

Ellipsis and Information Structure in Japanese Narrative Texts: Topic Continuity and Focus Management in Reading Materials

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines ellipsis in Japanese narrative texts and its implications for topic continuity and information focus. Previous work has analyzed ellipsis in a narrative context, and most focus on the syntactic and pragmatic components. This study focuses on Japanese folktales and employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical and minimal quantitative analytical approach. The findings suggest that argument ellipsis and zero anaphora are the most frequent forms and are used almost exclusively for the continuity of the topic, in the case of the omission of an element. However, new or focal information is always expressed. The findings indicate ellipsis is an adjunct that is highly significant in organizing discourse for the streams, the coherence, and the focus of the information, and for the syntactic-discord interface. Most importantly, the study examines the relevancy of ellipsis in Japanese language pedagogy.

Keywords: ellipsis; Japanese discourse; topic continuity; focus marking; information structure; narrative texts; zero anaphora; adult literacy

1. Introduction

Ellipsis in Japanese is one of the most unique linguistic features. Ellipsis encourages the listener or reader to rely on context rather than the explicit verbal or written communication. In most cases, Japanese speakers would omit the subjects, objects, or referential components of the sentence and assume that these components can be inferred from the reference context. Even though there is no verbal or written reference, it is still possible to capture the intended meaning

through the knowledge, the context, the flow of discourse, and the pragmatic inferences of the listeners. This is the most unique Japanese orientation, and the most unique linguistic phenomenon is Japanese discourse, that entails the role of linguistic economy and contextual dependency in focusing on the particular meaning (Shibatani, 1990; Kuno, 1973). It is overwhelmingly clear that Ellipsis is seen as a grammatical deletion phenomena in English and other languages, however, in Japanese, ellipsis is

a discourse phenomena that relies on a strong and flexible combination of linguistic composition, context, and culturally shared interpretation.

Ellipsis is an important narrative device as it aids storytelling and controls how much information is released. The development of a narrative involves the constant monitoring of participants, occurrences, and themes. In such cases, ellipsis allows the speaker or writer to sustain narrative coherence by avoiding the repeated use of referential phrases. When a participant has gained topical prominence in a narrative, repeated overt mentions may become redundant, and subject omission propels narrative progression. However, it is important to note that constituents which introduce new information or contrast often stay in the explicit form. Thus, ellipsis relates to the information structure, particularly to the configuration of topic and focus, which affect discourse interpretation and the control of attention constellations (Lambrecht, 2021; Gundel & Fretheim, 2006) scholars have acknowledged the relevance of topic and focus when analysing the organisation of discourse.

Topics refer to entities that are already established in discourse and are the main focus of the following remarks. In contrast, focus draws attention to the novel, contrastive, or communicatively relevant information. Discourse analysts have described Japanese as a topic-prominent language; when topically organised, Japanese allows for shifts in the narrative or informational emphasis by focal elements (Shibatani, 1990; Hinds, 1976). Therefore, topic continuity naturally results in ellipsis. When a discourse referent becomes sufficiently accessible, the expression of the referent is often considered unnecessary, and to avoid discourse redundancy, the referent is pragmatically omitted.

Previous research on ellipsis in Japanese has focused on either the syntactic or pragmatic facets of the issue. In the context of generative linguistics, ellipsis has been repeatedly studied vis-a-vis argument ellipsis, verb phrase ellipsis, or structural deletion of some sort, which is said to be governed by particular grammatical rules

(Takahashi, 2024; Simpson, 2023). From this viewpoint, ellipsis is regarded as a syntactic procedure in which some items are removed, but the syntactic structure that would allow the items to be interpreted remains intact. In contrast, some research has concentrated on discourse context and the pragmatic considerations of when ellipsis is triggered, and how the omitted items are considered. Such works focus on the importance of the accessibility of the antecedent, discourse focus, and the community's knowledge, in the interpretation of ellipsis (Maynard, 2017).

There has been considerable development in using the above techniques to understand ellipsis in the Japanese language, but most studies concentrate on experimental dialogue, or conversational discourse, with little emphasis on how ellipsis operates in long written narratives. Existing studies describe ellipsis in situations where the omitted elements are dependent on the discourse context, but studies on narrative ellipsis are harder to come by. Narrative or story discourse is a unique field for the study of ellipsis as it requires a deeper, more integrated use of a narrative discourse structure by the reader to successfully trace the pattern of characters, story events, and thematic relationships. Ellipsis operates more in the narrative context as a discursive structure rather than a phenomenon; it operates to create a narrative discourse coherence as well as determine how easily and readily the narrative can be interpreted.

Analyzing ellipsis in narrative texts also proves significant from the vantage point of linguistic anthropology. While narrative discourse features a certain linguistic construct, it also embodies a cultural construct by means of which a community expresses its values, social norms, and communal knowledge. Culture-specific reference, inference, and interpretation patterns emerge in narratives to enable participants to grasp meaning even in the absence of certain linguistic expressions. Ellipsis, in this case, is a resource that demonstrates the cultural assumption of the communicative expectations of how meaning is organized and how discourse is to be interpreted (Duranti, 2021; Agha, 2022).

Ellipsis in narrative texts is a case study of the intersection between a given linguistic expression and a culturally defined model of interpretation.

