Comprehension of VP-ellipsis and null object constructions in Korean

Speakers often omit parts of speech that have been mentioned in previous discourse and listeners can easily retrieve what is omitted. Here is an example:

(1) English
a. John ate an apple and Bill did too.
b. John ate an apple and Bill ~~ate an apple~~ too.

The second conjunct *Bill did too* in (1a) is interpreted as 'Bill ate an apple too.' As in (1b), the verb phrase *ate an apple* appears in both the first and the second conjuncts. Due to the economy of communication, however, such phrases are often omitted from the second conjunct, creating what is called Verb Phrase Ellipsis (henceforth VP-ellipsis).

A number of studies have extensively examined whether null object constructions as in (2) can be considered comparable to VP-ellipsis (Hoji, 1998; Huang, 1991; Kim, 1999; Otani and Whitman, 1991; Xu, 2003).

(2) Korean
a. Chelswu-ka   sakwa-lul   mek-ess-e.   Yenghuy-to   mek-ess-e.
   Chelswu-NOM apple-ACC   eat-PST-DECL   Yenghuy-also   eat-PST-DECL
   (Lit.) 'Chelswu ate apples. Yenghuy ate, too.'

According to Xu (2003), VP-ellipsis and null object constructions have different interpretation patterns in reconstructing antecedent clauses containing adverbials at the elided site in the second clause. As presented in table 1, in null object constructions, for example, manner and reason adverbials in the first clause are not reconstructed at the elided site in the second clause, whereas temporal and locative adverbials are. In VP-ellipsis, in contrast, the first conjunct's adverbials denoting an event's manner, reason, time, and location are all reconstructed at the elided site in the second conjunct. Considering the different recovery of adverbials in these two elliptical constructions, two experiments, adapted from Cheung's (2008) study, were conducted for this study.

Experiment 1 explored the recovery of manner and temporal adverbials in VP-ellipsis and null object constructions in Korean (see Appendix 2 for example sentences), employing a picture Truth Value Judgment Task. Experiment 2 tested the recovery of reason and locative adverbials, using the same method. Twenty adult Korean speakers participated in both Experiments 1 and 2.

The results of this study reveal that Korean speakers distinguish the differences between VP-ellipsis and the null object constructions in terms of adverbial recovery. That is, in VP-ellipsis, they reconstructed the entire VP including adverbial phrases from the first conjunct at the elided site in the second conjunct. On the other hand, in the null object constructions, they recovered the first conjunct's temporal and locative adverbials at the elided site in the second conjunct, whereas they did not recover the first conjunct's manner and reason adverbials at the elided site in the second conjunct. Based on the results, I propose the following:

1. In VP-ellipsis constructions, the same verb phrase including an adverbial phrase from the first clause is reconstructed at the elided site in the second clause. This is because the entire VP of the antecedent clause is elided in the second conjunct.
2. In Korean null object constructions containing a temporal or a locative adverbial phrase in the first conjunct, the noun phrase including the adverbial phrase of the first conjunct is reconstructed at the elided site in the second conjunct. Since action verbs usually denote events that occur at a particular point/period in time or at a particular point in space, they

generate an argument position for time and location at the elided site in the second conjunct.

3. In Korean null object constructions containing a manner or a reason adverbial phrase in the first conjunct, the adverbial phrase of the first conjunct is not reconstructed at the elided site in the second conjunct. Compared to the temporal and locative adverbials, manner and reason adverbials denote semantically and pragmatically more peripheral information, so verbs rarely generate a manner and a reason adverbial position at the elided site in the second conjunct.

The results of this study have some significant implications: First, the study verifies Hoji's (1998) argument that VP-ellipsis does not correspond to null object constructions. Second, the results of this study support the idea that null arguments in null object constructions have a wider range of interpretations than those in VP-ellipsis (Matsuo, 2007). Lastly, this empirical study bridges the gap between linguistic theory and real-time language comprehension in that the results of psycholinguistic experiments support the existing theoretical arguments.

References
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Appendix 1

Table 1. Adverbial recovery in VP-ellipsis and null object constructions in Korean

Adverbials	VP-ellipsis	Null object construction
Manner/Reason	Recovered	Not recovered
Temporal/Locative	Recovered	Recovered

Appendix 2 – Korean target sentences

a. VP-ellipsis
Chelswu-ga   phica-rul   ppalli   mek-ess-e-yo.   Yenghuy-to-e-yo.
Chelwsu-NOM pizza-ACC quickly eat-PST-DECL-POL Yenhuy-also-DECL-POL
'Chelswu ate pizza quickly. Yenghuy did too.'

b. Null object construction
Chelswu-ga   phica-rul   ppalli   mek-ess-e-yo.   Yenghuy-to   mek-ess-e-yo.
Chelwsu-NOM pizza-ACC quickly eat-PST-DECL-POL Yenhuy-also   eat-PST-DECL-POL
'Chelswu ate pizza quickly. Yenghuy ate too.'