snippets

Issue 33 - July 2018

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Collective predication and ellipsis

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Collective predicates like *meet* pose a challenge to the identity condition on ellipsis. Such predicates are typically assumed to only compose with expressions denoting pluralities, on the basis of contrasts like those in (1). This can be modeled as a presupposition, as in (2), assuming a Link (1983)-style ontology for pluralities.

(1)   a.   Jorge and Ivan met in the corridor.

 b.   *Jorge met in the corridor.

(2) $[\![\text{meet}_{sum}]\!] = [\lambda x \in D_e : \texttt{atom}(x){=}0 \,.\, \textbf{meet}'(x)]$

We claim here that the elliptical examples in (3) and (4) are grammatical, based on an informal acceptability survey of approximately ten native English speakers, and the author's own native judgements. Admittedly, some speakers find (3) and (4) degraded in an out-of-the-blue context, but they improve considerably in a context where the ellipsis-containing clause is treated as an afterthought.

(3)   [Jorge and Ivan]$_F$ met in the corridor,   *stripping*
 and Tanya Δ too.
 Δ ≠ [*t* met]

(4)   Jorge and Ivan met in the corridor,   *contrast sluicing*
 but I don't know which OTHER person Δ
 Δ ≠ [*t* met]

Given our assumptions concerning collective predication, the isomorphism between the ellipsis site and its antecedent would involve application of a collective predicate to a singular trace, as schematized above. (5a) and (5b) show two putative ellipsis sites which circumvent this issue.

(5)   a.   … Tanya/which OTHER person ⟨[Jorge, Ivan and *t*] met⟩

 b.   … Tanya/which OTHER person ⟨Jorge and Ivan met *t*⟩

Both of these solutions are problematic, however. First, it isn't clear which material in (3/4) is isomorphic to the elided material in (5a/5b). Moreover, (5a) involves adding the remnant as a conjunct and extracting it. This is parallel to what Chung, Ladusaw and McCloskey (1995) describe as *sprouting*, since {*Tanya/which* OTHER *person*} lacks a correlate. However, this involves violating the Coordinate Structure Constraint, and Chung, Ladusaw and McCloskey show that sprouting is island-sensitive. (5b) does not run into this issue, but it involves manipulating the argument structure of the predicate, which violates Chung, Ladusaw and McCloskey's *Fixed Diathesis* constraint (see also Barros 2014); argument structure alternations are generally not tolerated under ellipsis.

Ellipsis-specific considerations aside, the interpretation of the putative sources in (5) is simply too weak. (4) imposes a *same event* requirement - that is to say, it implies that there is a meeting event involving Jorge, Ivan and another person, of which the meeting event involving Jorge and Ivan is a proper part. The putative sources in (5) both have a reading according to which the meeting events are non-overlapping.

An analysis of (3) and (4) needs to meet an additional desideratum - the collective predicates which allow a singular remnant under ellipsis all fall into Winter's (2001) class of *set* predicates (*meet, gather,* etc). Winter's collective *atom* predicates, such as *to be a good team*, give rise to unacceptability.

(6)   a.   *Jorge and Ivan are a good team, and Tanya too.

  b.   *Jorge and Ivan are a good team, but I don't know which OTHER person.

References

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