1. Introduction

The phenomenon of ellipsis, such as verb phrase ellipsis (VPE, henceforth), sluicing, gapping, etc., is one topic that has attracted the interest of many researchers. One of the main concerns is the question of how the interpretation of the ellipsis site is recovered. Researchers, such as Ross (1969), Sag (1976), and Merchant (2001), among others, take the view that the ellipsis site has a full-fledged structure and is deleted (at PF). Other researchers argue that the ellipsis site is a null proform, whose contents are recovered from the context either through an interpretive rule as in the case of overt pronouns (Wasow (1972) and Lobeck (1995), etc.) or through the copying of the discourse-available antecedent (Williams (1977) and Fiengo and May (1994), etc.). Still others claim that there is no structure in the ellipsis site. It is argued by Culicover and Jackendoff (2005), for example, that the interpretation of ellipsis is obtained through an interpretative mechanism called indirect licensing (see their sections 7.5 and 7.6). Another major issue involving ellipsis is the question of how ellipsis is licensed. Merchant (2001, 2004, 2008), for instance, has recently developed a theory in accordance with the minimalist program where the E-feature residing on a head is responsible for the deletion of its complement.

In The Syntactic Licensing of Ellipsis, Lobke Aelbrecht attempts to reveal how ellipsis is syntactically licensed and to defend the PF deletion analysis,
by closely examining a previously unresearched phenomenon in Dutch that she calls modal complement ellipsis (MCE, hereafter), as illustrated in the second conjunct in (1).

(1) Roos wil Jelle wel helpen, maar ze kan niet.
   Roos wants Jelle help but she can not
   ‘Roos wants to help Jelle, but she can’t.’ (Ch. 2 (1))

Based on the investigation of various syntactic properties of Dutch MCE, she develops a theory of what she calls derivational ellipsis and attempts to corroborate it by demonstrating that other elliptical phenomena, such as sluicing, VPE, pseudogapping, and British English *do* (BE *do*, henceforth), can be accounted for under the theory.

In this review, we will first summarize the theory proposed by Aelbrecht (section 2) and see how her theory can account for the most crucial properties of Dutch MCE (section 3). We will also observe how it can be extended to other elliptical phenomena, i.e. English VPE and BE *do* (section 4). We will then compare her theory with Merchant’s (2001, 2004, 2008) to elucidate what contributions Aelbrecht makes to the theory of ellipsis as well as discuss potential shortcomings that her theory needs to address (section 5).


Aelbrecht’s main claims are summarized in (2). Note that vocabulary insertion is mentioned in (2b) because she adopts the Late Lexical Insertion view advocated by Halle and Marantz (1993) and postulates that ellipsis prevents lexical insertion at PF. For ease of exposition, however, I will use the term *deletion* to describe the ellipsis phenomenon in the discussion to follow.

(2) a. Ellipsis is licensed via an Agree relation between an [E]-feature and the ellipsis licensing head.
   b. Ellipsis occurs in the course of the derivation, as soon as the licensing head is merged. At this point the ellipsis site becomes inaccessible for any further syntactic operations, and vocabulary insertion at PF is blocked.

(Ch. 3 (1))

Following Merchant (2001, 2004, 2008), she claims that the E-feature residing on a head triggers the deletion of its complement, but she departs from Merchant by claiming that this E-feature needs to Agree (in Chomsky’s (2001, 2008) terms) with an independent licensor that resides higher up in
the structure in order to induce deletion, as stated in (2a). This mechanism is schematically represented in (3).

\[ (3) \]

She assumes that the E-feature is a bundle of category, inflectional, and selectional features and has an uninterpretable inflectional feature. This uninterpretable feature needs to be checked so that the derivation will not crash, and she claims that it is checked against the interpretable category feature on the licensing head L.\(^1\)

Another crucial aspect of her theory is that as soon as L Agrees with E, the deletion of the ellipsis site occurs, i.e., the complement of the head the E-feature resides on is sent to PF. She calls this derivational ellipsis. This aspect of her theory has important implications for the applicability of syntactic operations, as mentioned in (2b). After the ellipsis site has been sent to PF, it becomes inaccessible to syntax, disallowing the application of any additional syntactic operations, such as extraction, to an element inside it. Hence, in order for an element within the ellipsis site to be extracted out of it, it must be extracted \textit{before} the Agree relation is established between L and E.

