

# On the Asymmetries of Argument Ellipsis and the Structure of VP in Korean\*

YOUNG-HOON KIM

*Seoul National University*

## 1 Introduction

The present paper investigates the issue of null arguments in Korean from the perspective of the ellipsis phenomenon in the language, and elaborates on the structure of the lower verbal domain (*i.e.*, lexical VP) in the language. It thus attempts to provide plausible clues on how the argument ellipsis phenomenon (henceforth *AE*) is syntactically constrained in Korean. As for Korean, it has been argued that the ellipsis phenomenon targets nominal arguments whose  $\theta$ -role has been specified (Oku 1998; S.W. Kim 1999; Saito 2007; Takahashi 2014, *inter alia*), hence the terminology. Accordingly, subjects ( $\theta$ -wise *agent*) and direct objects ( $\theta$ -wise *theme*) can be elided. Since Oku (1998) and S.W. Kim (1999), this view has been prevalent as the consensus for *AE*. The most canonical example is presented below.

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(1) *Argument Ellipsis Phenomenon in Korean*

- A. Suho-ka [yenghwa sey-phyen]-ul po-ass-ta.  
 Suho-NOM [movie three-CL]-ACC see-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Suho watched three films.’
- B. Hani-nun  $\Delta$  po-ci anh-ass-ta.  
 Hani-TOP see-CI not-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Hani did not watch three films.’

As we can see in (1B), the direct object *yenghwa sey-phyen* ‘three films’ can be missing when the antecedent is given in the previous utterance (1A). What is crucial here is that the elided direct object can be interpreted either as *the same set of movies* with the antecedent or as *a different set of movies* from the antecedent. This is called E-type reading and Q-type reading, respectively (Takahashi 2014). Together with the strict/sloppy reading using the anaphor (in the case of Korean, *caki* ‘self’), it was used for the evidence that a syntactic structure is present in the missing part. I will use these two as the diagnostics for AE throughout the paper.

The consensus that  $\theta$ -given arguments can be elided, however, is not without any shortcoming, as asymmetries are observed in multiple nominal constructions such as inalienable possession and resultatives. In order to account for these asymmetries, I propose a syntactic constraint whereby arguments are licensed to be elided only in a particular syntactic configuration. I will then cover the structure of the lower verbal domain, that is, the lexical VP, followed by the case of direct object ellipsis.

## 2 Asymmetries in Argument Ellipsis

The suggested AE analysis seems to nicely capture the nature of missing arguments in Korean, as it bears no problem in accounting for elided subjects and elided direct objects. However, apparent asymmetries are observed for AE in Korean. S.W. Kim (1999) pointed out that *possessor* can be elided in inalienable possession.

(2) *Argument Ellipsis in Inalienable Possession* (S.W. Kim 1999)

- A. Jerry-nun [caki-uy ai]-lul phal-ul ttayli-ess-ta.  
 Jerry-TOP [self-GEN child]-ACC arm-ACC hit-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Jerry<sub>1</sub> hit his<sub>1</sub> child on the arm.’
- B. Sally-nun  $\Delta$  tali-lul ttayli-ess-ta.  
 Sally-TOP leg-ACC hit-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘Sally<sub>2</sub> hit his<sub>1</sub>/her<sub>2</sub> child on the leg.’

In Korean, double accusative Case-marking is allowed for *possessor* and *possessee* nominals, only when they have inalienable possessive relationship.

Given this, the nominals in (2A) are construed as arguments: the first nominal (*possessor*) and the second nominal (*possessee-theme*) are both given  $\theta$ -roles, and are obligatory for the intended interpretation. Crucially, the *possessee* nominal renders an inalienable possessive relationship with its *possessor* nominal (Higginbotham 1985; Yoon 1989). Then, the second nominal, given a  $\theta$ -role of *theme* and being a nominal argument, has no reason to be ineligible for AE. However, a surprising asymmetry emerges if we elide the second nominal.

