The Puzzle

- The why-sprout (1) is ambiguous (cf. Rudin 2017, ex. 39):
  1) Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why
     a. [nobody liked the movie, except John.]
        (People usually like trashy movies.)
     b. [John liked the movie.]
        (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 ellipses:
  • Merchant (2001): no (mutual) entailment
  • Chun et al. (1995): LF-copying, nobody ≠ John
- We use (1) for two things:
  i) to investigate the structure of except-phrase (suggested by Rudin 2017)
  ii) as an argument that ellipsis sites can serve as antecedents

Proposal: except-phrase antecedents

Proposal: The antecedent for the ‘John’ reading of the why-sprout is the except-phrase. The except-phrase itself contains ellipsis.
- Cross-linguistic precedents for clausal structure in except-phrases: Spanish (Perez-Jimenez and Moreno-Quiben 2012), Egyptian Arabic (Soltan 2016), Malagasy (Potsdam 2017)
- Bare argument ellipsis, aka stripping, in the except-phrase (2): focus-fron the subject, TP-ellipsis of the evaded clause, similar to sluicing (Merchant 2005)

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

2) [Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why]
- Full identity between ellipsis in the sprout (2) and the except-phrase antecedent (1b), brings (1) into line with standard cases of clausal ellipsis
- However, in solving one problem, we have created another: need to justify there being elided structure (2) in the except-phrase, taking (2) as antecedent

Structure in the except-phrase

Analysis: antecedent in (1b) is the elliptical clausal structure of the except-phrase

Prediction: without clausal structure in the except-phrase, no ‘John’ reading

Pronounceability as a proxy for clausal structure

- For (1b), what you can hear in the except-phrase is what you can interpret in the sprout (4):

3) [Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why]
- For (5) with a connected exceptive (a), or the addition of (b), clausal structure cannot be pronounced in except-phrase, so we infer its absence; as predicted, the ‘John’ reading disappears, leaving only the ‘nobody’ reading.

Proposal beyond pronounceability

- Pronounceability as a proxy only – unpronounceable clausal ellipsis (6):

    c. Unpronounceable clausal structure supports the ‘John’ reading in (7):

5) a. Nobody but/except John liked the movie, so why nobody but/except John liked the movie / John liked the movie.
    b. Nobody liked the movie, except for John (*liked the movie), so why nobody liked the movie, except for John / John liked the movie.

- Repair effects do not undermine our analysis. The clause we are trying to repair effects are why we are looking at sprouting, not sluicing (8): elliptical exceptive phrase antecedents, or the entire first clause with island repair?

    c. Unpronounceable clausal structure supports the ‘John’ reading in (7):

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

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

8) a. Nobody but/except John liked the movie, so why nobody but/except John liked the movie / John liked the movie.
    b. Nobody liked the movie, except for John (*liked the movie), so why nobody liked the movie, except for John / John liked the movie.

- Pronounceability beyond English

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

9) 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)
    b. With nur only (10), clausal structure can be pronounced, and the ‘Hans’ reading is available for the sprout:

10) a. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans (mochte den Film) nicht, everyone liked the film, only Hans liked the film aber ich weiß nicht warum (Reading: everyone/Hans)

References


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Conclusions

- Elliptical structure as antecedent for another ellipsis
- Clausal structure in except-phrases after the nobody clause; otherwise phrasal – not a clear free vs. connected divide (Hoeksema 1995): except *(fore)
- Compare standard uniform treatments of all kinds of exceptives: – semantic: quantifier modifiers (Reinhart 1993, von Fintel 1993)
- Syntactic: all exceptive phrases derived from underlying clauses (Harris 1982)

Eldied antecedents

- Ellided antecedents are in evidence beyond except-phrases with sprouting – sloppy VP ellipsis (11) (Hart 1999, Schwarz 2000)
- The elided VP [2] (a) is composed of the VPs [a] and [b] from (b)
- We add that despite never being spoken, the elided VP [2] forms part of the antecedent [2] for the sprout [2] in (c)

Negation

- A variant of (1), likewise ambiguous:

- Problem: No antecedent with John, negation, and like the movie all in one place

Option 1: Assume negation comes from except - but not
- Constituency problem of including half a word in the antecedent
- Assumed elided structure [13] cannot be pronounced (a)
- Instead pronounced with negation (b, c), not interpreted as double negation

(13) a. *Everybody liked the movie, except John the movie liked.
    b. Everybody liked the movie, except John didn’t like the movie.
    c. Everybody liked the movie, except John didn’t like the movie.

Option 2: Follow Rudin (2017), who argues that syntactic mismatches above VP, including negation (14) (Kroll 2016), do not matter for clausal ellipsis (15):

(14) Either turn in your final paper by midnight or explain why you didn’t turn it in by midnight!
(15) a. [Everybody liked the movie], except [John didn’t like the movie],
    but I don’t know why [John didn’t like the movie].

Conclusion

- Elliptical structure as antecedent for another ellipsis
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