This viewpoint is especially useful for analyzing the reading narratives used in the teaching of the Japanese language. Most Japanese reading materials include culturally embedded narratives like folklore, fables, etc. and perform an educational as well as a cultural role. They familiarize students not only with the vocabulary and grammar of a language but also with the structures and patterns of organization of discourse typical of Japanese language communication. In these narratives, ellipsis is used a lot after a character or an object has been introduced as the main protagonist of the story. The absence of referring expressions relies on the ability of readers to maintain the continuity of the discourse and recover the referent through contextual inference.

The challenges involved in interpreting elliptical constructions become even more pronounced for Japanese as a second language learners. Particularly when discourse continuity has not yet been established, learners may fail to determine omitted referents and are likely to be unable to do so when there are several possible antecedents in the discourse. Implicit references in discourse as a linguistic phenomenon demand a robust discourse competence — the ability to track reference chains, maintain and identify a topic, and rely on the context to guide reasoning — a position supported by even more recent studies in second language acquisition (Taguchi, 2020; Ishihara & Cohen, 2021). The challenges are compounded in second language reading as learners tend to struggle with the absence of explicit cues to guide reasoning, especially in the narratives where context is a determinant in the construction of meaning (Laleko & Polinsky, 2017). Therefore, a greater understanding of the roles Ellipsis plays in the narrative text, would be of great value to the teaching of Japanese discourse, as well as improving the ability of the learners to read between the lines.

One key aspect mentioned in the opening is the lack of research regarding ellipsis, topic

management, and focus construction in Japanese narrative reading materials. Ellipsis has been studied in terms of structural and pragmatic inference reasons, but few studies have examined how scaffolding in multiple ellipsis units assist narrative discourse construction in multiple sentences and paragraphs. The ellipsis phenomena in narrative discourse and how they contribute to topical persistence and the narrative advancement of highlighted focal information remain largely unexplored.

The three reasons mentioned speak to the importance of research in the areas of ellipsis and narrative discourse. Ellipsis and Japanese narrative discourse can research the phenomena of Japanese ellipsis and its relationship with discourse construction, contributing to the narrative structure and pedagogy intertwined with narrative reading materials. The pedagogical texts impose a structure that relates the culture and communicative practices the ellipsis narrative reading materials emphasize. Furthermore, the ellipsis, continuity of topic, and focus relationship does play an important role in how readers interpret and fill the gaps. The study of the ellipsis is necessary in the study of pedagogically-oriented materials and the communicative practices and cultural knowledge that the materials contain.

The current research analyzes the function of ellipsis in the organisation of topic and focus in Japanese narrative reading texts. More specifically, the present study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What types of ellipsis occur in Japanese narrative reading materials?
- How do elliptical constructions contribute to the management of topic continuity and focus within narrative discourse?
- How are omitted elements interpreted through the interaction of syntactic structure, discourse context, and information structure?

By examining ellipsis within narrative reading materials, this study aims to contribute to the The purpose of the present study is to examine ellipsis in narrative texts to help the understanding of

Japanese discourse organisation from a linguistic and cultural perspective. The analysis shows that ellipsis is a discourse device that aids narrative cohesion, reference maintenance, and information flow control in narratives. More importantly, ellipsis shows the alignment of the Japanese culture to the structure, i.e., of what is left unsaid, of the communicators and the inference using the Japanese narrative discourse. This study attempts to bridge the gap in Japanese and Asian linguistic anthropology on language, structure, discourse, and culture.

2. Review of the Context and Literature

2.1 Conceptualising Ellipsis in Linguistic Theory

Ellipsis is one of the most prominent areas of study in linguistic theory; it helps researchers understand how language users illustrate meaning without necessarily articulating every linguistic component. In the most general terms, it is the omission of one or more elements of a sentence, the interpretation of which can be situationally or linguistically contextualized. (Merchant, 2018; Abels & Dayal, 2023). While it may initially seem that some linguistic elements and the concepts that they represent may weaken communicative clarity, in most cases, the presence of ellipsis more likely enhances communicative clarity by avoiding repetition while still being grammatically acceptable and semantically coherent.

Theory-based linguistics has examined ellipsis through multiple perspectives analytic frameworks of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In the framework of generative syntax, ellipsis is treated as a structural deletion or non-pronunciation of some syntactic materials that are present and remain in the underlying representation (Merchant, 2018; Gribanova, 2020; Landau, 2023). In this case, it is elliptical constructions that are subject to the constraints of the grammatical rules of movement, the rules of ellipsis licensing and the rules governing the recoverability of the antecedent. The most commonly discussed forms of ellipsis include Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VPE), Argument Ellipsis (AE), Gapping, Sluicing, and Stripping. Each of

these forms involves a different structural configuration and different mechanisms in terms of interpretative mechanisms.

In semantic theories, the reconstruction of meaning has the most significant impact in the interpretation of ellipses. In these theories, the semantic content of an ellipsis is created by the parallelism of an antecedent clause or by an inference made at the discourse level (Griffiths & Lipták, 2022). From pragmatic perspectives, ellipsis is most often linked with the discourse and relies on the presence of discourse; the contextual salience; and the cooperative maxims of communication (Kim & Kim, 2023). From this viewpoint, ellipsis is understood as an interaction of various structural processes, and is an integration of grammatical strategies and the interpretation of discourse.

