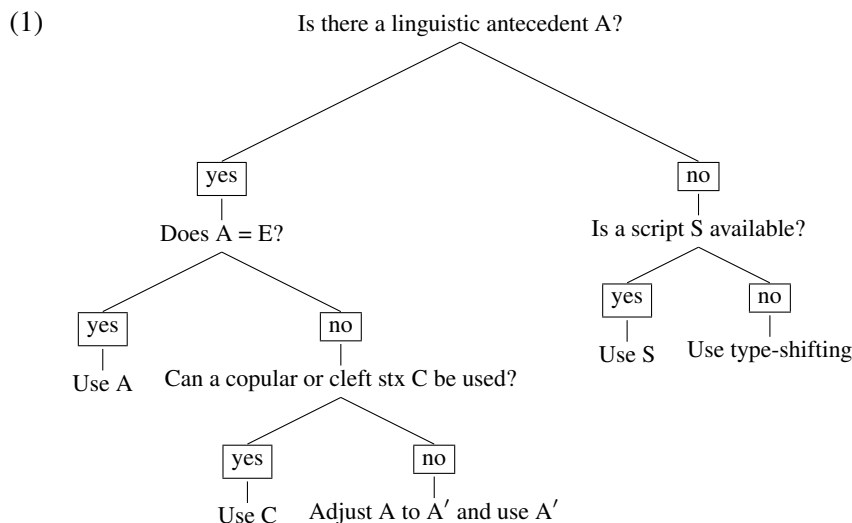# Ranked resolution strategies for ellipsis

Jason Merchant, University of Chicago

Many different beasts have been called elliptical: sluicing, VP-ellipsis, fragment answers, short directives, and even bare exophoric fragments, among others. I argue that while all of these can give rise to determinate propositional contents, these contents are not all generated by the same mechanisms. Instead, there is a stochastic ranked decision tree for resolving a putative ellipsis E:

(1)

Is there a linguistic antecedent A?

- yes — Does A = E?
  - yes — Use A
  - no — Can a copular or cleft stx C be used?
    - yes — Use C
    - no — Adjust A to A′ and use A′
- no — Is a script S available?
  - yes — Use S
  - no — Use type-shifting

I show that the left branches of this tree help model the behavior of traditional sluicing, as well as more recent discoveries by Lipták, Craenenbroeck, Barros, and others. I show that accommodation (with parallelism) is necessary, but that recent versions fail to work exactly as needed. I further document and analyze a surprising novel pattern of strict identity: 'morphological' identity effects are found in code-switching ellipsis contexts as well (illustrated here for Greek-English):

(2) a. I Maria tha ine   sto   parti, and her sister will (be), too.
        the Maria FUT *be.*PRES.*3s at.the party*
        'Maria will be at the party and her sister will (be), too.'

   b. I Maria ine   sto   parti, and her sister will *(be), too.
        *the Maria be.*PRES.*3s at.the party*
        'Maria is at the party, and her sister will *(be), too.'

   c. I Maria itan   sto   parti, and her sister will *(be), too.
        *the Maria be.*PAST.*3s at.the party*
        'Maria was at the party, and her sister will *(be), too.'

This data shows that all previous accounts of the English facts (Warner/Lasnik/ Potsdam) fail: I argue that this pattern is not due to morphological or movement quirks of English finite *be*, but rather from the version of Parallelism that generates the Dahl puzzles.

Finally, I show that fragments from scripts (in Schank's sense) differ from truly exophoric fragments. The latter include XPs that denote properties applied to a manifest object ("Jack holds up a letter and says, *'From Spain'*."), individuals as arguments of a manifest property ("a woman is coming through a door, and a linguist turns to her friend and identifies the new arrival by saying, *'Barbara Partee'*"), and quantifiers as arguments of a manifest property ("One of the men pointed to the group of children and said something, and Edgar answered, "Yes, *quite a lot of children*," and they both laughed although neither understood a word the other had said"). These can be modeled without syntactic ellipsis, but with a simple type-shifter:

(3) Type-shifting rule (Free variable introduction):
      Let $(\alpha(\beta)) \in \text{TERM}_a$ if $\alpha \in \text{TERM}_{<a,b>}$ and $\beta \in \text{VAR}_b$

Time permitting, I will show that recent attempts to reformulate the parallelism condition also fail, as they either rule out scopal reconstruction for A-movement (which exists) or predict that sluicing should not exist (it does) while ruling out extraction from an ellipsis site co-occurring with QR inside the ellipsis site (this also exists).