

Patterns of partial ellipsis in Dutch right dislocation.

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The literature increasingly takes right dislocation (including afterthoughts) to have a biclausal source, with the second clause reduced by ellipsis. There is less agreement on the nature of the ellipsis operation(s) involved. We aim to explore this issue by considering partial ellipsis (exemplified in (1)).

- (1) a. Dat Hendrik d'r heeft ontslagen – dat Hendrik Carla heeft ontslagen – verbaast me.
that Henry her has fired that Henry Carla has fired surprises me
'That Henry has fired her – that Henry has fired Carla – surprises me.'
- b. ?Dat Hendrik d'r heeft ontslagen – ~~dat~~ Hendrik Carla heeft ontslagen – verbaast me.
that Henry her has fired that Henry Carla has fired surprises me
- c. Dat Hendrik d'r heeft ontslagen – ~~dat Hendrik~~ Carla heeft ontslagen – verbaast me.
that Henry her has fired that Henry Carla has fired surprises me
- d. ?Dat Hendrik d'r heeft ontslagen – ~~dat Hendrik~~ Carla heeft ontslagen – verbaast me.
that Henry her has fired that Henry Carla has fired surprises me
- e. Dat Hendrik d'r heeft ontslagen – ~~dat Hendrik~~ Carla heeft ontslagen – verbaast me.
that Henry her has fired that Henry Carla has fired surprises me

According to an influential proposal by Ott & De Vries (2016), right dislocation requires a fronting-and-deletion analysis, on a par with sluicing. We show that this approach is not tenable, in essence because unfrontable material can be dislocated (such as the TP in (1b)). That leaves various options, including: (i) non-constituent ellipsis 'around' the right dislocated category in the manner proposed by Griffiths et al. (2023); (ii) top-down truncation, as proposed for optional infinitives in language acquisition by Rizzi 1993/4, and (iii) an accumulation of smaller steps of ellipsis.

In our assessment, the data support the third approach. We argue that two operations are involved: *gapping*, which optionally elides heads in a given domain in the absence of overt c-commanding heads, additionally triggering obligatory ellipsis of discourse-anaphoric dependents of the elided head, and *zapping*, which elides constituents in a given domain in the absence of overt c-commanding constituents. Gapping is of course well-known; zapping is involved in certain types of left-edge ellipsis. Note that zapping, truncation and clausal ellipsis around the focus all involve top-down reduction of clauses and therefore make partly overlapping empirical predictions.

Truncation fails to explain cases where omitted material exerts an influence on what remains. For example, parasitic gaps are licensed even if the moved category is not overt (see (2a)) and covert directional predicates still influence auxiliary selection (see (2b)). These data require an ellipsis analysis (and hence favor zapping or clausal ellipsis around the focus).

- (2) a. Hoeveel brieven hij zonder te openen heeft verbrand – [~~hoeveel brieven~~]₁
how.many letters he without to open has burned how.many letters
HENDRIK zonder *pg* te openen *t*₁ heeft verbrand – weet ik niet.
Henry without to open has burned know I not
'How many letters he has burned without opening – how many letters Henry has burned without opening – I don't know.'
- b. Dat Hendrik naar huis is gefietst – ~~dat Hendrik naar huis~~ is/*heeft
that Henry to home is cycled that Henry to home is has
GEFIETST! – verbaast me.
cycled surprises me
'That Henry has cycled home – that Henry has CYCLED home – surprises me!'
- b. Dat Hendrik naar huis is gefietst – ~~dat Hendrik naar huis~~ is/*heeft
that Henry to home is cycled that Henry to home is has
GEFIETST! – verbaast me.
cycled surprises me

Clausal ellipsis around the focus can capture most relevant data. However, Griffiths et al. argue that what remains must be a constituent in focus or containing the focus. This restriction is too strong, as there are cases of in which gapping or zapping yield remnants that are not constituents. An example where zapping is involved is given in (1d) (note that Dutch has verb clusters, so that the smallest constituent containing the object and the main verb also contains the auxiliary). An example where zapping is involved is given in (3). Finally, it is not obvious that backgrounding right dislocation leaves a remnant that is in focus.

- (3) Dat ik daar [te veel voormalige ministers] voor banken zie werken – (pardon:) ~~dat ik daar~~
that I there too many former ministers for banks see work excuse.me that I there
~~[te veel voormalige BURGEMEESTERS]~~ voor banken zie werken – irriteert me.
too many former mayors for banks see work irritates me
 ‘That I see too many former ministers working for banks there – (excuse me:) that I see
 too many former MAYORS working for banks there – irritates me.’

An important argument for the fronting-and-deletion approach is that right dislocation is subject to certain island constraints, a fact that seems to implicate movement (contrary to what we have argued above). We show that the locality data permit an alternative account based on the size of the juxtaposed clause and independently motivated restrictions on zapping into major constituents (which is very severely circumscribed). Thus, the contrast in (4) follows from the fact that zapping into disanaphoric CP subjects (as in (5)) can be shown to be impossible.

- (4) a. Dat Hendrik d’r heeft ontslagen – Carla – verbaast me.
that Henry her has fired Carla surprises me
 ‘That Henry has fired her – Carla – surprises me.’
 b. *Dat Hendrik d’r heeft ontslagen, verbaast me – Carla.
that Henry her has fired surprises me Carla
- (5) Dat Hendrik d’r heeft ontslagen, verbaast me – [~~dat Hendrik~~ Carla heeft ontslagen]
that Henry her has fired surprises me that Henry Carla has fired
 [~~verbaast me~~].
surprises me

An account along these lines has the additional benefit that it explains the contrast in (6), which remains mysterious on a fronting-and-deletion account.

- (6) a. *Dat Hendrik d’r heeft ontslagen, verbaast me – [[~~dat Hendrik~~ Carla₁ heeft ontslagen]
that Henry her has fired surprises me that Henry Carla has fired
 verbaast me].
surprises me
 b. Dat Hendrik snel iemand aanstelt is belangrijk, maar [wie₁ Hendrik snel t₁ aanstelt]
that Henry quickly someone appoints is important, but who Henry quickly appoints
 doet er niet toe.
does there not to
 ‘That Henry quickly appoints someone is important, but who Henry quickly appoints
 does not matter.’

References

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