(3) *The First Asymmetry: Inalienable Possession in Korean*

- A. Siwu-ka      Mina-lul      phal-ul      cap-ass-ta.  
     Siwu-NOM    Mina-ACC    arm-ACC    catch-PAST-DECL  
     ‘Siwu caught Mina’s arm.’
- B. Hani-nun       $\Delta$             tali-lul      cap-ass-ta.  
     Hani-TOP                      leg-ACC    catch-PAST-DECL  
     (intended) ‘Hani caught Mina’s leg.’
- #C. Hani-nun      Suho-lul       $\Delta$             cap-ass-ta.  
     Hani-TOP      Suho-ACC                      catch-PAST-DECL  
     (intended) ‘Hani caught Suho’s arm.’

Given the antecedent (3A), we can elide the first nominal in (3B) as argued in S.W. Kim (1999). Yet, we cannot elide the second nominal in (3C), since it is not possible to get the intended interpretation: it can only mean that *Hani caught Suho*, without referring to the specific body part. The infelicitousness of (3C) is thus unexpected from the previous consensus, since *phal* ‘arm’ here is an obligatory nominal argument whose  $\theta$ -role has been given. This is the first asymmetry.

A similar pattern holds for resultatives as well. Two nominal elements can render a resultative interpretation, when the first nominal denotes the initial state and the second nominal denotes the resultant state. Together, they have been analyzed to form a small clause constituent (den Dikken 2006; Ko 2015).

(4) *Small Clause Resultatives in Korean* (Ko 2015)

- Mapepsa-nun [sc mwul-ul      photocwu-lo] mantul-ess-ta.  
     Wizard-TOP            water-ACC      wine-RES      make-PAST-DECL  
     ‘A wizard turned water into wine.’

In (4), *mwul-ul photocwu-lo* ‘water into wine’ forms a small clause (SC) functional projection, the domain of which derives the relevant resultative interpretation. Provided that both nominals are obligatory for the interpretation and are construed as arguments (Carrier & Randall 1992), it is expected that each nominal should be eligible for AE in a parallel manner. However, it is not the case, as an asymmetry emerges.

(5) *The Second Asymmetry: Resultatives in Korean*

- A. Mapepsa-ka    wangca-lul    kaykwuli-lo    mantul-ess-ta.  
 wizard-NOM    prince-ACC    frog-RES    make-PAST-DECL  
 ‘A wizard turned the prince into a frog.’
- B. Manye-nun            Δ            paym-ulo            mantul-ess-ta.  
 witch-TOP                                    snake-RES            make-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘A witch turned the prince into a snake.’
- \*C. Manye-nun    kongewu-lul            Δ            mantul-ess-ta.  
 witch-TOP            princess-ACC                                    make-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘A witch turned the princess into a frog.’

We now have (5A) as the antecedent. Between the two nominals which derive the resultative interpretation, only the first nominal *wangca* ‘prince’ can be elided as in (5B). The second nominal *kaykwuli* ‘frog’, on the other hand, cannot be elided as in (5C): it results in the strict ungrammaticality. For *kaykwuli* ‘frog’ here is an obligatory nominal<sup>1</sup>, the ungrammaticality of (5C) is unexpected from the previous consensus, similar to (4C). This is the second asymmetry.

The previous literature would fall short of explaining the two asymmetries we have just seen. The asymmetric patterns in (3) and (5) indicate that the previous consensus is not specific enough to capture the empirical data, and these immediately call for an explanation. A common property that the aforementioned asymmetries share with each other is that only the first nominal is eligible for AE. In order to capture this common property and account for the asymmetric patterns observed, I now proceed to the proposal.

### 3 Proposal & Analysis

We observed asymmetries for AE in Korean in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I argue that we can account for these in terms of a syntactic constraint, which regulates the licensing condition for the AE phenomenon in Korean. I, then, move onto the respective analyses for two asymmetries.

