Three kinds of ellipsis:
Syntactic, semantic, pragmatic?

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1 Introduction

(1) Three senses of ‘sentence’ (Stainton 2006:31)
   a. sentence_{syntactic}: an expression with a certain kind of structure/form
   b. sentence_{semantic}: an expression with a certain kind of content/meaning
   c. sentence_{pragmatic}: an expression with a certain kind of use

(2) a. Abby left.
   b. < /abli left/ [. s [v P Ably] [. v P left ]] [. left(abby), [. left(abby)]<M s ∞ i ] = 1 >
   c. < P, S, M, C_R >

(3) a. P ≜_{phon} S
   b. S ≜_{sem} M
   c. M ≜_{prag} C_R

(4) a. Sound pattern (P) ≜_{phon} Syntax (S) ≜_{sem} Encoded content (M) ≜_{prag} Speech act content (C_R)
   b. P ≜_{ellipsis_{syntactic}} S ≜_{ellipsis_{semantic}} M ≜_{ellipsis_{pragmatic}} C_R

Stainton’s project:

(5) Premise 1: Speakers genuinely can utter ordinary words and phrases in isolation, and
   thereby perform full-fledged speech acts.
   Premise 2: If speakers genuinely can utter ordinary words and phrases in isolation, and
   thereby perform full-fledged speech acts, then such-and-such implications obtain.
   (Stainton 2006:3)

(6) “ordinary words and phrases, with the syntax of words and phrases, are not sentences_{syntactic}
   or sentences_{semantic}, but they are nevertheless sentences_{pragmatic}.” (Stainton 2006:12)

1.1 The main data: Three classes

(7) Properties applied to a manifest object
   a. Sanjay and Silvia are loading up a van. Silvia is looking for a missing table leg, Sanjay says, ‘On the stoop.’
   b. Anita and Sheryl are at the cottage, looking out over the lake. Watching a boat go by, Anita says, ‘Moving pretty fast!’
   c. Jack holds up a letter and says, ‘From Spain!’
   d. A car dealer points at a car and says, ‘Driven exactly 10,000km.’
   e. On a bottle of cold medicine: ‘Recommended for ages 6 and older.’
   f. She looked up at Nok Lek, who watched the forest nervously. ‘I told you, one of Anthony Carroll’s best men.’ (Daniel Mason, The piano tuner, Vintage: New York, 2002, p. 159)

(8) Individuals as arguments of a manifest property
   a. A woman is coming through a door, and a linguist turns to her friend and
      identifies the new arrival by saying, ‘Barbara Partee.’
   b. A girl is doling out jam and says, ‘Chunks of strawberries.’ Her mother nods and
      says, ‘Rob’s mom.’
   c. After some weeks one summer of unusually cold weather in Manitoba (a part of
      Canada where the summers are usually warm), Alice, looking at the sky, says to
      Bruce (who has just returned from a trip to Spain), ‘Nova Scotia.’
   d. Edgar didn’t have time to ask what this was, for at that instant, from behind the
      stage rose a plaintive wail. He caught his breath. It was the same tune he had
      heard that night when the steamer had stopped on the river. He had forgotten
      it until now. ‘The nogo-gyn, the song of mourning,’ said Nash-Burnham at his

(9) Quantifiers as arguments of a manifest property
   a. I’m at a linguistics meeting, talking with Andy. There are some empty seats
      around a table. I point at one and say, ‘An editor of Natural Language Semantics’,
      (p. 209)
   b. At a bar: ‘Three pints of lager.’
   c. He continued to walk, the children following at a distance. . . At the side of the
      road, a pair of men [who are Shan, and know no English, –JM] sat... One of the
      men pointed to the group of children and said something, and Edgar answered,
      ‘Yes, quite a lot of children,’ and they both laughed although neither understood
      a word the other had said. (Daniel Mason, The piano tuner, Vintage: New York,
      2002, p. 235)
2 The ‘representational-pragmatic’ view

(10) Stainton’s basic proposal, in general terms: a speaker produces a word or phrase whose content is combined with ‘an appropriate “completing entity” ... to yield a proposition’ (p. 156); this ‘completing entity’ is given by the context and it is ‘never “translated into” natural language format’ (loc. cit.). ‘Interpreters grasp worldly objects, properties, and so on ... and combine these, by function-argument application, with the contents of the phrase uttered.’ (p. 173).

(11) After some weeks one summer of unusually cold weather in Manitoba (a part of Canada where the sumners are usually warm). Alice, looking at the sky, says to Bruce (who has just returned from a trip to Spain): ‘Nova Scotia.’

