Deletion of non-constituents in clausal ellipsis: remnants in the middle field

**Synopsis.** The predominant analysis of sluicing and fragment answers rests on the assumption that any material that survives deletion has been moved to a sentence-initial position; as a result, the elided material is always contained in a single constituent. We document instances of clausal ellipsis that cast doubt on the viability of this approach. In these cases, ellipsis spares elements that have no impact on the truth value of the elliptical sentence and demonstrably do not occupy the prefield. Such facts favor a non-syntactic implementation of clausal ellipsis as prosodic deletion of given/deaccented material.

**Background.** Building on Ross 1969, Merchant (2001) proposes to analyze sluicing as movement of the wh-phrase to Spec-C and subsequent PF-deletion of TP, triggered by a feature of C0 (1). Merchant (2004) proposes to extend this analysis to fragment answers (2) (see also Arregi 2010).

(1) John kissed someone – guess [who C0 [he kissed t]].
(2) Who did John kiss? – [Mary C0 [John kissed t]].

This move-and-delete analysis (MDA, (3)) has been adopted in most subsequent work on clausal ellipsis (e.g. Sailor & Thoms 2014), notwithstanding the fact that it faces a number of non-trivial challenges (cf. Bruening in press). For instance, material in C0 never survives deletion; multiple remnants are possible where corresponding multiple overt movements are not ((4), Ortega-Santos et al. 2014); and ‘swiping’ seemingly inverts wh-phrases and prepositions ((5), Merchant 2002).

(4) Peter asked Bob about syntax. And who about phonology (*did he ask)?
(5) Peter went to the movies, but I don’t know who with (*he went to the movies).

Analyses that adopt the MDA are forced to assume exceptional movement of the secondary remnant.

**Observations and Proposal.** In this talk, we point out hitherto unnoticed cases of complex remnants in clausal ellipsis that mitigate against the MDA. In German, modal particles (MPs) and sentence adverbs (SAs) convey information related to speaker attitude but do not affect their host’s truth conditions. Both MPs and SAs can occur as unaccented secondary remnants (capitals indicate prosodic prominence):

(6) A: Peter hat Leute eingeladen. B: Und WEN wohl/vermutlich alles? (wohl ≈ presumably)
   *Peter has people invited and who PRT presumably all
   *who has Fritz invited PETER PRT presumably

Importantly, MP remnants resist an MDA-compliant analysis, since MPs are categorically immobile (8b):

(8a) Gestern/in Berlin hat Peter wohl Leute eingeladen. *low adverbials can move to prefield
   *yesterday/in Berlin has Peter PRT people invited
(8b) *Wohl hat Peter gestern Leute eingeladen. *MPs cannot move to prefield

Additionally, B’s responses in (6,7) are not legitimate prefield constituents:

(9) *Und WEN wohl alles hat er eingeladen? (10) *PETER wohl hat er eingeladen.
    *and who PRT all has he invited PETER PRT has he invited

(7B) cannot be a single middle-field constituent either: since Peter is stressed, scrambling across the MP/SA is prosodically dispreferred (11B) (cf. Struckmeier 2014). Instead, (7B) corresponds to (11B’), showing that Peter occupies the prefield while the MP/SA has remained in the middle field.

    *who has Fritz invited Fritz has Peter PRT/preumably invited
B’: PETER hat Fritz wohl/vermutlich t eingeladen.
Cases like (6B) raise an additional complication for the MDA, since the wh-remnant is the associate of the linearly separated floated quantifier. If all remnants were leftward-moved, deriving this order in the prefield would require countercyclic tucking-in of particle and quantifier below the fronted wh-phrase.

The MDA thus faces a dilemma. On the one hand, certain elements that can be fronted fail to occur as secondary remnants. The adverbials in (8a) are a case in point:

(12) Peter hat Leute eingeladen, aber ich weiß nicht, wen (*gestern / *in Berlin).

Fritz has people invited but I know not who yesterday / in Berlin

On the other hand, MPs are immobile yet occur as secondary remnants (6,7). Unless amended by stipulation, the MDA thus fails to correctly predict the range of licit remnants in clausal ellipsis.

We propose to abandon the MDA. Instead, ellipsis exclusively and exhaustively deletes deaccented material that is (e-)given (Merchant 2001); crucially, non-truth-functional material is not given (not entailed by context) and thus does not affect the parallelism of the elliptical sentence and its antecedent. This non-syntactic view of deletion permits and predicts ‘skipping’ of in situ MPs/SAs:


MPs/SAs are thus permissible remnants due to the fact that they, unlike the deaccented lower adverbs in (12), fail to induce a difference in truth value between the elliptical sentence and its antecedent. This is supported by the fact that MPs/SAs present in an antecedent sentence can be absent from an otherwise parallel elliptical sentence. For instance, the MP ja, which is incompatible with interrogative force, is present in (13A) but necessarily absent in B’s sluice, as shown by (13B’):

(13) A: Peter hat ja einen Freund eingeladen. B: Wen?

Peter has PRT a.ACC friend invited who.ACC

B’: Wen hat er (*ja) eingeladen?

The contrast between MPs/SAs (6,7) and the truth-functionally relevant adverbs in (12) is further supported by the fact that the latter can surface when exempted from deletion by means of contrast:

(14) A: Peter hat Leute eingeladen. B: Aha. Wen denn GESTERN/HIERHIN?

Peter has people invited aha who PRT yesterday/to this place

We thus correctly predict the range of possible secondary remnants in the middle field. This result could not be obtained under the MDA, according to which clausal ellipsis uniformly deletes TP in toto.

Once non-constituent deletion is permitted in this way, various constructions involving multiple remnants cease to be theoretically problematic, e.g. the abovementioned wh+XP sluices and swiping:

(4’) Peter asked Bob about syntax. And [WHO did he ask [about PHONOLOGY]]?

(5’) Peter went to the movies, but I don’t know [WHO he went to the movies [t WITH]]

We discuss a number of further implications of the non-syntactic implementation of clausal ellipsis, e.g. for locality effects, P-stranding, and Merchant’s (2008) MaxElide constraint.

**Conclusion.** The MDA defines clausal ellipsis syntactically, as deletion of TP. This assumption is incompatible with the occurrence of MP/SA remnants under clausal ellipsis. By contrast, it is straightforward to account for such facts on an alternative view of ellipsis as exhaustive phonological silencing of (e-)given material, exempting elements such as MPs/SAs that do not enter into the computation of truth conditions.

**References**