

### Distinguishing approaches to island-insensitivity

*Tim Hunter (UCLA) and David Potter (Northwestern University)*

Our aim here is to present an argument that the island-insensitivity of certain ellipsis constructions must be a consequence of island repair, and cannot be attributed to the availability of alternative “short source” structures in the ellipsis site. To illustrate these two competing approaches to island-insensitivity, consider (1), an instance of stripping (or “bare argument ellipsis”). Following a number of other authors (Depiante 2000, Merchant 2004, Nakao 2009), we will assume that this arises via movement of the remnant ('to John') out of some clause which is then elided, as shown in (2).

(1) A: She likes the manager who assigned the job to Bill.

B: No, to John.

(2) ... [to John]<sub>i</sub> [~~TP ... t<sub>i</sub> ...~~]

The question then is what subsequently-elided clausal structure this remnant moved out of. Given a complete structure inside the ellipsis site as shown in (3), one might expect (1) to be unacceptable due to the movement out of a relative clause island, contrary to fact. This has led to the suggestion that instead there is some smaller island-free structure in the ellipsis site, either as shown in (4a) or (4b) (e.g. Barros 2012, Erteschik-Shir 1973).

(3) ... [to John]<sub>i</sub> ~~she likes the manager~~ [<sub>island</sub> ~~who assigned the job t<sub>i</sub>~~]

(4a) ... [to John]<sub>i</sub> ~~the manager assigned the job t<sub>i</sub>~~

(4b) ... [to John]<sub>i</sub> ~~it was t<sub>i</sub>~~

Our aim is to show that examples like (1) can not in general be explained by positing structures like those in (4), and must instead be explained by supposing that in a structure like (3) the island violation is somehow “repaired” by the operation of ellipsis (e.g. Fox and Lasnik 2003, Merchant 2001). Our strategy will be to demonstrate that it is possible to detect the presence of material that is predicted to be absent according to the short source approaches in (4). Specifically, we will show that in cases analogous to (1) it is possible to detect Condition C effects in the stripped clause that are caused by the matrix subject pronoun 'she', which, note, is present in (3) but not in (4).

Formal large-scale judgement studies using Amazon Mechanical Turk have confirmed both the lack of island effects in cases like (1) ( $n=55$ ) and the crucial contrast in (7) that we rely on in our argument below ( $n=40$ ).

**Condition C and stripping:** As a first step we must establish certain background facts concerning the interaction of Condition C with stripping. The starting point is the contrast between (5a) and (5b).

(5a) A: She<sub>1</sub> said the manager assigned the job to Bill.

B: \*No, to Mary<sub>1</sub>.

(5b) A: Mary<sub>1</sub> said the manager assigned the job to Bill.

B: No, to her<sub>1</sub>.

The indicated co-reference is acceptable in (5b) but not (5a), as would be expected if these fragment answers consisted of a complete unpronounced copy of the preceding sentence and this structure were subject to Condition C. This analysis is also supported by the improved acceptability of (5c) over (5a), where the pronoun is embedded inside the subject.

(5c) A: Her<sub>1</sub> friends said the manager assigned the job to Bill.

B: No, to Mary<sub>1</sub>.

We will therefore assume that the unacceptability of (5a) is due to a Condition C effect inside a full-fledged ellipsis site, as shown in (6):

(6) ... [to Mary<sub>1</sub>]<sub>i</sub> ~~she<sub>1</sub> said the manager assigned the job t<sub>i</sub>~~

(Note that vehicle change does not seem to be applicable in (5a); Hunter and Yoshida (forthcoming) argue that the crucial distinguishing feature is that the relevant R-expression, 'Mary', is part of the fronted remnant in (5a), and that this obviates the possibility of vehicle

change applying to this R-expression inside the ellipsis site.)

**Using Condition C to diagnose the cause of island insensitivity:** We have used the manipulation of Condition C effects to argue that the fragment answers in (5) must have complete elided copies of their antecedent sentences; without this assumption, there would be no way to explain the contrast between (5a) and (5b)/(5c). The question now is whether the same conclusion can be reached in crucial examples like (1) where such a complete copy would incorporate a movement step that crosses an island boundary. The fact that the crucial contrast pattern from (4) carries over to (7) suggests that the answer is yes.

- (7a) A: She<sub>1</sub> likes the manager who assigned the job to Bill.  
B: \*No, to Mary<sub>1</sub>.
- (7b) A: Mary<sub>1</sub> likes the manager who assigned the job to Bill.  
B: No, to her<sub>1</sub>.
- (7c) A: Her<sub>1</sub> friends like the manager who assigned the job to Bill.  
B: No, to Mary<sub>1</sub>.

In the same way that the pattern in (5) led us to assume the full structure shown in (6) for (5a), the analogous pattern in (7) leads us to assume the full structure shown in (8) for (7a). Note that the alternatives in (9) would not provide any explanation for contrast in (7), because they do not contain the matrix subject 'she' which acts as the crucial binder in (7a).

- (8) ... [to Mary<sub>1</sub>]<sub>i</sub> she<sub>i</sub> likes the manager [who assigned the job t<sub>i</sub>] (cf. (3))  
(9a) ... [to Mary<sub>1</sub>]<sub>i</sub> the manager assigned the job t<sub>i</sub> (cf. (4a))  
(9b) ... [to Mary<sub>1</sub>]<sub>i</sub> it was t<sub>i</sub> (cf. (4b))

While the smaller alternatives in (9) provide a clear account of the absence of island effects in (7), they cannot provide any account of the *difference* between (7a) and (7b)/(7c). This difference forces us to adopt the full structure shown in (8), and leads to the conclusion that clausal ellipsis somehow “repairs” island violations, i.e. island violations cause unacceptability only when they are not in the scope of a clausal ellipsis operation.

**A potential objection:** There is arguably something odd about using the *unacceptability* of (7a) to argue for *island repair* in the acceptable (7b) and (7c). We have direct evidence for the presence of the matrix subject 'she' in the ellipsis site only in the unacceptable (7a), where the Condition C effect is detected. We have suggested that this is reason enough to conclude that the matrix clause, and therefore also the island structure, is also present in (7b) and (7c), but one might attempt to deny this step of the reasoning by hypothesizing that while (7a) has the elided structure shown in (8), (7b) and (7c) have smaller elided structures along the lines of (9). This eliminates the need to appeal to island repair, but leads to other complications.

Specifically, it becomes unclear how this approach should account for the Condition C effect in (5), where there is no island structure: should we take (5b) and (5c) to have the full two-clause structure in the ellipsis site (which is harmless, because it has no island) on the logic that this matches the necessary two-clause structure of (5a), or should we take (5b) and (5c) to have only the shorter, one-clause structures on analogy with (7b) and (7c)? In other words, this approach needs to posit a full two-clause ellipsis site when this would create a Condition C violation (i.e. (7a)), and needs to posit a shorter ellipsis site when the full two-clause alternative would create an island violation *but not* a Condition C violation (i.e. (7b) and (7c)), but has no motivated analysis in other situations (i.e. (5)). We adopt instead the simpler and more uniform alternative, according to which all ellipsis sites contain the complete structure of the antecedent, and movement across island boundaries is grammatical when in the scope of clausal ellipsis.

**References** Barros 2012. CLS 48 proceedings. Depiante 2000. PhD thesis, U. Conn. Erteschik-Shir 1973. PhD thesis, MIT. Fox and Lasnik 2003. LI 34:143-154. Hunter and Yoshida forthcoming. LI 47. Merchant 2001. OUP. Merchant 2004. L&P 27:661-738. Nakao 2009. PhD thesis, U. Maryland.