

# What is It Like to be Small: Verb Phrase Ellipsis in Muira Dargwa<sup>1</sup>

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**Introduction.** Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VPE) is a process in which a verb phrase, usually identified as *vP*, goes missing under identity with the *vP* of an antecedent clause. An example of VPE in English is given in (1), where the antecedent is in bold and the elided phrase is in angle brackets.

- (1) John **brought a present to Meg**, and Fred did <bring a present to Meg>, too.

Although VPE had long been considered to be unique to English, research over the past few decades has shown that VPE may also exist in other languages as well, though in a slightly different guise. In verb-raising languages (such as Russian, Greek, Hungarian, Hindi, Lithuanian), the verb manages to escape the ellipsis site before the deletion occurs; such a variety of ellipsis has been labeled as Verb-Stranding Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VVPE), see (Goldberg, 2005) for an extensive study of the phenomenon. In VVPE languages, only arguments that remain in the *vP* go missing, since the verb moves to a higher functional projection before deletion occurs.

The existence of VVPE suggests that VPE may occur yet in other languages as well, though the phenomenon may be obscured by some other factors, as was the case with head movement. Moreover, it has been demonstrated in the literature (Goldberg, 2005; Lipták, 2012; Sailor, 2014; a.m.o.) that VVPE is not a uniform phenomenon across different languages and different constructions within a single language. However, another option for getting a VVPE-like string, which has not been thoroughly investigated yet, is that the verbal element is ‘stranded’ not because it manages to evacuate the ellipsis site via head movement, but rather because it was not there in the first place due to the deletion of a smaller constituent. In this talk, I examine an ellipsis construction attested in Muira Dargwa (< Nakh-Daghestanian), in which part of a complex predicate (CPr) goes missing, and argue that, unlike previously examined languages, VPE in Muira Dargwa, which I label as *vVPE* (Light Verb-Stranding Verb Phrase Ellipsis, cf. Toosarvandani, 2009), targets a constituent smaller than *vP*. In the example of the construction in (2), not only the internal argument *χureg* ‘food’ is deleted, but also the non-verbal element (NV) *wana* ‘warm’ of the CPr *wana* AGR-*arq*’- ‘to warm smth. up’.

- (2) pat'imat-li      χureg      wana      b-arq'-ib      ašura-li  
PN-ERG      food.ABS      warm      N-make.PFV-AOR      PN-ERG
- <χureg      wana>      b-arq'-ib  
food.ABS      warm      N-make.PFV-AOR
- ‘Patimat warmed up the food, and Ashura did too.’

**Complex predicates.** CPrs are comprised of two parts: a light verb (LV) and a non-verbal element (NV). LVs are characterized by rather bleached semantics (causation, initiation, etc.), they function as verbalizers and play crucial role in determining the argument structure of the resulting CPrs. In turn, NVs are traditionally considered to be represented by nominal and adjectival roots; ideophones, adverbs, numerals, and borrowed verbs are also used as NVs. Following Kalyakin (2025), I partially extend the analysis of Folli et al. (2005) to Muira Dargwa CPrs, treating the LV as an overt realization of *v* head. However, there are a number of differences. First, the NV is considered to be the realization of a bare root (Marantz, 1997) that corresponds to a phonological word. Furthermore, I also adopt now widely accepted view that roots are devoid of syntactic information, viz. they do not project XPs and do not subcategorize (Alexiadou, 2014; Merchant, 2019). With respect to the position in the syntactic structure, roots can

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be either attached to  $v$  (3a), or merge with the direct object (3b) – the exact position is determined by the root’s conceptual content (Marantz, 2013; Levinson 2014).

(3) a. Transitive Change-of-State CPr: [<sub>VoiceP</sub> DP<sub>EA</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> [<sub>DP</sub> DP<sub>IA</sub>  $\checkmark$ ]  $v$ ] Voice]

b. Activity CPr: [<sub>VoiceP</sub> DP<sub>EA</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> XP [<sub>v</sub>  $\checkmark$   $v$ ]] Voice]

Given the assumption that NVs are roots, one should expect that NVs can go missing only due to VPE. As the contrast between (2) and (4) indicates, this seems to be the case. Moreover, the impossibility of eliding NVs individually provide crucial evidence for the existence of  $v$ VPE, since the string (2) cannot be derived via a process similar to Argument Ellipsis (AE), yet another – more targeted – mechanism of non-pronunciation of syntactic material.

(4) \*učitelj-li      musa      parḱat w-arq'-ib      direktur-li=ra  
 teacher-ERG    PN.ABS      calm    M-make.PFV-AOR      principal-ERG=ADD  
 musa      <parḱat>      w-arq'-ib  
 PN.ABS      calm      M-make.PFV-AOR  
 Int. ‘The teacher calmed Musa, and the principal did too.’

It should be noted that more orthodox diagnostics of ellipsis, such as pragmatic control, availability of sloppy identity readings, agreement, and wide scope of elided arguments also point to the conclusion that the string at hand instantiates surface anaphora.

