

Obligatory (non)parasitic gaps

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Abstract: The paper advocates the idea that at least in English, obligatory gaps are used in the positions in which either an R-expression or an overt pronoun would produce a constraint violation. Thus, in order to satisfy conditions on interpretation, the computational system (CS) renders the derivation to converge at LF. In the case of crossed-over coindexed expressions the strategy for the CS is to reconstruct the nonpronominal item into a pronominal one and subsequently delete it once it is accessible as a bound variable. The analysis additionally shows that the actual gap is not a parasitic gap.

Key words: parasitic gaps, cross-over, vehicle change, linked pronouns, bound variables, insulation effect

Introduction

In the discussion it is argued that what originally has been called an obligatory parasitic gap is actually not a real parasitic gap. First, it will be observed that even earlier accounts of gaps in subject islands suggested that the computational system (CS) allowed for gapping in order to secure the interpretation observing all constraints on derivation. Then it is shown that the application of Kennedy's (1997) island and strong crossover tests as well as Condition B test point to the fact that in the relevant positions parasitic gaps do not exist and, consequently, the idea of obligatory gaps as instances of deleted pronouns under bound variable analysis is advocated.

1. Obligatory gaps: the crossover constraint and linked pronouns.

1.1. The crossover constraint

Since Engdahl (1983) it has been claimed that P-gaps can be classified into two types:

- (1) Optional parasitic gaps:
 - a. follow the trace
 - b. mostly occur in adverbial and complement clauses
 - c. are in almost free variation with unstressed personal pronouns, which are understood to be coreferential to or bound by the filler
- (2) Obligatory parasitic gaps:
 - a. precede the trace
 - b. primarily occur in gerunds and noun complements
 - c. cannot be normally replaced by a coreferential pronoun without a significant loss of acceptability

According to the survey results given in Engdahl (1983), at least 65% of respondents marked sentences with obligatory P-gaps as more natural than their versions with pronouns¹. The sample sentence is given below:

- (3) a. Which boy_i did Mary's talking to *pg* bother *t* most?
 b. *?Which boy_i did Mary's talking to him_i bother *t* most?

The original explanation for the impossibility to replace a P-gap with a pronoun in gaps preceding the trace was that a pronoun cannot be bound by a *wh*-element which crossed it over. The following example shows the violation of Postal's Crossover constraint (Postal 1971):

- (4) Who_i does she_{*1/2} think *t*_i called yesterday?

Sentences with a gap, on the other hand, assure that the listener does not go beyond the very sentence to locate the referent, as a P-gap is interpreted as coindexed with a moved element of the same sentence. Engdahl (1983) maintains that in this way, the intentional interpretation of the sentence is secured, yet there is a way of obtaining the same interpretation with a coindexed pronoun:

- (5) a. *Who_i does she_i think *t*_i called yesterday?
 b. Who_i thinks she_i called yesterday?

(5a) is ruled out as it violates Postal's crossover constraint (Postal 1971) as well as the leftmost constraint (Jacobson 1977), according to which a *wh*-phrase cannot bind the crossed-over pronoun. In obligatory parasitic gap constructions, as in (3a), using a gap is a way of avoiding the constraint violation (Engdahl 1983), and securing the desired interpretation at the same time.

An independent argument in favor of the general strong tendency of avoiding coreferential (or linked) overt pronouns in main clauses comes from early sentence

¹ Engdahl's (1983) analysis is based on the poll results of the survey carried out at Stanford University in 1981: five sets of sentences with either a parasitic gap or a pronoun were presented to the group of 28 subjects. The preference was indicated as given below (Nb.: (iv) and (v) investigate the preference for obligatory P-gaps):

- | | | | |
|-------|----|---|------|
| (i) | a. | This is the kind of food _i you must cook <i>t</i> before you eat <i>pg</i> | [15] |
| | b. | This is the kind of food _i you must cook <i>t</i> before you eat it _i | [13] |
| (ii) | a. | Which girl _i did you send a picture of <i>t</i> to <i>t</i> ? | [19] |
| | b. | Which girl _i did you send a picture of her _i to <i>t</i> ? | [13] |
| | c. | Which girl _i did you send a picture of <i>t</i> to her _i ? | [2] |
| (iii) | a. | Susan always files <i>t</i> without reading <i>t</i> properly, [_{NP_i} all the memos from the lowlevel administration.] | [12] |
| | b. | Susan always files <i>t</i> without reading them _i properly, [_{NP_i} all the memos from the low-level administration.] | [16] |
| (iv) | a. | Which boy _i did Mary's talking to <i>pg</i> bother <i>t</i> most? | [15] |
| | b. | Which boy _i did Mary's talking to him _i bother <i>t</i> most? | [8] |
| (v) | a. | Which student _i did your attempt to talk to <i>pg</i> scare <i>t</i> to death? | [17] |
| | b. | Which student _i did your attempt to talk to him _i scare <i>t</i> to death? | [8] |

