

The Syntax of Noun Phrase Deletion in Ngwa Igbo

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Abstract

This article discusses noun phrase ellipsis (NP-Ellipsis) in Ngwa, a variety of the Igbo language spoken in south-eastern Nigeria. It examines how listeners recover meaning from a construction when the noun element is omitted. Effective communication requires adequate mapping of linguistic form and meaning. But, in ellipsis, the usual mappings seem to be entirely absent. This raises the question of how listeners interpret ellipted structures or derive meaning when a word is omitted from a sentence. How are elliptical materials recovered? To address this, the purposive sampling technique was used to draw primary data from participants, complemented with interviews and native-speaker intuition. Secondary data came from the internet and library materials. The descriptive method of analysis was used, with Leipzig Glossing Rule (LGR) of morpheme-to-morpheme inter-linear glossing, and syntactic tree diagrams. The minimalist program (MP) was used in the discussions because it employs fewer linguistic apparatus to construct syntactic structures. The result shows that the deletion of NP is possible in Ngwa Igbo and occurs when the specifier of the determiner phrase (DP) is occupied by quantifiers, possessives, or numerals. In conclusion, NP ellipsis in Ngwa takes place under syntactic identity with an antecedent NP in the same sentence.

Keywords: Ellipsis; Ngwa Igbo; Noun Phrase; Deletion; Minimalist Program

Abstract in Ngwa Igbo: Edemedede a lebara anya na nsepuokwu mkpọaha n'olu Ngwa, bu ngalaba asusu Igbo a na-asu na mpaghara odida anyanwu Najjiria. Ebumnuche ya bu imata ka ogee si aghota ihe e kwuru mgbe okwu hapuru mkpọaha n'ahiriokwu. Iji nwee mkparitauka zuru oke, o di mkpa na e nwere ezi mmako n'etiti mkpuruokwu na nghota ya. Mana e nwee nsepuokwu, nke a anaghi adikwa ire. Ya mere e ji ajuzi, kedụ ka ogee si enwe nghota n'ihe e kwuru mgbe mkpọaha puru n'ahiriokwu? Olee otu e si achoputa mputara nsepuokwu? Iji zaa ajuju a, omenchoputa webatara ufodu ngwaoru dika ideputa ahiriokwu nye ndi enyemaka nchoputa, igba ajujonu, tinyere nleru anya odee dika onye na-asukwa olu Ngwa. Ndi ozọ sitere n'ihe edeputara n'akwukwo ogugu ha na intaneti. A gbagidere ukwu n'usoro ntughari Leipzig nye nkeji mkpuruokwu obula nkowa, werekwa akara mmemme ndumodu di nta kowaa ka e si enweta nghota n'ahiriokwu mgbe esepuru

mkpọaha. Nchọpụta gosiri na ọ dị mfe inwe nghọta ahịrịokwu ma esepụ mkpọaha mgbe ụfọdụ okwu dika nkọwaaha, ngosiputa, ọnuogu, maobu onwunwe nochiri n'ebe aha kwesiri ino. Na mmechi, nsepuokwu na-aputa ihe n'olu Ngwa mgbe e nwere nkwekorita n'odidi mkpuruokwu nke bu uzọ na nke na-esote ya n'otu ahirjokwu.

Introduction

The human language faculty is a phenomenon that presents varied experiences and complex realities. It is, essentially, a meaning-laden and conveying tool that facilitates and ensures effective communication and understanding between people or groups. Language is a reliable instrument and device that is used for the transfer of ideas and exchange of information through the use of well-structured codes, signs or symbols. It is a veritable means of communication. However, language could be used to misinform and mislead the hearer when using it to communicate. It could be employed as a mechanism to withhold, delay or deny information to the audience. This happens when some parts of a construction are left unexpressed, either by not being verbally pronounced or visibly expressed in writing or speech. In a situation like this, it is possible that the communicator intentionally withheld information or simply refused to express some parts of what is required to be communicated. Nevertheless, the recipient or reader usually retrieves the intended meaning from the construction by reference to preceding discourse. Thus, among so many other qualities attributed to language, like using it to express new ideas, produce and comprehend new sentences which (people) have never said or heard before (Ndimele, 1997), it is used to delay or hide information.

