

Apparent voice mismatches in K'iche' ellipsis: non-distinctness, argument structure, and syntactic feature composition

Maša Bešlin*

Abstract: This paper investigates apparent voice mismatches in TP ellipsis in the Mayan language K'iche'. Antecedents of TP ellipsis in K'iche' can contain a verb in the so-called absolutive antipassive (AP) form in contexts where the elided verb must be active transitive. I argue that the K'iche' AP differs from the active transitive not in Voice specification, but in that it completely lacks the internal argument. The resulting mismatch bears directly on the formulation of the Syntactic Identity Condition on ellipsis and illustrates how ellipsis can be used to probe the feature composition of syntactic structures, including those associated with voice and argument structure. I show that the K'iche' facts are compatible with an approach to ellipsis that requires featural non-distinctness between the antecedent and the elided material, but not with the various stricter approaches which require syntactic identity. I further argue that purported restrictions on argument structure mismatches in ellipsis reduce to cases involving feature clashes. Finally, I consider the implications of these findings for theories of syntactic features. If the SIC argued for here is correct, privative features are necessary, but cannot be the only type of feature employed by the syntax.

Keywords: ellipsis, syntactic identity, voice mismatch, argument structure, syntactic features, K'iche' Maya

* Unless otherwise stated, the K'iche' data reported in this paper comes from fieldwork done by the author with speakers in Santa Lucía Utatlán, Sololá, Guatemala from 2022 to 2025. This work was made possible in part through financial support from the National Science Foundation, grants BCS-1941733 and BCS-2116344 to Maria Polinsky. I am very grateful to the Can Pixabaj and Xitamul Can families for sharing their language and their home with me, and in particular to Sindy Fabiola Can Pixabaj and Anastasia "Taxa" Pixabaj Ixcol for their incredible patience. Este artículo se lo dedico a la memoria de don Miguel Paulino Can Yac.

1 Introduction

Deletion of material in K'iche' (K'ichean, Mayan) is observed in *xow*-focus (1) and *are*-focus constructions (2), as well as in typical sluicing environments (3).¹

- (1) Ri ak'al na nojel ta q'ij k-Ø-tz'ib'-an-ik, xaq xow we je'lik
DET child NEG every IRR day NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP-IV PRT just DET pretty
taq tzij <k-Ø-u-tz'ib'-aj / *k-Ø-tz'ib'-an-ik>.
PL word NPST-ERG3SG-ABS3SG-write-TV NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP-IV
'The boy doesn't (generally) write every day, just poetry.'
- (2) Ri ak'al k-Ø-tz'ib'-an ronojel q'ij, are ri je'lik taq tzij no
DET child NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP every day EMPH DET pretty PL word NO
<k-Ø-u-tz'ib'-aj / *k-Ø-tz'ib'-an-ik>.
NPST-ERG3SG-ABS3SG-write-TV NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP-IV
'The boy writes every day, but poetry, he doesn't.'
- (3) Ri ak'al k-Ø-tz'ib'-an ronojel q'ij, pero na wetam ta jas
DET child NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP every day but NEG know IRR what
uwach <k-Ø-u-tz'ib'-aj / *k-Ø-tz'ib'-an-ik>.
kind NPST-ERG3SG-ABS3SG-write-TV NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP-IV
'The boy writes every day, but I don't know what.'

In this paper, I focus on the *xow*-focus phenomenon in (1), returning to classical sluicing briefly in section 3.4, where I undertake a comparison of K'iche' with the closely related language Kaqchikel. The main novel observation I will focus on is the following: Antecedents of TP ellipsis in K'iche' can contain a verb in the so-called absolutive antipassive (AP) form in contexts where the elided verb must be active transitive. This can be observed in (1)-(3): The overt verb is AP, yet the elided verbal complex (in angled brackets throughout) must be active transitive given the presence of the direct object outside the ellipsis site. As we will see, direct objects are disallowed with AP verb forms. Hence, non-elliptical versions of the sentences in (1)-(3) are only possible if the second verb is active transitive, but not if it is AP. In descriptive terms, this constitutes an apparent voice mismatch (antipassive-active) between the antecedent and the material in the ellipsis site (e.g., Mondloch 1981).² Mismatches of this kind have been argued to be impossible in the previous literature on ellipsis (Ross 1969, Merchant 2013, Chung 2006, 2013, Rudin 2019, a.o.).

¹Abbreviations in glosses are as follows: 1, 2, 3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person, ABS = absolutive, ACT = active, AF = agent focus, AP = absolutive antipassive, CLF = classifier, DET = determiner, EMPH = emphatic particle, ERG, EXS = existential, IMP = imperative, IRR = irrealis particle, IV = intransitive verb, NEG = negation, NPST = non-past Tense, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PRT = particle, PST = past Tense, REFL = reflexive, RN = relational noun, SG = singular, TV = transitive verb.

²It is impossible to construct examples where the mismatch is the other way around (antipassive-active), for independent reasons. Since the AP lacks an internal argument, the only argument that can be questioned/focused is the external argument. However, if the external argument is questioned/focused, the verb must be in so-called agent focus voice, see section 2.

Hence, the mismatches in (1)-(3) are pertinent in the context of research on well-formedness conditions for ellipsis. There are two pressing questions. First, what is the exact syntactic structure of the K'iche' AP (as compared to the active transitive)? And second, what is the syntactic relationship between the antecedent and the ellipsis site, such that it can accommodate these facts? In answering the first question, I will argue that the apparent active/AP voice mismatch in K'iche' is, in fact, a transitivity alternation, with the AP form being identical to the active transitive verb form, except for the complete lack of an internal argument. This will lead me to argue, in response to the second question, that the mismatch observed in K'iche' can be accounted for under an approach to ellipsis which requires featural non-distinctness between the antecedent and elided material (Ranero 2021, Ranero and Royer 2024; see also Chomsky 1965), but not under the various stricter approaches which require syntactic identity between the two (e.g., Merchant 2013, Chung 2013, Rudin 2019, a.o.).

More broadly, I argue that ellipsis offers a window into the feature composition of syntactic structure. If the well-formedness of ellipsis is sensitive to feature clashes between antecedents and ellipsis sites, then ellipsis patterns can reveal aspects of syntactic representations that are not always apparent on the surface. I illustrate this by comparing the K'iche' AP with its counterpart in the closely related language Kaqchikel: despite their superficial similarities, only the K'iche' AP participates in the relevant mismatch under ellipsis. This contrast suggests that the two constructions differ in their underlying feature composition, a conclusion that is independently supported by differences in causativization patterns. Thus, beyond its implications for theories of ellipsis, the present study argues that ellipsis can be used to probe the feature encoding of voice and other syntactic phenomena.

The paper is organized as follows: In section 2, I present some background facts about K'iche' grammar, with the aim of making the rest of the paper easier to follow.

Section 3 presents the main proposal of the paper. First, in section 3.1, I show that the *xow*-construction involves genuine TP ellipsis. Section 3.2 demonstrates that the K'iche' AP is an intransitive verb form, which differs from the active transitive not in voice but in argument structure. I argue that the structure of the AP is parallel to the active transitive form, except for a complete lack of internal argument. As we will see, when the categorizer *v* has a [D] feature (selects for an internal argument) and VoiceACT has an [ERG](ative) case feature, the resulting verb is active transitive. If those features are absent, the resulting verb form is AP. In section 3.3, I consider how the K'iche' data at hand bear on the Syntactic Identity Condition (SIC) on ellipsis. I consider four alternative formulations of the SIC (Merchant 2013, Chung 2013, Rudin 2019, Ranero 2021), and argue that the K'iche' data can only be accommodated under Ranero's approach, which requires featural non-distinctness between the antecedent and elided material, but not full syntactic identity. Then, in section 3.4, I compare K'iche' with the closely related language Kaqchikel, which does not allow AP-active

mismatches under ellipsis (Ranero 2021). I show there is independent evidence that the structure of the Kaqchikel AP is distinct from that of the K'iche' AP, and yields a feature-clash in the context of AP-active mismatches in ellipsis. I argue that the contrast between the two languages illustrates the utility of ellipsis as a diagnostic for the feature composition of voice-related structures.

2 Some aspects of K'iche' grammar

- (4) a. X-Ø-u-ch'ab'-ej le al Mari'y le a Xwan.
PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-speak.to-TV DET CLF María DET CLF Juan
'Juan spoke to Maria.'
- b. Le a Xwan, are le al Mari'y x-Ø-u-ch'ab'-ej.
DET CLF Juan EMPH DET CLF María PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-speak.to-TV
'It was Maria that Juan spoke to (not anyone else).'

³This estimate is based on the numbers reported in the 2018 census data, available here (Cuadro A7): <https://censo2018.ine.gob.gt/explorador>.

where transitive and intransitive subjects are grouped together to the exclusion of objects (5b).

(5) a. *Ergative-absolutive:*

ergative	absolutive
S – VTR	O – VTR
	S – VITR

b. *Nominative-accusative:*

nominative	accusative
S – VTR	O – VTR
S – VITR	

The contrast between the two alignment systems in (5) can be illustrated by comparing the K'iche' examples in (6a-b) with the Zulu examples in (7a-b). Like K'iche', Zulu allows verbal agreement with both subjects and objects. In K'iche', the object marker in the transitive (6a) corresponds to the subject marker in the intransitive clause (6b); in Zulu, the agreement marking treats subjects (transitive and intransitive) as a natural class, to the exclusion of objects (7a-b).

(6) a. K-at-u-sik'-ij.

NPST-ABS2SG-ERG3SG-call-TV

'S/he is calling you.'

b. K-at-b'in-ik.

NPST-ABS2SG-walk-IV

'You are walking.'

(7) a. u-mntwana u-cule i-ngoma

AUG-1.child 1s-sang 9.song

'The child sang a song.'

b. u-Mlungisi u-ya-gijima

AUG-1.Mlungisi 1s-YA-run

'Mlungisi is running.'

(adapted from Halpert 2012:71)

K'iche' is also syntactically ergative, a property that places an important restriction on the types of ellipsis configurations that can be tested. Like other syntactically ergative languages, K'iche' obeys restrictions on the A'-extraction of transitive (ergative) subjects, a phenomenon that Aissen (2017) terms the ERGATIVE EXTRACTION CONSTRAINT (EEC). As shown in (8a), ergative subjects cannot be extracted from ordinary transitive clauses. By contrast, extraction of direct objects and intransitive subjects is fully grammatical (8b-c). To extract a transitive subject, K'iche' employs the so-called Agent Focus (AF) construction (9).

(8) a. *Are ri ixoq x-Ø-u-b'aq ri ch'ajo'n.

EMPH DET woman PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-scrub DET clothes

intended: 'THE WOMAN scrubbed the clothes.'

b. Are ri ch'ajo'n x-Ø-u-b'aq ri ixoq.
 EMPH DET clothes PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-scrub DET woman
 'THE CLOTHES, the woman scrubbed.'

c. Are ri ala x-Ø-ch'aw-ik.
 EMPH DET boy PST-ABS3SG-speak-IV
 'THE BOY spoke.'

(Can Pixabaj 2004:58)

(9) Are ri ixoq x-Ø-b'aq-**ow** ri ch'ajo'n.
 EMPH DET woman PST-ABS3SG-scrub-**AF** DET clothes
 'THE WOMAN scrubbed the clothes.'

AF has received extensive attention in the Mayanist literature and I do not discuss the details of its treatment here (see Coon, Mateo Pedro, and Preminger 2014, Aissen 2017, Ranero 2021, Coon, Baier, and Levin 2021, Royer and Coon 2025 for recent discussion and analyses). Notably, AF has sometimes been described as a *last resort* strategy because it appears only when required to circumvent the EEC. Accordingly, it is unavailable when the extracted element is a transitive object (10a) or an intransitive subject (10b), contexts in which extraction is independently permitted.

