VERB BASE ELLIPSIS IN INUKTITUT
CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

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1. Introduction. The Eskimo languages are well known for their extreme degree of polysynthesis and concomitant complex word structures. The canonical structure of nouns and verbs in these languages has what is regarded as a basic frame consisting of two essential components: a base, which constitutes the lexical core of the word, and an inflectional ending. Optional postbases serving a variety of grammatical functions appear between the base and the inflectional ending.

This paper presents empirical data from Inuktitut, the language of the Inuit of arctic Quebec, documenting the conversational use of elliptical verb structures that lack the base component. These elliptical structures consist only of postbases and endings, providing striking counterexamples to the standard linguistic view of word formation in Eskimo languages. At the same time, the conversational speech data presented here reflect typical daily communicative interaction in Inuktitut in present-day arctic Quebec communities. While our data primarily reflect communication between caretakers and children, verb base ellipsis is found in adult conversation as well.

An overview of the structure of Inuktitut is given in 2. Canonical word structure is described in 2.1, and elliptical verb structure is introduced in 2.2. Details regarding the subjects, data collection, and coding for this study are given in 3. The structural and discourse distributions of elliptical verb constructions are illustrated and discussed in 4. Our findings are summarized in 5 and directions for future research are suggested.

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suffixed, head-marking language with a basic SOV word order, although lexical arguments are typically omitted in everyday speech. Inuittitut exhibits an ergative case-marking pattern, with the absolutive singular as the unmarked case. Inuittitut also has a rich system of both nominal case-marking inflections and verbal cross-referencing inflections, in which persons (first, second, third coreferent and third disjoint) and three numbers (singular, dual, plural) are normally differentiated.

2.1. Canonical word structure. The minimal structure of nouns and verbs in Eskimo languages canonically consists of a base followed by an inflectional ending. Optional postbases often appear between the base and the ending. Woodbury (1981:104) introduced the formula shown in (1) to characterize word formation in Central Alaskan Yupik. This formula was applied to Siberian Yupik Eskimo by de Reuse (1994:24), who noted that it was representative of word structure in all Eskimo languages.

\[
\text{BASE} + \text{POSTBASE}_{0,n} + \text{ENDING} + \text{ENCLITICS}_{0,m}
\]

Following the terminological definitions in Woodbury (1981) and de Reuse (1994), a BASE is a unit of one or more morphemes that constitutes the "lexical core" of the word. POSTBASES are (sometimes polymorphic) suffixes that may function variously as adjectives, adverbs, nominalizers, verbalizers, markers of modal, temporal, and aspectual relations, and the like. ENDINGS are word-final inflectional suffixes that may be morphologically simple or complex. Verb endings encode mood, person, and number of the subject, and of the object as well in the case of transitive verbs. ENCLITICS are suffixes that may attach to any word to form a phonological unit, but they function syntactically as particles.

The word components identified in (1) are illustrated in (2) and (3) below. In (2), qa’ı ‘come’ (which has the meaning ‘give’ in transitive form, as in this case) is the base; -laaq is a postbase that functions as a politeness marker in this utterance; -guk is the inflectional verb ending in the imperative mood, second-person singular subject, third-person singular object; and =li is an enclitic that translates variously as ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘what about’, or ‘as for’, depending on context and prosodic contour.

\[
\text{(2) Qaijaurulli.} \quad qai-laaq-guk=li
\]

\[
\text{come-POL-FML.2S.3S.O=and}
\]

‘And give it [to me]’.

Example (3), from Dorais (1988), illustrates some of the more complex derivational morphology found in Eskimo word formation, such as the verbalization of a nominal stem.

\[
\text{(3) Illujuaraalnaunualuirisamanginomaitaq.} \quad illu-juuaq-aluk-mut-uq-laaq-sima-ngiiq-gama=li=itaauq
\]

\[
\text{house-BIG-EMPH-ALL.SG-GO-PAST-PERF-NEG-CTQ.1S.S=but=also}
\]

‘But also, because I never went to the really big house’. (Dorais 1988:8)

(2) and (3) above illustrate canonical word formation in Inuittitut and conform to the structure formulated in (1), and thus to the typical pattern in all Eskimo languages. The data we present, however, demonstrate that under certain structural and discourse conditions, verb structures that are incomplete with respect to the formula in (1) (i.e., exceptions to canonical Eskimo word formation) are robust phenomena in the everyday communicative interaction of Inuittitut speakers.

2.2. Elliptical verb structure. Verbs with no base component appear in a variety of structural and discourse configurations. Elliptical constructions are often used in contiguous utterance pairs, such as a request and elliptical response or a question and elliptical answer, but they are not limited by contiguity or the presence of a linguistic antecedent, as demonstrated below (and discussed further in 4.3). When no linguistic antecedent is present, the elided material is recoverable from the situational context. The elided material may be either a base or an expanded BASE, that is, a base followed by one or more postbases. The overt structure may consist of one or more

indicative; INT = interrogative; INT\&NEG = negative interrogative; PAR = participial (functionally equivalent to indicative in Tarantuq). Verbal inflection (e.g., PAR.3sS): 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person (disjoint); 4 = fourth person (third-person coreferent); s = singular; d = dual; p = plural; x = any number; S = subject; O = object. Nominal inflection (e.g., ABS:SG): s = singular; p = plural. Possessed nominal inflection (e.g., BRO.3Ssg): 1 = first-person possessor; 2 = second-person possessor; 3 = third-person possessor; s = singular possessor; sp = singular possessum. Postbases: ATP = antipassive; CAUS = causative; DIST.FUT = distant future; EMPH = emphatic; ING = progressive; NEAR.FUT = near future; NEG = negation; NZ = nominalizer; PASS = passive; PAST = past; PERF = perfect; POL = politeness (preceding imperative inflection); PRP = prospective; RCT.PAST = recent past; TERN = terminative; TODAY.FUT = same-day future. Elided components: 2BASE = zero base; ZEND = zero ending.
postbases with a variety of functions (detailed in 4.1), followed by an
inflectional ending; in some cases, the structure has no postbases and con-
stitutes of a verb ending only (see 4.1.5). Elliptical verb structures and some
typical contexts in which they occur are illustrated below.

