

Verb Group Ellipsis in English

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Abstract: It is common knowledge that ellipsis constitutes a widespread and rather interesting grammatical device, with the help of which speakers intend to ensure the coherence of their ideas by omitting certain grammatical elements. Although many views on the essence and variety of types of ellipsis have been expressed by linguists, researchers in the sphere of grammar and linguistics still fail to reach a consensus on these particular issues and continue to study the topic under consideration whilst putting forward new ideas. It is, however, crucial that English learners develop a sufficient understanding of ellipsis in general and in particular of verbal phrase ellipsis (VPE) as one of the characteristic grammatical phenomena in the English language, as this knowledge could substantially improve their grammatical competence. This research paper thus focuses on the discussion of what VPE is, how it functions within the sentence, and what types of verbal elliptical phenomena are known.

Keywords: ellipsis, verbal phrase ellipsis, VPE, VP-ellipsis, meaning, preform, coherence.

I. INTRODUCTION

It was C. L. Ebeling who emphasised that language represents a series of form-meaning units and that the grammatical structure of sentences focuses on the interrelationship between the major forms' meanings [1]. However, there are cases when the linkages between these two aspects are not immediately apparent. The phenomenon of "verbal ellipsis" is what constitutes a good example of such indirection. It is worth mentioning that despite the relative prevalence of this phenomenon, linguists still struggle to reach a common and holistic understanding of the nature of verbal ellipsis and why speakers resort to it. In this paper, an overview of a verbal elliptical phenomenon known as verb group ellipsis will be presented with a view to explaining how it manifests itself and to shedding light on the major types of verb group ellipsis. Although this kind of ellipsis is well-studied, English learners still seem to lack knowledge about the variety of constructions with a verb phrase ellipsis. This paper is expected to fill this gap.

II. THE NATURE OF VERB GROUP ELLIPSIS

A. What Is Verb Phrase Ellipsis?

First and foremost, it is of particular importance to provide a definition of ellipsis. It is generally regarded as a deliberate deletion of a word or several elements in a sentence that contribute to its grammatical completeness [3]. At the same time, words or phrases that can be omitted do not require the availability of meanings that are readily implied by the sentence's overall context. When it comes to verbal phrase ellipsis (also referred to as VPE or VP-ellipsis), it is understood as an elliptical construction with a missing non-finite verb phrase [2]. In this connection, it is crucial to stress that an elided VP cannot contain a finite verb. Moreover, it needs to be emphasised that one cannot just omit a phrase; one has to use additional means superseding a group of verbs that has been omitted. To do this, one can either use an auxiliary or modal verb, particle to and/or other elements. When trying to identify an ellipsis, it is important to pay attention to what is referred to as an antecedent, an expression that provides a proform with a meaning. The point is that in the use of VPE implies that a nearby VP assumes the function as the VP proform's antecedent [4].

B. Types of Verbal Phrase Ellipsis

When speaking of VPE, it is worth mentioning that according to Fortuin [2], there are three types of this phenomenon. First, one should pay attention to the presence or absence of a contrast between the two parts of a sentence, including the one containing VPE. In this context, one should consider the following examples:

(1) He cannot say it, but he would like to.

(2) If I want to, I can go there without asking for permission.

As one can see, there is a stark contrast between the two parts of the first sentence. The speaker makes it clear that even though someone cannot do something, they really want to do it. One could also argue that both parts of the sentence constitute two separate semantic-syntactic units. As in the case of the second example, it is apparent that there is no contrast. It is the first part of the sentence that incorporates VPE and the construction, in general, is deprived of a “corresponding full counterpart” [2: 8]. The information embedded in the subordinate clause simply complements what is mentioned in the main clause while clarifying that nothing prevents the speaker from performing an action.

Fortuin also notes that there are sentences with VP-ellipsis, in which the role of the verbs such as *have*, *will* or *do* is particularly accentuated [2]. It was Ebeling who conducted an analysis of the instances with an emphasis on the abovementioned auxiliary verbs [1]. Here, one could take a closer look at the next example:

(3) She will tell him to stay home to help her and he will.

Indeed, it is clear that specific emphasis is placed on the second use of the verb *will*. In such a way, the speaker ensures the unity of information presented to the hearer.

Finally, there are sentences in which modal verbs are accompanied by an adverb *too* [2]. In this context, one could look at this sentence:

(4) Other students passed the test, so she could too.

In addition to the types of VPE described above, one could also mention grammatical structures known as question tags. As a matter of fact, VP-ellipsis is an essential component of the statements followed by an interrogative fragment, for instance:

(5) You like doing favours, don't you (like doing favours)?

It is notable that the examples of VPE mentioned in this paper make it evident that one can only come up with a correct interpretation of the verb only in case they have the possibility to familiarise themselves with a reference point contained in another sentence or clause. To put it differently, the successful interpretation of VPE is conditioned by the ability to capture the meaning of the information presented in the part of text or discourse that is directly related to the construction containing an ellipsis. The point is that the latter component never incorporates the necessary bits of information and is, therefore, dependent on other phrases or sentences incorporating the relevant details. At the same time, one cannot argue that verb phrases and verbs that form parts of elliptical constructions are completely devoid of meaning and are not complete in terms of a concept underlying them. One would argue that they are in possession of a rather abstract meaning that can be discovered with the help of the analysis of references [1].

C. Conclusion Acknowledgement

It needs to be emphasised that the research paper concentrates solely on the main characteristics of the phenomenon under discussion. It is not aimed at delving deeper into the essence and variety of verb group ellipsis. It, however, manages to provide general information on the topic, which could be helpful in improving the understanding of VPE.

III. CONCLUSION

It thus becomes apparent that verb phrase ellipsis represents a rather complex and widespread grammatical phenomenon that helps to economise language and convey the meaning of the preform while retaining the intended idea and achieving its coherence. The decision to use VPE in a sentence requires that one adheres to a specific structure and gives due attention to other relevant parts of a sentence, text or discourse. It is also apparent that the complexity of VPE stems from a variety of types of this phenomenon. There are several kinds of sentences incorporating a verbal ellipsis. All of them have certain specificities and a specific structure. What unites them is the availability of an elided group of verbs and that the elliptical construction includes the main verb of the sentence or the whole structure as its major component. Of course, the topic in question has much more nuances. Either way, I would like to hope that this research paper contributes to understanding the nature of VPE.

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