#### 3.1 The Proposal: the Constraint on Argument Ellipsis

From the asymmetries, we saw that only the first nominal can be elided, when two consecutive nominals are present. In accounting for this, I argue that a

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<sup>1</sup> The second nominal definitely has a property of predicate, as it falls into the category of small clause predicate in the sense of den Dikken (2006). As for Korean, D.H. Chung (2011) argues that resultant nominals, being predicates, cannot be elided. Despite of its predicate-like properties, however, note that the resultative marking *-lo* in (4-5) can be substituted for accusative Case *-(l)ul* in Korean, which gives rise to an alternative explanation: two nominals are obligatory arguments for the resultative interpretation.

particular syntactic configuration plays an important role in AE of Korean. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the asymmetric patterns share a common property: only the first nominal between the two nominals can be elided. In the inalienable possession and resultative cases, we apparently see the parallel pattern in allowing AE. The parallelism is not merely a coincidence, but a result of configuration where the two nominals are positioned within a unit of a syntactic operation. In order to capture the asymmetries in a straightforward manner, I propose that the nominal arguments are eligible for AE only in the specifier of a given phase unit.

(6) *The Constraint on Argument Ellipsis*

A nominal argument  $\alpha P$  whose  $\theta$ -role has been given is eligible for ellipsis only if  $\alpha P$  is placed in the specifier of phase XP, where XP corresponds to a unit of Spell-Out for syntactic linearization.

According to the proposal, nominal arguments should be given a  $\theta$ -role in order to be eligible for ellipsis, which is in line with the previous literature. Yet, the proposal departs from the previous literature in that it specifies the licensing position in terms of syntactic configuration. Here, the definition of phase corresponds to the unit of Spell-Out for syntactic linearization (Fox & Pesetsky 2005; Ko 2007). In their system, phase as a whole is the unit of Spell-Out which is then sent to the interfaces, and crucially, the relative order of elements within the same phase should be preserved. This condition is called the Order Preservation (OP) as a consequence of syntactic linearization.

(7) *The Order Preservation of Spell-Out Domain* (Fox & Pesetsky 2005:6)

Information about linearization, once established at the end of a given Spell-Out domain, is never deleted in the course of derivation.

Following this condition, the proposal states that only the leftmost element in a given phase unit can be a target of AE in Korean. For a clearer illustration, I provide the relevant schematization:

(8) *Configuration of the Constraint on Argument Ellipsis*

[XP phase  $\Delta$   $\alpha P_{\text{specifier}}$  [ $X'$   $\beta P_{\text{complement}}$  X ] ]

In the XP phase configuration of (8), only  $\alpha P$  in the specifier position is eligible for AE, as marked with the  $\Delta$ -marking. At the same time, other positions such as the  $\beta P$  complement position are not eligible for AE. Following the OP, the relative order among the phase-mates should be preserved. For example, after we linearize XP as  $\alpha P$ - $\beta P$ -X, we cannot have a reversed word order such as  $\beta P$ - $\alpha P$ . This, in other words, means that the target of argument ellipsis (*i.e.*,  $\alpha P$ ) must be the leftmost element at the timing of Spell-Out. In what follows, I will provide each analysis for two asymmetries.

### 3.2 The First Analysis: Inalienable Possession

We start with the first asymmetry: the case of inalienable possession. As we saw in Chapter 2, double accusative Case-marking is allowed in Korean when two nominals denote the inalienable relationship to each other. In order to capture their semantic properties as well as their syntactic properties, an analysis was proposed, in which we have a recursive VP structure (Tomioka & Sim 2007). According to this analysis, the structure for inalienable possession consists of two VP layers: the lower VP stands for the lexical verb and its *theme*, and the higher VP stands for the silent *affect* verb and its *affectee*. It is crucial that *affectee* (*i.e.*, *possessor*) is affected by the main event described in the lower VP. This nicely captures the syntactic property (that there are external *possessor* and internal *theme* of the event) and the semantic property (that the inalienable possessive relationship is pertinent to the Affectedness Condition). This is based on the data in (9). It shows that the Affectedness Condition matters, not the Animacy Condition, since inanimate objects can also be *possessor*, if they are affected by the main event.

