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Sluicing, originally discussed by Ross (1969), is exemplified by elliptical representations of the form in (1) that give rise to full-fledged interpretations of the kind in (2). We see in (1) that the interpretation of *who* (the SLUICE) is anaphorically dependent on that of the preceding clause *someone left*. We can speak of this clause as containing an “antecedent” (here: *someone*) with which the SLUICE is associated. (See Chung, Ladusaw & McCloskey 1995; Merchant 2001 for more discussion).

(1) Someone left and I wonder *who*.

(2) “Someone left and I wonder *who* left.”

AnderBois (2010) proposes the generalization in (3), on the basis of evidence such as the example in (4). Specifically, the observation is that the SLUICE *which* fails to be associated with the inner antecedent *a word* that surfaces within the (appositive) relative clause *who misspelled a word last night*.

(3) Sluicing is ungrammatical if the prospective inner antecedent is in an appositive.

(4) *?Amy, *who* misspelled a word last night, forgot *which*.

In this snippet, I point out that AnderBois’ generalization (3): a) extends to relative clauses in general; and b) is too strong.

Note first that (5) is also ungrammatical, and to the same degree that (4) is. Here, the antecedent *one of the most famous songs of the decade* surfacing in the (restrictive) relative clause *who wrote one of the most famous songs of the decade* may not serve as the associate of the SLUICE. This might suggest the reformulation of (3) that I give in (6).

(5) *? The composer *who* wrote one of the most famous songs of the decade didn’t want to reveal which.

(6) Sluicing is ungrammatical if the prospective inner antecedent is in a relative clause.

However, as it stands, (6) predicts that (7) and (8), which are comparable to (4) and (5) respectively, are ungrammatical, contrary to judgments.

(7) *? Amy, who misspelled a word last night and *(she)* forgot which, feels very embarrassed.

(8) *? The composer *who* wrote one of the most famous songs of the decade, but *(he)* didn’t want to reveal which, is one of my closest friends.
In (7) and (8), the clause that hosts the inner antecedent (a word, one of the most famous songs of the decade) is coordinated with the clause hosting the SLUICE (which). Taking into account all of these data, I suggest recasting (6) as in (9). (An alternative formulation -- with different implications -- might be as in (10).)

(9) Sluicing is ungrammatical if the prospective inner antecedent is in a relative clause, unless the clause hosting the SLUICE is coordinated with the clause that hosts the inner antecedent.

(10) Sluicing is ungrammatical if the prospective inner antecedent is in a relative clause, unless the SLUICE projects in the same level of embedding with and linearly follows the clause that hosts the inner antecedent.

References