

What does a plausible ‘in-situ’ theory of ellipsis look like?

The Question. From 2001 to the mid-2010s, the prevailing view of ellipsis in Mainstream Generative Grammar (MGG) was the *move & delete approach* (MDA) exemplified in (1B), according to which YP must move from XP because ellipsis necessarily (i) targets a phrase XP and (ii) unselectively elides everything in XP^[1,2]. The MDA has serious conceptual and empirical shortcomings, however, particularly as a theory of clausal ellipsis,^[3-7] and within the last few years, a number of alternative analyses have been offered.^[4-7] Although these analyses share the common trait of

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| (1) A: Who did Jo and Bo see?
B: [[YP each other] ₁ [XP they saw t₁]]].
(strikethrough = ellipsis) |
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| (2) A: Who did Jo and Bo see?
B: They saw [YP each other]. |
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abandoning assumption-(ii) above, which for most analyses allows remnants of ellipsis to remain *in-situ* (see (2B)),^[4,5,7] these analyses differ substantially in their views on how ellipsis is grammatically licensed and how elliptic material is semantically/pragmatically recovered. This diversity demonstrates that, once the constraining influence of the MDA is removed, basic questions about ellipsis – and therefore about the interfaces more generally – return and are amplified. In this post-MDA landscape, there is therefore a pressing need to delimit the search-space for plausible MGG-compatible theories of ellipsis. In an effort to begin this task, the question for our debate is: *What does a plausible ‘in-situ’ theory of ellipsis look like?* We start to answer this question by defending and then debating two fledgling yet distinct in-situ theories of clausal ellipsis.

Perspective A: The Syntactic Question approach (SQA). In this debate, the SQA represents the ‘conservative’ in-situ approach: it deviates least from the MDA, and adopts many suggestions already accepted in the ellipsis literature. It adopts the following extant ideas: that ellipsis is licensed by a syntactic [E]-feature,^[1,2] that syntactic movement is responsible (albeit indirectly) for the grammatical-like constraints on certain subclasses of fragmentary utterance,^[1,2] that an *e-GIVENNESS*-like condition plays a key role in recovering the meaning of elliptic material (following [1,2,8,9]), that clausal ellipsis is licensed by the QUD,^[5,8,10,11] that clausal ellipsis is a surface anaphor,^[12] and that antecedents can be pragmatically accommodated (i.e. inferred).^[5,9,13,14] The SQA has two main innovations. First, it claims that accommodated antecedents must have syntactic form (as ellipsis is a surface anaphor) and therefore that, as wh-questions, accommodated antecedents must obey the syntactic constraints on wh-question formation in a given language *L*. Second, it claims that ellipsis targets a constituent yet applies selectively within it (see (3)). In this debate, the SQA’s tenets are motivated via a study of *reprise fragments*^[15,16] in English and Hungarian^[17,18] (see (3B) for an example), and via a comparison of fragment answers in wh-movement and wh-in-situ languages.^[5] As will be demonstrated, the primary asset of the SQA is its ability to retain the MDA’s explanation for why a subset of fragmentary utterances show the hallmarks of A’-moved items while simultaneously avoiding the MDA’s misguided commitment to the notion that all fragments are derived by A’-movement.

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| (3) A: Did Bo finagle a raise?
B: { XP Did Bo [_Y FINAGLE] a raise }? |
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Perspective B: The hybrid Forms-and-Meanings approach (FMA). The FMA proposes that elided material and ellipsis fragments are licensed by separate mechanisms. Elided items are licensed by a non-syntactic mechanism: as *recoverable* from the *common ground* (CG). Because they are not given, foci are non-recoverable and therefore must not elide. In addition, elements that make no contribution to the CG and are therefore never recoverable, such as

- (4) B: So I met Adrian in the US, who drives a truck and wears a baseball cap and loves burgers and is so all-American...
- A: Let me guess - Adrian is also a guy who always has a colt with him?
- B: No, ~~he always has a woman with him.~~
- B':^{??} ~~Adrian~~ is a woman.

modal particles,^[4] are never elided. Materials that are recoverable, on the other hand, can optionally elide (*in-situ*).

According to the FMA, materials from movement islands *can* be recovered, e.g., if a relative clause is at-issue (e.g., see (4B)).^[19,20] Conversely, materials from main clauses can very nearly fail to reconstruct if the main

clause proposition is not at-issue (anymore) when the elliptical utterance is made (4B'). The FMA opposes the syntactic mechanisms of the MDA and the SQA, since findings such as in (4) refute movement-based predictions for both the availability and *unavailability* of reconstructions.

Fragment licensing, on the other hand, does make reference to syntactic mechanisms in the FMA: Only lexical items used verbatim in the discourse syntactically license the features borne by fragments.^[21,22] This has important consequences: Firstly, memory retention for the form of utterances is severely limited, as is well-known in the psycholinguistic literature,^[23] causing ellipsis to be a 'local' anaphoric relation. Secondly, this 'locality' helps explain why ellipsis formation can be *acquired* in the first place, as will also be shown. In sum, the FMA is a 'hybrid' theory, recruiting syntactic, discursive, and psycholinguistic factors for its explanation of elliptical reconstruction.

Relevance for linguistic theory. Ellipsis is the interface topic *par excellence*. Determining the nature of ellipsis as deletion (e.g. is ellipsis sensitive to syntactic constituency, prosodic constituency, both or none?) refines our understanding the syntax-phonology interface and the timing of operations at PF; using ellipsis to determine whether constraints on movement (or its absence) are narrow-syntactic or merely phonological in nature,^[1,2,24,25] provides a clearer understanding of precisely how 'minimal' the narrow syntax is; accurately specifying the mechanisms by which elliptic material is recovered informs us about the grammar's sensitivity to discourse structure and context. In short, narrowing the search-space for a viable theory of ellipsis entails narrowing the search-space for a viable theory of how syntax, phonology, and semantics/pragmatics interact. Lastly, because *in-situ* MGG approaches to ellipsis are more closely aligned with conceptions of ellipsis in monostratal formalisms (e.g. HSPG, Dynamic Syntax, see [26]) than the MDA, this debate will touch on the question of whether theoreticians should aim for equivalence/convergence across disparate frameworks.

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