Sprouting and the structure of *except*-phrases

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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 subjects — *John* vs. *Nobody* — means there is no one antecedent to copy over. Thus the

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²It could be that John and no-one else liked the movie for one and the same reason; e.g., because it was romantic. Then the ‘John reading’ collapses with the the ‘nobody reading’. But the two readings of (1) are in principle distinct, as brought out by the bracketed continuations.

²At best, there is unidirectional entailment from *Nobody liked the movie, except John* to *John liked the movie*. In this vein, see section 3.3.
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 together.

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). In subtly different kinds of except-phrases like (3) that — we will argue — do not contain clausal structure, 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; as predicted by our analysis, and not by a plausible alternative analysis in terms of entailment. Section 4 adds negation to the puzzle in view of a version of (1) with everyone in place of nobody, before section 5 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 t Thunderheart].

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

(6) [A Nobody liked the movie], except John [E t John liked the movie].

For concreteness, we adopt the PF-deletion approach to ellipsis (Merchant 2001).
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The rest of 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 structure in 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
      \[ t_{\text{John}} \text{ did not dance } t_{\text{with Mary}} \].

Second, except-phrases show modification (8) and binding (9) connectivity with embedded clauses in ways that differ surprisingly from superficially similar-looking phrases without except. In (8), the except-when-phrase can modify John’s running in (a). On the face of it, the availability of this interpretation is odd, since the except-when-phrase 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 extrapolation, which is clause-bounded (Ross 1967, Baltin 1981). Indeed, the reading where the except-when-phrase 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). The except-when-phrase originates as attached to the embedded clause prior to focus-fronting and clausal ellipsis:

(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],
       Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports ].

Pronominal binding (9) (cf. Potsdam 2018 for Malagasy) exhibits a similar 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). The except-when-phrase 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, 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, except [when it’s his birthday], she writes 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) — John and liked the movie are now together. Syntactic identity between ⟨E2⟩ and ⟨A2⟩ in (10) brings the ‘John reading’ into line with standard cases of sprouting like (2):

\[
\begin{align*}
(10) & \ A_1 \text{ Nobody liked the movie, except John } \langle A_2 [E_1 \text{ Sam introduced } \text{ t} \text{ who to Mary}] \rangle, \\
& \text{ but I don’t know why } \langle E_2 \text{ John liked the movie} \rangle.
\end{align*}
\]

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):

\[
(11) \ [A \text{ Sam introduced nobody to Mary}, \text{ except John } \langle E \text{ Sam introduced } \text{ t} \text{ John to Mary} \rangle].
\]

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’ (b) of the why-sprout takes as antecedent the elided clausal structure of the except-phrase, as in (13):

\[
(12) \ \text{Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John, but I don’t know why}
\]
\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{ a. } \ldots \text{Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John. (People usually like Mary.)} \\
& \text{ b. } \ldots \text{Sam introduced John to Mary. (John is not a nice guy.)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
(13) \ [A_1 \text{ Sam introduced nobody to Mary}, \\
& \text{ except John } \langle A_2 [E_1 \text{ Sam introduced } \text{ t} \text{ John to Mary}] \rangle, \\
& \text{ but I don’t know why } \langle E_2 \text{ Sam introduced John to Mary} \rangle].
\]

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

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⁴To 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 tₐjohn in ⟨A₂⟩ and John in ⟨E₂⟩ along similar lines to identity between twho and them in (i) (Merchant 2001):

\[
(i) \ [A_1 \text{ Chris likes someone}, \text{ and I know who } \langle A_2 [E_1 \text{ Chris likes } \text{ t} \text{ who to Mary}] \rangle, \\
& \text{ but I can’t remember why } \langle E_2 \text{ Chris likes them} \rangle).
\]

⁵The 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.

⁶Repair 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):
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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, all of which tells against a plausible alternative analysis in terms of entailment.

3.1 Except (for)

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:

(i) a. They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I can’t remember which (Balkan language).
   b. They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I can’t remember which (Balkan language) they want to hire someone who speaks.
   c. * They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I can’t remember which (Balkan language) they want to hire someone who speaks.

