Interactions between Constructions and Constraints in VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting

JONG-BOK KIM
Kyung Hee University

0. Introduction

English VP Ellipsis (VPE) has been traditionally regarded as a process that maps a 'syntactically complete' sentence like (1a) onto a 'syntactically incomplete' one, like (1b), that is semantically equivalent to it (cf. Sag 1976).

(1)  a. John could leave before I could leave.
     b. John could leave before I could.

As pointed out in many places, one of the striking properties of VPE is that unlike phenomena such as gapping and comparative deletion, VPE does not obey sentence grammar rules (see Chao 1987, Johnson 2001, Lobeck 1995, Williams 1977, among others). Following are some of the main properties of VPE:

- VPE can appear across utterance boundaries:

(2)  A: Tom won't leave Seoul soon.
     B: I don't think Mary will __ either.

- VPE can occur in either a subordinate or coordinate clause separate from the clause containing its antecedent:

(3)  a. Mary met Bill at Stanford although Sue didn't __.
     b. Tom thinks that Mary met Bill at Stanford, but Sarah knows that Sue didn't __.

- VPE obeys the Backwards Anaphora Constraint. As in (4), the ellipsis can precede, but not command, its antecedent (cf. Langacker 1966):

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Jong-Bok Kim

(4)  a. *Sue didn’t [e] but John ate meat.
    b. Because Sue didn’t [e], John ate meat.

    • VPE operates only on phrasal categories, as in (5).

(5)  a. *Mary will meet Bill at Stanford because she didn’t __ John.
    b. Mary will meet Bill at Stanford because she didn’t __ at Harvard.

    • VPE violates island constraints (cf. Napoli 1985):

(6)  a. John didn’t hit a home run, but I know a woman who did __. (CNPC)
    b. That Betsy won the batting crown is not surprising, but that Peter didn’t
       know she did __ is indeed surprising. (SSC)
    c. Peter never hit a home run, but Betsy did and she was very happy about
       it. (CSC)

    • VPE can induce ambiguity, implying that in determining the antecedent of an
      elided VP we must take into account its context.

(7)  Although Mary could have __, John decided to open the door. (could have
decided/could have opened).

    • VPE allows split antecedents, as illustrated in (8).

(8)  John was going to write a letter and Sue was going to send flowers, but one
      of them didn’t __. (write a letter and send flowers).

Such properties have led Williams (1977) and others to treat VPE within Discourse
Grammar differently from Sentence Grammar. Among several research issues in
the analysis of VPE, this paper deals with the syntactic environment of VPE licens-
ing within the framework of Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG). In
particular, it argues that language constraints on argument realization for auxiliary
verbs and relevant constructions can provide a clean analysis of puzzling VPE and
VP fronting phenomena.

1. VP Ellipsis
   1.1. VPE in General Cases
   The standard generalization of VPE is that it is possible only after an auxiliary verb,
as shown in the contrast between (9) and (10).

(9)  a. Kim can dance, and Sandy can __, too.
    b. Kim has danced, and Sandy has __, too.
    c. Kim was dancing, and Sandy was __, too.
VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting

(10)  a. *Kim considered joining the navy, but I never considered \underline{**}.
    b. *Kim got arrested by the CIA, and Sandy got \underline{**}, also.
    c. *Kim wanted to go and Sandy wanted \underline{**}, too.

The first issue in the analysis of VPE is the status of the elided VP. Following Lobeck (1995), López (2000), and Hardt (1999), among others, I take the elided VP phrase to be a \textit{pro} element. The properties of the VPE we have seen in the beginning can be also found in pronouns. First of all, pronouns are phrases and can appear across utterance boundaries, as in (11). In addition, they can occur in coordinate or subordinate clauses, as in (12), are subject to the Backwards Anaphora Constraint, as in (13), can violate island constraints, as in (14), and can even have split antecedents, as in (15).

(11)  A: Does John eat fish?
      B: Yes, but \textbf{he} hates it.

(12)  John eats fish because and he hates meat.

(13)  a. Because \textbf{he} doesn't like meat, John ate fish.
      b. *\textbf{He} doesn't like meat because John hates killing animals.

(14)  Bill really likes his new car. I think that the fact that it is an antique was a big selling point.