The discourse fragment in (4) illustrates a request and response exchange
between Elijah and his mother. In this exchange, the response utterance
lacks an overt verb base. In (4a), Elijah tells his mother that he wants to
have some soup. Elijah's mother responds that he will have some later, with
the elliptical construction in (4b). Her response lacks an overt base, in
this case the derived base qajurtuq- 'have soup (literally, soup-consume)', from
Elijah's preceding utterance, consisting of the noun qajutuq- 'soup' followed
by the verbalizing suffix -tuq- 'consume'. The full form corresponding to the
elliptical utterance in (4b) is given in (4c) for comparison.5

(4a) Anaana qajurturumajunga.
    anaana  qajuq-tuq-guma-junga
    mother  soup-consume-want-PAR.1sS

'Mother, I want to have soup'.

(4b) Nialirquit siaru.
    Ø-niaq-liq-vuuit siaru
    ZBASE-TODAY.FUT-ING-IND.2sS  later

'You will [have soup] later today'.

(4c) Qajurtunialirquit siaru.
    qajuq-tuq-niaq-liq-vuuit siaru
    soup-consume-TODAY.FUT-ING-IND.2sS  later

'You will have soup later today'.

An instance of an elliptical verb construction with no linguistic anteced-
ent is illustrated in (5), where Paul's father is playing a video game with his
sons. He uses the elliptical construction in (5), consisting of the politeness
postbase -laaq- followed by an imperative verb ending and an enclitic, to
express his desire for a turn. There is no linguistic antecedent for the elided
base, but the meaning is clear in context. This is a typical way to express
turn-taking in Inuktitut.

(5) Laurlangali.
    Ø-laaq-langa=li
    ZBASE-POL-IMP 1sS=and

'My turn' (lit., 'Please let me').

The exchange in (6) illustrates an elliptical verb construction in which the
speaker produces a reduced variation of his own preceding utterance. Here,
Paul has been slow to eat his lunch, and in (6a) his father admonishes him
by saying that if he does not eat, he will not grow up to be big. Paul insists,
in (6b), that he will grow up to be big, and his father responds with the
elliptical construction in (6c), in which the derived base angijjuu- 'be big',
present in both (6a) and (6b), is omitted from the first verbal word.

(6a) Angijulaaravit niriliirit atii.
    angi-juq-u-laaq-gavit
    be.big-NZ-be-DIST.FUT-CTG.2sS
    eat-POL-IMP.2sS
    initiaite

'Come on, eat now so you will be big'.

(6b) Angijulaarama.
    angi-juq-u-laaq-gama
    be.big-NZ-be-DIST.FUT-CTG.1sS

'I will be big'.

(6c) Laagunnairavit nirigajinuginavit.
    Ø-лаaq-gumnaq-gavit
    ZBASE-DIST.FUT-no.longer-CTG.2sS
    eat-can-NEG-CTG.2sS

'You will no longer [be big] because you cannot eat'.

Noncanonical verb structure in Inuktitut has been noted previously, but it
has not been described or investigated in detail. Dorais (1988:10) noted that
a verb base can sometimes be omitted in colloquial speech, resulting in a
word that consists of derivational and inflectional suffixes, such as jjujurtuq
'looks like'. He also (1993:60) mentioned the omission of a verb base in the
Nunavik dialect when "its presence is not deemed essential," giving the
examples suungjunga 'I am in a habit of' and jjaanngittuq 'it does not seem
so'. Fortescue noted the phenomenon in a personal communication reported
in Allen (1996:27), stating that in Tarramit and other Eastern Canadian
dialects of Inuktitut, certain postbases (those known as affixal verbs, which
for the most part correspond to the modal postbases discussed in 4.1.2 be-
low) may occur with a "zero root" in colloquial speech, while other Eskimo
languages require the use of the empty root pi.-6

Dorais (1993:60) noted the tendency for verb endings to be dropped after
a postbase expressing negation, such as -ngit-, or mental caution, such as
-galuug- 'however'; in some cases, both verb base and ending are omitted.
He observed that "[t]his modern way of speaking Inuktitut often sounds like
child language."

6 One reviewer cited a talk by Beach (2000) for work on these structures, but we were not
able to obtain a source for the presented material.

5 Ages for the children are given in the format years; months, rounded to the closest month.
Each of these reduced verbal forms—i.e., verbs with no base, verbs with no inflection, and verbs with neither base nor inflection—are well represented in the corpus of caregiver–child spoken interaction from which our data are taken. Uninflected verb forms are far more common in child speech than in caretaker speech, so we treat them separately—with attention to issues in language development—in Swift and Allen (2002). These include the radically reduced forms that lack both the base and the inflectional ending, found only in child speech in our data. For example, (7) consists of verbal postbases only: the desiderative postbase -guma- ‘want to’ and the negation postbase -ngit-.

