

What can focus association tell us about the syntax of silence?*

Ka-Fai Yip

Trinity Centre for Asian Studies, Trinity College Dublin

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1 Introduction

- Several constructions containing **apparent gaps** have been analyzed with one of the three mechanisms:

① **Movement**: Copy Deletion (Chomsky 1995; Nunes 1995, 2004; Bošković and Nunes 2007, *i.a.*)

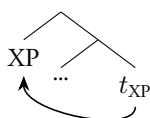
E.g., *Which book* do you like *<t>?* (cf. *Who likes which book?*)

② **Ellipsis** (Lobeck 1995; Merchant 2001; Johnson 2001, *i.a.*)

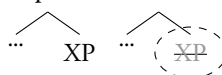
E.g., *Mary will buy this book. John will ~~buy this book~~, too.*

③ **Multidominance: Parallel Merge** (Wilder 1999; Citko 2005; Gračanin-Yuksek 2007, *i.a.*)

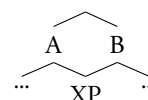
(1) a. *Movement*



b. *Ellipsis*



c. *Multidominance*



- Today's focus: **Right Node Raising (RNR)** (Postal 1974; Hudson 1976; Hartmann 2000; Abels 2004; Citko 2017)
- Involves *syntactic silence* (gaps) in Conjunct 1 in the surface word order.
- Pivot**: the element "shared" by Conjunct 1 and Conjunct 2.

(2) Right Node Raising (RNR) in English

- Mary likes __, and John also likes, [**DP this book**].
- Everyone knows that __, and nobody questions if, [**TP the earth is round**]. (Citko 2017:10, adapted)

(3) Right Node Raising (RNR) in Cantonese¹

- Aaming zungji __ ji Aafan m-zungji [**DP gobun syu**].
Ming like but Fan not-like that book
'Ming likes, but Fan dislikes, that book.'
- Aaming soeng __, tungmaai Aafan dou soeng, [**TP tingjat fei Meigwok**].
Ming want and Fan also want tomorrow fly US
'Ming wants (to), and Fan also wants (to), fly to the US tomorrow.'

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1. Unlike English, prosodic breaks before Conjunct 2 and before the pivot are optional in Cantonese.

- How the silence in RNR is properly analyzed has been subject to debate. (see Citko 2017 for overview)
- ❶ Across-the-board (ATB) movement (e.g., Postal 1974; Sabbagh 2007)
- ❷ Backward deletion/ Ellipsis (e.g., Wilder 1997; Hartmann 2000)
- ❸ Parallel Merge/ Horizontal sharing (e.g., McCawley 1982; Wilder 1999, 2008; Bachrach and Katzir 2009; de Vries 2009; Citko 2011; Grosz 2015)²
 - While ❶ can be distinguished from ❷–❸ by standard syntactic tests like binding, it is sometimes acknowledged that c-command diagnostics “are not going to distinguish [❷] ellipsis from [❸] multidominance” (Citko 2017:7)
- Recently, a non-uniform/“eclectic” view: RNR is structurally ambiguous between ❷ or ❸³ (Barros and Vicente 2011; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023)

Overview of the talk

- ❶ This study offers a *novel* diagnostic for ❸ multidominance:
Focus association of exclusive operators ‘only’ (e.g., Mary **only** likes **THIS BOOK_F**.)
 - It requires a c-command relation that can only be generated by ❸ in cases with silence
 - ➔ Multidominance is not just another pathway to silence: ❸ Parallel Merge creates distinct *structural relations* from ❶ movement and ❷ ellipsis (e.g., Wilder 1999; Citko 2005)
 - ❷ I draw cross-linguistic evidence from English (data confirmed with 9 spkrs.) and Cantonese (3 spkrs.) on *multidominance* in Right Node Raising.
 - Specifically, I focus on cases like (4) where ‘only’ in Conjunct 1 (and 2) associates with the pivot.
- (4) Mary **only** likes __, and John also (**only**) likes, **THIS BOOK_F**.
- (5) [... ‘**only**’ ...] & [... ‘**only**’ ... **Obj_F**]
- c-command c-command
- I will further show that only multidominant RNR accommodates such focus association, but elliptical RNR does not, supporting the non-uniform view (e.g., Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023).
 - ❸ I also demonstrate that focus association serves as a powerful diagnostic that can extend to other multidominant structures, such as **parentheticals/amalgams** and **right dislocation**.

• Road map

- | | |
|--|---|
| §2: Focus association | §5: Case ❸: Right dislocation as multidominance |
| §3: Case ❶: RNR as multidominance | §6: Conclusion |
| §4: Case ❷: Parentheticals as multidominance | §7: Appendices |

2. To the best of my knowledge, there is currently no formal analysis of Cantonese RNR. For Mandarin RNR, see H.-T. J. Cheng (2009, 2011) for a multidominance approach; and Y.-h. Cheng (2015) for a PF deletion approach. See also Y. Wang (2014) and H. Wang (2024) for an alternative analysis using empty categories.

3. There are other non-uniform views, such as Chaves (2014) who advocates for a combination of extraposition, backward deletion, and VP/N’ ellipsis. See also Hirsch and Wagner (2015) for arguments from scope that both ex-situ and in-situ analyses are needed. However, see Larson (2012) for objection to the non-uniform treatment (but see Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023 for rebuttal, as well as Georgi et al. 2025 for criticism to his approach).

2 C-command requirement of ‘only’ focus association

- ‘Only’ has a particular c-command requirement for focus association
- See Jackendoff (1972), Tancredi (1990), Beaver and Clark (2008), Erlewine (2014), and Hirsch and Wagner (2025) for English adverbial *only*, Cheung (2005, 2009) and Yip (2025) for Cantonese *zinghai* ‘only’ (cf. Erlewine 2017; Yip 2026 for Vietnamese)

- (6) The focus association constraint of exclusive operators: Exclusive operators like adverbial *only* and *zinghai* ‘only’ must *c-command* the **pronounced** copy of their focus associates.

