EGG 2022 – Topics in ellipsis

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Contents: Part 1

1   What's ellipsis and why should we care?

❖ *Working definition:* Ellipsis is a mismatch between sound and meaning in which certain syntactic "selectional" requirements are not met in the phonetic realisation of the sentence.

(1)   a.   John called someone, and I wonder whô.
       b.   **Interpretation of (1a):** John called someone, and I wonder who *he called*.

(2)   a.   I [$_{VP}$ wonder [$_{CP}$ if John will be late]].
       b.   I [$_{VP}$ wonder [$_{CP}$ who$_1$ John kissed t_1]].
       c. * I [$_{VP}$ wonder [$_{DP}$ Mary]].

❖ Ellipsis is a type of *discourse anaphor.* Just like other discourse anaphora (such as pronouns), it takes its referent from an *antecedent*.

(3)   Mary will [$_{antecedent}$ call John] and Sue will, too.
(4)   Mary called [$_{antecedent}$ John]. *He* was rather surprised.

Why is ellipsis interesting? Ellipsis does <u>not</u> apply freely!

❖ Ellipsis cannot be recovered from any discourse-proximate antecedent

(5)   A: What made that noise?
       B: Well whatever it was, *it made that noise* twîce.
       B′: * Well whatever it was, twîce.   (adapted from Griffiths, to appear)

(6)   a.   Susie rân and rân and rân.
       b. * Susie rân and dîd and dîd.   (Stockwell 2018)

❖ Ellipsis is only licensed in particular syntactic (and/or prosodic?) configurations:

(7)   a.   We're eating cake because **we want to**.
       b. * For advice on this matter, Jimmy would be a gôôd person to call, whereas **Saul would be a bâd person to**.   (Griffiths & Den Dikken 2022:118, cf. Lobeck 1995: ch. 6)

(8)   Susie thinks that Bill will win the race.
       a.   Kêlly thinks that {he **will** / * he'**ll**} *win the race*, too.
       b.   Kêlly thinks that {he **will** / * he'**ll**}, too.   (cf. King 1970)

❖ Retrieving the meaning of ellipsis from a nonlinguistic ('*exophoric*') antecedent is very difficult and only possible in very specific contexts:

(9)   a.   [Observing Hankamer attempting to stuff a 2" ball through a 6" hoop]:
             Sag: # I don't see why you even try to.   (Hankamer & Sag 1976: 414)
       b.   [Entering a construction site, Amy hands a helmet to Bob]. Bob: Do I hâve to?
                                                                                            (Miller & Pullum 2013: 8)

❖ Some grammatical constraints appear to be suspended under ellipsis (e.g., syntactic islands):

(10)   A: A biography of one of the Marx brothers is going to be published this year.
       B: * Oh? [Whîch Marx brother]$_1$ *is [$_{DP}$ a biography of t_1]$_2$ going to be published t_2 this year*?
       B′:   Oh? Whîch Marx brother?   (Merchant 2001:185)

❖ By studying ellipsis, we hope to obtain a better understanding of:

- o The discursive constraints on resolving phonologically 'weak' anaphora (ellipsis, deaccenting, argument drop, etc.)
- o The nature of the elements that can populate a discourse   (syntactic structures? Only propositions?)
- o The syntactic / prosodic licensing conditions on 'missing' items
- o The nature of independent syntactic constraints (e.g., islands)
- o Whether there is an interaction between the grammar and the context (if so, to what extent)
- o …

2   Types of ellipsis

2.1   Canonical classes

2.1.1   Clausal ellipsis

❖   Ellipsis of a clause to the exception of a single constituent (the *remnant*)

(11)   John called someone, and I wonder [CP whô he called].   *sluicing*

(12)   A: Who called John?   B: [CP Mâry called John].   *fragment answers*

(13)   John will participate, and [CP Bîll will participate], too.   *stripping*

NB: Clausal ellipsis with multiple remnants is also attested

(14)   Everyone will arrive with some dish, but I don't know [CP whô will arrive [with whât]].

