Ineffable narratives

Another case of overgeneration by *e*-GIVENess

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1. Introduction

One of the main questions for the theory of ellipsis is whether ellipsis resolution is syntactically or semantically determined. In Merchant's (2008) words:

Two general approaches to this question have been pursued: one, that the elided XP must be syntactically (LF-structurally, in current formulations) isomorphic to an antecedent, and two, that the elided XP must be semantically equivalent to an antecedent. **Both views have weaknesses: generally, the syntactic isomorphism approach undergenerates, while the semantic identity approach overgenerates**. [Merchant 2008: 134, my emphasis]

For semantic identity, Merchant refers to the e-GIVENness theory of ellipsis. Simplifying somewhat, for a syntactic constituent C in the complement of an [E] feature, C can be elided only if there is a mutual entailment relation between C and some antecedent A in the linguistic (sometimes, also discursive) context. The semantics for the [E] feature is the following:

(1) $[[E]] = \lambda p{:}\ e\text{-GIVEN}(p)\ [p]$

(2)   An expression E counts as e-GIVEN iff E has a salient antecedent A and, modulo $\exists$-type shifting,

   i. A entails F-clo(E), and

   ii. E entails F-clo(A)

(3)   The F-closure of α, written F-clo(α), is the result of replacing F-marked parts of α with

∃-bound variables.

The notion of *entailment* in (2) is defined in Schwarzschild's sense as a type of pragmatic entailment, where the rules underlying F-marking depends "on what the speaker *presents* as GIVEN" (Schwarzschild 1999:151). It is, then, this particular conception of semantic-pragmatic identity what will be under inspection here.[1]

As for the syntactic approach to identity, several implementations of the identity condition have been proposed either as complementary of some semantic dimension or as the main, maybe unique, aspect of the theory of identity (see Tancredi 1992, Rooth 1992, Fiengo & May 1994, Merchant 2008, 2013, Chung 2006, 2013, Tanaka 2011, Johnson 2012, Thoms to appear, among many others). For the purposes of the argument to be made here, I adopt a simple version of the syntactic identity condition, according to which antecedent and elided must be formal identical in the sense that every syntactic-semantic feature present in the elliptical constituent must have an identical feature in the antecedent in the syntax/LF.[2]

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[1] Other semantic approaches to semantic identity, such as Romero 1998, Elbourne 2008, Takahashi & Fox 2005 will not be particularly evaluated, although some of them could be consider as variants of Merchant's semantic-pragmatic approach (Romero 1998, for instance). Again, the main point under consideration here is whether or not the theory of ellipsis makes uses of pragmatic entailment as a crucial ingredient. Of course, even laxer proposals like Culicover and Jackendoff's (2005) inferential mechanism of recoverability will face the same problems to be discussed below.

[2] The reference to syntax (or LF, I will remain neutral on this aspect) is crucial here. In a model in which morphophonology comes after syntax (as in Distributed Morphology) the locus of identity, syntax or PF/LF, makes crucial different predictions as far as identity effects in ellipsis are concerned. Whenever identity is abstractly defined in the syntax or LF, we can avoid the problem of the so-called partial identity effects which usually refers to morphophonological differences between the antecedent and the elliptical constituent (e.g., agreement differences).

(4) <u>Ellipsis</u>: A constituent C can be elided if there is a constituent C' identical to C in the syntax/LF.

Merchant's observation on the predictive power of different conceptions on the identity condition is somewhat expected when comparing (1) and (4): *e*-giveness does not require formal identity to the extent that even radical different forms can feed ellipsis whenever mutual entailment is met. The opposite is not true: semantics cannot feed syntactic identity.[3]

As rightly pointed out by Merchant in the above quote, both approaches find empirical challenges in one or the other direction (over vs. undergeneration, as already mentioned)[4], although recent research seems to favor the syntactic approach over the semantic one (see in particular Merchant 2013, for recent discussion and references, and Chung 2013 for a mixed approach).

In this paper, I present a new case of overgeneration to the semantic view on identity in ellipsis. Concretely, I show that a radical version of the semantic approach to the identity condition on ellipsis, in particular, one with the notion of *pragmatic entailment* at its heart, wrongly predicts as grammatical cases of TP-ellipsis in Spanish where a (formal) present

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[3] The semantic view meets its more radical version in the claim that ellipsis can operate even across languages (see especially Merchant 2004 who also quotes Stainton 1997):

(i) A: Evales   to   potiraki   sti   tsanda?   [Greek]

     put.PAST.2sg   the   cup   in.the   bag

         Did you put the cup in the bag?