At both the spoken and written levels of interaction and communication exchange, language users tend to be economical with words. They do this by withholding some information with the expectation that participants in the communication event would be able to deduce their meanings through inference from context, or by referring to previous discourse or drawing from other extra-linguistic clues. This style of communicative interaction has been adjudged to have some advantages over the conventional forms without, however, overlooking some negative effects, especially, on neophytes and L₂ users of a language. One of the merits of communicating by withholding some information (like words or phrases) is that it is less engaging and energy-exerting on the one hand and economical and time-saving on the other. What this means is that reducing the number of words and, probably, allowing listeners to infer their meaning(s) from previous discourses, equip language users with the ability and skill to manage time well. The use of only relevant words and avoiding superfluity and unnecessary repetition has been studied for a very long

time in the field of linguistics and philosophy. In linguistics and language application, the practice of reducing unnecessary duplication is captured in the concept of ellipsis. Hence, ellipsis is defined as the omission of a word, phrase or whole clause from a sentence that has been mentioned earlier in a discourse the meaning of which the hearer can recover from context or previous discourse (Merchant, 2001). Ellipsis in linguistics is a device which eliminates superfluous materials in a communication exchange without defacing the meaning of the construction. That means when elements which ordinarily should be included are left unspoken or unwritten (and still the hearer makes meaning of the construction), such materials are said to have been elided, omitted or deleted. This process of abridging words and still conveying the required information for the purpose of economy or brevity is the focus of this study.

The elision of material from a structure is a process which involves different parts or aspects of a construction. For instance, it could be the omission of a word or a phrase or a whole clause that was mentioned earlier in the preceding sentence or discourse and which the hearer/reader can recover from context. The recovery of the omitted or elided material is very important in the discussion of ellipsis because it is the major issue that is treated in the study of elliptical constructions. Hence, the problem this study addresses is to examine how elliptical noun phrase in Ngwa Igbo get their meaning, how they are interpreted or recovered. How do listeners process or recover the meaning of a sentence in Ngwa Igbo when the noun phrase is omitted from the construction? The relevance of the study is that it will contribute to the body of knowledge on ellipsis structures. It also provides evidence on how the economy principle operates in Igbo grammar. From available materials and studies on Igbo grammar, the researcher noticed that no work has been carried out on ellipsis in Ngwa Igbo. This is the gap the present work seeks to close, with particular emphasis on the elision of the noun phrase.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the Minimalist Program (MP) by Chomsky (2000). The MP, is a framework in generative grammar that seeks to explain the nature of human language using simplest and most economical principles possible. According to Chomsky (1995, p. 166) minimalism “takes language to be part of the natural world.” It employs fewer linguistic apparatus to construct syntactic structures. It presents the syntax of a language as a computational system which links phonology and semantics (Marantz 1995). Its goal is to reduce theoretical apparatus to the minimum that is conceptually necessary. In Minimalism, the four levels of syntactic representation (D-Structure, S-Structure, Phonetic Form, and Logical Form) of standard GB are reduced into two interface levels: the Phonetic

Form (PF) and Logical Form LF). The phonetic form is the level of pronunciation, while the logical form is the level of meaning.

The minimalist program assumes that languages consist of two components: the lexicon and the computation system. The syntactic structure of a clause is formed by extracting words from the mental lexicon one by one and merging them in the structure. The computational system arranges these items in a way to form a pair. According to Radford (2009), the derivation of a phrase or clause is the set of syntactic operations (merger, movement, agreement and case-marking) used to form the relevant structure. Minimalism assumes that there are two interacting systems in the component of the human brain dedicated to language - the language faculty. These are the Articulatory-Perceptual system (A-P) and the Conceptual-Intentional system (C-I). The Phonetic Form (PF) is connected with the A-P system while the Logical Form is linked with the C-I. A derivation is adjudged to be grammatical if it converges at both the interface levels, PF and LF otherwise it crashes.

2.2 Conceptual framework

Ellipsis is a communication style or strategy whereby speakers and/or writers omit grammatically redundant materials in order to avoid unnecessary repetition of information, while still retaining the meaning of the whole message/conversation. In a more technical sense, ellipsis is a linguistic device which eliminates superfluous or unnecessary materials in a communication exchange without defacing the meaning of the construction (Hardt, 1993). This is to say that when elements which ordinarily should be pronounced are left unspoken or written, such materials are considered to have been elided, omitted or deleted. Merchant (2013, p. 1) notes that “The term *ellipsis* has been applied to a wide range of phenomena across the centuries”.

