



snippets

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7.

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Merchant says that MaxElide works for instances of wh-movement followed by VP deletion but it's not clear how or how it does

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Consider the following two cases. In (1), an example of sluicing, the *wh*-phrase moves to matrix Spec-C and the IP is deleted (here and throughout deletion sites are put in strikethrough). The same derivation in (2), however, does not allow for VP-deletion.

- (1) They said Nick heard about a Balkan language but I don't know [_{CP} which (Balkan language) ~~{_{IP} they [_{VP} said [_{CP} Nick [_{VP} heard about *t_{wh}*]}]}~~].
- (2) *They said Nick heard about a Balkan language but I don't know [_{CP} which (Balkan language) [_{IP} they did [_{VP} say [_{CP} Nick [_{VP} heard about *t_{wh}*]}]}].

Merchant (2008) argues that the grammaticality difference in (1)–(2) can be explained under (3):

- (3) **MaXElide (Definition):**
Let XP be an elided constituent containing an A'-trace. Let YP be a possible target for deletion. YP must not properly contain XP ($XP \subsetneq YP$).

Let us apply (3) to (2). Take the elided XP to be the VP [*say Nick heard about *t_{wh}**] and YP the IP [*they did [_{VP} say Nick heard about *t_{wh}*]*]. According to (3), both IP and VP are possible targets for deletion and both contain an A'-trace (actually the same), but IP properly contains VP. Deletion, then, targets the “Max(imal)” category IP. Whence, the only grammatical derivation is (1), predicting that sluicing is favored over VP-deletion.

Interestingly, though, (2) becomes a lot better as in (5) ((4) is the corresponding sluicing derivation):

- (4) They said Nick heard about a Balkan language, but I don't know [_{CP} which (Balkan language) ~~{_{IP} Nick [_{VP} heard about *t_{wh}*]}]}~~.
- (5) (?) They said Nick heard about a Balkan language, but I don't know [_{CP} which (Balkan language) [_{IP} he did [_{VP} hear about *t_{wh}*]}].

Let us now apply MaxElide to (5). Take XP to be the VP [*hear about *t_{wh}**] and YP the IP [*he did [_{VP} hear about *t_{wh}*]*]. Both IP and VP are possible targets for deletion and both contain an A'-trace (the same). Again, IP properly contains VP. Although MaxElide is clearly violated in (5), it does not give an ungrammatical output (albeit

slightly deviant ?) comparable to that of (2). Whence, sluicing (cf. (4)) is not favored over VP-deletion (cf. (5)).

The interesting difference between (2) and (5) is that the source of the elided VP in (5) does not include the matrix antecedent VP as in (2) but only the embedded one. The same seems to hold for (6) and (7) (the ungrammatical (6) cited from Fox and Lasnik 2003: 143, ex. 24):

(6) *It appears that a certain senator will resign, but [_{CP} which senator it does
[_{VP} appear [_{CP} that t_{wh} [_{VP} will resign]]]] is still a secret.

(7) It appears that a certain senator will resign, but [_{CP} which senator will
[_{VP} resign]] is still a secret.

VP-deletion with A'-traces seems to comply with a sort of "MinElide" principle; something like "delete the most minimal VP possible." In other words, the source of VP-deletion in (5) and (7) seems to favor a more minimal derivation by excluding the matrix VP. But if something like MinElide is possible (and/or preferable) for VP-deletion (of the form (5-7)), what prohibits us from assuming that the same is true with sluicing (of the form (1))?

References

- Fox, D. and H. Lasnik (2003). "Successive-cyclic movement and island repair: the difference between Sluicing and VP-Ellipsis." *Linguistic Inquiry*. 1: 34, 143-154.
- Merchant, J. (2008). "Variable island repair under ellipsis," in *Topics in Ellipsis*, ed. K. Johnson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 132-153.