processing analyses. While embedded clauses are interpreted in a shallow manner, matrix clauses receive a full interpretation. In full clausal interpretations, all referring expressions are assigned their referents, which also include pronouns (Bever and Townsend 1979). Additionally, Engdahl (1983) points to the fact that the shallow interpretation of subordinate clauses where the assignment of referents to pronouns is postponed supports the observation that in natural languages backward anaphora is licit in embedded clauses. The immediate interpretation of matrix pronouns is, in turn, consistent with the fact that pronouns c-commanding or almost c-commanding other NPs or DPs occur in main clauses (Lasnik 1976, Reinhart 1983).

1.2. Linked pronouns

Consider the following example of Weak Cross Over effect:

- (6) Who wonders what who stole?

In order to satisfy WCO effect, Hornstein (1995, 2001) proposes that:

- (7) Wh *in situ* is interpreted functionally like bound pronouns (Hornstein 1995)
 (8) A pronoun cannot be linked to a wh-t/variable to its right (Hornstein 2001)

In concert with (7) and (8), the only acceptable reading is the one in (9a):

- (9) a. Who₁ wonders [what₂ [pron₂] bought t₁]
 b. *Who₁ wonders [what₂ [pron₂] bought t₂]

(9b) has the trace, t₂, to the right of the bound pronoun, which according to the assumption in (8) violates WCO, and hence this reading is ruled out.

Note that Postal's crossover constraint and the leftmost constraint outlined in section 1.1. dismiss sentences like in (3) or (5) on the basis of wh-movement implications. Adopting the WCO strategy given in (8), the conclusion is that a linked pronoun does not tolerate a kin copy to its right.

Consider examples with a linked pronoun:

- (10) a. *Who₁ did he₁ say t₁ was afraid of ghosts?
 b. Who₁ t₁ said he₁ was afraid of ghosts?
 (11) a. *Who₁ did she₁ think t₁ had locked the door?
 b. Who₁ t₁ thought she₁ had locked the door?

(10b) and (11b) are favored over their counterparts for economy reasons: shorter move applies. There is a difference in the application of shorter move in (10) and (11) and the Superiority Effect (6). Lasnik and Saito (1992) report on the double meaning of questions like (6) due to the fact that wh-elements need not be coindexed. Here, the pronouns are linked.^{2,3}

² Lasnik and Saito (1992) discuss the possible ambiguous reading of sentences like (4), repeated below:

- (i) Who wonders what who stole?

Constructions with obligatory P-gaps parallel with the above derivations. In the approach developed here, an obligatory P-gap is a way-out strategy that secures grammaticality.

- (12) a. Which boy₁ did Mary's talking to *pg*₁ bother t₁ most?
 b. *Which boy₁ did Mary's talking to him₁ bother t₁ most?
 c. Which boy₁ did Mary's talking to him₂ bother t₁ most?
 d. *Which boy₁ did Mary's talking to *pg*₁ bother him₁ most?

A P-gap is always linked, but neither a gap nor a pronoun-t need observe the rule in (8). (12b) is ungrammatical as it violates (8): the pronoun in the noun complement is linked to wh-t to its right. (12a) is grammatical as the linked pronoun is deleted. (12c) remains grammatical as the pronoun is unlinked and does not violate (8).

2. Vehicle change

2.1. Apparent parasitic gaps (Kennedy 1997)

While P-gap constructions are sensitive to islands, Kim and Lyle (1995, 1996) point out that constructions with an (apparent) parasitic gap do not show island violations once the gap is contained in a deleted VP. The following set of examples comes from Kennedy (1997: 697-698); the (b) examples are perfectly grammatical when a P-gap is in the deleted VPs; the brackets mark extraction islands:

- (13) Wh-island:
 b. *Which article₁ did you read t₁ after Jim asked [who would be willing to summarize *pg*₁]?
 c. Which article did you read after Jim asked [who would be willing to { . . . }]?
 (14) Adjunct island:
 a. *Which movie₁ did you see t₁ because Polly was so excited [after going to *pg*₁]?
 b. Which movie did you see because Polly was so excited [after she did { . . . }]?

Both *who* of the matrix Comp and the *what* of the embedded Spec-CP can be paired with the subject *who* of the embedded clause. In the latter case, to avoid the Superiority violation, the only acceptable reading is that of '*A wonders what B stole, and C wonders what D stole*'. Irrespectively of the reading, the wh-element seeks the shorter route to C⁰.