7Cf. Reinhart (1993: 363), who rejects (14a) as a contradiction. (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 4.1 for more on DID.

8The 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):

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

(ii) a. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don’t know which boy.
   b. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy whom liked the movie, but I don’t know which boy whom liked the movie.
   c. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don’t know which boy nobody liked the movie, except whom.
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(14)  a. Nobody liked the movie, except John [liked the movie].
     b. * Nobody except John [liked the movie] liked the movie.
     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, clause-initial (c) except-phrases cannot contain elided clausal structure:

(15)  a. Nobody liked the movie, except John \textit{t}\textsubscript{John} liked the movie.
     b. * Nobody except John \textit{t}\textsubscript{John} liked the movie liked the movie.
     c. * Except John \textit{t}\textsubscript{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.\(^{10, 11}\)

\(^9\)Attempting ellipsis with connected except (15b) would give rise to a problem of antecedent containment. See Vostrikova (2019a: 74f.) on Persian.

\(^{10}\)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 \textit{John} out of the bracketed wh-island is repaired by ellipsis. Without ellipsis, (c) is ungrammatical (even by the standard set by (ia) in note 8). Note that \textit{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:

(i)  a. Chris will wonder who introduced nobody to Mary tomorrow, except John, but I don’t know why.
      Reading: nobody / John
     b. Chris will wonder [who introduced nobody to Mary] tomorrow, except John \textit{t}\textsubscript{John} who introduced \textit{t}\textsubscript{John} to Mary \textit{t}\textsubscript{John} to Mary.
     c. * Chris will wonder [who introduced nobody to Mary] tomorrow, except John Chris will wonder [who introduced \textit{t}\textsubscript{John} to Mary] tomorrow.

\(^{11}\)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.
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The prediction that the ‘John reading’ depends on antecedent clausal structure is borne out more subtly with sentence-final except for in (17).\textsuperscript{12} 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)  
\begin{enumerate}
  \item % Nobody liked the movie, except for John liked the movie.
  \item % Nobody liked the movie, except for John \textit{truly} liked the movie.
  \item Nobody liked the movie, except for John, but I don’t know why.
    Reading: nobody / %John
\end{enumerate}

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 except for (17) for some speakers. When there is no such clausal structure,\textsuperscript{13} 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.\textsuperscript{14}

3.2 German

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)  
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans.
    everyone liked the Film, except Hans
    ‘Everyone liked the Film, except Hans.’
  \item * Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans mochte den Film (nicht).
    everyone liked the film, except Hans liked the film (not)
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{12}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.

\textsuperscript{13}Cf. Harris (1982), who derives all exceptive phrases from full underlying clauses.

\textsuperscript{14}Thus the availability of the ‘John reading’ cuts across the distinction between free and connected exceptives (Hoeksema 1995).
'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 denFilm 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.¹⁵

3.3 Against a semantic analysis

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 a plausible alternative analysis in terms of entailment. 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):


   b. Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John. ⇒ Sam introduced John to Mary.

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).

¹⁵Section 4 confronts the fact that (18) and (19) involve jeden ‘everyone’ rather than niemanden ‘no-one’.
3.4 Interim summary

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 proxy for the potential presence of elided clausal structure. Thus our analysis fares better than a plausible semantic alternative in terms of entailment.

The next section confronts the fact that some of our examples – namely (7), and German (18) and (19) – have involved every rather than nobody.

4. 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 together, 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. According to our analysis, ellipsis is resolved in two steps: first from the main clause to the except-phrase; and second from the except-phrase to the why-sprout. Negation appears in one of these steps, with the two options 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

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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 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 ¬ like

b. Everybody liked → except John liked → why John didn’t like ¬ like

The rest of this section gives two reasons to favour the second option — that negation is contributed by except— before the issue of pronunciability tempers this support in the third subsection.