→ **Cannot** associate with traces and elided materials (and even empty categories, see Appendix A)

2.1 Focus association fails with traces

- As long observed for English, **focus cannot move out of the scope of ‘only’** as in (7) (e.g., Erlewine 2014)
- Also for Cantonese in (8) (cf. Cheung 2005; Yip 2025)⁴
- True for all kinds of movement: topicalization (A’), relativization (A’), clefting/ focus movement (A’), raising (A), passivization (A), though many of them allow for vanilla reconstruction (e.g., for binding)

→ The associate cannot be “reconstructed” back

(7) Focus association fails with movement

- a. John **only** met **MARY_F** at the party. (Topicalization; Erlewine 2014:11)
- b. #**MARY_F**, John **only** met __ at the party. (meaning ≠ a) (Left dislocation)
- cf. Mary_i, John **only** met **HER_F_i** at the party. (Left dislocation)

- (8) a. Aaming **zinghai** m-zungji [ni zek gau]_F. (Baseline) [Cantonese]
 Ming only not-like this CL dog
 ‘Ming only doesn’t like this dog.’
- b. ***[Ni zek gau]_F** ne, Aaming **zinghai** m-zungji __. (Topicalization)
 this CL dog TOP Ming only not-like __
 Int.: ‘Ming only doesn’t like this dog.’ (ONLY: ‘This dog, Ming only doesn’t like.’)

- This shows a sharp contrast with **reflexive binding**
- A’-movement like topicalization reconstructs the moved reflexives to the gap position

(9) The pictures of **himself_i**, John_i really likes __.

- (10) **[Keoizigei_k zek gau]**, Aaming_k hou zungji __ gaa3. [Cantonese]
 3sg.self CL dog Ming very like SFP
 Lit.: ‘Himself_k’s dog, Ming_k likes.’ (i.e., Ming_k likes his_k dog.)

- When the focus/*wh*-associates contain a reflexive, it is still ungrammatical to move the associates out:

- (11) a. John_i **only** likes **[the pictures of HIMSELF_i]_F**. (baseline)
 b. ***[The pictures of HIMSELF_i]_F**, John_i **only** likes __.

4. There is no focal stress in Cantonese (Wu and Xu 2010; Xu 2011).

- (12) ***[Keoizigei_k zek gau]_F**, Aaming_k **zinghai** zungji _ gaa3. [Cantonese]
 3sg.self CL dog Ming only like SFP
 Lit.: ‘Himself_k’s dog, Ming_k only likes.’

- **Across-the-board (ATB) movement** also fails focus association.

- (13) (Leftward) ATB-movement bleeds focus association of *only*
 a. [Mary **only** likes **THIS BOOK_F**] and [John **only** dislikes **THIS BOOK_F**]. (baseline)
 b. *It is **THIS BOOK_F** that [Mary **only** likes _] and [John **only** dislikes _]. (ATB-clefting)
 cf. It is **THIS BOOK** that [Mary likes _] and [John dislikes _].
 c. ***THIS BOOK_F**, [Mary **only** likes _] and [John **only** dislikes _]. (ATB-topicalization)
 cf. **THIS BOOK**, [Mary likes _] and [John dislikes _].
- (14) (Leftward) ATB-movement bleeds focus association of *zinghai* ‘only’⁵ [Cantonese]
 a. [Aaming **zinghai** zungji **bingo jan_F**] ji [Aafan **zinghai** toujim **bingo jan_F**]? (baseline)
 Ming only like who but Fan only hate who
 ‘Who does Ming like, and who does Fan hate?’
 b. ***Bingo jan_F**, [Aaming **zinghai** zungji _] ji [Aafan **zinghai** toujim _]? (ATB-topicalization)
 who Ming only like but Fan only hate
 Int.: ‘Which person x is such that Ming only likes x but Fan only hates x?’
 c. **Bingo jan_F**, [Aaming zungji _] ji [Aafan toujim _]? (ATB-topicalization w/o ‘only’)
 who Ming like but Fan hate
 ‘Which person does Ming like and Fan hate?’

- (15) Movement bleeds focus association
 Exclusive operators **cannot** associate with unpronounced copies (nor with the higher copies that they do not c-command).

2.2 Focus association fails with ellipsis

- As a cross-linguistically robust generalization, exclusive operators cannot associate with elided materials.
 (Han and Romero 2004; Beaver and Clark 2008; Bassi, Hirsch, and Trinh 2022; Cantonese: Cheung 2005, 2009; Yip 2020, 2025; Kasem: Aremu 2024; Vietnamese: Yip 2026)
- VP ellipsis **bleeds** focus association! (also true for sluicing, see Appendix B)

- (16) Focus association of *only* fails in VP ellipsis (Bassi, Hirsch, and Trinh 2022:817)
 A: I **only** know he brought **WHITE_F wine**. What about you?
 a. B1: I **only** know he brought **WHITE_F wine**, too.
 b. *B2: I **only** know he did ~~bring WHITE_F wine~~, too.
 cf. B3: I do ~~only know he brought white_F wine~~, too.
 cf. B4: I know he did ~~bring white wine~~, too.

5. Association with in-situ *wh* is possible in Cantonese (cf. Li and Law 2016; Erlewine 2025 for Mandarin).

(17) Focus association of *zinghai* ‘only’ fails in VP ellipsis [Cantonese]

- a. Aaming **zinghai** wui maai **siusyut**_F. *Aafan dou **zinghai** wui [_{VP} maai siusyut_F].
 Ming only will buy novel Fan also only will
 Int.: ‘Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.’
- b. Aaming wui **zinghai** maai **siusyut**_F. Aafan dou wui [_{VP} zinghai maai siusyut_F].
 Ming will only buy novel Fan also will
 ‘Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.’

(18) Ellipsis bleeds focus association

Exclusive operators **cannot** associate into ellipsis sites with the elided materials.

3 Case ❶: Right-Node Raising (RNR)

3.1 RNR as multidominance

- Is RNR derived by ATB-movement, backward ellipsis, or multidomaince?

→ Focus association: at least **multidomaince**!

- In RNR: ‘Only’ may be placed in the Conjunct 1 with an object gap in (19)-(21).
- Focus association with the object in Conjunct 2, as diagnosed by truth conditions.⁶

(19) Focus association of *only* in RNR

John **only** likes __, and Mary also **only** likes, **THIS BOOK**_F.

- a. ... # John also likes that book.
 b. ... # Mary also likes that book.

(20) a. John **only** likes __, and Mary also likes, **THIS BOOK**_F.

- b. John likes __, and Mary **ONLY** likes, **THIS BOOK**_F.⁷

(21) Focus association of *zinghai* ‘only’ in RNR

[Cantonese]

[Aaming **zinghai** zungji __] ji [Aafan (**zinghai**) toujim **gobun syu**_F]

Ming only like but Fan only hate that book

‘Ming only likes, but Fan (only) hates, *that book*.’

- To satisfy (22), the first (and second) ‘only’ must **c-command** the **overt** pivot pronounced at the clause-final position, configured in (23).

