1. Introduction

Following Rudin’s (2019: 275) suggestion, this paper investigates the structure of except-phrases based on sentences like (1) (cf. Rudin 2019: 274, ex. 39). The why-sprout is ambiguous between the two readings spelled out in (a) and (b).¹

(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 usually likes George Clooney.)

The ‘nobody reading’ in (1a) will follow from any functioning account of sprouting. The sprout takes the main clause as antecedent, just as for a vanilla case of sprouting like (2):

(2) Mary liked the movie, but I don’t know why
   a. . . . Mary liked the movie.

The ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout in (1b) is puzzling, however. Prominent accounts of clausal ellipsis cannot deliver it from the main clause (with or without the except-phrase) as antecedent (Rudin 2019: 275). For example, Merchant (2001) argues for mutual entailment between the antecedent and elided clauses; but John liked the movie does not entail Nobody liked the movie, except John.² Meanwhile Chung et al. (1995) propose that the ellipsis site is a pro-form, which is substituted by a copy of the antecedent at LF; but the mismatching

¹Thanks to Tim Hunter for advising; talk audiences at NELS and UCLA SynSem; poster visitors at the Penn Linguistics Conference, 22-24 March 2019 (PLC 43), and Sluicing and Ellipsis at 50, University of Chicago, 12-13 April 2019 (Sluicing+@50); several anonymous reviewers; Patrick Elliott and Rodrigo Ranero; and Johanna Benz for German.

²At best, there is unidirectional entailment from Nobody liked the movie, except John to John liked the movie. In this vein, see section 4.
subjects — *John* vs. *Nobody* — means there is no one antecedent to copy over. Thus the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout cannot be the main clause. What is needed is an antecedent where *John and liked the movie* are in the same place.

We argue that the *except*-phrase in (1) itself contains elided clausal structure, which in turn provides the required syntactic antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout in (1b). When an *except*-phrase does not contain clausal structure, as we will argue for cases like (3), there is no antecedent to support the ‘John reading’, which therefore disappears:

(3) Nobody except John liked the movie, but I don’t know why
   a. . . . nobody liked the movie, except John. (People usually like trashy movies.)
   b. # . . . John liked the movie. (He usually likes George Clooney.)

This pattern supports the view that clausal ellipsis requires a syntactic antecedent, and reveals diversity in the structure of *except*-phrases.

In outline, the next section lays out our proposal in the context of independent arguments for clausal *except*-phrases. Section 3 shows that the availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the potential presence of elided clausal structure in the *except*-phrase. Thus our analysis fares better than the plausible alternatives discussed in section 4 in terms of entailment or the distinction between free and connected exceptives. Section 5 adds negation to the puzzle in view of a version of (1) with *everyone* in place of *nobody*. Section 6 concludes.

2. **Proposal: *except*-phrase antecedents**

We propose that the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout in (1b) is a clausal ellipsis site in the *except*-phrase. The claim that there can be clausal structure in *except*-phrases has cross-linguistic precedents in Spanish (Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012), Egyptian Arabic (Soltan 2016), and Malagasy (Potsdam 2018). The same is plausible for English based on pronounceability as a crude but simple proxy in (4); we might think that elided clausal structure is present in (a) along the lines in (b) given that we can pronounce a clause in that position in (c):

(4) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John.
   b. Nobody liked the movie, except John *liked the movie.*
   c. Nobody liked the movie, except John liked the movie.

Specifically, we take the ellipsis in the *except*-phrase to be bare argument ellipsis, or “stripping”, following Merchant (2005) for a pair like (5). The answer is focus-fronted, followed by deletion of the TP from which the answer has moved; cf. Ross (1969) for sluicing:

(5) Q: Which movie did Jason like? A: Thunderheart [ Jason liked *Thunderheart*].

The stripping analysis applies to the *except*-phrase from (1) as in (6):

(6) [Nobody liked the movie], except John [ John *liked the movie*].

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3For concreteness, we adopt the PF-deletion approach to ellipsis (Merchant 2001).
This section reviews some independent arguments for clausal structure in except-phrases, before using it to account for the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout in (1b).