³ While there are two syntactic ways of asking questions with linked and unlinked pronouns, respectively:

- (ii) a. Who₁ thinks she₁ called yesterday?
 b. Who₁ does she₂ think t₁ called yesterday?

there is no such possibility while dealing with two *who*-elements, hence WCO Effect. Hornstein's (2001) rule given in (7) tackles the interpretation that does not stem from the word order.

- (15) Complex NP island:
- a. *Dick Dale_i, who we attempt to emulate t_i despite the admonitions of [many people who say we shouldn't try to sound like pg_i], is performing tonight at the Catalyst.
 - b. Dick Dale_i, who we attempt to emulate t_i despite the admonitions of [many people who say we shouldn't { . . . }], is performing tonight at the Catalyst.
- (16) Coordinate structure:
- a. *Which books_i did you read t_i after learning that Erik [read pg_i and found them_i interesting]?
 - b. Which books did you read after learning that Erik [did { . . . } and found them interesting]?

Kennedy (1997) proves that sentences with deleted VPs do not contain P-gaps at all and therefore do not show Subjacency effects. Instead, they contain pronouns that are interpreted as bound variables. Elided VPs have been claimed to have a full syntactic structure at LF (e.g. Lasnik 1995a, 1995b, 1997). To account for the fact that sentences with elided VPs do not show Subjacency effects and are consequently claimed not to have P-gaps, Kennedy (1997) adopts vehicle change by Fiengo and May (1994), where it is claimed that reconstruction phenomena include nondistinct features. In the case of apparent P-gap in deleted VPs, it operates in the way that coindexed elements differ in the value of the pronominal feature:

- (17) Vehicle change (Fiengo and May 1994: 218, Kennedy 1997, ex. 13):
 X_{[+pro]_i} is a reconstruction of Y_{[-pro]_i}.

Fiengo and May (1994) prove that deletions licensed by vehicle change are sensitive to Condition B (the underlined part is the LF representation of the deleted VP):

- (18) The headmistress suspended Michael_i because he_i wanted her to {suspend him_i}.
 (19) *The headmistress suspended Michael_i because he_i couldn't {suspend him_i}.

While (18) is grammatical and observes both Condition B and C, (19) violates Condition B (and observes Condition C). Kennedy (1997) concludes from these facts that Condition B effects are a test to check if the deletion involves vehicle change. Moreover, as all operations and structures based on \bar{A} -movement, including P-gaps, are sensitive to strong crossover (Cinque 1990, Williams 1990), then sentences with elided VPs that contain pronouns licensed by vehicle change should not show SCO effects (and should observe Condition B). And so, the following (a) examples with the pronoun instead of a P-gap do not show strong crossover effects, while their (b) counterparts with P-gap constructions do (example (22) is Kennedy's (1997) example (27)).

- (20) a. Which deputy_i did Kelly vote for t_i because he_i asked her to {vote for him_i}?
 b. *Which deputy_i did Kelly vote for because he_i asked her to support pg_i?
 (21) a. Who_i did Michael visit t_i after she_i asked him to {visit her_i}?
 b. *Who_i did Michael visit after she_i asked him to come to pg_i?
 (22) a. Who_i did you nominate t_i without him_i knowing that you did {nominate him_i}?
 b. *Who_i did you nominate without him_i knowing that you supported pg_i?

Kennedy (1997) concludes that sentences with VP-deletions contain “nonparasitic” gaps, which are actually pronouns licensed by vehicle change.

2.2. Further evidence for the island and strong cross-over tests

Consider examples of subject parasitic gaps from Engdahl (1985: 41):

- (23) a. ?a person who₁ you admire t₁ because you know close friends of pg₁
 b. *a person who₁ you admire t₁ because close friends of pg₁ become famous
 c. ?a person who₁ you admire t₁ because close friends of pg₁ seem to {admire pg₁}

(23c) becomes acceptable as the P-gap is contained inside the elided VP. Postal (2001a) observes that what in (23c) is a missing parasitic gap, would be treated as nonparasitic gap by Kennedy (where the pronoun in the deletion site is interpreted as a bound variable):

- (24) *a person who₁ you admire t₁ because close friends of pg₁ seem to {admire him₁}