Chomsky (1973) observes that ellipsis can be interpreted in terms of economy principle whereby languages are organised around principles that legislate against superfluous steps in derivation and superfluous elements in representation. For Gengel (2007, p. 17), “Elliptical structures seem to be an economy device. On the surface, a speaker does not utter materials he or she feels sure is already understood in the context and thus accessible to the hearer”. However, in a syntactic derivation, “all considerations of economy seem to fail, as restrictions that hold in the distribution of elliptical structures language-internally and cross-linguistically demand a high sophisticated approach” (Gengel, 2007, p. 17). This means that determining how ellipsis occurs is more than a guess work. It requires deeper understanding and analysis of the relationship or interaction between the elided element and the antecedent or non-elliptical construction.

There are different types of ellipsis phenomenon, including noun phrase, verb phrase, sluicing, gapping, pseudogapping, and fragment answer (Asuoha, 2021, p. 47). For instance, in 1(a), the verb phrase (VP-ellipsis) is deleted, while 1(b) is an instance of the noun phrase elision (NP-ellipsis).

1(a) John can play a guitar, Mary can [play a guitar], too.

(b) The first bus and the second [bus] have arrived.

This study discusses only noun phrase or nominal ellipsis (NPE), drawing data from Ngwa Igbo.

The noun phrase

By the traditional definition, a noun is the part of speech which names persons, places, things, ideas, or terms/concepts. Ndimele (2003, p. 87) defines a noun from the perspective of its syntactic function as: “anything, with the exception of the pronoun, that serves as the subject of a sentence, the object of a verb, or the complement of a preposition.” In other words, a noun is any word which can take the position of a noun phrase in a sentence. A noun can function as a subject, object (direct and indirect), or complement in a sentence. On the other hand, a noun phrase is a “strings of words whose central element is a noun” (Aarts, 2001, p. 31). Noun phrase ellipsis or ellipsis of arguments or nominal ellipsis, is the type of ellipsis which occurs when the noun and, perhaps, accompanying modifiers are omitted from a sentence. This means that noun ellipsis deletes a noun and often additional material that is adjacent to the noun. Nouns are items which display certain grammatical features such as number. They have specific distributions and perform specific syntactic functions.

Nominal ellipsis is limited in English. Hence, it is not so widespread like other ellipsis mechanisms such as VP-ellipsis or sluicing constructions (Lobeck, 1995). It occurs mainly with possessive determiners, pronouns (*mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs*) as in 2(a) or an NP introduced by selected quantifiers, or numbers (cardinal or ordinal: *one, two, three, first, second, third, etc.*), as in 2(b) or demonstratives as in 2(c).

2(a) I heard Mary’s dog, and you heard Bill’s [dog].

(b) The first bus and the second [bus] have arrived.

(c) Although she might order these [books], Mary won’t buy those books on art history (Kester, 1996, p. 196).

Nominal ellipsis, according to Halliday & Hasan (1976), is the term which refers to ellipsis within the nominal group, often a noun headword, the function of which is taken over by elements originally functioning as determiners or other pre-modifiers. One of the features of an elliptical nominal group is that it requires the availability of information necessary for filling it out. In other words, it is always possible to replace an elliptical

nominal group by its full, non-elliptical equivalent. This process is called ‘ellipsis resolution’ or ‘ellipsis recovery,’ as exemplified in (3).

(3) Mary bought a book, and John [NP ellipsis], too. (Aars, 2001, p. 31)

The sentence in (3) above means that Mary bought a book and John bought a book, too. By replacing the elliptical nominal group with its non-elliptical equivalent, the original meaning and structure of the sentence is fully recovered. Another feature of an elliptical nominal group is its cohesiveness. This is done thanks to anaphora through which the elliptical nominal group points to another nominal group (Varhanek, 2007).

3.1.2 The determiner phrase

The determiner is defined as a lexical item or a modifying word, which helps pin down or specify the kind of reference a noun or noun group has, for example ‘a, the, an,’ etc. The determiner phrase (DP), on the other hand, represents the structure of noun phrases (NPs) in terms of their functional categories. It indicates that a noun phrase consists of several layers of functional categories, which are hierarchically structured. “The Igbo language does not have the determiner as it is used in Indo-European languages” (Mbah, 2006, p. 108). However, any lexeme in Igbo which helps to understand better the lexical item described could be called a determiner, i.e. determining the noun out of several other nouns. Thus, the DP in Igbo describes any other category, whatsoever, which qualifies, modifies, or quantifies a head so as to discriminate it from other hitherto identified lexical items. The term includes possessives, articles, Specifier, and other parts of speech outside the traditional seven. The following Figure (1) is an illustration of DP.

