Not every stranding verb makes a VP ellipsis: head movement and ellipses

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While Portuguese licenses VP ellipsis (1a), the other Romance languages don't (1b for French, but the same applies for Spanish and Italian), as is well known, albeit the fact that all of them license TP ellipsis (2):

(1)　　a.　　João tinha visto o Pedro, mas a Maria não tinha.
　　　　　　João had seen the Pedro, but the Maria not had.
　　　　　　'João saw Pedro, but Maria didn't.'

　　　b.　*　Jean a vu Pedro, mais Marie ne pas.　　　　　　French

(2)　　Juan no desaprobó a Maria y a Ana tampoco.　　　Spanish (Saab, 2010)
　　　Juan not disapproved of Maria and of Ana also.
　　　'Juan didn't disapprove of Maria or of Ana.'

However, unrelated languages such as Portuguese, Irish or Hebrew license VP ellipsis, just to mention a few:

(3)　　Q:　　Salaxt etmol et ha-yeladim le-beit-ha-sefer?
　　　　　　Sent yesterday ACUS the-children to house-the-book?
　　　　　　'Did you send the children to school yesterday?'

　　　A:　　Salaxti.
　　　　　　Sent.
　　　　　　I did.　　　　　　　　　　　　　Hebrew (Goldberg, 2005)

Cases like (1a), and its translation into English, as well as (3), have been dubbed AUX(iliary) and V(erb)-stranding VP ellipsis, respectively, by Goldberg, 2005. Goldberg also claimed that V-stranding VP ellipsis (V-VPE) only occurs in languages in which the verb raises out of (vP)-VP in overt syntax. However, although that is a necessary condition for V-VPE, it is not a sufficient one, since the verb moves overtly in Spanish but the language does not license such an ellipsis.

With this in mind, our goal is to closely examine the so called V-VPE in different languages, as well as the verb movement in each case. We will claim that the term V-VPE is a misnomer, serving as an umbrella term for very distinct cases of ellipsis. In that sense, we will claim that verb movement can license ellipsis, but no necessarily VP ellipsis, even if the verb is superficially stranded. We will also claim that true cases of V-VPE are quite restrictive among languages. Finally, although orthogonal, we will claim that verb stranding is the result of syntactic head movement and that ellipses make up for a good diagnostic for that (see Lipták & Saab, 2014 as well).

It is striking that some of the VP ellipsis licensing languages exhibit a strict verbal identity constraint (see Portuguese, in (4), from Matos & Cyrino, 2005; but also Irish, McCloskey, 2017, Hebrew, Goldberg, 2005; a.o.):

(4)　*　Ela perguntou se alguém **lera** o jornal, mas ninguém **tinha**.　　Portuguese
　　　She asked if someone read the paper, but no one had.
　　　'She asked if someone had read the paper, but no one had.'

Nevertheless, this constraint does not seem to resist short answers to polarity questions or contrastive focus in several languages (Portuguese – see Kato, 2013; Finnish, 2001; Russian, Gribanova, 2013; a.o.):

(5)　　O João **comprou** uma casa em Chicago?　　　　　　　Portuguese
　　　The João bought a house in Chicago?
　　　'Did João buy a house in Chicago?'

　　　Não, **alugou**!
　　　No, rented.
　　　'No! He rented it!'

(6)　　O João nunca　**vendeu** um carro nos EUA, mas ele COMPROU.
　　　The João never sold　a　car　in-the US, but he　bought_EMPHASIS
　　　'João has never sold a car in the US but he has bought one.'

Apparently, the only language that behaves otherwise is Irish, according to McCloskey (2017). Gribanova & Harizanov (2016) propose that the differences in terms of the verbal identity constraint could be explained in terms of head movement. For them, there would be two possibilities: (i) internal merge in the syntax, which

would have a semantic effect and (ii) a post-syntactic amalgamation operation, a proposal in line with Chomsky (2001). Irish would only have (ii), while the other VP ellipsis licensing languages would have both. However, McCloskey et al. (2017) show that Irish V-VPE exhibit a *verum* focus realized by a discoursive particle in the left periphery of the structure. As for the true V-VPE, cases that obey the verbal identity constraint and that do not show a semantic effect as a consequence of verb movement, we will also claim that the movement is still syntactic on the basis of the clitic position in European Portuguese. We will also follow Aboh (2010: 8) to whom "syntactic movement is by necessity head movement".

We see no theoretical or empirical motivation for proposals resorting to syntactic and post-syntactic head movement which create a non-unified analysis for ellipsis. Rather, the question whether instances of (1a) vs. (5)- (6) – in the same language or in languages that license one or the other but not both – should be treated as cases of VP ellipsis or higher ellipsis with overt movement of the verb to a position outside TP. Although all of them end up with a stranding verb, that does not mean it has landed in the same category. We propose that cases of strict verbal identity are low VP ellipsis but those that have a semantic effect, such as contrastive focus or short answers to polarity questions as in (5), are cases of high CP ellipsis that depend on discoursive categories. The latter should be more pervasive among languages, even in languages that do not license low VP ellipsis, in our terms.

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