2.1.2   Predicate ellipsis

❖   Ellipsis of a predicate, **or**
❖   If the predicate is VP, part of the predicate that includes the verb

(15)   a.   John read something, and Mâry did [read something], too.   *Predicate/VP ellipsis*
(16)   b.   John is happy, and Mâry is [happy], too.   *Predicate/VP ellipsis*
(17)   John has read more magazines than Mâry has [read magazines].   *Comparative deletion*
(18)   John reads magazines, and Mâry [reads bôôks].   *Gapping*
(19)   John might read a magazine, and Mâry might [read a bôôk].   *Pseudogapping*

(20)   Die   broek   moet nog niet gewassen   worden,   maar hij   mag   wel al.   *MCE*
        Those   trousers must yet not washed   become   but   he   may   PRT already
        'Those trousers don't have to be washed yet, but they can be.'   (Aelbrecht 2010)

2.1.3   Nominal ellipsis

(21)   John can play five instruments, while Mary can play [sîx instruments].

2.2   Not ellipsis[(?)]*: signs, names, and fixed expressions*

❖   Not all cases of form/meaning mismatch are treated as ellipsis. This is because such cases don't appear to involve any syntax, and therefore don't meet our working definition (i.e., no silent syntactic selectional requirements).

(22)   Berlin 200 km   [*It's 200km from here to Berlin*]
(23)   Harry Potter   [*This book is called "Harry Potter"*]
(24)   Germany 3 England 0   [*Germany beat England three goals to zero*]
(25)   Happy Birthday!   [*I wish you a happy birthday*]

2.3   *Ellipsis? Argument drop? Left-edge deletion? -- Reduced registers*

❖   Many cases are less clear-cut. A rich vein of research exists that compares these "outlier" cases to
     canonical cases of ellipsis such as sluicing and VP ellipsis.   (cf. Andrew Weir's work)

(26)   Cows attack a farmer with an axe.   *Headlinese*
(27)   I felt sick all day. I stayed in bed. I will have soup later.   '*diary-drop*' *(subject drop)*
(28)   Wash the carrots. Cut them into small cubes.   *recipes (object drop)*
(29)   Have you been down the pub?   *informal spoken British English*

3   (Dis)similarity effects

First big question: To what extent are elliptic utterances similar to their nonelliptic counterparts?

   o   If very similar, this motivates the view that ellipsis is a grammatically 'superficial' operation, e.g.,
          a form of phonological suppression, i.e., a radical form of deaccentuation.

   o   If rather dissimilar, this motivates the view that elliptic utterances should be analysed as grammat-
          ically distinct from their nonelliptic counterparts.

❖   An elliptic utterance often displays the same formal properties as its nonelliptic counterpart (*simi-
     larity effect*). But sometimes it doesn't (*dissimilarity effects*).[1]

3.1   *Similarity effects*

3.1.1   *Interpreting movement dependencies*

❖   In (30), the second token of *who* establishes movement dependency with the gap in VP. The same
     dependency is established when the VP is elided, see (31).

(30)   I know who Bîll will kiss, but I don't know who$_1$ Jôhn will kiss __$_1$.
(31)   I know who Bîll will kiss, but I don't know who Jôhn will.

3.1.2   *Island sensitivity*

❖   In (32), A′-movement across a syntactic island induces unacceptability. The same effect persists when
     the phrase "containing" the island is elided; see (33) for VP ellipsis and (34) for clausal ellipsis.[2]

(32)   a.   * [Which Balkan language]$_1$ does Abby want to hire [$_{ISLAND}$ someone who speaks t_1]?   (wh-mvmt)

      b.   * … I don't know [how many dogs]$_1$ she knows [$_{ISLAND}$ a guy who has t_1].   (wh-mvmt)

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[1] What I call *similarity effects* are more commonly known as *connectivity effects* in the ellipsis literature (see for instance the
contributions couched in the transformational grammar framework in van Craenenbroeck & Temmerman 2019). I prefer *sim-
ilarity effects* because this term is more theory-neutral.

[2] See Merchant (2008) for insightful early discussion about the island-(in)sensitivity of ellipsis.

    c. * Abby knows five people who have dôgs, but câts₁ she doesn't know [ISLAND five people who have *t*₁].   *(topicalization)*

(33) a. * Âbby wants to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which (Balkan language) Bên does.   *(wh-mvmt)*

    b. * Abby knows five people who have dôgs, but câts she doesn't.   *(topicalization)*

(34) * She knows a guy who has five câts, but I don't know how many dôgs.   *(wh-mvmt)*

3.1.3   *Morphological case*

❖ The constraints on realizing morphological case observed in nonelliptic utterances are also observed in their elliptic counterparts.

