

EGG 2022 – Topics in ellipsis

01-05 August 2022, Masaryk University, Brno

Part 4

8 The syntactic licensing of ellipsis

8.1 Introduction to Dutch modal complement ellipsis

❖ Dutch (and some Romance languages, e.g., French, Spanish, Italian)¹ display a form of predicate ellipsis called *modal complement ellipsis* (MCE):²

- (1) A: Wie wast er vanavond af? B: Ik kan niet [afwassen].
 who washes there tonight off I can not
 ‘Who’s doing the dishes tonight?’ ‘I can’t.’

❖ Unlike English VP ellipsis, which is syntactically licensed whenever T is overtly realized, Dutch MCE is restricted to the complements of *deontic* (i.e., obligation, permission, desire) modal verbs.

- (2) a. * Kim ging naar Italië, maar Tom deed niet.
 Kim went to Italy, but Tom did not.
 b. * Lara zal er niet zijn vanavond, maar ik zal
 Lara shall there not be tonight, but I will
 c. * Thomas is niet gearresteerd, maar Jonas is.
 Thomas is not arrested, but Jonas is.
 d. * Jessica heeft gebeld gisteren, maar Sofie heeft niet.
 Jessica has called yesterday, but Sofie has not.
 e. Je mag me wel helpen, maar je moet niet.
 You may me PRT help, but you must not.
 ‘You are allowed to help me, but you don’t have to.’

❖ *Another difference:* wh-objects can be extracted from the VP ellipsis site in English, whereas wh-objects **cannot** be extracted from MCE in Dutch:

- (3) I don’t know who Mina should invite, but I know who_i she shouldn’t [invite t_i].
 (4) * Ik weet niet wie Katrien moet uitnodigen, maar ik weet wie ze niet moet.
 I know not who Katrien must invite but I know who she not must
 Intended reading: I don’t know who Katrien should invite, but I know who she shouldn’t.

❖ Extraction isn’t banned outright from Dutch MCE, however. Wh-subjects can be extracted:

- (5) a. A: Niet iedereen mocht de koning een hand geven.
 Not everyone was.allowed the king a hand give
 ‘Not everyone was allowed to give the king a hand.’
 B: Oh? Wie mocht (er) dan niet?
 Oh who was.allowed there then not?
 ‘Oh? Who wasn’t allowed to, then?’

¹ See Dagnac (2010).

² All Dutch examples are taken from Aelbrecht (2008, 2010).

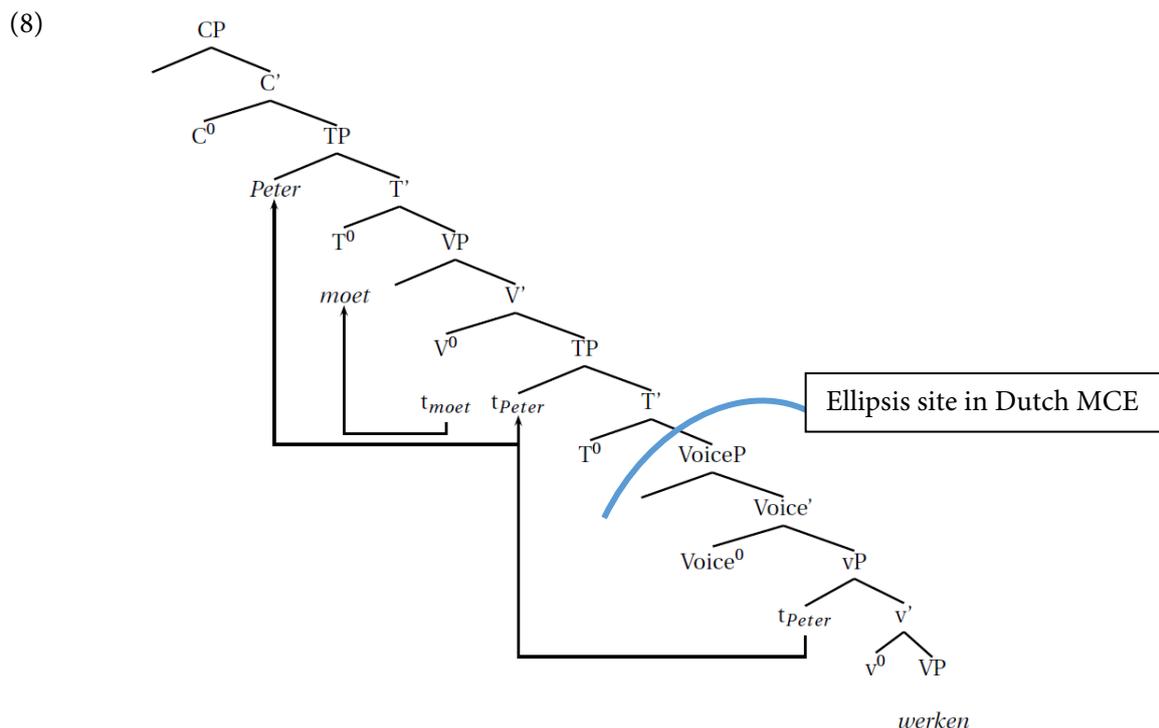
- b. Deze broek moet vandaag niet gewassen worden, maar die rok moet wel.
 This trousers must today not washed become but this skirt must PRT
 ‘These trousers don’t need to be washed today, but this skirt does.’

