A phonological approach to particle stranding ellipsis in Japanese

Synopsis: This paper investigates so-called ‘particle stranding ellipsis’ in Japanese, where particles such as case/focus particle or postposition are stranded alone, eliding elements that they are attached to. It provides novel observations on this phenomenon, and argues that it is basically phonology-governed.

Observations in Previous Studies: In Japanese, particles can be stranded alone, without the host NPs [1B], which Sato (2012) dubs ‘particle stranding ellipsis’ (PSE). PSE is observed with a variety of particles: with a case particle [2a], with a focus particle [2b], and with a postposition [2c]. The previous studies provide the following observations: First, PSE is a root/main clause phenomenon (Nasu 2010, Goto 2012, Sato 2012, a.o.) in the sense that PSE can occur only in the root/main clause and cannot occur in the embedded clause [3]. Second, stranded particles need to be a sentence-initial topic (Yoshida 2004, Nasu 2010, Sato 2012, a.o.) (see the contrast between [4B1] and [4B2]). Third, PSE can occur only once in a clause [5] (Sato 2012, a.o.). Thus, [5B], where PSE occurs twice, is unacceptable.

Analyses in Previous Studies: Previous studies (Nasu 2010, Goto 2012, Sato 2012, a.o.) provide a syntactic analysis for PSE. The assumption that they have in common is that there is a position for a stranded particle in the highest CP layer which exists only in the root/main clause. For instance, Sato (2012) claims that a topic marker – wa is a head of TopP (= Topic Phrase), which he assumes to be a phase head. This head optionally undergoes Spell-Out to PF with its complements, leaving its specifier not sent to PF. Authors such as Nasu (2010) and Goto (2012) claim that above TopP, there is a projection FP in the matrix clause which hosts a stranded particle and that the stranded particle moves from [Spec,TopP] to [Spec,FP].

New Observations: Here, I provide observations that have been unnoticed or not fully discussed in the literature. First, PSE is not necessarily a root/main clause phenomenon. In [6], the embedded subject undergoes PSE, but the sentence is acceptable. Note that the analysis in which the embedded subject is scrambled to the matrix clause does not seem to work here since such scrambling violates the ban on string vacuous scrambling (Hoji 1985). Second, stranded particles need to be ‘strictly’ sentence-initial in that no phonological entity can precede it, even an item like an interjection [7]. Third, for a sentence with PSE to be acceptable, the stranded particle needs to be focused (with dephrasing thereafter): PSE involves focus phrasing which starts from the stranded particle. Fourth, PSE is not allowed in Korean, which has a particle system very similar to Japanese; my Korean informants all reject PSE in Korean.

Proposal: I propose that PSE is basically phonology-governed. Following Pierrehumbert & Beckman (1988), I assume that prosodic categories in Japanese are hierarchically organized as in [8]. Then, recall that PSE involves focus prosody, which is roughly formalized as follows: when an element is focused, the intermediate phrase boundary is inserted at the left of the focused item [9a], and there is no intervening left intermediate phrase edge between the focused item and the end of the sentence (in single focus cases) [9b]. For example, the sentence [10a] normally has the intermediate phrasing [10b], but when the topic marker is focused, it has the phrasing [10c]. Then, since PSE is ‘strictly’ sentence initial, I propose [11] as a licensing condition for PSE, which states that the stranded particle is possible only when its intermediate left-edge corresponds to utterance edge and the particle itself is focused.

Consequences: The current analysis accounts for all the properties in [3]–[7]. For instance, the reason why PSE in a non-sentence-initial position is bad ([3], [4B1]&[5]) is trivial since such PSE fails to meet the condition [11]. Also, it is not problematic at all for the condition [11] even if a particle in the embedded clause is stranded [6], for the condition itself does not mention a syntactic structure. Then, why an interjection blocks PSE [7] is not mysterious, either; whether the interjection forms its own intermediate phrase or not, the left intermediate phrase edge of the stranded particle does not correspond to utterance edge in such a case. Furthermore, the current formalization of PSE allows us to account for why PSE is impossible in Korean. Jun (1993) reports that in Standard Korean (Seoul dialect), it is impossible to focus only a particle; Korean cannot have the phrasing equivalent to [10c], unlike Japanese. Since putting focus only on a particle is a necessary process for PSE licensing, the current analysis predicts that Korean cannot have such ellipsis, which is indeed the case. Thus, the difference in the acceptability of PSE between Japanese and Korean naturally follows if PSE is phonology-governed.
   TOP yet come-NEG.POLITE
   ‘He hasn’t come yet.’

   NOM company-ACC quit EXCL.
   ‘(He) quit (his) company.’
   (Goto 2012: 103)
   -only come-NEG.POLITE COP.POLITE-PAST
   ‘Only he didn’t come.’
c. A: ‘Did you draw a picture with that pencil?’
   B: -de kai-ta (yo).
   -with draw-PAST EXCL.
   ‘(I) drew (a picture) with (the pencil).’
   (Goto 2012: 103)

   John-TOP that time -TOP Mary-NOM kill-PAST C think-PAST
   ‘intended: John thought at that time that [e]=Taro, Mary killed.’
   (Sato 2012: 496)

B1: *tabun -wa hantaisu-ru darou kedo, settokusu-ru tumori.
   probably -TOP disagree-PRES may though persuade-PRES will
   ‘Though, speaking of John, he may probably disagree, I will persuade him.’
B2: -wa tabun hantaisu-ru darou kedo, settokusu-ru tumori. (Nasu 2010: (28))

B: *-wa-ne, -wa MIT-ni suisensuru-tumori-mitai da yo.
   -TOP-TAG -TOP MIT-DAT recommend-intend-seem COP TAG
   ‘It seems that Prof. Suzuki intends to recommend Takahashi to MIT.’
   (Sato 2012: 497)

B: -ga sigoto-o yameru ka dooka-wa sira-nai kedo, sooiu uwasa-wa aru.
   -NOM job-ACC quit Q whether-TOP know-NEG though such rumor-TOP exist
   ‘Though I don’t know whether [e] (=John) will quit his job, there is such a rumor.’

   well -TOP come-NEG.POLITE
   ‘Well, he won’t come.’


   Left edge of focus = left intermediate phrase edge
b. FOCUS-TO-END
   No intervening [], between any focus constituent and the end of the sentence

    Naoko-TOP Sunday Nagoya-in Mari-DAT met
    ‘On Sunday, Naoko met Mari in Nagoya.’
b. [u] [Náoko wá] [nichiyóobi] [Nágoya dé] [Mári ni átta]  
c. [u] [Náoko] [uá nichiyóobi Nagoya dé Mári ni átta]  
   (Nagahara 1994: 40)

[11] PSE is licensed in: [u] [X …… ], where X is a stranded particle and is focused.