The problem Postal (2001: 404-405) points to is that (23c) is acceptable, while (24) is not. In (24), the licenser (L-gap) is too remote from the parasitic gap, which makes the entire P-gap construction illegitimate.⁴ In (23c) on the other hand, the object parasitic gap is an L-gap for the subject-internal P-gap, which makes the construction legitimate, thus, at least acceptable. Postal concludes that even though the above paradigm supported by the analysis based on the anti-c-command condition provides the evidence for the thesis that there are no instances of missing P-gaps in English (and in any other natural languages), Kennedy’s island test and the strong crossover test can prove otherwise. The tests show that neutral missing P-gap constructions (NMP-gap cases) do not contain missing P-gaps, while subject missing P-gap cases (SMP-gaps whose L-gap is missing within a deleted VP) do, as NMP-gap constructions do not show island violations, whereas SMP-gap structures do (see the examples of contrasting pairs under (13)-(16)). It is on this basis that Kennedy (1997) claims that a NMP-gap construction does not contain a parasitic gap. Postal’s observation, however, is that when we apply the same tests to SMP-gap cases (where the sentences with VP deletions are correct and

⁴ Structurally, the construction in (24) is problematic with regard to the anti-c-command constraint on parasitic gap licensing and earlier accounts of P-gaps. For example, Longobardi (1985) employs Kayne’s (1984) Connectedness Condition to show that at least two coindexed parasitic variables are bound by a single operator.

- (i) Connectedness Condition (Kayne 1984)
 Given a maximal set of empty categories β_1, \dots, β_n , each locally bound by the same antecedent α in a tree T , the union formed by the g-projection sets of every β by the antecedent α must form a subtree of T .

This is in concert with Engdahl’s (1983) initial observation that licensing variables cannot c-command parasitic gaps: once it happens, the operator that c-commands the licenser becomes a non-local binder.

their counterparts with a P-gap are not), we have a different result as both sentences show island violations (the examples come from Postal 2001: 406-407):

(25) Complex NP island:

- a. *[Which author]₁ did they defend t₁ despite the fact that friends of *pg*₁ didn't want to defend *pg*₁?
- b. *[Which author]₁ did they defend t₁ despite the fact that friends of *pg*₁ didn't want to?

Note the contrast between the ungrammatical SMP-gap construction in (25) and the grammatical NMP-gap structure in (26):

(26) Which author₁ did they defend t₁ despite the fact that Sally didn't want to?

(27) Coordinate structure island:

- a. *That the report which₁ Arlene copied t₁ after critics of *pg*₁ read *pg*₁ and found it₁ interesting.
- b. *That the report which₁ Arlene copied t₁ after critics of *pg*₁ did and found it₁ interesting.

Again, compare the ungrammatical SMP-gap construction in (27) with the grammatical NMP-gap structure under (28):

(28) That the report which₁ Arlene read t₁ after Nick did and found it₁ interesting.

(29) Wh-island:

- a. *the one who₁ they hired t₁ after friends of *pg*₁ said it was unknown why Myron wouldn't hire *pg*₁
- b. *the one who₁ they hired t₁ after friends of *pg*₁ said it was unknown why Myron wouldn't *pg*₁

The example in (29) once again contrasts with the otherwise grammatical NMP-gap construction in (30):

(30) the woman who₁ they hired t₁ after saying it was unknown why Myron wouldn't

Postal's (2001) application of the strong cross over test shows the similar results. As it was pointed to in the previous subsection, standard parasitic gaps show strong cross over effects and Kennedy's SCO test proves that NMP-gap structures do not (as in (20)-(22)). This test when applied to SMP-gaps shows that they do show strong cross over effects:

- (31) a. *[Which candidate]₁ did the Smiths vote for t₁ because neighbors of *pg*₁ said he₁ could convince the Republicans to vote for *pg*₁?
- b. *[Which candidate]₁ did the Smiths vote for t₁ because neighbors of *pg*₁ said he₁ could convince the Republicans to?

As expected, an NMP-gap construction does not show strong cross over effects:

- (32) [Which candidate]₁ did the Smiths₂ vote for t₁ because they_{2/3} said he₁ could convince the Republicans to?

Postal (2001) concludes that Kennedy's tests support his thesis that (in elided VPs) NMP-gap cases do not involve parasitic gaps (they are other words 'nonparasitic'), but at the same time the very tests show that subject-missing parasitic gap constructions (SMP-gaps) are instances of true parasitic gaps. Postal's application of the island and the strong crossover test independently shows how representative the tests are and, consequently, directs toward the reconstruction/vehicle change approach to nonparasitic cases.

3. Vehicle change and pronoun deletion in subject islands

In section 1 it has been proposed that what we have so far called 'obligatory P-gaps' act as deleted pronouns in the syntactic 'way-out' strategy. Adopting vehicle change, we may now widen the spectrum of the analysis and proceed to other cases of gaps in subject islands. Consider the following:

- (33) a. My attempt to talk to Jack₁ scared him₁.
 b. *My attempt to talk to him₁ scared Jack₁.
 (34) a. *Which student₁ did your attempt to talk to Jack₁ scare t₁?
 b. ?Which student₁ did your attempt to talk to him₁ scare t₁?⁵
 c. Which student₁ did your attempt to talk to ____₁ scare t₁?