(35) a. Er will **jemandem** schmeicheln, aber sie wissen nicht, {* wer / * wen / **wem**} er jemandem schmeicheln will.
        'He wants to flatter someone.DAT, but they don't know who.DAT he wants to flatter.'

    b. Er will **jemanden** loben, aber sie wissen nicht, {* wer / **wen** / * wem} er jemanden loben will.
        'He wants to praise someone.ACC, but they don't know who.ACC he wants to praise.'

(36) a.   Er will jemandem schmeicheln, aber sie wissen nicht, {* wer / * wen / **wem**}.
    b.   Er will jemanden loben, aber sie wissen nicht, {* wer / **wen** / *wem}.   (Ross 1969)

3.1.4   *Morphological agreement*

❖ In (37), the finite verb establishes an agreement dependency with the postverbal subject. The same dependency is established when the postverbal subject is "contained" in an elided VP, see (38).

(37) A: Are there mice in the cupboard?   B: Yes, there {are / *is} **mice** in the cupboard.
(38) A: Is there a mouse in the cupboard?   B: Yes, there {is / *are}.

3.1.5   *Binding effects*

❖ The principles of the Binding Theory apply in ellipsis just as they do in regular nonelliptical contexts.

(39) Patrick$_i$ likes {himself$_i$ / * him$_i$ / # Patrick}.

(40) A: Who does Patrick$_i$ like?   B: {Himself$_i$ / * him$_i$ / # Patrick}.   (cf. Merchant 2004)

3.1.6   *Idiom chunk reconstruction*

❖ *Idiom chuck reconstruction* = the extracted part of an idiom chunk can be reconstructed into the larger idiom chuck so that the idiomatic meaning can be retained:

(41) a.   [John pulled strings] to get his position.
    b.   [Which strings]₁ did [John pull __₁] to get his position?

❖ The same dependency is retained in (42), even though the lower part of the idiom chunk is 'contained' in an elliptic phrase.

(42) John pulled strings to get his position, but I don't know whîch strings.   (Lasnik & Funakoshi 2019:50)

3.2   Dissimilarity effects

3.2.1   Island sensitivity (again)

❖ In (43), movement across a syntactic island induces unacceptability. But no such sensitivity to islands is observed in the elliptic version of this utterance, see (44).

(43) * [Which Balkan language]$_1$ does Abby want to hire [$_{ISLAND}$ someone who speaks t_1]?   (wh-mvmt)

(44)   Abby wants to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember whîch (Balkan language).

3.2.2   Morphological case (again)

❖ In B's response in (45), the pronominal subject must display nominative case morphology. In the fragmentary counterpart of this utterance, the same pronoun must display accusative case, see (46).

(45)   A: Who wants pizza?   B: {Î / * Mê} want pizza!
(46)   A: Who wants pizza?   B: { Mê / * Î}!

3.2.3   Negative polarity items

❖ B's fragmentary answer in (47) is interpreted as a subject yet contains an NPI. The (naïve) nonelliptic counterpart of this fragment is unacceptable, however, see (48).

(47)   A: What didn't work?   B: Any of the prînting equipment.
(48)   A: What didn't work?   B: * Any of the prînting equipment didn't work.

(van Craenenbroeck & Den Dikken 2006)

3.2.4   No (straightforward) nonelliptic paraphrase

❖ Elliptic utterances can refer to two antecedents simultaneously (so-called *split antecedent* cases). When this occurs, a natural nonelliptic paraphrase is difficult to obtain.

(49)   a.   Whenever Max is using the fax or Oscar is using the Xerox, I cân't.   (Fiengo & May 1994)
       b.   Whenever Max is using the fax or Oscar is using the Xerox, I cân't *use the thing being used*.

(50)   a.   Whenever Jack wants to interview an athlete or Sally wants to profile a politician, the editor asks whîch.   (Messick et al. 2016)
       b.   Whenever Jack wants to interview an athlete or Sally wants to profile a politician, the editor asks whîch *person*$_{\{athlete, politician\}}$ *Jack wants to interview or Sally wants to profile*.

