

Split Antecedents in VP Ellipsis

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Background A theory of VP ellipsis (VPE) must account for examples like (1), first discussed by Webber 1978, in which the elided material has a “split” antecedent.

- (1) a. I did everything that Mary and Jane did. Mary swam the English Channel, and Jane climbed Kilimanjaro, and I did, too. (Fiengo and May 1994)
b. Sally wants to sail around the world, and Barbara wants to fly to South America, and they will, if money is available. (Webber 1978)

In (1a) it is understood that I both swam the English Channel and climbed Kilimanjaro. This is unexpected if interpretation of the ellipsis site involves deletion or reconstruction of a VP under identity (or near-identity) conditions. First, there is no single VP to delete or reconstruct; second, the conjunction which is understood at the ellipsis site is unexplained. Fiengo and May 1994 propose that a conjoined VP – *swam the English Channel and climbed Kilimanjaro* for (1a) – is syntactically reconstructed from the two VPs and the conjunction in the preceding discourse.

Negation However, Hardt 1999 observes that conjunction appears to scope over negation in split-antecedent VPE (SAVPE) (2a), in contrast to overt conjoined VPs (2b).

- (2) a. I thought Harry went to nice restaurants and I thought he left big tips.
It turns out he doesn't.
'He neither goes to nice restaurants nor leaves big tips' (Hardt 1999)
b. Harry doesn't go to nice restaurants and leave big tips.
'He doesn't do both, but might do one or the other' (Hardt 1999)

If a VP were syntactically reconstructed at the ellipsis site, as Fiengo and May propose, then this difference is unexpected, Hardt argues. Instead, Hardt proposes that the ellipsis site contains a null pronominal form, which denotes a plural property (a set of properties, analogous to a plural individual). By homogeneity considerations, the negation above the ellipsis site is distributed to all members of the plural, resulting in the apparent narrow scope of the negation.

Claim I argue that Fiengo and May 1994 are correct in that a conjoined VP is reconstructed at the ellipsis site. This claim is based on new data showing that the interpretation of the ellipsis site is sensitive to focus stress on the antecedent conjunction. Following Szabolcsi and Haddican's 2004 analysis of conjoined DPs, I suggest a refinement to the reconstruction analysis whereby the ellipsis site is semantically interpreted as a plural property when the conjunction is unstressed; but as a normal (boolean) conjoined VP otherwise. This dichotomy is presumably characteristic of conjunction in general.

Focus Stress Szabolcsi and Haddican 2004 have proposed for (overt) conjoined DPs that stressed *AND* is boolean conjunction and may scope under negation, but unstressed *and* shifts into a plural denotation, and negation distributes over the plural. I observe that overt conjoined VPs are also sensitive to stress (3). Furthermore, the interpretation of ellipsis is also stress-sensitive: observe the difference in Hardt's examples when stress is taken into account (4).

- (3) a. Mary didn't dance a jig **AND** wear a lampshade on her head. 'not both'
b. Mary didn't dance a jig *and* wear a lampshade on her head. 'neither'
(4) a. I thought Harry went to nice restaurants and I thought he left big tips.
It turns out he doesn't.
'He neither goes to nice restaurants nor leaves big tips' (when *and* is unstressed)
b. I thought Harry went to nice restaurants **AND** I thought he left big tips.
It turns out he doesn't.
'He doesn't do both, but might do one or the other' (when *AND* is stressed)

I extend Szabolcsi and Haddican’s analysis of DPs to conjoined VPs. I assume that focus stress is represented in the syntax. If reconstruction occurs at the ellipsis site, then a focus projection will be present and semantic interpretation can be stress-sensitive. A proform that denotes a plural property, though, cannot accommodate the case where the antecedent conjunction bears stress.

Disjunction SAVPE may also have a disjoined antecedent (5), (6). This in itself is a reason to reject the proform analysis, since if the ellipsis site is always interpreted as a proform denoting a plural property, there is no source for the understood disjunction. Ellipsis with a disjoined antecedent is not sensitive to focus stress (7), which is consistent with overt disjoined VPs.

- (5) Whenever Max uses the fax or Oscar uses the Xerox, I can’t. (Fiengo and May 1994)
 ‘I can’t use the fax or the Xerox, whichever one is in use’
 ? ‘I can use neither when one is in use (e.g. they share a power circuit)’
- (6) (Context: I’m uncertain about my young nieces’ after-school activities.)
 Sammie swims or Mary plays tennis. Julie does too.
 ‘Julie swims or plays tennis, whichever one Sammie or Mary does’
 ? ‘Julie swims or plays tennis, I’m not sure which’
- (7) Sammie swims or/OR Mary plays tennis. Julie doesn’t.
 ‘Julie does neither’
 * ‘Julie might do one or the other, but not both’

Respectively Readings Finally, SAVPE may also have a (frequently optional) ‘respectively’ interpretation, as in (1b), (5) and (8). A silent Resp operator has been proposed by Gawron and Kehler 2004 to account for the existence of respectively readings without an overt adverb (9b).

- (8) You and I did everything that Mary and Jane did. Mary swam the English Channel, and Jane climbed Kilimanjaro, and you and I did, too. (Fiengo and May 1994)
 ‘You swam the E.C. and I climbed K.’
 ‘You and I both did both.’
- (9) a. Sue and Karen jog and drive respectively.
 b. Sue and Karen jog and drive. = ‘S and K jog and drive respectively’ (e.g. as answer to: How do S and K get to work?) (Gawron and Kehler 2004)

Resp distributes a plural property one-to-one over a plural individual (subject to pragmatic considerations). I extend Gawron and Kehler’s analysis to VPE and suggest that Resp may occur at an ellipsis site. Its optional character accounts for the optionality of the respectively reading. Furthermore, I observe that both Resp and overt *respectively* are infelicitous in the presence of stressed *AND* (10).

- (10) a. Sue and Karen jog AND drive. = ‘both do both’ only
 b. * Sue and Karen jog AND drive respectively.

The respectively reading also disappears for SAVPE with stressed *AND* in the antecedent. When the respectively reading is unavailable, it cannot be the case that the ellipsis site is interpreted as a plural property.

References

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