



When VP Ellipsis is Bled: Locative Inversion and Specificational Copulars*

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ABSTRACT

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The licensing element for VP ellipsis has for long been a controversial issue. Tense (Zagona 1988), Spec-head agreement on T (Lobeck 1994), and sentential polarity focus (López 1995) have been put on the table on the issue on a VP ellipsis-licensing element. In this paper we argue by examining locative inversion (LI) and specificational copular (SC) constructions vis-à-vis their kin that sentential polarity focus is a proper licensing element for VP ellipsis. Characteristically, LIs and SCs bear (presentational) focus feature on a markedly postposed subject DP inside a VP (relative to topic feature on a markedly preposed locative phrase in clause-initial position), which in turn precludes the occurrence of sentential polarity focus outside the VP. The ban on both VP ellipsis and VP anaphora in LIs and SCs is thus accounted for by the absence of such focus in need. By contrast, apparently similar and related constructions such as pseudo-LIs & existentials with 'there' in [Spec,TP] and equative copulars that encode sentential polarity focus are fine with VP ellipsis and VP anaphora.

KEYWORDS

VP ellipsis, locative inversion, specificational copular, pseudo-LI, equative copular

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1. Introduction

It has been noted in Bruening (2010) and Griffiths and den Dikken (2020) that VP Ellipsis is not permitted in Locative Inversion (LI) constructions. Though allowed in Non-LI constructions like (1b), VP ellipsis is ruled out in LI counterparts like (2b), with (1) and (2) taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

(1) VP Ellipsis allowed in Non-LIs:

- a. The Confederate flag used to fly on this building, and it is going to fly on this building, too.
- b. The Confederate flag used to fly on this building, and it is going to ~~<fly on this building>~~, too.

(2) VP Ellipsis NOT allowed in LIs:

- a. On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag, and on THAT building used to fly the Confederate flag, too.
- b. * On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag; on THAT building did ~~<used to fly the Confederate flag>~~, too.¹

As also noted in Bruening (2010) and Griffiths and den Dikken (2020), albeit differing minimally from LIs, so-called Pseudo-Locative Inversion (Pseudo-LI) constructions with the expletive subject ‘there’ in SpecTP can undergo VP ellipsis as in (3), taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

(3) VP Ellipsis allowed in Pseudo-LIs:

- a. On THIS building there used to fly a Confederate flag, and on THAT building there used to fly Confederate flag, too.
- b. ✓ On THIS building there used to fly a Confederate flag, and on THAT building there did ~~<used to fly a Confederate flag>~~, too.

What resembles a family of LIs in VP ellipsis is a kin of copulars. Unmarked Predicational Copular (PC) constructions allow VP ellipsis as in (4a-b), but marked Specificational Copular (SC) constructions do not as in (5a-b), with (4) and (5) taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

(4) VP Ellipsis allowed in PCs²:

¹ More examples taken from Bruening (2010: 63) are in order to show that LI constructions are resistant to VP ellipsis.

- (i) a. Into the room stepped a purple dragon. Then I did.
- b. Into the room stepped a purple dragon. *Out of it did too.

² More examples displaying the Predicational vs. Specificational asymmetry in VP ellipsis, taken from Mikkelsen (2005: section 6.3), are in order, as follows:

(i) VP Ellipsis allowed in PCs:

- a. The fact that Harry was the tallest player doesn't mean that he now is ~~<the tallest player>~~. **PCs**
- b. I know that Ingrid Bergman is the lead actress in this movie, and think she is ~~<the lead actress>~~ in that movie, too. **PCs**

- a. √ For this theory, the AGREEMENT facts have turned out to be my biggest worry; for that theory, the ELLIPSIS facts have ~~<turned out to be my biggest worry>~~. **PCs**
- b. √ FOOD SHORTAGES frequently seem to be the trigger of political protest; CORRUPTION often does ~~<seem to be the trigger of political protest>~~, too. **PCs**

(5) VP Ellipsis not allowed in SCs:

- a. * For this theory, MY biggest worry has turned out to be the agreement facts; for that theory, YOUR biggest worry has ~~<turned out to be the agreement facts>~~, too. **SCs**
- b. * The TRIGGER of political protest frequently seems to be food shortages; ironically, the. OUTCOME of such protest often does ~~<seem to be food shortages>~~, too. **SCs**

