between VP ellipsis and their antecedents. One is a relation of structural identity that must hold between antecedent and elided VPS. Basically speaking, the structure and content of the VPS must be the same in order for one to be elided.

Importantly, Fiengo X may identify yet another relation, which holds over the greater structure in which the VPS occur. Rooth describe this relation as " regulating indices " requiring syntactic isomorphy for the patterns of indices in a tree.

It is fairly obvious that the restriction on clausal antecedents for ellipsis in poss-ing phrases cannot be the same one described by Fiengo X may (1994). If the discussion and analysis of the structure of poss-ing phrases in 2 3 is at all on track, than one would legitimately expect the structural isomorphy between the DP and TP functional layers to be sufficiently similar. Rather, what is uncovered here is a different syntactic requirement that must hold over the structures that contain antecedent and elided VPS. This constraint is apparently correlated with the category of

the licensing head, though for the time being, its full nature is unfortunately unknown.

The conditions on ellipsis of VP inside of a poss-ing gerundive are both complex and fascinating. As we have shown, the typical understanding of ellipsis in the syntax simply cannot account for all of the data presented. VPE in poss-ing DPS is much more restricted than VPE in other domains. This cannot be attributed to VP – internal morphosyntax or to conditions outside of the DP. This leaves the licensing heading itself to be the source of the restrictions, and locality conditions on the restrictions point to this being the case.

However, moving to an account of ellipsis where heads license the deletion of their complements still raises a number of issues that are not fully resolved here.

One reason that poss may not allow an ellipsis to find VP antecedents may have to do with its more usual status as the possessive determiner.

The fact that it typically selects for NPS may cause speakers to react differently when it selects for a VP.

There do not seem to be a great deal of ellipsis- licensing heads in the language that take complements of different categories, but the verb (be) selects for many phrase types and seems to allow for the ellipsis of all of them. One potential course of investigation would be to see if there are any restrictions on be and the ellipsis it licenses. The question to ask would be whether ellipsis after be has different properties depending on the elided constituent. This could help identify reasons why some ellipsis are licit while others are not permissible.

Another place for investigation is VPE after other heads. As we have noted many times so far, ellipsis is licensed by TV aux, and E. It would likely be worthwhile to test and see how good ellipsis are when the antecedent and the elided constituent are selected by different members of this set of licensing heads to see if there are any restrictions in this domain.

If any regularities are discovered, this could help uncover why the mismatch between poss and other licensing heads exists.

In conclusion, there is still a great deal of work to be done. The problems presented here are only a few of many peculiar questions posed by ellipsis in poss-ing nominal. The facts, though, point to the ellipsis-licensing head as being the source of a lot of these, and it is these head that need further investigation.

8. References :

- Clerk, H. H. and Carlson, T. B. (1982) speech Acts and Hearers Beliefs in Smith N. V. ed. Mutual Knowledge. London: Academic Press.
- Fiengo, Robert & Robert May (1994) movement Operations after Syntax. Linguistic Inquiry.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1968) The case for case in Bach. E. and Harms, R. J. eds. Universals in Linguistic Theory. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Fowler, H. W. (1926) Modern English Usage. London: Oxford University Press.
- Frazier, Lyn, Charles Jr. Clifton, & Katy Carlson (2007) Focus and VP Ellipsis. Language and speech.
- George, H. V. (1972) Common Errors in Language Learning. Rowley: Newbury House.
- Hankamer, Jorge & Ivan Sag (1976) Deep and Surface Anaphora. Linguistic Inquiry. URL <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4177933>.
- Jackendoff, Ray S (1971) Gapping and Related Rules. Linguistic Inquiry.
- Lobeck, Anne (1995) Ellipsis. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rooth, Mats (1992) Ellipsis redundancy and reduction redundancy. In proceeding of the Stuttgart Ellipsis workshop, IBM Germany.
- Ross, John Robert (1967) Constraints on variables in syntax. Ph. D. thesis Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Zwicky, Arnold M. (1982) Stranded to and phonological phrasing in English. *Linguistics*.