



THE APPEARANCE AND ANALYSIS OF CLAUSAL ELLIPSIS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract: This article discusses clausal ellipsis, a type of ellipsis in language. Ellipsis often results in concise and realistic responses. In everyday life, people frequently use short phrases or words instead of complete sentences. Since verbs in Uzbek are conjugated according to the subject, it is easy to omit the pronoun (For example, saying Keldim already implies Men keldim — “I came”). In English, one cannot say just Came; one must say I came. However, in informal speech, English also allows subject omission in certain cases, such as Seen Tom lately? instead of Have you seen Tom lately? — a phenomenon we will explore further in the context of situational ellipsis. Thus, clausal ellipsis is a pragmatic feature found in both languages. The difference is that it is grammatically easier in Uzbek (since verb forms reflect the subject), while in English it is mostly allowed through pragmatic conventions (i.e., only in informal contexts).

Key words: Clausal ellipsis, sluicing, zero anaphora, literary text.

INTRODUCTION

Clausal ellipsis refers to a phenomenon where a significant part of a sentence (or clause — subject-predicate structures) is omitted due to contextual clarity. Although the sentence may appear grammatically complete, its full meaning is only understood based on the surrounding context or a previous interrogative sentence. Fragmentary responses, brief answers to commands or questions, and omission of subjects or predicates in compound sentences — all are examples of clausal ellipsis. This phenomenon often occurs in conversation, as interlocutors rely on shared knowledge and context to communicate effectively without forming full sentences.

Even if parts of a sentence are dropped in everyday ellipsis, the intonation must remain complete. For instance, in the sentence Ko'kni kiyaman (“I'll wear the blue one”), the intonation is complete. But if one says Ko'kni... and stops, the listener remains in anticipation. Therefore, in spoken language, ellipsis is governed by intonation — the speaker senses where to pause, and the listener perceives the intended meaning accordingly.

Main Part. Clausal ellipsis contributes to a lively style. It eliminates unnecessary detail and enhances the realism of dialogues. In both Uzbek and English, such ellipsis has similar pragmatic functions — aiming for quick communication and logical conciseness.

– Obbo! Itlik yo'q! Sizda-a? E tavba...

– Non ursin agar... (Cho'lpon, Kecha va Kunduz, p.139)

The example above is taken from a dialogue in which a character swears an oath. The phrase Non ursin agar... contains a subordinate clause introduced by agar (“if”), but the main clause is omitted. The subordinating conjunction agar is not followed by a predicate or continuation of the main clause, leaving the sentence open-ended. This stylistic choice emphasizes the speaker's sincerity and passion.



Typically, a conditional clause has two parts: if X, then Y. In this case, only the if part is expressed, and even that is incomplete. The phrase *Non ursin* ("May the bread curse me") is a colloquial Uzbek oath used in place of the main clause's predicate, while the conditional clause (*agar...*) serves as its condition. Here, the structure is reversed — the result (*non ursin*) precedes the condition — an example of inversion. This ellipsis is intensified by the fact that the condition itself is vague.

The dialogue makes it clear that the phrase functions as a subordinate clause, as it is interrupted by another character. Its complete form would be something like *Non ursin, agar men yolg'on gapirayotgan bo'lsam* ("May I be cursed by bread, if I'm lying"). The omitted conditional clause *bo'lsam* (1st person singular, present tense, subjunctive mood) aligns with the speaker (based on the context, either *Miryoqub* or *Mingboshi*). Thus, the ellipsis allows us to reconstruct the full sentence as *Non ursin, agar men yolg'on gapirgan bo'lsam*.

In the literary text, stating the verb explicitly is unnecessary — omitting it makes the oath more emotionally charged and expressive. Unlike standard conditional sentences, here even the main clause (the result) appears in an elliptical form — only the oath phrase *non ursin* is present. The omission of the condition reflects the speaker's emotional intensity — as though he cannot finish his thought due to strong feelings or interruption (as in the case where another character cuts him off). In literary works, such constructions create dramatic effect, amplifying the emotional state of the character and making the scene more vivid and lifelike.

