An argument against non-constituent ellipsis

INTRODUCTION. While the debate on whether only constituents can be elided (Merchant 2004, Abe 2015, Weir 2016), the possibility of eliding non-constituents has received less attention in Korean. This paper argues non-constituents cannot be elided and that remnants cannot survive ellipsis in their in-situ positions, based on novel data from Korean copular constructions with the degree morpheme *te*.

TE **AND COMPARATIVE NOMINALS.** When an adjective appears in degree constructions, it is accompanied by the *pota*-phrase ('than-phrase') and the degree morpheme *te*, which is similar to English '-er', but is not an affix (Park S.-Y 2005; cf. Chae 1998). I will refer to nominals containing *te* and a *pota*-phrase followed by an adjective as comparative nominals (CNs), as exemplified in (1a). Unlike in English, the degree morpheme *te* 'more' generated in the CN can either move out alone, as shown in (1b/1d), or together with the *pota*-phrase as shown in (1c).

(1) a. I   key   ce kes-pota   te   pissa-n   kenmwul-i-ya.
        this thing.NOM   that thing-than   more   be.expensive-ADN   building-COP-D
        (Lit.)This thing is a more expensive building than that one.
     b. I key   te   ces kes-pota pissa-n kenmwul-i-ya.
     c. Te   i key   ce kes-pota pissa-n kenmwul-i-ya.
     d. Ce kes-pota   te   i key   pissa-n   kenmwul-i-ya.

The precise internal structure of the CN is not the focus of this paper (cf. Heim 2000, Kennedy 1999, Bhatt and Pancheva 2004). Importantly, [*pota*-phrase *te* Adj] forms a constituent, which merges with the modified noun, as the replacement constituency test in (2) indicates.

(2) A: [(I   kenmwul-pota)   te   pissa]-n   kenmwul-i   iss-ni?
        this building-than   more   be.expensive-ADN   building-NOM   exist-Q?
        Is there a more expensive building (than this)?
     B: Kule-n   kenmwul-un   eps-e.   [*kule* = (*I kenmwul-pota*) *te pissa*]
        such-ADN   building-TOP   lack-D.   'There isn't such a building.'

Based on this, the structure of the CN can be represented as in (3). Following Mikkelsen (2005), I assume that in Korean copular constructions the referential NP and the CN functioning as a predicate are generated in PredP and the copula is located in v, as illustrated in (4).

(3) [NP [AP/DegP   PP-than   *te*   Adj] N]

(4) [TP [vP   [PredP   referential NP   [Pred'   Predicate NP   Pred] COP] T]

ELLIPSIS DATA. The example in (5) contains a copular verb, and B's utterance includes the contrastive focus elements – the contrastive subject and the degree morpheme *te*.

(5) A: Ol   hay-nun   chwuwun   hay-i-ess-e.   B: Caknyen-un   te-i-ess-e.
        this year-TOP   cold   year-COP-PAST-D   last.year-TOP   more-COP-PAST-D
        'This year was a cold year.'   (Int.)' Last year was colder than this year.'
     B': Caknyen-un   ol   hay-pota   te   chwuwun   hay-i-ess-e.
        last year-TOP   this year-than   more   cold   year-COP-PAST-D
        Last year was colder than this year.

Although both the constituent ellipsis approach and the non-constituent ellipsis approach assume that (5B) is derived from (5B'), they posit different derivations, as in (6).

(6) a. constituent ellipsis approach
        [CP   Caknyen-un₁   te₂   [PredP   ~~t₁~~   [CN ~~olhay-pota~~ ~~t₂~~ ~~chwuwun hay~~] -i-ess-e]
     b. non-constituent ellipsis approach
        [CP   Caknyen-un₁   [PredP   ~~t₁~~   [CN ~~olhay pota~~   te   ~~chwuwun hay~~] -i-ess-e]

Given the presence of the copula, one might suggest that the sentence in (5B) is derived from a cleft sentence (see Park 1998). However, this possibility is ruled out by the ungrammaticality of the corresponding cleft sentence, as illustrated in (7).

(7) *Ol   hay-pota   chuwun   kes-un   caknyen-un   te-i-ess-ta.
        this year-than   cold   C-TOP   last.year-TOP   more-COP-PAST-D
        'It was last year more that this year was cold'

ELLIPSIS AND FOCUS. Korean allows in-situ focus constructions, where any element accompanied by phonological prominence is interpreted as a focus in its in-situ position (8).

