Sluicing for Clarification: A Discourse-Based Perspective

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1. Sluicing in clarification

Sluicing is an ellipsis construction where only a stand-alone *wh*-phrase (a remnant) appears in a clause with **sentential meaning** (i.a., Chung et al. 1995):

(1) A: John hates **someone**. B: *Who?* (= '*Who* does John hate?')

Clarification request sluicing (CR-sluicing)

Sluicing in which a responder **fails to understand** some aspects of the correlate (the expression the remnant referring back to), **presumed to be shared** among speakers in the given context (Ginzburg and Sag 2000).

Due to its purpose, CR-sluicing receives **idiosyncratic interpretation**:

(2) A: You know **she** came back.
B: *Who?* ('*Who*/*Which woman* do you mean by '**she**'?')
A: Your girlfriend. (COCA 2018 FIC)

Previous analyses on canonical sluicing cannot properly explain the characteristics of CR-sluicing. As an alternative, we provide an analysis using the Table model (Farkas and Bruce 2010), focusing on the pragmatic points.

2. Key observations

2.1. On correlates

Canonical sluicing requires an indefinite correlate that can be covert (i.a., Merchant 2001), whereas **CR-sluicing** demands a definite, overt antecedent.

(3) a. A: John was talking (**to someone**). B: *Who?* [canonical]
b. A: John was talking *(**to Mary**). B: *Who?* [CR-sluicing]

2.2. Two possible interpretations

There are two possible interpretation for CR-sluicing decided by the background knowledge of the interlocutors (data from COCA 2018 MOV).

(4) a. **Speaker's ignorance** ('*Who* do you mean by *x*?')
A: I should talk to **Dr. Johns** about it. B: *Who?* A: Dr. Harold Johns.
b. **Multiple possible referents** ('*Which x* do you mean?')
A: Did you know **the kid**? B: *Who?* Which kid? A: The Beech kid.

2.3. [NP + *wh*] string

A remnant in CR-sluicing can follow an NP, together behaving as a single unit:

(5) a. A: Yo, who that?
B: It's **me**?
A: *Me who?*
B: It's Ali! (COCA 2018 MOV)
b. "She was **Apollo**'s sister."
"Apollo? *Apollo who?*
Oh, wait. Apollo." (COCA FIC 2004)

2.4. Island insensitivity

Just like canonical sluicing ((6); Merchant 2001), CR-sluicing is island-insensitive – a remnant can refer to a correlate inside a syntactic island.

(6) a. They want to hire [$_{NP}$ someone who speaks a **Balkan** language], but I don't remember *which*. (Merchant 2001: 6)
b. A: So, you mad about [$_{NP}$ the **Jason** thing]? B: *Who?* (COCA 2018 MOV)

2.5. Phonological parallelism

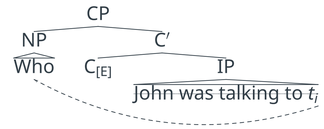
Unlike canonical sluicing, CR-sluicing is subject to an additional phonological identity condition that affects its syntax:

(7) a. A: John was talking **to someone**. B: *Who to?* (Merchant 2001: 88)
b. A: John was talking **to Mary**. B: *#Who to?*

3. Previous analysis & Discussion

The mainstream approach of sluicing, called **the PF-deletion approach** (i.a., Merchant 2001) assumes that sluicing derives from underlying source:

(8) A: John was talking to **someone**. B: (*To*) *who?*
a. [$_{CP}$ C$_{[E]}$ [$_{IP}$ John was taking to *who*]]
b. [$_{CP}$ *who*$_i$ C$_{[E]}$ [$_{IP}$ John was taking to t_i]]
c. [$_{CP}$ *who*$_i$ C$_{[E]}$ [$_{IP}$ John was taking to t_i]]



Empirical issues

However, the PF-deletion approach cannot properly capture the idiosyncratic meaning of CR-sluicing for the following reasons:

- First, the PF-deletion approach cannot capture the idiosyncratic, context-dependent meaning of CR-sluicing.

(9) A: John was talking to **Mary**. B: (*To*) *who?*
[$_{CP}$ *who*$_i$ C$_{[E]}$ [$_{IP}$ John was taking to t_i]] [Underlying source]
≠ 'Who do you mean by '**Mary**'? / Which **Mary** do you mean?'

- As the derivation accompanies movement, it needs additional conditions to solve the island insensitivity properly (i.e., island repair).

(10) A: You mad about [$_{NP}$ the **Jason** thing]? B: *Who?*
⇒ ***Who** [$_{CP}$ ⟨am I mad about [$_{NP}$ the t_i thing]⟩]? [Underlying source]

- What is the structure and the meaning of [NP-*wh*] string CR-sluicing?