What is analogous to PCs but dissimilar to SCs in VP ellipsis is Equative Copular (EC) constructions. In syntactic studies of copulars, ECs, investigated initially by Moro (1997)³, are a type of copulars in English where canonical SCP word order (i.e. a PC construction composed of Subject + Copula + Predicative expression) as in (6a) is apparently reversed in a sense that one has the order PCS instead (the derived form of sentence composed of Predicative expression + Copula + Subject) as in (6b), with (6a-b) taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

(6) PCs (6a) and ECs (6b):

- a. Twenty years ago, Austen and Heller were my favourite authors; nowadays, TOLSTOY AND CHEKHOV are my favourite authors, too. **PCs**
- b. Twenty years ago, MY favourite authors were Austen and Heller; nowadays, MY DAUGHTER'S favourite authors are Austen and Heller, too. **ECs**

It is to be noted that like PCs in (7a), ECs are safely amenable to VP ellipsis as in (7b), with (7a-b) taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

(7) VP Ellipsis allowed in ECs (7b):

- a. Twenty years ago, Austen and Heller were my favourite authors; nowadays, TOLSTOY AND CHEKHOV are ~~<my favourite authors>~~. **PCs**
- b. Twenty years ago, MY favourite authors were Austen and Heller; nowadays, MY DAUGHTER'S favourite authors are ~~<Austen and Heller>~~, too. **ECs**

We have two sets of triplets: one set such as Non-LIs, LIs, and Pseudo-LIs, and the other set such as PCs, SCs, and ECs. Most recently, Griffiths and den Dikken (2020) proposes a Spec-Head agreement account for the ban on VP

(ii) VP Ellipsis not allowed in SCs:

- a. * The fact that the tallest player is Harry doesn't mean that the best player is ~~<him>~~. **SCs**
- b. * I know that the lead actress in that movie is Ingrid Bergman, and I think the one in Double Indemnity is ~~<her>~~, too. **SCs**

³ Following Heycock and Kroch (1997), we call as ECs what Moro (1997) calls as Inverse Copulars, to eschew the confusion in Moro's coinage. Heycock and Kroch (ibid.) argue convincingly that ECs in English do not involve inversion between the subject DP and the copular complement predicate DP.

ellipsis in LIs and SCs, building on the fact that these constructions lack canonical subject verb agreement. Questioning the validity of Spec-Head agreement as a proper licenser for VP ellipsis, in this paper we seek an alternative analysis for the unavailability of VP in LIs and SCs, arguing that sentential polarity focus is a critical determinant for licensing VP ellipsis. Since presentation focus on a markedly postposed subject DP precludes the occurrence of sentential (positive/negative) polarity focus, both VP ellipsis and VP anaphora cannot be properly licensed.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 starts with a review of Griffiths and den Dikken’s (2020) previous analysis for VP ellipsis in LIs and SCs and the previous approaches to VP ellipsis in general. Section 3.1 goes towards an alternative analysis for the prohibition against VP ellipsis in LIs and SCs, particularly concentrating on the characteristics of these constructions at issue in light of information or focus structure. Section 3.2 goes on to propose that presentational focus on a markedly postposed subject DPs in LIs and SCs results in excluding sentential polarity focus, thereby VP ellipsis always being ruled out in these constructions.

2. Previous Analyses

Griffiths and den Dikken (2020) recently tackle with the ban on VP ellipsis in LIs and SCs of English. Specifically, G & D argue that, to license VP ellipsis, T must enter into a Spec-Head agreement relationship with the phrase in its specifier, and it must be in a c-command relationship with a local v head that has a [tense] value. Based on both den Dikken’s (2006) analysis of LI and his (2006, 2014, 2019) analysis of SCs, G & D assert that the prerequisite of Spec-T agreement for VP ellipsis in LIs and SCs is not met. First, according to den Dikken’s (2006), the preposed PP of LIs does not end up as occupying the structural subject position, SpecTP as in (8).

(8) [PP On this building] [TP Ø_I [T' T [... [RP the Confederate flag t_i]]]

Instead, the overt PP in (8) lands in an A'-position in the left periphery of the clause, with the structural subject position hosting a silent pro-form linked to the initial PP, hence the absence of a Spec-Head agreement relation between T and the occupant of SpecTP.

Likewise, den Dikken (2006, 2014, 2019) argues for English that in double-DP SC constructions, what is moved to the SpecTP position is a complex constituent formed by a null predicate head as in (9).