(15)  John arrived and later Susan arrived. \textbf{They} left together.

In accounting for the \textit{pro}-drop phenomenon exemplified by Korean sentences like (16), we do not need to posit a phonologically empty pronoun if a level of argument structure is available (cf. Bresnan 1982, Bender 2000):

(16)  John-i \textit{pro} poassta.
      John-NOM \textit{pro} saw
      ‘John saw (him).’

We can simply encode the pronominal properties in the argument structure. For example, as represented within the feature structure of HPSG, illustrated in (17), the transitive verb \textit{poassta} 'saw' takes a \textit{pro} object NP as its argument, but the \textit{pro} NP is not instantiated as the syntactic complement of the verb (as marked by the shaded area):
(17) \( poaas\)ta 'see'

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{word} \\
\text{HEAD} \\
\text{SUBJ} \quad \mathbb{E} \\
\text{COMPS} \quad \{ \} \\
\text{ARG-ST} \quad \mathbb{E} \mathbb{NP}, \mathbb{NP}(\mathit{pro})
\end{array}
\]

Adopting this treatment of \( pro \) phenomena as a mismatch between the argument-structure and the syntactic valence features (cf. Manning and Sag 1999), we could interpret English VPE as a language-specific constraint of the argument realization constraint on \textit{auxiliary verbs}, as represented in (18):

(18) Argument Realization Constraint on \textit{aux-verbs}:

\[
\text{aux-verb} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c}
\text{SUBJ} \quad \mathbb{E} \\
\text{COMPS} \quad \mathbb{E} \\
\text{ARG-ST} \quad \mathbb{E} \oplus \mathbb{E} \oplus \text{list}(\mathit{XP}[\mathit{pro}])
\end{array}
\]

What the constraint in (18) tells us is that when the final phrasal element in the argument-structure list of an auxiliary verb is a \( pro \), this \( pro \) phrase need not be realized in the \text{COMPS} list, relevant to syntax. For example, the lexeme of the auxiliary verb \textit{can} in (19a) takes a \( \mathit{VP}[\mathit{bse}] \) as its complement. When this \( \mathit{VP} \) is realized as a \( pro \) element, it need not appear in its \text{COMPS} list, as illustrated in (19b):

(19) a. lexeme \textit{can}:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{lexeme} \\
\text{PHON} \quad \text{can} \\
\text{SUBJ} \quad \mathbb{E} \\
\text{COMPS} \quad \mathbb{E} \\
\text{ARG-ST} \quad \mathbb{NP}, \mathbb{NP}(\mathit{VP}[,\mathit{bse}])
\end{array}
\]

b. word \textit{can} in VPE

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{word} \\
\text{PHON} \quad \text{can} \\
\text{SUBJ} \quad \mathbb{E} \\
\text{COMPS} \quad \{ \} \\
\text{ARG-ST} \quad \mathbb{NP}, \mathbb{NP}(\mathit{VP}[,\mathit{pro}])
\end{array}
\]

The lexical entry in (19b) will then project the VPE structure (20) for a sentence like (9a):

110
VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting

(20)

In the structure of (20), the head daughter’s COMPS list (VP[pro]) is elided and is not realized in the syntax. The sentences in (9b) and (9c) are also such cases: verbs such as has and was are auxiliary verbs ([+AUX]) and subcategorize for a VP complement. Thus, their VP complement can be elided but not that of the main verbs in (10). In the same manner, this analysis will easily generate examples like (21).

(21) Kim must have been dancing and 

\[
\begin{align*}
(a. & \text{ Sandy must have been } \underline{\text{__}}, \text{ too.} \\
(b. & \text{ Sandy must have } \underline{\text{__}}, \text{ too.} \\
(c. & \text{ Sandy must } \underline{\text{__}}, \text{ too.})
\end{align*}
\]

One important constraint on VPE is that it cannot apply immediately after an adverb, as illustrated in (22):

(22) \begin{align*}
(a. \text{ Tom has written a novel, but Peter never has } \underline{\text{__}}. \\
(b. \text{ *Tom has written a novel, but Peter has never } \underline{\text{__}}.
\end{align*}

One simple fact we can observe from (22) is that adverbs cannot modify an empty VP. In the framework of HPSG, VP modifying adverbs carry at least the lexical information given in (23).