2.1 Clausal except-phrases

This subsection presents two arguments that except-phrases can contain elided clausal structure. First, multiple exceptions (7) (Potsdam and Polinsky 2019). The sentence in (a) from Moltmann (1995: 260) has two universal quantifiers and two exceptions in a single clause-final free except-phrase. Since John with Mary is not a constituent, the except-phrase is taken to have an elliptical clausal source with multiple focus-fronting, as in (b):

(7) a. Every boy danced with every girl, except John with Mary.
   b. Every boy danced with every girl, except John with Mary
      \[\text{John did not dance with Mary.}\]

Second, connectivity with embedded clauses (8). In (a), the except-when-clause can modify John’s running. On the face of it, the availability of this interpretation is odd. The except-when-clause is not attached to the embedded clause; being to the right of a main clause modifier, it is indisputably in the main clause on the surface, and cannot have arrived there by extraposition, which is clause-bounded. Indeed, the reading where the except-when-clause modifies the embedded clause is unavailable without except: (b) can only have the strange meaning that Mary’s writing is weather-dependent. The availability of the embedded clause reading in (a) is explained if we postulate elided clausal structure as in (c), where the except-when-clause is attached to the embedded clause prior to focus-fronting:

(8) a. Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports [except when it’s raining].
   b. Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports [when it’s not raining].
   c. Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports [except [when it’s raining]]
      \[\text{Mary writes [that John runs, when it’s not raining].}\]

In addition to modification, pronominal binding (9) (cf. Potsdam 2018 for Malagasy) exhibits a parallel pattern of embedded clause connectivity. In (a), his can be bound by every boy. This is odd, since variable binding usually requires c-command. Indeed, a bound interpretation is unavailable in the absence of except in (b). The availability of the bound reading in (a) is explained if we postulate the elliptical clausal structure in (c), where the except-when-clause focus-fronts from a position where it is c-commanded by an elided every boy:

(9) a. Mary writes that Susan looks after every boy in her reports, except when it’s his birthday.
   b. * Mary writes that Susan looks after every boy in her reports when it’s his birthday.
   c. Mary writes that Susan looks after every boy in her reports, except [when it’s his birthday]
      \[\text{she doesn’t write that Susan looks after every boy in her reports.}\]
2.2  *Except*-phrases as elliptical antecedents

With independent arguments in hand for the potential presence of clausal structure in *except*-phrases, we can now link it to the meaning of sprouts. We propose that the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout in (1b) is the ellipsis site in the *except*-phrase.

With clausal ellipsis as in (6), the *except*-phrase provides the antecedent to support the ‘John reading’ of (1b) — we now have *John and liked the movie* in the same place. Syntactic identity between ⟨E2⟩ and ⟨A2⟩ in (10) brings the ‘John reading’ into line with standard cases of sprouting like (2):\(^4\)

(10)  [A1 Nobody liked the movie], except John ⟨A2 [E1 t\_from liked the movie]],

but I don’t know why ⟨E2 John liked the movie⟩.

With subjects, the focus-fronting movement involved in stripping is string vacuous, from spec-TP to the left edge. Focus-fronting is starker with the non-subject exception in (11):\(^5\)

(11)  [A Sam introduced nobody to Mary], except John [E Sam introduced t\_John to Mary].

Unsurprisingly, adding a *why*-sprout to (11) is ambiguous along the same lines as (1) in (12). As in (10), while the ‘nobody reading’ (a) takes the main clause as antecedent, the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout takes as antecedent the elided clausal structure of the *except*-phrase, as in (13):

(12)  Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John, but I don’t know why

a. …Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John. (People usually like Mary.)
b. …Sam introduced John to Mary. (John is not a nice guy.)

(13)  [A1 Sam introduced nobody to Mary],

except John ⟨A2 [E1 Sam introduced t\_from to Mary]],

but I don’t know why ⟨E2 Sam introduced John to Mary⟩.

Thus our proposal solves the puzzle of the two readings of the *why*-sprouts in sentences like (1) or (12). Each reading is supported by a different syntactic antecedent: whereas the ‘nobody’ reading (a) takes the entire main clause as antecedent, the ‘John reading’ (b) takes just the elided clausal structure of the *except*-phrase.\(^6\)

\(^4\)To be more precise about traces and identity in (10), identity holds between ⟨A1⟩ and ⟨E1⟩ based on the A-bar traces of QR-ed *nobody* and focus-fronted *John*, similar to (5). Identity holds between t\_John in ⟨A2⟩ and *John* in ⟨E2⟩ along similar lines to identity between t\_who and *them* in (i) (Merchant 2001):

(i)  [A1 Chris likes someone], and I know who ⟨A2 [E1 Chris likes t\_who]],

but I can’t remember why ⟨E2 Chris likes them⟩.