"Jannat gave birth to seven children; none survived." (Said Ahmad. *Ufq*, p. 157)

In the given sentence, the first part of the compound sentence contains a standard subject-predicate construction, while the second part consists solely of the predicate ("*turmadi*" – did not survive). In the second clause of this asyndetic compound sentence, both the subject and object are omitted; that is, the verb "*turmadi*" semantically implies "the children did not survive" through ellipsis. Although this shortened construction may appear simple at first glance, it actually creates a semantic opposition: on one side, it conveys the fact of childbirth, while the adjacent clause reveals that none of those children survived, i.e., they died in infancy. The use of the single predicate *turmadi* (did not survive) gives the utterance a restrained, quiet tone. It does not overtly declare the tragedy but strongly evokes it emotionally. Here, the lexical meaning of the verb *turmoq* (to stand/live) acquires a connotative layer: in the negative form, it conveys the meaning "did not live" or "did not survive." Thus, with no redundant words, the concise and elliptical construction expresses the painful fact that all seven of the protagonist's children died in infancy. This syntactic solution, through its structural economy, achieves a powerful emotional-aesthetic effect and allows the tragic image of *Jannat* to be conveyed plainly and smoothly in a short sentence, deeply impacting the reader.

"Mr. Darcy promised, if asked, he would certainly explain everything."

(Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 112)

In this example, the predicate of the if-clause is reduced, retaining only the passive verb form *asked*. Nevertheless, the sentence remains semantically clear.

Such elliptical constructions with the conjunction *when* are also widely used in literary texts:

"The professor, when questioned, denied all allegations."

(Dan Brown. *Angels and Demons*, p. 112)

In this sentence, too, the subject and auxiliary verb of the subordinate clause are elided, and the meaning is conveyed through the passive construction questioned. This type of ellipsis adds brevity and clarity to literary texts.

Sluicing (Wh-Ellipsis) Phenomenon

Sluicing is a special type of ellipsis involving wh-interrogative pronouns, in which only the wh-component of a question remains, and the rest of the clause is omitted. The term was first introduced by J. Ross (1969) in the form of “Guess who?”, and it has been extensively studied in English. In English, sluicing arises from general syntactic rules, where the wh-word is moved to the front of the clause and the rest is elided [1, pp. 256–286]. This phenomenon functions as a question meant to fill an informational gap, prompting the reader or listener to guess the unknown part — such as “who” or “what.”

Sluicing typically appears in the second clause of compound sentences or in additional questions introduced by conjunctions. Simply put, a general statement is followed by a wh-word used to ask about the unknown information, with the rest omitted. For example, in English: “Someone has arrived, but I don’t know who.”

Here, the second clause “I don’t know who” semantically implies “who has arrived”, with the phrase has arrived omitted and only the interrogative who remaining.

In Uzbek, such meaning is typically expressed not through true sluicing but through a subordinate clause: “Kimdir keldi, lekin kim kelganini bilmayman.”

In this example, the wh-word kim (who) is followed by the clause kelganini bilmayman (don’t know who came), making it a complete clause. This construction in Uzbek corresponds in meaning to the English who in isolation, although structurally it is not the same.

Vera Gribanova, a scholar from Stanford University, in her comparative study of ellipsis in English and Uzbek, observes that wh-words in Uzbek usually remain within the sentence and do not move to an independent fronted position. Therefore, she concludes that Uzbek lacks true sluicing structures. Instead, it often employs reduced governing clauses or incomplete clefts. According to J. Merchant’s theory (2001), true sluicing should only be observed in languages where wh-constructions can independently be fronted [3, p. 168]. Hence, the absence of true sluicing in some languages is natural.

Thus, constructions in Uzbek resembling sluicing are often referred to as “sluicing-like constructions” [4, p. 632].

Siz kim-ga-dir pul ber-di-ngiz, lekin but kim(-ga)-lig-i-ni bil-ma-y-man.

You gave money to someone, but I don’t know (to) who [5,3].

It is worth noting that in Uzbek, true sluicing—i.e., retaining only a wh-word such as Kim? (Who?) or Qayerda? (Where?) while omitting the rest—is not very common and mostly appears in informal, spoken language. For example, in a dialogue:

“Someone knocked on the door.” – “Who?”

Here, the second sentence is a shortened form of “Who knocked?”, where only the wh-interrogative Kim? (Who?) remains. In written literary Uzbek, however, such meaning is typically expressed using subordinate clauses, such as kim ekanini bilmayman (I don’t know who it was) or qayerga ketganini so’ramadi (he/she didn’t ask where he/she went).