- (10) a. *Are ri ch'ajo'n x-Ø-b'aq-**ow** ri ixoq.
 EMPH DET clothes PST-ABS3SG-scrub-**AF** DET woman
intended: 'THE CLOTHES, the woman scrubbed.'
- b. *Are ri ala x-Ø-ch'aw-**ow**.
 EMPH DET boy PST-ABS3SG-speak-**AF**
intended: 'THE BOY spoke.'

Hence, the EEC has an important consequence for the present study: it prevents us from testing ellipsis configurations in which the AP appears in the ellipsis site. As I argue below, the K'iche' AP lacks an internal argument. Consequently, the only argument available for extraction from an AP clause is the external argument. Since extraction of that argument triggers AF, the resulting clause would not contain an AP at all, as shown in (11). For this reason, the relevant ellipsis configurations necessarily involve AP-active mismatches in only one direction: the AP appears in the antecedent, while the active transitive verb appears in the ellipsis site.

- (11) Ma-jun x-Ø-u-b'aq ri ch'ajo'n, xaq xow Ixkeem
 no-one PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-scrub DET clothes PRT just Ixkeem
 (x-Ø-b'aq-**ow** / *x-Ø-b'aq-**an**).
 PST-ABS3SG-scrub-**AF** PST-ABS3SG-scrub-**AP**
 'No one scrubbed the clothes, only Ixkeem (scrubbed them).'

As can be observed in examples (6) versus (8), K'iche' has two markers of Tense/Aspect (TA), namely *x-* and *k-*. I gloss these TA markers as past and non-past

Tense, respectively, while the Mayanist tradition understands them to mark completive and incompleted (viewpoint) Aspect; see [Bešlin 2023b](#) for arguments that the markers signal Tense in (Sololá) K'iche'. Nothing in the analysis hinges on whether these elements realize Tense or Aspect, since both of these projections are above Voice. However, since both of these TA markers are affixes (prefixes), and K'iche' does not have an equivalent of *do*-support, the entire verbal complex is elided in all cases of (finite) verbal ellipsis. Hence, all cases of finite verbal ellipses in K'iche' are at least TP ellipses and not vP/VoiceP ellipses.

Another set of affixes on verbal predicates are so-called *status suffixes* (SSs), which indicate verb class membership, based on transitivity, mood, and whether the verb is root or derived ([Larsen 1988](#), [Kaufman 1990](#), [López Ixcoy 1997](#), [Henderson 2012](#), a.o.). I show the SSs on simple intransitives, (12), so-called root transitives (13), and derived transitives (14), glossing them as TV (transitive) and IV (intransitive) throughout. Root transitives are those transitive verbs that are derived directly from CVC roots, while derived transitive have additional (morphosyntactic or phonological) material. As exemplified in (13-c) below, these two classes of transitives have different morphological patterns. Note that SSs appear only when the verb is in clause-final position, roughly corresponding to the minimal CP (see [Henderson 2012](#) and [Royer 2022](#) for a more careful qualification of this statement). As we will see immediately below and in section 3.2, the AP verb form carries the intransitive status suffix *-ik*.

- (12) K-in-b'in-ik.
NPST-ABS3SG-walk-IV
'I'm walking.'
- (13) X-Ø-k-il-o.
PST-ABS3SG-ERG3PL-see-TV
'They saw it.'
- (14) X-Ø-r-eta'm-aj.
PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-know-TV
'S/he learned it.'

Note also that the exact syntactic role and position of SSs is still contentious across Mayan ([Coon 2016](#)). K'iche' SSs have a distinct 'argument-counting' property; that is, the status suffix is *-ik* for one-argument verbs, regardless of whether those verbs are run-of-the-mill intransitives (15a), passives (15b), or AP (15c). Similarly, the derived transitive SS *-aj* appears equally on regular derived transitives (16a) as on causativized intransitives (16b). While this will not be crucial for my purposes, I assume that the SS projection sits higher than argument-introducing projections (as confirmed by its linear order). I also assume that SS has an agreement-type probe, which searches for DP arguments and has distinct exponence when it agrees with one versus two

arguments (see [Deal and Royer 2025](#) for an approach to ergative marking in Mayan which capitalizes on the same distinction).

- | | | | |
|------|--|---|---|
| (15) | a. tzaq- ik
fall-IV
'fall' | b. xib'-ix- ik
hug-PASS-IV
'be hugged' | c. tz'ib'-an- ik
write-AP-IV
'write' |
| (16) | a. et- aj
measure-TV
'measure (sth.)' | b. atin-is- aj
bathe-CAUS-TV
'bathe (sb.)' | |

Finally, Mayan languages are traditionally said to have complex voice systems, including (some or all of) the active, one or more passives, one or more antipassives, agent focus, applicative, and instrumental voice ([Dayley 1981](#), [Mondloch 1981](#), [Grinevald and Peake 2012](#), [Coon 2016](#), [Ranero 2021](#), a.o.). Here, I focus on the morphological expression of the active voice and the AP, which will be of relevance throughout the paper. As we have already seen in the examples above, the morphological expression of active voice is null.⁴ K'iche' has been argued to have up to three distinct antipassives: the absolutive antipassive (AP), the incorporative antipassive, and the focus antipassive ([López Ixcoy 1997](#), [Can Pixabaj 2015](#)). In this paper, I restrict my attention to the AP. Determining whether the conclusions reached here extend to the other antipassive constructions would require a detailed investigation of their syntax and behavior under ellipsis, a topic that falls beyond the scope of the present study. The K'iche' AP has the suffix $-(V)n$, both with root bases (17a) and derived transitive bases (17b).⁵

- (17) a. Ri achi k-Ø-mes-**on** ronojel q'ij waral.
DET man NPST-ABS3SG-sweep-AP every day here
'The man sweeps here every day.'

⁴The SSs do not expone active voice; for example, passives based on derived transitives have the intransitive status suffix *-ik* clause-finally, as in (i).

(i) K-ix-loq'-ox-ik.
NPST-ABS2PL-love-PASS-IV
'You are loved.'

(adapted from [Mondloch 1981](#): 125)

While treating the SSs as separate from voice is quite standard, [Aissen 2011](#) argues that the suffix on derived transitive verbs— $-(V)j$ —is an active voice suffix, and not a SS. Her argument is based on the fact that the suffix $-(V)j$ is in complementary distribution with the passive and antipassive suffixes. While this is true, $-(V)j$ is also in complementary distribution with the other status suffixes. Hence, I take the position that the active suffix is uniformly null and that the SS uniformly has phonological exponence.

⁵In (Sololá) K'iche', the AP is morphologically distinct from both the incorporative antipassive and the agent focus construction. The suffix $-(V)n$ is shared across all these constructions for derived transitive bases, but root transitive bases have the suffix *-ow* in the incorporative antipassive and agent focus. This difference is neutralized in some dialects of Kaqchikel, for example, where the suffix in question is uniformly $-(V)n$ ([Patal Majtzul et al. 2000](#)).

- b. Ri ak'al k-Ø-tz'ib'-an ronojel q'ij.
 DET boy NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP every day
 'The boy writes every day.'

I discuss the morphological and syntactic features of the AP in detail in section 3.2. I now turn to the main proposal of the paper.

3 Proposal

Based on data from feature mismatches in K'iche' ellipsis, I argue that the Syntactic Identity Condition (SIC) on ellipsis must be formulated in terms of featural non-distinctness (Ranero 2021, Ranero and Royer 2024), rather than featural identity (Merchant 2013, Chung 2013, Rudin 2019). Specifically, while clashing features are disallowed between the antecedent and the ellipsis site, the ellipsis site may contain features that are absent in the antecedent (or vice versa). Importantly, this condition is not restricted to portions of the clausal spine above the argument-introducing domain (contra Chung 2013, Rudin 2019). To see this, I first offer evidence that K'iche' *xow*-constructions involve TP ellipsis (section 3.1), followed by evidence that the K'iche' AP is an active intransitive construction, which differs from the active transitive only in the fact that it lacks an internal argument (section 3.2). I then show how this state of things can be accounted for under a featural non-distinctness approach to the SIC, but not under other approaches which require identity (section 3.3). I close by comparing K'iche' with the closely related language Kaqchikel, in which surface-identical AP-active mismatches are disallowed (section 3.4).

3.1 *Xow*-constructions involve ellipsis

There is existing evidence that *xow*-constructions of the kind we have seen involve elided syntactic material, specifically sluicing (sluicing with non-*wh* remnants has been attested in other languages as well, see e.g., Lipták 2022 on Hungarian). The evidence comes from Bešlin's (2023a) investigation of exceptive-like *xow*-constructions in K'iche'. She shows firstly that *xow*-phrases *can* be extended into a full clause (18) and that they can be modified by speaker-oriented adverbs (19).⁶ The latter fact supports the presence of hidden clausal structure on the mainstream assumption that speaker-oriented adverbs attach high in the clausal spine and cannot modify nominals (see Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012 and Soltan 2016 for the development of this diagnostic in the domain of exceptives).

⁶If the *xow*-phrase appears in a negative polarity context, as in (19), what we observe is sentential negation (Spanish *no* or K'iche' *ja'i*). Predicate negation in K'iche' involves a circumfix *na...taj* which must attach to an overt element and is therefore not available when that element is elided.

- (18) Maj k-Ø-u-tij-o, xow ri lej
 nothing NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3G-eat-TV just DET tortilla
 (k-Ø-u-tij-o).
 NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3G-eat-TV
 ‘S/he doesn’t eat anything, just tortillas (s/he eats).’ (Bešlin 2023a: 10)
- (19) Konojel ri ak’al-ab’ x-e-wa-ik, xow Ixkeem wane’ no.
 all DET child-PL PST-ABS3SG-eat-IV just Ixkeem maybe NO
 ‘All the children ate, just Ixkeem maybe didn’t.’ (Bešlin 2023a: 12)

Furthermore, it has been observed that some exceptive constructions give rise to ambiguous interpretations in the context of sluicing (Potsdam and Polinsky 2019, Stockwell and Wong 2020; see also Merchant 2001:22). While the interpretation in (20a) is expected for the sluice in (20), the availability of the reading in (20b) is a priori surprising, since the required antecedent (*John liked the movie*) is not present on the surface. This data can be accounted for if the exceptive itself supplies the antecedent thanks to its hidden clausal structure, as illustrated in (21).

- (20) Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why.
 a. ...but I don’t know why <nobody liked the movie except John>.
 b. ...but I don’t know why <John liked the movie>.
- (21) Nobody liked the movie, except John [~~liked the movie~~].

Xow-constructions show the same kind of ambiguity in sluicing (22). The availability of the interpretation in (22b) shows that they too are underlyingly clausal.

- (22) Ma-jun utz k-Ø-u-na’ ri wa, xow ri nan Tax, pero
 no-one good NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-taste DET food only DET CLF Tasha but
 na wetam taj jacha’.
 NEG know IRR why
 ‘No one likes the food, just Doña Tasha, but I don’t know why.’
 a. ...but I don’t know why no one likes the food (just Doña Tasha).
 b. ...but I don’t know why Doña Tasha likes the food. (Bešlin 2023a: 11)

The next ellipsis diagnostic relies on the possibility of stranding syntactic material inside the ellipsis site. According to Merchant 2001, a language *L* allows (preposition) stranding under sluicing iff *L* allows (preposition) stranding under regular *wh*-movement. Hence, if K’iche’ allows stranding and if the *xow*-construction involves clausal ellipsis, we should be able to strand and elide syntactic material within the clause. This prediction is borne out. To see this, consider the following: In K’iche’, phrases headed by *ruk’* ‘with’ are used to introduce an accompaniment relation

between the main clause subject and *ruk'*'s complement (23a). The *ruk'*-phrase can be questioned, in which case *ruk'* is either displaced along with its complement (23b) or it remains in situ (23c), just like its English equivalent *with*.⁷

- (23) a. Ri Lu' x-Ø-jow ruk' jun ixoq.
 DET Pedro PST-ABS3SG-dance RN one woman
 'Pedro danced with a woman.'
- b. **Jachin** ruk' x-Ø-jow ri Lu'?
 who RN PST-ABS3SG-dance DET Pedro
 'With who did Pedro dance?'
- c. **Jachin** x-Ø-jow ri Lu' ruk'?
 who PST-ABS3SG-dance DET Pedro RN
 'Who did Pedro dance with?'

