

Approaches to fragments and ellipsis in spoken and written English

Workshop at BICLCE2017 (7th Biennial International Conference on the Linguistics of Contemporary English, <https://biclce2017.wordpress.com/>) in Vigo, 28-30 September 2017

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Spoken (and written) language exhibits a high number of incomplete sentences, among them cases of ellipsis or fragments, such as “From Europe!” or “Milk?”.

A crucial question posed in previous studies is whether fragments are sentential or not. Moreover, the interpretation of fragments and their force has been at the center of the relevant research (Barton 1990; Stainton 2006). Analyses vary from those that follow an “ellipsis approach,” or a deletion-based analysis of fragments (among others, Hankamer 1979; Morgan 1973 - Stanley 2000; Reich 2003; Brunetti 2003 - Merchant 2001, 2004, 2008), to those of the direct interpretation approach, or “direct generation” account (among others, Ginzburg & Sag 2000; Barton 1990; Stainton 1998 - van Riemsdijk 1978; Culicover & Jackendoff 2005).

The first type of approaches proposes a deletion transformation which assumes an unpronounced structure and thus complicates syntax (e.g. Hankamer 1979). According to Merchant, fragment answers are a result of a movement of the remnant (pronounced) part to a clause-peripheral position which is followed by the ellipsis of the unpronounced part. The second type of approach does neither involve ellipsis nor any underlying syntactic structure, rather the syntax of the fragment is just the phrase/fragment itself. A proposition can arise from an NP with a revision of the usual mappings (complicating the syntax-semantics mapping). According to this type of approaches, there are two types of fragments: fragments that can be resolved through structural identity with an explicit linguistic source; and other fragments that can be resolved through inference, since no linguistic source is available for them (among others, Ginzburg & Sag 2000; Ginzburg & Cooper 2004; Kempson et al. 2015 – cf. also Ford, Fox & Thompson 2002 and Couper-Kuhlen 2011).

Construction Grammar (CxG) (e.g. Goldberg 2006; Kay & Fillmore 1999) may yet offer another way of explaining the prevalence of fragments and ellipsis in (spoken) language. Assuming a hierarchical network of constructions (form-meaning pairings), CxG can account for full form (mother) constructions (“He is from Europe”), reduced constructions (“From Europe”) and also formulaic units with an idiomatic character. Being a usage-based model CxG allows for redundancy in the network of constructions

and fragments and ellipsis are stored as constructions independent of a full form (Heine 2006).

The idea of the workshop is to bring together scholars interested in a systematic study of fragments. The focus will be on exploring characteristics of ellipsis and fragments from various theoretical perspectives, assessing the well-established notion of “complete sentences” as a basis of grammatical theories. The issues to be addressed include, among others, the following:

- The theoretical analyses of fragments and ellipsis in English
- Fragments/ellipsis as constructions
- The notion of the ‘complete sentence’
- Fragments/ellipsis and different English registers
- Fragments and Grammar – Fragments and Communication
- Fragments as elements in an ‘interactional grammar’
- The synchrony and diachrony of fragments and ellipsis
- Similarities and differences between fragments and formulaic units

The deadline for submission of abstracts (no longer than 350 words, excluding references) is **15 February 2017**. Notification of acceptance will be sent out by 15 March 2017. Please send your abstracts to nlavidas@enl-auth.gr (Nikolaos Lavidas) and mpentrel@uos.de (Meike Pentrel).

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