In the most recent linguistic theories, ellipsis is primarily understood as an interface phenomenon as a point of contact between the different components of ellipsis, such as syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse structure (Landau, 2023; Griffiths & Lipták, 2022). This theory accepts the fact that grammatical structure puts a boundary on the amount of information that can be omitted, and that discourse can be usefully pragmatic. Thus, when given the appropriate discourse context, ellipsis can be structural. It can therefore be understood that ellipsis is more than a structural phenomenon, and should be analyzed in the context that constructively provides the elements that have been omitted.

2.2 Ellipsis in Japanese Linguistics

Considering the heavy use of contextual reference in Japanese, the importance of ellipsis in Japanese linguistics is self-evident. Japanese frequently allows omission of arguments, including subjects and objects, provided that their referents can be retrieved from discourse context. This phenomenon, also called zero anaphora, has been reported in both spoken and written discourse (Shibatani, 1990; Simpson, 2023).

Argument ellipsis, where arguments that are semantically and pragmatically recoverable are

omitted, is the most frequently studied type of ellipsis in Japanese. Studies show that, compared to most of the Indo-European languages, Japanese has an unusual amount of permissibility regarding argument ellipsis. This is a reflection of a different syntactic and discourse organization (Abe, 2026; Tanabe & Kobayashi, 2024). Most often, argument ellipsis occurs when the omitted referent is a discourse focal. This would enable the audience to reconstruct the same intended meaning as the speaker, and helps avoid ambiguity in the discourse.

Recent studies look into relatively more sophisticated ellipsis phenomena in Japanese such as antecedent-contained deletion (ACD) and V-stranding verb phrase ellipsis (Simpson, 2023). These phenomena show that ellipsis in Japanese entails a deep combination of certain syntactic formations and some interpretive or 'functional' patterns. For example, ACD implies that some ellipsis constructions necessitate some syntactic movement or structural reconstruction so as to not incur a circular interpretive problem.

Many scholars also observe that, notwithstanding the structural aspects, Japanese ellipsis cannot be understood on the basis of syntactic mechanisms alone. The Japanese language, especially in the context of discourse, enables the listener to fill in the gaps in the discourse, and speakers are able to omit certain elements that are inferrable (Maynard, 2017; Shimojo, 2024). The main discourse principle behind most ellipsis constructions is to eliminate redundancy in communication while achieving the same goals.

2.3 Information Structure: Topic and Focus

For understanding ellipsis in Japanese discourse it is also necessary to consider the information structure, especially the topic and focus. Information structure is the organization of information in a sentence or discourse in relation to the sender and recipient's shared knowledge (Lambrecht, 2021; Gundel & Fretheim, 2006).

The topic of a sentence typically focuses on what the conversation is centered around. It is assumed that this information is known or accessible, or that it is already shared amongst the

speakers. On the other hand, the focus is on what is new, what information is being presented that is contrastive, or what information is salient within the relevant communicative context. The relationship between focus and topic explains the information structuring in terms of introduction, attention retention, and information updating in the discourse.

Japanese language is frequently characterized as a language that is prominent in the use of topics. This suggests that the primary focus in organizing discourse is on the establishment and maintenance of topics (Bossi & Diercks, 2019; Shibatani, 1990; Hinds, 1976). The marker of the particle *wa* (は) is central in marking topical features and guiding the interpretation of the information to follow. Once a topic is established, other references to that topic can be omitted.

The relationship between topic continuity and ellipsis is of utmost importance. The element of discourse that is already accessible and is focal is less likely to be mentioned than those that are focal. On the contrary, focused information presents the greatest communicative value and is more likely to be expressed. This explains the reason why in Japanese discourse the use of ellipsis is often parallel to the information structure. Omitted members often are those that have been previously established as topics.

Information structure impacts cognitive processing for ellipsis, and new research supports this. Researchers, using eye-tracking and psycholinguistics, found that both speakers and listeners make use of omitted elements and the discourse prominence and topical salience (Kaps, 2023). This evidence leads to the conclusion that both discourse information structure and grammatical structure influences ellipsis resolution.

2.4 Ellipsis, Discourse, and Narrative Organisation

The structure of narrative discourse is particularly interesting for the study of ellipsis and information structure. Narratives involve tracking multiple characters and events along

with thematic changes across the discourse. Ellipsis becomes important in such situations to avoid excessive repetition and maintain narrative coherence.

In storytelling, once a character is established as a central figure, mentioning this character becomes redundant. The narrative then shifts focus from the mentioned character to other story elements using contextual cues. This strategy keeps the story progressing and the reader focused on new events (Shibatani, 1990; Hinds, 1976).

This pattern can be seen in many Japanese narratives. In popular Japanese folk stories like *Urashima Tarō*, once the main character is introduced, future mentions of the character can be left out as long as the character can be determined from context.

When it comes to the understanding of the story, the lack of referential expressions does not create an obstacle. It is more of an artifact of the narrative's dependence on continuity of discourse and the interpretive expectations of the audience.

From a discourse point of view, ellipsis contributes to various elements of narrative organisation that include:

- maintaining topical continuity
- reducing redundancy in reference
- highlighting focal events within the storyline
- facilitating narrative pacing and coherence

Given these features, ellipsis is a key element of the structure of narrative discourse and transcends simple grammatical encodings.