(7) Gumaangi.
\( \emptyset \)-guma-ngit-\( \emptyset \)

ZBASE-WANT-NEG-ZEND

‘I/1 don’t want to’.

The omission of verb endings has also been noted in the related languages of Central Siberian Yupik (de Reuse 1994) and West Greenlandic (Sadock 2002), and appears to be a more widespread phenomenon than the verb base ellipsis found in Tarramiut.

In the following sections, we provide evidence demonstrating that elliptical verb constructions, such as those in (4)–(6), are robustly attested in Inuktitut conversational speech under certain structural and discourse conditions. Although these data come from a corpus of child and caregiver communicative interaction, elliptical verb constructions are not specifically a phenomenon of child language or of child-directed speech; they appear in conversational exchanges between adults as well.

3. Methodology. In this section we discuss our subjects and data methodology.

3.1. Subjects. The data used are from the spontaneous speech of four Inuit children and their (grand)parents. The names given are pseudonyms, to protect the identity of the subjects. The children—Elijah, Lizzie, Louisa, and Paul—were aged 2;0, 2;5, 2;10, and 2;6 respectively at the outset of data collection. Elijah was adopted by his grandparents and lived in an extended family with these grandparents, his birth mother, and his adopted siblings. His grandmother, who did not work outside the home, served as his primary caretaker. Each of the other subjects lived in nuclear families in which both parents worked outside the home; the children were cared for during the day by members of their extended families. Elijah’s grandparents were in their late forties and spoke only Inuktitut; the other children’s parents were in their late twenties and early thirties and were all native speakers of Inuktitut, but they also spoke English in varying degrees of proficiency. Elijah, Louisa, and Paul were the youngest siblings in their families, while Lizzie was the oldest. One baby was born in Elijah’s family during the data collection period.

All of the children and their (grand)parents lived in the same functionally monolingual Inuit community of some 200 inhabitants in arctic Quebec. All Inuit in this community (some 97% of the permanent population) are native and fluent speakers of Inuktitut (Hudson Strait or Tarramit dialect), though most between the ages of about eight and forty are also fluent to varying degrees in English and/or French.

3.2. Data collection. The children were videotaped by Shanley Allen, four hours per month for nine months, in naturalistic communication situations with their friends and families. Though the (grand)parents were not focused on in the taping sessions, they were nevertheless present fairly often and interacted in typical ways with their (grand)children. Approximately half of the data (two hours per child per month) was selected for transcription on the basis of relative frequency of utterances by the target child and potential ease of transcription of the tape. These data were then transcribed by native speakers of Inuktitut and entered into a computer data base following the CHAT transcription conventions of the CHILDES project (MacWhinney and Snow 1990). Transcriptions of the first, middle, and last months of taping for each child were chosen for intensive analysis. These transcripts were checked for accuracy by Allen in consultation with native speakers of Inuktitut and then coded for various morphological, syntactic, and discourse features. Computerized data analysis was conducted using the CLAN programs (MacWhinney and Snow 1990). (See Allen 1996 for complete details concerning data collection and transcription.)

Only utterances with verbal components were included in the data analyzed in this paper. In addition, all utterances analyzed were fully intelligible and complete from the point of view of the speaker’s intonation, and were not composed solely of routines (e.g., songs, alphabet). Note that utterances of partial or complete imitations of previous speakers and self-repetitions were included in the analysis, for a total of 2,584 utterances for the four children (aged 2;0–3;6) and 2,413 for the eight adults.

3.3. Coding. All verbal words in the data base from the children and their (grand)parents were coded for the presence or absence of a verb base and/or a verb ending. From these, we selected utterances with a verbal word missing a base, but not an ending, for the present analysis, resulting in a total of 241 for the children (about 9% of their total verbal utterances) and 103 for the adults (about 4% of their total verbal utterances).
The relevant utterances were coded according to both structural and discourse distributional features. First, elliptical constructions were coded according to the type of postbase(s) overtly present. These include a variety of postbases, which fall into four broad semantic classes: temporal, modal, politeness (postbases commonly used in requests and commands), and negation. Elliptical constructions were also coded for verb-ending features of transitivity, mood, and subject. Finally, elliptical constructions were coded according to the presence or absence of a linguistic antecedent. In addition, we attempted to categorize elliptical verb constructions according to the estimated identity of the elided verb base but rejected this method of categorization because it could not reliably be applied across the data due to the element of guesswork involved, especially in cases where no linguistic antecedent was present.

4. Analysis. Elliptical construction distribution according to postbase category is discussed in 4.1, distribution according to the presence or absence of a linguistic antecedent in the discourse in 4.2, and distribution by the verb-ending features in 4.3.

4.1. Distribution by postbase category. Elliptical verb constructions typically consist of at least one postbase followed by an inflectional verb ending. The postbases are categorized according to the semantic classes of temporal, modal, politeness (postbases frequently used in commands and requests, elaborated in 4.1.3), and negation, or some combination of these. There are some instances in the data of elliptical constructions consisting of a verb ending only (the “null” postbase category); elliptical constructions with postbases that do not clearly fall into one of these categories are called “other.”

