

Sluicing and Modal Mismatches

Sluicing permits “modal mismatches” as in (1) and (2).

(1) The baseball player went public with his desire to be traded. He doesn’t care where <he {is, will be} traded>. (Rudin 2018, 21(b)).

(2) Sally knows that there is always the potential for awful things to happen, but she doesn’t know when <awful things {will, might} happen>. (Rudin 2018, 23(a)).

Rudin 2018 proposes that mismatches outside the “eventive core” (EC; \approx the *v*P of the elided TP) are permitted in sluicing. Lexical material within EC is subject to a condition relating it to its “correlates” in the antecedent TP (p 11): (a) correlates must be lexically identical or (b) they must be coindexed. We argue: 1) Rudin’s second condition should refer to anaphora, not coindexing; 2) modal mismatches involve anaphoric modals; 3) the syntactic EC generalization can be replaced with a semantic condition.

Anaphora Condition: Part (b) of Rudin’s condition is motivated by pronominal anaphora (3). Here *them* is not lexically identical to *five burger restaurants*, but the correlates are coindexed, so (b) permits the mismatch. But coindexing can’t be the right notion, as Rudin (fn 14) acknowledges with respect to (4), in which *they* is not coindexed with *Many prominent congressman*.

(3) Someone ate at [five burger restaurants]¹, but I don’t know who <ate at them₁>

(4) Many prominent congressmen still have not endorsed the candidate. In a moment, two of them will explain why <they still have not endorsed the candidate>

We propose that (a) correlates must be lexically identical or (b) they must be anaphoric. Fiengo and May (1994) and Rooth 1992 show that correlates need not be coindexed – Hardt et al. (2013) treat anaphoric elements as “holes” within elided material that are resolved independently of constraints on ellipsis. An exemption for anaphoric elements accounts for modal mismatches in the same way as nominal mismatches.

Modals are Anaphoric: In (2), *might* is anaphoric, as indicated by superscript and subscript *w* in (5).

(5) Sally knows that there is always the potential^w for awful things to happen, but she doesn’t know when <awful things might_w happen>.

Following Stone (1997), superscript *w* indicates the introduction of a set of possible worlds in which awful things happen, and subscript *w* is restricted to this set. Indexing on anaphoric *might* is not relevant for ellipsis resolution; it must merely be interpretable in context.

The Semantic Restrictiveness of Sluicing: Cases of sloppy identity like (6) are possible under VPE, but impossible with sluicing, where anaphoric elements are not re-interpreted at the ellipsis site.

(6) A girl¹ said she₁ was smart. Another girl² did <say she₂ was smart> too.

We suggest a semantic alternative to Rudin’s EC generalization: sluicing may not introduce a new event into the discourse context (q.v. Chung et al. 2011). Consider (7).

(7) Bradley said that he has not shut the door to a presidential race, though he would not say when <a presidential race might be>

There are two new elements in the sluice: *might* is outside the EC, but *be* is within it. This violates the EC generalization. The elided material refers to a previously introduced event – a presidential race. The modal is required to refer to the set of possible worlds in which the race takes place. Such examples (nominal antecedents/newly introduced verbal elements) are attested in the UCSC sluicing corpus.

The Eventive Core: above arguments all point to replacing the EC generalization. Polarity mismatches, such as (8), remain to be explained.

(8) Have those documents on my desk by 8am or explain why <you don’t have them on my desk by 8am>!

These mismatches fall out under the EC generalization, as polarity sits above *v*P. The alternative proposed here could derive polarity mismatches if polarity particles are propositional anaphors Krifka (2013). Alternatively, Kroll (2018) provides a fully pragmatic explanation of the possibility of polarity mismatches, which would trace them to a separate source.

Selected References: Chung, S., Ladusaw, W., McCloskey, J. 2011. Sluicing(:) Between Structure and Inference. Hardt, D., N. Asher, and J. Hunter. 2013. VP ellipsis without indices. Kroll, M. (2018) Polarity reversals under sluicing. Rudin, D. 2018. Head-based syntactic identity in sluicing.