2.5 Ellipsis in Japanese Language Pedagogy

In terms of pedagogy for teaching Japanese, ellipsis is particularly relevant for the teaching of reading comprehension skills. Elliptical constructions that need contextualised interpretations are prevalent in Japanese reading materials. Students who are not used to these discourse patterns do not find it easy to recover the missing parts.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies demonstrate that learners typically work with an explicit model and find elliptical constructions difficult, especially where the discourse clues are subtle (Taguchi, 2020; Ishihara & Cohen, 2021). This is particularly true in cases where the missing discourse element is the antecedent, and the learner may find it difficult to establish whether the omission pertains to the topic or some other participant in the discourse.

While engaging with narrative texts requires comprehension of multi-participant and multi-event interactions, reading exercises should not present as many obstacles as possible. Understanding ellipsis should be a skill acquired alongside the ability to follow referential chains, manage topics, and most importantly, possess the grammatical and the discourse knowledge.

Learning about ellipsis in narrative texts can provide the framework to create better reading exercises and teach reading comprehension in a more effective way. Patterned distribution and interpretation of ellipsis can be provided to the learners to understand the construction of referential ellipsis in Japanese texts.

2.6 Research Gap

Research about ellipsis in Japanese language has elaborated some important elements, however, the literature still presents a number of deficiencies. First, the majority of the studies in the area have been conducted in the sentence or the spoken conversation dimension, leaving ellipsis neglected in the dimension of narrative texts. Second, even though research has recognized that communicative purpose and information structure are paramount, ellipsis and topic-focus articulation in narrative discourse have not been examined rigorously. Finally, there is a gap in literature with the pedagogical consequences of ellipsis in reading materials in Japanese as a second language.

Some form of integrated analysis bridging the gaps concerning the syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse perspectives on ellipsis is clearly warranted. In the present study, the author attempts to address the gaps by focusing on

ellipsis in the context of reading materials with narratives.

The current study attempts to elucidate how ellipsis enables topic continuity and focus marking in the Japanese narratives and how these ellipsed constituents are understood in the context of the information structure as adopted/used by the narrative. In so doing, study attempts to establish elucidation of the link between ellipsis and how the discourse is sequenced, and how a narrative is construed in Japanese.

The relationship between ellipsis and how discourse is organized in Japanese narrative texts has, for the first time, integrated syntactic, pragmatic, and information structure analysis with organizational discourse analysis. Ellipsis is understood in the context of the interaction of discourse topics, contextual inference, and new information. This interaction is more than mere grammatical operation(s). This is illustrated in the analysis of Figure 1.

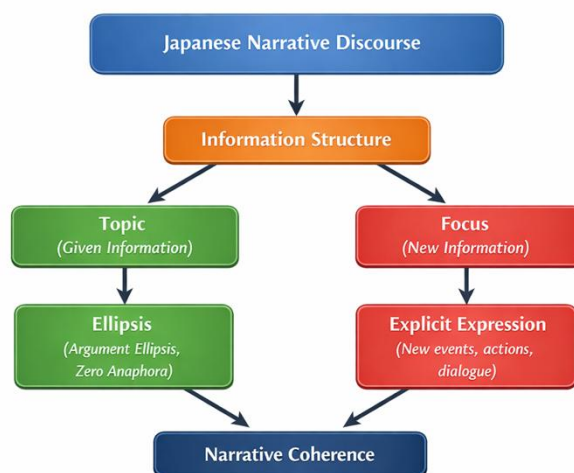


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Ellipsis in Japanese Narrative Discourse

Based on the data in Figure 1, ellipsis is a mechanism which engages with the information structure of discourse. Through argument ellipsis or zero anaphora, elements that are given or topical are often omitted, while the newly introduced or focal information is typically explicated. Both the information structure and ellipsis of the discourse work together to enhance the economy and coherence of the discourse.

3. Methodological Framework

3.1 Research Design

For the study, a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design with the integration of limited quantitative analysis is used to examine the function of ellipsis in controlling the topic continuity and focus of Japanese narrative reading materials. The qualitative perspective is justifiable because ellipsis in discourse often does not take an explicit form, and thus, requires

interpretation within a given context. Furthermore, the limited quantitative analysis assists the study in identifying the distributional patterns of ellipsis within the narrative text, which in turn, provides a basis for the qualitative interpretation.

The analytical framework consists of three complementary perspectives: syntactic, pragmatic, and information structuring analyses. Syntactic analysis helps to uncover the structural characteristics of elliptical constructions and identify the grammatical loci of the elements that have been omitted. In pragmatic analysis, the discourse context and interpretive role of the omitted linguistic elements through common ground and contextual inference are examined. In information structuring analysis, the focus is on the relationship between ellipsis and the

organization of discourse, in particular, the role of topic persistence and focus.

The study interprets ellipsis phenomena at the syntax-pragmatics interface, in which grammatical and contextual interpretations collaboratively construct coherent discourse. The integration of the three perspectives reflects the latest trends in linguistic theories that focus on the interface of syntax, pragmatics, and information structure in ellipsis (Landau, 2023; Abe, 2026; Tanabe & Kobayashi, 2024).

3.2 Data Source

The data of this study is comprised of Japanese narrative texts most frequently encountered as reading materials in the JFL context. The narrative texts were chosen because of the structurally organized discourse context that is ideal for observing the persistence of topic and flow of information over several sentences.

Narratives are particularly suited to the study of ellipsis because of the following typical characteristics of the genre:

- recurring referential expressions,
- sequential event descriptions,
- continuity of discourse topics,
- frequent omission of arguments whose referents are already established.

These features provide researchers the ability to study the role of ellipsis as a discursive device used to tie together a narrative.