(9) *Inalienable Possession Related to Affectedness* (Tomioka & Sim 2007)

Chelswu-ka Lopus-ul pal-ul palp-ass-ta.  
 Chelswu-NOM robot-ACC foot-ACC step.on-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Chelswu stepped on the robot’s foot.’

To conclude, the two nominals should be related to each other both by the inalienable possessive relationship and by the Affectedness Condition. These two factors can be properly captured in the proposed analysis by Tomioka & Sim (2007) whose structure I present below.

(10) *Recursive VP for Inalienable Possession* (Tomioka & Sim 2007)

[<sub>VP<sub>2</sub></sub> *possessor-affectee* [<sub>V’<sub>2</sub></sub> [<sub>VP<sub>1</sub></sub> *possessee-theme* V<sub>1(lexical)</sub> ] V<sub>2(affect)</sub> ] ]

The structure in (10) captures the properties of inalienable possession: two recursive VPs have each argument in their domains, and the Affectedness Condition is satisfied via the higher VP<sub>2</sub>. Crucially, VP<sub>2</sub> here is construed as a phase domain under the suggested linearization system. Regarding the relevant data, it was pointed out that the VP<sub>2</sub> domain (*i.e.*, the unit comprised of *possessor*, *possessee* and the verb) behaves as a single unit under the successive cyclic movement operation for the inalienable possession case (D.W. Lee 2005)<sup>2</sup>. His analysis is in line with the analysis of Tomioka & Sim (2007)

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<sup>2</sup> He argues that in inalienable possession, only the non-genitive possessor undergoes successive cyclic movement. Even though he assumes that possessor is base-generated in the specifier of DP, it intermediately moves to the VP peripheral position, which corresponds to the left-most position of a syntactic unit.

as well, since it requires that the two relevant nominals belong to the VP domain. Having these in mind, I first present the asymmetric paradigm one more time, and accordingly move onto its detailed derivation.

(11) *Argument Ellipsis: Inalienable Possession*<sup>3</sup>

- A. Siwu-ka [caki hyeng]-ul phal-ul cap-ass-ta.  
 Siwu-NOM [self brother]-ACC arm-ACC catch-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Siwu<sub>1</sub> caught his<sub>1</sub> brother’s arm.’
- B. Hani-nun Δ tali-lul cap-ass-ta.  
 Hani-TOP leg-ACC catch-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘Hani<sub>2</sub> caught his<sub>1</sub>/her<sub>2</sub> brother’s leg.’
- C. Hani-nun [caki nwuna]-ul Δ cap-ass-ta.  
 Hani-TOP [self sister]-ACC catch-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘Hani<sub>2</sub> caught her<sub>2</sub> sister’s arm.’

We can now account for this asymmetric pattern based on the structure in (10): the first *possessor* (and also *affectee*) is in the specifier of VP<sub>2</sub>, which is the phase domain, while the second *possessee* (and also *theme*) is in the lower position of the lexical VP, which is apparently not the specifier of a phase. Therefore, only the first nominal is eligible for AE.

(12) *Derivation: Argument Ellipsis for Inalienable Possession*

$$[VP_2 \boxed{\text{phase}} \Delta \text{his/her brother} [V_2 [VP_1 \text{arm} V_{1\text{catch}}] V_{2(\text{affect})} ]].$$

The derivation in (12) illustrates this point. Only *possessor* can be elided, as it is in the specifier of the VP<sub>2</sub> phase. On the contrary, despite being a typical direct object of the main event, *possessee* cannot be elided, as it is not in the specifier of a phase. The first asymmetry is thus accounted for.

