

Topics in the syntax of ellipsis

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25.06.2018

Class 1: Sluicing and silent structure

- This class is about the syntax of *ellipsis*.

- In *elliptical constructions*, linguistic material is left unpronounced, but is nevertheless understood.
- Ellipsis is therefore a classical example of a *form-meaning mismatch*.
- Some canonical examples of ellipsis (some of which we'll be covering in this class).

(1) *Sluicing*

Someone stayed out until 7am,
but I have no idea who stayed out until 7 am.

(2) *VP ellipsis*

Elin stayed out until 7am, and Fraser did stay out until 7 am too.

(3) *Fragment answers*

Q: Who stayed out until 7am?

A: Elin stayed out until 7am

- Some other phenomena which have been (controversially) analysed as ellipsis:

(4) *Comparative deletion*

Fraser stayed out later than Elin stayed out.

(5) *Pronouns*

A woman walked in. [She_D woman] sat down.

(6) *Conjunction reduction*

Patrick talked to Elin and Patrick talked to Fraser.

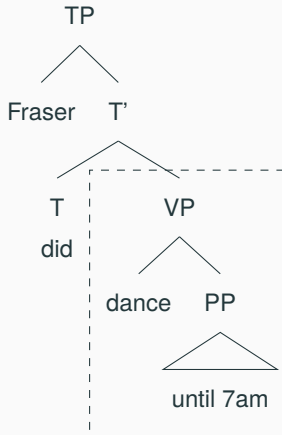
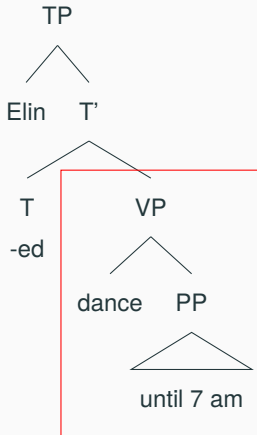
- Ellipsis should be distinguished from other phenomena where linguistic material is missing but nevertheless understood, such as, e.g. implicature.

(7) Fraser danced with some of the people at the party.

~> *Fraser danced with some of the people at the party and he didn't dance with all of the people at the party*

- Here, what is *understood* deviates from what we would expect based on the compositional semantics.
- There is little to suggest that there was ever a stage in the derivation at which this linguistic material was present, however.
- Elliptical phenomena display a distinct signature: the syntax betrays that the linguistic material is *missing*, and the missing material must be *recoverable* based on the context of utterance.

Terminology



- A(n)tecedent)
- E(lips)is) site

Three questions

- The *structure* question
- The *identity* question
- The *licensing* question

See Merchant (2018).

- (8) In elliptical constructions, is there syntactic structure that is unpronounced?

- (9) What is the relationship between the understood material and its antecedent?

- (10) What heads or structures allow for *ellipsis*, and what are the locality conditions on the relation between these structures and ellipsis?

- *The identity question*

To what extent must an elided constituent be identical to its antecedent?

At what level is the identity condition enforced – the narrow syntax, the semantics, or some other level?

- *The licensing question*

What are the *syntactic licensing conditions* governing ellipsis (not everything *recoverable* can necessarily be elided). Can only syntactic constituents be elided?

- Since Ross (1969)

(11) guess who Δ .



Merchant, Jason. 2018. Ellipsis: A survey of analytical approaches. In Jeroen Van Craenenbroeck & Tanya Temmerman (eds.) (Oxford handbooks). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.



Ross, John Robert. 1969. Guess who. *Sluicing: Cross-Linguistic Perspectives*.