**Adjudicating ellipsis size.** Johnson (2004) notices that von Stechow’s (1996) insight that *again*-modification ambiguity is structural in nature can be fruitfully applied to diagnosing the constituent that is silenced under ellipsis. In English VPE, where the whole  $vP$  is elided, only repetitive reading may arise, as the adverb can survive ellipsis only if it merges with the  $vP$ . In Muira Dargwa, when *ʔibrra* ‘again’ is used in the context of  $v$ VPE, it turns out that both readings are still permitted, see (6) with the more important restitutive reading.

(5) daʔ-li      unc:a      čikawq'-un      čī-li-k'al      *pro* hark      b-arq'-ib-li  
 wind-ERG    door.ABS    close.PFV-AOR    who-ERG-INDEF      open    N-make.PFV-CVB  
 ač:wi.      aʔirra      rasul-li      ʔibrra <unc:a      hark>      b-arq'-ib  
 NEG.COP.PST    finally    PN-ERG      again    door.ABS    open    N-make.PFV-AOR  
 ‘The wind blew the door shut, no one opened it. Finally, Rasul opened the door again.’

**Size consequences.** This lower-than-average VPE has a number of consequences, here I address only some of them. First, the frequently employed adjunct-test is of no value in differentiating  $v$ VPE from AE. If, as it is traditionally assumed, low adjuncts are attached to  $vP$ /VoiceP, Muira Dargwa  $v$ VPE should never be able to target them, as they are always located outside the ellipsis site. AE, in turn, simply deletes individual arguments and cannot target adjuncts.

It is also expected that NVs that merge as adjuncts of  $v$  (3b) should be exempt from  $v$ VPE, since the process targets the complement of  $v$ . As (6) demonstrates, this prediction is borne out, too.

(6) \*darḱa      taʕḱ      Ø-uq-un      rursi=ra      <taʕḱ>      r-uq-un  
 child.ABS    jump    M-move.PFV    girl.ABS=ADD    jump    F-move.PFV-AOR  
 Int.: ‘The boy jumped, and the girl did too.’

Finally, given the widespread view that  $v$  is associated with eventive semantics and transitivity (Chomsky, 1995),  $v$ VPE should tolerate transitivity alternations, as the operation does not target the  $v$  head. As expected, example (7) with an inchoative-causative pair is licit.

(7) Q: hu-ni            šin                    wana    d-arq'-at:i-w?  
          you-ERG    water.ABS            warm   NPL-make.PFV-AOR.2SG-PQ  
A: il-t:i<sub>i</sub>            <t<sub>i</sub>            wana>    d-Ø-ib  
          this.ABS                    warm   NPL-become.PFV-AOR  
Q: 'Have you warmed up the water?' A: 'It warmed up (on its own).'



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**[ФМЛ 2025] Результаты рецензирования**

Писем: 3

**FML Conference** <fmconf@gmail.com>  
Кому: Ivan Kalyakin <kalyakin.iv@gmail.com>

15 сентября 2025 г. в 22:13

Дорогой Иван Викторович,

Мы рады сообщить Вам, что Ваш доклад «What is It Like to be Small: Verb Phrase Ellipsis in Muira Dargwa» был принят для участия в конференции «Формальные модели в лингвистике 2025», которая состоится 2-3 декабря 2025 года в Санкт-Петербурге.

Мы просим Вас подтвердить Ваше участие в конференции и прислать деанонимизированную версию тезисов с учётом комментариев рецензентов до 30 сентября. Окончательная версия тезисов будет опубликована на сайте конференции.

Чуть позже мы вышлем программу конференции и подробные инструкции о том, как добраться до места её проведения.

Поздравляем и с нетерпением ждём встречи на ФМЛ 2025!

С уважением,  
Оргкомитет ФМЛ

**Рецензент 1:**

The study examines one cross-linguistically unusual ellipsis pattern from Muira Dargwa. The author(s) provide just the right amount of data which illustrates their point very well. The data themselves are of interest, as they are concerned with a typologically rare type of ellipsis. The author(s) show well enough (at least for a two-page conference abstract) that Muira Dargwa vVPE is distinct from other patterns of ellipsis. This makes the data important both in a wider grammatical perspective. But even in the smaller context of a single language under discussion, the author(s) go on to show how the nature of vVPE influences the results traditional diagnostics show when applied to Muira Dargwa. In sum, I believe the abstract to be very neatly organized, well-formatted and scientifically significant.

**Рецензент 2:**

This is a nicely presented explicit idea.  
I wonder, whether presence/absence of additive particle affect ellipsis-site in Dargwa. As you probably know, [Sailor 2014] states that there are two sizes for vP ellipsis with the main observable difference in presence/absence of 'too'. If the interpretation (6a) would be impossible in presence of this additive particle, it would be a nice addition.  
I am not fully sure that I understand what (6b) shows. Didn't you forget an asterisk?