Tables 1 and 2 show the distribution of elliptical constructions according to postbase category in adult and child speech, respectively. The frequency of elliptical constructions is shown for each speaker and then summed across speakers, for each postbase category. The final column shows the total constructions in each postbase category divided by the total elliptical constructions for each set of speakers.

The proportional distribution of elliptical constructions across postbase categories is roughly similar in the speech of the adults and the children, with the exception of the temporal and politeness categories. The highest proportion of elliptical constructions in adult speech is with temporal postbases (34%), followed by those with politeness postbases (24%), while the highest proportion of elliptical constructions for the children is with politeness postbases (38%), followed by those with temporal postbases (26%). This difference in postbase category distribution in elliptical structures between the adults and the children most likely reflects typical constructions in caretaker and child speech in the data, that is, relatively more (promisory) references to future activities and events in caretaker speech, and relatively more requests in child speech.7

The majority of elliptical constructions contain postbases that cluster in the semantic categories of temporality, modality, politeness, and negation. Not all postbases support elliptical constructions, however. For example, a structure that begins with the verbalizing postbase -ir ‘exist’ is ungrammatical in Inuktut. Sadock (1984:213) has demonstrated the ungrammaticality of such a structure in West Greenlandic with contrasting question and answer pairs. The question Kaali inimiipaa? ‘Is Karl in his room?’ may be followed by the full response Suu, inimiipooq ‘Yes, he is in his room’

7 A quantitative analysis of postbase category distribution across all verbal structures in the data is left for future research.
but not by the elliptical response *Suu, ippoq ‘Yes, he is’. When the locative component ininini ‘in his room’ is omitted, the remaining elliptical response, consisting of the verbalizing postbase -it- followed by the inflectional ending -poq, is ungrammatical.

Fortescue (1980) related the differences between derivational and inflectional suffixes in West Greenlandic to their relative ordering in the word. The postbase categories that robustly support elliptical verb constructions in our data—specifically, the temporal, modal, politeness, and negation postbases—are typically more inflectional than derivational in function. Inflectional postbases tend to operate at the propositional rather than lexical level and occur closer to the inflectional ending. In contrast, postbases such as nominalizers and verbalizers are more derivational in nature and appear closer to the base. Few of these are found in elliptical constructions in our data. As mentioned above, no elliptical constructions may begin with -it- ‘exist’ and there are no instances of, e.g., -tuq- ‘consume’, -aq- ‘go by way of’, -aq- ‘arrive at’, -liuq- ‘make’, or -u- ‘be’. Derivational postbases are not entirely absent from elliptical structures, however (see 4.1.6 for examples with the verbalizer -qaq- ‘have’).

In the following sections, we provide discussion and examples of elliptical structures for each of the postbase categories shown in tables 1 and 2.

4.1.1. Temporal. Inuktut has a rich system of temporal marking that includes at least nine markers of temporal remoteness (see Dorais 1988 and Swift 2000; 2002) and a large inventory of aspectual markers. Aspectual postbases and temporal remoteness postbases marking past and future time reference appear in elliptical constructions. More than one-third of the elliptical structures in our data contain temporal postbases. The temporal remoteness postbases that appear in elliptical constructions are recent past -kainaq-, distant future -lauq-, near future -lango-, yesterday past -laaq-, same-day future -niaq-, and same-day past -gqaq-. The aspectual postbases are terminative -jariiq-, durative -laukait-, ingressive -liq-, habitual -gattaq-, -ratuq- ‘just, yet’, prospective -si-, and nominalizing habitual -sunak-. Examples of temporal postbases in elliptical constructions are given below.

In (8a), Lizzie’s mother tells Lizzie that they will go to the mountains later, to where her sauniq (namesake) lives. She uses full verb forms in (8a) and (8b), but in (8c) she produces an elliptical structure niaratta ‘we will later today’ that is parallel to the full verb form aniniaratta ‘we will go out later today’ in (8a), except the base ani- ‘go out’ is elided.

8 Beach (personal communication) reports a generalization from his data that no postbases beginning with a vowel appear as the initial postbase in elliptical constructions.
The elliptical utterance in (11) is also based on the near-future postbase -langa-. In this case, however, there is no linguistic antecedent and the meaning must be recovered from the situational context. In this situation, Louisa's mother takes Louisa's pillow away for a moment to put a cover on it. Louisa cries to get it back, but makes no explicit linguistic protest. Her mother responds to the crying with the elliptical construction in (11), promising Louisa that she will get the pillow back shortly.

(11) **Langagaviuk.**

Louisa's mother

Ø-langa-gaviuk

ZBASE-NEAR.FUT-CTG.2sS.3sO

'You will soon [get] it [back]'.

The following example illustrates an elliptical construction with past time reference, based on the recent past postbase -kainnaq-. Louisa's mother engages Louisa in a telephoning activity by inviting her to call a number of people, using utterances such as the one shown in (12), where the verb base is ugallak- 'call, telephone'.

(12) **Tracinut uqallalaurit?**

Louisa's mother

Traci-mut uqallak-lauq-git

Tracy-ALL.SG call-POL-IMP.2sS

'Shall you phone Tracy?'

During the next 30 minutes, Louisa calls several people on the telephone and has brief verbal interactions with them. After a number of calls, Louisa's mother tries to put an end to Louisa's phoning by taking the phone from Louisa and putting it on the table, but Louisa picks it up again and asks for permission to phone Tracy, as shown in (13a). Her mother produces an elliptical response consisting of the recent past postbase -kainnaq- and an inflectional ending, shown in (13b), reminding Louisa that she just called Tracy a moment before.