### 3.3 The Second Analysis: Resultatives

Having accounted for the first asymmetry, we now move onto the other: the case of resultatives. As we saw, two nominals can constitute a small clause, deriving the resultative interpretation. This small clause has been analyzed as RelatorP (RP) within which two nominals are realized in the specifier and in the complement position, respectively (den Dikken 2006). This RP derives the resultative interpretation by which the initial state nominal turns into the resultant state nominal. Considering the typical characteristics of resultatives,

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<sup>3</sup> Note that I slightly changed the data to indicate the possibility of sloppy reading, using the anaphor *caki* ‘self’.

this means that RP merges to the structure via complementation to the lexical V head, and that this RP is construed as phase (Ko 2015)<sup>4</sup>.

(13) *RelatorP for Resultatives* (Ko 2015)

[<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>RP</sub> [<sub>phase</sub> *initial state* [<sub>R'</sub> *result state* R ] ] V ]

According to the structure in (13), the initial state nominal is in the specifier of RP, while the result state nominal is in the complement of RP. Now, take a look at the asymmetric paradigm again.

(14) *Argument Ellipsis: Resultatives*<sup>5</sup>

- A. Mapepsa-ka [wangca twul]-ul kaykwuli-lo mantul-ess-ta.  
 wizard-NOM [prince two]-ACC frog-RES make-PAST-DECL  
 ‘A wizard turned two princes into frogs.’
- B. Manye-nun Δ paym-ulo mantul-ess-ta.  
 witch-TOP snake-RES make-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘A witch turned two princes into snakes.’
- \*C. Manye-nun [kongcwu twul]-ul Δ mantul-ess-ta.  
 witch-TOP [princess two]-ACC make-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘A witch turned two princesses into frogs.’

We observed that only the first nominal can be elided. This asymmetry can be accounted for under the proposal and the postulated structure: the initial state nominal is in the specifier of the RP phase, while the result state nominal is in the complement of the RP phase. Therefore, only the first nominal, not the second one, is expected to be elided. Below is the derivation.

(15) *Derivation: Argument Ellipsis for Resultatives*

[<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>RP</sub> [<sub>phase</sub> Δ *two princes* [<sub>R'</sub> *frogs* R ] ] V ]

Similar to the case of inalienable possession, the derivation in (15) accounts for the asymmetry. Only the first initial state nominal can be elided, as it is in the specifier of the RP phase. On the contrary, the second result state nominal cannot be elided, as it is not in the specifier of a phase. The second asymmetry is thus accounted for.

<sup>4</sup> Ko argues that *-lo* resultative is the typical resultatives, as it cannot be repeated unlike *-key* resultative, and the result state cannot be canceled in the following context, again, unlike *-key* resultative: only *-lo* resultative is a telic event.

<sup>5</sup> Note that I slightly changed the data to indicate the possibility of Q-type reading, using the quantified expressions.



## 4 The Structure of VP and the Types of Nominal Objects

Having accounted for the two asymmetric patterns observed, I will now cover the structure of VP in Korean, and accordingly account for the case of direct object ellipsis. Some types of nominal objects, even though seem to be direct objects of the verb, show different characteristics from typical direct objects. I will cover two of such cases here: verbal nouns; and idiom nouns.

### 4.1 Verbal Nouns, Idiom Nouns, and the Structure of VP

Verbal nouns in Korean resemble the noun incorporation phenomenon, in that a verbal noun and the light verb *ha-* form a verbal predicate. They have the distribution of nominal elements, yet bear the characteristics of verbal elements, since they can give rise to another  $\theta$ -role given argument.

(16) *Verbal Noun in Korean* (H.R. Chae 1997)

Chelswu-ka enehak-ul kongpwu-lul ha-n-ta.  
 Chelswu-NOM linguistics-ACC study-ACC LV-PRES-DECL  
 ‘Chelswu studies linguistics.’

