Limited Reactivation in Noun Phrase Ellipsis
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Questions: What is the nature of the representation at ellipsis sites? What information, and how much, is reactivated?

Background

Reactivation occurs when constituents are reaccessed to resolve a dependency, e.g., fillers reactivating at gap sites, pronouns reactivating their antecedents. Ellipsis instantiates such a dependency between the antecedent and ellipsis site.

- Sue sawed John’s [dog] Antecedent And Bill walked Mary’s [cat] Ellipsis Site
- differs from filler-gap
- requires antecedent
- but contains non-overt material
- What is the depth of reactivation needed to interpret ellipsis sites?

Agreement Attraction (AA) can diagnose the amount of structure reactivated. AA occurs when the verb incorrectly agrees with the attractor that intervenes between the grammatical controller of agreement and the verb.

- The key is to the cabinet was, on the table.

AA is fed by differing number features contained in the same constituent [3-5].

(NP) Ellipsis + AA: Can agreement attraction effects be seen after ellipsis sites?
- AA-triggering complex nominals can be used as the antecedent for NPE
- The amount of structure reactivated will reactivate different number features
- Sarah’s [key to the cabinets] antecedent got lost, but Scarlett’s . . .

Full Reactivation (Deep): [key to the cabinets] were on the table.
Partial Reactivation (Shallow): [keys] was on the table.
Agreement appearing on the verb after the ellipsis site will diagnose the size of the reactivated constituent.

Predictions: If full reactivation → ✓ agreement attraction
If partial reactivation → X NO agreement attraction

Experiment 1

Q: Do complex AA-triggering nominals generate agreement attraction when in a possessive structure?

Design: Self-paced reading: 32 participants; 32 item sets distributed via Latin Square; 96 fillers
2x2: Attractor Number (Singular • Plural •) x Verb Grammaticality (Grammatical, Ungrammatical)

Items: Scarlett’s memo from the editor was on the table. Singular Attractor
Scarlett’s memo from the editors were on the table. Plural Attractor

Main effect of GRAMMATICALITY; interaction of NUMBER X GRAMMATICALITY
Ungrammatical, Plural (•) condition is read faster than Ungrammatical, Singular (•)

Complex AA-triggering nominals in a possessive structure → ✓ agreement attraction

Experiments 2 & 3

Q: Do complex AA-triggering nominals generate agreement attraction when elided?

Design: Self-paced reading
2x2: Attractor Number X Grammaticality X Ellipsis [Ellipsis, No Ellipsis]

Experiment 2: Clauses Joined with Causal & Contrastive Connectives

Items: Ann’s memo from the editor was on the table. Singular Attractor
though Jo’s, luckily, (was/were) at the office. Elipsis
though Jo, luckily, (was/ were) at the office. No Ellipsis

Main effect of GRAMMATICALITY; no GRAMMATICALITY X Attractor interaction
✓ When elided . . . X NO agreement attraction
✓ Sensitivity to GRAMMATICALITY; at least reactivating head

Claim: Reactivation is partial: only the head is reactivated
NO attraction since the intervening number features are not reactivated

Experiment 3: Clauses Joined with Temporal Subordinators

Items: Even before Harry’s examination of the patient was (was/ were) revealed nothing.
Richard (was/ were) unable to help.

Main effect of GRAMMATICALITY; no GRAMMATICALITY X Attractor interaction
✓ When only elided . . . ✓ agreement attraction

Experiment 4

Q: Does agreement attraction occur when only the attractor is elided?

Design: Self-paced reading
2x2: Attractor Number X Ellipsis

Items: After the statement from Bob’s friend was also (was/ were) sent out yesterday.

Main Effect of GRAMMATICALITY; Interaction of GRAMMATICALITY X Attractor
✓ When only the attractor is elided . . . ✓ agreement attraction

Conclusions:
- Reactivation is not deep/exhaustive; there is only partial reactivation
- Representation of ellipsis sites is sensitive to number features

Discussion
- Sensitivity to morpho-syntactic number features implicates that the representation is partially syntactic [4, 5, 6]
- Lack of attraction effects in Experiments 2 & 3 is contra a percolation account, but compatible with a content-addressable account.

Future Work
- Is all reactivation under ellipsis partial [6]? (perhaps generalizable to VPE, slicing, etc.)
- Are mismatches in NPE allowed as in VPE?
- What factors trigger partial versus full reactivation?

References

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