(22) The focus association constraint of exclusive operators

Exclusive operators like adverbial *only* and *zinghai* ‘only’ must **c-command** the **pronounced** copy of their focus associates.

(23) [... ‘**only**’ ...] & [... ‘**only**’ ... **Obj**_F]
 c-command c-command

6. Vietnamese allows doubling of the adverbial particle *chỉ* ‘only’ and adfocal particle *mỗi* ‘only’ (Hole 2017; Erlewine 2017; Yip 2026). There is a syntactic dependency between the two exclusive particles (assumed to be Agree by Quek and Hirsch 2017). Interesting, such a dependency is preserved in RNR (judgment confirmed by 4 speakers):

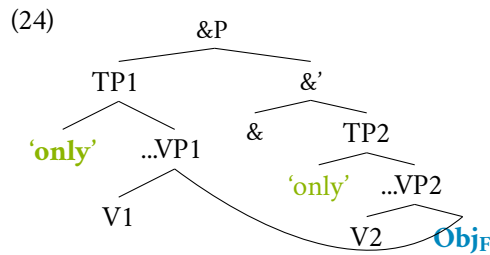
(i) [Nam **chỉ** thích __] và [Lan cũng **chỉ** thích **MỖI CUỐN SÁCH NÀY**_F]
 Nam only like and Lan also only like only CL book this
 ‘Nam only likes, and Lan also only likes, *this book*.’

[Vietnamese]

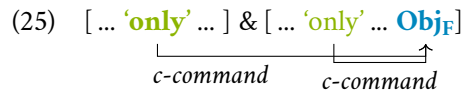
7. Stress is needed on *only* in Conjunct 2 due to the absence of other contrastive materials.

RNR = ③ multidominance

Only multidominance creates the required c-command relation for focus association.



- Parallel Merge/ Horizontal node-sharing: the verbs in both conjuncts merge with the same object node. (Wilder 1999; Citko 2011; Grosz 2015, *i.a.*)
- ‘Only’ in the first conjunct, according to Wilder (1999, ex.18-21)’s definition in (26), **c-commands** the object node shared by both verbs.

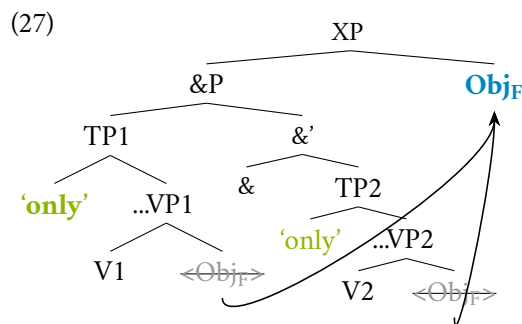


Wilder (1999, ex.18-21)’s definition of c-command (also used to linearize multidominant structures with LCA, see also Wilder 2008):

- (26)
- Sharing: α is shared by X and Y iff (i) neither of X and Y dominates the other, and (ii) both X and Y dominate α .
 - Full dominance: X fully dominates α iff X dominates α and X does not share α .
 - C-command: X c-commands α iff (i) $X \neq \alpha$, (ii) X does not *fully* dominate α , (iii) α does not dominate X, and (iv) all categories that dominate X dominate α .

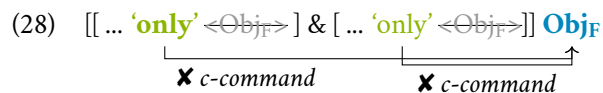
Not ① movement

- RNR as movement (e.g., Ross 1967; Postal 1974, 1998; Sabbagh 2007)
- ATB-movement **cannot** create the correct c-command relation for focus association⁸
—recall how leftward ATB-movement bleeds focus association in (13–14)



- Both objects move to a higher position rightward to &P
- Variant: rightward movement of the shared pivot (i.e., ③ multidominance feeds ① movement, cf. Citko 2005’s account of ATB-movement)
- Under either account, ‘only’ in Conjuncts 1 and 2 **does not c-command** the pronounced copy of the moved pivot. (Rather, ‘only’ is c-command by the pivot)

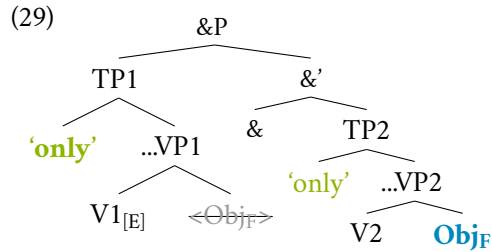
→ **Wrongly** predicts focus association (both TPs) to fail!



8. I do **not** assume the Remerge/multidominance theory of movement (see, e.g., Bachrach and Katzir 2009 for application to RNR), because there is ample evidence for the Copy Theory of Movement from partial Copy Deletion (Bošković and Nunes 2007; van Urk 2018; see Yip and Ahenkorah 2023; Lee and Yip 2025 for Cantonese). Even if one takes the Remerge view, there still needs to be a principled difference from Parallel Merge that derives the ban on focus association with movement.

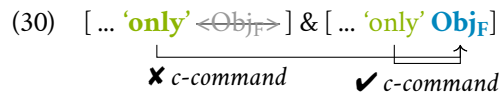
Not ❷ ellipsis

- RNR as (solely) ellipsis (or some PF deletion) (e.g., Wilder 1997; Hartmann 2000; Bošković 2004; Ha 2008)
- **At least** in the cases with focus association, ellipsis **cannot** provide the required c-command relation—indeed, it does not create any new c-command relations. (see §4 for more discussion on elliptical RNR)



- Two (near-)identical objects are base-generated in the two conjuncts respectively
- The first object undergoes backward deletion/ellipsis
- 'Only' in Conjunct 1 does not c-command the pronounced copy of the object in the second conjunct.

→ **Wrongly** predicts focus association (from TP1) to fail!



3.2 A non-uniform view on RNR

Barros and Vicente (2011) and Belk, Neeleman, and Philip (2023):

→ RNR is structurally ambiguous between ❷ ellipsis and ❸ multidominance

- (31) Crucial diagnostics:⁹
- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| Internal reading of relational modifiers | → ❸ multidominance |
| Cumulative agreement | → ❸ multidominance |
| Vehicle change effects | → ❷ ellipsis |
| Morphological mismatches | → ❷ ellipsis |

3.2.1 Multidominant RNR: focus association allowed

① Internal reading of relational modifiers in RNR

(Jackendoff 1977; Abels 2004; Barros and Vicente 2011; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023; cf. Carlson 1987; Barker 2007)

- The internal reading of *same/different* in the pivot scopes over subjects in both conjuncts in RNR.