Now, if a *ruk'* phrase is embedded inside an exceptive-like *xow*-construction, *ruk'* appears on the surface only optionally (24). I take this to mean that the *xow*-phrase is (standardly) focus-fronted prior to ellipsis, with *ruk'* either displaced along with it or stranded in situ and elided. If this is the correct analysis, we then have further evidence that *xow*-constructions involve ellipsis. Note that the optionality of *ruk'* in (24) cannot be due to something trivial like an existing instance of the same element in the main clause since overt *ruk'* is obligatory in both instances in cases of clausal coordination, for example (25).

- (24) Ri Lu' x-Ø-xojow kuk' konojel le ixoq-ib', xow (ruk') ri
 DET Pedro PST-ABS3SG-dance RN every DET woman-PL just RN DET
 Tolor no.
 Dolores NO
 'Pedro danced with every girl, just not (with) Dolores.' (Bešlin 2023a : 12)
- (25) Ri Lu' x-Ø-xojow *(ruk') jun ixoq y ri tat Max
 DET Pedro PST-ABS3SG-dance RN one woman and DET CLF Tomás
 x-Ø-jow *(ruk') konojel le ixoq-ib'.
 PST-ABS3SG-dance RN every DET woman-PL
 'Pedro danced with one woman & Don Tomás danced with every woman.'

Finally, K'iche' *xow*-phrases can include multiple exceptions that do not form a constituent unless they are in a full clause. In (26), *ri Lu'* 'Pedro' and *ruk' ri Tolor* 'with Dolores' form a constituent only together with the verb *xojowik* 'dance'. The surface

⁷What we see in K'iche' (23c) is not strictly speaking preposition stranding since *ruk'* is a so-called relational noun. Relational nouns are a much more common way than prepositions of expressing spatio-temporal relations in Mayan languages. I leave the category issue aside, since what matters for our purposes is simply the fact that these elements can be stranded under movement.

form can be arrived at from the structure in (27), with both the subject and the *ruk'* phrase iteratively escaping the TP ellipsis site.

- (26) Konojel le achi-jab' x-e-xojow kuk' konojel le ixoq-ib', xow ri
 every DET man-PL PST-ABS3PL-dance RN every DET woman-PL just DET
 Lu' ruk' ri Tolor no.
 Pedro RN DET Dolores NO
 'Every boy danced with every girl, only Pedro didn't (dance) with Dolores.'
 (Bešlin 2023a: 11)

- (27) [_{FocP} [_{DP} ri Lu] [_{FocP} [_{DP} ruk' ri Tolor] ... [_{TP} [_{ri Lu}] xaxojow [_{ruk' ri Tolor}]]]]
-

Sentences like (26) look reminiscent of gapping, but we can show that the relevant deletion operation is, in fact, ellipsis. Gapping is traditionally understood to involve (vP or TP) coordination (Ross 1970, Neijt 1979, Wilder 1997 Merchant 2001, Johnson 2009, a.m.o.). It is furthermore observed that the portion of structure involving the gap cannot be fronted, possibly because the result would violate the Coordinate Structure Constraint (Ross 1967), see (28a-b). However, we can see that the fronting of K'iche' *xow*-constructions is perfectly acceptable (29), demonstrating that they are not connected to the main predicate via coordination.⁸

- (28) a. John has eaten tortillas and Sue tamales.
 b. *Sue tamales, John has eaten tortillas and.
- (29) a. Xow ri lej, maj k-Ø-u-tij-o.
 just DET tortilla nothing NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-eat-TV
 'Just tortillas, s/he doesn't eat anything (else).'
- (Bešlin 2023a: 6)
- b. Xow ri Lu' ruk' ri Tolor, ma-jun le achi-jab' x-e-xojow
 just DET Pedro with DET Dolores no-one DET man-PL PST-ABS3PL-dance
 kuk' ma-jun ixoq-ib'.
 with no-one woman-PL
 'Just Pedro with Dolores, no (other) man danced with any women.'

Moreover, elliptical constructions can be embedded, unlike structures that involve gapping (Ross 1970, Neijt 1979, Hankamer 1979, Williams 1997, Hartmann 2000, Johnson 2009, 2017; *pace* Jung 2022). This is illustrated for English by the contrast in (30a-b). K'iche' *xow*-constructions are routinely embedded, as in (31), suggesting again that they involve ellipsis and not gapping.

⁸Note that the acceptability difference between the English and K'iche' sentences in (28)-(29) cannot be attributed to the presence/absence of an overt conjunction. In fact, the base gapping sentence in English is fine even without an overt conjunction (*John has eaten tortillas, Sue tamales.*), whereas the sentence with the fronted gap is still out (**Sue tamales, John has eaten tortillas.*)

- (30) a. Some had bought cars and she claimed that others had done so too.
 b. *Some had bought cars and she claimed that others houses.

- (31) Maj k-Ø-u-tij-o, xow ri lej
 nothing NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-eat-TV only DET tortilla
 x-Ø-u-bij chwe <chi k-Ø-u-tij-o>.
 PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-say to.me that NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-eat-TV
 ‘S/he doesn’t eat anything, only tortillas s/he told me (s/he eats).’

Finally, K’iche’ *xow*-constructions exhibit island repair properties to the same extent as typical sluicing constructions in K’iche’ and in other languages (e.g., Merchant 2001). As seen in the often-cited English example in (32a), sluicing makes acceptable those sentences which seemingly violate island constraints and would therefore be unacceptable in the absence of ellipsis. K’iche’ replicates this pattern both in typical sluicing environments (32b) and in *xow*-constructions (32c). Putting aside here the considerable literature on how best to deal with repair-by-ellipsis, and taking into consideration all the evidence we have seen for the presence of hidden clausal structure with *xow*-phrases, this pattern confirms that the ellipsis phenomenon we are dealing with is comparable to classical sluicing.⁹

- (32) a. They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don’t know which (Balkan language) <they want to hire someone who speaks.>
 b. X-Ø-ki-k’am loq ri ala k-Ø-u-ch’o’b’ jun
 PST-ABS3SG-ERG3PL-bring PRT DET boy NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-know one
 ch’ab’al mayab’ pero man w-eta’m taj jachike.
 language Maya but NEG ABS3SG-know IRR which
 ‘They brought the boy who speaks a M. language, but I don’t know which.’
 c. X-Ø-ki-k’am loq ri ala k-Ø-u-ch’o’b’
 PST-ABS3SG-ERG3PL-bring PRT DET boy NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-know
 konojel ri ch’ab’al mayab’, xow ri K’iche’ no.
 all DET language Maya just DET K’iche’ no
 ‘They brought the boy who speaks all Mayan languages, just not K’iche’.

In this section, I have shown evidence that the K’iche’ *xow*-construction involves ellipsis. Since the elided verbs are finite, and finite verbs in K’iche’ always involve prefixal Tense morphology, we can be quite certain that the relevant kind of ellipsis is

⁹ A reviewer wonders if (32c) might not be an instance of stripping. This possibility is not crucial for the present argument, since the null hypothesis is that the same considerations regarding syntactic identity will apply across different types of ellipsis. Nevertheless, two properties distinguish the construction from stripping. First, the *xow*-remnant can undergo fronting, whereas stripping does not permit fronting of the remnant. Second, the remnant may include adverbials such as *wane’* ‘maybe’, whereas stripping allows only a single phrasal constituent to survive ellipsis.

TP ellipsis. Crucially, in examples like (1) and (33)-(35), the ellipsis antecedent contains a verb in the AP form, yet the verb in the ellipsis site must be active transitive given the presence of the direct object.

- (33) Na k-Ø-kem-on taj, xow we pas
 NEG NPST-ABS3SG-weave-AP IRR just DET sash
 <k-Ø-u-kem-o>.
 NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-weave-TV
 ‘S/he doesn’t (ever) weave, just traditional sashes.’
- (34) Na x-Ø-loq’om-an ta pa k’ayb’al, xow ri k’aj
 NEG PST-ABS3SG-buy-AP IRR on market just DET flour
 <x-Ø-u-loq’-o>.
 PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-buy-TV
 ‘S/he didn’t buy at the market, just some flour.’
- (35) K-Ø-su’-un le ixoq pa ri ja, xow ri uchi’ja no.
 NPST-ABS3SG-clean-AP DET woman on DET house just DET door house no
 ‘The woman is cleaning around the house, just not the door.’

This state of affairs constitutes a potential problem for theories which posit a Syntactic Identity Condition on ellipsis. To investigate this more closely, however, we need to understand in what way the AP differs from the active transitive form of the verb. In the following section, I show that the AP differs from the active transitive not in the flavor of Voice, but in that it is syntactically intransitive. Then, in section 3.3, I show how the K’iche’ data can be accounted for on an approach to ellipsis which disallows feature clashes, but not on approaches which require syntactic identity.

3.2 K’iche’ AP is syntactically intransitive

In this section, I argue that the K’iche’ AP is syntactically intransitive and differs from the corresponding transitive verb only in this respect. To support this claim, I apply a range of syntactic diagnostics, several of which have also been used by [Burukina and Polinsky \(2025\)](#) to argue that the Kaqchikel AP lacks an internal argument.

First, notice that AP only has absolutive (B) marking (36a), a hallmark of intransitive constructions. Compare this to the transitive version of the verb in (36b), which tracks both ergative (A) and absolutive (B).

- (36) a. Ixno’j na k-Ø-tz’ib’-an taj.
 Ixno’j NEG NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP IRR
 ‘Ixno’j doesn’t write.’
 b. Ixno’j na k-Ø-u-tz’ib’-aj taj.
 Ixno’j NEG NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-write-TV IRR

'Ixno'j doesn't write it.'

Moreover, overt objects—both definite and indefinite—are disallowed with AP (37a-b). On the other hand, topical arguments including objects are optionally overt with active transitive verbs (37c). In (37b), we also see that the AP patterns with other intransitives in the language in that it has the SS *-ik* in clause-final position; cf. (12).

- (37) a. Ixno'j na k-Ø-tz'ib'-an taj (*we je'lik taq tzij).
 Ixno'j NEG NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP IRR DET pretty PL words
 'Ixno'j doesn't write (*poetry).'
- b. Ixno'j (*maj) k-Ø-tz'ib'-an-ik.
 Ixno'j nothing NPST-ABS3SG-write-AP-IV
 'Ixno'j writes (*nothing).'
- c. Ixno'j na k-Ø-u-tz'ib'-aj ta (we je'lik taq tzij).
 Ixno'j NEG NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-write-TV IRR DET pretty PL words
 'Ixno'j doesn't write it/poetry.'

Only syntactically represented arguments can host depictive and resultative modifiers; implicit (semantic) arguments cannot (Williams 1980, Mittwoch 1982, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). Both kinds of arguments can be phonologically null. Hence, when a predicate has a null argument (as in the case of K'iche' AP), it is important to understand whether that argument is syntactically represented or not. For example, phonologically null objects in Italian can host depictives (38a), while their English counterparts cannot (38b). The depictive in the English sentence can only be hosted by the subject *John*; in Italian, it can also be hosted by a null plural object ('people'), as evidenced by the presence of plural marking on the depictive. Based on contrasts like (38a-b), Rizzi (1986) argues that Italian null objects are syntactically represented (as *pro*), while they are entirely absent in the syntax in English.

- (38) a. Di solito, Gianni fotografa sedut-i.
 in general Gianni photographs seated-PL
 'In general, Gianni photographs people seated.'
- b. In general, John photographs seated. (adapted from Rizzi 1986:505)

In K'iche', depictives and resultatives are available with null objects of transitive verbs, but not with AP verb forms (39a-b). This is easily accommodated if AP is syntactically intransitive since there is nothing for the depictive/resultative to modify.

