The syntax of ellipsis

1 Practical information

Instructor:

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Office hours: Tuesdays 13:30–15:00 & by appointment

Meeting time and place:

Time: Mondays, 14:35–17:25

Place: Room 117, 1085 Dr. Penfield

2 Description

The following sentences have the property that the part in [ ] can be pronounced or unpronounced and yet somehow we understand both versions in the same way.

(1) Mary drinks coffee every morning, and John does [ ], too.

(2) Somebody just left — guess who [ ].

This phenomenon is called ellipsis: under certain conditions, linguistic material can be omitted from an utterance but we nevertheless understand the utterance as if it has not been [ ]. The challenge of associating meanings with "silence" has made this [ ] a central topic in linguistic research. In this course, we will explore a variety of phenomena that involve omission of *[ ], mainly involving ellipsis in the verbal domain. We will ask ourselves not only what material can be elided, but also why [ ]; and we will discuss at length whether it's possible to "rescue" some ungrammatical structures using ellipsis, and if so, which ones [ ]. We will study both seminal and current papers in the syntactic literature, and also ?[ ] psycholinguistic aspects of the processing of ellipsis and its perception.

3 Goals

- Learn about different types of ellipsis constructions possible in the English language;
- Develop skills in reading academic literature in syntax;
- Carry out research on one topic related to the theoretical ideas discussed in class.

4 Prerequisites

LING 201 (Introduction to Linguistics) & LING 371 (Syntax 1), or permission of instructor.

5 Requirements

1. Contribution to class discussion: 10%
2. Reading questions: 30% (10 * 3%)
3. Class presentation: 20%
4. Final paper sketch: not graded
5. Final paper: 40%

Required readings will be available on myCourses. The class discussions will assume that you have done the required readings. **You are expected to contribute to class discussions by bringing in your own questions and comments on the readings**.

Reading questions: Each reading will come with a (small) set of questions. The purpose of the questions is to help you do the reading more efficiently as well as digest materials covered in class, which in turn will help you make contributions to class discussions. Responses should be short and straightforward, if you have done the reading. **Responses must be submitted by 18:00 the day before class.** You may choose not to submit one response without consequence, or the grade of the lowest response will be dropped.

The final paper should take one of the following forms:

- Analysis: Identify an original puzzle. Use the skills developed in class to carefully describe the issue, and sketch a possible solution.

- Evaluation: Read a paper not discussed in class. Present the main issues raised in the paper, including the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis. Discuss further predictions, bring new data to bear on the analysis, or discuss remaining questions.

- Synthesis: Choose a phenomenon/data set not discussed in class, read two or three complementary papers, and describe the major question(s) and arguments.

- Investigation: Investigate a topic discussed in class in a foreign language, working with data from published papers or with a native speaker consultant.

- Experimentation: (Option for students with background in psycholinguistics) Choose one theory discussed in class, sketch out a prediction of the theory, and propose an experiment to test this prediction.

Meet with me to discuss possible topics, no later than week 10.
A *1-page sketch* is due in Week 11.
The final week will be dedicated to short (10 minute) *presentations* of your final papers.

6 Materials

Lecture slides and/or handouts will be posted in MyCourses after each class. All readings will be available on MyCourses, as well. **It is your responsibility to monitor the course website on a regular basis.**

7 Class policies

Talk to me: **I want you to succeed in this class**. If any material or requirement is unclear, let me know. In extreme cases, alternative arrangements can be made for some of the course requirements, but only by talking to me first. **Come to office hours to discuss your paper topic, and any other questions you may have about the course.** If you can't make my office hours, email me and we will find another time to meet.

Student cooperation: You are allowed and encouraged to discuss readings with other students. However, you must submit your own response to the readings, and you must list the students with whom you have discussed the readings.

Email policy: I will try to respond to any e-mails within two working days. Students often find that the discussions on MyCourses are very helpful in clearing up any confusions.

Academic integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see `http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr` for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site `www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/`).

Right to submit written work in English or French: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Copyright: Instructor-generated course materials (handouts, assignments, etc.) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

Discussion tools: There are two discussion tools on myCourses. I encourage you to use the *Student Discussion Tool* for questions concerning the course material. I will monitor and join in through guiding comments or clarifications of potentially misleading or wrong answers provided by fellow students. For questions concerning the course material that you want to direct specifically to me, consider using the tool entitled *Questions about course content for instructor*. This way the whole class benefits from your questions and my answers.

8 Schedule

Note: The schedule is subject to change. In particular, readings for the last part of the course and perhaps even its content will be determined based on our progress and on participants' interests. Stay tuned!

Week	Date	Topic	Readings (*Required*)
1	5/1	Introduction: What is ellipsis?	
2	12/1	Licensing ellipsis	*Hankamer and Sag (1976)*, Merchant (2012) p. 1–20
3	19/1	Sluicing	*Ross (1969)*, Chung et al. (1995), Merchant (2001, §2)
4	26/1	VP Ellipsis and Antecedent Contained Deletion	*Johnson (2001)*, Kennedy (1997), Sailor and Thoms (2013)
5	2/2	Pseudogapping	*Lasnik (1999)*, Merchant (2008a)
6	9/2	Gapping	*Johnson (2009)*, Coppock (2001)
7	16/2	Mismatches in ellipsis	*Merchant (2013)*, Merchant (2001, §1), Williams (1977), Thoms (2013)
8	23/2	Island repairs under sluicing	*Merchant (2008b)*, Fox and Lasnik (2003), Fox and Pesetsky (2005)
9	2/3	**No class: study break**	
10	9/3	Against island repairs	*Barros et al. (To appear)*, Barros (2012)
11	16/3	**Paper sketch due: before class**	
		Parsing of ellipsis	Arregui et al. (2006), Frazier and Clifton (2001)
12	23/3	More parsing	Hackl et al. (2012), Xiang et al. (2014)
13	30/3	Aux drop and diary drop	Fitzpatrick (2006)
14	6/4	**No class: Easter Monday**	
15	13/4	Student presentations	
		Final paper due on 20/4 by 17:00	

9 Assignment submission policy

Reading questions will be posted on myCourses by 18:00 the Tuesday before class. You must submit the response by 18:00 on Sunday before class.

Late submission policy: No late responses to questions will be accepted unless approved by me in advance. Extensions will only be granted until Monday 14:30 (that is, before class starts), but no later than that since we will discuss the responses in class. An extension will only be granted for an acceptable reason (e.g., sickness or a family tragedy).

References

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