→ Requires multidominance¹⁰

- (32) a. John likes, and Mary dislikes, the **same** books. (Internal reading)
 → Compare the set of books that John likes and the set of books that Mary dislikes: same
- b. John likes, and Mary dislikes, **different** books. (Internal reading)
 → Compare the set of books that John likes and the set of books that Mary dislikes: different

- **Not possible** under an ellipsis account:

- (i) pronouncing both objects result in the external reading (Jackendoff 1977) as in (33a);
- (ii) VP ellipsis bleeds the internal reading (Abels 2004) as in (33b).

9. These diagnostics may interact in a systematic way given that it is possible for an elided structure to contain a multidominant structure (i.e., ❸ feeding ❷, see extensive discussion in Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023:§5, taking up the challenge raised by Larson 2012). See also Georgi et al. (2025) for a critical reply to Larson (2012).

10. Belk, Neeleman, and Philip (2023) propose to derive the wide scope by QR-ing the pivot. See Bachrach and Katzir (2009) for a Delayed Spell Out approach and Hirsch and Wagner (2015) for discussion of other quantifiers.

- (33) a. John likes **different** books, and Mary dislikes **different** books. (External reading)
 b. John likes **different** books, and Mary does too. (External reading)
- Prediction: **Focus association** should be possible with **internal readings**.
- Borne out! The sets of books liked and disliked are the *same* and *exhaustive* among John and Mary in (34):
- (34) *There are 4 books: 1984, Animal Farm, Lord Of The Rings, Harry Potter. John only likes fantasy books: LOTR and HP. Mary, on the other hand, only dislikes fantasy books: LOTR and HP. So, you report:*
 John **only** likes, and Mary **only** dislikes, **THE SAME BOOKS_F**.
- (35) *You and I each have a cat. Your cat is picky and only likes a certain brand of wet cat food. My cat is not picky, but there is a particular brand that he doesn't like. You just discovered that the brand that your cat likes is the same brand that my cat doesn't like. You say: What a coincidence! ...* [Cantonese]
 [Ngo zek maau **zinghai** zingji _] ji [nei zek maau **zinghai** m-zingji **tung jat-zung paaizi-ge**
 1SG CL cat only like but 2SG CL cat only not-like SAME one-CL brand-GE
gungun_F] wo4!
 can SFP
 '(How surprising!) You cat only likes, and my cat only dislikes, the same brand of wet cat food!'
- Though usually marked, focus association is also possible with *different*, facilitated by the context.
- (36) *There are 4 books: 1984, Animal Farm, Lord Of The Rings, Harry Potter. John and Mary are supposed to give the same books to Jim and Maggie. However, John only gave Jim LOTR and HP, but not the other two. Mary, on the other hand, only gave Maggie 1984 and AF, but not the other two. So, you report:*
 %John **only** gave Jim, and Mary **only** gave Maggie, **DIFFERENT BOOKS_F**.
- (37) *This school has an inadequate sex education program. Male teachers only teach male students about condoms, and not about IUDs. Similarly, female teachers only teach female students about IUDs, but not about condoms. So you report:* [Cantonese]
 [Naamlousi **zinghai** gaau naamtungbok _] ji [neoilousi **zinghai** gaau neoitungbok
 male.teacher only teach male.student but female.teacher only teach female.student
mtung-ge beijan fongfaat_F].
 different-GE birth.control method
 'Male teachers only teach male students, and female teachers only teach female students, different birth control methods.'

② Cumulative/summative agreement in RNR

(Grosz 2015 (first circulated in 2009), Barros and Vicente 2011; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023; cf. Yatabe 2003)¹¹

- Cumulative plural agreement: *have* in (38) agrees with both embedded subjects in the two conjuncts in RNR (Grosz 2015; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023)
- Subject to speaker variations

11. See also Tamar-Mattis (2025) for cumulative agreement in Basque backward gapping and a multidominant account.

- Grosz & Belk et al.: can only be captured by multidominance¹²

(38) *Several people have stolen backdoor keys, and we know who some of them are.*

%Mary discovered that Ryo_{j}, and Carla discovered that John_{r}, **have**_{j,r} stolen backdoor keys.

(Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023:693)

- Importantly, for speakers who accept (38), focus association is also possible in (39):

(39) *Mary discovered that Ryo stole BACKDOOR keys (but didn't realize Ryo also stole frontdoor keys), and Carla discovered that John stole BACKDOOR keys (but didn't realize John also stole frontdoor keys). You report:*

Mary **only** discovered that Ryo, and Carla **only** discovered that John, **have** stolen BACKDOOR_F KEYS.

→ Focus association **corroborates the multidominant structure** of RNR diagnosed by internal readings and cumulative agreement.

3.2.2 Elliptical RNR: focus association disallowed

③ Vehicle change effects in RNR

(Ha 2008; Barros and Vicente 2011; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023, i.a.)

- Vehicle change effects: a signature property of ellipsis (e.g., Fiengo and May 1994)
 - Follows from the semantic identity condition (i.e., no strict syntactic identity)
- Possible in RNR: Condition C violation is circumvented by ellipsis in (40)

(40) a. I used to show **Mary_i**'s teacher interesting papers, and she_i will soon too. (VP ellipsis)

b. **She_i** is going to, and I will soon, show **Mary_i**'s teacher interesting papers. (RNR)

c. ***She_i** used to show **Mary_i**'s teacher interesting papers, and I will soon show **Mary_i**'s teacher interesting papers.

d. **She_i** used to show **her_i** teacher interesting papers, and I will soon show **Mary_i**'s teacher interesting papers.

(adapted from Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023:705)

- Prediction: Vehicle change effects require ellipsis, which **bleeds** focus association of *only*

→ Borne out below!

(41) ***She_i** **only** used to, and I will soon, show **MARY_i'S TEACHER_F** interesting papers.

④ Morphological mismatches in RNR

(Bošković 2004; Ha 2008; Barros and Vicente 2011; Chaves 2014; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023, i.a.)

- Ellipsis does not require syntactic/morphological identity: morphological mismatches
- RNR in (42): The gerund form *studying* mismatches with infinitival *to* in the first conjunct.¹³

12. Grosz (2015) propose to capture cumulative agreement by shared T heads, whereas Belk, Neeleman, and Philip (2023) resort to semantic agreement by assuming that multidominance blocks syntactic agreement. The present arguments go through under both views.

13. It is crucial to place the pause **after** *be*. Otherwise, there are not necessarily morphological mismatches (i.e., ^{OK}*to be studying*).