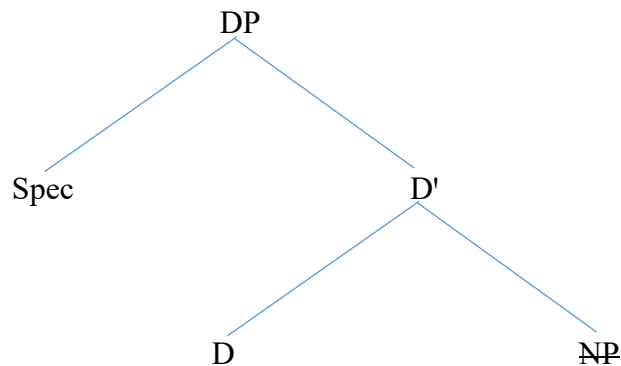


Figure 1: Schema showing the elision or deletion of the NP.

The schema above means that a nominal phrase consists of a determiner (D) and a noun phrase (NP). The DP is the topmost layer or projection. The Spec position is a place within the DP that precedes the determiner and provides additional information about the noun phrase. The Spec position in Igbo can be filled by such elements as possessives,

demonstratives, quantifiers, numerals. The study assumes that the elision of the NP structure in Ngwa Igbo occurs within the DP when the Spec of the DP is occupied by a modifier like quantifiers, possessives, or numerals. Following Mbah (2006), the study regards all qualifiers as immediate daughters of the DP.

Secondly, the elliptical structure conveys the same propositional content as its fully non-elliptical counterpart. Thus, ellipsis takes place under identity of syntactic categories and this condition is met before lexical items are part of the derivation. Therefore, all instances of NP elision investigated in this study are taken to be fully structured and deletion occurs under syntactic identity. This means that an ellipsis site is fully represented syntactically, but is not pronounced at PF. In other words, the ellipsis site of a nominal element contains syntactic structure that is elided at the level of Phonetic Form (PF). This process is referred to in this study as derivational PF-deletion. Elliptical phenomena in Ngwa Igbo can successfully be dealt with in the MP framework because each element has features in LF even if it is not present in the PF. When an element is deleted in PF, it needs to satisfy the Parallelism Requirement at LF with its antecedent. The parallelism condition is necessary to recover the identity of the elided element, which should receive the same interpretation of its antecedent (Lasnik, 1995).

Method of data collection

The study adopted the purposive sampling technique research design to draw information from research participants. The primary data came through elicitation in which four competent adult Ngwa Igbo native speakers between the ages of 50 – 70 years were consulted. Structured interview questions were administered to the participants to orally identify what was omitted in the second clause of the constructions and their responses were recorded for analysis. The secondary sources of data came from relevant textbooks, journals, articles from the internet and the library. A simple descriptive method was used in the analysis and discussions using the Leipzig Glossing Rule (LGR) of inter-linear morpheme-to-morpheme glossing, in addition to syntactic tree diagrams. The data are tone marked thus: the high tone is marked /'/, the low tone is marked with the grave /`/, while the macron /-/ is used for down-stepped tone.

Data presentation and analysis

The data suggest that only words with certain grammatical categories can license the elision of the noun phrase in Ngwa Igbo. These typically are modifiers like numerals (cardinal and ordinal numbers), quantifiers, adjectives, modifiers, and possessives, which specify the head noun.

Noun phrase ellipsis

NP-ellipsis + Cardinal number

Numerals are used for counting. There are two kinds of numerals: cardinal and ordinal. The cardinal number, *ótū* ‘one,’ in Ngwa Igbo occurs as a pre-modifying element within the NP. It indicates the number or specific definite referent a NP denotes. The data in 4(a-b) are instances whereby ellipsis of the nominal argument is licensed by a cardinal number.

- 4(a) Í nyèrè m̀ jí ábúō, mà m̀ chòrò ótū [e].
2sg give.pst 1sg N Num, but 1sg want.FT Num [e].
‘You gave me two yams, but I need one.’
- (b) É-nyèrè m̀ yá égō ísé, ò wéghàchí=té [e] ábúō.
Prf-give.pst 1sg 2sg N Num, 2sg return=CL [e] Num.
‘I gave him five naira notes, he returned two.’