- (39) a. K'atinaq (ri lej) x-Ø-u-b'an ri ak'al.
 burnt DET tortilla PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-make(TV) DET child
 'The child made the tortilla/it burnt.'

- b. *K'atinaq (ri lej) x-Ø-b'an-on ri ak'al.
 burnt DET tortilla PST-ABS3SG-make-AP DET child
intended: 'The child made the tortilla/it burnt.'

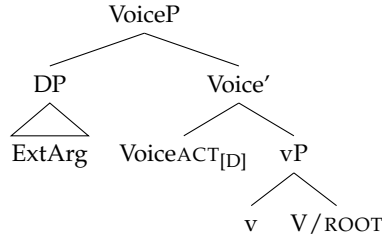
Finally, we can show that patients/themes in K'iche' AP forms are not represented even as implicit arguments. Williams (2015) defends the claim that definite implicit arguments are explicitly specified in the grammar (and distinct from mere entailments), whereas indefinite implicit arguments are not. In K'iche', definite implicit objects are allowed if the verb has transitive morphology, but not if it is AP. The sentence in (40), which establishes a context in which particular güipiles are under discussion, can be felicitously continued with a sentence containing a transitive verb (40a), but not an AP verb (40b). This shows that the understood object in AP sentences can only be indefinite and suggests that AP lacks a grammatical representation of the object altogether.

- (40) **Context:** X-e-ki-tzer ri kipo't konojel ri ixoq-ib'.
 PST-ABS3PL-ERG3PL-tear DET güipiles all DET woman-PL
 'All the women tore their güipiles.'
- a. Ri nim-a'q taq ixoq-ib' x-e-ki-tis-o.
 DET big-PL PL woman-PL PST-ABS3PL-ERG3PL-repair-TV
 'The old women repaired them.'
- b. # Ri nim-a'q taq ixoq-ib' x-e-tisom-an-ik.
 DET big-PL PL woman-PL PST-ABS3PL-repair-AP-IV
intended: 'The old women repaired them.'
available: 'The old women did some repairing.'

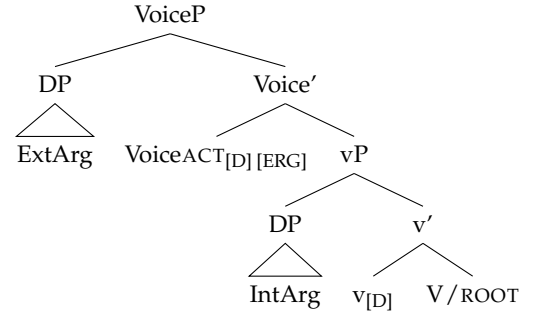
The structure I propose for the K'iche' AP is given in (41a); cf. the active transitive in (41b). The two structures are relatively similar, except for the presence of [D] and [ERG] features in the active transitive, which are responsible for selecting the internal argument and licensing ergative case on the external argument, respectively (that the locus of ergative case in languages like K'iche' is *v*/Voice is argued for extensively in Coon, Mateo Pedro, and Preminger 2014; absolutive is licensed by Infl/T).¹⁰ As I will detail in the following section, this structure allows us to explain why the AP/transitive mismatch is possible under Ranero's approach to the SIC (but not others): There is no feature clash; the ellipsis site in the AP/transitive mismatch sentences simply has extra features—[D] on *v* and [ERG] on Voice—which are absent in the antecedent.

¹⁰I assume that the [D] feature responsible for the presence of the internal argument is on (the categorizer) *v*, since the same root in a nominal environment may not introduce an argument. It is not crucial for my purposes whether the internal argument is *introduced* as the specifier of *v* or elsewhere, for example, as the complement of V/the root (though this would raise questions regarding the locality of selection, see e.g., Hornstein 2024). If *v* is responsible for introducing the internal argument, then the correlation between the presence of the internal argument and the presence of [ERG] can be straightforwardly implemented through selection. Specifically, Voice with an [ERG] feature selects for *v* with a [D] feature only.

(41) a. *K'iche'* AP



b. *K'iche'* active transitive



As shown in (41), I am arguing that the VoiceACT projection is shared between the active transitive and the AP. As in uncontroversially active sentences, the Voice projection in the AP then has null exponence. This view differs from the mainstream, with Mondloch, for example, stating that the K'iche' "absolutive voice marker is the verbal suffix $-(V)n$ " (Mondloch 1981: 184). Instead, I argue that $-(V)n$ is the exponent of intransitive v (v without a [D] feature), as already suggested for the Kaqchikel cognate in Burukina and Polinsky 2025. Two pieces of evidence support this claim for K'iche'. First, many regular intransitive verbs look like they are derived from a root followed by the suffix $-(V)n$, as shown in (42).¹¹

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (42) a. b'ix-on-ik
sing-VN-IV
'sing' | c. at-in-ik
bathe-VN-IV
'bathe' | e. uxl-an-ik
rest-VN-IV
'rest' |
| b. xik'-an-ik
jump-VN-IV
'jump' | d. mux-an-ik
swim-VN-IV
'swim' | f. etz'-an-ik
play-VN-IV
'play' |

Moreover, intransitive verbs in K'iche' usually have transitive counterparts, derived in one of two ways. The first way is where (descriptively speaking) the transitive SS $-(V)j$ replaces $-(V)n$ and attaches directly to the root (43); cf. (42a). This lends some credence to the idea that (i) $-(V)n$ is a morpheme distinct from the root

¹¹My consultants show no systematic syntactic distinction between unaccusative and unergative verbs. In some closely related Mayan languages like Santiago Tz'utujil and Kaqchikel, the distinction is potentially detectable through agreement patterns. In these languages, arguments of unaccusatives pattern with other internal arguments in the languages under discussion, in that 3PL animates trigger agreement on the verb only optionally, while external arguments do so obligatorily (Lyskawa and Ranero 2022, Burukina and Polinsky 2025). As discussed in Lyskawa and Ranero 2022, this pattern could be the result of animacy restrictions, rather than unaccusativity itself: animate arguments control agreement obligatorily, and while verbs like *fall* can combine with inanimates, verbs like *walk* cannot (see also England 2011). A similar pattern has been reported in Fried, Lyskawa, and Ranero 2021 for at least one speaker on K'iche'. However, my consultants mark agreement obligatorily even with 3PL inanimate arguments of intransitive verbs, as seen in (i).

- (i) Keb' wa'is x-e'/*Ø-tzaq pa le ulew.
two pots PST-ABS3PL/*Ø-fall on DET floor
'Two pots fell on the floor.'

even in plain intransitives and (ii) *-Vn* is associated with intransitivity, plausibly as an exponent of *v* which lacks a [D] feature. I discuss the second way of deriving transitive verbs—namely causativization—in section 3.4, where I provide a comparison of K'iche' APs and their counterparts in Kaqchikel.

- (43) K-Ø-u-b'ix-aj b'ixamaq' rech Paxil Kayala' ri ali.
NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-sing-TV anthem RN Guatemala DET girl
'The girl is singing the national anthem of Guatemala.' (ALMG 2010: 21)

In this section, I have provided extensive argumentation for the claim that the K'iche' AP is intransitive. Specifically, I argued that its structure is parallel to that of active transitive verbs, except for the lack of [D] on *v* and [ERG] on Voice, recall (41). Next, I discuss the different formulations of the SIC on ellipsis and the nature of the SIC that can accommodate the facts at hand.

3.3 Accounting for the K'iche' data

Before considering the various proposals concerning the SIC on ellipsis in detail, it is useful to briefly discuss English examples such as (44), commonly referred to as *sprouting*. At first glance, these examples resemble the K'iche' mismatches investigated in this paper: the antecedent contains an implicit object, whereas the ellipsis site contains an overt one. Such examples have played an important role in the ellipsis literature, serving as evidence against a SIC on ellipsis in Merchant (2001) and against identity requirements on the tails of movement chains in Rudin (2019).

- (44) Sally ate, but I don't know what <Sally ate what>. (Merchant 2001:19)

There are a few things to say here. First, if we take it for granted that the antecedent verb in (44) lacks a syntactic internal argument (while the verb in the ellipsis site clearly has one), then the difference between the two is not just in the presence of a tail of a movement chain in the ellipsis site, but also in the selectional features of the two verbs, a fact that is ignored in Rudin 2019. Second, examples such as (44) are quite extraordinary in English; this kind of alternation is not productive and there is no consensus on how exactly the verbs in the antecedent and the ellipsis site differ from each other syntactically, if at all. Hence, the K'iche' data is useful because the transitive/AP alternation is productive and has a number of visible correlations in addition to the presence/absence of the internal argument (as discussed in section 3.2).

Second, I adopt [Rudin's](#) proposal that the SIC ignores the tails of movement chains. A particularly clear illustration of why such a provision is necessary comes from the English examples in (45) and (46), adapted from [Chung \(2006\)](#). The ellipsis site is identical across these examples; the relevant differences concern the antecedent

and the sluice remnant. First, (45) and (46) differ in whether the antecedent contains a *to*-phrase. Second, the (a) and (b) examples differ in whether the preposition *to* is pied-piped with the remnant DP or remains inside the ellipsis site.

- (45) a. We're donating our car to some organization, but it's unclear **to which organization** <we're donating our car to which organization>.
 b. We're donating our car to some organization, but it's unclear **which organization** <we're donating our car to which organization>.
- (46) a. We're donating our car, but it's unclear **to which organization** <we're donating our car to which organization>.
 b. *We're donating our car, but it's unclear **which organization** <we're donating our car to which organization>.

The crucial observation is that a preposition may not be stranded inside the ellipsis site if there is no corresponding preposition in the antecedent (46b). By contrast, the sentence becomes acceptable when the preposition is pied-piped together with the sluice remnant (46a), even though the pied-piping derivation arguably leaves a copy of *to* within the ellipsis site. This pattern is an instance of *Chung's Generalization*, according to which P-stranding is impossible under sprouting.

The contrast between (46a) and (46b) indicates that the SIC disregards the tails of movement chains.¹² In (46a), the copy of *to* inside the ellipsis site does not have to match anything in the antecedent because it forms part of a movement tail. In (46b), by contrast, *to* remains in situ within the ellipsis site and therefore gives rise to a mismatch with the antecedent. The implication for the K'iche' AP/transitive alternation is that the copy of the extracted object DP in the transitive ellipsis site is not itself part of the mismatch that requires an explanation.¹³

Even once these considerations are taken into account, the K'iche' data highlight a question that English examples such as (44) may obscure: We are still in need of an explanation for how an active transitive and AP verb can mismatch in features under ellipsis. In order to answer that question, let us examine in more detail the various formulations of the SIC on ellipsis, laid out in (47).

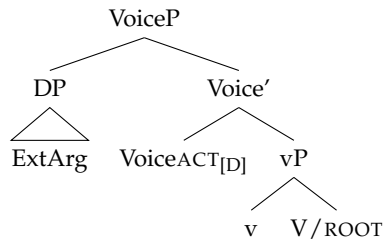
¹²I do not discuss in detail the issue of *why* the SIC seems to ignore tails of movement chains. [Ranero \(2021\)](#) suggests that this is because the SIC imposes an identity between the antecedent and material *properly contained* within the ellipsis site, see (47d). Since the sluice remnant in the target clause is the highest link of a movement chain which is not properly contained within the ellipsis site, it is ignored for the purposes of the SIC. Note that this view is in potential tension with findings from [Gribanova's](#) work, which finds that a verb remnant in verb-stranding VP-ellipsis in languages like Russian cannot mismatch in some cases with the verb in the antecedent ([Gribanova 2017](#); cf. [Gribanova 2013](#)). A full analysis of the factors that may be leading to these differences is beyond the scope of this paper; see [Saab 2022](#) for a recent discussion of the relevant facts.

¹³I assume here the Copy-theory of movement ([Chomsky 1995](#)), but nothing hinges on this choice. If movement leaves behind traces, then the SIC must ignore them for purposes of calculating identity.