(13a) **Tracinut.**

Louisa 2;10

Traci-mut

Tracy-ALL.SG

'[I want to call] Tracy'.

(13b) **Kainnaraviv Tracinut.**

Louisa's mother

Ø-kainnaq-gavit Traci-mut

ZBASE-RCT.PAST-CTG.2sS Tracy-ALL.SG

'You [called] Tracy a moment ago'.

Elliptical structures with aspectual postbases are shown in the following examples. In (14), Paul has climbed on top of the bookshelf and now wants to get down. His brother asks him if he wants help getting down (14a). Paul responds with the elliptical construction in (14b), in which the verb base arqa- 'get down' in the antecedent utterance is omitted, and the verbal word consists only of the prospective aspect marker -si- followed by the verb ending.

(14a) **Arqatilaurlagit?**

Paul's brother

arga-tit-lauq-lagit

got.down-CAUS-POL-IMP.1sS.2sO

'Shall I get you down?'

(14b) **Imminik sigama.**

Paul 2;6

imminik Ø-si-gama

myself ZBASE-PRSP-CTG.1sS

'I'm about to [get down] myself'.

In (15), Louisa has just finished assembling a jigsaw puzzle and produces this utterance as she puts the last piece in place. There is no linguistic antecedent for the elided base in this context, but the meaning is clear from the situation.

(15) **Giirpunga.**

Louisa 3;2

Ø-jariiq-vunga

ZBASE-TERM-IND.1sS

'I finished [assembling the puzzle]'.

The examples above illustrate the use of temporal postbases in elliptical constructions in conversational Inuktitut. Examples (8) and (10) demonstrate typical uses of these constructions in caretaker speech as a way of making promises about future activities and events and postponing the fulfillment of a child's request. Such uses may contribute to the relatively higher proportion of these constructions in the adult speech data, as shown in table 1. (21) is an example of an elliptical structure with a temporal postbase followed by negation; in (6c), the distant future -laaq- postbase is followed by the negated modal postbase -gunnaiq- 'no longer'.

4.1.2. Modal. Modal postbases in Inuktitut convey speaker beliefs and attitudes such as desire, intention, and ability. One-quarter of the elliptical constructions in the data include modal postbases, specifically -guna- 'want

9 The first syllable of the terminative postbase -jariiq- is often dropped following a base and its surface form appears as -giiq- or -riiq-, but the full form is used when it combines with the empty root pi- in pijariiq- 'finish'. All of the elliptical structures with -jariiq- in our data have the shortened form, but these instances are insufficient to evaluate whether it is the elided material or some phonological constraint that influences the morphophonological surface structure.
to', -gunnaq- 'can, be allowed', -gajaq- 'can, be able', -gquuq- 'probably', and -qu- 'want [someone else] to'. The modal postbases often occur together with the negation postbase -ngit-, and -gunnaq- 'can, be allowed' has a lexicalized negated form -gunnaiq- 'no longer'. Elliptical structures with modal postbases are illustrated in the following examples.

The exchange between Elijah and his mother in (16) illustrates two elliptical constructions with different modal postbases. Elijah wants to get his sled and play outside in the snow, but his mother does not want him to go out. Elijah expresses his desire to get his sled in (16a). His mother denies him permission with the elliptical construction in (16b), which contains the modal postbase -gunnaq- 'no longer'. But Elijah is adamant and reasserts his desire with the elliptical construction in (16c), which contains the modal postbase -guma- 'want to'.

(16a) Anaanaa, qamutiknguarani aitsigumalirtunga. (Elijah 2;0)
anaana qamutik-nguaq-ganik  aits-i-nga-ma-liq-junga
mother  sled-imitation-MOD.1Sg  get-ATP-want-ING-PAR.1sS
'Mother, I want to get my toy sled now'.

(16b) Gunnaillutit! (Elijah's mother)
θ-gunaq-lutit
ZBASE-no.longer-ICM.2sS
'Don't you [get it]!'

(16c) Gunaungungna! (Elijah 2;0)
θ-guma-vunga
ZBASE-want-IND.1sS
'I want to [get it]!'

The elliptical constructions in (16b) and (16c) share the same elided base material, specifically aitsi-, the antipassive form of ai- 'get', present in Elijah's utterance in (16a).

(17) below illustrates an elliptical modal construction with the postbase -qu- 'want (someone else) to'. Paul, his brother, and his cousin are playing with toy cars on the carpet. His cousin folds the carpet over, and Paul tells her that she is not allowed to do that. In this instance, there is no linguistic antecedent, but the meaning is clear from the situational context.

(17) Qajaungginavit.
θ-qu-nga-ngit-gavit
ZBASE-want-PASS-NEG-CTG.2sS
'You are not allowed (lit., wanted) to [do that]'.

The discourse fragment in (18) illustrates an elliptical structure with the modal postbase -gquuq- 'probably'. Louisa sees Tracy coming down the street and informs her mother that Tracy is coming (18a). Her mother affirms Louisa's observation with the elliptical construction in (18b).

(18a) Tracii qajii.
Traci-∅  qai-juq
Traci-ABS.SG  come-PAR.3sS
'Tracy is coming'.

(18b) Qurnmaat.
∅-qguuq-mmat
ZBASE-probably-CTG.3sS
'She probably [is coming]'.