❖ Do the examples in (5) definitely show extraction from within the ellipsis site? Are we sure that deontic modal verbs in Dutch aren’t control verbs?³

- (6) a. [CP Wh₁ ... [VP V(modal) [TP t₁ ...]]] *raising analysis of Dutch deontic modals*
 b. [CP Wh_{i/1} ... [VP t₁ [v' V(modal) [TP PRO_i ...]]]] *control analysis of Dutch deontic modals*

❖ Unlike control verbs, raising can (i) have inanimate subjects, (ii) allow impersonal passives, (iii) allow expletive subjects. Dutch deontic modals pattern with raising verbs:

- (7) a. De auto kan / moet / mag gewassen worden.
 The car can must is.allowed.to washed become
 ‘The car can / has to / may be washed.’ *inanimate subject*
- b. Er kan / moet / mag gedanst worden.
 There can must is.allowed.to dance become
 ‘Someone can / must / may dance.’ *impersonal passive*
- c. Het kan / moet / mag regenen.
 It can must is.allowed.to rain
 ‘It can/must/may rain.’ *expletive subject*



- Tasks:** [1] explain why there is an extraction asymmetry in Dutch MCE
 [2] explain why only deontic modals can license Dutch MCE
 [3] explain why no extraction asymmetry is observed for English VP ellipsis
 [4] explain why English VP ellipsis is syntactically licensed whenever T is overtly realized

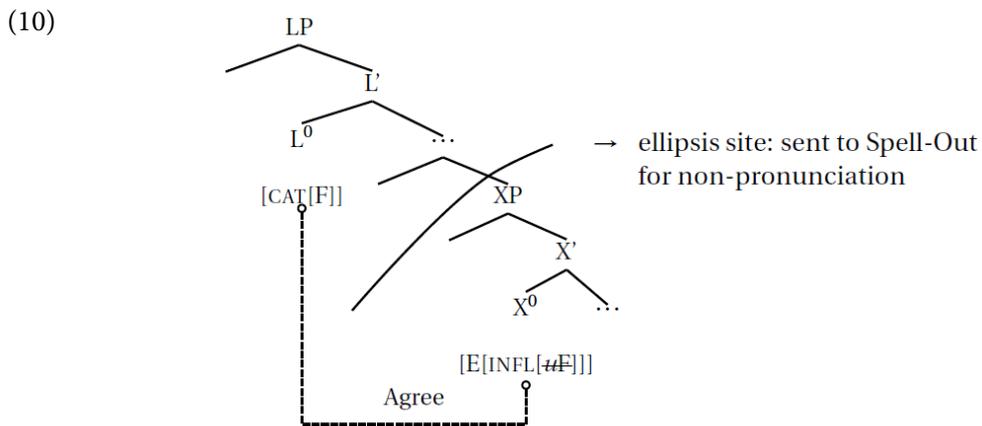
³ For evidence that deontic modal verbs select a TP complement, see Aelbrecht (2008, 2010).