(12) Assuming that ‘Nova Scotia’ stands for an object, it must be the argument to a contextually arrived-at function, which is taken to be something along the lines of THE WEATHER HERE IS SIMILAR TO ... The output of this function, given NOVA SCOTIA as argument, is the proposition that THE WEATHER HERE IS SIMILAR TO NOVA SCOTIA. This is what was asserted. (Stainton 2006:156)

[Suppose the speaker produces the word ‘Reserved’, pointing at a chair. here, the thing uttered has a propositional function as its content. That is what language proper contributes. The context then provides, as argument to that function, the indicated chair. The hearer applies the function to the indicated chair, and arrives at a neo-Russellian proposition. That is the thing-asserted. (Stainton 2006:157)]

(13) A car dealer points at a car and says, ‘Driven exactly 10,000km.’

Main problem: overgeneration.

(14) [Abby and Ben are on their balcony looking out over a parade of schoolchildren passing by in perfect marching rhythm. The children’s right hands are at their sides, not visible from the balcony (their left hands are visible, and empty). At the command of the bandleader, every child in synchrony raises their right hand above their head and is revealed to be holding a small flag with the school colors on it. Abby exclaims:] Wow!

a. Every child has a flag!
b. #A flag!
c. #Every child has flag!
d. Flags!

(15) a. \( \lambda x . \chi_{child}(x) \rightarrow Q(\lambda y (\text{flag}(y)(x))) \)
b. \( \lambda P \chi_{flag}(x) \land P(x) \)

3 Ellipsis

3.1 Short or ‘fragment’ answers

(16) a. Mit wen hast du gesprochen?
   with whom.dat have you spoken
   ‘With whom did you speak?’
   b. Mit Hans.
   Hans
   ‘I spoke with Hans.’

Connectivity effects:

(17) a. Mit wen hast du gesprochen?
   with whom.dat have you spoken
   ‘With whom did you speak?’
   b. * Hans.
   Hans
   ‘I spoke with Hans.’

(18) a. * Wen hast du mit gesprochen?
   whom.dat have you with spoken
   (lit.) ‘Who did you speak with?’
   Hans have I with spoken
   (lit.) ‘Hans, I spoke with.’

(19)

(20) Voice connectivity in short answers

a. English
   Q: Who is sending you to Iraq? A: *By Bush.

b. German

   who.nom has the boy examined? by a psychologist
   Q: ‘Who examined the boy? A: [intended] ‘(He was examined) by a psychologist.’
ii. Q: Von wen wurde der Junge untersucht?  
A: * Eine Psychologin.

by whom was the boy examined a psychologist.

Q: ‘Who was the boy examined by?’  
A: [intended:] ‘A psychologist (examined him).’

Such connectivity effects form the best argument that there is syntactic ellipsis involved in fragment answers, and that the unpronounced syntax must be identical in some way to the syntax in the question asked. These effects tell strongly against approaches like Ginzburg and Sag’s 2000 and Culicover and Jackendoff’s 2005, which posit no syntax internal ellipsis sites at all.

21 BARE ARGUMENT ELLIPSIS (CULICOVER AND JACKENDOFF 2005)

a. Syntax: [u: XP[ourP]]

b. Semantics: \( \langle X \rangle \)

c. If \( f \) is an expression in \( CS_n \) and \( f \) cannot be determined from \( SYNTAX_n \) by application of Rules \( R_1-R_n \), then “\( f \) amounts to the presupposition of the antecedent, constructed by substituting variables for the [f]ecessary elements] in the CS of the antecedent” (Culicover and Jackendoff 2005:276)

3.2 The limits of the ‘limited ellipsis syntactic’ strategy

3.2.1 <That’s> X and labels (Merchant 2004)

22 Properties applied to a manifest object

a. <It’s> On the stool.

b. <That’s> Moving pretty fast!

c. <It’s> From Spain!

d. <It’s been> Driven exactly 10,000km.

e. <It’s> Recommended for ages 6 and older.

f. <He’s> one of Anthony Carroll’s best men.

23 Individuals as arguments of a manifest property

a. <That’s> Barbara Partee.

b. <It’s> Rob’s mom.

c. <It’s> Nova Scotia.

d. <It’s> The ngo-gyes, the song of mourning.

Cf:

24 That’s Max (all right, all over again, for sure, for you).

25 Quantifiers as arguments of a manifest property

a. An editor of Linguistics and Philosophy

b. Three pints of lager.

c. <There/they are> quite a lot of children.

