Ellipsis

1 Techinca

Time/place: Mondays, 3:00-5:50, Foster 408
My contact info, including office hours: on my webpage, home.uchicago.edu/merchant

2 Goals and course description

Ellipsis has always been one of the most fascinating and challenging puzzles for theories of grammar, in that it poses a seemingly insoluble dilemma: how does one associate meanings with silence, where the usual sound(gesture)-meaning correspondence is missing? This fact has stimulated the vast majority of the work on this topic, because it has a unique potential to inform our ontology of syntax: what are the syntactic building blocks of language? This course reviews the evidence pro and con for abstract, unpronounced syntactic structures, and explores the possibility for building an empirically adequate theory using nodes in the syntax that fail to trigger any pronunciation. Second, we examine the necessity for a hybrid theory of the identity relation. Finally, in building such an adequate theory, we encounter another startling property of elliptical structures: the application of ellipsis to certain defective structures seems to repair them. In other words, structures which, when pronounced, are deviant in some way, seem to be licensed just in case they are elided (e.g., certain islands, anaphoric dependencies, multiple (wh- and other) movements, ‘scrambling’ in English, etc.). We will explore the implications of this prima facie puzzling fact for our understanding of the mechanisms involved in the deviancy in overt structures by examining their effects in a variety of elliptical constructions (sluicing, verb phrase ellipsis, antecedent-contained deletions, stripping, gapping, pseudogapping, etc., as time permits), with an eye to determining as well to what extent repair effects form a homogeneous class. We will also be working towards developing a general theory of the licensing conditions on ellipsis itself.

3 Evaluation

Your evaluation for this course will be based on class participation (70%) and a final paper (30%) (due by noon on Friday of finals week), with the proviso that you must participate regularly to pass the class (regardless of your class participation grade). This means read the papers, be prepared with a few questions or comments about them for class, etc. The class participation grade will also be assigned in part by your presentation of the papers from the column labeled ‘Reading 2’ (and I’m open to moving papers around: if you really want to present something else, including from the additional readings column, just let me know). Each student taking this course for a grade will be expected to present to the class two of these readings, with a brief handout summarizing the main points and including the main data. Each class will begin with me presenting the reading from my work, followed by the student presenting the other paper where applicable.
## 4 Schedule

(Rough, may be revised; dissertations and mss are on chalk, along with some other things, but most journal articles are yours to find through the library; all my papers are on my webpage.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading 1</th>
<th>Reading 2</th>
<th>Additional readings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intro: stx, id, licensing</td>
<td>Merchant 2016, Merchant 2013a</td>
<td></td>
<td>van Craenenbroeck and Merchant 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MLK</td>
<td>no class</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Morphological effects, ‘vehicle change’, structure and islands, and other miracles</td>
<td>Merchant 2015, Merchant 2013b, Saab 2009</td>
<td>Fiengo and May 1994, Yoshida et al. 2015a, Yoshida et al. 2015b</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Wishful thinking? My new paper on re-binding | Messick et al. 2015 | Elbourne 2008
References


Bennett, Ryan, Emily Elfner, and James McCloskey. 2015. Prosody, focus, and ellipsis in Irish. Ms., Yale, University of British Columbia, and University of California, Santa Cruz.


Griffiths, James. 2013. Parenthetical verb constructions, fragment answers, and constituent modi-


Kobele, Gregory M. 2014. LF-copying without LF. Lingua.


