

snippets

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1.

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Sluiced fragment answers: another puzzle involving islands and ellipsis

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Fragment answers -- like Speaker B's utterance in (1) -- and sluicing ((2)) receive the same analysis in Merchant (2004), where PF-deletion of TP leaves material extracted from TP overt (deleted structure in grey font):

- (1) Speaker A: Who did Sally fire?
Speaker B: Bill_i [_{TP} Sally fired *t_i*]

- (2) Sally fired someone, guess who_i [_{TP} Sally fired *t_i*].

Merchant notes that fragments, unlike sluices, do not ameliorate island violations. In example (3) (from Merchant 2001), extraction of *which Balkan language* violates an island:

- (3) They hired someone [_{CP} who speaks a Balkan language], but I don't know
which Balkan language_i [_{TP} They hired someone [_{CP} who speaks *t_i*]]

However, testing island-sensitivity for fragments is not straightforward, since an island-violating analog of (1) is unacceptable:

- (4) A: *Which Balkan language did they hire someone who speaks?
B: Albanian.

Merchant (2004) circumvents this by using questions like Speaker A's in (5); a yes-no question with a focused constituent (in *italics*) contributes an implicit Wh-question, licensing a fragment. With island-bound constituents, fragments are unacceptable:

- (5) A: Did *Abby* refuse to dance with Ben?
B: No, *Christine*
- (6) A: Did Ben leave the party because *Abby* wouldn't dance with him?
B: *No, *Beth* [Example (88), Merchant (2004)]

However, the grammar provides us with another tool for circumventing the problem in (4); sluicing ameliorates island violations. We can fix (4), by replacing the set-up question with a sluice. Surprisingly, island-violating fragments become acceptable:

- (7) A: They hired someone who speaks a Balkan language.
 B: Which one?
 A: Albanian.
- (8) A: Ben left the party early because someone wouldn't dance with him.
 B: Who?
 A: Christine.

The generalization is: fragment answers become insensitive to islands when they are answers to sluiced questions (call them "sluiced fragments", to distinguish from cases like (6)).

Merchant's (2004) account for the difference between sluicing and fragments involves a PF-uninterpretable feature '* ' which marks intermediate traces of successive cyclic Wh-movement in island-violating extractions. Ellipsis "hides" '* ' from PF, rendering violations acceptable under sluicing, but not fragment answers:

- (9) Which Balkan language_i did they [_{VP} *_{t_i} hire someone [_{CP} who _{t_i} speaks _{t_i}]]?
 (10) [_{CP} Which Balkan language [_C C⁰ [_{TP} did they [_{VP} *_{t_i} hire...
 (11) *_{[F(ocus)P} Beth_i [_F F⁰ [_{CP} *_{t_i} [_C C⁰ [_{TP} Ben [_{VP} *_{t_i} left the ...]]]]]]]]]

Fragment answers are argued to occupy a higher specifier position than Wh-phrases under sluicing; Spec, Focus⁰, above CP. Deletion of TP under fragment answers fails to erase the PF-uninterpretable '* '. This theory accounts for the difference in acceptability between (5) and (6), but what about (7) and (8)?

An additional asymmetry between fragments and sluiced fragments involves possible answers.

- (12)A: Did Ben leave the party because *Abby* wouldn't dance with him?
 B: No, because *Beth* wouldn't dance with him. (cf. 6)
- (13)A: Ben left the party early because someone wouldn't dance with him.
 B: Who?
 A: *Because Christine wouldn't dance with him. (cf. 8)

Whatever account is given for sluiced fragments should also account for the pattern in (12)-(13).

References

- Merchant, J. (2001) *The Syntax of Silence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Merchant, J. (2004) "Fragments and ellipsis." *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27: 661-738.