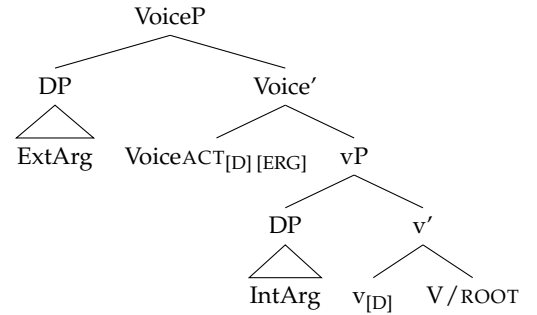
- (47) a. **Merchant 2013**: The heads in the verbal spine of the elided constituent must be syntactically identical to the corresponding heads in the antecedent.¹⁴
- b. **Chung 2013**: A predicate in the ellipsis site must have an argument structure identical to the argument structure of the corresponding predicate in the antecedent clause. If the interrogative phrase of the sluice is a DP, it must be Case-licensed by a head in the ellipsis site identical to a corresponding head in the antecedent clause.
- c. **Rudin 2019**: The heads in the eventive core (=highest vP that is associated with an event introducing predicate) of the elided constituent must be syntactically identical to the corresponding heads in the antecedent.
- d. **Ranero 2021**: The antecedent and material properly contained in the ellipsis site must be featurally non-distinct; roots must match one-to-one.

To facilitate the discussion of these proposals in relation to the K'iche' mismatches, I repeat the structure of the K'iche' AP and active transitive verb in (48). We can immediately reject **Merchant's** proposal, since the heads in the verbal spine of active transitive and AP verbs in K'iche' are clearly not identical: The active transitive v selects for a DP internal argument (has a selectional [D] feature), and the AP v does not. Moreover, the active transitive Voice head licenses ergative case on the external argument (has an [ERG] feature), and the AP Voice head does not. Further representative examples of why complete syntactic identity cannot be a prerequisite for ellipsis can be found in **Potsdam 2007**, **Chung 2013**, **Rudin 2019** and **Ranero 2021**.

(48) a. *K'iche' AP*



b. *K'iche' active transitive*



Next, I address **Chung's** and **Rudin's** proposals in tandem, given that they are unable to accommodate the K'iche' data for similar reasons. Both proposals privilege the argument-introducing portion of the verbal spine, in essence arguing that this part of the structure must be identical in the antecedent and the ellipsis site (while higher portions of the structure may mismatch). **Chung's** proposal directly references the argument structure domain, while **Rudin's** includes it since the highest vP associated

¹⁴Note that **Merchant** never actually spells out the identity condition explicitly in this work; the above is an interpretation of his proposal found in **Chung 2013**.

with an event-introducing predicate properly contains all of the argument-introducing heads. However, as we have seen, the K'iche' data challenge the conclusion that syntactic identity in the argument structure domain is a prerequisite for ellipsis since the transitive and AP verb differ in whether they introduce an internal argument or not, as well as in whether ergative case is assigned or not. I refer the reader to [Rudin 2019](#) for further empirical arguments against the proposal in [Chung 2013](#) and to [Saab 2014](#) and [Ranero 2021](#) for data that clearly contradicts the formulation of the SIC as in [Rudin 2019](#).

Finally, [Ranero \(2021\)](#) argues that the SIC is formulated in terms of “featural non-distinctness”, meaning that it allows feature mismatches, but not feature clashes. In other words, the antecedent may contain features absent in the ellipsis site (or vice versa) so long as the same head in the antecedent and ellipsis site does not contain clashing features. For example, [Ranero](#) shows that certain voice mismatches are allowed under sluicing in the Mayan language Kaqchikel if they involve so-called Agent Focus (AF) voice in either the antecedent (49) or the ellipsis site (50). As discussed in section 2, AF is a construction found in many Mayan languages and used obligatorily when the transitive subject undergoes A'-extraction (in *wh*-questions or focus constructions, for example); see [Aissen 2017](#) for an overview. Agent focus can mismatch with both the active and the passive, as illustrated in (49)-(50).¹⁵ On the other hand, AP-active mismatches are disallowed in Kaqchikel sluicing, (51).¹⁶ These results are replicated for another Mayan language, Chuj, in [Ranero and Royer 2024](#).

- (49) A: Xa xe ri ma Juan x-Ø-loq'-O kotz'i'j.
 EMPH only DET CLF Juan PST-ABS3SG-buy-AF flower
 'Only Juan bought flowers.'

B: Kan qitzij? Ta-b'ij pe chwe achike kotz'i'j
 PRT truth IMP-say PRT to.me what flower
 <x-Ø-u-löq'>!
 PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-buy.ACT
 'Really? Tell me which flowers!'

- (50) A: Ri aq x-Ø-kam-is-äx ruma jun ixöq.
 DET pig PST-ABS3SG-die-CAUS-PASS RN a woman.
 'The pig was killed by a woman.'

B: Kan qitzij? Achike ixöq <x-Ø-kam-sa-n ri aq>?
 PRT truth which woman PST-ABS3SG-die-CAUS-AF DET pig
 'Really? Which woman (killed the pig)?'

¹⁵In (50), the verb in the ellipsis site must be in the agent focus form and not passive with P-stranding. P-stranding is impossible in Kaqchikel (unlike in K'iche'), see the discussion in [Ranero 2021:119-21](#).

¹⁶Active/passive and passive/active mismatches cannot be tested in Kaqchikel or K'iche' for independent reasons, see [Ranero 2021: section 2.5](#).

- (51) *Xta Juana n-Ø-k'ay-in pa k'ayib'äl wkami. Ta-wla achike
 CLF Juana NPST-ABS3SG-sell-AP on market now IMP-guess what
 <n-Ø-Ø-k'ay-ij>!
 NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-buy-ACT.TV
intended: 'Juana is selling (something) at the market now. Guess what!'

Ranero (2021) argues that mismatches involving AF are possible in Kaqchikel because its AF construction lacks a Voice projection altogether. By contrast, he analyzes active and AP verbs in Kaqchikel as bearing distinct values of Voice—namely ACTIVE and ANTIPASSIVE—with the result that AP-active mismatches under ellipsis involve a feature clash and are therefore ruled out. Although I adopt a revised analysis of the Kaqchikel AP in section 3.4, based on recent evidence from Burukina and Polinsky 2025, the crucial point remains unchanged: the AP and active transitive constructions in Kaqchikel differ in their feature composition in a way that yields a feature clash under ellipsis. I therefore set aside the details of the Kaqchikel analysis here and refer the reader to Ranero 2021 for the arguments underlying these conclusions. More generally, Ranero shows that a non-distinctness-based formulation of the SIC correctly predicts not only the Kaqchikel facts, but also a broader range of documented mismatch and non-mismatch patterns under ellipsis (see especially chapters 3 and 4).

The featural non-distinctness approach to the SIC straightforwardly accounts for the K'iche' data examined in this paper. The only difference between the active transitive and the AP verb is that the AP lacks the [D] and [ERG] features responsible for selecting the internal argument and licensing the external argument of the transitive, respectively. Since the lack of these features does not constitute a feature-clash, it is allowed under ellipsis. In the next section, I undertake a comparison of the K'iche' AP and its counterpart in the closely related language Kaqchikel. As we have seen, AP-active mismatches are disallowed in Kaqchikel. I show independent evidence that the AP in the two languages has a distinct underlying structure. In Kaqchikel, I follow Burukina and Polinsky's (2025) analysis of Kaqchikel APs and argue that it is necessary to posit distinct featural specifications for *v* on active transitive verbs and APs in order to account for their selectional restrictions. This distinct featural specification on *v* leads to a feature clash under ellipsis, accounting for why AP-active mismatches are disallowed in Kaqchikel.

3.4 AP: A comparison with Kaqchikel

As we have seen, AP-active mismatches are impossible in Kaqchikel sluicing (52). Compare this to the very similar (yet acceptable) K'iche' sentence in (53). In this section I lay out evidence (beyond ellipsis) that the AP has a different structure in the two languages, despite surface similarities.

- (52) *Xta Juana n-Ø-k'ay-in pa k'ayib'al wkami. Ta-wla achike
 CLF Juan NPST-ABS3SG-sell-AP on market now IMP-guess what
 <n-Ø-Ø-k'ay-ij>!
 PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-buy-ACT
intended: 'Juana is selling (something) at the market now. Guess what!'
- (53) Ri nan Juana k-Ø-k'ay-in pa k'ayib'al. Ch-a-ch'ak-a' jas
 DET CLF Juana NPST-ABS3SG-sell-AP on market IMP-ABS2SG-guess-IMP what
 uwach ri jastaq <k-Ø-u-k'ay-ij>!
 kind DET thing NPST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-sell-TV
'Doña Juana sells at the market. Guess what kind of thing <she sells>!'

Ranero (2021) argues that the structure of AP in Kaqchikel is as in (54a) and that the reason mismatches with the active are disallowed is because the Voice head has an AP feature, whereas in the active voice it is specified for active (54b), which leads to a feature clash in ellipsis contexts.¹⁷ Ranero does not specify the position of the sole argument in the AP construction.

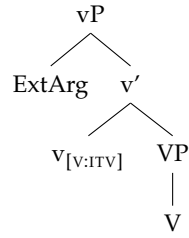
(54) *Ranero's analysis of the Kaqchikel AP and active transitive:*

- a. [... Voice_[AP] [... v_{trans} [... V]]]
- b. [... Voice_{[ACT][ERG]} [... v_{trans} [... V]]]

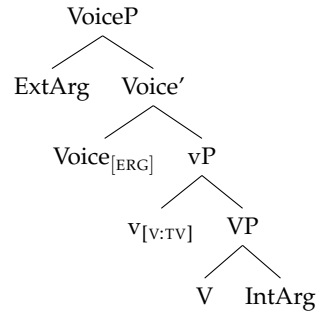
In more recent work, Burukina and Polinsky (2025) have taken the distinction between the active transitive and the AP in Kaqchikel to be in transitivity. Like the K'iche' AP discussed in this paper, the Kaqchikel AP is claimed to lack an internal argument. Beyond this, however, Burukina and Polinsky argue that transitive and intransitive external arguments are introduced in different structural positions. Specifically, they propose that the external arguments of intransitive verbs—including AP verbs—are introduced by v, whereas the external arguments of transitive verbs are introduced by Voice (55). Their proposal thus adopts a “small” analysis of intransitives, under which intransitive verbs do not project Voice.

¹⁷Ranero also posits an [EPP] feature on Voice_{ACT}, which attracts the absolutive argument in so-called high-Absolutive languages like Kaqchikel (and K'iche'), and drives the syntactic ergativity effects we observe in these languages. This detail is not crucial for my analysis here, so I omit it in the schematic representations and in the discussion that follows. If this feature is present in transitive constructions and absent in intransitive ones, the mismatch would be allowed under ellipsis in the same way as the presence/absence of an [ERG] or [D] feature. However, it is unclear to me how one would tell if the [EPP] feature on Voice is present or absent on intransitive verbs of any kind, since syntactic ergativity is not manifested in these constructions.

(55) a. *Kaqchikel AP*



b. *Kaqchikel active transitive*



Burukina and Polinsky use the shorthand ITV for intransitive verbs and TV for transitive verbs, which may initially suggest that they assume these to be heads with potentially clashing features. This would account for the impossibility of AP-active mismatches in Kaqchikel ellipsis. However, they explain that these are shorthand labels for *v* with and without a nominal selectional feature. For them, “intransitive” *v* is simply *v* that selects for a nominal argument (while the arguments of transitive verbs are introduced by *V* and *Voice*). In principle, then, there is no feature clash between the AP and active transitive verb on this account of their structure (see [Burukina and Polinsky 2025: Table 3](#)).