3. MCE in Dutch

Aelbrecht observes seven properties of Dutch MCE and demonstrates that her theory can account for them. In this section, I will discuss the property

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\(^1\) Note that this notion of Agree departs from the standard one in Chomsky (2000, 2001), where the probe with uninterpretable features resides in a position higher than the goal.
most crucial for her theory, i.e. limited extraction possibilities, and show how Aelbrecht’s theory captures it. It is observed that Dutch MCE allows subject extraction as in (4).

(4) Deze rok mag *wel* gewassen worden, maar ik weet niet welke nu ook weer *niet* mag [welke gewassen worden].

‘This skirt can be washed, but I don’t know which one can’t be again.’ (Ch. 2 (80b))

The subject wh-phrase originating in the complement of the passive verb in the modal complement is, on the surface, situated in the front of the complement clause of the matrix verb. This indicates that the subject has moved out of the ellipsis site. Now observe (5), where the object is extracted out of the ellipsis site.

(5)?* Ik weet niet wie Kaat *wou* uitnodigen, maar ik weet wel wie ze *moest* [welke uitnodigen].

‘I don’t know who Kaar wanted to invite, but I do know who she had to.’ (Ch. 2 (81a))

Since its non-elliptical counterpart is acceptable, the unacceptability of (5) indicates that the object wh-phrase originating in the modal complement cannot be extracted out of the ellipsis site.

Next, let us turn to how the subject/object contrast in extractability is accounted for in Aelbrecht’s theory. First, it is claimed that Dutch modal verbs have a TP complement (her section 2.1.3 provides evidence). It is then postulated that in MCE the T head has the E-feature and that the licensor is the Mod(al) head. Hence, the relevant portion of the modal complement construction with a passive verb as in (4) has the structure in (6).^2

\[
[\text{TP} \text{ DP(subject)}]_{\text{Voice}} \text{ [Voice [ VP [ V [ tDP \text{ Agree} ] ] ] ] }\]

The subject wh-phrase originates in the complement of the V and moves

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^2 Although Aelbrecht uses non-italicized notation for small \( v \), I will use the italicized notation in this review, following the standard convention in the minimalist literature.
through [Spec, VoiceP] to [Spec, TP] (Voice, rather than $v$, is assumed to be the clause-internal phase edge here). Notice that the licensor (the Mod head) has not been merged when the subject is raised to [Spec, TP]. Thus, the ellipsis site (VoiceP) has not yet been deleted at this point, which is the reason that the subject can be extracted out of the ellipsis site. Subsequently, the Mod head is merged and Agrees with the E-feature on T, simultaneously inducing the deletion of VoiceP. The subject wh-phrase further moves to [Spec, CP].

In the case of an object as in (5), it can move to [Spec, VoiceP], just as in the case of a subject; however, it cannot move out of VoiceP, in contrast to a subject because an object cannot move to [Spec, TP], which is a subject position. See (7).

(7) $\ldots$ [ModP Mod [TP DP(subject) [T $\ldots$ VoiceP DP(object)$\ldots$])]

\begin{itemize}
  \item Agree
\end{itemize}

(adapted from Ch. 3 (78)–(80))

As soon as the Mod head is merged, it Agrees with the E-feature on T, which results in the deletion of VoiceP. Since the object is stuck inside VoiceP, it is deleted along with the other material in VoiceP.

4. Extending the Theory to Other Types of Ellipsis

In this section, we will see how the theory extends to other types of ellipsis. Aelbrecht investigates sluicing, English VPE, pseudogapping, and BE do; however, here I will focus on extractability in English VPE and BE do.

Let us first see what the licensor is and where the E-feature resides in English VPE. Given that English VPE is possible with finite auxiliaries but impossible with non-finite ones, as illustrated in (8), Aelbrecht concludes that the licensor of English VPE is T.

(8) a. Jasmin can draw an elephant, but Ryan can’t [draw an elephant].

\begin{itemize}
  \item (Ch. 4 (16a))
\end{itemize}

b. *I hadn’t been thinking about it, but I recall Morgan having been [thinking about it].

\begin{itemize}
  \item (Ch. 4 (19a))
\end{itemize}
She also postulates that E resides on the Voice head, observing that the aspectual and voice auxiliaries are not deleted in VPE, as shown in (9).\(^3\)

(9) This skirt has been washed, but it shouldn’t have been \([washed]\).