4.1.3. Politeness. Politeness postbases are commonly used in commands and requests and typically precede the imperative mood verb ending. The politeness postbases -liq- and -lauq- function as temporal markers when they are not in imperative constructions (-liq- marks ingressive aspect and -lauq- marks yesterday past; see 4.1.1 above). In the imperative mood, however, these postbases do not contribute a transparent temporal meaning to the utterance. They are typically interpreted as lending a softening effect to the utterance by increasing its length and hence facilitating prosodic modulation. The causative postbase -tit- is included in this category because it often precedes the politeness postbase in these structures, as in (19) below. Politeness postbases appear in more than a third (34%) of the elliptical structures in our data.

Structures in the politeness category typically contain not only a politeness postbase but also the imperative mood verb ending. The imperative mood is, strictly speaking, an optative mood, since it occurs with first- and third-person subjects as well as second-person subjects. Its function therefore is broader than the imperative form in English. Imperative endings with first-person subjects can be glossed in English as 'shall I' or 'let me', while imperative endings with third-person subjects can be translated 'shall he/she/it' or 'let him/her/it'.

The discourse fragment in (19) illustrates two instances of elliptical politeness constructions in which the causative postbase -tit- precedes the politeness postbase. Louisa and her mother are calling people on the phone (this...
is the same context as 14 above). Having decided to call her grandmother, Louisa takes the phone in her lap and tries to dial the number. Louisa's mother offers to help her dial the number (19a), and Louisa agrees (19b).

(19a) *Tilaurlagit?*  
Louisa's mother  
\( \emptyset \text{-tit-lauq-lagit} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-CAUS-POL-IMP.1sS.2sO} \)  
'Shall I help you [do it]?' (lit., 'Shall I make you [do it]?')

(19b) *Tilaunnga.*  
Louisa  
\( \emptyset \text{-tit-lauq-nnga} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-CAUS-POL-IMP.2sS.1sO} \)  
'You shall help me [do it]' (lit., 'You shall make me [do it]').

(20) below illustrates an elliptical politeness construction with a linguistic antecedent. Here, Lizzie and her mother are watching a television program with the sound turned down. Lizzie's mother asks Lizzie to turn up the volume, first with the full verbal utterance in (20a), followed by a repetition of her request with the elliptical structure in (20b).

(20a) *Nipataarilaukkit.*  
Lizzie's mother  
\( \text{nipa-taag-tit-lauq-kkit} \)  
\( \text{sound-acquire-CAUS-POL-IMP.2sS.3pO} \)  
'Please turn up the volume' (lit., 'You please make them acquire sound').

(20b) *Atii, laukkit.*  
Lizzie's mother  
\( \text{atii} \text{-} \emptyset \text{-lauq-kkit} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-POL-IMP.2sS.3pO} \)  
'Go on, please turn up the sound' (lit., 'You please [make] them [acquire sound]').

4.1.4. Negation. Negation postbases are found in approximately one-fourth of the elliptical structures in our data. Examples of elliptical structures with negation are given below (see also 6c and 21).

Negation is common in combination with temporal and modal postbases in elliptical constructions, as noted above. In (21), Elijah is watching television and exclains excitedly that a particular program is about to come on (21a). His mother expresses her disagreement with the elliptical construction in (21b), which contains temporal postbase -larga- followed by negation postbase -ngit-. Elijah counters with (21c), a positive version of his mother's preceding elliptical utterance.

(21a) *Nuqsiju!*  
Elijah 2;9  
\( \text{nui-si-juq} \)  
\( \text{appear-PRSP-PAR.3sS} \)  
'It [the program] is about to appear!'

(21b) *Langanngitaluk!*  
Elijah's mother  
\( \emptyset \text{-langa-ngit-juq} \text{-aluk} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-NEAR.PUT-NEG-PAR.3sS} \text{-EMP} \)  
'It will not [appear]!'

(21c) *Langammat.*  
Elijah 2,9  
\( \emptyset \text{-langa-mmata} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-NEAR.PUT-CTG.3sS} \)  
'It will [appear].'

A structure that consists of negation postbase -ngit- followed by a verb ending is a common means of expressing disagreement, even though the negation particle auka is available in the lexicon. The discourse fragment in (22) illustrates two instances of this construction. Paul and his brother are arguing over a mitt. Paul claims the mitt as his own (22a). Paul's brother refutes the claim (22b), using the elliptical negation construction ngimmata 'is not; no way', and claims the mitt as his own. Paul objects, again with ngimmata (22c).

(22a) *Una uvanga.*  
Paul 2,6  
\( \text{u-na \text{-} uvanga} \)  
\( \text{this.one-ABS.SG \text{-} mine} \)  
'This [is] mine'.

(22b) *Ngimmata uvanga.*  
Paul's brother  
\( \emptyset \text{-ngit-mmata} \text{-uvanga} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-NEG-CTG.3sS} \text{-mine} \)  
'It [is] not, [it's] mine'.

(22c) *Ngimmata.*  
Paul 2,6  
\( \emptyset \text{-ngit-mmata} \)  
\( \text{ZBASE-NEG-CTG.3sS} \)  
'It [is] not.'

Additional forms with the negation postbase only, specifically ngituuq (ngit-juq <NEG-PAR.3sS>) and ngittara (ngit-jara <NEG-PAR.1sS.3sO>) appear in the data.

4.1.5. Null. There are a few (six) instances in the data of verb endings with neither base nor postbases. Two examples are given below.