I return to the question of “small” intransitives immediately below, arguing that there is evidence the K’iche’ AP differs in this from the Kaqchikel AP (and from other, inherent intransitives in both languages). First, however, it is worth noting that, under standard assumptions about selection, Kaqchikel must distinguish between [*v*:TV] and [*v*:ITV]: (i) only [*v*:TV] can be selected by *Voice*, and (ii) only [*v*:TV] can select for a VP with an internal argument, as in (55). [Burukina and Polinsky](#) gesture toward a semantic explanation of (i), writing that [*v*:TV] “introduces a new thematic relation (Agent), but that head is defective in that it does not project a syntactic argument. This leaves the transitive *vP* unsaturated and the EA relation must be taken care of for the derivation to be interpretable at LF. Under our proposal, it is *Voice* that does the job.” ([Burukina and Polinsky 2025:20](#)). However, as I show below on the basis of causativization, K’iche’ AP is clearly a *Voice* phenomenon, in the sense that the intransitive AP verb nevertheless projects *Voice*. Since *Voice* is therefore not restricted to transitive verbs in K’iche’, there is no reason to regard such a restriction as a consequence of general semantic principles. Consequently, if the Kaqchikel AP is indeed a small structure lacking *Voice*, the inability of *Voice* to combine with it must be encoded in the syntax.

Moreover, we are left with (ii): why does *v*ITV select only VPs with internal arguments, while *v*ITV selects only VPs without them? This too appears to require c-selectional restrictions. In other words, *v*TV and *v*ITV must constitute distinct syntactic “flavors” of *v* in Kaqchikel, allowing them to (i) uniquely select different kinds of phrases and (ii) be uniquely selected by *Voice* or not, assuming the relevant

features on *v* are able to percolate to the *vP* level. If Kaqchikel indeed has two distinct *v* heads with distinct featural content (say, TV and ITV), this also explains the impossibility of AP-active mismatches under ellipsis on a featural non-distinctness approach to the SIC, cf. (55a)/(55b).

Let me now return to the structural differences between Kaqchikel and K'iche' APs by discussing patterns of causativization in the two languages. As illustrated with the pairs of verbs in (56)-(59), causativization is a productive way of transitivity intransitive verbs in K'iche' (see López Ixcoy 1997, Gluckman 2015, Marroquin Pelíz and Mateo Pedro 2021 for more examples). While causativization of intransitives is possible and productive in K'iche', active transitives and passives cannot be causativized (60). Importantly, AP cannot be causativized either (61). Therefore, with respect to causativization, K'iche' AP does not pattern with inherently intransitive verbs in the language, but rather with active transitives and passives, verb forms that are the prime candidates to contain Voice.

- | | | | | |
|------|----|--|----|---|
| (56) | a. | kam-ik
die-IV
'die' | b. | kam-sa-j
die-CAUS-TV
'kill' |
| (57) | a. | atin-ik
wash-IV
'wash (self)' | b. | atin-isa-j
wash-CAUS-TV
'wash (sb.)' |
| (58) | a. | b'in-ik
walk-IV
'walk' | b. | b'in-isa-j
walk-CAUS-TV
'walk (sb.), handle' |
| (59) | a. | kix-ik
shame-IV
'be ashamed' | b. | kix-sa-j
shame-CAUS-TV
'shame' |
| (60) | a. | *loq'-sa-j
buy-CAUS-TV
'make buy (sth.)' | b. | *tz'ib'-ax-sa-j
write-PASS-CAUS-TV
'make be written (by sb.)' |
| (61) | a. | *X-e-qa-k'ay-in-sa-j
PST-ABS3PL-ERG1PL-sell-AP-CAUS-TV
x-e-qa-loq'-on-sa-j
PST-ABS3PL-ERG1PL-buy-AP-CAUS-TV in market every day
'We made them sell/buy at the market every day.' | / | |
| | b. | *X-e-qa-tz'ib'-an-sa-j
PST-ABS3PL-ERG1PL-write-AP-CAUS-TV in A1PL-language | | pa k'ayb'al ronojel q'ij.
A1PL-ERG1PL-CAUS-TV in market every day
'We made them write in the market every day.' |

‘We made them write in our language.’

Following [Burukina and Polinsky 2025](#), I take the contrasts above to suggest that inherent intransitives in K’iche’ are small constructions (vPs) as in Kaqchikel, and that causativization in these languages is a vP phenomenon. That is, causativization in K’iche’ and Kaqchikel involves vP iteration: adding a vCAUS on top of another vP. Furthermore, while vP recursion is allowed, a vP cannot be merged on top of a VoiceP (hence, the restriction on causatives of transitives and passives). Moreover, the fact that K’iche’ AP cannot be causativized (61) suggests that it too involves the projection of Voice. If AP were a small vP construction, there should in principle be no issue with its causativization. If my analysis is on the right track and (i) vCAUS is a vP phenomenon while (ii) AP is a Voice phenomenon in K’iche’, we then expect K’iche’ causatives to be able to antipassivize. This is in fact what we observe (62).

(62) Context: Talking about duties of family members in child-rearing...

Le’ nan k-e’-atin-is-an, le’ ati’t
DET mother NPST-ABS3PL-wash-CAUS-AP DET grandma
k-e-war-tis-an.
NPST-ABS3PL-sleep-CAUS-AP
‘Mothers bathe, grandmothers put to sleep.’

If both causativization and antipassivization in Kaqchikel are vP phenomena ([Burukina and Polinsky 2025](#)), we potentially expect to see both causativized antipassives and antipassivized causatives in the language. While causativization is generally not as productive in Kaqchikel as it is in K’iche’, examples of both suffix orders can be found in published work, compare (63) from [Burukina and Polinsky 2025](#) (fn. 14) and (64) from [García Matzar and Rodríguez Guaján 1997](#) (p. 437).

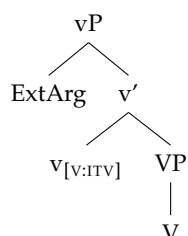
(63) La yawa’ x-Ø-u-chul-**un-isa-j** ri kik’.
DET patient PST-ABS3SG-ERG3SG-urinate-AP-CAUS-TV DET blood
‘The patient urinated over some blood.’

(64) X-e-saqar-**isa-n** chi Iximche’ ri ajq’ij-a’.
PST-B3PL-white-CAUS-AP in Iximche’ DET priest-PL
‘The Mayan priests woke up in Iximche’.’
lit. ‘The Mayan priests made white in Iximche’.’

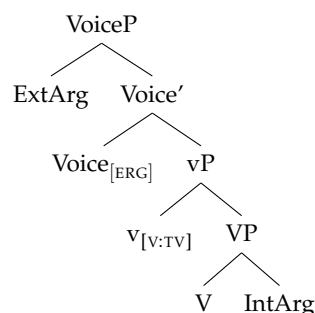
We therefore have independent evidence from causativization patterns that K’iche’ APs project Voice, while their Kaqchikel counterparts do not. As we have seen in (55), repeated here in (65), the Kaqchikel AP and active transitive verb differ (at least) in that they have different flavors of v (transitive versus intransitive). This assumption was needed to account for their selectional restrictions. In K’iche’, on the other hand,

no such provision was necessary. As seen in (41), repeated here in (66), the K'iche' AP and active transitive differ only in that the AP lacks the [D] and [ERG] features present on the active transitive verb.

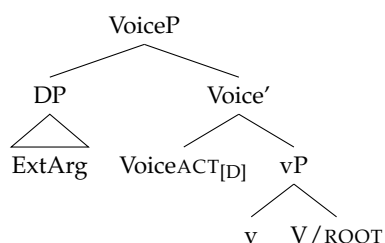
(65) a. *Kaqchikel* AP



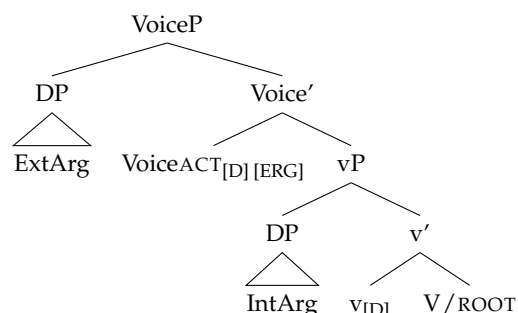
b. *Kaqchikel* active transitive



(66) a. *K'iche'* AP



b. *K'iche'* active transitive



Before I close this section, I would like to point out one more, perhaps less obvious conclusion of the work presented in this paper. Namely, if it is correct that K'iche' AP is essentially an active intransitive verb and that Kaqchikel AP has a small structure (while the passive voice may involve the manipulation of Voice features, see e.g., [Ranero 2021](#)), then there is no unified notion of “voice” in grammar (see [Wood and Tyler 2025](#) for related discussion). In other words, what we call *active*, *passive* and *antipassive* voice may involve distinct structures in different (even closely related) languages. If the surface expression of these structures is similar enough, it is likely that they have been subsumed under the same general labels. I also refer the reader to [Heaton's 2017](#) typological study of antipassives, where she makes this point for the active-antipassive alternation specifically. She shows that what is referred to as *antipassive* in the linguistics literature and in grammars is a cluster of traits, some of which may be absent in antipassives in individual languages, and some of which may be present in constructions that are not (referred to as) antipassive. This point is also pertinent if we look at voice systems of Austronesian languages, where the label “voice” disguises phenomena that are very distinct in nature than the argument-altering voices in more familiar languages (see [Erlewine, Levin, and Urk 2017](#) for an overview). For example, [Lennox, Chen, and Potsdam's \(in press\)](#) analysis

of voice-mismatches under ellipsis in Phillipine-type voice systems relies on the idea that “voice” in these languages is encoded as an Agree relation between a DP and a position in the high left periphery. That is, the relevant feature is outside the ellipsis site, even in sluicing (a similar analysis can also be found in [Ranero 2021](#): section 5.2.1). This is very different than the notion of voice we have seen in this paper and there seems to be little grounds for their theoretical unification.

4 Extensions

In this section, I discuss the implications of the work presented in this paper beyond the SIC. First, in section 4.1, I offer some comments on the purported unavailability of argument structure mismatches in ellipsis contexts. I argue that argument structure alternations can arise due to distinct underlying structures cross-linguistically; the mismatches are only unavailable when they involve feature-clashes. Then, in section 4.2, I offer some thoughts on the implications of the present work regarding theories of syntactic features. I show that the featural non-distinctness approach to the SIC, if true, argues quite forcefully for the inclusion of both privative and non-privative features in the syntax. Moreover, ellipsis may then serve as a detector of privative features, hence allow us to test hypotheses about the formal properties of syntactic feature systems.

4.1 *Argument structure alternations*

What we observed with the K’iche’ active transitive-AP mismatch examples is essentially an argument structure alternation (transitive-intransitive). Argument structure alternations have been argued to be impossible under ellipsis ([Levin 1982](#), [Chung, Ladusaw, and McCloskey 1995](#), [Merchant 2001, 2013](#), [Chung 2013](#), [Rudin 2019](#)). For example, [Merchant \(2013\)](#) proposes to subsume the ban on active-passive mismatches in English clausal ellipsis (67) to a more general prohibition on argument structure mismatches in predicate ellipsis (68).