     B: No, I didn't.

[Merchant 2004: 700, Footnote 12]

[4] Well-known arguments against syntactic isomorphism are found in Merchant 2001. Against *e*-giveness as originally formulated by Merchant (2001), we refer mainly to Chung 2006, Hartman 2009 and Merchant 2013.

tense feature on T in the antecedent undoubtedly entails (in the above sense) a (formal) past tense feature in the elliptical constituent and viceversa. However, this is not attested: present tense cannot serve as a suitable antecedent for formal past tense in TP-ellipsis contexts, regardless of pragmatic entailment.

On the basis of this fact, a main conclusion that we advance here is that syntactic identity not only cannot be dispensed with, as in the radical semantic approach, but it should be regarded as a crucial ingredient of the theory of ellipsis resolution, *pace* the recent conclusion reached by Chung (2013) for whom, although necessary, syntactic identity is reduced to play a very limited role in ellipsis.

2. Spanish TP-Ellipsis

I will focus on the structure of a specific kind of TP-ellipsis in Spanish, which involves at least a remnant and a polarity particle preceding the elliptical gap (see (5)):

(5) a. Juan desaprobó a   María   pero   a   Ana no.

        Juan failed   ACC María   but   ACC Ana not

        'Juan failed MARÍA, but not Ana.'

    b. Juan no desaprobó a   María   pero a   Ana sí.

        Juan not failed   ACC María   but ACC Ana yes

        'Juan did not fail María, but he did fail Ana.'

    c. Juan desaprobó a   María   y   a   Ana también.

        Juan failed   ACC María   and ACC Ana too

        'Juan failed MARÍA and Ana too.'

    d. Juan no desaprobó a   María   y   a   Ana tampoco.

        Juan not failed   ACC María   and ACC Ana neither

'Juan did not fail MARÍA and Ana neither.'

Let us assume that the correct analysis for TP-ellipsis corresponds essentially to the analysis sketched in (6):

(6)   [$_{TopP}$ Remnant Top [$_{ΣP}$ Σ$_{[E]}$ ~~[TP   …   T   …~~

The [E] feature on $Σ^0$ is the same proposed by Merchant 2001, and much subsequent work (see van Craenenbroeck & Lipták 2006 for an attempt to parameterize the [E] feature). A functional projection with an [E] feature triggers the deletion or non-pronunciation of its complement: which, in the case at hand, is the TP. For the time being, the main point to stress is the fact that the category affected for ellipsis is really a TP and not, for instance, a vP. I will follow here the arguments given by Zagona (1988), among others.

First, as is well known, Spanish TP-ellipsis does not allow stranded auxiliaries. In this regard, compare the ungrammaticality of (7a) with the translation of the same example in English in (7b), which is fully grammatical:

(7)   a. *Juan ha salido y Pablo ha también.

      b. Juan has left and Pablo has too.   (Zagona 1988: 95)

Second, Spanish TP-ellipsis does not tolerate differences in tense features between the antecedent and the elliptical gap (see Murguia 2004 for discussion and references):

(8)   *En el pasado, María   ha   leído mucho   y

      in the past   María   has   read a-lot   and

Elena   en el futuro   ~~habrá   leído mucho~~   también.

Elena   the   future   will-have   read   a-lot   also

'María has read a lot in the past and Elena in the future will have too.'

(adapted from Murguia 2004: 86)

These two facts follow straightforwardly if the category affected by ellipsis in Spanish is at least TP as in (6) and not *v*P.

Now, the semantic and the syntactic approach to ellipsis differ in how the identity of the complement is calculated. As an illustration, consider a simple sentence like (9):

(9)   [Yo]$_F$ [$_{TP}$ fui   al   cine]   y   [María]$_F$ también

     I   went   to.the   cinema   and   M.   also

     [$_{TP}$ ~~fue al   cine~~]

       went   to.the   cinema

As for the mutual entailment approach, it is easy to see that the antecedent A entails E and viceversa once the F-marked parts both in the antecedent and in the second conjunct are replaced with ∃-bound variables.

