

Noun-Phrase Ellipsis in English and French

Dr. Hafissatou Kane

Cheikh Anta DIOP University of Dakar, Senegal

Abstract

Ellipsis in linguistics refers to a construction whose phonological form is missing relative to the form that construction should have, given the meaning it denotes. However, the mismatch between form and meaning requires that the meaning associated with the gap is somehow recoverable. Goldberg & Perek (2016: 1-2) explain that every language balances the need to be expressive with the need to be sufficiently easy to produce. In a broad sense, the existence of elliptical constructions is clearly motivated by our need to express our messages economically. For example, in (1) *my horse is faster than yours (your horse)*, repeating the whole noun phrase ‘*your horse*’ is perceived as redundant because the single possessive pronoun ‘*yours*’ fully expresses the same idea. For Rutgers (2018), it is not surprising that, as far as we know, there are no languages that are completely free of ellipsis constructions. However, constructionist approaches predict that ‘language constructions vary from language to language’. Therefore, speakers need to learn the nuances of how individual ellipsis constructions are conventionalized in each particular language (Goldberg & Perek, *ibid*). Knowledge of these nuances is also essential for additional language learners in order to avoid confusion or negative transfer. Based on the existing literature, this paper examines the construction of the Noun-Phrase ellipsis in English and French using contrastive analysis. Drawing on the author’s previous research on VP-Ellipsis in the same two languages (Kane, 2020), this paper will argue that although there are similarities, ellipsis in the Noun-Phrase is conventionalized more differently in the two languages. For example, in (2a), the definite article is dropped because in English we often drop the definite article when talking about things in general or when referring to all members of a group in a broad sense, whereas in French it is required (e.g., 2b). In (3a), the ellipsis of the noun ‘boy’ is recovered by the pronoun ‘one’, while the French sentence in (3b) is fully understood with the same noun drop.

2. a. _ Children understand more than we think
b. Les enfants comprennent plus que nous le pensons.
3. a. I saw the boys play in the yard. The *(tall) ONES played with the *(small) ones.
b. J’ai vu les garçons dans la cour. Les *(grands) _ jouaient avec *(les petits) _.

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