We assume (33a) to be the representation at LF. In (34a) the wh-movement produces ungrammaticality. As the coreference between a pronoun and an R-expression is unacceptable due to Condition B (cf. (33b)), also Condition C disallows coreference between two c-commanding R-expressions:

- (35) a. *[Jessica]₁ thinks that we despise [Jessica's brother]₁.
 b. *?[Jessica's neighbours]₁ think that we despise [Jessica's brother]₁.

Hence, the coreference in (34a) between the c-commanding copy {*which student*} and the coindexed *Jack* produces ungrammaticality. At LF the vehicle change operation of X_{[+pro]i} being a reconstruction of Y_{[-pro]i} shifts an R-expression into a pronoun and we end up with an intermediate structure (34b). The construction does not show strong crossover effect and is sensitive to Condition B, which is a positive test for vehicle change (cf. Kennedy 1997)⁶, whereas 'normal' P-gap constructions do show strong crossover effect (Williams 1990, Munn 2001):

- (36) a. *Whose₁ brother did they talk to t₂ after he₁ saw pg₂?
 b. *Whose₁ brother did they talk to t₂ and he always despises pg₂?
 c. *Whose₁ brother did they talk to t₂ before he₁ thought that Jeff saw pg₂?

⁵ The example (22b) was marked as 'most natural' by 32% of respondents in the study carried out at Stanford University in January 1981 (Engdahl 1983).

⁶ Here, the strong crossover test is actually inferior to Condition B test, as it is the whole subject not the pronoun itself that c-commands the trace of the operator, however, the two are coindexed (cf. insulation effect facts in section 4).

Once the intermediate step (34b) has been obtained via vehicle change, in the final step (34c) the pronoun is deleted as it is interpreted as a bound variable.⁷ Note that when the (undeleted) pronoun is noncoreferential, the sentence is grammatical:

(37) Which student₁ did your attempt to talk to him₂ scare t₁ ?

The derivation is sensitive to Condition B and does not show strong crossover effects, which are diagnostics for vehicle change. This indirectly shows that the reconstruction/vehicle change operation is not limited to VPs (which should not come as unexpected provided that the rule in (17) is complete, nor was it ever claimed in Fiengo and May 1994).

4. Insulation effect

In explaining the phenomenon of ('nonparasitic') gaps in subject islands we have adopted Kennedy's (1997) argument that gaps sensitive to Condition B must be treated as pronouns. Apparently, there exist sentences with subject/Genitive islands containing a coindexed pronoun that are acceptable:

(38) *?Which boy₁ did [Betty's talking to his₁ brother] excite?

(39) ?Which boy₁ did [Betty's talking to Lucy [about him₁]] excite?

(40) ?Which actress₁ did [the director's discussing with Robert deNiro [about her₁]] nobilitate?

This fact can be explained on the basis that complex Genitive constructions contain the possessive that is not in the most local domain of the antecedent, which ameliorates Condition B effects. For instance, Witkoś (2002) shows how Condition B effects in Polish can be weakened when there is a complex possessive specifier:

(41) Witkoś (2002: 316)

a. Piotr₁ widział swojego₁/*jego₁ brata.

Piotr-NOM saw self his brother-ACC

'Piotr saw his brother.'

b. Piotr₁ znalazł [książkę swojej₁/?jego₁ mamy].

Piotr-NOM found book-ACC self his mother-GEN

'Piotr found his mother's book.'

The argument is developed along the lines of Kuno's Insulation Effect against Condition B' (Kuno 1997):

(42) Insulation Effect (Kuno 1997: 12)

The deeper a given non-anaphor is embedded in a larger NP, the more insulated it is from the effect of Principle B'.

The examples in (39) and (40) can be accounted for on the basis of insulation effect.

⁷ The pronoun is interpreted as a bound variable; otherwise it would exhibit strong crossover effect. The situation parallels with what we observe in elided VPs with pronouns (Kennedy 1997).

Conclusion

In the approach presented here the obligatory gap is the result of the syntactic way-out strategy that secures grammaticality of a desired interpretation without violating any syntactic constraints, as the offending bound/linked pronoun is being deleted. The so-called “gap” in the relevant positions is only apparent. It is rather a linked pronoun licensed by vehicle change. At the Spell-out, it is a deleted pronoun interpreted as a bound variable.

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