(Ch. 4 (29e))

Thus, English VPE is schematically represented as in (10) under her theory.

(10) \[ [TP \ T \ [AspP (have)] \ [AspP (be)] \ [VoiceP \ Voice (be)] \ vP \ t\text{subj} \ [vP \ [vP \ [vP \ [vP]] \ Agree]]]] \]

(Ch. 4 (40))

English VPE allows object extraction as well as subject extraction, unlike Dutch MCE, as illustrated in (11).

(11) a. Derived subject: This shirt has been washed but these pants should be \([washed \ these \ pants]\) too.

b. Wh-object: I don’t remember what Ryan made for our Valentine’s Tea, but I know what Alice did \([make \ what \ for \ our \ Valentine’s \ Tea]\).

(Ch. 4 (43c))

The analysis she developed for Dutch MCE can also account for these facts. Observe in (10) above that a phase edge, i.e. [Spec, VoiceP], lies between the licensor T and the head with the E-feature (the Voice head). This phase edge acts as an escape hatch and allows an element inside the ellipsis site (the subject, the object, etc.) to be extracted. That is, an element within the ellipsis site moves to the [Spec, VoiceP] before the licensor is merged and induces the deletion of the ellipsis site. This then makes it possible for such an element to move further up. However, I wish to point out that these facts about English VPE are also compatible with a non-derivational analysis of ellipsis, where deletion occurs at the end of the derivation, because there is no restriction on the extractability of an element out of the ellipsis site. Since no restrictions on extractability out of the ellipsis site are observed in sluicing or pseudogapping either, there is no independent support for Aelbrecht’s derivational analysis of ellipsis from these types of ellipsis. It is at this point where BE do becomes the focus of the discussion.

In British English, do can appear in the VPE context, as illustrated in (12).

\(^3\) Note in this connection that Sag (1976: 31) observes that a constituent larger than vP can also be elided, as in (i). In order to accommodate such examples, Aelbrecht would need to assume that the E-feature can reside on the Aspect head as well.

(i) Betsy must have been being hassled by the police, and Peter ...
   {a. *must; b. must have; c. must have been; d. *must have been being}, too.
(12) Luis will run the race and Nana will (do) \{run the race\}, too.

(Ch. 4 (81))

Interestingly, examples with BE do do not allow object extraction out of the ellipsis site in contrast to VPE, as observed by Baltin (2005, 2007, 2010).

(13) Although I don’t know who Thomas will visit, I do know who Aga will (*do) \{visit \}. 

(Ch. 4 (83), adapted from Baltin (2010: (2) and (3)))

Subject extraction, by contrast, is permitted, as in (14).

(14) Kay might seem to enjoy that, and James might do \{seem to enjoy that\}, too.

(Ch. 4 (86a))

Aelbrecht postulates that the licensor is v and the locus of the E feature is also v, as schematically represented in (15). Note that she assumes that BE do is a little v head, following Stroik (2001), Baltin (2005, 2010), and Haddican (2007).

(15) \[TP [T \cdot T [AspP Asp [VoiceP Voice [vP \{v do\} [VP \{v V \ldots\}]]]]]]

Agree

(adapted from Ch. 4 (96))

In the case of a derived subject, Aelbrecht crucially assumes, following Baltin (2010), that it always moves through [Spec, vP], the base-position for regular subjects. This allows the derived subject to move out of the ellipsis site (VP) because it is able to move to [Spec, vP] simultaneously as the small v head (which is the licensor as well as the locus of the E-feature) is merged and induces deletion. In the case of an object, on the other hand, since it does not move to [Spec, vP], it has to wait until Voice is merged in order to be moved, but at the point when Voice is merged, the deletion of the complement of the small v has already occurred, making extraction impossible. This distinction between subject and object extraction possibilities can only be made under the derivational ellipsis approach, which constitutes independent support for Aelbrecht’s analysis.