In the data in 4(a), the noun phrase elided is *ji* ‘yam’. It is licensed by the cardinal number, *ótū* ‘one’. The deletion of the nominal argument is possible because of the presence of the cardinal number *ótū* ‘one’, which precedes the noun it modifies.

The situation is not totally the same in 4(b). Although the licenser in this instance is still a numeral modifier, but it comes after the elided nominal argument. The reason is that in Ngwa Igbo, the cardinal number *ótū* (one) usually comes before its nominal element, whereas other numerals, like *abuō* (two), *atō* (three), follow the nominal argument they modify. Thus, Ngwa Igbo has pre-N modifiers and post-N modifiers. Consider the following data:

5. Ó gá-éwé m̀ nkéjì ábúō màòbù [e] átō.
3sg AUX-take 1sg N Num or [e] three.
‘It will take me two minutes or three.’

The elision of the noun phrase in (5) is locally bound and the elided NP refers to the antecedent within the same phrase or construction. Observe that the deletion of the noun phrase head, *nkéjì* ‘minutes’ in the subordinating clause in (5) occurs before the cardinal number, *atō* ‘three’ in the second conjunct of a coordinated noun phrase.

5.1.2 NP-ellipsis + Ordinal number

The data in (6) is an instance where ellipsis of the nominal argument is licensed by an ordinal number. An ordinal number is achieved when a cardinal number post-modifies a noun, which in turn is post-modified by the particle *ké*.

6. Óché ké mbū là [e] ké átō ádíghí mǎmá.
 N ptr Num and [e] ptr Num prf-be-NEG good.
 ‘The first chair and the third are not in order.’

The data in (6) exemplifies a case of nominal deletion licensed by an ordinal number. It can be seen that the accompanying modifier of the nominal argument (the particle, *ké*) is not elided with the noun, *oche* ‘chair’. The particle is emphatically deitic in function wherever it occurs. It particularizes an entity among many entities that may be referred to (Anyanwu, 2010, p. 53).

The data presented in the example in (7) below is different from the foregoing. In (6) above, the accompanying modifier the particle *ké*, is present in the second clause. However, if the particle *ké* is excluded from the construction, the sentence would appear weak and infelicitous as indicated in (7) below.

7. ?Óché ké mbū á-díghí mǎmá, là [e] átō.
 Chair ptr first prf-be-NEG good, and [e] third.
 ‘The first chair is not good and, also, the third.’

NP-ellipsis + Quantifier

The elision of the noun (phrase) occurs when a noun and, perhaps, the accompanying modifiers are omitted from a sentence. In other words, ellipsis of the argument deletes a noun and often additional material that is adjacent to the noun. Consider the following data in (8).

8. Úmúákwúkwo ñ-gàrà úlē, mà úfódú [e] ñjí íhéré lótá.
 Childrenbook prf-go-pst test, but Qty [e] take shame come-pst.
 ‘The students went for exams, but some came back in shame.’

In (8), the NP, *úmúákwúkwo* ‘students’ in the second clause is elided. However, the meaning of the construction is understood because it is still recoverable from the context. This is made possible by the presence of a quantifier, *úfódú* ‘some’ to refer back to *úmúákwúkwo*, omitting the noun phrase. The elision of the second NP from the sentence makes for efficient communication while ensuring meaningful expression.

The ellipsis of the NP in (9) is licensed by a quantifier which fills the Spec of DP. Recall that the Specifier position is a place within the DP that precedes the determiner (see section 3.2.1) and provides additional information about the noun phrase.

9. Ó sí m wéré jí òtù m chòrò. M wéré óbérē
 [e].
 3sg say 1sg take N like 1sg want. 1sg take-rV.pst Qty
 [e].
 ‘He told me to collect as many yams as I wanted. I collected a little.’

The elided NP *jí* ‘yam’ in (9) refers back to the noun phrase in the matrix clause. Its deletion is licensed by the quantifier, *óbérē* ‘little’ which sits in the Spec position.

Possessive/Genitival NP-Ellipsis

NP-ellipsis is also possible when it strands a genitival sentence or phrase. This is exemplified in the following data in 10(a-b).

- 10(a) Ényí Íké m-bìàrà òrírí, mà [e] ké Ádá á-bíághí.
 Friend Ike prf-come.pst eating, but [e] Poss Ada prf-come.NEG
 ‘Ike’s friend came for the party, but Ada’s did not come’.

- (b) Ágúólá m ákwúkwó John, mà àgúbèghì m [e] ké
 Éméká.
 Prf-read-pst 1sg book John, but prf-read-NEG 1sg [e] Poss
 Emeka
 ‘I have read John’s book, but I haven’t read Emeka’s.’