4.1 Polarity mismatches and why-sprouts

The first point in favour of negation being contributed by except is that the ‘John reading’ of (21b) then involves a polarity mismatch into a why-sprout. Example (22) and many of the other examples in Kroll (2019) provide independent evidence that polarity mismatches are tolerable in this configuration. 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

17Ranero (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 delivered 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.
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.

Returning to *except*-phrases, unlike in (24), there is no contrast between the pair in (25):\(^\text{18}\)

   b. Everyone DID like the movie, except John.

The absence of a contrast in (25) suggests that there is no polarity mismatch between the main clause and the elided clausal structure in the *except*-phrase; which in turn argues that negation in the *except*-phrase is contributed by *except* rather than sentential *not*.

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.

### 4.2 NPIs

The behaviour of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in *except*-phrases provides a second reason to favour the view that negation is contributed by *except*.

Vostrikova (2019a: ch. 3.2.2; 2019b: 423) presents (26) 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* in (b), as is overtly good in (c):\(^\text{19, 20}\)

(26) 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.
   c. John didn’t dance with any girl from his class.

\(^\text{18}\)Reassuringly, the ‘John reading’ continues to be available in (i), with a permissible polarity mismatch between the *except*-phrase and the *why*-sprout:

(i) Everyone DID like the movie, except John from John liked the movie, but I don’t know why John didn’t like the movie.

\(^\text{19}\)Cf. Moltmann (1995), who dismisses a clausal source for (26a) due to the polarity mismatch in (26b).

\(^\text{20}\)Vostrikova (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, (ii) about the subset of blond girls does not follow:

(i) John danced with everyone except with girls from his class.
   (ii) John danced with everyone except with blond girls from his class.
We have two related counters to this argument. First, although *any* is c-commanded by *didn’t* in (26), it is not in (27). An *except*-phrase containing *any* can happily associate with a universal quantifier in subject position (a); this despite being higher than a putative elided *didn’t* (b), as is overtly bad in (c):

(27) a. Everyone came, except any boys from Mary’s class.
   b. Everyone came, except any boys from Mary’s class *didn’t come*.
   c. * Any boys didn’t come.

Second, the ellipsis indicated in (26b) deletes a non-constituent. Following the assimilation of *except*-phrase deletion to stripping pursued here, (26a) would instead be represented as in (28). PP focus-fronts beyond sentential negation before deletion of the TP constituent:

(28) John danced with everyone, except [with any girl from his class],
    John *didn’t dance* t.

However, moving an NPI above the surface scope of its licensor, as in (28), generally results in ungrammaticality, as illustrated in (29):

(29) a. Sam does not 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*. Rather, it favours the view the negation is contributed by *except* in a higher position, akin to other high negations that license NPIs in subject position, like *doubt* or *nor* in (30):

(30) a. Mary doubts that any boys came.
   b. Mary didn’t go, nor did anyone from Bill’s class.

### 4.3 Pronounceability redux

Tempering the arguments of the previous two subsections, the view that negation is contributed by *except* faces a challenge from pronounceability (31) (cf. Moltmann 1995: 262f.). 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 (31) 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 (31). Thus *except* does not seem to be contributing any negation in (c) or (d):

(31) 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*.
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The same goes for (32) where the main clause is already negative, as it was in (1):

(32) 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.\(^{21}\)

5. 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. Regarding the existence of clausal exceptives, our paper is in broad accord with Vostrikova (2019a,b), who identifies clausal exceptives across a number of languages and proposes a semantics that interprets the clausal structure;\(^{22}\) but the syntactic status of negation in clausal except-phrases remains an outstanding issue.

References


\(^{21}\)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).

\(^{22}\)Vostrikova (2019a,b) analyses clausal exceptives as quantifying over possible situations, where except-phrases are standardly analysed as quantifier modifiers (Reinhart 1991, von Fintel 1993, Moltmann 1995). Vostrikova (2019a: ch. 5.1) shows that her semantics can be extended to phrasal exceptives, while stressing that the complications and redundancy involved are only for the sake of uniformity.


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