The Puzzle

(1) Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why
   
   (a) nobody liked the movie, except John.
   
   (b) John liked the movie.

   (People usually like trashy movies.)

   (He’s usually very highbrow.)

   The ‘nobody’ reading (a) is uninteresting: exact identity for ellipsis.

   However, the ‘John’ reading (b) is puzzling: no antecedent where we can find John and liked the movie in the same place.

   Taking the antecedent to be the first clause – Nobody liked the movie (except John) – is problematic for prominent accounts of clausal ellipsis:

   Merchant (2001) and Merchant (2006) allows for comments and correction feedback.

   (2) Nobody liked the movie, except for John (in (2b)), clausal structure cannot be pronounced in exception phrases, so we infer its absence; as predicted, the ‘John’ reading disappears, leaving only the ‘nobody’ reading.

   For (5) with a connected exceptive (a), or the addition of for (b), clausal structure cannot be pronounced in exception phrases, so we infer its absence; as predicted, the ‘John’ reading disappears, leaving only the ‘nobody’ reading.

   (3) Nobody but/except John (*liked the movie), liked the movie, but I don’t know why John liked the movie.

   Pronoun case as a proxy for unpronounceable ellipsis (6):

   a. Mary gave John a book, not [Mary (she gave (a book))]
   

   Pronoun case as a proxy for unpronounceable ellipsis supports the ‘John’ reading in (7):

   a. Mary gave no one (a book), except John [Mary (she gave (a book))],
   
   b. I don’t know why [Mary (she gave (a book))].

   Repair effects do not undermine our analysis. The clause we are trying to pronunciate in (5) – i.e. John liked the movie – does not need to be repaired.

   Repair effects are why we are looking at pronouncing Elliptical except-phrase as antecedent, or the entire first clause with island repair?

   (8) Nobody liked the movie, except some boy (liked the movie), a boy which liked the movie / nobody liked the movie, except [some (boy (liked (the movie)))]

   Pronoun case beyond English

   With German außer ‘except’ [9], no clausal structure can be pronounced, and a why-sprout is unambiguous:

   a. Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans (*mochte den Film) (*nicht),
   
   everyone liked the film except Hans liked the film not aber ich weiß nicht warum
   
   but I know not why (Reading: everyone/Hans)

   With nur only [10], clausal structure can be pronounced, and the ‘Hans’ reading is available for the sprout:

   a. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans (mochte den Film) nicht,
   
   everyone liked the film, only Hans liked the film not aber ich weiß nicht warum
   
   (Reading: everyone/Hans)

For (5b) in (5), the ellipted VP (a) is a composite of the VPs (a) and (b) from (b).

We add that despite never being spoken, the elided VP (a) forms part of the antecedent (a) for the sprout (a) in (c)

Proposition: except-phrase antecedents

Most clausal structure accounts assume that in (2), John and liked the movie are in the same place. However, the structure in (3) (overlapping red + blue + purple)

(3) Nobody liked the movie, except John [nobody liked the movie (a)]

(2) Nobody liked the movie, except John [nobody liked the movie (a)]

(1) Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why

(4) Nobody liked the movie, except John (I did like the movie), but I don’t know why John liked the movie.

(5) Nobody but/except John (I liked the movie), but I don’t know why John liked the movie.

(6) a. Mary gave John a book, not [Mary (she gave (a book))]
   

(7) a. Mary gave no one (a book), except [Mary (she gave (a book))]
   
   b. I don’t know why [Mary (she gave (a book))].

(8) Nobody liked the movie, except some boy (liked the movie), a boy which liked the movie / nobody liked the movie, except [some (boy (liked (the movie)))]

(9) Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans (*mochte den Film) (*nicht),
   
   everyone liked the film except Hans liked the film not aber ich weiß nicht warum
   
   but I know not why (Reading: everyone/Hans)

(10) Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans (mochte den Film) nicht,
   
   everyone liked the film, only Hans liked the film not aber ich weiß nicht warum
   
   (Reading: everyone/Hans)

Structure in the except-phrase

In (2), John and liked the movie are in the same place. Hence, (1b) has the structure in (3) (overlapping red + blue + purple)

(3) Nobody liked the movie, except John [nobody liked the movie (a)]

(2) Nobody liked the movie, except John [nobody liked the movie (a)]

(1) Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why

For (5b) in (5), the ellipted VP (a) is a composite of the VPs (a) and (b) from (b).

We add that despite never being spoken, the elided VP (a) forms part of the antecedent (a) for the sprout (a) in (c)

Conclusion

• Elliptical structure as antecedent for another ellipsis

• Ellipses in exception phrases after the nobody clause; otherwise praseal – not a clear free vs. connected divide (Hoeksema 1995; except for)

• Compare standard uniform treatments of all kinds of exceptives – semantic: quantifier modifiers (Reinhart 1991, von Fintel 1993)

• syntactic: all except phrases derived from underlying clauses (Harris 1982)

References