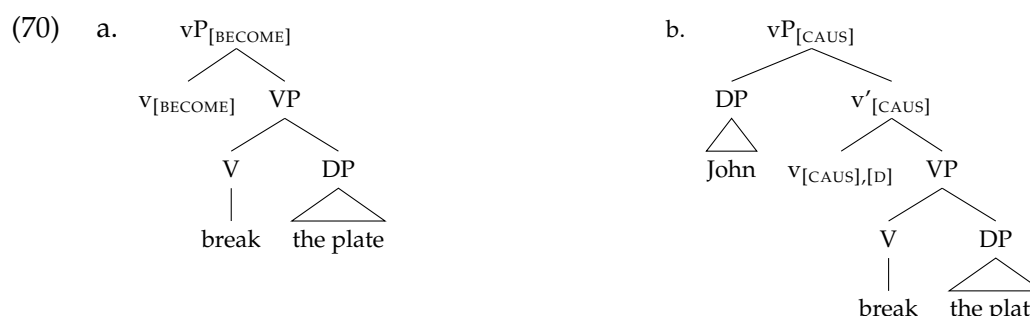
- (67) a. *Joe was murdered, but we don’t know who. ([Merchant 2013](#): 81)
- b. *Someone murdered Joe, but we don’t know who by.
- (68) a. This can freeze. Please freeze this. ([Merchant 2013](#):96)
- b. This can freeze. *Please do. ([Merchant 2013](#):97, from [Johnson 2004](#):7)

Now, the illicitness of active-passive mismatches such as (67) can be accounted for under the featural non-distinctness approach to the SIC, on the standard assumption that verbs in the active and passive voice have distinct feature values of the Voice head—ACT and PASS (e.g., [Merchant 2013](#), [Ranero 2021](#)). Evidence that the value of the Voice head is responsible for the unacceptability of (67) comes from the fact that

active-passive mismatches are allowed in English if the ellipsis targets a portion of the structure smaller than Voice, for example vP (69); see also [Stockwell 2024](#) for a recent discussion. Assuming the SIC is stated in terms of featural non-distinctness, the contrasting acceptability of active-passive mismatches in TP and vP ellipsis is fully expected if active and passive are distinct features on Voice, but not if only one member of {active, passive} were featurally marked (for example, if passive were marked with a feature PASS on Voice, while the active simply lacked that feature).

- (69) This problem was to have been looked into, but obviously nobody did.
([Merchant 2013](#): 90)

The apparent issue for a featural non-distinctness approach is (68): If mismatches are allowed in the K'iche' antipassive-active context, understood now as a transitivity alternation, then why is the mismatch with the transitivity alternation in (68) impossible? For starters, the inchoative-causative alternation in (68) is not exactly parallel to the alternation we saw in K'iche', despite the fact that we could characterize both as transitivity alternations. While I showed that the K'iche' AP/active transitive mismatch revolves around the syntactic presence or absence of the internal argument, recent analyses of the inchoative-causative alternation (at least in familiar languages) do not analyze it as involving merely the presence/absence of the external argument, but instead as involving two quite distinct structures. Specifically, in recent constructionist analyses, certain argument structure alternations have been argued to be encoded via different "flavors" of v (i.e., the fact that v can have a number of different feature specifications): DO, CAUS, and BECOME. These flavors of v have distinct distributional patterns and interpretations at the interfaces ([Marantz 1997](#), [Harley 1999](#), [2005](#) [2008](#), [Folli and Harley 2005](#), [2007](#)). [Folli and Harley \(2005\)](#) suggest that the inchoative-causative alternation in English is due to the ability of certain roots/Vs to combine equally well with v[CAUS] and v[BECOME]. Each flavor of v is associated with a distinct structural configuration; (70a) is an inchoative construction and (70b) a causative construction.¹⁸



¹⁸I use the notation from [Folli and Harley 2005](#), [2007](#); V is equivalent to $\sqrt{}$. Moreover, nothing would change if we assumed the external argument of causatives is introduced by Voice and not vCAUS: Voice would be specified to select vCAUS but not vBECOME.

If inchoative and causative verbs have the structures given in (70), we can immediately see why such mismatches are disallowed under ellipsis: An inchoative-causative mismatch involves a feature clash (due to the features CAUS vs. BECOME on *v*). Such constructions are then correctly predicted to be unable to mismatch under ellipsis on a featural non-distinctness approach to the SIC. This is only the case, however, if the above analysis of the inchoative-causative alternation is justifiable and the same level of empirical coverage cannot be achieved under the simpler analysis that revolves around the presence/absence of the external argument. Indeed, distinct featural specification on *v* is necessary in driving the inchoative-causative alternation because only certain roots/*V*s can be inserted under *v*BECOME, accounting for why there is no causative version of *arrive* or *descend*, for example. The same is true for *v*CAUS. An approach that simply posits the presence or absence of [D] on *v* or Voice (selecting the external argument) to drive the alternation would not be able to account for this “pickiness” and would massively overgenerate (see [Folli and Harley 2005](#) for a detailed discussion of this issue). With the alternative hypothesis discarded, we can then understand that inchoative-causative mismatches are disallowed under ellipsis because they involve a feature mismatch.

It is also important to note that the analysis of K’iche’ antipassive-active mismatches, where the only distinction is in the presence/absence of the internal argument, does not overgenerate. This is because all transitive verbs have antipassive counterparts ([Sis Iboy and López Ixcoy 2007](#): 79). Hence, the syntactic distinction between the two can simply be encoded via the presence/absence of [D] and [ERG] features on *v* and Voice. If these features are present, the result is an active transitive form of the verb. If they are absent, the result is the AP. This does not, of course, mean that all fully productive alternations can be captured with privative features. Kaqchikel’s AP-active alternation is a case in point. While all transitive verbs in Kaqchikel have AP counterparts as well, we have seen that their underlying structure is quite different. Capturing the distributional properties of the Kaqchikel AP (independently of ellipsis) requires one to postulate features that clash with features of active transitives (recall [TR] and [ITR] on *v*).

A point similar to the one made for “transitivity alternations” can be made about reflexives of the Romance and Slavic variety. So-called *se*-reflexives in these languages, exemplified in (71) for Italian and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS), pattern in a number of ways with intransitive verbs, a discovery that goes back to [Kayne 1975](#). On the other hand, their counterparts with the full anaphoric DP ‘self’ (72) behave like regular transitives.

- (71) a. **Si** pettina.
 REFL.CL.3 combs
 ‘She combs herself.’

- b. Marija **se** češlja.
 Mary REFL.CL.3 combs
 ‘Mary combs herself.’
- (72) a. Pettina **sé stessa**.
 combs herself
 ‘She combs herself.’
- b. Marija češlja **seb-e**.
 Mary combs self.3-ACC
 ‘Mary combs herself.’

Hence, if only SE-reflexives in these languages constitute “true” reflexive constructions, analyzed as instantiating a reflexive flavor of Voice, VoiceREFL (Bruening 2006, Labelle 2008, Déchaine and Wiltschko 2017, a.o.), we predict they should not be able to mismatch with active transitive verbs under ellipsis. Moreover, if full DP reflexives are regular internal arguments which appear in active transitive constructions, we predict that they should be able to be antecedents for active transitive verbs under ellipsis. This prediction is borne out, as evidenced in (73) for Italian and in (74) for BCS.

- (73) a. Pettina **sé stessa** e non so chi altro <pettina>.
 combs herself and NEG know who else combs
 ‘She combs herself and I don’t know who else.’
- b. ***Si** pettina e non so chi altro <pettina>.
 REFL.CL.3 combs and NEG know who else combs
intended: ‘She combs herself and I don’t know who else’
- (74) a. Marija češlja **seb-e**, ali ne znam koga još <Marija češlja>.
 Mary combs self.3-ACC but NEG know who else Mary combs
 ‘Mary combs herself, but I don’t know who else.’
- b. *Marija **se** češlja, ali ne znam koga još <Marija češlja>.
 Mary REFL.CL.3 combs but NEG know who else Mary combs
intended: ‘Mary combs herself, but I don’t know who else.’

It therefore seems that mismatches, including argument structure mismatches, are allowed in ellipsis contexts so long as they do not involve feature clashes. Finally, argument-alternations, like voice alternations, can have quite different underlying structures in different languages.

4.2 Theories of features

The SIC argued for here has consequences for theories of syntactic features. While some researchers have argued that a syntax with only privative features should be the

default assumption, others have argued that both privative and non-privative features are necessary (see [Cowper and Hall 2014](#) for discussion). Privative features can only be present or absent, whereas non-privative features involve structured oppositions, either as binary values (e.g., [+/-F]) or as values of a higher-order feature, as in multivalued representations of the form [attribute: value]. Selectional features (e.g., [D]) and case features (e.g., [ERG]) are often analyzed as privative.

If the SIC requires featural non-distinctness, it provides a new argument against theories that employ only privative features. Under a privative feature system, a mismatch between an active and a passive clause could be represented as [Act] versus [Pass]. Since neither feature is shared, there is no clash: each structure simply contains a feature that the other lacks. Such a mismatch would therefore be predicted to satisfy the SIC and be acceptable under ellipsis. By contrast, if voice is represented as a binary [+/-Act] or with a multivalued feature, with values such as [Voice: Act] and [Voice: Pass], the two structures contain incompatible values of the same feature and therefore clash. The SIC predicts such mismatches to be illicit. More generally, if all syntactic features were privative, and given the SIC based on featural non-distinctness, we would not expect any identity violations if all the roots in the derivation were identical, contrary to fact.

The argument against exclusively privative feature systems is not entirely novel. For example, [Harbour \(2011\)](#) argues that privative features are insufficient to capture the complexity of number systems such as that of Kiowa. Likewise, [Adger and Svenonius \(2011:7\)](#) discuss limitations of privative representations arising from their inability to define the natural classes required in theories of locality and (defective) intervention. However, if the version of the SIC defended here is correct, it provides positive evidence that both privative and non-privative features are necessary in the syntax. Mismatches involving the presence versus absence of a privative feature are tolerated, whereas mismatches involving incompatible values of the same feature are not. In principle, ellipsis may also help determine which kinds of non-privative representations are required. Binary ([+/-]) features necessarily involve two values, whereas multivalued features permit larger paradigms. Consequently, if future research were to identify a domain in which three or more feature values consistently pattern as mutually incompatible under ellipsis, this would constitute evidence for multivalued representations. More generally, if the proposal advanced here is correct, ellipsis may provide a valuable diagnostic for investigating the formal architecture of syntactic feature systems.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I showed that the Mayan language K'iche' allows apparent voice mismatches (antipassive-active) in clausal ellipsis contexts. I then that the antipassive

(AP) verb form differs from the active transitive not in Voice specification, but in that it completely lacks the internal argument. I proposed that the ellipsis facts can be accounted for under an approach to syntactic identity in ellipsis which requires featural non-distinctness, but not under approaches that require strict featural identity.

More broadly, I argued that ellipsis can provide a window into the feature composition of syntactic structure. The comparison between K'iche' and the closely related language Kaqchikel showed that constructions which appear superficially similar may differ substantially in their underlying representation. Although both languages possess an AP construction, only the K'iche' AP participates in the relevant mismatch under ellipsis, suggesting a difference in feature composition that I showed is reflected in their argument structure and morphosyntactic behavior. More generally, the paper showed that labels such as *voice* and *argument structure alternation* do not necessarily correspond to uniform syntactic configurations across languages. The availability of mismatches under ellipsis therefore provides a useful source of evidence for distinguishing between superficially similar structures and uncovering differences in their underlying feature composition.

Finally, I argued that the SIC defended in this paper has direct consequences for our understanding of syntactic features and their organization into featural systems. Specifically, both privative and non-privative features are necessary in the syntax, and research on feature mismatches under ellipsis may prove valuable in determining whether the non-privative features are equipollent or multivalued (or both).