3.2.2 Other syntactic questions

26 Even though it is obviously true.

a. no-one noticed that *(it’s) on the stool!

b. Jack didn’t exclaim that *(it is) moving pretty fast!

c. few mail carriers recognized that *(it is) from Spain!

d. she said that *(he is) one of Anthony Carroll’s best men.

27 a. Jenny told us that *(that is) Barbara Partee.

b. Anita hinted that *(it was) Rob’s mom.

c. Katerina complained that *(it was) Nova Scotia.

• Stainton 2006:116: ‘if these posited expressions really do have sentential structures, they should embed in all sentential frames’.

• ‘Penthouse Principle’ (Ross 1973), whose generalization we can state informally but memorably as ‘the rules are different if you live on the top floor’.

28 Phenomena occurring only in matrix clauses

a. German and Dutch verb second (Vikner 1995):

Das Buch hat er gelesen.

the book has he read

‘He read the book.’

b. Hídatsa declarative clause marker -c (Boyle 2007):

puslíiká- mášhká- éekaa-c
cat-DET. DEF dog-DET. DEF see-DECL

‘The cat sees the dog.’

c. Imperatives (in many, perhaps all, languages; Postdam 1998):

Ánise – tin portal! (Greek)

open.IMP: In the door ‘Open the door!’

d. Subject-auxiliary inversion in English questions (McCloskey 2006):

How many presents did he get? vs. *How many presents he got?

We were surprised at [*how many presents did he get. | how many presents he got.]

e. Albanian polar interrogative particle n

A je ti te lollin?

Q are you AGT. tired

‘Are you tired?’

f. Greek dubitative interrogative particle ara (Giannakidou to appear):

Tha perasi araże tin eksesa?

FUT pass.3s PRT the exam

‘Will he pass the exam, I wonder?’
g. English question-modifying 'so.'
   So who came?
   I wonder (*no) who came?

h. English tag-questions:
   He’ll pass, won’t he?
   I wonder if he’ll pass (*won’t he).

### 3.2.3 Final problems with syntactic ellipsis

The philosopher’s game: Stainton 2006:107:

Hans and Franz are playing a boring game one day in which each person takes turns naming an object which reminds him of a particular person. Their conversation consists of sentences such as

(29) Problem example 1.

Die Lampe erinnert mich an meinen Onkel Wolfram.

*The lamp reminds me of my uncle Wolfram.*

They go their separate ways and a few days later, Hans is sitting in a bar when Franz walks in the door. Hans points at a nearby beer-stained old wooden table and says,

(30) Mein Vater!

*my NOM father (*My father!*)

(31) a. Das ist mein Vater!

*that is my NOM father

‘That is my father!’

b. Meinen Vater!

*my ACC father

‘My father!’

(32) Das erinnert mich an meinen Vater.

*that NOM reminds me on my ACC father

‘That reminds me of my father.’

(33) Derjenige, der in der gegebenen Beziehung zu dem gerade angedachten Tisch the one who in the given relationship to the just indicated table

stellt, ist mein Vater.

*stands is my father

‘The one who stands in the given relationship to the just indicated table is my father.’

(34) Problem example 2.

A father is worried that his daughter will spill her chocolate milk. The glass is very full, and she is quite young, and prone to accident. He says, ‘Both hands!’

### 4 Ellipsis semantic as ‘slot-filling’

Is Stainton right when he writes that “what is asserted ... is fully propositional; but what is metaphorically determined by slot-filling and disambiguated expression-meaning is something less than propositional” (2006:228) and that ordinary words and phrases used in isolation ‘don’t have’ slots that yield something propositional when they are used in context” (2006:158)?

(35) a. He left.

   b. leave(x$_2$)

   c. g = { x$_2$ ↦ Sam }

   d. [leave(x$_2$)]$^g$ = 1 if Sam left

   expression type
   a. sick $<$ e, t $>$

(36) b. sick(job)

   c. sick(x$_2$)

   d. λx$_2$[sick(x$_2$)] $<$ e, t $>$

(37) Definition [Typed λ-terms]. Let VAR$_a$ be a countably infinite set of variables of type a and CON$_a$ a collection of constants of type a. The set TERM$_a$ of λ-terms of type a is defined by mutual recursion as the smallest set such that the following holds:

i. VAR$_a$ ⊆ TERM$_a$

ii. CON$_a$ ⊆ TERM$_a$

iii. (α(β)) ∈ TERM$_a$ if α ∈ TERM$_{a+b}$ and β ∈ TERM$_b$

iv. λx.α ∈ TERM$_{a+b}$, if x ∈ VAR$_b$ and α ∈ TERM$_a$

(38) a. [exen] = λP$_a$λQ$_a$[∀x.(P(x) → Q(x))]

   b. [boy] = λx.[boy(x)]

   c. [see] = λx.[see(x)(y)]