The corpus under study consists of well-known Japanese folktales and narratives included in language learning materials, particularly narratives such as Urashima Tarō, Tsuru no Ongaeshi, Momotarō, and Kasa Jizō. These folkloric narratives are recognized for their clarity of structure and the consistency of the discourse, which is why they are included in many Japanese reading textbooks.

As an illustration, in the case of the story of Urashima Tarō, the protagonist is an example of anaphoric reference, where the same person is repeatedly mentioned across successive clauses,

often even allowing the subject to be omitted once the referent is established.

“While Urashima Taro was fishing, a turtle swam up to him and said, ‘Thank you for the other day.’”

In the case of the other successive clauses, the subject is most often omitted as the referent is discursively salient. Such constructions are particularly useful for studying the interplay of ellipsis and topic persistence.

- The narrative texts selected for the corpus meet the following criteria:
- The text must be narrative in genre.
- The text must contain multiple sequential clauses or sentences.
- The text must allow ellipses to be identified across discourse units.
- The text must be commonly used in Japanese reading materials.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

The central focus in this analysis will be the elliptical construction within a particular clause or a sentence. By definition, an elliptical construction is a type of construction that is held to be incomplete on account of the absence of one or more of the syntactic components of the construction, with such components being contextually available in the preceding discourse.

Each instance of ellipsis is analysed according to three analytical dimensions:

1. Structural Dimension

This dimension examines the grammatical properties of the elliptical construction, including:

- the type of ellipsis,
- the syntactic category of the omitted element,
- the position of the ellipsis within the sentence.

2. Discourse Dimension

This dimension focuses on the role of ellipsis in discourse organisation, including:

- the location of the antecedent,
- the continuity of the discourse topic,
- the relationship between the elliptical element and surrounding sentences.

3. Interpretive Dimension

This dimension investigates how the omitted element is interpreted by readers or listeners, including:

- contextual inference mechanisms,
- discourse salience of antecedents,
- interaction between topic and focus information.

By examining these dimensions simultaneously, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how ellipsis functions within narrative discourse.

3.4 Classification of Ellipsis Types

In line with the existing studies on ellipsis in the Japanese context (Abe, 2026; Tanabe & Kobayashi, 2024), the elliptical constructions for this study are categorized into a few major forms.

Argument Ellipsis

Argument ellipsis refers to the omission of syntactic arguments such as subjects or objects when their referents can be recovered from the discourse context. This type of ellipsis is prevalent in the Japanese language due to the permission of argument omission when contextually specified.

For example:

(Ø) climbed onto the turtle's back.

In this sentence, the subject is omitted but can be easily inferred as Urashima Taro from the previous discourse.

Zero Anaphora

Zero anaphora is the omission of a referential expression, such that the meaning is reconstructed via the context of discourse. In

Japanese narratives, when a topic has been established, the occurrence of zero anaphora is commonplace.

Once the discourse topic is established, reference to that topic can be omitted in subsequent discourse without sounding ambiguous.

Verb Phrase Ellipsis

The omission of a predicate phrase from the preceding clause is called verb phrase ellipsis. While this ellipsis type is common in English and less so in Japanese, certain discourse contexts make it permissible to omit the verb phrases.

Adjunct Ellipsis

In some cases, adjuncts are omitted, meaning, time, place, and so forth, if these adjuncts are previously established in the discourse.

3.5 Data Annotation Procedure

The first stage of the systematic procedure used to analyze ellipsis is data annotation. This procedure has multiple stages.

Stage 1: Text Segmentation

Initially, all narrative texts were segmented into individual clauses and sentences. This process of segmentation enables the analysis of what seems to be ellipsis and facilitates the analysis of discourse.

Stage 2: Identification of Ellipsis

Each clause was analyzed to identify whether a syntactic component had been omitted, yet could be understood with reference to the surrounding discourse.

A construction was classified as elliptical if:

- a syntactic argument or predicate was absent,
- the omitted element could be inferred from prior discourse,
- the sentence remained grammatically acceptable.

Stage 3: Antecedent Identification

Regarding each elliptical construction, the antecedent was located in the narrative context.

Antecedents were classified into three categories, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. List of Antecedents

Category	Description
Local antecedent	located within the same sentence
Adjacent antecedent	located in the immediately preceding sentence
Distant antecedent	located earlier in the narrative discourse

As shown in Table 1, antecedents are categorized by their relationship to the elliptical construction in the narrative discourse. A local antecedent is within the same sentence as the ellipsis, so the omitted component can be retrieved easily from the local syntactic position. An adjacent antecedent is in the previous sentence, and the referent is still salient in the reader's discourse memory. A distant antecedent, however, is positioned earlier in the narrative compared to the ellipsis, and the reader must use a more extensive discourse context to figure out the missing component. This division is useful to show how elliptical constructions in Japanese narrative texts are used to achieve referential continuity.

Stage 4: Information Structure Analysis

In the preceding stage, the information structure of each sentence was analyzed to determine whether the missing component belonged to the topic information or focus information.

For the identification of a topic, discourse continuity and the presence of a topic marker, such as *wa*, were crucial. The identification of a focus was determined by the presence of new or contrastive information in the clause.

