Verb phrase anaphora in a verb second language*

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Recent work on ellipsis has identified new varieties of verb phrase ellipsis in Hebrew (Goldberg 2005), Irish (Goldberg 2005, McCloskey 1991) and Farsi (Toosarvandani 2006). These varieties look different from English verb phrase ellipsis in that the main verb (in Hebrew and Irish) or the light verb (in Farsi) is stranded. These authors argue that the differences in surface appearance are due to other syntactic properties of these languages: Hebrew and Irish have V-to-T raising (English does not), and in Farsi complex predicates v has independent phonological expression (English v does not). Given these independently established properties of English, Hebrew, Irish and Farsi, the surface forms arising from verb phrase ellipsis in the different languages are in fact entirely expected. The goal of this paper is to investigate two kinds of VP anaphora in Danish -- one involving a null form (VPE) and one involving a proform (VPP). Specifically, I ask what kind of VP anaphora constructions we would expect to find in this language on theoretical grounds and whether this is indeed what we find.

Unlike English (and Hebrew, Irish and Farsi), Danish is a generalized V2 language: in all main clauses, the finite verb -- whether it is an auxiliary or a main verb -- raises to second position and some phrasal element surfaces in initial position. I argue that the V2 property of Danish leads to two expectations about the surface realization of VP anaphora in the language:

i)   that at least one type of VP anaphora (VPE) should, under certain circumstances, strand a finite main verb, and

ii)   that the proform involved in VPP should participate in movement to clause-initial position.

I show that the second of these expectations is realized, but that the first one is not. I then consider what these empirical observations reveal about the syntactic derivation of these VP anaphoric constructions, and, more generally, about verb movement and the V2 property found in Danish and most other Germanic languages. I end with some speculations as to what makes Danish different from Hebrew and Irish.

Goldberg, Lotus (2005) Verb-Stranding VP Ellipsis: A Cross-Linguistic Study, Ph.D. thesis, McGill University.

McCloskey, James (1991) Clause structure, ellipsis and proper government in Irish, Lingua 85: 259-302.

Toosarvandani, Maziar (2006) v-Standing VPE: Ellipsis in Farsi Complex Predicates, ms. UC Berkeley (to appear in the Proceedings of NELS 36).