8.2 An Agree-based model of the syntactic licensing of ellipsis

❖ Like Merchant (2001), Aelbrecht proposes that the instruction to suppress phonological realization of is contained in the so-called [E]-feature.

$$(9) \quad E \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{INFL} \quad [uF] \\ \text{SEL} \quad [X] \end{array} \right)$$

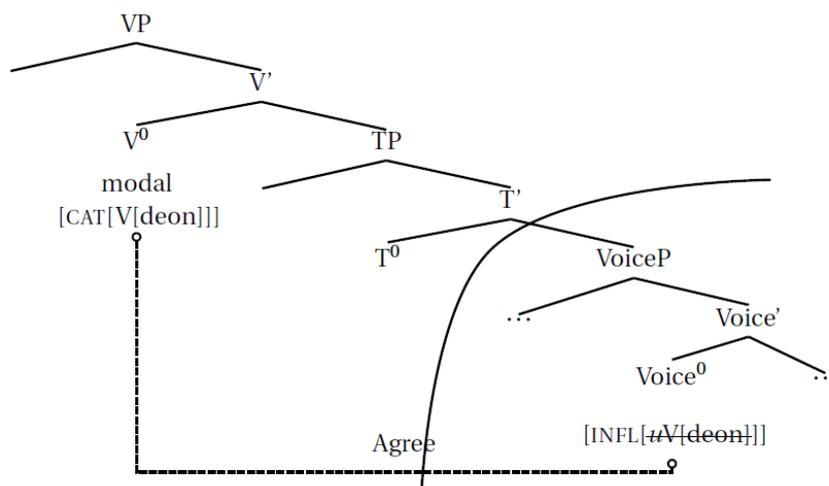
❖ Crucially, Aelbrecht also proposes that, at the instance in derivational time that [E]’s feature-values are satisfied, Spell-Out of the XP that [E] resides in will occur.



❖ The lexical entry for [E] will change depending on the type of ellipsis involved. For Dutch MCE, the following lexical entry is postulated:

$$(11) \quad E_{MCE} \left(\begin{array}{l} \text{INFL} \quad [uV \text{ [deon]]} \\ \text{SEL} \quad [\text{Voice}] \end{array} \right) \quad \text{“}E_{MCE} \text{ sits on the Voice head, and Agrees with a deontic modal verb”}$$

(12) The syntactic licensing of Dutch MCE:

