snippets

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P-stranding generalization and Bahasa Indonesia: a myth?

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Merchant 2001 analyzes examples of sluicing as in (1a) in English as the result of *wh*-movement of the remnant followed by TP deletion, as shown in (1b).

(1) a.   I heard that Jack bought something, but I don't know what.
  b.   ... but I don't know [$_{CP}$ what [$_{TP}$ Jack bought t_{what}]]

 According to this analysis, regular *wh*-movement underlies the derivation of the sluicing phenomenon. Merchant argues that this analysis receives strong crosslinguistic support from the generalization in (2).

(2)   A language L will allow preposition stranding under sluicing iff L allows
   preposition stranding under regular *wh*-movement. (Merchant 2001: 92)

 This generalization correctly accounts for the presence/absence of P-stranding under sluicing and *wh*-movement in a wide variety of P-stranding and non-P-stranding languages. English allows P-stranding under *wh*-movement, as in (3a). Thus, the preposition *with* can be elided by deleting the TP that contains the stranded preposition, as in (3b). By contrast, Greek does not allow P-stranding under *wh*-movement, as in (4a). Thus, the preposition cannot be elided by TP deletion, as in (4b). (Examples are from Merchant 2001: 92, 94.)

(3) a.   Who was he talking with?
  b.   Peter was talking with someone, but I don't know (with) who.
(4) a.   * Pjon   milise   me?
      who   she.spoke   with
      'Who did she speak with?'
  b.   * I Anna milise me kapjon, alla dhe ksero *(me)   pjon
      the Anna spoke with someone but not   I.know (with) who
      'Anna spoke with someone, but I don't know with who.'

 The generalization in (2), however, is called into question by Bahasa Indonesia because it is a non-P-stranding language under regular *wh*-movement like Greek that nonetheless permits P-stranding under sluicing like English. To illustrate, consider examples in (5a-e).

(5) a.   * Apa   yang   kamu   bicara   tentang?
      what   that   you   talk   about
      'What did you talk about?'

b. Tentang apa   kamu   bicara?
   about   what you   talk
   'What did you talk about?'
c. Saya ingat dia bicara (tentang) sesuatu, tapi saya tidak tahu
   I remember he talk   about something but I   Neg know
   (tentang)   apa.
   about   what
   'I remember he talked about something, but I don't know (about) what.'
d. Kamu   bicara (tentang) apa?
   you   talk   about what
   'What did you talk about?'
e. * Apa kamu   bicara?
     what you   talk
     'What did you talk about?'

The contrast between (5a) and (5b) shows that the preposition *tentang* 'about' cannot be stranded under regular *wh*-movement in Bahasa Indonesia. The grammaticality of the sluicing example in (5c) without the preposition shows that the same preposition can apparently be stranded and elided under sluicing. Note that while Bahasa Indonesia characteristically allows P-drop, as shown in the first clause in (5c) and in situ *wh*-questions as in (5d), the P-drop option is unavailable under regular overt *wh*-movement ((5e)).   Therefore, we can exclude the possibility that the sluicing example in (5c) instantiates a pied-piped PP sluice whose preposition is simply dropped after *wh*-movement.

The contrast between (5a) and (5c) poses a serious problem for the P-Stranding Generalization, hence significantly undermines Merchant's theory. Note that Merchant's sample of 24 languages to motivate the P-Stranding Generalization does not include a single language from the Austronesian family, whose sheer number far exceeds that of families like Indo-European, to which most of his sample languages belong. Potsdam 2003 observes that Malagasy provides another counterexample -- it is a non-P-stranding language that nonetheless allows the preposition to be deleted/ stranded under sluicing. Some other Austronesian languages such as Javanese show the same pattern. A broader examination of the robustness of the P-Stranding Generalization, as well as a theoretical explanation of why (some) languages of the Austronesian family are special in this regard, is an important task to undertake.

References

Merchant, J. (2001) *The Syntax of Silence: Sluicing, Islands, and the Theory of Ellipsis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Potsdam, E. (2005). "Evidence for semantic identity under ellipsis from Malagasy sluicing." In *NELS 33: Proceedings of the North East Linguistic Society*, ed. M. Kadowaki and S. Kawahara. Amherst, MA: GLSA, 285-302.

Editors' note

After this snippet was accepted for publication, a dissertation appeared on precisely this topic: Catherine Rose Fortin, *Indonesian Sluicing and Verb Phrase Ellipsis*, PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2007. See the announcement at http://linguistlist.org/issues/18/18-3446.html.