As we can see in (16), the verbal noun *kongpwu* ‘study’ appears with the light verb *ha-*, and together they give rise to the direct object *enehak* ‘linguistics’. In order to account for the distribution and the characteristics of these verbal nouns, H.R. Chae (1997) proposed the following structure:

(17) *Structure for Verbal Nouns* (H.R. Chae 1997)

[<sub>VP</sub> *linguistics*<sub>( $\theta$ )</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> *study* V<sub>light verb</sub> ] ]

In the structure in (17), we can see that the verbal noun occupies the complement position (and forms the verbal predicate with the light verb *ha-*), and the  $\theta$ -role assigned direct object occupies the specifier position in VP.

Idiom nouns in Korean show similar properties with verbal nouns in terms of the structural composition. Idiom nouns derive an idiomatic interpretation when they are realized with certain verbs, and the meaning of idiom is distinct from their compositional meaning. The idiom nouns are similar to the verbal nouns, in that they have the distribution of nominal elements, yet behave as the part of verbal elements as soon as the idiom unit is formed.

(18) *Idiom Noun in Korean*

Suho-nun chentwung-ey kep-ul mek-ess-ta.  
 Suho-TOP thunder-DAT fear-ACC eat-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Suho was frightened by the thunder.’

Together with the verb *mek-* ‘to eat’, the idiom noun *kep* ‘fear’ has the  $\theta$ -role argument *chentwung* ‘thunder’. It was argued that a noun and a verb (*i.e.*, the

idiom unit) form a syntactic complex, and this unit is inseparable since it is the domain of idiomatic interpretation (Karimi 2003). She suggests that the verb and its complement (*i.e.*, the V' node) is the very domain of idiomatic interpretation.

(19) *Structure for Idiom Nouns* (à la Karimi 2003)

[<sub>VP</sub> **thunder**<sub>(θ)</sub> [<sub>V'</sub> **fear** V<sub>eat</sub> ] ]

In the proposed structure of (19), we can see that the idiom noun occupies the complement position (and forms the idiom unit with the verb), and the θ-role assigned direct object occupies the specifier position in VP.

Now, we can capture the parallelism between these two types of nominal elements, through which we can demonstrate the structure of VP in Korean.

(20) *The Structure of VP with Verbal Nouns and Idiom Nouns*

a. *VP with Verbal Nouns*

[<sub>VP</sub> **direct object** [<sub>V'</sub> **verbal noun** V<sub>light verb</sub> ] ]

b. *VP with Idiom Nouns*

[<sub>VP</sub> **direct object** [<sub>V'</sub> **idiom noun** V<sub>idiom verb</sub> ] ]

Both in the verbal noun and idiom noun cases, direct objects to which θ-role is assigned occupy the specifier of the VP position, while verbal nouns and idiom nouns occupy the complement of the VP position. The observation that there are two object positions in the lexical VP has been dealt with in detail since Bowers (1993), where he argues that the position of θ-role assignment for direct objects is the specifier of VP, and that only this position is licit for types of A-movement such as passivization. In a similar vein, Karimi (2003) suggests that the specifier position of VP is allotted to the specific elements, whereas the complement position of VP is allotted to the non-specific ones. These two lines of claims can be corroborated by the Korean data.

First, the A-movement diagnostic suggested by Bowers (1993). According to his analysis, it is expected that verbal nouns and idiom nouns are illicit for passivization, unlike typical direct objects. This is borne out.

(21) *Passivization Diagnostic for Verbal Noun and Idiom Noun*<sup>6</sup>

- \*a. Kongpwu-ka        enehak-ul        ha-eci-ess-ta.  
 study-NOM            linguistics-ACC LV-PASS-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘The study of linguistics was done by Chelswu.’
- \*b. Kep-i                chentwung-ey        mek-eci-ess-ta.  
 fear-NOM            thunder-DAT        eat-PASS-PAST-DECL  
 (intended) ‘Suho was frightened by the thunder.’

The fact that both sentences are strictly ungrammatical<sup>7</sup> supports the claim made by Bowers (1993), and thus upholds the structure of VP proposed here. Second, the claim made by Karimi (2003) also firmly supports the structure in (20), since both verbal nouns and idiom nouns yield non-specific, generic readings. Now, having the structure of VP with two object positions in mind, I move onto the argument ellipsis paradigm of direct objects, which has been already widely attested in the language.

