



# Verb-echo answers

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## Phenomenon

- **Verb-echo answers:** short responses typically given to polar questions; the finite verb is echoed and sometimes accompanied by a polarity particle.

- (1) A: O Pedro chegou? [Brazilian Portuguese]  
the Peter arrived  
"Did Peter arrive?"  
B: Chegou.  
arrived  
"Yes."

- **Languages under investigation:** Finnish, Georgian, Basque, Turkish, Polish, Hebrew, Brazilian Portuguese and Korean.

**Goal: to present a set of diagnostics to distinguish analytical options.**

(two warnings: i. there might be some dialectal variation; ii. this is work in progress)

## Analytical space

- I will focus on the omission of the subject.

i. *syntactic fragmentation:* Verb

Dalrymple et al 1991; Kehler 1993; Culicover and Jackendoff 2005; Stainton 2006

ii. *pro-drop:* [ *pro* Verb ]

Rizzi 1982, 1986; Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou 1998; Holmberg 2005; Roberts 2010; Sheeran 2016; Laka 1990; Holmberg 2016

iii. *argument ellipsis:* [ *Subj* Verb ]

Oku 1998; Saito 2007; Takahashi 2008; Otaki, Sugisaki, Yusa and Koizumi 2013, see also Hoji 1998

iv. *verb stranding clausal ellipsis:* Verb [ *Subj* *t<sub>Verb</sub>* ]

McCloskey 1991; Doron 1999; Martins 2006; Ruda 2014; Holmberg 2001, 2016; Kato 2016; Gribanova 2017

v. *remnant movement:* [*x<sub>P</sub>* *t<sub>Subj</sub>* Verb ] [ *Subj* *t<sub>x<sub>P</sub></sub>* ]

Holmberg 2001, 2016

## Test 1 - indefinites under question

**If verb-echo answers are derived via *pro-drop*, the context should provide a discourse referent that could be picked up by a *pro*-dropped subject; otherwise, verb-echo answers are predicted to be infelicitous**

- This test was first proposed by Holmberg (2016).

- prevention strategy: indefinites under question (see Karttunen 1976)

- (2) A: Gushin vinme movida? [Georgian]  
yesterday anyone.NOM came.AOR  
"Did anyone come yesterday?"  
B: Xo (\*movida).  
yes came.AOR  
"Yes." Holmberg 2016

◆Basque and Hebrew align with Georgian

- (3) A: Alguém veio ontem? [Brazilian Portuguese]  
someone came yesterday  
"Did anyone come yesterday?"  
B: Veio.  
came  
"Yes."

- (4) A: Nwkwunka-ka ecey wa-ss-ni? [Korean]  
anyone-NOM yesterday come-PST-Q  
"Did anyone come yesterday?"  
B: Wa-ss-eo.  
come-PST-DEC  
"Yes."

◆Finnish, Turkish and Polish align with Brazilian Portuguese and Korean.

☞ Georgian, Basque and Hebrew verb-echo answers have a *pro-drop* derivation; Brazilian Portuguese, Korean, Finnish, Turkish and Polish verb-echo answers do not.

## Test 2 - indefinites under negation

**If verb-echo answers are derived via *pro-drop*, the context should provide a discourse referent that could be picked up by a *pro*-dropped subject; otherwise, verb-echo answers are predicted to be infelicitous**

- prevention strategy: indefinites under negation (see Karttunen 1976)

- (5) A: Aravin (ar) movida gushin [Georgian]  
no-one NEG came.AOR yesterday  
"No-one came yesterday."  
B: Rogor ara - (\*movida)  
how not came  
"Yes, someone did."

◆Basque and Hebrew align with Georgian

- (6) [Context: A and B disagree on the facts] [Brazilian Portuguese]  
A: Ninguém veio ontem.  
No-one came yesterday  
"No-one came yesterday."  
B: Veio, sim.  
came yes  
"Yes, someone did."

