

Verbal Noun Ellipsis in Meeteilon

Huiningshumbam Surchandra Singh, Ph.D.

Department of Linguistics, Manipur University

hsurchandra14@gmail.com

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to explore how the verbal noun ellipsis in Meeteilon takes place in a discourse and its role in making a cohesive Meeteilon discourse. This kind of ellipsis is generally found to be taking place in different kinds of sentence like assertive, interrogative and negative sentence. The constituents that remain when there is a verbal noun ellipsis in an utterance are the subject of the elliptical verbal noun and the lexical negator *natte*. When there is an elliptical verbal noun in an utterance the copulative marker *-ni*, interrogative marker *-la~-ra* and the inquisitive marker *-no* are the constituents that are affixed to the subject and the interrogative words. The elliptical verbal noun gets its interpretation through the presupposed verb or verbal noun which is somewhere within the discourse.

Keywords: Ellipsis, verbal noun, cohesion, presupposition, discourse.

Introduction

Meeteilon is the first language of the people in the valley of Manipur and the second language of those for whom Meeteilon is not their mother tongue. It is the only medium of communication among the speakers of the different languages inhabiting in the hilly areas of Manipur. So, it is a lingua-franca of the state. It is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages of Sino-Tibetan family which is placed under the Kuki-Chin proper separately by Grierson (1904), and in Meitei branch of Kukish section by Shafer (1974). It is also spoken in some other places of India like Assam, Tripura and in some other countries such as Myanmar and Bangladesh. Meeteilon had been included in the eighth schedule by the 71st amendment of the Indian Constitution on 20th August, 1992.

Verbal noun ellipsis means the removal of the verbal noun in the predicate of an utterance. The characteristic function of ellipsis is that of cohesion by presupposition (Halliday and Hasan, 1976). An elliptical verbal noun presupposes the verbal form or a verbal noun which is in the preceding part of the discourse. The elliptical verbal noun has to be recovered from this presupposed verbal form or the verbal noun. The Meeteilon speakers use the elliptical verbal noun in a particular context having been understood by both the speaker and the hearer. When the elliptical verbal noun presupposes the verbal form or verbal noun which is in the preceding part of the discourse, and this elliptical verbal noun finds its interpretation through the presupposed verbal form or verbal noun, it should be treated as a cohesive device and helps a lot in bringing cohesion to the discourse.

The verbal noun ellipsis can take place mainly in the assertive, interrogative (content question and polar question) and negative sentences. In this case, the only constituent that remains when a verbal noun ellipsis takes place in an utterance is the subject of the elliptical verbal noun and the lexical negator *nətte*. Even though the verbal noun ellipsis takes place within an utterance, the elliptical verbal noun gets its interpretation through the presupposed verbal form or verbal noun which is beyond that utterance and in the preceding part of the discourse. When there is an elliptical verbal noun *-ni*(copula), *-la~-ra*(interrogative) and *-no*(inquisitive) are always there attaching to the subject and to the interrogative words. The forms of the elliptical verbal noun in different types of sentence are shown in the following table.

Table 1

The forms of elliptical verbal noun in different types of sentence

Sl.N o.	Types of sentence	Elliptical form
1.	Assertive	S+ -nə + -ni
2.	Interrogative	S+ -nə + -ra (polar question) IW+ -no (content question)
3.	Negative	S + -nə + nətte

Verbal noun ellipsis in the assertive sentence

The Meeteilon verbal noun ellipsis can take place in an assertive sentence in which the subject with one or more markers can stand as a sentence. When a verbal noun ellipsis takes place within an assertive sentence, some markers having been affixed to the non-elliptical verbal noun are affixed to the subject of that elliptical verbal noun. From the form of the subject it has been clearly seen that there is an elliptical verbal noun and also known that the process of verbal noun ellipsis is carried out. The easiest evidence of the verbal noun ellipsis is the affixation of the markers of the non-elliptical verbal noun to the subject.

1. A - udu jalləmle kənanəno k^həŋde
u-du jal-ləm-le kəna-nə-no k^həŋ-de
tree-DET cut-COMPL-PFV who-ERG-INQ know-NEG

‘The tree had been cut down. I do not know who did it.’

B - əinəni

əi-nə-ni

I- ERG-COP

(NEF: əi-nəjan-bə-ni or əi-nəjal-li-bə-ni)

‘I had cut it down.’

In the above given example it is seen that a process of verbal noun ellipsis has taken place in the utterance of the speaker B. Here the subject with the markers stands as a sentence. The copula **-ni** having been affixed to the non-elliptical verbal noun **jan-bə-ni** or **jal-li-bə-ni** is added to the subject of that elliptical verbal noun as the verbal noun ellipsis is taking place. So the verbal noun **janbə** or **jallibə** ‘cut’ is completely absent in the utterance. The elliptical verbal noun presupposes the verb **jan** ‘cut’ which is in the speaker A’s utterance. Here the utterance in which the verbal noun ellipsis takes place is an assertive sentence. The non-elliptical verbal noun may be the one with either the nominalizer **-bə** only or with it the progressive marker **-li**. So the non-elliptical form may be either **əin əjanbəni** or **əina jallibəni** ‘I had cut it’.

2. A - casi kənanə t^həkləmlibəno
ca-si kəna-nə t^hək-ləm-li-bə-no
tea-DET who-ERG drink-COMPL-PROG-NMLZ-INQ

‘Who drank tea?’

B - caubanəni

cauba-nə-ni

Chaoba-ERG-COP

(NEF: cauba-nət^hək-ləm-bə-ni)

‘Chaoba drank it.’

