

Discourse functions and PF factors control ellipsis formation

(Volker Struckmeier)

In syntactic approaches to ellipsis, the syntactic mobility of phrases is central for their suitability as fragments in elliptical utterances (e.g. Merchant 2001, 2004). Fragments must evacuate a single syntactic constituent (E-) marked for deletion via focus movement, as in (1):

1. a) John kissed someone – guess [$WHO_{Foc} C^0 [TP \text{he kissed who}]$].
b) Who did John kiss? – [$MARY_{Foc} C^0 [TP \text{John kissed Mary}]$].

This move-and-delete approach (the *MDA*) predicts typological differences for ellipsis:

- English allows for P-stranding, while German does not. Therefore, complements of P are predicted as possible fragments in English (2a), but P complements in German are not (2b):

2. a) Peter danced with somebody, but I don't know WHO_{Foc} ~~he danced with t~~
b) ??Peter tanzte mit jemandem, aber ich weiß nicht, WEM_{Foc} ~~Peter mit t tanzte~~.
Peter danced with someone but I know not who (intended meaning as in 2a)

- Swedish allows for extraction from relative clauses, but English and German do not. Thus, relative clause-internal materials cannot become fragments in German or English:

3. Q: Would John hire somebody who tries to fix a car with a hammer?
A: #No, a $SCREW DRIVER_{Foc}$ [~~John would hire somebody [who tries to fix a car with t]~~].

The approach proposed here makes different predictions. Following Chomsky & Lasnik (1993), it is argued that ellipsis is a PF matter. I propose that PF ellipsis is conditioned partially by discourse (e.g., Reich 2007, Krifka & Féry 2008) and partially by PF conditions:

- All restrictions on fragments are waived when fragment utterances do not answer to a *question under discussion (qud)*, but repeat (a) or correct it (b). Contrary to the *MDA*, we get:

4. a) Q as in 3a, then A': (Mit) Einem $HAMMER_{Foc}$? Nein.
(With) a hammer? No.
b) Q as in 3a – then A": Einem $SCHRAUBENZIEHER_{Foc}$ meinst Du? Ich glaube ja!
a screw driver mean you? I believe yes!
'With a screw driver, you mean? I think so, yes.

- Since in (4), the form (!) of *the qud itself* is relevant in A/A', relative-clause fragments are predicted to be good (as long as they address an actual part of the form of Q, of course).

- On the contrary, the relative clause in (3) serves (only) to restrict the denotation of *somebody*, so the (relative clause-internal) hammer abuse has simply never been asserted (*at issue*) here (cf., e.g. Tonhauser 2012).¹

¹ E.g., answering *no* means that *John would not hire [such a person]* – but cannot mean that *[nobody] fixes/[sb.] does not fix cars with a hammer*.

- As soon as relative clauses express a proposition central to the discourse, they actually *may* contain fragments – a distinction syntax is (and should be) ignorant of:

5. Q: Ist Peter nicht dieser Typ, der einen TIGER_{Foc} als Haustier hat?

is Peter not that guy who a tiger as pet has

'Isn't Peter that guy who has a tiger for a pet?'

A: Nein, einen BIBER_{Foc} (*ist Peter der Typ, der t als Haustier hat).

No, a beaver.

- If German DPs cannot surface without a P, this is a PF (case-licensing) restriction, not an extraction fact, I believe: Quirky cases are affected stronger (cf. 6a/b) and P complements without overt Case markings make good ellipsis fragments even with quirky cases (6c):

6. a) Q: Für wen arbeitet Peter?

for who works Peter?

'Who does Peter work for?'

A: Die MAFIA/ den PAPST/...

the Mafia_{Acc}/ the pope_{Acc}/...

b) Q: Weswegen arbeitet Peter?

For which works Peter

'For what/ why does Peter work?'

A: *(Wegen) des GELDES.

(for) the money_{Gen}

'For/because of the money'

c) Q: Mit wem hat Peter gearbeitet?

With who has Peter worked?

A: KATHARINA UND ANKE.

Katharina and Anke

- As we see, the approach advocated here shares none of the issues of the MDA. To name just one more (for reasons of space), modal particles are predicted to be able to surface, contrary to the MDA (Ott & Struckmeier 2018), despite being *unfocussable* and *unmovable*:

7. Q: Wen hat Peter alles so eingeladen? A: Seine FREUNDE wohl (*hat er eingeladen)

In sum, the MDA over- and undergenerates dramatically (with more examples in the talk).

Approaches that combine discourse and PF factors mostly mildly overgenerate (we will see) – and only *as of yet*, so stay tuned!

References

- Chomsky**, N. & H. **Lasnik** 1993: "The theory of principles and parameters". In J. Jacobs et al. (eds.): *Syntax*, 506-569. **Féry**, C. & M. **Krifka** 2008: "Information structure: notional distinctions, ways of expression". In P. van Sterkenburg (ed.): *Unity and diversity of languages*, 123-136. **Ott**, Dennis & Volker **Struckmeier** 2018: "Particles and Deletion". In *LI* 49, 393-407. **Reich**, I. 2007: "Toward a Uniform Analysis of Short Answers and Gapping". In K. Schwabe & S. Winkler (eds.): *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form*, 467-484. **Tonhauser**, Judith 2012: "Diagnosing (not-) at-issue content", Judith Tonhauser. In *Proceedings of SULA 6*, 239-254, UMass.