A deletion solution to the sloppy-ellipsis puzzle   *Syntax: Ellipsis* [15 minute]

One of the most central questions in the study of ellipsis is the nature of the ellipsis site itself, in particular whether the ellipsis site contains at some level of syntactic representation structural phrase markers of the familiar kind. Most current theories of ellipsis assume it does, positing either PF 'deletion' or 'copying in' at LF. Such structure-based theories have recently been confronted with a fundamental challenge by an important set of facts discovered independently by Hardt 1999 and Schwarz 1999, and illustrated in (1).

(1)   a. I'll help you if you want me to. I'll kiss you even if you don't.
       b. I'll help you if you [$_{VP1}$ want me to <[$_{VP2}$ help you]>]. I'll kiss you even if you don't <[$_{VP3}$ want me to kiss you]>.

The difficulty, the *sloppy-ellipsis puzzle*, is that the second elided VP can mean <want me to kiss you>: the elided VP in the antecedent *want me to* <>, instead of meaning 'help you', as it does in the first clause, instead means 'kiss you'. In short, an elided VP_2 embedded inside a VP_1, where VP_1 is the antecedent to a VP_3, can get a 'sloppy interpretation' inside VP_3.

This sloppy-ellipsis reading arises only when the antecedent VP contains an ellipsis site; without ellipsis in the antecedent, the sloppy reading is unavailable:

(2)   I'll help you if you want me to help you. I'll kiss you even if you don't <>.
       a. <> = <want me to help you>   STRICT
       b. <>   <want me to kiss you>   SLOPPY

Both Hardt and Schwarz take this data to indicate that the ellipsis site is syntactically and semantically merely a (null) bound variable. In this paper, I show how a redefinition of Merchant's 2001 e-givenness can accommodate the sloppy-ellipsis puzzle while preserving a structure-based view of ellipsis. Merchant proposes that elided constituents are marked by an E-feature: this E-marking is the locus of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic requirements found in ellipsis. As Tomioka 2003 shows, Merchant's definition of e-givenness cannot handle the sloppy-ellipsis puzzle. I propose the redefinitions in (3) and (4):

(3)   *e-givenness*: An expression *X* is *e-given* iff E has a salient antecedent A and, modulo existential type-shifting, (i) A entails E-clo(*X*), and (ii) *X* entails E-clo(A).
(4)   The *E-closure of* α (E-clo( )) is the result of replacing all E-marked elements of   with existentially bound variables of the appropriate type

For (1), VP_2 is E-marked as in (5) (shown by $_{:E}$), hence by (4) is replaced by a bound variable, *P*, allowing VP_3 to satisfy (3), as shown in (6). (2) lacks a sloppy reading because there is no E-feature in the antecedent.

(5)   I'll help you if you [$_{VP1}$ want me to <[$_{VP2:E}$ help you]>]. I'll kiss you even if you don't <[$_{VP3:E}$ want me to [$_{VP:E}$ kiss you]]>.
(6)   E-clo(VP_1) = E-clo(VP_3) = *x. P.x* wants me to *P*

This solution salvages the structure-based deletion account of ellipsis by altering the semantics, not the syntax, of the ellipsis site and its associated E-feature.

[490 words]