Here the speaker A is asking a question to the speaker B who will give a response. In the response of the speaker B which is an assertive sentence, it is evidenced that there is no verbal noun and the only constituent that stands as a sentence is the subject *caubə* with the marker *-nə* ‘ergative’ and the marker *-ni* ‘copula’. This elliptical verbal noun presupposes the verbal form *t^hək* ‘drink’ which is in the speaker A’s utterance. So the elliptical verbal noun finds its interpretation through the presupposed verbal form *t^hək* ‘drink’ which is in the speaker A’s utterance. In this context the speaker A can understand the speaker B’s utterance with this elliptical verbal noun and there is cohesion because of this elliptical verbal noun.

Verbal noun ellipsis in the interrogative sentence

Another type of sentence in which the verbal noun ellipsis can take place is the interrogative sentence. In both of the content question and polar question types of interrogative sentence, the verbal noun ellipsis can take place. In an interrogative sentence in which there is a verbal noun ellipsis, the only constituent which will remain is the interrogative word or the subject only. When this verbal noun ellipsis takes place in an interrogative sentence, the marker *-no* (inquisitive) and the marker *-ra* (interrogative) are affixed respectively to the interrogative word and to the subject. The marker *-no* is affixed to the non-elliptical verbal noun of the content question and the marker *-ra* is affixed to the subject of that polar question.

3. A - lairiktu segairəmle
 lairik-tu segai-rəm-le
 book-DET tear-COMPL-PFV
 ‘The book had been torn.’

B - kənanəno

kəna-nə-no

who-ERG-INQ
 (NEF:kəna-nəsegai-rəm-li-bə-no)
 Who had torn it?’

In the above given example it has been clearly shown that the speaker B is making a content question without a verbal noun in it. That means there is an elliptical verbal noun which presupposes the verbal form *segai* ‘tear’ which is in the speaker A’s utterance. Here this content question is formed by the interrogative word *kəna* ‘who’ with the marker *-nə* ‘ergative’ and the marker *-no* ‘inquisitive’. In fact the verbal noun *segairəmlibə* ‘tear’ is in the elliptical form. The important fact here is that the marker *-no* ‘inquisitive’ having been affixed to the non-elliptical verbal noun has been affixed to the interrogative word *kəna* ‘who’ when the verbal noun ellipsis is taking place in this question form.

4. *lairiksi* *segairəmle* *nəṇnəra*
 lairik-si *segai-rəm-le* *nəṇ-nə-ra*
 book-DET tear-COMPL-PFV you- ERG-INTR
 (NEF: nəṇ-nəsegai-rəm-li-bə-ra)
 ‘The book had been torn. Did you tear it?’

This is an example of utterances which is the combination of an assertive sentence in the first and an interrogative sentence (polar question) in the second. Here the verbal noun ellipsis is taking place in the interrogative sentence of the polar question. The elliptical verbal noun presupposes the verbal form *segai* ‘tear’ which is in the first utterance i.e. an assertive sentence *lairiksi segairəmle* ‘The book has been torn’. In this case also the subject *nəṇ* ‘you’ with the marker *-nə* ‘ergative’ and the marker *-ra* ‘interrogative’ stands as an interrogative sentence whereby there is no verbal noun. The marker *-ra* ‘interrogative’ affixed to the non-elliptical verbal noun is now affixed to the subject *nəṇ* ‘you’ when the verbal noun ellipsis is taking place. The non-elliptical verbal noun of the interrogative sentence will be *nəṇnə segairəmlibəra* ‘Did you tear it?’.

Verbal noun ellipsis in the negative sentence

In making a negative utterance with the verbal noun ellipsis the lexical negator *nətte* is used. When a verbal noun ellipsis occurs in a negative utterance the constituents in that utterance will be the subject and the lexical negator.

In the above example in which the speaker B is making a response to the speaker A's question, it is clearly seen that the subject *ma* 'he' alone stands as an utterance with the lexical negator *natte*. Here the verbal noun *iramba* is understood. So the process of verbal noun ellipsis has come out. The elliptical verbal noun presupposes the verbal noun *iramba* which is in the speaker A's utterance of question.

Conclusion

The paper concludes with the facts that the Meeteilon verbal noun ellipsis is taking place in the assertive, interrogative and negative sentences. In the case of the assertive sentence, whenever the verbal noun ellipsis is taking place the subject with the suffixes having been affixed to it has become an utterance and the verbal noun is omitted. When the verbal noun ellipsis is taking place in an interrogative sentence (polar and content question) the subject or the interrogative word only can stand as a sentence. At that time the question marker *-la~ra* will be affixed to the subject of the polar question whereas the inquisitive marker *-no* will be affixed to the interrogative word of the content question. In a negative sentence to make an ellipsis in the verbal noun, the lexical negator *natte* is used and the only constituent that will remain as a sentence will be the subject of that elliptical verbal noun and the lexical negator *natte*. From the above analysis of discourse with the aim to find out the notion of verbal noun ellipsis it has been found that in order to interpret the elliptical verbal noun, one needs to look for the presupposed verb or verbal noun that is available within the discourse. This is how this verbal noun ellipsis contributes a lot to making a successful cohesive discourse in Meeteilon.

Abbreviations

COMPL	completive	IW	interrogative word
COP	copula	NEF	non-elliptical form
DEF	definite	NEG	negative
DET	determiner	NMLZ	nominalizer
ERG	ergative	PFV	perfective
INQ	inquisitive	PROG	progressive
INTR	interrogative	S	subject

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