

## Ellipsis sites as antecedents: sluicing and *except*

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This paper argues that antecedents for ellipsis can themselves be elided, based on the interaction between sluicing (1) and sprouting (2) (Ross 1969) and *except*-phrases (Reinhart 1991):

- (1) Everybody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don't know who.
- (2) Everybody liked the movie, except John, but I don't know why.

The sluice in (1) asserts ignorance as to which boy didn't like the movie. Assuming sluices to contain unpronounced structure in the ellipsis site, (1) is represented as in (1') (~~elided structure~~):

- (1') Everybody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don't know who ~~didn't like the movie~~.

That the only available antecedent for ellipsis in (1') appears to be the first clause – *Everybody liked the movie, except some boy* – is highly problematic for prominent accounts of sluicing: there is no entailment, let alone mutual entailment, between the antecedent and ellipsis (Merchant 2001); while the mismatching polarity, *liked* vs. *didn't like*, means the ellipsis site is not an LF-copy of the antecedent (Chung et al. 1995).

Rudin (to appear) does not consider (1), but his syntactic identity account, distilled in (3), would allow it. Of the elided structure, *like*, *the*, and *movie* have lexically identical correlates in the antecedent; while the mismatching negation originates above vP (cf. sluicing mismatches in tense, modality, etc.):

- (3) Rudin's (to appear) head-based syntactic identity condition on sluicing: elided material must either (a) have a lexically identical or coindexed correlate in the antecedent; or (b) originate above vP.

However, as Rudin himself recognises, (3) comes unstuck on (2), whose ambiguity is spelled out in (2'):

- (2') Everybody liked the movie, except John, but I don't know why ...
  - a. ... ~~everybody liked the movie, except John~~.
  - b. ... ~~John didn't like the movie~~.

The 'everybody' (a) reading of the sprout is uninteresting, since there is exact identity between antecedent and ellipsis. But the 'John' (b) reading, while still troubling for mutual entailment and LF-copying, is also problematic for Rudin: *John* is elided, originates inside vP, but lacks a correlate, since it mismatches with the subject *everybody* in the first clause.

To account for the interpretation and successful licensing of sluicing in (1) in a way that generalises to sprouting in (2), we propose that there is elided structure in *except*-phrases, as in (4). This elided structure then serves as the antecedent for sluicing, as in (1'') and (2''):

- (4) a. Everybody liked the movie, except some boy ~~didn't like the movie~~.  
b. Everybody liked the movie, except John ~~didn't like the movie~~.
- (1'') Everybody liked the movie, except some boy [<sub>A</sub> ~~didn't like the movie~~ ],  
but I don't know who [<sub>E</sub> ~~didn't like the movie~~ ].
- (2'') Everybody liked the movie, except [<sub>A</sub> John ~~didn't like the movie~~ ],  
but I don't know why [<sub>E</sub> ~~John didn't like the movie~~ ].

This analysis comes close to bringing (1) and (2) into line with accounts of sluicing: full identity between antecedent and ellipsis means mutual entailment, LF-copying, and syntactic identity to vP (and beyond) are all viable. However, there are two issues outstanding. First, sluicing is licensed in (1'') and (2'') based on an antecedent which is itself mostly elided. This sits comfortably with accounts that postulate

unpronounced structure in ellipsis sites, over which semantic (Merchant 2001) or syntactic (Rudin to appear) identity is calculated. Such elided antecedents complicate accounts that do not make this assumption, however. For example, ordering would have to be imposed on applications of LF-copying: copying into the *except*-phrase would have to precede copying into the sluice.

Second, in solving the problem of ellipsis licensing for the sluice, we look to have created another one: how is ellipsis of *didn't like the movie* licensed in the *except*-phrases in (4)? With precedents from Spanish (Pérez-Jiménez & Moreno-Quibén 2012), Egyptian Arabic (Soltan 2016), and Malagasy (Potsdam 2017), we claim that the ellipsis in the *except*-phrase takes the first clause as antecedent, as in (4'). We take the ellipsis in the *except*-phrase to be an instance of bare argument ellipsis, or stripping: the subject has been focus-fronted, with TP-ellipsis of the evacuated clause, similar to sluicing (Merchant 2004). The polarity mismatch between *liked* in A and *didn't like* in E negation remains a problem for mutual entailment or LF-copying accounts, but is grammatical by (3), lending additional support to Rudin's vP syntactic identity account of sluicing:

- (4') a. [A Everybody liked the movie ], except some boy [E ~~t<sub>some boy</sub> didn't like the movie~~ ].  
 b. [A Everybody liked the movie ], except John [E ~~t<sub>John</sub> didn't like the movie~~ ].

In support of our analysis in (1'') and (2''), where sluicing is licensed based on an elliptical antecedent in the *except*-phrase, note that the ambiguity from (2') is resolved in (5) with a connected *but*-exceptive (a), and with the addition of *for* (b) – the 'John' reading disappears, leaving only the 'everybody' reading:

- (5) a. Everybody but John liked the movie, but I don't know why.  
 b. Everybody liked the movie, except for John, but I don't know why.

The lack of a 'John' reading in (5) follows from our analysis to the extent that elided structure should be pronounceable. The structure hypothesised to be elided in (1'') and (2'') cannot be pronounced in (5'), suggesting that it is absent entirely. In the absence of elided structure in the *except*-phrase to provide the antecedent for sluicing, the 'John' reading disappears:

- (5') a. Everybody but John (\*didn't like the movie) liked the movie, but I don't know why.  
 b. Everybody liked the movie, except for John (\*didn't like the movie), but I don't know why.

In closing, we note that elided antecedents are in evidence beyond *except*-phrases with sluicing (1) and sprouting (2), in that cases of sloppy VP ellipsis (Hardt 1999, Schwarz 2000) can provide elided antecedents for sprouting. In (6), the elided VP E *want him to clean* in (b) is composed of parts of two different antecedent VPs: A *want him to cook* from (a) and A'' *clean* from (b). Despite never being spoken, the elided VP *want me to clean* is part of the antecedent for the sprout, A-S, in (c):

- (6) a. John will <A' cook > if you [A want him to <E' ~~cook~~ > ].  
 b. And {A-S he'll <A'' clean > even if you don't [E ~~want him to <E'' clean >~~ ] }  
 c. But I don't know why {E-S he'll <A'' clean > even if you don't [E ~~want him to <E'' clean >~~ ] }

Overall, the interaction of *except*-phrases with sprouting and sluicing shows that elided structure can itself serve as the antecedent for ellipsis: the theory of ellipsis must allow for non-pronunciation to be licensed by unpronounced material.

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