#### 4.2 Argument Ellipsis of Direct Objects

We saw that the position of direct objects to which  $\theta$ -role is assigned is the specifier position of the lexical VP. In light of this idea, it is worth mentioning that the lexical VP in Korean is construed as phase. Ha (2008) argues that the scope rigidity in Korean has to do with the fact that the domain of VP is the first phase in Korean. The relevant data is presented below.

(22) *Scope Rigidity Related to the VP Phase* (Ha 2008)

[<sub>TP</sub> etten namca.ai-ka<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> motun yakwu.kyengki-ey ka-] ] ] ...  
 some boy-NOM                                    every baseball.game-LOC go-  
 ‘Some boy went to every baseball game.’ [  $\exists > \forall / * \forall > \exists$  ]

The interpretation of (22) indicates that the inverse scope is impossible in Korean. However, this can be accounted for, if both  $vP$  and VP are domains of phase in Korean. In languages where scope ambiguity is tolerated, such as English, objects can take scope over subjects as they drop by the edge of  $vP$  at LF. This is due to the fact that  $vP$  is the first phase in these languages. Yet, the construal is rather different in Korean. Since Quantifier Raising (QR) is licensed only if it has a semantic effect (Fox 1995), movement from VP to  $vP$  cannot be licensed, thus objects cannot take scope over subjects in Korean (Ha 2008:66). Taken together, we can posit a  $\theta$ -role assigned direct object in

<sup>6</sup> The ungrammaticality remains unaffected regardless of the presence of *by*-phrases.

<sup>7</sup> Note that in (21a), the ungrammaticality remains intact even if we change the light verb *ha-* into its canonical passive counterpart *toy-* ‘to become’.

the specifier for transitives, with the lexical VP being construed as phase. Now, we revisit the instance of direct object ellipsis, which I repeat below.

(23) *Argument Ellipsis Phenomenon in Korean* (repeated from (1))

- A. Suho-ka [yenghwa sey-phyen]-ul po-ass-ta.  
 Suho-NOM [movie three-CL]-ACC see-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Suho watched three films.’
- B. Hani-nun  $\Delta$  po-ci anh-ass-ta.  
 Hani-TOP see-CI not-PAST-DECL  
 ‘Hani did not watch three films.’

Following the structural representation that was sketched in the last section, the direct object *yenghwa sey-phyen* ‘three films’ occupies the specifier of VP. As the VP in question is construed as phase, the direct object is placed in the leftmost position of the VP phase. Therefore, AE can be licensed.

(24) *Derivation: Argument Ellipsis for Direct Objects*

[VP  $\boxed{\text{phase}}$   $\Delta$  *three films* [<sub>v</sub> V<sub>see</sub> ]]

As shown in (24), the direct object is eligible for AE in the specifier of the VP phase, which is the designated position of the  $\theta$ -role assigned direct objects for transitives. Therefore, the proposal can cover the case of direct object ellipsis as well.

## 5 Conclusion

In the present paper, I have investigated the issue of null arguments in Korean from the perspective of the argument ellipsis (AE) phenomenon, providing a syntactic account for the licensing position of AE. This line of investigation was extended to the structure of VP in Korean, by which the case of direct object ellipsis was accordingly covered. In order to account for the asymmetries found in inalienable possession and resultatives, I proposed that only arguments in the specifier position of a phase unit are eligible for AE in the language. The domain of phase is defined as a unit of Spell-Out, after which the word order is established by syntactic linearization.

The asymmetries could be properly accounted for under the proposal, and the structure of VP was entertained with two types of nominal objects found in Korean: verbal nouns and idiom nouns. In particular, it was pointed out that the two positions for objects in the lexical VP are not only in line with the previous literature, but also relevant to the case of direct object ellipsis. If the present paper is on the right track, it can shed promising lights on the syntactic environments of null arguments in Korean.

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