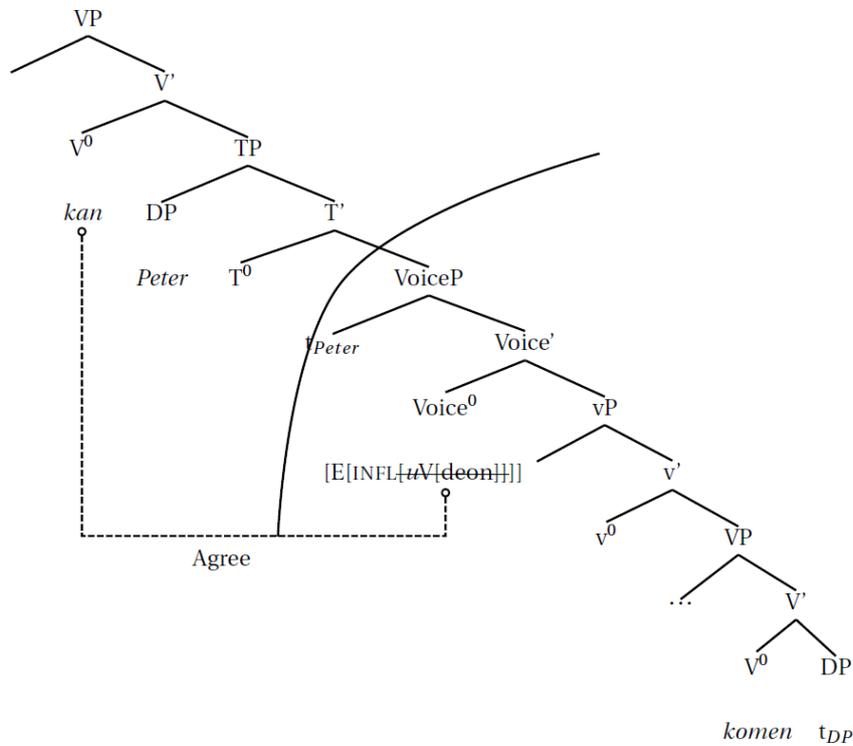


❖ Because this system appeals to derivational-timing, it can capture the extraction asymmetry of Dutch MCE.

- Recall that the [E]-feature will only trigger Spell-Out of its complement when all of its features are satisfied. This only occurs once V_{modal} is first-merged.

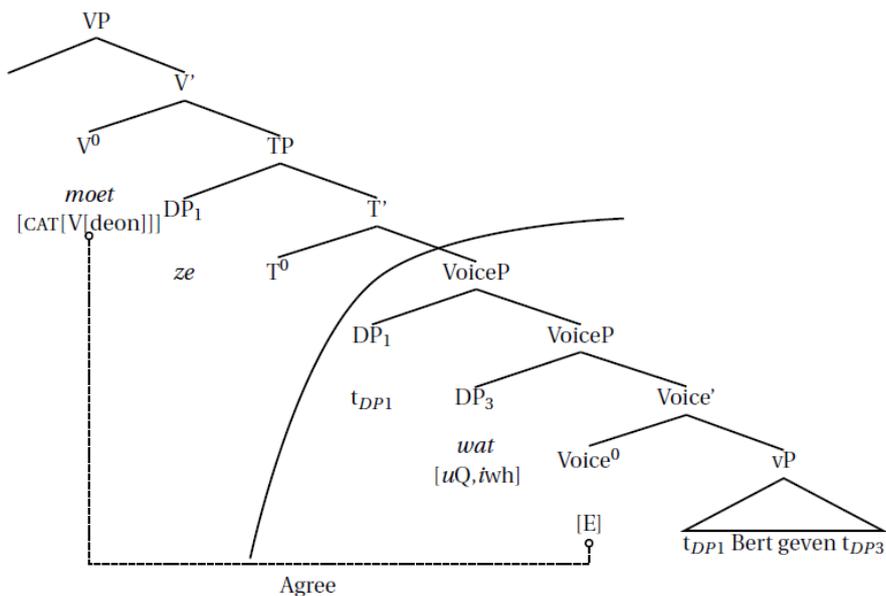
- By the point in derivational-time that V_{modal} is first-merged, any moving subject will already have been attracted to the lower SpecTP by an EPP-feature on T.
- In other words, the moving subject will have already vacated VoiceP by the time that VoiceP is Spelled-Out by [E].

(13)



- ❖ By contrast, if we assume that movement proceeds via phase-edges (and that VoiceP is the phase-head), then a *wh*-object will get stuck in SpecVoiceP.
- ❖ When the modal verb is first-merged and [E]’s features are all checked, the *wh*-object will get stuck in the Spelled-Out domain of [E], and therefore cannot proceed further, to SpecCP. This yields a derivational crash.