The data in 10(a-b) are examples of possessive/genitival NP ellipsis. The deletion of the NP in 10(a-b) happens before the possessive particle *ke*, which licensed it. However, this is a different scenario from the data in (11) below.

11. Ényí Íké m-bìàrà òrírí, ó-búghí [e] Ámáká.
 Friend Ike prf-come.pst eating, 3CL-be.NEG [e] Amaka.
 ‘Ike’s friend came for the party, not Amaka’s.’

Actually, in (11), the possessive particle *ke* is missing or better still, stranded. That is to say that *ke* is missing from its original position where it shows possession or functions as a possessive element. Meanwhile, the meaning conveyed by the construction is still recoverable from the preceding sentence as referring to Amaka’s friend.

Ellipsis allows speakers to convey complex ideas efficiently, while still maintaining clarity and coherence. Thus, the elision of the noun phrase is a productive communication technique attested to in everyday normal conversational exchange in Ngwa Igbo as the example in (12) below shows. In the following data, the nominal argument, *ákwúkwó* ‘book’ is elided in the third turn of the dialogue:

12. Speaker A: Í nwéré ákwúkwó?
 2sg have book?
 ‘Do you have books?’
- Speaker B: É-é. N’ímé úlō.
 Aftv. Prp.inside house
 ‘In the house.’
- Speaker A: Gáá wétá =rá ì [e].
 Go get=BNF 1SG [e]
 ‘Go and get for me.’

In the above conversation, Speaker A asks Speaker B if s/he has books. Speaker B replies by saying: *E-e, in the house*, ‘Yes, in the house,’ invariably acknowledging that such books are available. Following the communication frame, Speaker A responds by telling him/her to go and get the book (*gáá wétá=rá ì [e]*). Here, it is observed that the noun phrase, ‘books’ is elided in the last sentence by Speaker A.

NP ellipsis

Noun phrase elision in Ngwa is NP-deletion within DP and it occurs when the specifier of the determiner phrase is occupied by a modifier like quantifiers, possessives, or numerals. Already, Jackendoff (1971) had remarked that N'-ellipsis is possible in English only when it strands a genitive phrase. This condition is observed in the Ngwa Igbo data in 11(b) above, which is repeated here as (13).

13. Ágúólá ì ákwúkwó John, mà agúbéghì ì [e] ké Émé
 ká.
 Prf-read-pst 1sg book John, but prf-read-NEG 1sg [e] Poss
 Emeka
 ‘I have read John’s book, but I haven’t read Emeka’s.’

In (13), the deleted NP refers to ‘book’, which as is in the possessive case. The elliptical NP is *ákwúkwó* which is recoverable from the context. The sentence implies that the speaker has not read the book written by Emeka. As observed in the above data (13), the

deletion of the noun phrase *ákwúkwó* ‘book’ occurs in the second clause, in the object position. The possessive particle, *ke* is a genitive marker. It performs the same function as the English ’s. In other words, *ke* in Ngwa Igbo is a possessive marker and it is used to mark possession.

Saito & Murasugi (1990), and Lobeck (1990) consider similar cases as in (13) as an instance of a more general phenomenon, that is to say, the major cases of ellipsis (i.e. N'-ellipsis, VP-ellipsis, and sluicing) all involve functional heads (D, T, C), and in each case, the deletion of the complement is allowed only when the Spec position is filled. To be more specific, Saito & Murasugi (1990) claim that NP-ellipsis is actually the movement of an argument to Spec DP followed by deletion of the complement NP. On the basis of this generalisation, the study examines the following NP structure, which is (4) repeated here as (14).

14. *Í nyèrè m jí ábuọ, mà m chòrò ótū [e].*
 2sg give.pst 1sg N two, but 1sg prf-want one [e]
 ‘You gave me two yams, but I need one’.

The nominal argument in the above example, is *jí* ‘yam’. However, this NP undergoes deletion under syntactic identity with the antecedent NP, leaving only the numeral *ótū* ‘one’ behind in the Spec of DP. For the deletion to be sustained without crashing, there has to be a quantifier element (in this case, a cardinal number) *ótū* ‘one’, which licenses it. However, before the deletion of the NP *jí* ‘yam’, there has to be available a landing site, which is the Spec of DP.

The foregoing analysis is illustrated in (15), which has Figure (2) as its tree diagram representation.