\(^5\)The indirect object in (11) ensures this is an instance of free rather than connected *except*, which will be an important distinction in the next section.

\(^6\)Repair effects block an argument for elliptical *except*-phrase antecedents based on sluicing rather than sprouting. Sluicing repairs island violations, famously as in (i) (Ross 1969): (a) has the elliptical structure in (b), but does not incur the same relative clause island violation as its pronounced counterpart in (c):
3. Prediction: the ‘John reading’ covaries with clausal except-phrases

The previous section proposed that the antecedent for the ‘John’ reading of the sprouted clause in (1) is the elliptical clausal structure of the except-phrase. We therefore predict that the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout will only be available only when there is clausal structure in the except-phrase to serve as the antecedent. Without such clausal structure, the ‘John’ reading will lack an antecedent, and should disappear. This section shows that the prediction of our analysis is borne out: the availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the presence of clausal structure in the except-phrase. We show as much for except-phrases in various positions, except for, and exceptive phrases in German.

Recalling (4), in (14) we use pronounceability as a simple, if crude, proxy to diagnose whether clausal structure can be elliptically present when no clausal structure is pronounced in a certain position. Clause-final except admits a pronounced clause in (a), lending support to the presence of the elided structure in (6). Connected (b, cf. 3) and clause-initial (c) except, on the other hand, do not admit pronounced clausal structure:

(14) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John [liked the movie].
   b. * Nobody except John [liked the movie] liked the movie.

In this light, consider the sluicing version of (1) in (ii). The correlate some boy is in the except-phrase. The sluice in (a) is unambiguously about the boy who liked the movie. Given our proposal, we might be tempted to conclude that there must be clausal structure in the except-phrase to serve as the antecedent for the sluice, as in (b). But the antecedent could just as well be the entire first conjunct, with sluicing repairing the otherwise illicit wh-extraction in (c):

(ii) a. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don’t know which boy.
   b. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy [some boy liked the movie], but I don’t know which boy [some boy liked the movie].
   c. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don’t know which boy [some boy liked the movie, except some boy].

The judgements are clearer with subject remnants as in (14); but the same point can be made with non-subject remnants in (i), based on (11):

(i) a. Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John [he introduced to Mary].
   b. * Sam introduced nobody except John [he introduced to Mary] to Mary.
   c. * Except John [he introduced to Mary], Sam introduced nobody to Mary.


(14a) may sound better with do-insertion to carry polarity focus, i.e. Nobody liked the movie, except John DID like the movie. Likewise for (17a), below. See section 5.1 for more on DID.
c. * Except John [liked the movie], nobody liked the movie.

We infer from this unpronounceability that connected (b) and clause-initial (c) except cannot take clausal complements. Hence in (15), unlike clause-final except (a), connected (b) and, more surprisingly,\(^\text{10}\) clause-initial (c) except-phrases cannot contain elided clausal structure:

(15) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John \(t_{\text{John}}\) liked the movie.
    b. * Nobody except John \(t_{\text{John}}\) liked the movie liked the movie.
    c. * Except John \(t_{\text{John}}\) liked the movie, nobody liked the movie.

No clausal structure should mean no ‘John reading’. This prediction is borne out in (16):

(16) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why. = (1)
    Reading: nobody / John
    b. Nobody except John liked the movie, but I don’t know why. = (3)
    Reading: nobody / *John
    c. Except John, nobody liked the movie, but I don’t know why.
    Reading: nobody / *John

Thus we correctly predict the ‘John reading’ to track the potential presence of clausal structure in the except-phrase, as diagnosed by the proxy of pronounceability.