(8) a. [John-i   [F   motun chayk-ul]   ilk-un kes]-i   ani-ess-ta.
        John-NOM   every book-ACC   read-PAST C-COP   NEG-PAST-D
        'It was not that John read every book.' (NEG > every, *every > NEG)

b. [John-i   Mary-pota   [$_F$ te]   ku-n   kes]-i   ani-ess-ta.
    John-NOM   Mary-than   more   tall-PAST   C-COP   NEG-PAST-D
      (i) John is as tall as Mary. (equal reading) (ii) John is smaller than Mary. (inferior reading)

The sentence in (8a) shows that the in-situ focused element cannot scope over the negation above it. This is because negation is located higher than the universal quantifier. If this is correct, it is expected that *te* located lower than negation in (8b) must take only narrow scope. At first glance, the inferior reading in (8b) seems to result from the wide scope of *te*. However, this reading is actually the logical consequence of the narrow scope of *te*, since the narrow scope of *te* logically entails the inferior reading. Specifically, '¬(A is taller than B)' logically implies that 'A is as tall as B' and 'A is smaller than B.' Crucially, the narrow scope of *te* allows both the readings in (i) and (ii), while the wide scope allows only the meaning (ii). (9) demonstrates that remnants cannot be inside the ellipsis site.

(9) Context: Two people who took different trains are talking about the speed of each train.
     A: I   ken   ppalun   kicha-ka   ani-ess-e.   Ce ken   ette-ass-e?
       this thing.TOP   fast   train-FOC   NEG-PAST-D   that thing.TOP   how-PAST-Q
       'This was not a fast train. How about that one?
     B: Ce ken   i   kes-pota   te   ppalun   kicha-ka   ani-ess-e.
       that thing.TOP   this thing-than   more   fast   train-FOC   NEG-PAST-D
       (i) ?That train was as fast as this one.   (ii) That train was slower than this one.
     B': Ce ken   te   ani-ess-e.   B": ?Ce   ken   te   i-ess-e.
       that thing.TOP   more   NEG-PAST-D   that thing.TOP   more   COP-PAST-D
       (i) *That train was as fast as this one.   (ii) That train was slower than this one.

The non-elliptical sentence in (9B) can have both the equal reading and the inferior reading, although the former is harder to obtain than the latter. Interestingly, both in (9B') and (9B"), where vP and NegP are elided, respectively, the equal reading is not available, while the inferior reading is allowed. This implies that only the wide scope of *te* with respect to negation is possible in (9B') and (9B"), while the narrow scope is not. Given that scope is read off the syntactic structure in Korean (Han et al. 2007, Zeijlstra 2024), we can say that *te* must move from the CN that is c-commanded by negation to a position higher than negation. Since NegP does not provide a landing site for a moving element, the lowest possible landing position for the moving *te* is above NegP both in (6B') and (6B"), as illustrated in (10). I assume that NegP is selected by v (Han et al. 2007) and that the presence of negation prevents an overt copula in copular constructions.

(10) a. (9B'): [$_{CP}$ Ce ken$_1$ te$_2$ [$_{NegP}$ [$_{PredP}$ ~~t$_1$~~ [$_{CN}$ ~~i kes-pota~~ ~~t$_2$~~ ~~ppalun kicha ka~~] ani]-ess-e]
     b. (9B"): [$_{CP}$ Ce ken$_1$ te$_2$ [$_{NegP}$ [$_{PredP}$ ~~t$_1$~~ [$_{CN}$ ~~i kes-pota~~ ~~t$_2$~~ ~~ppalun kicha ka~~] ani]-i-ess-e]

The requirement that *te* be positioned outside the ellipsis site for the correct interpretation suggests that the remnant is located higher than the ellipsis site, indicating that what is elided is a constituent. If non-constituent ellipsis were possible, it would be erroneously predicted that (9B') and (9B") could have the equal reading. The reason (9B') and (9B") do not allow narrow scope of *te* is that *te* does not reconstruct after movement, as shown in (11).

(11) Context: Two people are comparing the prettiness of an item in real life to that in photo.
     a. Te$_1$ silmwul-i   sacin-pota   t$_1$ yeppu-ci ahn-a.
       more   real.thing-NOM   photo-than   pretty-NEG-D
       (i)*'The item in real life is as pretty as that in photo.' (NEG > more)
       (ii)'The item in real life is uglier than that in photo.' (more > NEG)
     b. Silmwul-i   sacin-pota   te   yeppu-ci ahn-a.
       real.thing-NOM   photo-than   pretty-NEG-D
       'The item in real life is as pretty as that in photo.' (NEG > more)

MORE ON ELLIPSIS AND SCOPE. If a remnant must be moved to a position higher than the ellipsis site, it is expected that the wide scope of the universal quantifier in (12B) is permitted. This is because the scrambled quantifier object can take scope over the quantifier subject, although the in-situ quantifier object cannot scope over the quantifier subject.

(12) A: Han haksayng-i   motun si-lul   ilk-ess-e.   B: Motun sosel-to.
      one student-NOM   every poem-ACC   read-PAST-D   every poem-also
      'One student read every poem.' (∃ > ∀, *∀ > ∃)   'Every novel, as well.' (∃ > ∀, *∀ > ∃)

The unavailability of wide scope of the universal quantifier object remnant in (12B) arises from the parallelism in scope (cf. Fox 1998).