MaxElide Phenomena and the Nature of Ellipsis
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1. Outline Merchant (2008, circulated in 2001) presents a constraint on ellipsis called MaxElide, which says “Let XP be an elided constituent containing an A'-trace. Let YP be a possible target for deletion. YP must not properly contain XP (XP ∉ YP).” Takahashi and Fox (2005) (T&F) argue that it should be generalized in such a way as to cover its impact on certain interpretations including sloppy identity. The main purpose of this paper is to show that neither of the previous approaches can account for the full range of relevant MaxElide phenomena. As an alternative, I will put forth a unified analysis based in part on Johnson 2001, which turns out to provide important insights into the nature of ellipsis.

2. Problems MaxElide explains the contrast in (1) where the elided domain contains an A'-trace left by wh-movement (elided constituents are shaded). (2a,b) involving no A'-movement are both permitted because they are simply not subject to MaxElide. Merchant fails to capture the fact that (3a) lacks the sloppy reading under which the missing pronoun refers to Bill instead of John. To deal with this, T&F suggest that MaxElide applies to the Parallelism Domain (PD). Putting details aside, the sloppy reading forces the PD to be the higher VP in (3), whereas the strict one does not, with the higher and lower VPs counting as independent PDs. Their account, however, faces at least three kinds of problems. First, it wrongly expect (4a) to be legitimate, where the elided domain counts as an independent PD. Second, it makes the incorrect prediction that the sloppy interpretation should be missing in (5a), just as in (3a) (strict reading is not available here because of every boy binding the overt pronominal variable him and the parallelism condition). Third, it cannot explain the difference in sloppy identity between (6a) and (6b): in both the PD is the higher VP but MaxElide applies to the lower one because the contrastively focused item (KATE in (6a) and DIDN’T in (6b)) cannot be deleted (Schuyler 2001).

3. Proposal Examining VP ellipsis in English, Johnson (2001) argues for a movement theory of ellipsis: elided categories undergo movement, topicalization in particular, before phonologically deleted. Viewed from this perspective, MaxElide is highly reminiscent of Chomsky’s (1973) A-over-A Principle (or its successor, see for example Müller 2011). I maintain that MaxElide effects are observed only when ellipsis cannot use an empty category (Lobeck 1995) but must be executed via movement. This line of analysis reduces MaxElide, a mere description, to a general minimality principle and answers the fundamental question of why the constraint refers to A'-movement. In (1) the presence of an A'-trace requires there to be fully articulated structure in the elided domain, thereby banning the use of an empty VP/TP. Thus the movement strategy must be employed in (1), giving rise to the A-over-A effect. In (2) you undergoes A-movement from the complement position of the unaccusative verb arrive. Lasnik (1999a) argues that A-movement does not leave a trace, which means that the VP there can start out as an empty category, whose content is identified at LF via copying. (2a), which is ruled out by (2b) if it is a case of ellipsis through movement, is allowed precisely because it can use an empty VP. This is why (2) is superficially free from MaxElide. As for (3), the ellipsis in (3a) cannot arise from movement, blocked by that in (3b). In other words, it must be an instance of empty VP, which permits only the strict reading when the antecedent VP is copied. In contrast, (3b) can be a genuine case of phonological deletion and the pronoun him within the elided VP, just like its overt counterpart, can refer to Bill. (4), with a trace inside the elided phrase, receives the same explanation as (1). Turing to (5), (5a) must use an empty VP, which is converted to the antecedent VP marry him with the pronominal variable being bound by every boy. Since the variable is semantically compatible with this boy, the sloppy reading ensues. (5b) will have the sloppy reading no matter which strategy of ellipsis is employed. Finally, (6a,b) are similar to (3) in that sloppy reading requires movement of the
elided category. The ban on such movement in (6b) is due to a negative island (Ross 1984).

4. Implications To the extent that the present analysis is on the right track, it settles the long-standing debate over how ellipsis is derived: both the deletion theory and the copy theory are correct and capture different aspects of ellipsis. Ellipsis via movement, followed by deletion, is found only in limited environments where it is forced, i.e., it applies to fully articulated structure. The dual nature of ellipsis explains why topicalization does not fully pattern with ellipsis (Aelbrecht and Haegeman 2012). Furthermore, the proposed account of MaxElide implies that the putative reductions of MaxElide using notions of economy (Funakoshi 2012, Messick and Thoms 2016) are wrong. I will show how exactly they fail based on further empirical data. Also, Lasnik’s (1999a) claim that A-movement does not leave a trace must be correct, contra Hartman (2011), who bases his sole counterargument on the matrix/embedded contrast in (7). The contrast can in fact be explained in terms of ellipsis making T-to-C movement unnecessary and hence impossible in (7a) (Lasnik 1999b).

Examples
(1) a. *Mary was kissing someone, but I don’t know who she was \([_{VP}\text{ kissing} t]\).
   b. Mary was kissing someone, but I don’t know who \([_{TP}\text{ she was }_{VP}\text{ kissing} t]\].
(2) a. Mary said you would arrive, and Sue also said you would \([_{VP}\text{ arrive} t]\).
   b. Mary said you would arrive, and Sue also did \([_{VP}\text{ say you would }_{VP}\text{ arrive} t]\].
(3) a. John said Mary hit him, and BILL also said she did \([_{VP}\text{ hit} t]\). (strict / *sloppy)
   b. John said Mary hit him, and BILL also did \([_{VP}\text{ say she }_{VP}\text{ hit} t]\). (strict / sloppy)
(4) a. ??Ben knows who she invited, but Charlie doesn’t know who \([_{TP}\text{ she }_{VP}\text{ invited} t]\].
   b. Ben knows who she invited, but Charlie doesn’t \([_{VP}\text{ know }_{CP}\text{ who }_{TP}\text{ she }_{VP}\text{ invited} t}\)].
(5) a. Almost every boy hopes that Sally will marry him. Even this boy hopes that she will \([_{VP}\text{ marry} t]\). (*strict / sloppy)
   b. Almost every boy hopes that Sally will marry him. Even this boy does \([_{VP}\text{ hope that she will }_{VP}\text{ marry} t}\].
(6) a. John said Mary hit him, and BILL said KATE did \([_{VP}\text{ hit} t]\). (strict / sloppy)
   b. John said Mary hit him, and BILL said she DIDN’T \([_{VP}\text{ hit} t]\). (strict / *sloppy)
(7) a. You know Anna is going to resign. The only question is: when \(*\text{will she} _{VP}\text{ resign}\)?
   b. You say you’ll pay me back, but you haven’t told me when (you will) \([_{VP}\text{ pay me back} t]\).

References