The prediction that the ‘John reading’ depends on antecedent clausal structure is borne out more subtly with sentence-final except for in (17).\(^\text{11}\) There is interspeaker variation as to whether except for admits pronounced clausal structure (a). We infer that except for admits (elided) clausal complements only for some speakers (b). The ‘John reading’ is available in (c) for exactly those speakers who accept pronounced clausal structure in (a):

(17) a. % Nobody liked the movie, except for John liked the movie.
    b. % Nobody liked the movie, except for John \(t_{\text{John}}\) liked the movie.
    c. Nobody liked the movie, except for John, but I don’t know why.
    Reading: nobody / %John

In sum, when there is (elided) clausal structure in the except-phrase, as diagnosed by the proxy of pronounceability, the ‘John reading’ is available; this is the case for clause-final

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\(^{10}\) Attempting ellipsis with connected except (15b) would give rise to a problem of antecedent containment. See Vostrikova (2019a: 74f.) on Persian.

\(^{11}\) Rudin (2019: 274f., ex. 39) exemplifies with except (i). But he also traces the observation back to Merchant (2001: 22, ex. 32i), who has except for (ii); and back to the quoted film itself (iii) (Thunderheart, 1992):

(i) Nobody liked the movie except Jerry, and I have no idea why — he’s usually very highbrow.
(ii) Nobody’ll talk to you, except for old Wakasha. I have no idea why.
    (From the context it’s clear this means, “I have no idea why old Wakasha will talk to you.”)
(iii) A: They don’t want you here. Ain’t nobody gonna talk to you.
    B: Fine.
    A: Except for the wica’sa wakan, and I don’t know why.
    B: The who?
    A: The man who sent me to find you. Says he has some information for the FBI.
except (a), and except for (17) for some speakers. When there is no such clausal structure,¹² there is no syntactic antecedent to support the ‘John reading’, which therefore disappears; this is the case for connected except (b), clause-initial except (c), and except for (17) for some speakers.

German, like English, is a language where clausal structure can be pronounced in only some exceptive phrases. As predicted, the availability of a ‘Hans reading’ of a warum-sprout co-varies with the pronounceability of clausal structure in the exceptive phrase. With außer (18), ‘except’ (a), no clausal structure can be pronounced (b), and a warum-sprout (c) is unambiguous — there is no ‘Hans reading’:

(18) a. Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans.
   everyone liked the Film, except Hans
   ‘Everyone liked the Film, except Hans.’

   b. *Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans mochte den Film (nicht).
      everyone liked the film, except Hans liked the film (not)

   c. Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans, aber ich weiß nicht warum.
      everyone liked the film, except Hans, but I know not why
      ‘Everyone liked the film, except Hans, but I don’t know why.’

Reading: jeder / *Hans

With nur . . . nicht (19), ‘only . . . not’ (a), on the other hand, clausal structure can be pronounced (b), and the ‘Hans reading’ is available for the warum-sprout (c):

(19) a. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans nicht.
   everyone liked the film, only Hans not
   ‘Everyone liked the film, only Hans didn’t.’

   b. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans mochte den Film nicht.
      everyone liked the film, only Hans liked the film not
      ‘Everyone liked the film, only Hans didn’t like the film.’

   c. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans nicht, aber ich weiß nicht warum.
      everyone liked the film, only Hans not, but I know not why
      ‘Everyone liked the film, only Hans didn’t, but I don’t know why.’

Reading: jeder / Hans

Thus German and English pattern alike with respect to the circumstances which license the ‘John/Hans reading’: when there can be clausal structure in the exceptive phrase, the ‘John/Hans reading’ is available; in its absence, the ‘John/Hans reading’ is likewise absent.¹³

Overall, this section has confirmed the prediction of our analysis from section 2. There we proposed that the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprout in (1) takes the elliptical clausal structure of the except-phrase as antecedent. The analysis predicted that the ‘John reading’ would only be available when there is clausal structure in the except-phrase. This prediction was borne out for English and German, where pronounceability served as a convenient

¹²Cf. Harris (1982), who derives all exceptive phrases from full underlying clauses.
¹³Section 5 confronts the fact that (18) and (19) involve jeden ‘everyone’ rather than niemanden ‘no-one’.
proxy for the potential presence of elided clausal structure.\textsuperscript{14,15} Thus our analysis fares better than the plausible alternatives discussed in the next section.

4. Alternative analyses

Our syntactic proposal correctly predicts that the availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the presence of clausal structure in the except-phrase. As such, it fares better than plausible alternative analyses in terms of entailment or differences between free and connected exceptives.