(9) [TP [PredP Ø [my biggest worry]]_I [T' T+RELATOR=be[RP the agreement facts [R' t_{REL} t_i]]]]

The SpecTP in (9) hosts a null-headed PredP that is not equipped with the necessary featural matrix to make it a candidate Agree-goal for T. On this approach to SCs, the singular form of the copula is a default form, NOT the reflex of a Spec-T agreement relation.

To reiterate, in Griffiths and den Dikken’s (2020) account for the ban on VP ellipsis in LI and SCs, not ‘special/default agreement’ but Spec-Head agreement is required for licensing VP ellipsis. However, Spec-Head Agreement is lacking in LIs and SCs, where the apparent subject is categorially not a DP but a DP/PP overlaid with a null head.

Though Griffiths and den Dikken’s (2020) account is a well worked-out one, one quick conceptual argument against G & D’s account is in order. This argument bearing on following question doubts the validity of G & D’s

thesis: Is Spec-Head agreement a proper licenser for VP ellipsis in English? In fact, VP ellipsis in ECM constructions shows that the answer to this question is negative. As noted by Martin (2001), there is a well-known asymmetry in allowing VP ellipsis between canonical control and ECM infinitives. (10) and (11) taken from Marin (2001) make a case for such an asymmetry.

- (10) a. John tried to be courageous, and Mary tried to [_vVP e] also.
b. I persuaded Max to go, but I couldn't persuade Beth to [_vVP e].

- (11) a. ?* I believe John to be courageous, and I believe Mary to [_vVP e] also.
b. ?* John is believed to be courageous, and Mary is believed to [_vVP e] also.

Capitalizing on the distinction in tense property between control and ECM infinitives, one can embrace the proposal that the former assigns Null Case to the PRO subject, but the latter cannot (Chomsky 1995, Martin 2001), thereby holding on to Spec-Head agreement in licensing VP ellipsis in control infinitives, but not in ECM infinitives. Still, the following examples taken from Martin (2001) fail this attempt.

- (12) a. I believe John to be courageous, and I believe Mary to be [_vVP e] also.
b. John is believed to be courageous, and Mary is believed to be [_vVP e] also.

- (13) Who do you believe to have been working on his thesis all night?
a. I believe Javi to have [_vVP e].
b. I believe Javi to have been [_vVP e].

As noted by Martin (2001), the addition of an aspectual auxiliary verb 'have/be' in ECM clauses as in (12-13) makes it possible that otherwise disallowed VP ellipsis is fine in these clauses.⁴ VP ellipsis in (12) and (13) renders compelling evidence refuting the licensing condition on VP ellipsis via Spec-Head agreement.

The alternative hypothesis to Spec-Head agreement in VP ellipsis licensing is that sigma (Σ) or sentential polarity focus is a licenser for VP ellipsis (López, 1995 and Potsdam, 1997). The convincing evidence for the latter idea comes from VP ellipsis in subjunctive clauses of (14), where Spec-Head agreement is evidently lacking but only sentential negation is present.

- (14) a. A: Should we wake Dad? B: No! It's absolutely imperative that you not [_vVP e].
b. Kim needs to be there but it is better that the other organizers not [_vVP e].
c. Ted hoped to vacation in Liberia but his agent recommended that he not [_vVP e].
d. We think that Mary should present her case but we will ask that Bill not [_vVP e].
e. A: Should I attend the meetings? B: I suggest that you not [_vVP e].

(taken from Potsdam 1997)

⁴ To anticipate the proposal below on the licensing condition on VP ellipsis in English, we will argue that sentential polarity focus is a proper licensing element for VP ellipsis in this language. Still, in tandem, following Zanuttini (1991) among others, we assume the close interaction between sentential polarity focus and Tense (features). The legitimacy of VP ellipsis in the ECM infinitives of (12) and (13) is ascribed to tense features coming from the auxiliary verbs such as 'have' and 'be'. The close interaction between sentential polarity focus and Tense (features) also applies to control infinitives in English, where Tense is invariably a modal element.

Returning to ECM clauses, the following contrast also reinforces the thesis that what matters in licensing VP ellipsis is not Spec-Head agreement but sentential polarity focus.

- (15) a. *I consider Bill intelligent and I consider Sally [_{v/VP} e] too.
b. I consider Bill intelligent and I consider Sally not [_{v/VP} e].

In the sections below, since VP ellipsis licensing via Spec-Head agreement does not work, we are in keeping with and are to advocate VP ellipsis licensing via sentential polarity focus.