(10)   A: ∃x [x fui al cine]

       E: ∃x [x fue al cine]

Now, A entails E and E entails A and, as a consequence, E is subject to deletion at PF.

As for the syntactic approach, let us assume that the complement of [E] has to match all the syntactic and semantic features present in the antecedent including the value of lexical Roots

(*modulo* inflectional agreement and other morphonological properties). In the case at hand, both the antecedent and the elided constituent are formally identical.

Let us return for a moment to an example like (8), because such cases raise some questions on the *e*-giveness approach. How is tense calculated for the purpose of ellipsis? Why does the [future] feature not count as given in virtue of the fact that a temporal adjunct indicating future tense is an F-marked constituent that has to count as given and the same situation is obtained for the past feature in the antecedent, which is linked to the temporal adjunct indicating past tense? As far as I see the problem, both adjuncts are F-marked and should introduce temporal variables in the antecedent and the elliptical site, creating a mutual entailment relation between both IPs. It seems that formal tense has to be given regardless of temporal adjuncts. This state of affairs does not follow easily under the semantic-pragmatic approach. Under the syntactic approach, instead, (8) is trivially derived as a failure on the identity condition (i.e., [past] ≠ [perfect future]). Let us suppose however that cases like these do not allow us to evaluate the two theories in competition and let us see whether concise experiments can be constructed in the domain of tense, anyway.

3. Narratives

A good case to explore the consequences of the two approaches in the domain of tense is the historical present in Spanish, which entails -in the sense of entailment we have discussed- a past meaning, once the proper contextual conditions for this are met. The discourse in (11), where a present form is used for a narrative, is just a translation of the same discourse in (12) where the past forms are used:

(11)   ¡Adiviná   qué me   pasó   ayer!
       guess   what CL.1sg.dat happened   yesterday

Estoy tomando una cervecita en el   bar   y   entonces *veo*

am.1sg drinking a   beer   in the bar   and   then   see.1sg

a   mi   mujer besándose con mi   mejor   amigo.

acc my   wife   kissing   with my   best   friend

'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar and then I see

my wife kissing my best friend.'

(12) ¡Adiviná   qué   me   pasó   ayer!

guess   what CL.1sg.dat happened yesterday

Estaba   tomando una cervecita en el bar y   entonces *vi*

was.1sg   drinking a   beer   in he bar and   then   saw.1sg

a   mi   mujer besándose con mi   mejor   amigo.

acc. my   wife   kissing   with my   best   friend

'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I was drinking a beer in the bar and then I saw

my wife kissing my best friend.'

In (11) the speaker presents the past meaning as given. This can be done to the extent a

temporal anchor is present in the discourse (Hornstein 1990). In the case at hand, the temporal

adverb *ayer* 'yesterday' performs this anchoring function.

Now, notice that the hearer has the option of interrupting the discourse of the speaker but

only if the answer is in the formal past, not in the historical present form, a fact not previously

noted, as far as I know:

(13)   A: ¡Adiviná   qué   me   pasó   ayer!

guess   what CL.1sg.dat happened   yesterday

Estoy   tomando una cervecita en el   bar...

am.1sg drinking a beer in the bar

'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar…'

B: ¡Qué casualidad! ayer yo también ***estaba tomando*** una cervecita

what coincidence yesterday I also was drinking a beer

en el bar

in the bar

'What a coincidence! Yesterday, I was also drinking a beer in the bar.'

B'¡Qué casualidad! #ayer yo también ***estoy tomando***

what coincidence yesterday I also am drinking

una cervecita en el bar

a beer in the bar

'#What a coincidence! Yesterday, I am also drinking a beer in the bar.'

It seems that a pragmatic condition is at work here. The change of discursive subjects prevents the reintroduction of the narrative present into the hearer discourse. Whatever is the right explanation of this restriction, it is clear that it allows us to control an experiment for testing the mutual entailment theory of ellipsis. What this approach to ellipsis predicts is that an elliptical answer to the speaker discourse should be fine even if the antecedent is in the historical past and the elided constituent contains a verb in the formal past, because there is mutual entailment between them. However, this prediction is not borne out:

(14) A: ¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer!

guess what CL.1sg.dat happened yesterday

Estoy tomando una cervecita en el bar

am.1sg drinking a beer in the bar

'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar…

B: ¡Qué casualidad! #Yo también ~~estaba/estoy   tomando   una   cervecita~~

    what coincidence I   also   was/am   drinking   a   beer

    ~~en el   bar.~~

    in the   bar

    '#What a coincidence! Me too.'