In (23a), Lizzie's mother observes that she can hear Lizzie's aunt and friends playing outside. In (23b), she urges Lizzie to look out the window to check. In this utterance, the third-person plural dubitative inflection is used without a base or postbases, with the interpretation 'if they [are]'.
(23a) Aala atsakuttit pinnguaatii maani. (Lizzie’s mother)
  aala atsa-kkut-tit
  listen maternal.aunt-and.companions-ABS.2SPL
  ma-ani
  here-LOC

  ‘Listen, your aunt and her friends are playing out here’.

(23b) Mangata takulaukkinaat. (Lizzie’s mother)
  @-mmangata taku-llaq-kkit=ai
  3BASE-DUB.3PS see-POL.IMP.2SS.3PO=EMPH

  ‘Please look to see if they are’.

In (24), Lizzie is looking at a picture book and her mother admonishes her to be careful not to tear the pages. Lizzie responds that she is being careful, with an elliptical utterance consisting only of the first-person singular inchoative mood verb ending -lunga followed by the enclitic -li ‘and’.

(24) Lungali.
  lunga=li
  1CM.1SS=AND

  ‘And I [am being careful]’.

In addition to (23) and (24), inflections that occur in this kind of elliptical structure in the data are all in the participial mood: -jautit <PAR.2SS.3PO>, -junga <PAR.1SS>, and -juq <PAR.3SS>.

4.1.6. Other. Not all of the postbases found in elliptical verb constructions fall into the categories described above. These include adverbial postbases such as -kasak- ‘almost’ and -gallak- ‘a little more, a little bit’, and the verbalizing postbase -qaq- ‘have’. A few of these are illustrated below.

An example of an elliptical construction with an adverbial postbase is shown in (25). Here, Elijah is climbing on the furniture, being rambunctious, and generally showing off. He has just jumped over his grandmother, who is sitting on the sofa. She observes that he almost fell, using the adverbial postbase -kasak- ‘almost’ (25a). Elijah protests with (25b), in which he omits the verb base ijukka- ‘fall’ and uses the adverbial postbase -kasak- ‘almost’ in combination with the negation postbase -ngkit- in an elliptical construction.

(25a) Ijukkakasagavit. (Elijah’s grandmother)
  ijukka-kasak-gavit
  fall-almost-CTG.2SS

  ‘You almost fell’.

(25b) Kasanngitunga.
  @-kasak-ngkit-junga
  ZBASE-almost-NEG-PAR.1S

  ‘I didn’t almost [fall]’.

(26) is an example of an elliptical construction with the verbalizing postbase -qaq- ‘have’. Elijah and his friend are looking for a screwdriver to open the keyboard of a toy organ. Elijah announces that there is no screwdriver, using a full verb form in (26a). In (26c), Elijah responds to his friend’s question by repeating his statement from (26a), but this time using an elliptical construction in which he elides the nominal base piiruti ‘screwdriver’.

(26a) Piirutiiqangqimmallit.
  piiruti-qaq-ngkit-mmait=li
  screwdriver-have-NEG-CTG.3SS=AND

  ‘There is no screwdriver’.

(26b) Piilulakkat?
  piil-laq-lakka
  remove-POL-IMP.1SS.3PO

  ‘Want me to unscrew it?’

(26c) Qanngimat.
  @-qaq-ngkit-mmait
  ZBASE-have-NEG-CTG.3SS

  ‘There isn’t [a screwdriver]’.

In the exchange in (27), Elijah wants the skidoo to be fixed but it needs an engine part. Elijah asks if the part is at the co-op, and his mother says that it probably isn’t (27a). Elijah insists (27b), using the verbalizing postbase -qaq- ‘have’.

(27a) Quuqngiqmat.
  quuq-qaq-ngkit-mmait
  probably-NEG-CTG.3SS

  ‘Probably not’.

(27b) Qarqu.
  qaak-vuq
  have-IND.3SS

  ‘There is’.

In addition to those illustrated above, postbases in this category include -ngaaq- ‘rather’, -nguaq- ‘pretend, play’, and the passivizing postbase -jau-. Sometimes they appear together with temporal, politeness, or negation postbases (as in 25 and 26), but this is not always the case (27b).
4.2. Distribution by verb ending. Elliptical verb constructions occur with a wide variety of inflectional endings. We present data here on their distribution in terms of verb mood, transitivity, and subject features.

The verb moods found in the elliptical structures in our data are the conditional, contingent, dubitative, imperative, incontemporaneous, indicative, interrogative, negative interrogative, and participial. Three of the four most frequent verb moods in adult speech are equally distributed: the contingent, interrogative, and participial (20% each), with slightly more for the fourth, the imperative (30%). For the elliptical constructions in child speech, 37% have imperative endings, 32% participial endings, 20% contingent endings, and 10% indicative endings.

Both intransitive and transitive verb endings appear in elliptical constructions. Intransitive endings are more frequent, making up 79% of the elliptical verb constructions in adult speech and 55% in child speech. Most of the transitive endings in the child speech constructions are in the imperative. Elliptical constructions with intransitive endings occur with first-, second-, and third-person subjects, while the transitive endings occur with first- and second-person subjects only.

Second-person subject endings are found in 67% of the elliptical constructions in adult speech, as might be expected in mostly child-directed speech, while 49% of the elliptical verb constructions in child speech have first-person subject endings and 29% have second-person endings.