3. Towards an Analysis

3.1. VP Ellipsis and Focus

Though Griffith and den Dikken (2020) certainly provide a finely elaborated analysis for the unelidability of VP in LI and SC constructions, in addition to the problem with the licensing condition on VP ellipsis that G & D assume, their analysis does not sufficiently enough accommodate the interaction of VP ellipsis with focus in the constructions at issue where information or focus structure is taken to be encoded. Speaking of these constructions, apparently VP ellipsis in these constructions includes a markedly post-posed subject DP that is known to bear (presentational) focus (Culicover and Winkler 2008, Ward and Birner 1998). Ward and Birner (1998) suggest that the relative discourse-familiarity of preposed and postposed constituents regulates the felicity of inversion in such constructions as LIs and SCs. The more familiar/old information must appear in preposed position, whereas the newer information must appear in postposed position in the resulting inverted sentence structure. Thus, inversion ministers to an information-packaging function, allowing the relatively new information to be processed in terms of its relationship to relatively familiar information.

How does focus or new information interact with ellipsis? It is a well-established fact that focused elements need to escape out of the constituents to be elided. This is because the former bear new information, while the latter bear old information; thus if ellipsis applies to the latter, it violates identity in ellipsis such as the requirement for mutual entailment between them (Merchant 2001). To the extent that it is the case that focus or new information cannot be included in the constituent to be elided, the following statement can be hypothesized to be true: the relatively new information or focus represented by a markedly postposed subject DP in LI and SC constructions cannot be part of VP ellipsis.

Given this hypothesis, we can readily rule out VP ellipsis in LI (16b) and SC (17a-b) constructions, repeated below from (2) and (5):

- (16) VP Ellipsis not allowed in LIs:
a. On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag, and on THAT building used to fly the Confederate flag, too. **LIs**
b. * On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag; on THAT building did ~~<used to fly the Confederate flag>~~, too. **LIs**

(17) VP Ellipsis not allowed in SCs:

- a. * For this theory, MY biggest worry has turned out to be the agreement facts; for that theory, YOUR biggest worry has ~~<turned out to be the agreement facts>~~. **SCs**
- b. * The TRIGGER of political protest frequently seems to be food shortages; ironically, the OUTCOME of such protest often does ~~<seem to be food shortages>~~, too. **SCs**

In these cases, the culprit for their ungrammaticality is that they have markedly postposed focus subject DPs included in VP ellipsis.

This line of analysis evidently has an advantage in accounting for VP anaphora or replacement as well as VP ellipsis, as in (18) and (19):

(18) VP Anaphora/Replacement not allowed in LCs:

- a. On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag, and on THAT building used to fly the Confederate flag, too. **LIs**
- b. * On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag; on THAT building did so, too. **LIs**

(19) VP Anaphora/Replacement not allowed in SCs:

- a. * For this theory, MY biggest worry has turned out to be the agreement facts; for that theory, YOUR biggest worry has done so, too. **SCs**
- b. * The TRIGGER of political protest frequently seems to be food shortages; ironically, the OUTCOME of such protest often does so, too. **SCs**

Griffith and den Dikken's (2020) analysis based on the thesis that the absence of Spec-head agreement bleeds VP ellipsis cannot say anything about the ban on VP anaphora or replacement in LI and SC constructions. Their analysis needs to introduce an additional condition to rule out VP anaphora/replacement in these LI and SC constructions at hand.

Relating to VP ellipsis and VP anaphora is British English 'do' ellipsis, which has been proposed as a form of predicate ellipsis that targets VP, the sister of v (Aelbrecht 2010, Baltin 2012, Haddican 2007, Stroik 2001). The examples in (20) and (21a-b) are taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

(20) * On THIS building would fly the Confederate flag; on THAT building would (do) ~~<fly the Confederate flag>~~, too. **LIs**

- (21) a. * For this theory, BOB'S biggest worry will seem to be the agreement facts; for that theory, KATE'S biggest worry will (do) ~~<seem to be the agreement facts>~~. **SCs**
- b. * The TRIGGER of the political protest might seem to be food shortages; ironically, the OUTCOME of the protest might (do) ~~<seem to be food shortages>~~, too. **SCs**

The ungrammaticality of (20) and (21a-b), in our analysis, follows from the illegitimate inclusion of markedly postposed focus subject DPs inside VP ellipsis.

