A Scope Argument Against C'-deletion

1. TP-deletion vs. C'-deletion. The mainstream view on sluicing holds that it is derived by TP-deletion licensed by an interrogative C ($C_{[Q,uWh]}$) (Lasnik 1999a,b, Merchant 2001 and much subsequent work). A minority view derives it by C'-deletion (Heck and Müller 2003, Thoms 2010, Döring 2014, Messick and Thoms 2016). The dispute between these two views has not been settled yet, since different considerations tilt the scales in opposite directions. From a theoretical point of view, C'-deletion is at a disadvantage. First, it runs counter to a deep-seated principle in generative syntax, here adapted from Chomsky 1994.

(1)   *Syntactic X'-invisibility*
        Intermediate projections are invisible to syntactic operations.

Thus, only minimal and maximal projections are said to participate in coordination, movement, ellipsis etc. Second, the TP-deletion view is harmonious with the standard framework of *head-licensing* for ellipsis; for sluicing, the licensor is $C_{[Q,uWh]}$. On the C'-deletion view, however, C^0 is part of the ellipsis site, hence cannot qualify as an external licensor; nor can any other head, there being no higher functional head in the clausal spine than C^0. Of course, these two theoretical considerations may be discarded in the face of compelling evidence, but so far at least, they seem quite solid.

2. The Sluicing-Comp Generalization. In contrast, empirically C'-deletion has one clear advantage over TP-deletion: It provides a direct and unified explanation for (2).

(2)   *The Sluicing-Comp Generalization* (SCG) (Merchant 2001)
        In sluicing, no non-operator material can appear in COMP.
        → a.   No T-to-C.
        → b.   No complementizer.

Both (2a) and (2b) follow immediately from C'-deletion (which is indifferent to whether C is externally or internally merged). TP-deletion, however, must be supplemented by additional assumptions to derive the SCG. Furthermore, the two components (2a) and (2b) do not receive a unified account, with attention having focused mostly on deriving (2a), the ban on T-to-C under sluicing (e.g., by some appeal to economy or PF-bleeding; see Lasnik 1999a,b, Merchant 2001, Boeckx and Stepanović 2001).

3. Scopal predictions. A limitation of the dispute is that the two analyses produce indistinguishable outputs at PF. Whether it is TP that is deleted and T-to-C blocked, or C' that is deleted, the result is identical: Only the operator material in [Spec,CP] is pronounced. At LF, however, the situation is different. Because TP-deletion must invoke some independent mechanism to block T-to-C, not only would T not surface at C but it would also not take its scope there; rather, it should take unenhanced scope. In contrast, on the C'-deletion view, there is nothing to stop T-to-C under sluicing (Thoms 2010). In fact, the sluicing and no-sluicing derivations are identical up to the C' level, and this identity carries over to LF. The prediction, then, is that T will be allowed to take enhanced scope in its higher position, C.

(3)   *Scopal predictions for matrix sluicing*
        a.   TP-deletion: Scope of T confined to T' (no scope enhancement).
        b.   C'-deletion: Scope of T enhanced to C' (scope enhancement).

In fact, two scopal interactions are attested under T-to-C movement, but crucially, not under sluicing. This asymmetry supports TP-deletion over C'-deletion and more generally, the idea that head movement is syntactic and feeds semantic interpretation (Ladusaw 1988, Lechner 2006, 2017, Hartman 2011, Iatridou and Zeijlstra 2013, Keine and Bhatt 2016, Matyiku 2017, Sato and Maeda 2017).

4. Scopal effects of T-to-C. The ambiguity of sentences like (4a) in English between the direct scope and the inverse scope readings disappears under T-to-C movement (4b), which carries negation above the quantified subject (Ladusaw 1988, Potsdam 2013).

(4) a. Everybody didn't see the fight. $\forall \gg \neg, \neg \gg \forall$
     b. Didn't everybody see the fight? $\neg \gg \forall$

Inverse scope in (4a) is explained by reconstruction of the subject below negation. Smilarly, modals like *can* reconstruct to a lower position (Roberts 1998, Iatridou and Zeijlstra 2013, Harwood 2014), producing scopal ambiguities with quantificational adverbs (Lechner 2006), as in (5a). Once again, T-to-C removes the (more natural) inverse scope reading (5b).

(5) a. He can always be wrong.   *always* $\gg \Diamond, \Diamond \gg$ *always*
     b. Can he always be wrong? $\Diamond \gg$ *always*

Both rigid scope effects in (4b) and (5b) can be attributed to (6).

(6) *T-to-C scope enhancement*: T-to-C movement does not reconstruct.

5. Sluicing bleeds scope enhancement. T-to-C in *Wh*-questions displays the same scope enhancement effect, occasionally forcing unnatural readings (examples (C) below); The crucial observation is that the sluicing variants do *not* display it and their scopal profile is identical to the declarative source, i.e., equally ambiguous (examples (B) below).

(7) A: Everybody didn't see the fight. $\forall \gg \neg, \neg \gg \forall$
     B: Which fight? $\forall \gg \neg, \neg \gg \forall$
     C: Which fight didn't everybody see? $\neg \gg \forall$

(8) A: The solution can always be simpler than you think.   *always* $\gg \Diamond, {}^{\#}\Diamond \gg$ *always*
     B: How much simpler?   *always* $\gg \Diamond, {}^{\#}\Diamond \gg$ *always*
     C: How much simpler than I think can the solution always be? ${}^{\#}\Diamond \gg$ *always*

The fact that sluicing falls together with declaratives and not with interrogatives with respect to the scope position of T directly argues for (3a) and against (3b): The unpronounced modal or auxiliary in sluicing occupies T not only at PF but also *at LF*.

6. Consequences. First, although ellipsis is usually described as "eliminative" (Fiengo and May 1994), complex interactions with other processes may make it *expansive*: The elided variant supports interpretations that are not available in the non-elided variant. Second, *Syntactic X'-invisibility* (1) is vindicated (why else would C'-deletion be excluded?). Third, approaches to head movement that completely divorce it from syntax are inadequate insofar as they fail to predict its scopal consequences at LF. Finally, the SCG (2) is still an open problem**:** The absence of Comp-material in sluicing is not a simple result of ellipsis per se but rather follows from its interaction with other grammatical principles (e.g., Landau 2018).