First, a semantic analysis might source the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ from the entailment properties of except-phrases. The entailments in (20) could supply the ‘John reading’ of the why-sprouts in (1) and (12), either directly (Kroll 2019) or indirectly by licensing the construction of another syntactic object (Fox 2000):

\begin{align*}
(20) & \quad a. \text{Nobody liked the movie, except John. } \Rightarrow \text{John liked the movie.} \\
& \quad b. \text{Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John. } \Rightarrow \text{Sam introduced John to Mary.}
\end{align*}

However, this exclusivity entailment is carried by all kinds of exceptive phrases, regardless of whether they are except or except for, connected or free, clause-final or clause-initial. An account that sources antecedents for ellipsis from the entailment properties of except-phrases would therefore predict that the ‘John reading’ should be available with all except-phrases. Such an account is falsified by the disappearance of the ‘John reading’ with connected except (16b), clause-initial free except (16c), and for some speakers with except for (17c).

Second, the availability of the ‘John reading’ is not conditioned by whether the except-phrase is connected to the quantifier phrase it associates with, or free from it (Hoeksema 1995). Taking free except, the ‘John reading’ is available with clause-final free except (1b, \textsuperscript{15})

\begin{align*}
14 & \text{We should emphasise that pronounceability is a proxy only, since some clausal ellipses cannot be pronounced. With (14), we tested whether the perfectly grammatical clause \textit{John liked the movie} was admissible in certain positions, so issues surrounding repair effects in clausal ellipsis did not arise (recall note 6). But in (i), the ‘John reading’ is supported in (a) by clausal structure that is not pronounceable. On our approach, the ‘John reading’ is generated by doubly the elliptical structure in (b). The violation involved in moving } John \text{ out of the bracketed wh-island is repaired by ellipsis. Without ellipsis, (c) is ungrammatical (even by the standard set by (ia) in note 7). Note that why must sprout from above the wh-island, since sprouting from within islands is ungrammatical (Chung et al. 1995); accordingly, (a) is unambiguously about the reason for Chris’s wondering, not the reason for the introducing:}

d. & \quad \text{Chris will wonder who introduced nobody to Mary tomorrow, except John, but I don’t know why.} \\
& \quad \text{Reading: nobody / John}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
15 & \text{Vostrikova (2019a) identifies Spanish (Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012), Persian and Bulgarian as languages where exceptive deletion is mandatory (cf. comparative deletion): exceptive phrases that can be diagnosed as clausal (cf. section 2.1) cannot contain pronounced clauses. We predict that clausal exceptives should support ‘John readings’ of why-sprouts, regardless of pronounceability.}
\end{align*}
12b, 16a), but is crucially unavailable with clause-initial free except (16c) (and with clause-final free except for (17c) for some speakers).

In sum, the availability of the ‘John reading’ tracks neither entailment, nor the free vs. connected position of the except-phrase, but rather the presence of (elided) clausal structure in the except-phrase. The next section confronts the fact that some of our examples – namely (7), and German (18) and (19) – have involved every rather than nobody.

5. Negation

Our initial example in (1) associated an except-phrase with nobody. But except-phrases can associate just as well with universal quantifiers like everybody in (21), which exhibits a parallel ambiguity to (1):

(21) Everybody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why
   a. . . . everybody liked the movie, except John. (People usually hate trashy movies.)
   b. . . . John didn’t like the movie. (He usually hates George Clooney.)

The ‘everybody reading’ (a) is uninteresting, as before. But now negation is added to the puzzle of the ‘John reading’ (b). Where before there appeared to be no antecedent where we could find John and like the movie in the same place, there is now also a mismatch in polarity.16

In principle, polarity mismatches are tolerable in clausal ellipsis, as evinced by Kroll (2019) (22) and permitted by Rudin’s (2019) vP-level syntactic identity condition:

(22) Either turn in your final paper by midnight or explain why you didn’t turn it in by midnight!

From this perspective, there is no syntactic identity problem with the appearance of negation in (21b).