However, as seen above, unlike SCs, ECs allow for VP ellipsis as in (22), repeated below from (7b):

(22) VP ellipsis allowed in Equative Copulars:

Twenty years ago, MY favourite authors were Austen and Heller; nowadays, MY DAUGHTER'S favourite authors are <Austen and Heller>, too. ECs

Since VP anaphora goes hand in hand with VP ellipsis, as predicted, VP anaphora is also fine with ECs, as follows:

(23) VP Anaphora/Replacement allowed in ECs:⁵

- a. Twenty years ago, Austen and Heller used to be my favourite authors; ten years ago, TOLSTOY. AND CHEKHOV did so. PCs
- b. Twenty years ago, MY favourite authors used to be Austen and Heller; ten years ago, MY DAUGHTER'S favourite authors did so, too. ECs

Why do ECs differ from SCs in VP ellipsis and anaphora? In fact, Heycock and Kroch (1997) argue that ECs and SCs are distinguished at least in three respects. In (24)-(26), taken from Heycock and Kroch (1997), the (a)-sentences illustrate SCs, where predicate fronting requires special discourse context and typically includes an explicit indicator of comparison. Not canonical Spec-T agreement but special/default agreement holds in (24a). Reconstruction effects arise in (25a). Subject-auxiliary inversion cannot apply to derive a 'yes-no' question. By contrast, In (24)-(26), the (b)-sentences exemplify ECs, which do not involve literal inversion (contrary to the claim made by Moro (1997)). Canonical Spec-T agreement occurs in (24b). Reconstruction effects do not show up, thus the bound variable pronoun within the subject DP in Spec being unable to be bound by its associate predicate QP in (25b). The subject in SpecTP can invert with the copular to derive a 'yes-no' question in (26b):

- (24) a. Delinquency is a menace to our society. Also a menace are/*is factory closings and fascist propaganda.
b. The biggest problem is/*are factory closings.
- (25) a. (In the late 19th century Japan became a threat to its neighbors.) Also a threat to its₁ neighbors was [every country/more than one country in Western Europe]₁.
b. * The enemy of its₁ neighbor was [every country in Western Europe]₁.
- (26) a. *Are also a menace to society factory closings?
b. Is the biggest problem factory closings?

Since unlike SCs, ECs do not involve inversion, the post-copular DP is not a markedly postposed subject DP but a regular predicate DP; Simply speaking, it is not necessarily a focus-bearing element. Thus, the predicate DP can be safely included inside VP ellipsis of (22) and VP anaphora of (23b). Mutatis mutandis, the same reasoning applies to the VP ellipsis leaving behind British 'do' in ECs of (27) below:

⁵ "The antecedent of 'so' is most often an AdjP, but other categories are possible, as in the DP of [i]. With the verb 'be' comparable reduction usually takes the form of ellipsis (*Kim was enthusiastic and Pat was too*), but 'so' is not altogether excluded" (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1537):

(i) The bible was already a symbol of class struggle, and remained **so** for a long time.

- (27) KEVIN'S favourite authors might {appear / be likely} to be Austin and Heller. And KAT'S favourite authors might (do) <appear to be Austin and Heller>, too. **ECs**

We now return to Pseudo-Locative Inversion constructions in (28), repeated below from (3). Pseudo-LIs with 'there' in [Spec, T] permit VP ellipsis as in (28b):

- (28) VP ellipsis allowed in Pseudo-LIs with 'there' in SpecTP:
 a. On THIS building there used to fly a Confederate flag, and on THAT building there used to fly Confederate flag, too.
 b. ✓ On THIS building there used to fly a Confederate flag, and on THAT building there did <used to fly a Confederate flag>, too.

We suggest that Pseudo-LIs be analyzed on a par with so-called 'there' existential constructions in English. They are amenable to VP ellipsis, as in (29) and (30), which are taken from Griffiths and den Dikken (2020):

- (29) Yesterday there seemed to be more problems than there do <seem to be> today.
- (30) a. A: Is there likely to be any philosophers at the party?
 B: No, there ISN'T <likely to be any philosophers at the party>.
 B': ? No, there ISN'T likely to be <any philosophers at the party>.
 b. A: Will there be any philosophers at the party?
 B: There isn't LIKELY to be <any philosophers at the party>, no.
 c. A: Will there be a lot of awkward dancing at the after-conference party?
 B: Don't worry! After a few drinks, there won't SEEM to be <any awkward dancing at the party>.