Carpenter 1997; Heim and Kratzer 1998; Chung and Ladusaw 2004

(39) a. λx$_2$[on.the.stroke(x$_2$)]

   b. λQ$_a$[∃z.[quote.a.lot*c(z) ∧ children(z) ∧ Q(z)]]

(40) a. on.the.stroke(x$_2$)

   b. ∃z.[quote.a.lot*c(z) ∧ children(z) ∧ P(z)]
Montague 1973, Partee and Rooth 1983, Jacobson 1999, Barker to appear, and many others: an individual-denoting expression can lift into a generalized quantifier type

(41) a. \( \lambda P \exists ![P(\text{parte})] \)
   b. \( \lambda P \exists ![P(\text{parte})](Q_n) \rightarrow Q(\text{parte}) \)
   c. \( Q(\text{parte}) \)

(42) a. Every patient was told that he was sick. But then most of them forgot it.
   b. Most reservists found out by mail that they were being sent to Iraq and that
      pissaed them off.
   c. Everyone remembered to bring their swimsuits. No-one forgot.
   d. Everyone remembered that they wanted to marry their cousin. No-one forgot.

(43) a. Every patient was told that he was sick. But then most of them forgot that
   they were sick.
   b. Most reservists found out by mail that they were being sent to Iraq and the
      fact that they found out by mail pissed them off.
   c. Everyone remembered to bring their swimsuits. No-one forgot to bring their
      swimsuits.
   d. Everyone remembered that they wanted to marry their cousin. No-one forgot
      that they wanted to marry their cousin.

5 Scripts, contexts, and syntactic ‘slots’

(44) a. Ferte mu (enian) kafe (parakalo)! (Greek)
   bring.imp me a coffee.acc please
   ‘Bring me (a) coffee (please)!’
   b. Dajte mne vody (požalujsta)! (Russian)
   give.imp me water.gen please
   ‘Give me (some) water (please)!’

(45) a. (Enian) kafe (parakalo)! (Greek)
   a coffee.acc please
   ‘(A) coffee (please)!’
   b. Vody (požalujsta)! (Russian)
   water.gen please
   ‘(Some) water (please)!’

(46) Dutch phone-answering
   a. ‘Met’ (lit. ‘with’) followed by your name.
   b. ‘Met Jason’.
   c. ‘U spreekt met Jason’ (‘You are speaking with Jason’)

(47) Greek addressees
   a. Dimitri Giannakidi (accusative)
   b. #Dimitris Giannakidis (nominative)

(48) a. Marco gets into a taxi and says, ‘To Segovia. To the jail.’
   b. A passenger gets into a cab and the driver turns and asks, ‘Where to?’

1. Schank and Abelson 1977: ‘script’ (with linguistic ‘lines’)
2. Is this idea incoherent? Stanton claims that the notion of script is irrelevant since
   ‘surely it is the speaker, not her grammar, that determines which script is in play’
   (p. n).
3. But this is equally true for the choice of words themselves, and it is the grammatical
   features of particular words that can determine properties of even antecedentless
   anaphoric elements, such as those discussed by Culicover and Jackendoff 2005:261:

(49) a. Vítu rétta mér hana? (Icelandic)
   will.you hand me dat of.fem.acc
   ‘Will you hand me that?’ [pointing at a book = lokina [fem.acc]]
   b. Vý mohť by mne dat’ étu? (Russian)
   you could conditional me.dat give.inf that.fem.acc
   ‘Could you give me that?’ [pointing toward a herring = seljetku [fem.acc]]

(50) a. That looks good on you.
   b. Those look good on you. (Culicover and Jackendoff 2005:262 fn. 20)

6 Conclusions and consequences

1. Semantic ellipsis can be construed as an application of already existing semantic
   structure-building (-licensing) operations, applied to ‘ordinary words and phrases’
2. The proposed semantic ellipsis account here shares, by design, both the strengths and
   weaknesses of Stanton–the primary difference being in where the labor is situated.
3. Division of labor: If syntactic and semantic and script strategies are in principle avail-
   able, how does one decide?