(23) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{HEAD} \\
\text{ADV} \\
\text{MOD} \\
\text{VP-[pro]} \\
\text{CONTENT} \\
\text{ADV-rel} \\
\text{ARG} \\
\end{array}
\]
The lexical entry in (23) simply states that the adverb with this lexical information modifies a VP. The head feature MOD guarantees the fact that the adverb selects the head VP it modifies. This then entails that when the VP that an adverb modifies is not syntactically realized as in (22b), there is no VP for the adverb to modify. Given Sag and Fodor’s (1994) traceless theory, an ungrammatical example like (22b) then would have the structure given in (24).²

(24)
```
VP
  \|-- V[+AUX]
    \|-- *VP
        \|-- Adv[MOD VP]
            \|-- never
```

This explains the unacceptability of VPE after an adverb (cf. Kim 2000).

This analysis also can provide a simple analysis for the puzzling property with respect to the negator not: it is possible to strand the negator not in VPE when it follows a finite auxiliary, but not when it follows a nonfinite auxiliary verb.

(25)  a. Kim said he could have heard the news, but Lee said that he could not __.

       b. *Kim said he could have heard the news, but Lee said that he could have not __.

Following the analysis of Warner (2000), Kim (2000), and Kim and Sag (2001), I adopt the idea that the English negator not leads a double life: one as a nonfinite VP modifier when it is constituent negation and the other as a complement of a finite

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¹ See Sag and Fodor (1994) for the critical reviews of positing phonetically empty categories.
² But notice that we have a different prediction for modifiers in VP final position:

(i)  a. Tom will not finish his book on Monday, but Kim [[will __] on Tuesday].

       b. Kim will not eat the fish with knife, but Kim [[will __] with chopsticks].

The adverbial elements here are right-adjointed to the VP headed by the auxiliary will. This means that there is a VP head daughter the adverbials on Tuesday and with chopsticks can modify. A similar observation can be found in the contrast between VP final adverbs and VP initial adverbs:

(ii)  a. Kim has been driving the car carelessly, but Mary [[has __] carefully].

       b. *Lee is simply being a student, but Kim is not [simply __].

Though the adverb carefully modifies the VP headed by has, simply has nothing to modify. See Kim (2000) for further discussion.
VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting

auxiliary verb when it is sentential negation. Within this analysis, the negator not in (25a) (but not the one in (25b)) is the complement of the finite auxiliary verb could as given in (26a). But when its VP complement is realized as pro, this VP does not appear in the COMPS list as represented in (26b).

\[(26)\]
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{a.} & \text{COMPS} \{\text{[ ] [ ]}\} \\
& \text{ARG-ST} \{\text{NP, [ADV][NEG +], [VP[bse]]}\} \\
\text{b.} & \text{COMPS} \{\text{[ ]}\} \\
& \text{ARG-ST} \{\text{NP, [ADV][NEG +], [VP[bse, pro]]}\}
\end{array}
\]

The lexical information (26b) would then project the syntactic structure in (27).

\[(27)\]
\[
\text{VP} \\
\text{[neg-ph & head-comp-ph]} \\
\text{V} \\
\text{[AUX +} \\
\text{COMPS} \{\text{[ ]}\} \\
\text{ARG-ST} \{\text{NP[nom], [VP[pro, bse]]}\} \\
\text{could} \\
\text{NEG -} \}
\]

Notice that the phrase [could not] in (27) forms a well-formed head-complement structure where not is the complement of the head could. Nothing blocks this structure.

1.2. VPE in Infinitival Clauses

The analysis also immediately predicts the behavior of VPE after the infinitival marker to, which has also been taken to be an auxiliary verb, as shown in (28).

\[(28)\]
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{a.} & \text{Tom wanted to go home, but Peter didn't want to} \\
\text{b.} & \text{Because John persuaded Sally to}, he didn't have to talk to the reporters. \\
\end{array}
\]

\[ ^3 \text{I assume that this English specific property comes from construction constraints on the phrase negation-ph. This phrase, a subtype of aux-head-ph, is peculiar in that it selects a [NEG +] adverbiaal element as its additional complement. This view of negation is similar to that of Kim (2000) and Kim and Sag (2001).} \]
Jong-Bok Kim

However, an issue arises from the VPE in rationale clauses or in purpose clauses. As noted by Lobeck (1987) and others, in such clauses the auxiliary infinitive marker to does not license VPE:

(29)  a. *Mag Wildwood came to read Fred's story, and I also came to ___.
   b. *John selected Bill to talk to the reporters yesterday, but today he chose Ralph to ___.

