

# VP ellipsis, phases and the syntax of morphology

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**Abstract** The main goal of this paper is to propose a derivational account of the salient syntactic properties of VP ellipsis constructions, both in languages like English and in the languages that Goldberg (2005) dubs “V-stranding VPE languages”. The analysis makes reference to (and offers evidence for) the claim that derivations proceed by phases, cf. Chomsky (2000, 2001a). Phases turn out to be relevant to the characterization of the heads that license VP ellipsis—only phase heads have the required property. They also shed light on the asymmetry between the languages that display VP ellipsis and those that do not. It appears that in the former, the uninterpretable [tense] feature of the phase head *v* is valued phase-internally, at the *v*-level, whereas in the latter, it is not. Another important claim embodied in the analysis developed here is that the morphosyntactic properties of verbal forms across languages must be part of any account of VP ellipsis. They turn out to be relevant, not to the definition of the Identity Condition on VP ellipsis, as Lasnik (1995) claims, but to the proper characterization of its licenser.

**Keywords** V-stranding VPE · Principle of Recoverability · Lexical Identity Condition · Licensing Condition on VPE · Phase · Semantically relevant/irrelevant feature · Valued/unvalued feature · European Portuguese · Welsh · English

Since Sag’s and Williams’s seminal work in the 1970s, VP ellipsis (henceforth VPE) has been extensively studied. But, although the major questions concerning the phenomenon have been identified, it is fair to say that they haven’t received a consensual answer yet. The major issue concerns the division of labor between the various components of the computational system. Do the operations involved in the ellipsis process belong to the LF component or should they be assigned to the PF component?

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