Is there repair by ellipsis?

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Comments welcome

Ross (1969) observed that an island violation could apparently be overcome or "repaired" if the island were deleted, as in sluicing, where wh-movement occurs out of an elided structure. This could be superficially described as an instance of ellipsis "feeding" an otherwise-illicit application of movement. Over the years, this phenomenon has been thought to extend beyond islands: ellipsis can apparently feed or repair a variety of illicit movements, including unlicensed instances of (multiple) focus movement, head movement, etc. (Merchant 2010).

Recently, though, several authors have leveled convincing arguments against the original claim that ellipsis can repair island violations, showing apparent examples to be illusory (Barros *to appear*, a.o.). With the foundation of elliptical repair in doubt, the following question arises: To what extent, if any, can ellipsis make an ill-formed structure acceptable?

The structure in (1), in which an XP has moved out of some elided YP, has been ascribed to several ellipsis phenomena (some involving more than one moved XP):

(1) XP … ~~[YP … t_{XP} …]~~

We refer to this as the "move-and-delete" derivation.

Sluicing was the first phenomenon to be assigned this derivation, following Ross (1969). Sluicing (2) is widely thought to involve wh-movement out of an elided constituent (3):

[Context: *John saw someone*.]
(2) Who?
(3) Who_i ~~[did he see t_i]~~ ?

English would require this movement of *who* independent of the ellipsis; thus, sluicing appears to involve incidental co-occurrence of two discrete syntactic operations (movement and deletion).

Ross noted, though, that the situation might not be this simple. In unreduced wh- questions, wh-movement is prohibited out of islands (e.g., coordinate-structure islands (4)); however, sluiced analogues of such questions are often perfectly acceptable (5).

[Context: *John saw Mary and someone else*.]
(4) *Who did he see her and?
(5) Who?

According to Ross, (4) and (5) differ only in what is pronounced, meaning the two share a structural description containing an island violation (but see below). This led to the proposal that island violations could be mitigated if the offending islands were deleted, which came to be known as "elliptical repair" of island violations (see Merchant 2001 for extensive discussion, and Fox & Pesetsky 2005 for a generalized approach based on "cyclic linearization").

Since Ross (1969), the scope of elliptical repair has expanded beyond amelioration of apparent island violations. In the ellipsis literature, move-and-delete analyses of many different phenomena invoke movements that would yield ungrammatical sentences if ellipsis were not applied, even without an island present. Consider Merchant's (2004) influential move-and-delete analysis of fragment answers: Merchant argues convincingly that fragment XPs originate within clausal answers, but escape ellipsis of these clauses via movement (6). Crucially, (7) shows that this movement is ungrammatical without ellipsis.

[Context*: How is John feeling?*]
(6) Sick$_i$ ~~[he is feeling t_i]~~.
(7) *Sick he is feeling.

This ellipsis dependency is common among analyses of move-and-delete phenomena, including pseudogapping (8) (Jayaseelan 2001, echoed by Merchant a.o.) and multiple fragment answers (10) (adapted from Merchant 2004:711):

(8) John won't read magazines, but he will books$_i$ ~~[read t_i]~~.
(9) *John won't read magazines, but he will books read.

(10) Q: Wer hat gestern wen gesehen? *German*
who.NOM has yesterday who.ACC seen
'Who saw whom yesterday?'

A1: Der Mann$_i$ den Jungen$_j$ ~~[t_i hat gestern t_j gesehen]~~.
the.NOM man the.ACC boy has yesterday seen
'The man (saw) the boy.'

A2: *Der Mann den Jungen hat gestern gesehen.
the.NOM man the.ACC boy has yesterday seen

The same state of affairs arises in well-motivated proposals for gapping (Coppock 2001), stripping (Depiante 2000), apparent non-constituent coordination (Sailor & Thoms, to appear), and other ellipsis phenomena (see Thoms, to appear, and Merchant 2010). Space restrictions preclude exemplifying each phenomenon, but they can all be shown to involve the derivation in (1), and, in each, ellipsis behaves like a well-formedness condition on the ellipsis-dodging movement: it facilitates convergence of a structure that is otherwise ill-formed. This is strongly reminiscent of apparent island repair in sluicing, except that examples such as (6) do not involve islands in the familiar sense.