15. [TP
 [_{NP} I [T' [T [_{VP} nyere] [_{NP} m] [_{DP} jí [_{QP} abuọ]]]],
 [_{CoordP} [C ma] [TP [_{NP} m] [T' [T [_{VP} chọrọ] [_{QP} otu]]]]].

The sentence in (14) consists of two clauses: *Í nyèrè m jí ábuọ, mà m chòrò ótū [e]* ‘you gave me two yams, but I need one.’ The first clause is: *Í nyèrè m jí ábuọ*, ‘you gave me two yams.’ The second clause is: *m chòrò ótū [e]* ‘I need one.’ The second clause, *m chòrò ótū [e]*, is an elliptical construction, where the NP *jí* ‘yam’ is elided. The antecedent for the elided NP is the NP, *jí ábuọ* ‘two yam’ in the first clause. The (quantifier) determiner *ótū*

‘one,’ in the second clause agrees with the elided NP *jí* ‘yam,’ indicating that the ellipsis is NP deletion.

The [e] represents the elided NP, *jí* ‘yam.’ The determiner (a numeral quantifier) *ótū* ‘one,’ is in the Specifier position of the DP, agreeing with the elided NP, *jí* ‘yam.’ The antecedent NP *jí ábuo*, ‘two yams’ licenses the ellipsis. It is observed in Figure (2) that D is a functional head, and the complement of the lower DP has been elided because its Spec position is filled. This conforms to findings in the literature which hold that ellipsis of any element is allowed if there is a licensing head that must be in a local relation with that element (Albrecht, 2009). The above analysis shows that the sentence is an instance of NP ellipsis, where the NP in the second clause is elided, and the determiner agrees with the elided NP.