In English, sluicing appears frequently even in literary texts, where it has become a standard structure in which the wh-word appears first and the rest is omitted, for example: “She bought something, but I don’t know what.”

= what she bought.

The syntactic and semantic description of sluicing shows that for this type of ellipsis to be successful, there must be sufficient context to accurately recover the omitted portion. In English, this is usually resolved without difficulty, as the *wh*-word itself indicates what type of information is missing (e.g., *who* – person, *where* – place, *why* – reason, etc.), and the first clause provides the necessary context.

In Uzbek, *wh*-words typically appear within subordinate clauses and are connected to other elements (usually verbs) within the clause. For instance, in the construction *kim kelganini bilmayman* (I don't know who came), the verb-derived component *kelganini* functions as the complement in the subordinate clause. Thus, it may be said that in Uzbek, there exists a functional equivalent to sluicing in the form of *wh*-headed subordinate clauses.

In English, sluicing usage is more flexible. As long as the omitted portion is grammatically recoverable, the structure *wh*-word + ? (with interrogative intonation) is sufficient. In Uzbek, direct *wh*-interrogatives are also possible in context, but from a formal stylistic perspective, it is more appropriate to use full subordinate clauses.

For example, in English journalistic style, the sentence

“The culprit escaped – nobody knows how”

is considered natural. However, in formal Uzbek writing, it would be more typical to write:

“*Jinoyatchi qochib ketgan – hech kim uning qanday qochib qolganini bilmaydi.*”

Thus, the sluicing phenomenon serves the same semantic function in both languages—to compress and simplify the expression of a question about previously mentioned information—but the grammatical expression of this function in Uzbek appears in the form of incomplete subordinate clauses.

Null complement anaphora is a relatively less-studied form of ellipsis that shares many syntactic and semantic features with verb phrase ellipsis (VP-ellipsis), though there are distinct differences. Its key distinguishing feature is that in both segments of the ellipsis, the same verb in null form must be used. The ellipsis occurs between the subject and the verb [6, p. 91]. In other words, null complement anaphora syntactically refers to the omission of the verb's complement without repeating it. Morphologically, this involves the verb or verbal element appearing in a null morphemic form.

Researchers such as I. Sh. Balli and R. O. Jakobson consider this type of ellipsis a “zero” element, which functions as an anaphoric or deictic marker.

To understand this phenomenon more clearly, let us analyze the following examples from various discourses:

“I promised to keep the secret, but I couldn't.” (John Green. *The Fault in Our Stars*, p. 114) = *Men sirni saqlashga va'da bergan edim, ammo uddalay olmadim.*

In this example, *keep the secret* is explicitly expressed in the first clause, while in the second clause it is omitted in a null anaphoric form. Nevertheless, the meaning can be reconstructed from the context.

When comparing English and Uzbek, null complement anaphora is used more broadly in English. This is linked to English syntactic structures, where infinitives and gerunds are often easily understood from the pragmatic context. In Uzbek, such elliptical constructions are mainly used in spoken language to ensure brevity and naturalness.

For instance, consider the following Uzbek dialogue:



“Shall we go to the movies today?” – “I suggested it, but he didn’t want to.” (Tashkent radio program transcript, 2024) = Bugun kinoga bormaymizmi? – Taklif qildim, lekin istamadi. In this example, the verb *istamadi* (he didn’t want to) in the second line normally requires a complement. However, the complement is omitted in null form, creating an anaphoric elliptical construction. The meaning of the null complement is pragmatically linked to the movie suggestion in the previous utterance and is recoverable through the context. In this case, semantic clarity depends on the listener’s pragmatic competence and contextual communicative experience.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the phenomenon of ellipsis in English and Uzbek is shaped by the grammatical structure and pragmatic needs of each language. English distinguishes various specific types of ellipsis, such as gapping, sluicing, etc., which have been named and studied in linguistic literature. These forms arise from the analytic nature of English and its rigid word order. In contrast, Uzbek typically realizes ellipsis through verb forms, reflecting its synthetic linguistic nature. Nevertheless, from a pragmatic perspective, both languages use ellipsis to serve similar purposes: avoiding unnecessary repetition, conveying information concisely, and making speech more natural and lively.

Ellipsis, therefore, represents the economy of language and the cooperative nature of communication. Although it may manifest differently in each language, it shares a common communicative function.

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