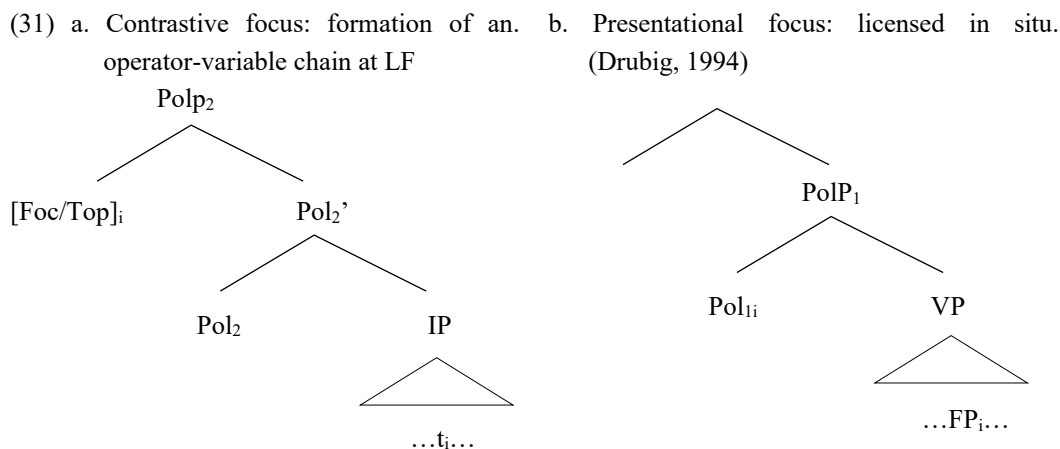
We assume that when 'there' is in SpecTP position, Pseudo-LIs and 'there' existentials are not subject to the felicity condition on inversion because the relative discourse-familiarity of the preposed and the post-posed constituents is not what matters. In the two constructions in question, without computing the relative discourse-familiarity of the preposed and post-posed constituents, in the case of Pseudo-LIs and 'there' existentials only PP preposing applies, leaving the apparently postposed subject DP in postverbal position. Thus, unlike the markedly postposed subject DP in LIs and SCs, the apparently postverbal subject DP in Pseudo-LIs and 'there' existentials does not necessarily bear focus, being able to be safely included inside VP ellipsis.

3.2. VP-internal Focus in LIs and SCs, Sentential Polarity Focus, and VP Ellipsis

In the previous section we have seen that LIs and SCs contain a markedly postposed subject DP in VP-internal position, which in turn bleeds VP ellipsis and VP anaphora. In this section we argue that focus on a markedly postposed subject DP in VP-internal position in LIs and SCs precludes the occurrence of sentential polarity focus that can serve as a proper licensing element of VP ellipsis. Thus, it is argued that the absence of sentential polarity focus due to the occurrence of VP-internal focus in LIs and SCs is responsible for the unelidability of VP in the constructions at hand in English.

Drubig (1994) argues convincingly that in languages like English and German a contrastive focus phrase moves at LF, namely in the Spec position of a sentence-initial higher PolP (PolP₂) as in (31a). By contrast, the

presentational focus phrase is licensed in situ by the head of a lower polarity phrase (PolP₁) as represented in (31b):



There is another type of focus: ‘Verum focus’ or sentential polarity focus (SPF). Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal (2009) note that this type of focus is taken as narrow focus on polarity and the rest of the clause is taken as background. Postal (2004) and Bruening (2010) (and also Aissen (1975) and Bresnan (1994)) note that the preposed PP in LIs does not allow an emphatic ‘do’, in contrast to Pseudo-LIs with the SpecTP hosting ‘there’, as follows ((32) and (33) being taken from Bruening (2010)):

- (32) a. On the wall hung a portrait of the artist. **LIs**
 b. * On the wall DID hang a portrait of the artist. **LIs** with positive SPF
 c. On the wall **there** DID hang a portrait of the artist. **Pseudo-LIs** with positive SPF
- (33) a. * On this wall will **not** hang a picture of U. S. Grant. **LIs** with negative SPF
 b. On this wall there hasn’t ever hung a picture of Chomsky. **Pseudo-LIs** with negative SPF

The ungrammaticality of (32b) indicates that a markedly postposed subject DP is not compatible with sentential (positive/negative) polarity focus.