Still, we can wonder at which point negation appears, with consequences for the syntax of the except-phrase. Negation appears along the way from the main clause Everybody liked the movie to the why-sprout, with ellipsis resolution proceeding via the except-phrase. The options for when negation appears are sketched in (23). If negation appears in the first step from the main clause antecedent to the elliptical except-phrase (a), then the except-phrase may contain sentential not (Vostrikova 2019a,b). If instead negation appears in the second step from the except-phrase as antecedent to the why-sprout (b), then the negative meaning of the except-phrase would be contributed by except itself (Potsdam and Polinsky 2019):

(23) a. Everybody liked → except John didn’t like → why John didn’t like
   b. Everybody liked → except-NEG John liked → why John didn’t like

16The same goes for except-phrases with non-subjects; (i) is parallel to (12):

(i) Sam introduced everybody to Mary, except John, but I don’t know why
   a. . . . Sam introduced everybody to Mary, except John. (People tend not to like Mary.)
   b. . . . Sam didn’t introduce John to Mary. (John is a perfectly nice guy.)
The rest of this section gives two reasons to favour the second option — that negation is contributed by except — before the issue of pronounceability tempers this support in the third subsection.

5.1 Polarity mismatches and why-sprouts

The first point in favour of the view that negation is contributed by except is that it involves a tolerable polarity mismatch into a why-sprout, like in (22) and many of the other examples in Kroll (2019). Thus taking negation to be contributed by except avoids proliferating environments where polarity mismatches are observed; in particular, we don’t have to countenance polarity mismatches in (except-phrase) stripping.

Further, not all speakers accept polarity mismatch examples like (22). An anonymous reviewer who found (22) highly degraded also found (21b) a very hard reading to get. This parallel suggests that there is a group of speakers for whom all polarity mismatches are out. If except-phrases contained sentential not, we would expect such speakers to reject except-phrases that associate with everyone; yet these are fine for all speakers. This argues that the polarity mismatch is between the except-phrase and the sprout, with except contributing negation to its own phrase.

We can also see what happens when we attempt to mismatch negative polarity with emphatic positive polarity. Ranero (2019a,b) argues against Rudin’s (2019) privileging of vP for syntactic identity in clausal ellipsis, presenting data from Spanish and Kaqchikel (Mayan) where tense mismatches are bad in clausal ellipsis. He argues that the looseness of syntactic identity in clausal ellipsis is not a question of height — above or below vP — but featural non-distinctness (cf. Chomsky 1965). With respect to the polarity mismatch in (22) in particular, Ranero argues that the antecedent and elliptical clauses are featurally non-distinct in terms of the presence versus absence of NegP. Expanding on Ranero (2019a,b), assume that emphatic DID instantiates a contentful polarity projection (Laka 1990), with features distinct from sentential not. We would then expect that polarity mismatches between DID and didn’t are ungrammatical. This is borne out in the version of (22) in (24), where (a) massages the first conjunct from imperative to declarative. Adding emphatic DID to the first conjunct makes (b) markedly worse, as predicted by Ranero’s non-distinctness condition:

(24) a. Either he turned in his final paper by midnight or he explained why 
   he didn’t turn it in by midnight.

   b. ?? Either he DID turn in his final paper by midnight or he explained why 
   he didn’t turn it in by midnight.

Ranero (2019a) may be too hasty in concluding that English does not present fertile terrain for ungrammatical tense mismatches if the following examples involve clausal ellipsis, as indicated:

(i) The postman delivered the letter yesterday, not three days ago the postman delivered the letter.
(ii) * The postman deliver ed the letter yesterday, not tomorrow the postman will deliver the letter.
(iii) The postman will deliver the letter tomorrow, not in three days the postman will deliver the letter.
(iv) * The postman will deliver the letter tomorrow, not yesterday the postman delivered the letter.
Returning to *except*-phrases, the lack of a contrast between the pair in (25) suggests that, unlike in (24), there is no polarity mismatch between the main clause and the elided clausal structure in the *except*-phrase. Further in (26), the ‘John reading’ continues to be available in (a), with the permissible polarity mismatch between the *except*-phrase and the *why*-sprout indicated in (b):

    b. Everyone DID like the movie, except John.

(26) a. Everyone DID like the movie, except John, but I don’t know why.
    Reading: everyone / John
    b. Everyone DID like the movie, except John *truly* liked the movie, but I don’t know why John didn’t like the movie.

In sum, taking negation to be contributed by *except* rather than sentential *not* involves a tolerable polarity mismatch in the familiar environment of a *why*-sprout, and makes correct predictions stemming from Ranero’s non-distinctness condition on ellipsis.