There are, however, good reasons to question Ross's (1969) initial claim that ellipsis can repair island violations (cf. Merchant 2001:ch. 4 and references therein). Recent work by Barros (to appear) and others provides compelling arguments that apparent cases of island repair in sluicing (*qua* TP ellipsis), e.g. (11), are actually illusory: they always and only arise when the missing material is recoverable either as some subpart of the island in the antecedent (the "short source" strategy: (11a)) or as a simple cleft (the "pseudosluicing"/"pseudofragment" strategy: (11b)), neither of which involves an island violation, as full recovery would (11c) (see Merchant 2001; example adapted from Barros (51)):

(11) They hired someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't know which one.
   a. …which one$_i$ ~~[they speak t_i]~~. *Short source*
   b. …which one$_i$ ~~[it was t_i]~~. *Pseudosluice*
   c. …which one$_i$ ~~[they hired someone who speaks t_i]~~. *Full recovery*

Given that the appearance of island repair only arises in environments where (11a) or (11b) is an available parse, there is no reason to believe that the parse in (11c) is ever available. As Barros and others point out, ellipsis sites are widely believed to contain silent structure, which in turn predicts that ellipsis should be unable to repair island violations. This prediction is maintained if (11c) is simply ruled out for the same reason its non-elided counterpart is.

That being said, if ellipsis is incapable of repairing island violations, then the analytical foundation of elliptical repair in general is called into question. Thus, our contribution to this volume—the core set of open questions we wish to pose—is:

(12) Can ellipsis ever rescue an illicit derivation, or are all apparent cases illusory?
   a. If elliptical repair is real:
      i. Is it a uniform phenomenon, perhaps operating on a natural class of structures or movement types within the general schema of (1), or is the appearance of uniformity accidental, and (1) perhaps too restrictive?
         1. If it is a uniform phenomenon, what is the proper analysis of it?
         2. If it is non-uniform, how can each case be accounted for without egregious additions to the grammar?
      ii. Why is ellipsis able to repair the underlying deviance of move-and-delete derivations such as (6), (8) and (10), but unable to repair island violations?

b. If elliptical repair is illusory:

   i. What mechanisms do the apparent cases reduce to?

   ii. If some or all of the move-and-delete approach is to be maintained:

      1. Are the movements indeed illicit (and therefore need repair), but repaired by something other than ellipsis?

      2. Or are the movements actually not illicit, and we simply do not understand the underlying structure that is obscured by ellipsis (cf. pseudo-sluicing)?

We close with commentary on some of these questions.

It is commonly held that islands are not uniform phenomena, meaning any successful approach to (12a.ii) would presumably require uniformity of (some subpart of) the move-and-delete phenomena, part of the open question in (12a.i). Thus, those two questions may be implicationally related. That islands cannot be repaired is significant: it reins in the theory of repair, and potentially makes predictions about the nature of the repairable movement(s).

Regarding (12a.i), a comparative inversion phenomenon described in Merchant (2003) poses a challenge for unification of elliptical repair (13). It exhibits the same ellipsis dependency as the move-and-delete phenomena discussed above, but it differs from them by not obviously involving the move-and-delete derivation in (1). First, the illicit movement being repaired is head movement (T-to-C), not phrasal movement; second, the trace of this illicit movement is apparently outside the elided constituent:

(13) Abby can speak more languages than can$_i$ her father t_i ~~[speak]~~.
(14) *Abby can speak more languages than can her father speak.

Perhaps such cases (and others, including *as*-clauses: Merchant 2003) can be related to the move-and-delete phenomena we have been discussing; if so, a uniform approach to elliptical repair may be achievable.

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