- (42) a. Ava will soon be **studying** Oceanic languages, but Habib is not going **to**. (VP ellipsis)
 b. Habib is going **to**, and Ava will soon be, **studying** Oceanic languages. (RNR)
 c. *Habib is going **to studying** Oceanic languages, and Ava will soon be **studying** Oceanic languages.
 d. Habib is going **to study** Oceanic languages, and Ava will soon be **studying** Oceanic languages.

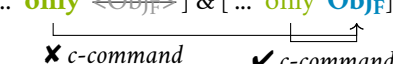
(adapted from Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023:705)

- Prediction: Morphological mismatches indicate ellipsis, which **bleed** focus association of *only*

→ Also borne out below!

- (43)*? Habib is **only** going **to**, and Ava will soon be, **studying** OCEANIC LANGUAGES_F.

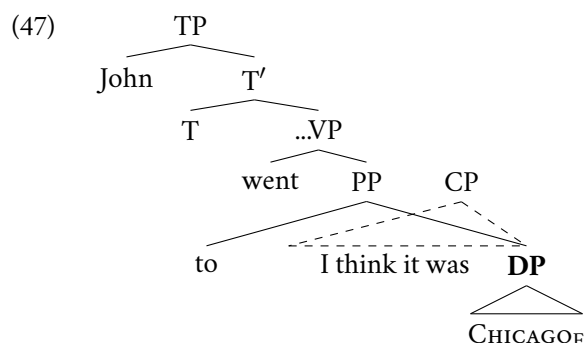
→ Focus association is **bled in the elliptical structure** of RNR diagnosed by vehicle change effects and morphological mismatches.

- (44) [... '**only**' <Obj_F>] & [... '**only**' Obj_F]


4 Case ②: Parentheticals/amalgams as multidominance

Focus association also diagnoses multidominance in:¹⁴

- (45) a. Case ②: Parentheticals/amalgams
 b. Case ③: Right dislocation
- **Syntactic amalgams**: arguably involves a multidominant structure (van Riemsdijk 1998; Riemsdijk 2006; Guimarães 2004; Johnson 2013; cf. Lakoff 1974; Kluck 2011)
- (46) a. John went to, [I think it was Chicago] on Saturday. (adapted from Lakoff 1974:324)
 b. John went to, [Mary told me someplace in Chicago].
 (i.e., John went to someplace in Chicago, and that's what Mary told me)



- As expected, focus association of *only* is possible in the matrix clause:

- (48) John **only** went to, [I think it was CHICAGO_F].

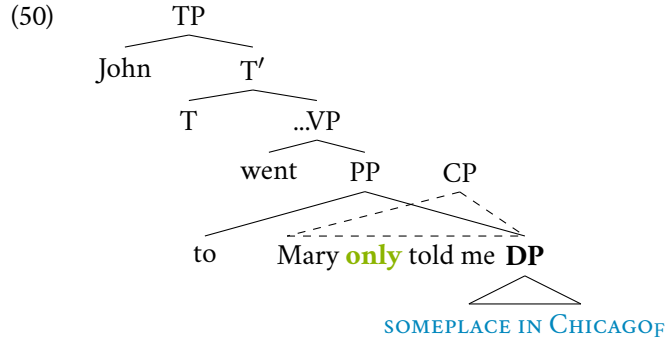
14. Other multidominant constructions often involve some operations that bleed focus association, such as ATB-movement (Citko 2005) or conjoined *wh*-questions (Gračanin-Yuksek 2007), and cannot be tested further.

- Crucially, focus association of *only* is possible from the parentheticals/amalgams!

(49) Focus association in parentheticals/amalgams¹⁵

Mary only told you John went to “someplace in Chicago”, and she didn’t give you more specific information.

- John went to, [Mary **only** told me **SOMEPLACE IN CHICAGO_F**]. (Mitcho Erlewine, p.c.)
- John went to, I think Mary **only/just** said, **SOMEPLACE IN CHICAGO_F**. (Mitcho Erlewine, p.c.)



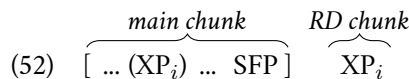
→ Focus association of exclusive operators serves as a powerful diagnostic for multidominance!

5 Case ③: Right dislocation (RD) as multidominance

5.1 Background on RD

Right dislocation (henceforth RD) refers to the phenomenon that some elements are displaced or “copied” to the right of a sentence, commonly found in colloquial speech.

- (51)
- He’s real smart, **John**.
 - He’s real smart, **John is**. (Kayne 1994:78)
- In Chinese (including **Cantonese** and **Mandarin**), when sentence-final particles (SFPs) are present, the displaced elements must follow the SFPs (Cheung 2009, 2015)
 - The same goes for **Japanese** (Tanaka 2001) and **Korean** (Park and Kim 2009).



(53) Gapped right dislocation (GRD)

- [_ heoi-zo Meigwok laa3] **Aaming**. [Cantonese, CC]
- [_ qu-le Meiguo le] **Xiaoming**. [Mandarin, MC]
 go-PFV US SFP Ming
 ‘Ming went to the US.’

15. Most English speakers I consulted accepted (49). One speaker rejected (49) when the parentheticals convey backgrounded information, and reported that the judgment is improved with a QUD “Where did Mary tell you that John went to?”.

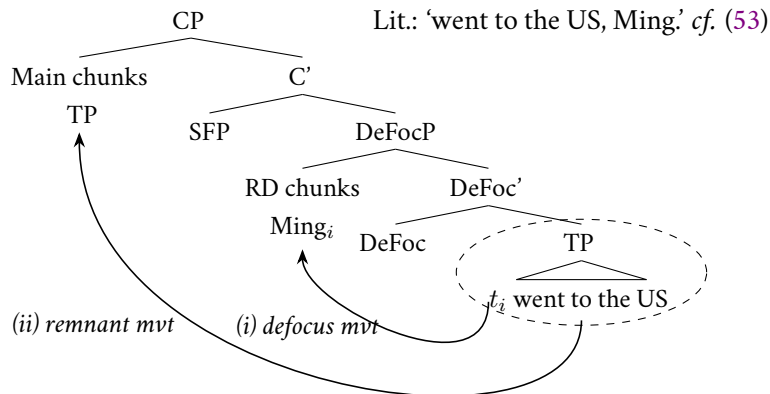
- Previous proposals of Chinese RD disagree on the assumed clausal structure: *monoclausal* vs. *biclausal*
- The **derivation relationship** between main & RD chunks (*movement* vs. *juxtaposition/coordination*)
- The **nature of the non-pronunciation** in RD chunks (*trace/Copy Deletion* vs. *ellipsis*)

