

Perfect and imperfect copies

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An ideal theory of ellipsis, whether implemented by copying, deletion, or some other local mechanism, would take the elided material to be a perfect copy (or equivalent) of its antecedent: such a theory would have a straightforward way of accounting for the fact that sluicing does not permit voice mismatches, for example: *Someone admired Abby, but it's unclear by whom *(Abby was admired).*

Unfortunately, there are numerous empirical difficulties with this ideal state—a range of imperfections are documented in Fiengo and May 1994 (who coin the term ‘vehicle change’ for some of them), Merchant 2001, Chung et al. 2010, van Craenenbroeck 2010, and Barros 2014, among others:

- (1) a. They arrested Alex₁, though he₁ thought they wouldn't.
- b. Decorating for the holidays is easy if you know how.
- c. Abby was reading, but I don't know what.
- d. Politiker würden gern helfen, aber sie wissen nicht, wie. [Ger]
 politicians would gladly help but they know not how
- e. She has five cats, but I don't know how many dogs.
- f. He put in a bid, but I couldn't tell on whose behalf.
- g. (A:) Jan hat juster in praatsje holden. (B:) Wêr dat oer? [Fris]
 Jan has yesterday a talk held what that about
 A: ‘Jan gave a talk yesterday.’ B: ‘What about?’
- h. Ben: Abby hates her damn dog! Abby: No, I don't.
- i. Ralph is a talented robber: when he does, the victims often don't even realize they've been robbed.

I review a range of previous approaches to these data, and conclude that the copying mechanism (or equivalence computation) must allow monotonic additions to the antecedent, and that these extension mechanisms may be language-specific (depending on the grammatical resources of individual languages). Cases that do not fall under this approach can be analyzed as instances of ellipsis-external agreement phenomena, on a decompositional view of lexical realization.

References

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