3.2.5   (Dis)similarity effects: Summary

Similarity effects	Dissimilarity effects
❖ Interpreting movement dependencies	❖ Island insensitivity
❖ Island sensitivity	❖ Morphological case
❖ Morphological case	❖ Negative polarity items
❖ Morphological agreement	❖ Split antecedent contexts
❖ Binding effects	
❖ Idiom chunk reconstruction	

Q: How should we deal with these mixed results?

4   Two main approaches to ellipsis: (non)structuralism

❖ There exist myriad generative linguistic formalisms of ellipsis (see e.g., van Craenenbroeck & Temmerman 2019). A superordinate bifurcation can be made between *structural* and *nonstructural* approaches.
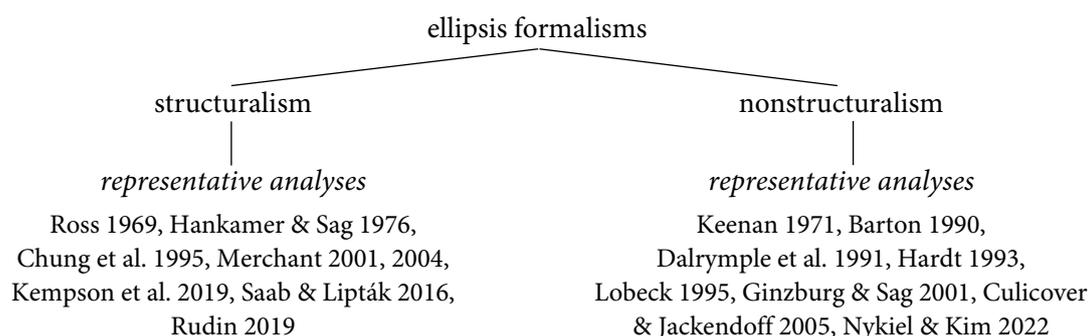
(51) *Structuralism* (ellipsis)
      An ellipsis site (potentially) contains more than one unpronounced syntactic terminal node.

(52) *Nonstructuralism* (ellipsis)
      An ellipsis site maximally contains one unpronounced syntactic terminal node.

(53)   ellipsis formalisms

          structuralism   nonstructuralism

        representative analyses   *representative analyses*

        Ross 1969, Hankamer & Sag 1976,   Keenan 1971, Barton 1990,
        Chung et al. 1995, Merchant 2001, 2004,   Dalrymple et al. 1991, Hardt 1993,
        Kempson et al. 2019, Saab & Lipták 2016,   Lobeck 1995, Ginzburg & Sag 2001, Culicover
                 Rudin 2019   & Jackendoff 2005, Nykiel & Kim 2022

(54) Paula hired someone, but I don't know…
      a.   who$_1$ [$_{TP}$ she hired t_1].   *elliptic clause generated in normal way = structuralism*
      b.   who *pro* / Δ   *ellipsis site is a null pronominal item = nonstructuralism*
      d.   who$_{[+]}$ *no syntactic placemarker for ellipsis, but enriched meaning for wh = nonstructuralism*

Regarding the mixed results from §3:

❖ Structuralist accounts view similarity effects as showing that ellipsis is a superficial grammatical phenomenon. They view dissimilarity effects as slight deviations licensed by ellipsis itself.

❖ Nonstructural accounts view dissimilarity effects as showing that elliptical utterances deviate at a fundamental level from their nonelliptic counterparts. Similarity effects are 'baked in' to the definition of elliptic phenomena.

Our plan of action: proceed considering only the structuralist perspective, and then return to compare structuralism and nonstructuralism later on, when have broader picture of the empirical landscape.

4.1   *Considerations for structuralism, based on the (dis)similarities discussed in §3*

❖ Structuralism straightforwardly accounts for **all** similarity effects

❖ To account for dissimilarity effects, a plausible structuralist approach must allow for structural deviations from (the most prominent) nonelliptic paraphrase

❖ Three possible ways to deviate:
    [1]   the elliptical phrase is a grammatical yet syntactically *nonisomorphic* configuration, sometimes yielding an ineffable configuration
    [2]   ellipsis bleeds some grammatical processes, yielding an ineffable configuration
    [3]   grammatical constraints are suspended under ellipsis, yielding an ineffable configuration

4.1.1   Using method [1] to explain some dissimilarity effects

❖ In the sententialist literature, an elliptic phrase is *nonisomorphic* if its phrase marker differs from the antecedent utterance's phrase marker.