5. Comments on Aelbrecht’s (2010) Contributions

Here, I will first compare Aelbrecht’s theory with the most influential theory of ellipsis in recent years that has been advocated by Merchant (2001, 2004, 2008) and in so doing clarify the contributions of Aelbrecht’s study to the analysis of ellipsis. In an attempt to remove an independent deletion component from grammar, Merchant (2001, 2004, 2008) developed a theory of ellipsis where deletion is attributed to the properties of the feature E on a head. He proposes for sluicing that the E-feature has an uninterpre-
table strong feature, which needs to be checked against a C with an interrogative wh-feature through a head-to-head relation. This ensures that E resides on such a C. The E-feature is then assumed to have the effect of “instruct[ing] the post-PF phonological interpretative component not to parse its [TP] complement” (Merchant 2004: 671). Note that in this theory the locus of the E-feature and that of its licensor are the same head, i.e. C in this case. Similarly, in the case of VPE, the E-feature is specified in such a way that it is licensed on a head whose complement is elided.

Under this implementation of the E-feature licensing, to account for the data in (9), where the complement of the Voice head is deleted, it is necessary to postulate that the locus of the E-feature is Voice, which is assumed to be higher than v but lower than T (see the structure in (10)). Since the E-feature can appear on Voice, it would then be expected that the deletion of vP is also possible in examples like (8b), contrary to the fact. Aelbrecht’s theory, on the other hand, can handle the distinction between (8b) and (9) because it separates the locus of the licensor of ellipsis and that of the E-feature. Recall that the E-feature on Voice, which has an uninterpretable inflectional feature, must Agree with T. In the case of (8b), because T is not available in the complement clause, the E-feature on the Voice head has no licensor to Agree with, and its uninterpretable feature cannot be checked, rendering (8b) unacceptable. As for (9), T is available for the E-feature to Agree with it. Since the licensor and the E-feature are separated in Aelbrecht’s theory, some elements can appear between the licensing T head and the ellipsis site, as in (9).

Another phenomenon that can be accounted for in Aelbrecht’s theory but not in Merchant’s is the restriction in extraction out of the ellipsis site as we saw in sections 3 and 4. Under Merchant’s theory, which does not take a derivational view, ellipsis takes place in “the post-PF phonological interpretative component” and the full-fledged structure will remain to be available in syntax. It would then be expected that elements in the ellipsis site, including the subject and the object, can be extracted out of it equally. As seen in sections 3 and 4, however, this is not the case in Dutch MCE and BE do. Given these considerations, Aelbrecht’s theory can be regarded as an improved extension of Merchant’s ellipsis theory.

Nevertheless, Aelbrecht’s theory also has some shortcomings. One crucial issue that needs to be addressed is the fact that object extraction does not seem to be totally impossible in some cases of Dutch MCE and is perfectly acceptable in others, as Aelbrecht herself notes. As we have seen in sections 3 and 4, her theory disallows extraction of the object in Dutch
MCE because it cannot be extracted out of the ellipsis site prior to the merger of the licensor for lack of an escape hatch. This is a rigid structural ban on object extraction, and thus the theory makes a negative prediction that extraction of the object is totally unacceptable (unless some distinct derivations are available). This does not seem to be the case in some types of object extraction. The first case comes from Topicalization data in Dutch MCE in (16).

(16) Die boeken mag je lezen, maar deze boeken moet je.
Those books are allowed you read but these books must you
‘Those books you’re allowed to read, but these books, you have to.’

(Ch. 2 (96b))

Although examples like (16) are degraded, they do not seem to be completely unacceptable as the theory predicts. The second case comes from Antecedent-Contained Deletion with MCE in Dutch.

(17) Olaf leest elk boek dat hij wil lezen.
Olaf reads every book that he wants read
‘Olaf reads every book he wants.’

(Ch. 3 (93a))

In line with Chomsky (1977), she assumes that an operator or a relative pronoun undergoes movement to [Spec, CP] of the relative clause. Hence in (17), an operator, which originates in the object position of the verb in the relative clause, is extracted out of the ellipsis site. This operation, however, is illicit under her theory. Thus, the “not completely unacceptable” status of object extraction in Topicalization as well as its complete acceptability in ACD with MCE poses a challenge for her analysis.

To sum up, we have reviewed Aelbrecht’s theory of derivational ellipsis and discussed the contributions it has made to the theory of ellipsis licensing. Although there are some issues that need addressing, I believe that our understanding of the ellipsis phenomena has been advanced by her theory, which has been developed through a detailed and meticulous examination of various types of elliptical constructions, such as Dutch MCE, sluicing, English VPE, pseudogapping, and BE do. I also believe that her theory has provided a new perspective for the investigation of other types of ellipsis, such as gapping, stripping, NP deletion, and fragment answers.
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