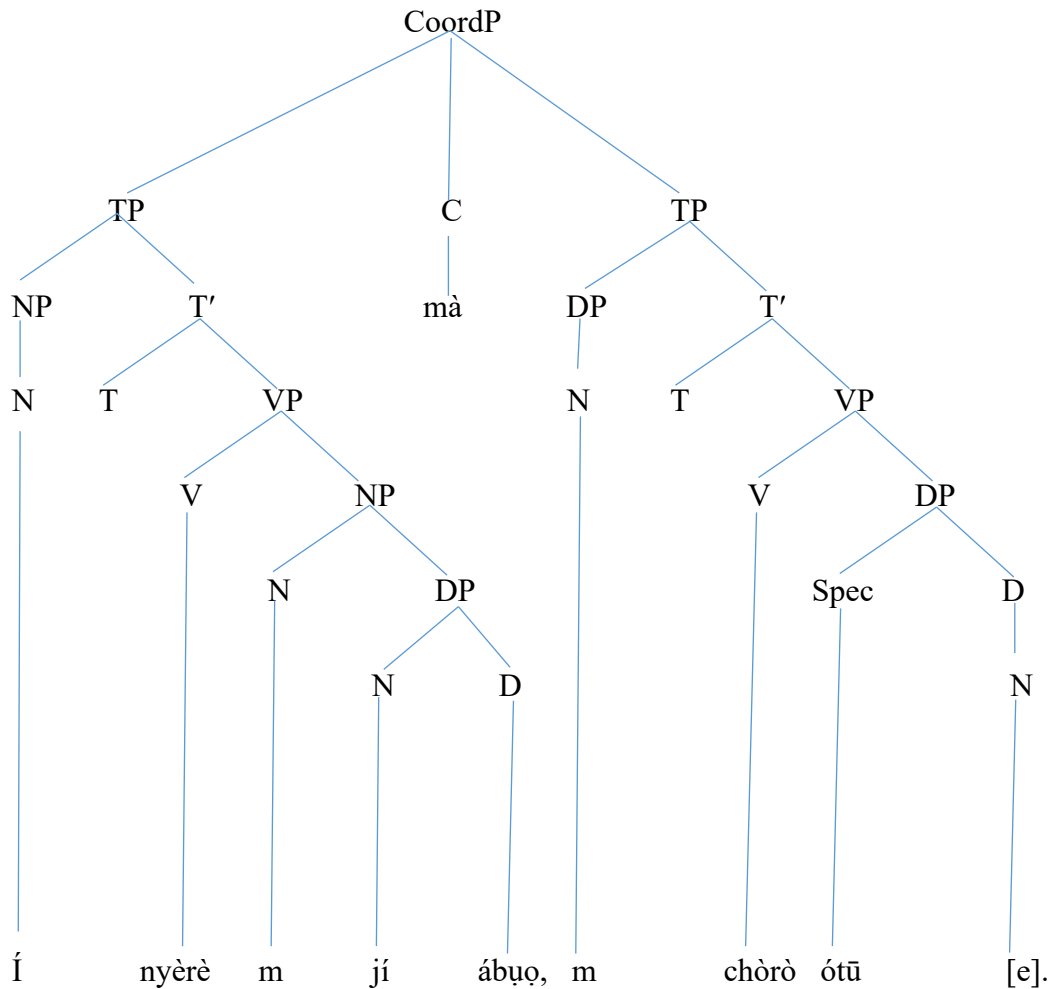


Figure 2: Elision of the noun phrase in Ngwa Igbo.

Discussion

The data presented above show that ellipsis occurs in the environment of certain syntactic contexts or trigger words, also known as licensors of ellipsis. In the case of the nominal ellipsis in Ngwa Igbo, some licensors or trigger words have been identified as determiners and modifiers of the ellipsed noun. Taking the data presented in (8), for instance, it is observed that the quantifier *ufodu* ‘some’ licenses the ellipsed noun or target, which is recovered from the previous context or antecedent clause of the sentence, in this case it is *umwakwukwo* ‘students’. So, by making reference to the preceding discourse, i.e. antecedent NP, it was possible to deduce the meaning of the elided NP as referring to *ufodu umwakwukwo* ‘some students’. Since the Spec of DP is occupied, as indicated by the presence of the quantifier, *ufodu* ‘some’ the elision of the NP is permitted. 16

Further evidence to show that the noun phrase underwent elision in the sentence under consideration, is that if there is no element in the Spec of DP, the deletion of the NP will crash and therefore, not be allowed. Consequently, the sentence will become infelicitous, ungrammatical and, therefore, unacceptable. This situation is clearly illustrated in the following example in (16).

16. **Úmúákwúkwó ñ-gàrà úlē, mà ñjí íhéré lótá.*
Childrenbook prf-go.pst test, but take shame come
‘The students went for exams, but [e] came back in shame.’

Given the foregoing discussion, the study concludes that nominal or NP-Ellipsis is available in Ngwa Igbo and it is only possible to delete this NP when the Spec of DP is occupied by a quantifier, possessive, numeral, etc. Secondly, the deletion of the nominal argument in the second of two clauses is possible if it shares the same syntactic identity with an antecedent NP. Hence, the elided NP in Ngwa Igbo undergoes the syntactic processes of deletion. The deleted site is indicated as [e]. So, the application of ellipsis is constrained by syntactic identity. Since the first and second conjuncts are structurally identical, deletion is applied to the second noun phrase. Given that syntactic identity guarantees recoverability of the deleted item, the ellipsed material is thus recovered at the interpretative level, that is LF, and this enables the sentence to be assigned the correct interpretation. Following the MP tenets of economy and inclusiveness, the study notes that licensing of ellipsis occurs only when the antecedent provides sufficient information for

recovery. Furthermore, NP-Ellipsis ensures that the elided material is recoverable from context, thus maintaining inclusiveness of meaning and structure. Finally, NP-Ellipsis minimises computational resources while preserving interpretability.

Conclusion

This study examined ellipsis of the noun phrase in Ngwa Igbo, with the aim of determining how listeners process the meaning of a construction when a noun phrase has been deleted. It adopted the descriptive method of data analysis, while applying the MP theoretical framework in the discussions. It noted that ellipsed noun phrases in Ngwa Igbo convey the same propositional content as their full non-elided counterparts. It observed that NP deletion in Ngwa Igbo occurs when the Spec of DP is occupied by a quantifier, possessive, or numeral. Finally, all instances of NP-Ellipsis investigated are fully structured and ellipsis take place under syntactic identity. The study has proved that even when words are not pronounced, the syntactic structure is still there in the mind. This supports the idea that syntax operates at a deeper abstract level, beyond what is spoken. It has also helped to refine the idea of Universal Grammar and language variation.

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List of Abbreviations

Aftv → affirmative	Prf → prefix
AUX → auxiliary	verb Ptr → particle
BNF → benefactive	Pst → past
CL → clitic	Qty → quantifier
[e] → ellipsis	rV → root verb
FT → factitive	1sg → first person singular 19

NEG → negative
NUM → number
Poss → possessive

2sg → second person singular
3sg → third person singular