5.2 NPIs

The behaviour of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in *except*-phrases provides a second reason to favour the idea the negation is contributed by *except*. Vostrikova (2019a: ch. 3.2.2; 2019b: 423) presents (27) in arguing for the opposite view that sentential negation is present in *except*-phrases. She argues that the NPI *any* is licensed in (a) by an elided *not*, as in (b):18,19

(27) a. John danced with everyone, except with any girl from his class.
    b. John danced with everyone, except John *didn’t* dance with any girl from his class.

We have two related counters to this argument. First, an *except*-phrase containing *any* can associate with a universal quantifier in subject position. There is no contrast between (28) and (27a), despite NPIs in subject position not being licensed by sentential negation, as shown in (29):

(28) Everyone came to the party, except any boys from Mary’s class.

(29) * Any boys didn’t come to the party.

This suggests that the negation is contributed by *except* higher up, akin to other high negations that license NPIs in subject position, like *doubt* or *nor* in (30):

18Cf. Moltmann (1995), who dismisses a clausal source for (27a) due to the polarity mismatch in (27b).
19Vostrikova (2019a,b) shows that *except*-phrases are not downward entailing environments (see also von Fintel 1993, 127, ex.14). From (i) about the set of girls, we are cannot infer (ii) about the subset of blond girls:

(i) John danced with everyone except with girls from his class.
(ii) John danced with everyone except with *blond* girls from his class.
(30) a. Mary doubts that any boys came.
    b. Mary didn’t go, nor did anyone from Bill’s class.

Second, the ellipsis indicated in (27b) deletes a non-constituent. Following the assimilation of except-phrase deletion to stripping pursued here, (27a) would be represented as in (31), with focus-fronting of the PP beyond sentential negation before deletion of the TP constituent:

(31) John danced with everyone, except [with any girl from his class];

However, moving an NPI above the surface scope of its licensor, as in (31), generally results in ungrammaticality, as illustrated in (32):

(32) a. Sam doesn’t like silly pictures of any of his friends.
    b. * Which pictures of any of his friends does Sam not like?

Thus, contra Vostrikova (2019a,b), the behaviour of NPIs in except-phrases does not support the elliptical presence of sentential not, but instead favours the idea the negation is contributed by except.

5.3 Pronounceability redux

Tempering the arguments in the previous two subsections, the idea that negation is contributed by except faces a challenge from pronounceability (cf. Moltmann 1995: 262f.). Consider (33). With negation contributed by except, the elliptical clausal structure would lack negation, as in (a). But pronouncing the elided structure presumed in (a) is bad in (b). Rather, a fuller version of (33) is pronounced with negation, as in (c). Negation can also be pronounced in concert with stripping in (d). Importantly, neither (c) nor (d) are interpreted as ‘double negation’; they mean the same as (33). Thus except does not seem to be contributing any negation in (c) or (d):

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

The same goes for (34) where the main clause is already negative, as it was in (1):

(34) Nobody liked the movie, except John liked the movie.

In sum, while polarity mismatch considerations and the behaviour of NPIs support the view that negation is contributed by except, such an analysis has to overcome the fact that we hear sentential not in pronounced clausal except-phrases that associate with every.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\)Perhaps significantly, NPIs are not licensed in clausal exceptives in Spanish, Bulgarian and Persian, the languages where ellipsis is mandatory in clausal exceptives (Vostrikova 2019a).
6. Conclusion

This paper investigated the structure of except-phrases based on the comings and goings of the ‘John reading’ of why-sprouts, which target the exception only. The availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the potential presence of elided clausal structure. Clause-final except-phrases contain (elided) clausal structure, which can serve as the syntactic antecedent for clausal ellipsis. Connected and clause-initial free except-phrases, on the other hand, do not take clausal complements, so cannot provide such antecedents.

Semantically, except-phrases are standardly analysed as quantifier modifiers (Reinhart 1991, von Fintel 1993, Moltmann 1995). Presently, however, Vostrikova (2019a,b) proposes a compositional semantic treatment of clausal exceptives as quantifying over possible situations. Diversity in the syntax of except-phrases might suggest that both analyses are needed; on the other hand, a uniform semantics may suffice. Vostrikova (2019a: ch. 5.1) shows that her semantics can be extended to phrasal exceptives, while stressing that that the complications and redundancy involved are only for the sake of uniformity. In the opposite direction: even if syntax passes a full clause to semantics, does semantics have to use it all?

References

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