

snippets

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Perfect Island Repair by Ellipsis in Nupe: Against Aspectual Mismatch

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Perfect island effects in Nupe arise when non-edge vP-internal material (e.g., objects) is A'-extracted in a clause containing the perfect marker *á* (Kandybowicz 2009):

- (1) a. Ké Musa [_{vP} pa t] o?
 what Musa pound.PST FOC
 'What did Musa pound?'
 b. * Ké Musa [_{vP} á t pa] o?
 what Musa PRF pound.PST FOC
 Intended: 'What has Musa pounded?'
 c. Zě t [_{vP} á eci pa] o?
 who PRF yam pound.PST FOC
 'Who has pounded the yam?'

Mendes and Kandybowicz (2023) (MK23) reported that Nupe perfect islands are neutralized in sluicing/stripping environments and argued that perfect island violations can be salvaged by ellipsis:

- (2) A: Musa á ejan ndoci pa.
 Musa PRF thing certain pound.PST
 'Musa has pounded something.'
 B: Ké Musa á t pa o?
 what ~~Musa PRF~~ pound.PST FOC
 'What has ~~Musa~~ pounded?' (cf. (1b))

MK23 empirically rejected several alternative analyses which do not resort to repair: *pseudosluicing*, *nondeletion* (LF-copying/ deep anaphora), *nonmovement* (nonconstituent deletion), and *resumption*. Not considered by MK23, however, was the possibility that the ellipsis site doesn't contain the perfect marker despite its presence in the antecedent (suggested to us by Marcel den Dikken and Julie Legate (p.c.)), which could evade a perfect island violation within the ellipsis site. Promisingly, (1a) can be felicitously used in the context of (2A):

- (3) A: Musa á ejan ndoci pa.
 Musa PRF thing certain pound.PST
 'Musa has pounded something.'
 B: Ké Musa pa t o?
 what Musa pound.PST FOC
 'What did Musa pound?'

Whether this proposal provides a solid alternative to MK23's salvation by deletion proposal remains an empirical question. An important background point concerns the mismatch between

ellipsis site and its antecedent that is required for this alternative, with respect to tense/aspect: on the alternative analysis suggested, the antecedent would be in the perfect, but the elided clause would be in the simple past. Although this might seem like the kind of mismatch that would be ruled out by ellipsis identity, Thoms (2015, 184) provides data showing that such mismatches are possible under ellipsis in Scottish Gaelic, and the theory of ellipsis identity in Ranero 2021 allows mismatches between ellipsis sites and their antecedent so long as they do not implicate featural clash. Thus, if the difference between (3A)'s and (3B)'s *vP* can be stated without conflicting features (e.g., (3A) has a [perf] feature that (3B) lacks), ellipsis should be allowed. This lack of parallelism, however, leads to infelicity in certain non-elliptical contexts; specifically, when a reference time is specified in the perfect clause:

- (4) A: Musa [á] ejan ndoci pa [lókàti na mi tun na].
 Musa PRF thing certain pound.PST time REL 1.SG arrive REL
 ‘Musa had pounded something when I arrived.’
 B:# Ké Musa pa t ([lókàti na mi tun na]) o?
 what Musa pound.PST time REL 1.SG arrive REL FOC
 ‘What did Musa pound (when I arrived)?’

Despite this fact, sluicing is possible in this context:

- (5) A: Musa [á] ejan ndoci pa [lókàti na mi tun na].
 Musa PRF thing certain pound.PST time REL 1.SG arrive REL
 ‘Musa had pounded something when I arrived.’
 B: Ké Musa [á] t pa o?
 what Musa PRF pound.PST FOC
 ‘What has Musa pounded?’

Since the absence of the perfect marker in the *wh*-question in (4B) leads to an infelicitous question, the availability of the sluicing construction in (5B) cannot be attributed to lack of perfect morphology within the ellipsis site. The dataset in (6) also controls for short cleft sources which could, in principle, be used as a strategy to evade a perfect island violation within the ellipsis site. Short clefts typically require exhaustivity (e.g., *#What else (was it)?*) and thus cannot cope with *else*-modification (Merchant 2001; see MK23 for further arguments against short cleft sources in Nupe).

- (6) A: Musa [á] eci pa [lókàti na mi tun na].
 Musa PRF yam pound.PST time REL 1.SG arrive REL
 ‘Musa had pounded the yam when I arrived.’
 B:# Ké Musa pa t ([lókàti na mi tun na]) be o?
 what Musa pound.PST time REL 1.SG arrive REL else FOC
 ‘What else did Musa pound (when I arrived)?’
 B’: Ké Musa [á] t pa be o?
 what Musa PRF pound.PST else FOC
 ‘What else had Musa pounded?’ / ‘#What else was it?’ (bad without ellipsis)

We thus reject the *aspectual mismatch* alternative, alongside other alternatives in MK23, and conclude that Nupe perfect island violations can indeed be repaired by deletion. Hence, the opacity

of perfect *v*Ps in the language is *not* the result of narrow syntactic constraints, but rather PF-representation constraints that can be voided under ellipsis as claimed by MK23.

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