The answer is fine if the antecedent is in the formal past:

(15) A: ¡Adiviná   qué   me   pasó   ayer!

          Guess   what CL.1sg.dat happened   yesterday

          Estaba tomando   una   cervecita   en el   bar

          was.1sg drinking   a   beer   in the   bar

      'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I was drinking a beer in the bar…'

      B: ¡Qué casualidad! Yo   también   ~~estaba   tomando   una   cervecita~~

          what coincidence I   also   was   drinking   a   beer

          ~~en el   bar.~~

          in the   bar

       'What a coincidence! Me too.'

It is important to note that there is no ban against a narrative serving as suitable antecedent *per se*. In this respect, consider the following fragment:

(16) A: Adiviná   qué   me   pasó   ayer!

          guess   what CL.1sg.dat   happened   yesterday

Estoy	tomando	una	cervecita	en el	bar
am.1sg	drinking	a	beer	in the	bar

y	de repente	**[IP aparece cierta persona que conocés]**
and	suddenly	appears certain person that know.you

'Guess what happened to me yesterday! I am drinking a beer at the bar and suddenly certain person you know appears.'

The boldfaced IP may be a suitable antecedent for a sluicing fragment like (17B) just because a non-elliptical answer can be given using the present tense as a narrative (17B'). The pragmatic restriction previously discussed is not at play; i.e., there is no change of discourse subject here: the hearer question is framed within the previous narrative. Of course, a full answer in the formal past is also felicitous here (17B'') although it cannot be a target for deletion, as it would violate the syntactic identity condition on ellipsis:

(17)   B: Quién ~~aparece~~?

       B':   Quién   aparece?
             who   appears

       B'': Quién   apareció?
             who   appeared

Thus, the new fact presented in this paper goes in favor of the syntactic approach to ellipsis resolution. In effect, a mutual entailment-based theory predicts that the answer (14B) should have an elliptical alternative because "yesterday *x* **is** drinking a beer" entails "yesterday *y* **was** drinking a beer" and viceversa. As for the syntactic approach, the oddness of (14B) follows, instead, for exactly the same reason as the oddness of (13B'). Under this view, (13B), i.e., the

case where the tense node in the elliptical gap is formally different to its correlate in the antecedent cannot be a suitable target for deletion because of the identity condition on ellipsis. (13B') can, but then the pragmatic restriction on narrative just presented applies. Thus, the syntactic approach rightly predicts this case of grammatical ineffability.

I do not see how the mutual-entailment condition on ellipsis can deal with this issue without loosing one of its fundamental premises: that something may count as *given* from information contextually salient in the discourse. Notice that pragmatic entailment is the crucial notion here. For a purely LF-approach to ellipsis, where ellipsis resolution takes place on pure LF structures, you can get the right result trivially: the semantic denotation of [[past]] $\neq$ [[present]], even if [[present]] is semantically vacuous (Fintel & Heim 2002). Therefore, a LF approach is extensionally equivalent to the syntactic approach at least in this respect. For the pragmatic approach, instead, ellipsis resolution takes place on pragmatic structures. In the case at hand, identity should be calculated after present is translated into past by some rule of narratives (see Hornstein 1990 and, especially, Nunes 1994 for concrete implementations). Whenever [[present]] is converted into past by the presence of some anchor like *yesterday* mutual entailment with a formal past form is automatically triggered. Of course, additional assumptions could be made in order to avoid mutual entailment in this case. But I will leave the task of proponing and defending such additional assumptions to the proponents of the mutual entailment theory.

4. Conclusion

As it stands, the problem of grammatical ineffability in narratives posses a novel challenge for the mutual entailment approach to identity in ellipsis. By the same token, it seems that syntactic identity (even if calculated at LF, assuming the syntax/LF division makes any sense

in the first place) is much more than a very limited ingredient of the theory of ellipsis (*pace* Chung 2013).

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