- (7) [Context: A and B disagree on the facts] [Korean]  
A: Amwuto ecey an-wa-ss-ta.  
no-one yesterday NEG-come-PST-DEC  
"No-one came yesterday."  
B: Ani-ya wa-ss-ta.  
no-DEC came-PST-DEC  
"Yes, someone came."

◆Finnish, Turkish and Polish align with Brazilian Portuguese and Korean. (there might be some variation in Turkish here)

☞ Georgian, Basque and Hebrew verb-echo answers have a *pro-drop* derivation; Brazilian Portuguese, Korean, Finnish, Turkish and Polish verb-echo answers do not.

## Test 3 - independent availability of indefinite null subjects

**If verb-echo answers can resort to indefinite null subjects (e.g. via argument), indefinite null subjects should be independently available in the language**

- tested in the languages whose verb-echo has an alternative to *pro-drop*.

- testing sentences are based on Oku's (1998) diagnostics for argument ellipsis.

- (8) *Indefinites can't be dropped* [Brazilian Portuguese]  
A: Um vendedor foi na casa do Pedro hoje.  
a salesman went in.the house of.the Peter today  
"A salesman went to Peter's house today."  
B: \*(Um vendedor) foi na casa do Paulo  
a salesman went in.the house of.the Paul  
também.  
too  
Intended: "A salesman went to John's house too."

◆Turkish and Polish align with Brazilian Portuguese.

- (9) *Indefinites can be dropped* [Korean]  
A: Panmeyca-ka John-uy cip-ey onul  
a.salesman-NOM John-GEN house-LOC today  
wa-ss-ta  
come-PST-DEC  
"A salesman came to John's house today."  
B: (Panmeyca-ka) Peter-uy cip-ey-to  
a.salesman-NOM Peter-GEN house-LOC-also  
was-ess-ta.  
come-PST-DEC  
"A salesman came to Peter's house too."

◆Finnish is currently under test.

☞ It is possible that Korean verb-echo answers resort to indefinite null subjects; this is not an option for Portuguese, Turkish and Polish. [Finnish is under test]

## Test 4 - Connectivity effects

**If there is agreement morphology, there is an agreement controller**

- Holmberg (2016).

- (10) A: Você veio ontem? [Brazilian Portuguese]  
you came.2SG yesterday  
"Did you come yesterday?"  
B: Vim  
came.1SG  
"Yes, I did."

- Finnish, Turkish and Polish align with Brazilian Portuguese.  
- strengthening the test, gender agreement in Polish:

- (11) A: Czy jakieś krzesł-o się zepsuł-o? [Polish]  
Q any.N chair-N REFL broke-N  
"Did any chair break?"  
B: Tak, zepsuł-[\*∅/o/\*a] się.  
yes broke-M/N/F REFL  
"Yes, some chair broke."  
(12) [Context: A and B disagree on the facts] [Polish]  
A: Żadn-a lamp-a się wczoraj nie zepsuł-a."  
no-F lamp-F REFL yesterday not broke-F  
"No lamp broke yesterday."  
B: Tak, zepsuł-[\*/\*o/a] się.  
yes broke-M/N/F REFL  
"Yes, some lamp broke."

☞ Connectivity effects provide evidence for hidden syntactic structure in Brazilian Portuguese, Turkish, and more strongly in Polish, but not in Korean.

## Summary of results

	Georgian	Basque	Hebrew	B. Portuguese	Polish	Turkish	Finnish	Korean
<b>Test 1 - Indefinites under question</b> □ <i>pro-drop</i>	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
<b>Test 2 - Indefinites under negation</b> □ <i>pro-drop</i>	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
<b>Test 3 - Indefinite null subjects</b> ◇ argument ellipsis/ remnant movement				✗	✗	✗	?	✓
<b>Test 4 - connectivity effects</b> □ V-strand. clausal-E/ remnant movement				✓	✓	✓	✓	✗

## Discussion

- verb-echo is not a cross-linguistically uniform phenomenon (Holmberg 2016);

- the baseline examples are compatible with multiple verb-echo grammars; if kids learning the same language consistently learn the same verb-echo grammar, how do they end up learning the correct one?

- novel evidence for hidden structure in ellipsis.