❖ Recall from §3.2.1 that some sluicing configurations are island-insensitive, despite the most prominent paraphrase involving island-violating wh-movement:

(55)   *Repeated from (43) and (44)*
    a. * [Which Balkan language]$_1$ does Abby want to hire [$_{ISLAND}$ someone who speaks t_1]?
    b.   Abby wants to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember whîch (Balkan language).

❖ Notice that island-sensitivity for the sluice is only expected if the elliptic clause is isomorphic its antecedent, see (56). But the attested island-insensitivity is correctly predicted if the elliptic clause is nonisomorphic, see (57).[3]

(56)   … [whîch (Balkan language)]$_1$ [$_{TP}$ she wants to hire [$_{ISLAND}$ someone who speaks t_1]].

(57)   a.   … [whîch (Balkan language)]$_1$ [$_{TP}$ {they / the person she wants to hire} should speak t_1].
    b.   … [whîch (Balkan language)]$_1$ [$_{TP}$ it should be t_1].
    c.   … [whîch (Balkan language)]$_1$ [$_{TP}$ it should be t_1 that {they / the person she wants to hire} speak(s) t_1].

❖ One might also use method [1] to explain the NPI dissimilarity effects from §3.2.2:

(58)   A: What didn't work?   B: What didn't work was any of the prînting equipment.

❖ Recall from §3.2.2 and §3.2.3 that the distribution of case morphology and NPIs is dissimilar for the elliptic utterances and their nonelliptic counterparts. One explanation for this could be that fragments are nonisomorphic to their antecedents, insofar as fragments are not full clauses, but actually only *v*Ps (cf. Valmala 2007, Kodner 2022):

(59)   A: Who wants pizza?   B: [$_{vP}$ me want pizza]!
(60)   A: What didn't work?   B: [$_{NegP}$ not [$_{vP}$ any of the printing equipment work]].

4.1.2   Using method [2] to explain some dissimilarity effects

❖ Some scholars have proposed that EPP-driven movement is suspended under ellipsis. This proposal is employed to explain island-insensitivity for derived-position islands under sluicing and NPI subject fragments, among other things.[4]

(61)   A: What didn't work?   B: [$_{TP}$ T(did)$_{[-EPP]}$ [$_{NegP}$ not [$_{vP}$ any of the printing equipment work]]].

(62)   *Repeated from (10)*
    A: A biography of one of the Marx brothers is going to be published this year.
    B: * Oh? [Whîch Marx brother]$_1$ *is [$_{DP}$ a biography of t_1]$_2$ going to be published t_2 this year*?
    B′:   Oh? Whîch Marx brother?   (Merchant 2001:185)

(63)   … [which Marx brother]$_1$ [$_{TP}$ T(is)$_{[-EPP]}$ [going to be published [$_{DP}$ a biography of t_1 this year]]?

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[3] This approach to explaining island-insensitivity under clausal ellipsis is called the *island-evasion* approach (Merchant 2001, Abels 2011, Barros et al. 2013, 2014, Griffiths 2019a).
[4] See Merchant 2001, Van Craenenbroeck & Den Dikken 2006, Den Dikken 2013, Griffiths et al. 2021.

4.1.3   Using method [3] to explain some dissimilarity effects

❖ *Island-repair*, which refers to the idea that syntactic island boundaries are suspended in particular elliptic configurations, has proven highly influential in the sententialist literature.[5] Appealing to island-repair allows one to explain discrepancies in island-sensitivity:

(64)   *Repeated from (43) and (44)*
   a.   * [Which Balkan language]$_1$ does Abby want to hire [$_{ISLAND}$ someone who speaks t_1]?
   b.   Abby wants to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember whîch (Balkan language).

(65)   ... [which Balkan language]$_1$ [Abby wants to hire [$_{NOT\text{-}ISLAND}$ someone who speaks t_1]]?

4.1   Considerations for structuralism: Closing remarks

❖ Structuralism is the prevailing view in transformational formalisms of Generative Grammar (and has been since the late 1990s / early 2000s), probably due to straightforward way that it explains similarity effects.

❖ However, it requires one to assume that silence can be highly structured --- a big assumption!

❖ Also, its frequent recourse to ineffable structures to explain dissimilarity effects tend dangerously towards unfalsifiability, and therefore should be viewed with caution.

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[5] We will return to discuss the notion of island repair in more detail in Part III of the course.

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