References

- Adger, David, and Peter Svenonius. 2011. Features in Minimalist syntax. In Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Minimalism, ed. C. Boeckx, 27–51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aissen, Judith. 2011. On the syntax of agent focus in K'ichee'. Proceedings of FAMLi 1:1–16.
- Aissen, Judith. 2017. Correlates of ergativity in Mayan. In Oxford Handbook of Ergativity, ed. J. Coon, D. Massam, and L. Travis. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ALMG. 2010. K'iche' Choltzij: Vocabulario K'iche'. Guatemala: Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala.
- Bešlin, Maša. 2023a. Exceptives questionnaire K'iche'. Variation in Exceptive Structures. Zenodo. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.8059591](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8059591).
- Bešlin, Maša. 2023b. Reanalyzing K'iche' as a Tensed Language. In Proceedings of the Workshop on American Indigenous Languages (WAIL 25), ed. J. A. G. Douglas-Tavani and G. Belmar Viernes. UC Santa Barbara Linguistics Department.
- Bruening, Benjamin. 2006. The morphosyntax and semantics of verbal reciprocals. Manuscript, University of Delaware.
- Burukina, Irina, and Maria Polinsky. 2025. The antipassive and verbal projections. Journal of Linguistics 1–34.
- Can Pixabaj, Telma. 2004. La topicalización en K'ichee': Una perspectiva discursiva. Bachelor's thesis, Universidad Rafael Landívar, Guatemala.
- Can Pixabaj, Telma, and Nora England. 2011. Nominal topic and focus in k'ichee'. In Representing language: Essays in honor of judith aissen, ed. R. Guitérrez-Bravo and & E. Potsdam L. Mikkelsen, 15–30. Santa Cruz, CA: Booksurge.
- Can Pixabaj, Telma Angelina. 2015. Complement and purpose clauses in K'iche'. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1965. Aspects of the theory of syntax. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1995. The Minimalist Program. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chung, Sandra. 2006. Sluicing and the lexicon: The point of no return. In Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society 31, ed. R. T. Cover and Y. Kim, 73–91. Berkeley: UC Berkeley, Berkeley Linguistic Society.
- Chung, Sandra. 2013. Syntactic identity in sluicing: How much and why. Linguistic Inquiry 44:1–44.
- Chung, Sandra, William A Ladusaw, and James McCloskey. 1995. Sluicing and logical form. Natural Language Semantics 3:239–282.
- Coon, Jessica. 2016. Mayan morphosyntax. Language and Linguistics Compass 10:515–550.

- Coon, Jessica, Nico Baier, and Theodore Levin. 2021. Mayan agent focus and the ergative extraction constraint: Facts and fictions revisited. Language 97:269–332.
- Coon, Jessica, Pedro Mateo Pedro, and Omer Preminger. 2014. The role of case in A-bar extraction asymmetries: Evidence from Mayan. Linguistic Variation 14:179–242.
- Cowper, Elizabeth, and Daniel Currie Hall. 2014. Reductio ad discrimen: Where features come from. Nordlyd 41:145–164.
- Dayley, Jon P. 1981. Voice and ergativity in Mayan languages. Journal of Mayan Linguistics 2:3–82.
- Deal, Amy Rose, and Justin Royer. 2025. Mayan animacy hierarchy effects and the dynamics of Agree. Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 43:1607–1663.
- Déchaine, Rose-Marie, and Martina Wiltschko. 2017. A formal typology of reflexives. Studia Linguistica 71:60–106.
- England, Nora C. 2011. Plurality agreement in some Eastern Mayan languages. International Journal of American Linguistics 77:397–412.
- Erlewine, Michael Yoshitaka, Theodore Levin, and Coppe van Urk. 2017. Ergativity and Austronesian-type voice systems. In Oxford handbook of ergativity, ed. J. Coon, D. Massam, and L. D. Travis, 373–396. Oxford: OUP.
- Folli, Raffaella, and Heidi Harley. 2005. Consuming results in Italian & English: Flavors of v. In Aspectual inquiries, ed. P. Kempchinsky and R. Slabakova, 95–120. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Folli, Raffaella, and Heidi Harley. 2007. Causation, obligation, and argument structure: On the nature of little v. Linguistic Inquiry 38:197–238.
- Fried, Marisa, Paulina Lyskawa, and Rodrigo Ranero. 2021. Agreement in K'iche'(Mayan): Reflections on microvariation and acquisition. Proceedings of the 44th Penn Linguistics Conference .
- García Matzar, Pedro, and José Obispo Rodríguez Guaján. 1997. Rukemik ri Kaqchikel Chi': Gramática Kaqchikel. Guatemala City: Cholsamaj.
- Gluckman, John. 2015. Some causative alternations in K'iche', and a unified syntactic derivation. In Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, volume 41, 155–73.
- Gribanova, Vera. 2013. Verb-stranding verb phrase ellipsis and the structure of the Russian verbal complex. Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 31:91–136.
- Gribanova, Vera. 2017. Head movement, ellipsis, and identity. Ms., Stanford University .
- Grinevald, Colette, and Marc Peake. 2012. Ergativity and voice in Mayan languages: A functional-typological approach. In Ergativity, valency and voice, ed. G. Authier and K. Haude, 15–50. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Halpert, Claire. 2012. Argument licensing and agreement in Zulu. Doctoral Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

- Hankamer, Jorge. 1979. Deletion in coordinate structures. New York: Garland.
- Harbour, Daniel. 2011. Valence and atomic number. Linguistic Inquiry 42:561–594.
- Harley, Heidi. 1999. Denominal verbs and aktionsart. In Papers from the Penn/MIT Roundtable on the Lexicon, ed. L. Pylkkänen, A. van Hout, and H. Harley, 73–85. Cambridge, MA: Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, MITWPL.
- Harley, Heidi. 2005. How do verbs get their names? Denominal verbs, manner incorporation and the ontology of verb roots in English. In The syntax of aspect, ed. N. Erteschik-Shir and T. Rapoport, 42–64. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harley, Heidi. 2008. On the causative construction. In Handbook of Japanese linguistics, ed. S. Miyagawa and M. Saito, 20–53. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hartmann, Katharina. 2000. Right node raising and gapping. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Heaton, Raina. 2017. A typology of antipassives, with special reference to Mayan. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.
- Henderson, Robert. 2012. Morphological alternations at the intonational phrase edge: The case of K'ichee'. Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 30:741–787.
- Hornstein, Norbert. 2024. The Merge Hypothesis: A Theory of Aspects of Syntax. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, Kyle. 2004. How to be quiet. In Proceedings from the 40th Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, ed. N. Adams, A. Cooper, F. Parrill, and T. Wier, 1–20. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Johnson, Kyle. 2009. Gapping is not (VP-) ellipsis. Linguistic Inquiry 40:289–328.
- Johnson, Kyle. 2017. Gapping. In The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Syntax (Second Edition), ed. M. Everaert and H. van Riemsdijk. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Jung, Wonsuk. 2022. Phasehood and embedded gapping in Spanish. Glossa: a journal of general linguistics 7.
- Kaufman, Terrence. 1990. Algunos rasgos estructurales de los idiomas mayances con referencia especial al K'iche'. In Lecturas sobre la lingüística maya, ed. N. England and S. Elliot, 59–114. Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica Antigua, Guatemala.
- Kayne, Richard S. 1975. French syntax: The transformational cycle. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Labelle, Marie. 2008. The French reflexive and reciprocal se. Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 26:833–876.
- Larsen, Thomas Walter. 1988. Manifestations of ergativity in Quiché grammar. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

- Lennox, Luané, Victoria Chen, and Eric Potsdam. in press. The Javanese free exceptive and its implications for ellipsis constraints in Austronesian. In Proceedings of AFLA 30.
- Levin, Beth, and Malka Rappaport Hovav. 1995. Unaccusativity: At the Syntax-Lexical Semantics Interface. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
- Levin, Lori S. 1982. Sluicing: A lexical interpretation procedure. In The mental representation of grammatical relations, ed. J. Bresnan, 590–654. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lipták, Anikó. 2022. Sluicing. In Syntax of Hungarian: Coordination and ellipsis, ed. Z. Bánréti, 139–154. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- López Ixcoy, Candelaria Dominga. 1997. Ri Ukemiik ri K'ichee' Chii': Gramática K'ichee'. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- Lyskawa, Paulina, and Rodrigo Ranero. 2022. Optional agreement as successful/failed Agree: Evidence from Santiago Tz'utujil (Mayan). Linguistic Variation 22:209–267.
- Marantz, Alec. 1997. No escape from syntax: Don't try morphological analysis in the privacy of your own lexicon. In University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics 4 (2), ed. Alexis Dimitriadis, Laura Siegel, Clarissa Surek-Clark, , and Alexander Williams, 201–225. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, PWPL.
- Marroquin Pelíz, Mario, and Pedro Mateo Pedro. 2021. K'iche' Tijonik Keb' K'at: Curso de Idioma K'iche'. Guatemala: Proyecto de Enseñanza de Idiomas Indígenas.
- Merchant, Jason. 2001. The syntax of silence: Sluicing, islands, and the theory of ellipsis. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merchant, Jason. 2013. Voice and ellipsis. Linguistic Inquiry 44:77–108.
- Mittwoch, Anita. 1982. On the difference between eating and eating something: Activities versus accomplishments. Linguistic Inquiry 113–122.
- Mondloch, James Lorin. 1981. Voice in Quiche-Maya. Doctoral Dissertation, State University of New York at Albany.
- Neijt, Anneke. 1979. Gapping: A Contribution to Sentence Grammar. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Patal Majtzul, Filiberto, Lolmay Pedro García Matzar, and Carmelina Ixchel Espantzay Serech. 2000. Rujunamaxik Ri Kaqchikel Chi': Variación Dialectal En Kaqchikel. Guatemala: Cholsamaj.
- Pérez-Jiménez, Isabel, and Norberto Moreno-Quibén. 2012. On the syntax of exceptions. Evidence from Spanish. Lingua 122:582–607.

- Potsdam, Eric. 2007. Malagasy sluicing and its consequences for the identity requirement on ellipsis. Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 25:577–613.
- Potsdam, Eric, and Maria Polinsky. 2019. Clausal and phrasal exceptives. In Conference presentation at GLOW 42.
- Ranero, Rodrigo. 2021. Identity conditions on ellipsis. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland.
- Ranero, Rodrigo, and Justin Royer. 2024. Deep and Surface Anaphora: A Mayan Reappraisal. In Proceedings of NELS 54, 127–136.
- Rizzi, Luigi. 1986. Null objects in Italian and the theory of pro. Linguistic Inquiry 17:501–557.
- Ross, John Robert. 1967. Constraints on variables in syntax. Doctoral Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Ross, John Robert. 1969. Guess who? In Papers from the Fifth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society, ed. R. I. Binnick, A. Davison, G. M. Green, and J. L. Morgan, 252–286. Chicago: UChicago, Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Ross, John Robert. 1970. Gapping and the order of constituents. In Progress in Linguistics, ed. M. Bierwisch and K. Heidolph, 249–259. The Hague: Mouton.
- Royer, Justin. 2022. Prosody as syntactic evidence: The view from Mayan. Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 40:239–284.
- Royer, Justin, and Jessica Coon. 2025. Correlates of object raising in Mayan. Language and Linguistics Compass 19:e70013.
- Rudin, Deniz. 2019. Head-based syntactic identity in sluicing. Linguistic Inquiry 50:253–283.
- Saab, Andrés. 2014. Ineffable narratives in Spanish. Another case of overgeneration by e-GIVENness. Probus 28:367–389.
- Saab, Andrés. 2022. Grammatical silences from syntax to morphology: A model for the timing of ellipsis. In The Derivational Timing of Ellipsis, ed. G. Güneş and A. Lipták, 170–224. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sis Iboy, María Juliana, and Candelaria Dominga López Ixcoy. 2007. Utuxaniik Tzij ri K'ichee' Ch'ab'al: Derivación de Palabras en K'ichee'. Guatemala: Editorial Cholsamaj.
- Soltan, Usama. 2016. On the syntax of exceptive constructions in Egyptian Arabic. In Perspectives on Arabic Linguistics XXVII, ed. S. Davis and U. Soltan, 35–57. John Benjamins.
- Stockwell, Richard. 2024. Ellipsis, contradiction and voice mismatch. Glossa: a journal of general linguistics 8:1–21.
- Stockwell, Richard, and Deborah JM Wong. 2020. Sprouting and the structure of except-phrases. In Proceedings of NELS 50, 169–183.

- Wilder, Chris. 1997. Some properties of ellipsis in coordination. In Studies on Universal Grammar and Typological Variation, ed. A. Alexiadou and T. A. Hall, 59–107. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Williams, Alexander. 2015. Arguments in Syntax and Semantics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, Edwin. 1980. Predication. Linguistic Inquiry 11:203–238.
- Williams, Edwin. 1997. Blocking and anaphora. Linguistic Inquiry 28:577–628.
- Wood, Jim, and Matthew Tyler. 2025. Voice. In The Cambridge Handbook of Comparative Syntax, ed. S. Barbiers, N. Corver, and M. Polinsky, 500–536. Cambridge: CUP.