Likewise, the following SCs in contrast to ECs show that they behave in the same way as LIs in terms of incompatibility with sentence polarity focus.⁶

- (34) a. Delinquency is a menace to our society. *Also a menace ARE factory closings and fascist propaganda.
SCs
 b. The biggest problem IS factory closings. **ECs**

⁶ Thanks go to Michael Barrie (perl. comm.), who confirms that (34a) and (34b) with sentential positive polarity focus are unacceptable.

(35) a. Delinquency is a menace to our society. *A menace is **not** factory closings and fascist propaganda.⁷

SCs

b. The biggest problem is **not** factory closings. ECs

The incompatibility of sentential polarity focus in LCs and SCs validates Leonetti and Escandell-Vidal's (2009) thesis that the verum focus is taken as narrow focus on polarity and the rest is taken as background. The encoding of information structure in LIs and SCs mandatorily places focus on a markedly postposed subject DP inside VP structure, thus precluding the occurrence of sentential polarity focus on the head of a lower polarity phrase. By contrast, since Pseudo-LIs and 'there'-existentials as well as ECs do not involve the strict sense of inversion, the in-situ (or extraposed) subject DP does not necessarily bear analogous kind of focus, permitting the occurrence of sentential polarity focus on the head of a lower polarity phrase.

We now go back to the ban on VP ellipsis in LIs as in (36b) in contrast to (36a) and the asymmetry in VP ellipsis between LIs and Pseudo-LIs as in (37a) and (37b), which are taken from Bruening (2010):

(36) a. Into the room stepped a purple dragon. Then I did.

b. Into the room stepped a purple dragon. *Out of it did too.

(37) a. * From the back of the hall will appear a large purple dragon, and from backstage (probably) will too.

b. From the back of the hall (there) will appear a large purple dragon, and from backstage **there** (probably) will too.

The focus on a markedly postposed subject DP in LIs takes priority over sentential polarity focus, suppressing the occurrence of the latter. This in turn bleeds VP ellipsis in LIs. By contrast, Pseudo-LIs can bear sentence polarity focus as seen in (32c), which comes into play in licensing VP ellipsis in this type of constructions.⁸

In passing, we assume with Miller (2011) that the presence of sentential polarity particle is also indispensable for licensing VP anaphora. The ban on VP anaphora in LIs and SCs, as in (38) and (39), repeated, is attributed to the fact that presentational focus on a markedly postposed subject DP in these constructions preempts their focus structure, preventing the occurrence of sentential polarity focus.

⁷ As Higgins (1976: 321) points out, 'the copula in a Specificational pseudo-cleft cannot have a "straight" negation of the predicate, but at best only some kind of contradiction negation'. Declerck (1988: 166) extends the scope of Higgins's observation to include specificational copular sentences in general; cf. (i), which likewise is good only on a 'contradiction reading' (cf. den Dikken (2001: 23)).

(i) *Smith's murderer isn't John

⁸ One reviewer of this journal draws attention to the fact that LIs in English are amenable to Gapping, as in (i) taken from Bruening (2010):

(i) To Hercules fell the task of cleaning the Aegean Stables, and to Jason, of retrieving the Golden Fleece.

Two things are to note here. One is that T and sentence polarity focus are included in the Gapping process. The other is that the new information-denoting PP as part of the postposed subject DP in (i) survives this process. Though it is a controversial issue whether Gapping is an ellipsis process, it suffices to note that the absence of sentence polarity focus in LIs does not bleed the Gapping process.

(38) VP Anaphora/Replacement not allowed in LCs:

- a. On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag, and on THAT building used to fly the Confederate flag, too. **LIs**
- b. * On THIS building used to fly the Confederate flag; on THAT building did so, too. **LIs**

(39) VP Anaphora/Replacement not allowed in SCs:

- a. * For this theory, MY biggest worry has turned out to be the agreement facts; for that theory, YOUR biggest worry has done so, too. **SCs**
- b. * The TRIGGER of political protest frequently seems to be food shortages; ironically, the OUTCOME of such protest often does so, too. **SCs**

At the same time, British English ‘do’ ellipsis as in (40) and (41), repeated below, are accounted for in the same line of analysis. The lack of sentential polarity focus prohibits British English ‘do’ ellipsis in LIs and SCs.