The generalization we can draw from such a contrast is that VPE is licensed in an infinitive when the infinitive clause is lexically selected (see Lobeck (1987) for a similar generalization). This could be further supported by the contrast in (30).

(30)  a. Even though he doesn't like to ___, Ron jogs every day.
   b. *Even though he could jog to ___, Rob doesn't do anything to stay in shape.

This restriction can be interpreted as a constructional constraint on \textit{ellipsis-ph} in (31).

(31) \textit{ellipsis-ph}

\[
\left[ \text{fin-vp} \lor \text{comps-ss} \right] \rightarrow \text{H[AUX +]},...
\]

What the constraint in (31) ensures is that the \textit{ellipsis-ph} itself should be either a finite clause or an element of the COMPS list. This in turn means that only a complement infinitival VP clause could serve as a VP ellipsis phrase, but not a purpose or rationale clause which is not lexically selected.

This analysis would generate the structure (32) for (28a) and (33) for the sentence (29a):

114
**VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting**

(32)

```
VP
  \[ V \]
  [head \[ COMPS (\[ VP \]) \]]
  \[ ellipse & compss \]
  [head \[ COMPS (\{} \]
  \[ AUX + \]
  [COMPS (\}] \]
  \[ ARG-ST \{ NP: VP[pro] \} \]
```

(33)

```
VP
  \[ *VP \]
  [head \[ COMPS (\{} \]
  \[ ellipse \]
  [head \[ COMPS (\{} \]
  \[ AUX + \]
  [COMPS (\}] \]
  \[ ARG-ST \{ NP: VP[pro] \} \]
```

As marked by the shaded area in (32) and (33), the marker *to* in both cases selects a base VP as its complement, and hence it can be unrealized in syntax in accordance with the Argument Realization Constraint on auxiliary verbs. But the constraint on *ellipsis-ph* requires the phrase to be *comps-synsem*: Only the VP structure in (32) observes this.
Jong-Bok Kim

One immediate consequence of this analysis is a clean account of so-called extraposed cases like (34), which have often been treated as a movement process.

(34)  
  a. You shouldn’t talk to reporters because it is dangerous to __.
  b. It doesn’t bother Mary to tour art galleries, but it certainly annoys Bill to __.

In a lexicalist perspective, the adjective *dangerous* and the verb *annoys* in such cases will have at least the lexical information given in (35).

(35)  
  a. *dangerous: [COMPS (VP[inf])]
  b. annoys: [COMPS (NP, VP[inf])]

Since the infinitival VP is within the list of COMPS, it could serve as an *ellipsis-ph*. But the ellipsis is blocked in the preverbal infinitival subject position as represented in (36):  

(36)  
  a. *You shouldn’t talk to reporters because [to __] is dangerous.
  b. *It doesn’t bother Mary to tour art galleries, but [to __] certainly annoys Bill.

The reason for the ungrammaticality of these examples comes from the constructional constraint in (31). No *subject-ss* can serve as an *ellipsis phrase*. The predicates *dangerous* and *annoys* in (36) would have the lexical information given in (37a) and (37b).

(37)  
  a. *dangerous in (36)a:

        [SUBJ (VP[inf])]
        [COMPS (  )]

  b. annoys in (36)b:

        [SUBJ (VP[inf])]
        [COMPS (NP) ]

The infinitival VP here is not a *comps-ss* but a *subj-ss* which must be realized in syntax.

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4 VPE in infinitives is grammatical when the negative marker *not* precedes *to* in infinitival subjects and adjuncts.

(i)  
  a. Mary wants to try to get a raise, because [not [to __]] would be silly.
  b. Mary wants to get a raise, and for her [not [to __]], she’d have to refuse to be evaluated.