Monoclausal approach: Silence = trace

(Packard 1986; Siu 1986; Cheung 1997, 2005, 2009; Law 2003; Chiang 2017, 2022; Lee 2017, 2021, 2023; Wei and Li 2018; Yip 2020)

- RD consists of **one** clause
- The two chunks are *derivationally related*:
Either main chunks are moved out from RD chunks, or both chunks involve movement
- Head-initial SFP (Simpson and Wu 2002; Paul 2014; Pan 2022) + **leftward** movement

(54) The monoclausal + movement approach to RD (adopted from Lee 2017)¹⁶

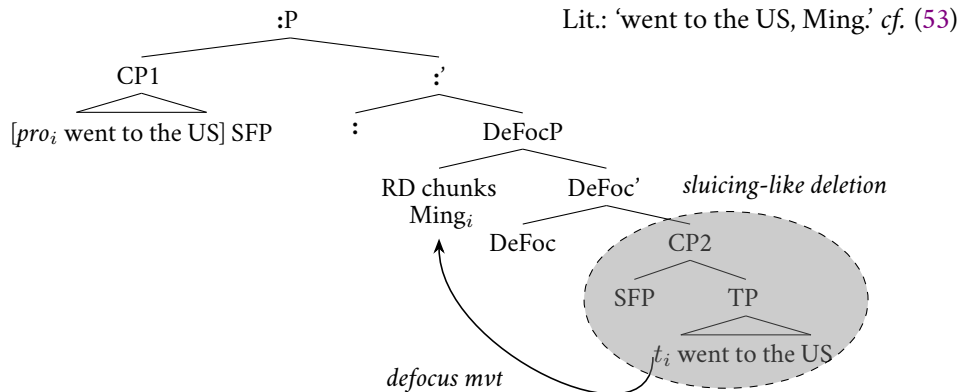


Biclausal approach: Silence = ellipsis/slucing

(Cheung 2015; Tang 2015, 2018; Chan 2016; Chen 2016; Dong 2018; Yip 2025)

- The two chunks are **two** clauses, which are *base-generated* on their own
- SFPs can underlyingly be either head-initial or head-final
- There is no “cross-chunk” movement, though the RD chunk may involve movement internally

(55) The biclausal + sluicing approach to RD (Yip 2025, inspired by Cheung 2015; Ott and de Vries 2016)¹⁷



16. DeFocP is a projection for defocus/anti-focus [-Foc], elements that resist alternative-based focus (e.g., contrastive, exclusive, *wh*-question-answer). See Zubizarreta (1998), Molnárfi (2002), Zeller (2008), and Lee (2017, 2020).

17. Ott and de Vries (2016) propose that RD involves a specifying coordination : (colon) (Koster 2000), with the second clause “specifying the first by adding relevant information to it” (p.649).

5.2 Focus association in RD

Zinghai ‘only’ in Cantonese can be right-dislocated to the end of a sentence after sentence-final particles (SFPs). (As observed the earliest in Cheung 1997, cf. Cheung 2005, 2009, 2015; Yip 2020, 2025)

- (56) a. [_ Aaming_F wui lai zaa3] **zinghai**. (Subj focus) [Cantonese]
 Ming will come SFP only
 ‘(Only) *Ming* will come, only’
 b. [Aaming _ zungji nibun syu_F zaa3] **zinghai**. (Obj focus)
 Ming like this book SFP only
 ‘Ming (only) likes *this book*, only’

- Also possible in Mandarin and Korean¹⁸
- Same for *wh*-association of ‘the-hell’ expressions, see Appendix C

- (57) [Wo taoyan tamen a] **zhishi**. [MC]
 1SG dislike them SFP only
 ‘It’s just (the case) that I dislike them.’ (Dong 2018:25)

- (58) [Minswu-nun _ Chelswu_F-man(-ul) manna-ss-eyo], **oloci**. [KR]
 Minsu-TOP Cheolsu-only-ACC meet-PST-HON only
 ‘Minsu only met Cheolsu.’ (Florence Zhang, Yumin Ji, p.c.)

- Challenges existing analyses with movement or ellipsis:
 (i) a monoclausal structure with leftward movement in (59) (Cheung 2009; Lee 2017); and
 (ii) a biclausal structure with sluicing in CP2 in (60) (Cheung 2015; Yip 2025)

- (59) [CP Δ SFP [Δ... [TP ‘only’...focus]]]] RD by mvt. (60) [CP1 ...focus...SFP][CP2 Δ [‘only’...XP_F]] RD by sluicing

- Both approaches generate an *illicit* configuration (61) for focus association.¹⁹

- (61) *_{[main ... XP_F ...] SFP [RD ... ‘only’ ... <XP_F> ...]}
 ↑ *no c-command* | *c-command*↑

- I propose that RD consists of a biclausal **multidominant** structure.
 – See Yip (2025) for independent arguments for a biclausal structure over a monoclausal structure

- (62) Multidominance in right dislocation: CP2 shares every (non-branching) node with CP1 except for the defocused element(s) that undergo(es) movement.

18. Cheung (2009, 213) notes that RD of *zhi* ‘only’ in Mandarin is marginally acceptable. Yet, using disyllabic *zhishi* ‘only, just’ significantly improved the judgment, as also reported by Dong (2018). I set the difference between *zhi* and *zhishi* aside for now.

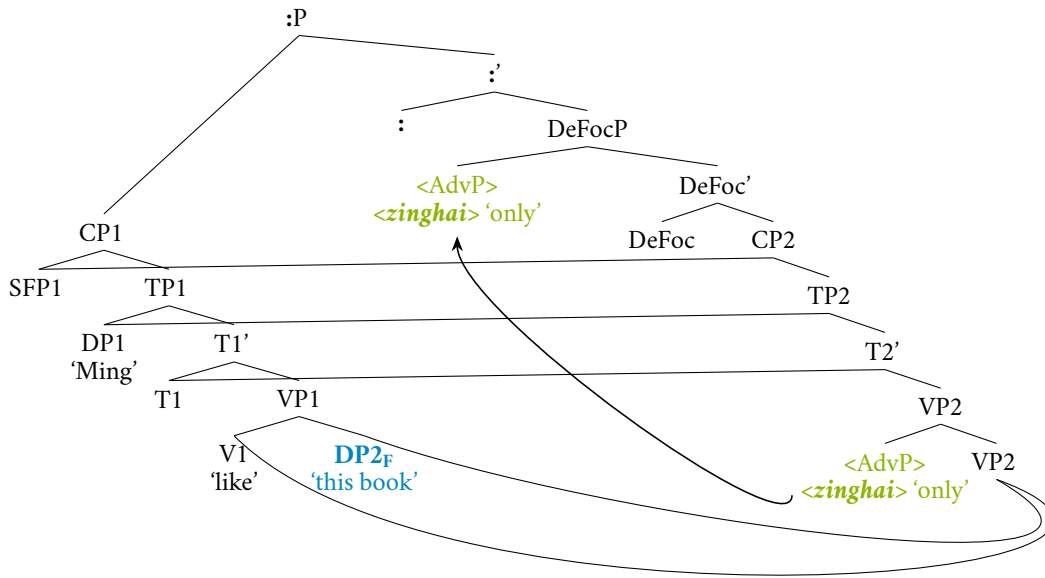
19. Rightward movement in RD with a monoclausal structure is not feasible independently (cf. Cheung 2009; Yip 2025). See Appendix D.