4. An alternative approach

4.1. Pragmatics and semantics: The Table model

Based on the empirical observation and challenges above, we propose a discourse-based analysis using **the Table model** (cf., Farkas and Bruce 2010).

(11) Key notions
a. **Table**: stack of issues (propositions) committed by the interlocutors to the given discourse
b. **BK$_{Sp}$ (Background Knowledge)**: set of propositions that individual *Sp*(eaker)s know and may or may not be shared among interlocutors
c. **Common Ground (CG)**: set of propositions mutually and publicly agreed among interlocutors
d. **PS (Projected Set, *ps*)**: set of possible future common grounds

Example: Speaker's ignorance CR-sluicing

(12) A: I met **John** yesterday. p = *meet*(*A*, *John*); K_1: s_1
B: *Who?* ('Who do you mean by *John*?') K_2: s_2
A: John, the linguists. a = *linguist*(*j*); K_3: s_3

- **BK condition for speaker's ignorance CR-sluicing**:
$\{p \cap a\} \in BK_A$; $BK_B \cap \{a\} = \emptyset$

- **Initial CG condition for speaker's ignorance CR-sluicing** (K_1):
CG_1: $s_1 \cap \{a\} = \emptyset$; $ps_1 = \{s_1\}$ (s = situation)

The meaning of *Who?* is captured as a set of propositions where the antecedent p intersecting with all the correlate's possible properties:

(13) $[\![Who?]\!]$ = $\{p \cap linguist(j), p \cap novelist(j), p \cap teacher(j), \ldots\}$ (K_2)
= $\lambda P.meet(A, j)$ & $P(j)$

Finally, the corresponding answer expands the CG and PS.

(14) **CG repaired by an answer to *Who?* on K_3**:
CG_3: $s_3 \oplus \{a \cap p\}$; $ps_3 = \{s_3 \cup \{a \cap p\}\}$

4.2. Syntax: A non-derivational approach

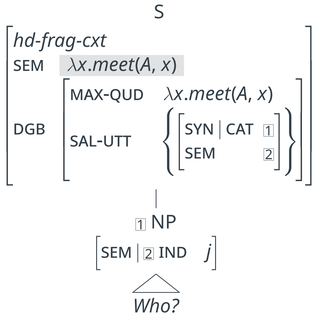
We assume that there is **no hidden linguistic unit** in the sluiced site. Instead, a simple XP directly projected to a sentential-level expression.
The projection is based on the key notions for relevant ellipsis constructions.

(15) **Key notions** (i.a., Ginzburg and Sag 2000; Goldberg 2006)
a. **MAX-QUD** (MAXimal question-under-Discussion): the most salient discussable question in the given context (i.e., current discourse topic)
b. **SAL-UTT** (SALient-UTTerance): the (sub)utterance which receives the widest scope within MAX-QUD (i.e., focused material)
c. **DGB** (Dialogue Game Board): a set of attributes recording contextual parameters in the ongoing discourse (similar to the Table)

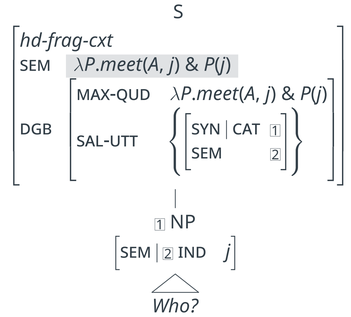
The sentential meaning (MAX-QUD) of the remnant (SAL-UTT) is retrieved by the given context described in the Table (cf., (11)-(13))

(16) **Sluicing: Structure and meaning** (c.f., Ginzburg and Sag 2000)

[Canonical sluicing]
A: I met **someone**.
B: $[Who?]_F$ (= $\lambda x.meet(A, x)$)



[CR-sluicing – *Sp*'s ignorance]
A: I met **John**.
B: $[Who?]_F$ (= $\lambda P.meet(A, j)$ & $P(j)$)

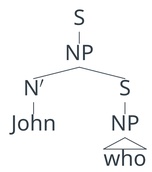


4.3. [NP + *wh*] CR-sluicing

CR-sluicing queries ***not-at-issue*** information related to its antecedent, which is a pattern that can also be observed in **appositives** (Keizer 2005: 455):

(17) a. A: John, *a friend of mine*, teaches Linguistics.
B: No, he doesn't./#No, he isn't.
b. A: I met *John* yesterday.
B: John who?
A: The linguist.

Given this, this study claims that the whole string is **an NP headed by the N**. The remnant is an appositive clause modifying the N head.



5. Theoretical implication

By using this alternative approach, we can capture not only the idiosyncratic meaning of CR-sluicing interacting with discourse in a streamlined manner.

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