(ii)  
  a. Mag came to introduce the barkeep but I came [not to __].
  b. John recounted a story to remember because Bill had recounted a story [not to __].

The data suggest that the infinitival phrase modified by an adverbial element can also serve as an *ellipsis-ph*. But when *not* follows *to*, no VPE is allowed, as our analysis predicts:

(iii)  
  *John prefers to talk to Mary, but Bill would like to not __ can help it.
2. **VP Fronting**

Now, let us consider the phenomenon often referred to as VP fronting, given in (38a).

(38) Mary claimed that
   a. eat bananas, John would __
   b. *eating bananas, John started __.
   c. *eat bananas, John made me __.

The first thing we notice is that VPF cannot be identified with VPE because of ungrammatical cases like those given in (39b) and (39c).

(39) They swore that Lee might have been using heroin, and
   a. using heroin he might have been __!
   b. *been using heroin he might have __!
   c. *have been using heroin he might __! (Akamajian et al. 1979)

If any constituent that can undergo VPE can also be VP-fronted, we would expect that VPs headed by *been or have* would not be able to be elided. A simple generalization we can obtain from such data is that a fronted VP cannot be headed by an auxiliary element. This will block examples like (39b) and (39c).

However, this simple approximation is counterevidenced by examples like (40) (data from Gazdar et al. 1982):

(40) a. *... and [to go] he is __.
   b. *... and [be going] he will __.
   c. *... and [have gone] he will __.
   d. ... and [being evasive] he was __.

Notice here that though the fronted VP in (40a-c) carries the [+AUX] value inherited from the head (*to, be and have*), they are all unacceptable. To overcome this issue, we assume that the progressive *be* and perfective *have* are aspect verbs (♯ASP(BCT)) (cf. Gazdar et al. 1982) together with the constructional constraint in (41).

(41) **vp filler ph**

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{filler} \\
\text{ASPECT} \\
\text{VFORM} \\
\text{LOCAL} \\
\end{array}
\rightarrow
\begin{array}{c}
\text{H} \\
\text{SLASH} \{\square\} \\
\end{array}
\]

117
Jong-Bok Kim

We thus accept the idea that VPF is different from VPE in that the former is a subtype of a head-filler-ph construction constituting a filler and a sentence with this filler as a gap. To allow a VP to be gapped, all we need to do is to slightly revise the Argument Realization Constraint on auxiliary verbs as in (42).

(42) Argument Realization Constraint on aux-verbs (final):

\[
\text{aux-verb} \rightarrow \begin{cases} 
\text{SUBJ} & \text{□} \\
\text{COMPS} & \text{□} \\
\text{ARG-ST} & \text{□} + \text{□} + \text{□} \end{cases} \text{listXP[noncanon-ss]} 
\]

This revised constraint tells that when the final member of the ARG-ST is realized as noncanon-synsem whose subtypes are pro and gap-ss, it does not appear in its COMPS list. Thus when it is realized as pro, it introduces ellipsis-ph and when it is realized as gap, the auxiliary verb lexically introduces a nonempty SLASH value in accordance with the constraint in (43)a. The information in (43)b is partial lexical information for the verb was in (40), whose VP complement is topicalized.

(43)

a. \[
\text{gap-synsem} \rightarrow \begin{cases} 
\text{LOC} & \text{□} \\
\text{SLASH} & \text{□} \end{cases} 
\]

b. \[
\begin{align*}
\text{word} \\
\text{HIAAD} \{\text{AUX +} \} \\
\text{SUBJ} \{\text{NP} \} \\
\text{COMPS} \{\} \\
\text{ARG-ST} & \{\text{□} \} \text{VP} \{\text{gap-ss} \} \\
\text{SLASH} & \{\text{□} \}
\end{align*}
\]

This lexical information, together with the constraint on gap-synsem, would then generate the structure (44) for (40):

118
The current system that allows only the complement of an auxiliary verb ([AUX +]) to be realized in a nonlocal position (realized as a gap-ss) can easily block overgenerating cases such as those given in (45):

(45)  a. *I never thought that he would want to go, but [to go] he wanted __.

b. *I never thought Lee would help move the chair, but [move the chair]
   Lee helped __.

c. *I never thought Lee would stop feeding the dog, but [feeding the dog],
   Lee stopped __.