(14)

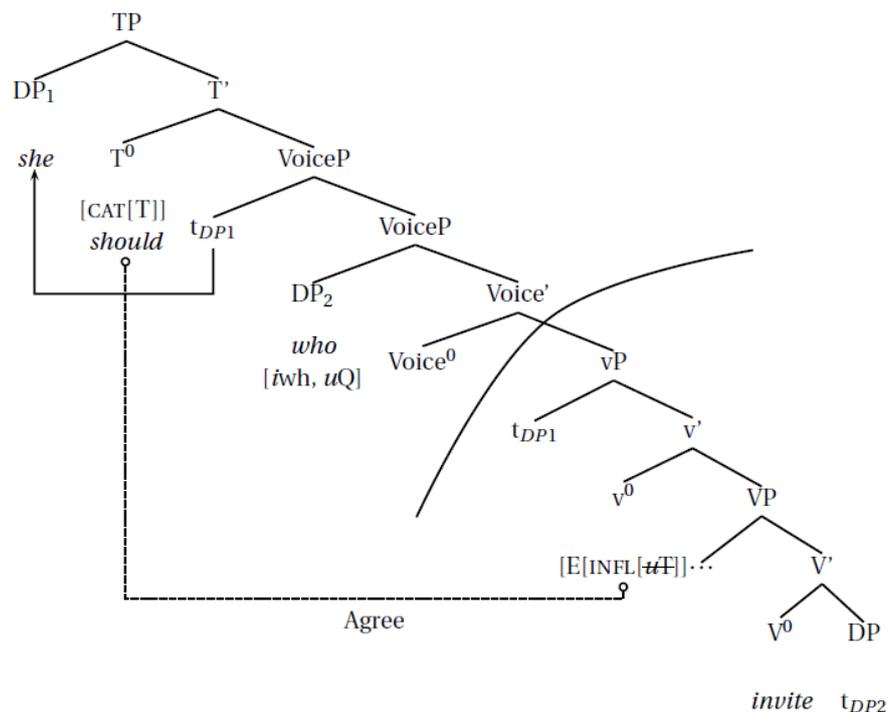


Now for English VP ellipsis...

$$(15) \left(\begin{array}{cc} E_{VPE} & \text{INFL } [uT] \\ & \text{SEL } [v] \end{array} \right) \quad \text{“}E_{MCE} \text{ sits on the } v \text{ head, and Agrees with } T\text{”}$$

- ❖ If English VP ellipsis is Spell-Out of vP instead of VoiceP, and if wh-objects undergo intermediate A'-movement to SpecVoiceP (the phase edge), then wh-objects will never get ‘trapped’ in the ellipsis site.
- ❖ This captures the observation that both wh-subject and wh-object extraction are permitted from within the elliptic phrase in English VP ellipsis.

(16)



8.3 Summary of Aelbrecht's (2008, 2010) treatment of Dutch MCE and English VP ellipsis

- ❖ Aelbrecht appeals to derivational-timing and to the idea that ellipsis has the same ‘freezing’ effect as phasal Spell-Out to explain the subject-object extraction asymmetry observed in Dutch MCE.
- ❖ She offers an analysis of the syntactic licensing of ellipsis which unites Merchant's (2001) [E]-feature with Agree.
- ❖ Some of the technical assumptions of this account are questionable, however...
 - The assessment of whether a chunk of syntactic structure still contains uninterpretable / unvalued features usually occurs when phasal Spell-Out occurs. Why isn't the same true for [E]? In other words, how exactly does checking all of [E]'s features immediately yield Spell-Out of [E]'s complement?
 - To account for the differences between Dutch MCE and English VP ellipsis, the analysis relies heavily on there being distinct VoiceP and vP projections? Is this true?
 - Doesn't having a different [E]-feature for every type of ellipsis simply restate the empirical facts in more formal terms?

- Stipulating that $[E]_{VPE}$ agrees with T isn't enough to capture the syntactic licensing requirements on English VP ellipsis: it doesn't explain why T must be occupied by a pronounced item or why T must Agree with the phrase in SpecTP. For a more sophisticated analysis, see Griffiths & Den Dikken 2022.

References

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