3.6 Coding and Reliability

Each instance of ellipsis was coded according to various analytical parameters, as in Table 2:

Table 2. List of Analytic Variables

Variable	Description
Ellipsis type	argument ellipsis, zero anaphora, verb phrase ellipsis
Omitted element	subject, object, predicate
Antecedent location	local, adjacent, distant
Information status	topic or focus
Discourse function	topic continuity or focus marking

Table 2 lists the analytic parameters for the study of the corpus of narratives of elliptical constructions. These parameters include the kind of ellipsis, the grammatical component that was omitted, the position of the antecedent, the information status of the omitted element and its discourse role. All these variables constitute an

analytical framework for studying the ellipsis as it relates to the topic continuity and focus in Japanese narrative discourse.

To guarantee reliability of the coding, a subsample of the data was coded by another researcher who was trained on the ellipsis

identification criteria. Inter-annotator reliability was measured by the Kappa coefficient, which is a standard measure of reliability in the annotation of linguistic studies. A Kappa coefficient of 0.80 and above was interpreted as a high level of agreement among the annotators.

3.7 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was carried out in three stages.

First, the aim was to determine the narrative discourse dominant patterns by studying the distribution of ellipsis differentials in the corpus.

The next stage was to focus on each elliptical construction as it relates to its discourse role especially in regard to the maintenance of topic continuity and the emphasis of focal information.

The study considered the mechanisms of how readers reconstruct omitted elements, particularly the interplay of discourse context and information structure.

The study intends, through this multi-faceted analysis, to show how ellipsis aids in the construction of narrative coherence and information control in the Japanese reading materials.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Distribution of Ellipsis in Narrative Texts

The narrative corpus analysis shows Japanese narrative discourse consistently and frequently uses ellipsis. In the analysed narratives, ellipsis is instrumental for the economy and coherence of discourse. Japanese narrative texts extensively use argument ellipsis and zero anaphora, especially when the discourse topic is established.

The narrative corpus analysis shows ellipsis are several recurring ellipsis types which have distinct grammatical and discourse functions in Japanese narrative texts. Ellipsis types identified in the corpus are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Types of Ellipsis Identified in the Narrative Corpus

Ellipsis Type	Linguistic Description	Example Context	Discourse Function
Argument Ellipsis	Omission of syntactic arguments such as subject or object	Subject omitted after topic introduction	Maintains topic continuity
Zero Anaphora	Referential element omitted but recoverable from discourse	Character reference omitted in subsequent clauses	Avoids repetition
Verb Phrase Ellipsis	Predicate omitted but inferred from context	Action implied from previous clause	Maintains narrative flow
Adjunct Ellipsis	Temporal or locative element omitted	Repeated location omitted	Reduces redundancy

Table 3 summarizes the ellipsis types of the narrative corpus. Argument ellipsis and zero anaphora are most frequent, especially when the discourse topic is established. These constructions aid coherence and eliminate repetitive narrative text.

To understand the frequency of ellipsis types, the counts of elliptical constructions from the narrative corpus are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Ellipsis Types in the Narrative Corpus

Ellipsis Type	Frequency Percentage	
Argument Ellipsis	62	54%
Zero Anaphora	39	34%

Ellipsis Type	Frequency	Percentage
Verb Phrase Ellipsis	9	8%
Adjunct Ellipsis	5	4%

Argument ellipsis is shown to be the most frequent type of omission in the corpus in Table 4. This evidences that Japanese discourse relies more on the contextual inference of the reader to keep the topic going. The frequent occurrence of zero anaphora also illustrates the relevance of implicit reference in Japanese narrative texts.

Argument ellipsis shows dominance as a form of omission. This is seen in more than half the instances of omission. This is in agreement with past studies that viewed argument ellipsis as a defining aspect of Japanese grammar, most especially in discourse settings where the reference is implicitly stated.

Japanese narrative discourse demands an active role on the part of the reader to depend on contextual interpretation as opposed to direct commands of the grammar system.

The typological conjecture that Japanese grammar is more prone to the omission of arguments rather than predicates, is illustrated in the less frequent occurrence of verb phrase ellipsis and adjunct ellipsis.

The Japanese narrative texts of ellipsis discourse principles to create topic continuity and avoid redundancy of information.

4.2 Ellipsis and Topic Continuity

The strongest finding of the study is the connection of ellipsis with topic continuity. Often, after a discourse topic is established, reference to that topic is omitted through argument ellipsis or through zero anaphora.

In a narrative text, the protagonist is usually introduced at the beginning, and that character becomes the default discourse topic, so there is no explicit subject repetition.

In the narrative of Urashima Tarō, the subject is introduced at the beginning of the narrative.

“Urashima Taro was delighted and climbed onto the turtle's back.”

In the subsequent several clauses, the subject is omitted. This is because the discourse context remains salient, and the omission doesn't create ambiguity.

This illustrates that topic continuity is maintained by ellipsis across sentences. Omitting redundant references expressions enables a narrative to be more concise.

Such constructions demonstrate an important feature of the Japanese discourse: an established topic may be omitted repeatedly until a topic shift.

To showcase the role of ellipsis in narrative discourse, examples have been taken from the corpus and are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Examples of Ellipsis in Japanese Narrative Texts

Narrative Context	Elliptical Construction	Reconstructed Meaning	Discourse Function
Urashima Tarō introduced	Ø climbed onto the turtle's back	Urashima Tarō climbed onto the turtle's back	Topic continuity
Turtle dialogue	Ø thanked him	The turtle thanked Urashima Tarō	Reference tracking
Journey description	Ø arrived at the palace	Urashima Tarō arrived at the palace	Narrative progression

Table 5 examples show ellipsis in the narrative discourse and referential continuity, and how the same noun phrases need not be repeated. Previous discourse topics help the readers to fill in the gaps in the elements.