The constructional constraint in (41) also imposes constraints on its filler. The slashed VP should be [−ASP], i.e. not headed by progressive be or perfective have.\(^5\)

By requiring such restrictions on the filler VP, we can account for the grammatical contrast in the following examples:

\(^5\) The filler also has the constraint that it should not be infinitive. Such a constraint will block examples like (43a) and (45a).
Jong-Bok Kim

(46)  a. *They said he would go, and _VP[+ASP][be going] he will __.
    b. *They said he would have finished it, and _VP[+ASP][have finished] he will __.
    c. They said he would be noisy, and _VP[−ASP][being noisy] he was __.

As assumed, the progressive be and perfective have in (46a-b) are [+ASP]. The lexical rule specifies that the VP headed by either of these aspect verb cannot undergo the fronting process.

Taking VP fronting to be a special case of topicalization, the analysis also allows unbounded examples like (47) (data from Gazdar et al. 1982).

(47)  a. ... and [go], I think he will __.
    b. ... and [going], I believe Kim knew he was __.
    c. ... and [being evasive], I believe he knew he was __.

Notice that this constructional analysis explicitly factors out the similarities and differences between VPF and VPE phenomena. VPF is relevant only to the phrase whose head is an auxiliary. This restriction similarly holds in VPE too. But the restriction on the aspecual value of the gapped VP complement makes them different: the head of the VP that undergoes fronting should be nonaspecual. This accounts for the difference between VPF and VPE (relevant data repeated here).

(48)  They swore that Lee might have been taking heroin, and
    a. taking heroin he might have been __ !
    b. *been taking heroin he might have __ !
    c. *have been taking heroin he might __ !

(49)  Lee might have been taking heroin, and
    a. Sandy might have been __ too.
    b. Sandy might have __ too.
    c. (?)Sandy might __ too.

Then, what does this VP fronting analysis predict concerning negation? Recall that our treatment allows not to be either a VP modifier or a syntactic complement of a finite auxiliary, and that we permit the negator not to be stranded only if it becomes a complement of a finite auxiliary, i.e. only when it occurs immediately after a finite auxiliary. This prediction is borne out:

(50)  a. They all said that John was not being followed, and [being followed] he was not __.
VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting

b. They all said that John was not being followed, and [not being followed] he was __.

The negative marker not in (50a) is the complement of the auxiliary be, and its VP complement being followed is fronted. In (50b), the same VP is fronted and not is modifying the fronted VP.

But notice a different behavior of the modifier not.

(51) Kim said she would be not eating spinach, and
   a. *[eating spinach] she will be not __.
   b. [not eating spinach] she will be __.

The negator not (51a) can be only a modifier. As noted in the previous section, the modifier not cannot be stranded, since the modifier not does not satisfy its MOD requirement. Meanwhile, nothing blocks (51)b in which not is a modifier.

Within the present analysis, examples like (52) will be predicted to be unacceptable:

(52) Kim said she would not be eating spinach, and
   a. *[be eating spinach] she will not __.
   b. *[not be eating spinach] she will __.

The fronted VP is headed by the aspectual head, the progressive be. This violates the condition on the assumed vp-filler-ph.

3. Conclusion

I have presented an analysis of VP ellipsis and VP fronting within a system in which phrases are modeled as typed feature structures. This theory of grammar, introducing grammatical constructions together with declarative constraints on them, gives us a clean analysis of some otherwise puzzling phenomena in English. VP ellipsis and VP fronting. It has been common practice to accept such phenomena as idiosyncratic in terms of their distributional properties. This has led to the adoption of English-specific rules like do-support and the introduction of functional projections such as NegP, VP, AgrP, and PredP, as well as transformational operations and empty categories. The construction, constraint-based analysis presented in this paper makes it unnecessary to resort to such abstract machinery, enabling us to find new levels of generalizations within the English auxiliary system, which has often been regarded as a storehouse of peculiarities.
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VP Ellipsis and VP Fronting

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Jong-Bok Kim
School of English
Kyung Hee University
1 Hoegi-dong, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul
Korea 130-701

jongbok@khu.ac.kr