- **Non-bulk sharing** (as in conjoined *wh*-question, e.g., *What and where did Kelly drink?*; Gračanin-Yuksek 2007; Citko and Gračanin-Yuksek 2013, i.a.)

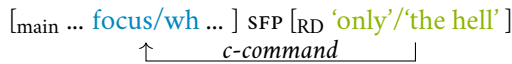
– *Linearization*: non-trivial! For now, let's assume all the shared nodes linearized/ordered before the non-shared ones in RD (i.e., the opposite of conjoined *wh*-questions)

- → The required c-command configuration directly follows from a “non-bulk sharing” analysis of RD.

(63) A slightly simplified derivation of right dislocation of adverb ‘only’ Lit.: ‘Ming likes *this book*, only.’



(64) Multidominance creates the required c-command relation in RD



6 Conclusion

- ① I offered a **novel** diagnostic for **multidominance**: Focus association of exclusive operators ‘only’

→ Possible in **Right Node Raising** in English and Cantonese

– Only Parallel Merge generates the c-command relation for focus association in RNR

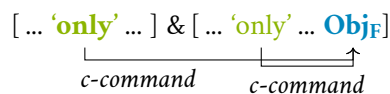
→ Multidominance is not just another pathway to silence: it creates distinct **structural relations** from movement and ellipsis (e.g., Wilder 1999; Citko 2005)

- ② I showed that there are two derivations of RNR:

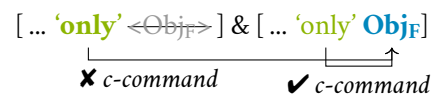
– **Multidominant RNR** feeds focus association and **elliptical RNR** bleeds it.

→ Supports the **non-uniform view** on RNR (Barros and Vicente 2011; Belk, Neeleman, and Philip 2023)

(65) Multi-dominant RNR



(66) Elliptical RNR



- ③ I also demonstrated that focus association is a more general test for multidominance:

→ Extends to **parentheticals/amalgams** and **right dislocation**.

7 Appendices

Appendix A: Sluicing bleeds focus association

- Sluicing bleeds focus association of *only* in English.

(67) Focus association fails with sluicing

Some student took GERMAN. Also, some other student took FRENCH. ...

- ... I don't know which student took FRENCH, though I know who took GERMAN.
- ... I don't know which student ~~took FRENCH~~, though I know who took GERMAN.
- ... I **only** don't know which student took **FRENCH_F**, though I know who took GERMAN.
- *... I **only** don't know which student ~~took FRENCH_F~~, though I know who took GERMAN.
(with FRENCH as the intended associate)

- The comparable construction in Cantonese is fragment questions
- Wei (2018): fragment questions in Chinese are derived by movement + deletion (=sluicing)
- Importantly, fragment questions, unlike regular movement, have selective island repair effects, supporting the sluicing approach (see Wei 2018 for a pied-piping explanation on the island repair effects)

(68) Fragment polar questions

(baseline) [Cantonese]

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| Q1. Aaming tingjat wui heoi tousyugun aa4? | A1. Wui. |
| Ming tmr. will go library SFP | will |
| 'Will Ming go to the library tomorrow?' | 'He will.' |
| Q2. Gam Aafan (tingjat) ne? | A2. Dou wui. |
| then Fan tomorrow TOP | also will |
| 'What about Fan (tomorrow)?' | 'She will as well.' |
| (i.e. Will Fan go to the library tomorrow?) | |

(69) Sluicing in question fragments repairs islands selectively

- [_{CP} Question fragment [_{TP} [_{Left-branch/Sent.-Subj.} ...]]]
↑
- *[_{CP} Question fragment [_{TP} [_{CNPI/Adjunct} ...]]]
↑

- Fragment questions in Cantonese also bleed focus association of *zinghai* 'only'.

(70) Focus association fails in fragment questions

[Cantonese]

- | | |
|--|------------|
| Q1. Aaming zinghai wui heoi tousyugun_F aa4? | A1. Wui. |
| Ming only will go library SFP | will |
| 'Will Ming only go to the library?' | 'He will.' |
| Q2.*Gam Aafan zinghai ne? | |
| then Fan only TOP | |
| Int.: 'What about Fan?' | |

Appendix B: Focus association fails with empty categories

(71) ‘Only’ cannot associate with big PRO

- a. I_i **only** want [MYSELF_i]_F [PRO_i to succeed].
 b. #I_i **only** want to [[PRO_i]_F to succeed]. (meaning≠(a))

(72) ‘Only’ cannot associate with subject *pro*

[Cantonese]

- a. *Ming asks you, besides Fan, whether YOU will come too. You say:*
 Hai aa3, {ngo/ *pro*} dou wui lai aa3.
 yes SFP 1SG also will come SFP
 ‘Yes, (I) will come too.’
 b. *Ming asks you whether YOU are the only one coming. You say:*
 Hai aa3, **zinghai** {ngo_F/ **pro*_F} wui lai aa3.
 yes SFP only 1SG will come SFP
 ‘Yes, only *(I) will come.’

(73) ‘Only’ cannot associate with null object *e*

[Cantonese]

- a. *Tommy is showing off his new MacBook. You say:*
 Ngo dou jau {Mekbuk/ *e*_O} laa1.
 1SG also have MacBook SFP
 ‘I also have (a Mac).’
 b. *Tommy asks you whether you only have MACBOOK AIR (and don’t have Macbook Pro). You say:*
 Hai aa3, ngo **zinghai** jau {Mekbuk-Ejaa_F/ *[*e*_O]_F} zaa3.
 yes SFP 1SG only have MacBook-Air SFP
 ‘Yes, I only have *(MacBook Air).’