4.3 Ellipsis and Focus Marking

Ellipsis often leaves out intuitive or topical information, whereas information that provides focus or is new is usually stated. This variation between the topic and the focus is a strong reason to view ellipsis in relation to the information structure.

Consider the following narrative sequence from the corpus:

“The turtle swam up to him and said, “Thank you for the other day.”

In the above example, the speech act is new information. This serves as the focus of the clause. For this reason utterance content is fully stated and not omitted.

In contrast, the referential elements relating to participants stated earlier may be omitted.

This pattern illustrates a key principle of discourse organisation:

old information tends to be omitted, while new information tends to be explicitly expressed.

These results uphold the theories that associate ellipsis with the information hierarchy. In this line of thinking, ellipsis is one of several devices that signal the difference between backgrounded information and foregrounded information.

4.4 Ellipsis as a Mechanism of Narrative Coherence

Another significant finding is the influence of ellipsis on narrative coherence. In narratives, the order of events is distributed across several sentences, and narrative coherence is necessary, even in the absence of certain constituents.

Coherence is achieved through ellipsis, which enables the audience to reconstruct the missing material from the context of the discourse. For example, in the narrative sequence of Urashima

Taro's trip to the Dragon Palace, several successive clauses leave the subject unstated, as the protagonist is the only one who is a major participant. Such constructions help advance the narrative smoothly without unnecessary repetition of the referential expression.

From a discourse point of view, this pattern demonstrates the influence of ellipsis on supporting cohesion devices like reference and discourse persistence. Instead of repeating the same noun phrase, the narrative relies on the audience's contextual inference to maintain a reference. This technique decreases repetition while keeping the overall meaning intact.

4.5 Ellipsis and Information Structure in Japanese Narrative Discourse

Japanese narrative texts and the uses of ellipsis explain the manipulation of information structure in its entirety.

Japanese narrative texts reveal that the manipulation of information structure can be understood by organizing discourse participants based on the information status. Elements in the structure that function as topics are more likely to be omitted than added since they are already present and available in the shared discourse representation. On the contrary, focused elements are likely to be added as they introduce new information that is available and not present in the shared discourse representation. This is consistent with the available information structure theory that differentiates new information and given information.

In narrative discourse, given information is the topic and is most likely to be the protagonist or any character that is likely to be used more than once, while new information which is the focus is any event or actions or development that is used in the discourse and is novel. To focus on a particular aspect of the discourse that is not background information while retaining focal information is the function of ellipsis. This means that the greater part of the information discourse organization is ellipsis focused. Figure 2 shows the information structure and ellipsis.

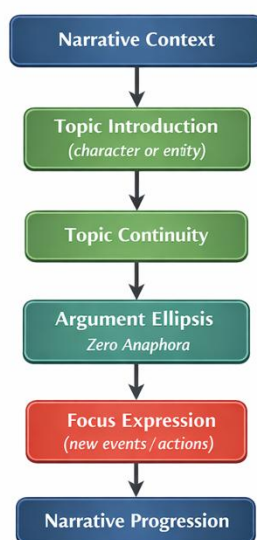


Figure 2. Ellipsis–Topic–Focus Interaction in Japanese Narrative Discourse

Ellipsis in conversation is illustrated in Figure 2. Here, ellipsis occurs when participants are familiar with the established topic of discussion. New information, however, is expressed more explicitly. This mechanism of discourse enables narrative discourse to achieve clarity while minimizing repetition.

4.6 Implications for Japanese Linguistic Theory

The results from the present study also offer the possibility of further critiques on the ellipsis phenomenon with respect to the Japanese language.

- First, the results support the view that ellipsis cannot be explained solely through syntactic mechanisms. While structural constraints clearly play a role, the interpretation of ellipsis depends heavily on discourse context and information structure.
- Second, the study demonstrates that ellipsis operates as an interface phenomenon, involving interactions between syntax, pragmatics, and discourse organisation.
- Third, the results highlight the importance of examining ellipsis within extended discourse contexts, rather than focusing solely on isolated sentences.

Continuous discourse worth the above analysis is provided by narrative texts, which make it possible to analyze repeated topical continuities and shifts of focuses.

4.7 Pedagogical Implications for Japanese Language Learning

This study's findings add to the existing literature by offering new insights to the teaching of the Japanese language. When teaching the Japanese language, one of the greatest challenges students face is ellipsis, because they must infer the omitted elements from the context of the discourse. In contrast to the specific structure of other languages, Japanese often requires the omission of arguments, so learners are often unable to interpret all of the elements that make up a narrative.

The role that understanding ellipsis plays in a discourse's information structure is essential to developing specific reading comprehension pedagogy, focusing on the Japanese language. More specifically, pedagogy will be enhanced by the inclusion of teaching how the discourse topic is modified, established, and maintained through and across sentences. The suggested pedagogy will reduce the insensitivity learners exhibit toward the context prior to interpreting the construction of ellipsis.

