

## Indefinite Object Drop in Modern Greek: Towards a Minimalist Typology of Null Objects

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**The phenomenon:** Indefinite Object drop (IOD) is a well-documented null object construction in Standard Modern Greek (Dimitriadis 1994a, 1994b; Giannakidou and Merchant 1997). As the contrast between (1) and (2) shows, only indefinite objects can be dropped, such that null objects are in complementary distribution with clitics.

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| (1) Q: Efere o Nikos vivlia?<br>brought the Nick books<br>'Did Nikos bring books?'<br>A: Ne, *(ta) efere<br>yes them brought<br>'Yes, he brought [books].' | (2) Q: Efere o Nikos ta vivlia?<br>brought the Nick the books<br>'Did Nikos bring the books?'<br>A: Ne, *(ta) efere<br>yes them brought<br>'Yes, he brought them.' |
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**Analysis:** We advance an analysis whereby IOD involves null NP anaphora under a null D (Giannakidou and Merchant 1997; Panagiotidis 2002: 69-79). More specifically, IOD is argued to be the outcome of argument ellipsis (Oku 1998; Şener and Takahashi 2010). IOD involves ellipsis: it licenses sloppy (3) and quantificational readings (4), while it is also possible to extract from an IOD gap (5).

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| (3) Q: Efere o Nikos merika apo ta<br>brought the Nick some of the<br>vivlia tu?<br>books his<br>'Did Nikos <sub>i</sub> bring some of his books?'<br>A: Oçi, o kostas efere __ .<br>no the Kostas brought<br>'No, Kostas <sub>j</sub> brought [ <del>some of his</del> ] <sub>j/i</sub><br>books].' | (4) O Nikos ipoðextike tris maðites ke<br>the Nick welcomed three students and<br>i Maria ksenagise __ .<br>the Mary gave.tour<br>'Nikos welcomed [three students] <sub>i</sub> and<br>Mary showed around [ <del>three students</del> ] <sub>i/j</sub> .' |
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- (5) ja ti mama tu, o Markos eftiakse turta. ja to baba tu, ðen eftiakse \_\_ .  
for the mom his the Markos made cake for the dad his neg made  
'For his mom, Markos made a cake. For his dad, he didn't make [a-eake].'

(cf. Merchant 2018: 264)

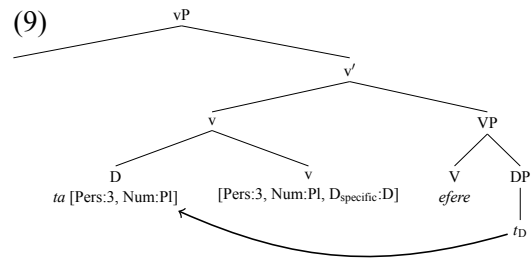
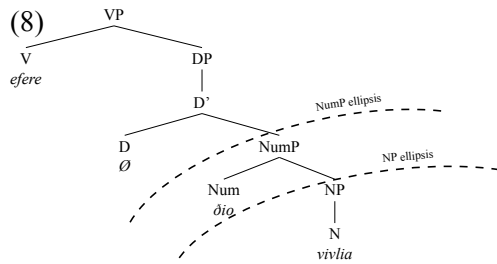
IOD must be derived by argument ellipsis, as opposed to verb-stranding ellipsis, given that low adverbs cannot be interpreted at the ellipsis site (*pace* Merchant 2018):

- (6) O Nikos aÿorazi sixna metoçes. O Kostas omos ðen aÿorazi \_\_ .  
the Nikos buys often stocks the Kostas however neg buys  
'Nikos often buys stocks. Kostas, however, does not.'  
= Kostas does not buy stocks.  
≠ Kostas does not buy stocks often.

The possibility of numeral stranding shows that argument ellipsis operates on NumP or NP:

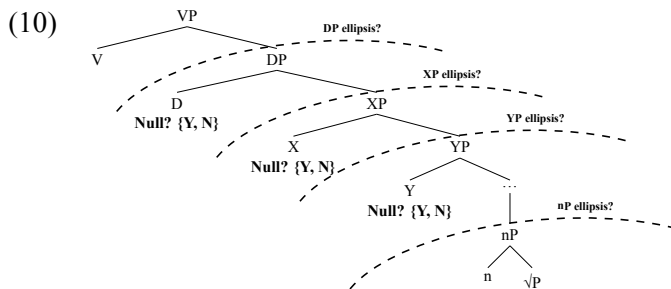
- (7) O Nikos efere ðio vivlia. O Kostas omos ðen efere (ðio) \_\_ .  
the Nikos brought two books the Kostas however neg brought two  
'Nikos brought two books. Kostas, however, did not bring (two) [books].'

The restriction to indefinite antecedents follows from the interaction of ellipsis with the D-system of Greek. Indefinite 'null objects' arise because the ellipsis site is introduced by indefinite D, which is null. Thus, (7) corresponds to (8):



But definite null objects are impossible because definite D is always morphologically realized, and it escapes the DP via cliticization. We propose an account of Greek proclisis in the general spirit of Uriagereka (1995): Greek clitics are Ds (Tsimplici and Stavrakaki 1999; Mavrogiorgos 2010) bearing only phi-features but no structural Case (Nevins 2011). *v* has phi-features and a [uD] feature encoding specificity (Diesing 1992). As such, clitics are defective goals for *v*, into which they incorporate (Roberts 2010). (2) is then as in (9).

**Cross-linguistic implications:** This analysis of IOD paves the way for an understanding of null objects that ties their behaviour directly to the properties of the D-system of a given language. In this view, null object ‘licensing’ reduces to the interaction between the realization of the extended nominal projection and null anaphora, as proposed also by Tomioka (2003) for discourse pro-drop languages (cf. Barbosa forthcoming and Roberts forthcoming for null subjects). We present a preliminary cross-linguistic survey suggesting that, in languages that derive their null objects via argument ellipsis, null objects are in complementary distribution with pronominal clitics, which are D elements. These facts hint at the possibility of deriving a Minimalist typology of elliptical objects based on two axes of variation: (a) which heads in the extended nominal projection receive morphological exponence and (b) how high nominal ellipsis can apply within the cartography of the DP.



We explore the challenges faced by this approach, arguing that the lack of understanding of what structural factors determine the availability of different ellipses prevents a principled approach to (b). A promising way of dealing with this obstacle is found in the form of Saito’s (2007) conjecture, which states that argument ellipsis correlates with the absence of agreement. This link to agreement also provides a promising way of connecting null object variation to variation in null subjects. We examine the predictions that Saito’s conjecture makes for argument ellipsis in each of the null subject language (NSL) types identified by Roberts and Holmberg (2010), namely Radical, Consistent and Partial NSLs.

Given that RNSLs arguably lack agreement altogether, Saito’s conjecture predicts that both elliptical subjects and elliptical objects should be possible. This prediction is borne out for Japanese, which has a negative setting for the phi macroparameter (Kuroda 1988) and whose null subjects and null objects show the properties of ellipsis (Oku 1998). In CNSLs, where subject agreement is by definition present, Saito’s conjecture predicts that object ellipsis may be possible, but subject ellipsis should be unavailable. We examine null arguments in two CNSLs, Greek and Spanish, and find that this prediction holds (pace Duguine 2014 for Spanish). As for PNSLs, Saito’s conjecture predicts that elliptical null arguments should be possible just where agreement is not present; Holmberg’s (2005) claim that null subjects in Finnish are derived by ellipsis is a problem for this prediction, since Finnish shows rich subject agreement.