The distributional pattern of verb endings in elliptical structures does not appear to be strikingly different from the verb ending distribution in full verb forms in the data, although a full analysis of all the verb forms in the corpus would be needed for explicit comparison.

4.3. Discourse distribution of elliptical verb constructions. Elliptical verb constructions contribute to discourse coherence by creating links to the preceding discourse. These forms are discourse-bound in that they are only used when the elided material is recoverable, either from explicit linguistic material or from the situational context. The elliptical structures in our data include both types, that is, cases in which the elided material has already been introduced in the discourse as a linguistic antecedent and cases in which the elided material is not linguistically present but can be inferred from the situation. Often, the latter cases involve the physical manipulation of a salient object. Instances in which a linguistic antecedent is present are consistent with the antecedent notion of ellipsis as deletion under identity motivated by a desire to reduce redundancy when the elided material can be reliably recovered from the linguistic context. Several examples of each case can be found in the preceding sections (e.g., see 4, 6, 8, 18, 20, and 21 for the presence of a linguistic antecedent, and 5, 11, 15, and 17 for cases in which the elided material must be recovered from context).

The elliptical structures have been classified according to the presence or absence of a linguistic antecedent for the elided material. Elliptical utterances for which the linguistic antecedent is either unintelligible or not present in the recording, such as when an elliptical structure occurs as the first utterance after a break in taping, are categorized as "unclear." The linguistic antecedent distribution for elliptical verb constructions is shown in table 3 and table 4, for adult and child speech, respectively. The number of elliptical constructions with and without a linguistic antecedent is shown for each postbase category. The bottom row shows the total constructions in each antecedent category (present, not present, unclear) divided by the total elliptical constructions for each set of speakers.

Almost half (47%) of the elliptical utterances in adult speech occur with a linguistic antecedent (39% without), while elliptical constructions in child speech occur more frequently without linguistic antecedents in the discourse.

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13 The difference in proportion of imperative mood endings (30%) vs. politeness postbases (24%) in elliptical structures in adult speech is due to imperative mood constructions with modal postbases typically used in prohibitions, as in (16b).
context (64%) than with them (34%). The relatively higher frequency of elliptical structures in child speech could be attributed to a tendency for children’s greater reliance on situational context (e.g., Hickmann 1995 and Crain and Thornton 1998). The data in tables 3 and 4 also indicate that there are no structural (i.e., postbase category) restrictions on elliptical structures that appear with or without a linguistic antecedent.

5. Summary and conclusion. The data presented here demonstrate that elliptical verb constructions are a robust phenomenon in Inuktut conversational discourse. This is in striking contrast to the standard linguistic view of word formation in Eskimo languages, in particular the claim that the base is an essential component of the word.

Verb base ellipsis in Inuktut communicative interaction is compatible with the notion of ellipsis as a means to reduce redundancy when the elided material is recoverable, either from an explicit antecedent or from context. The data also show that postbases with certain meanings are prevalent in elliptical structures, specifically temporal, modal, politeness, and negation. These postbases fall into semantic categories often associated with auxiliaries cross-linguistically, and many of them make clear contributions to the meaning of an existing structure, e.g., -guma- ‘want to’, -qaq- ‘be able to’, -si- ‘be about to’, and -ngit- ‘not’. However, it is not clear whether these characteristics contribute to the prominence of these postbases in elliptical structures by, for example, rendering them more analyzable than other postbases.

The relative frequencies of different postbases in elliptical constructions could be a reflection of the distribution of these postbases in the data over-all. Moreover, as the data are taken from a corpus of spontaneous speech, the absence, underrepresentation, or overrepresentation of certain structures cannot be reliably interpreted without further information. One area for future research is additional data collection targeted at establishing what sort of restrictions apply to the elision of base material in Inuktut, if any, as well as the range of postbases manifested in the structure.

Also to be addressed is the question of when elliptical structures arose in Inuktut, and why in Inuktut but not in other related languages? In many cases, Inuktut elliptical constructions have straightforward translations in English (e.g., langavanga ‘I will’) and Dorais (1993:60) refers to the omission of verb components as a “modern way of speaking” (see 2.2). However, the complete absence of such structures in other languages of the Eskimo-Aleut family, such as West Greenlandic and Yupik, both of which have a long history of contact with Indo-European languages, suggests that language contact alone is not responsible for this phenomenon.

De Reuse (1992:513) comments on the omission of verb bases in Inuktut as “evidence that Inuktut speakers have some awareness of the morphological structure of words, an awareness I have never encountered among Yupik speakers, who appear to be incapable of segmenting words morphologically.” A possible explanation for this lies in differences in the prosodic structure of these related languages. Inuktut has relatively predictable prosodic word structure, which may contribute to the analyzability of word-internal components, while the prosody of Yupik is complex and strikingly different (Woodbury 1987). However, prosodic differences would not explain the absence of verb base ellipsis in West Greenlandic, a language with prosodic structure more similar to Inuktut. One reviewer has suggested that the early tradition of syllabic writing in arctic Quebec and its influence on the consciousness of word structure may have contributed to a consciousness of word structure in the spoken language.

The presence of verb base ellipsis in Inuktut raises interesting questions about Eskimo-Aleut word formation processes and how they may be influenced by specific linguistic and cultural factors, as well as more general questions on the nature of affixation in morphological theory. We hope that the data presented here will stimulate new research in these areas.

REFERENCES