4.8 Summary of Findings

In summary, the study's results confirm that ellipsis is instrumental in the Japanese narrative discourse. The main findings can be summarised as follows:

- Argument ellipsis and zero anaphora are the most common forms of ellipsis in Japanese narrative texts.
- Ellipsis is closely linked to topic continuity, allowing the omission of referential expressions once the discourse topic has been established.
- Focus information tends to remain explicit, while topical information is more likely to be omitted.
- Ellipsis contributes to narrative coherence by reducing redundancy while maintaining interpretability.
- The phenomenon reflects an interaction between syntax, pragmatics, and information structure.

In language such as Japanese, where the context of the discourse is vital to the construction of meaning, these findings strengthen the position of ellipsis being a phenomenon of the syntax-discourse interface.

5 Conclusion

This study has explored the function of ellipsis in the Japanese narrative texts used as reading materials in the management of topic focus and continuity. The synthesis of syntactic analysis, pragmatic analysis, and theory of information structure, enables the researcher to provide a holistic account of the role ellipsis plays in Japanese discourse. The findings reveal ellipsis is a mechanism of discourse, and not merely a grammatical phenomenon. A discourse mechanism that manages information effectively and contributes to the overall narrative coherence.

Argument ellipsis and zero anaphora are the most established types of omission within Japanese narrative discourse according to this study. These

instances recur when interlocutors have previously established themselves as the topic. Once a referent becomes the core topic of the narrative, following clauses are likely to omit mention of that participant. This exemplifies the relationship between the use of ellipsis and topic focus in Japanese discourse. Narrative texts are designed to be coherent and to not repeat the same referent therefore they depend and trust the audience to use the context to determine the omitted references.

The use of ellipsis intertwines with the informational structure, particularly with topic and focus. There is an evident disparity between the omission of elements that are deemed contextually given or in the background, and the omission of elements that are in focus, for instance the omission of new actions or critical plot elements of the story. This disparity illustrates that ellipsis is a mechanism to structure information in discourse. Japanese narrative texts are concise, and in order for them to be this, they have to omit topical elements and retaining information, thereby being explicit and direct.

The role of ellipsis in narrative coherence is another significant finding. In narrative discourse, the events that are presented occur in a temporal order, and the equal cross-sentential relation of referring participants is required. Readers are able to fill in the gaps in their mind because the context is provided, and ellipsis is used. Ellipsis makes narrative discourse flow more naturally and is able to reduce the amount of repeated the same information. Ellipsis, therefore, shows that both the economy of language and the cohesion and readability of discourse are improved.

The findings, from a purely theoretical standpoint, reiterate that ellipsis must be considered a cross-sentential structural phenomenon. A purely structural grammatical approach to ellipsis will be of no value, as has been demonstrated in this study. There is little research that considers the phenomenon of ellipsis from a discourse-oriented perspective, information structure, and cognitive theory, particularly with respect to referential

connections. It will be necessary to approach the study of ellipsis in the Japanese language from a theoretical perspective that has been neglected in the study of ellipsis in the Japanese language.

To analyse ellipsis in extended discourse rather than in isolated sentences demonstrates the importance of the study in Japanese linguistic research. Previous studies focused either on conversational data or single sentences. Although those studies may describe valuable details on grammatical mechanisms, the studies may not describe the interplay of ellipsis and discourse organization. This study illustrates ellipsis in narrative texts over multiple clauses and sentences. It analyses ellipsis in a discourse and not in isolation. It closes the gap in scholarship on the role of ellipsis in discourse organization.

There are also Japanese pedagogy implications because of the study. Omitted elements are not explicitly stated in the discourse context and must be inferred. Therefore, ellipsis can be a challenge to non-native speakers of Japanese. For example those first language permits overt subjects. Such learners may have expressive and receptive difficulties in use and understanding of elliptical sentences in the Japanese language. It is therefore necessary to consider topic continuity and focus marking in teaching Japanese reading skills. Japanese language pedagogy may focus on the use, maintenance, and shifting of discourse topics in a narrative text.

The study offers various contributions to the research on ellipsis and discourse analysis, but there are some concerns. The study's primary source of analysis is written narrative texts contained in reading materials. These texts may vary in structures and features relative to other discourse types, such as spontaneous conversation, academic writing, and digital communication. Other genres may contain ellipsis for different communicative purposes,

and specific stylistic conventions. Additionally, this study's research corpus is smaller relative to other studies. Although the corpus exemplifies ellipsis, it may be possible to obtain a research corpus that is larger than this study that can enable a more extensive quantitative analysis for greater generalization of findings.

Considering the present research findings, there are potential research areas for future studies. One possibility is to analyze ellipsis commentary discourse type, media discourse, and online dialogues. Another possibility is the use of a wide range of corpus linguistics studies. With this, researchers can study ellipsis in larger corpora. Furthermore, the use of some experimental methods, such as eye-tracking experiments and studies of psycholinguistic processing, can help researchers find out how constructs that are people perceive and interpret in an elliptical manner as a real-time phenomenon.

Another possible area for future work is cross-linguistic studies. Comparing Japanese ellipsis with other languages that have a topic-first construction such as Korean or Chinese might show some typological similarities or differences in ellipsis and information structure. Such studies could show how the organization of discourse and the structure of grammar interact in different languages.

As for the disposal of repeated information and the retention of information significant for the discourse, the results of this study reinforce the idea of ellipsis as a necessary component for the communicative effectiveness and discourse coherence of a narrative. This study, alongside other studies on Japanese linguistics, aims to show the value of discourse analysis in the studies of ellipsis, and the value of the analysis of syntax, pragmatics, and information structure to discourse analysis as a whole.

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