Appendix C: *Wh*-association of ‘the-hell’ expressions

‘The-hell’ expressions: adverbs that must associate with *wh*-words (or alternative-triggering expressions like disjunction) that can be roughly translated together as ‘*wh*-the-hell’ (cf. Huang and Ochi 2004, among others).

- (74) **Daodi** **shui** hui lai a?
 the.hell who will come SFP
 ‘Who the hell will come?’

(Wh-Subj) [MC]

- (75) Aaming **doudai** zungji **[binbun syu]_F** aa3?
 Ming the.hell like which book SFP
 ‘After all, which book does Ming like?’

(Wh-Obj) [CC]

- (76) **Ittai** **dare**-ga ki-ta n-da?
 the.hell who-NOM come-PST NMLZ-COP
 ‘Who the hell came?’

(Yusuke Yagi, p.c.) [JP]

- (77) Ku salam-i **totaychey** **nwukwu**-ya?
 that person-NOM the.hell who-INT
 ‘Who the hell is that person?’

(Florence Zhang, Yumin Ji, p.c.) [KR]

The c-command requirement of ‘the-hell’ expressions

First, ‘the-hell’ expressions have a peculiar c-command requirement like ‘only’:

(78) The *wh*-association constraint:

‘The-hell’ expressions must *c-command* the **pronounced** copy of their focus/*wh*-associate.

- See Huang and Ochi (2004) for “the-hell” in Mandarin and Japanese
- Moving out the *wh*-associate of ‘the-hell’ yields ungrammaticality (Huang and Ochi 2004; Cheung 2009).

(79) Wh-association fails with movement (Topicalization) [CC]

*[Bin zek gau]_F, Aaming doudai m-zungji __?

which CL dog Ming the.hell not-like __

Int.: ‘Which dog does Ming not like?’

- *Wh* association also does not survive in sluicing.

(80) Wh association fails in fragment questions [CC]

Q1. Aaming doudai wui heoi bindou?

Ming the.hell will go where

‘Where the hell will Ming go?’

A1. Tousyugun.

library

‘Library.’

Q2.*Gam Aafan doudai ne?

then Fan the.hell TOP

Int.: ‘What about Fan?’

Wh-association in RD

‘Only/the-hell’ however can be right-dislocated and associate “leftward” with the focus/*wh* in the main chunk.

(81) [_ shui hui lai a] daodi?

who will come SFP the.hell

‘Who the hell will come?’

(*Wh*-Subj) [MC]

(82) [Aaming _ zungji binbun syu]_F aa3] doudai?

Ming like which book SFP the.hell

‘After all, which book does Ming like?’

(*Wh*-Obj) [CC]

- Also true in Japanese and Korean!

(83) [_ Dare-ga ki-ta n-da], ittai?

who-NOM come-PST NMLZ-COP the.hell

‘Who the hell came?’

(Yusuke Yagi, p.c.) [JP]

(84) [Ku salam-i _ nwukwu-ya] totaychey?

that person-NOM who-INT the.hell

‘Who the hell is that person?’

(Florence Zhang, Yumin Ji, p.c.) [KR]

Appendix D: Against rightward movement/adjunction in RD

- Rightward movement: **Right Roof Constraint**
- RD is not subject to RRC

(85) Right Roof Constraint in rightward extraposition (Ross 1967:166)

- [That [a review of this article] came out yesterday] is catastrophic.
- [That [a review _] came out yesterday [of this article]_i] is catastrophic.
- *[That [a review _] came out yesterday] is catastrophic [of this article]_i.

(86) No Right Roof Constraint in RD

[Cantonese]

- [ngo zi [CP ZS _ maai-zo bou soenggei] aa3] **hai dinnouzit.** (from embedded cl.)
1SG know ZS buy-PFV CL camera SFP at computer.festival
'I know ZS bought a/the camera at the Computer Festival.'
(Lee 2017:64)
- [_ zi [CP ZS hai dinnouzit maai-zo bou soenggei] aa3] **ngo.** (from matrix cl.)
know ZS at computer.festival buy-PFV CL camera SFP 1SG
'I know ZS bought a/the camera at the Computer Festival.'

- Rightward movement: sometimes **violates island constraints**
- RD is island sensitive (Cheung 2009; Lee 2017)

(87) a. [A man with blond hair] came into the room.

b. [A man _i] came into the room [with blond hair]_i.

c. *[With what color hair]_i did [a man _i] come into the room?

(Göbbel, Bainbridge, and Agbayani 2007, ex. 10a-b)

(88) RD is banned with subject islands

*[Go _ naamjan] jap-zo gaan fong laa3 [gamfaat ge].
CL man enter-PFV CL room SFP blond.hair GE
Int.: 'The man entered the room with blond hair.'

- RD is **biclausal** (Yip 2025): rightward movement is only compatible with a monoclausal structure
- An extra typological argument: the main chunk gaps in gapped RD (GRD) are base-generated empty categories, rather than movement traces

(89) a. [CP [[TP XP _{XP}] SFP] XP]

Monoclausal (rightward mvt): YP-SFP-XP

b. [CP1 [_i] YP SFP] [CP2 XP_{RD*i*} [... _{XP} YP SFP]]

Biclausal: YP-SFP-XP

- Correlation between *the type of GRD* and *the inventory of empty categories*:

→ GRD of X is only possible if base-generated *empty* X is possible in a specific language

(Chinese-type: Huang 1982; Li 2005; Tang 2001; Japanese/Korean-type: Tanaka 2001; Park and Kim 2009; Takano 2014; Yusuke Yagi p.c.; Catalan-Spanish-type: Fernández-Sánchez 2017; Alessandra Pintado-Urbanc, María Teresa Borneo, p.c.; Dutch-English-type: Ott and de Vries 2016)

Languages	Empty category inventory			Gapped right dislocation		
	Subject drop	Object drop	Empty verb ²⁰	Subject GRD	Object GRD	Verb GRD
Cantonese, Mandarin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Japanese, Korean	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Catalan, Spanish	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Dutch, English	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Table 1: Correlation between GRD and empty categories

- **Right adjunction** also does **not** work, because:
 - Independently, adjuncts are attached leftward in Chinese
 - Reconstruction is possible in RD (Cheung 2009; Lee 2017; Yip 2025)
 - RD is island sensitive

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20. Gapping as in *John talked about Bill and Mary ~~talked~~ about Susan*, which arguably is a elliptical phenomenon (as opposed to “born empty” elements), should not be considered.

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