(40) * On THIS building would fly the Confederate flag; on THAT building would (do) ~~<fly the Confederate flag>~~, too. **LIs**

- (41) a. * For this theory, BOB’S biggest worry will seem to be the agreement facts; for that theory, KATE’S biggest worry will (do) ~~<seem to be the agreement facts>~~. **SCs**
- b. * The TRIGGER of the political protest might seem to be food shortages; ironically, the OUTCOME of the protest might (do) ~~<seem to be food shortages>~~, too. **SCs**

Before leaving this section, we briefly look into VP fronting, which is known to call for sentential polarity focus. According to Ward (1990), VP fronting serves two functions in discourse: to affirm a speaker’s belief in a silent proposition explicitly evoked in the prior discourse, or to suspend a speaker’s belief in such a proposition. Crucially, the felicity (viz. proposition affirmation and suspension) condition on VP fronting is in tandem with the syntactic-phonological requirement that it applies to the VP that immediately follows an emphatically stressed auxiliary verb, as noted already by Ross (1967). In other words, the felicity condition on VP fronting is interlocked with its requirement for sentential polarity focus on T.

The requirement for sentential polarity focus on T in VP fronting as well as in VP ellipsis predicts that VP fronting in LIs and SCs is prohibited. This prediction is achieved, as follows.

(42) VP Fronting not allowed in LCs:

To this argument can be added numerous others,

* ... and added numerous others, to this argument certainly can be.

(taken from Bruening 2010, also Ross 1967)

(43) VP Fronting not allowed in SCs:⁹

Delinquency seems to be a menace to our society. *Seem to be factory closings and fascist propaganda, also a menace do. (adapted from Heycock and Kroch 1998)

The absence of sentential polarity focus on T in LIs and SCs bleeds VP fronting in these constructions.

We saw before that unlike LIs and SCs, Pseudo-LIs as well as ‘there’-existentials and ECs are compatible with sentential polarity focus. The prediction to make is that VP fronting will be allowed in these constructions. However, the prediction is not borne out in Pseudo-LIs as well as ‘there’-existentials, as in (44) and (45):

(44) VP displacement not allowed in Pseudo-LIs:

To this argument can be added numerous others,
* ... and added numerous others, to this argument there certainly can be.

(taken from Bruening 2010)

(45) VP Displacement not allowed in ‘there’ existentials:

- a. *I said there would be a man in the garden, and [be a man in the garden] there certainly will [e].
- b. *[Be a man in the garden] though there might [e], I still won’t stay inside.

(taken from Bruening 2010)

By contrast, VP fronting is allowed in ECs, in accordance with the prediction, as in (46):

- (46) It was asserted that the biggest problem seemed to have been factory closings, and seem to have been factory closings, the biggest problem certainly did.

Capitalizing on the asymmetry in VP fronting between Pseudo-LIs & ‘there’-existentials and ECs, we suggest that the expletive ‘there’ is what is to blame for this asymmetry. Provisionally adopting the rationale for expletive replacement, we assume that the expletive ‘there’ needs to be replaced by its associate in Pseudo-LIs & ‘there’-existentials. However, since VP fronting as an instance of topicalization stays in its displaced position at LF, the expletive ‘there’ in Pseudo-LIs & ‘there’-existentials fails to be replaced by its associate inside the fronted VP, being responsible for the ban on VP fronting in these constructions.

4. Conclusion

The ban on VP ellipsis in LIs and SCs is puzzling, given that VP ellipsis is generally permitted in finite clauses. Griffiths and den Dikken’s (2020) account for it based on the lack of Spec-Head agreement in the constructions in question is a reasonable one, but since VP anaphora as well as VP ellipsis is not available to them, Spec-Head agreement does not give a right handle to the empirical agenda at issue.

⁹ The following example clearly shows that what undergoes VP fronting is VP, but other categories such as ProgressiveP or PerfectP:

- (i) They swore that Lee might have been using heroin, and using heroin he might have been. (Akamajian et al. 1979)

In this paper we take a new avenue, leveraging the well-known observation that inversion in LIs and SCs results in encoding a particular kind of information or focus structure. Specifically, presentational focus on a markedly postposed subject DP in LIs and SCs precludes the occurrence of sentential (positive/negative) polarity focus on the head of a lower polarity phrase. We identified the absence of sentential polarity focus in LIs and SCs as the real culprit for the ban on VP ellipsis. To the extent that the proposed approach is correct, it renders a compelling argument to the idea that sigma (Σ) or sentential polarity focus is a proper licenser for VP ellipsis (López 1995, Potsdam 1997). At the same time, the inability to replace a VP with ‘do so’ anaphora in LIs and SCs speaks for the fact that sentential polarity focus is also a prerequisite for VP anaphora (Miller 2011).

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Tertiary