

N'-ellipsis in Japanese and Okinawan: Deletion or Haplology

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Every language manifests ellipsis phenomena, but the mechanisms underlying them are not uniform (see Johnson 2001; Lobeck 2006; Merchant 2006). Regarding ellipsis within DP, it has been argued in the literature that Japanese allows so-called N'-deletion (Jackendoff 1971, 1977; Saito and Murasugi 1990; Saito et al. 2008; Watanabe 2010, among others). I show, with abundant empirical evidence, that what has been considered to be N'-deletion in Japanese is indeed better analyzed as an instance of pronominalization with a light noun, followed by haplology. In contrast, I argue that Okinawan, an endangered Ryukyuan language, does allow N'-deletion (in addition to pronominalization). One of the strongest pieces of evidence is that NP-ellipsis in Japanese, unlike in Okinawan and English, cannot target a [+human] NP. The availability of N'-deletion in Okinawan is theoretically expected given its richer agreement syntax. This in turn suggests a possibility that Japanese lacks a deletion operation entirely, with argument ellipsis as the only option. Finally, I propose a phase-based theory of syntactic haplology and show that haplology in the pronominalization in question is sensitive to Spell-Out domains.