

CHAPTER 4

Neither fragments nor ellipsis*

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Jason Merchant (2004, and Chap. 3, this volume) proposes to account for all speech acts performed with “fragments,” whether in discourse-initial position or otherwise, by appealing to syntactic ellipsis. Though his proposal is insightful, I offer empirical and methodological considerations against it. Empirical problems include: (a) His alleged “elliptical sentences” do not embed the way they should; (b) in some cases where Merchant requires fronting to take place, it is blocked – either by an island (e.g., in English) or because nonsubject fronting is not allowed in the language in question (e.g., in Malagasy); and (c) his “limited ellipsis” strategy, allowing *do it* and *this is* _ to be licensed in discourse-initial position, is not general enough. The methodological problem is that, his protests to the contrary, Merchant’s view multiplies hidden structure without necessity.

1. Introduction

It appears that speakers can produce ordinary words and lexically headed phrases and thereby perform speech acts. What’s more, it appears that they can do so when no appropriate linguistic antecedent is in place. For instance, to introduce some at-tested examples, Benigno got into a taxi and said *To Segovia. To the jail.*¹ With these discourse-initial words, he thereby ordered the driver to take him to Segovia. Or again, a theorist was discussing whether humans in general suffer from a recently noticed cognitive deficit. Dirk leaned over to a friend and whispered, *Just him.* Dirk here joked that it is just the theorist himself who suffers from the deficit in question. Dirk seemingly got this across with a mere phrase, however, not with a full sentence; and Dirk was not replying to an interrogative, nor to any other linguistic expression that one would usually think of as licensing *Just him.* In yet another example, a father was worried that his daughter was going to spill her chocolate milk. The glass was very full, and she was quite young, and prone to accidents. He said, or appeared to say, *Both hands.* The father thereby instructed his daughter to use both hands, using not a sentence but a mere phrase. As with the second example, there was talk going on prior to this utterance, so in one sense there was prior discourse; but there was not an appropriate linguistic trigger for *Both hands.* So, in that sense, we seemingly have what I will call a “linguistically discourse-initial” usage of a mere phrase in a speech act.

Some theorists have rejected these appearances. In particular, some have contended that even linguistically discourse-initial examples are really cases of syntactic ellipsis of a familiar sort. This is precisely the view of Jason Merchant (2004, and Chap. 3, this volume). It is Merchant's account of linguistically discourse-initial cases of (what appear to be) nonsentential speech acts that will be my focus here.

The game plan is as follows. I will quickly rehearse Merchant's clever and insightful proposal, and will also explain its very significant advantages compared to previous attempts to reject the appearances by appeal to syntactic ellipsis. I explain both his general account (for cases in which there is a linguistic antecedent of some kind), and his more specific suggestion for the kinds of case that have been my own focus. My aim here is threefold. First, I want to make clear why (to my mind anyway) Merchant's is the most sophisticated attempt so far to deal syntactically with the phenomenon at issue. Fairness demands as much. Second, though Merchant's own discussion is admirably clear, it is directed at professional linguists. Given the multidisciplinary audience of this volume, I hope to present his proposal in a way that philosophers and others can readily understand. Third, I fear that some of the seeming advantages vis-à-vis cases that do have linguistic antecedents (e.g., the answer in a question-answer pair) don't ultimately hold up, once all the facts about discourse-initial cases are on the table. That is, some familiar objections to ellipsis accounts that seem to have been definitively overcome by Merchant really are not. So, it's important to rehearse those familiar objections, and Merchant's treatment of them. Having explained the various facets of Merchant's view, I provide empirical and methodological considerations against it. I conclude that the appearances noted earlier cannot be set aside by appeal to syntactic ellipsis. More than that, not only is there not ellipsis going on, there aren't genuinely "fragments" at play either (hence the title of the chapter). Instead, precisely as the appearances suggest, people are using plain old words and phrases, rather than "fragments" of anything, to perform speech acts.

Before moving forward, I should issue some caveats. To begin with, I am not defending the idea that syntactic ellipsis never happens between sentences. I do not do so because both Morgan (1973, 1989) and Merchant (2004, and Chap. 3, this volume) provide examples that seem, at present, to call for a syntactic account. My burden is merely to argue that syntactic ellipsis is not the whole story; I'm happy for it to be part of the story. I should also stress that the present chapter is almost entirely negative. I present and criticize a view, but I don't here propose an alternative account. Nor do I here consider the important consequences of rejecting, as a general account, a syntactic ellipsis story – for linguistic theory, for cognitive science more broadly, or even for philosophy of language/mind. Those interested in my positive view and its implications should consult my *Words and Thoughts* (2006). (I also discuss syntactic ellipsis accounts far more thoroughly there.)

2. Merchant's proposal and its advantages

Merchant's innovative account can be divided into two facets. There is a part that is needed to handle "fragments" of all kinds, whether in linguistically discourse-initial position or not. This part essentially extends and revises Merchant's (2001) theory of sluicing from within-sentence cases to between-sentence cases. The second facet is specifically introduced to account for "fragments," as he calls them, that occur without an antecedent. I will explain these two facets in turn, moving then to the advantages of Merchant's story. A warning, however, before I proceed: What follows is a brief sketch of Merchant's empirically and theoretically rich view. Given the purpose of this section, details are omitted. Maybe more importantly, trees are introduced that include elements that are no longer the "cutting edge" in theoretical syntax. At the same time, certain quite new posits are sometimes included, resulting in trees that are hybrids of various frameworks. This is inelegant, but the aim is to render the story more accessible to those not specializing in syntax.

2.1 The [E] feature and movement

Merchant's account introduces a morphosyntactic feature that "serves as the locus of all the relevant properties that distinguish the elliptical structure from its non-elliptical counterpart" (2004:670). He calls it the [E] feature. Let me briefly review its phonology, syntax, and semantics. Consider (1):

- (1) Jose lives in Canada, and we know why

On Merchant's story, what appears "below the surface" in such a construction is:

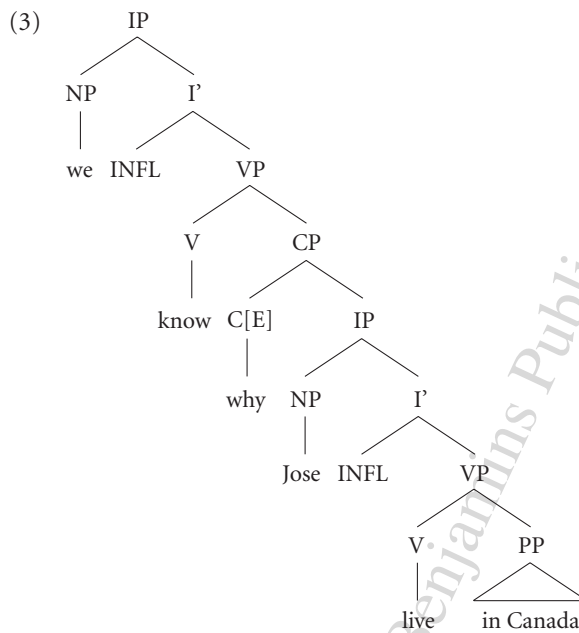
- (2) Jose lives in Canada, and we know why [E]_[IP Jose lives in Canada]

The [E] feature tells the phonological component not to parse its complement. (This rule is easy enough to state. How to implement it in a parsing and production system is another matter. But I put that aside.) In the present example, the presence of the [E] feature as the sister to the embedded IP tells the phonological component not to pronounce this embedded sentence at all. So, what we hear is not the whole sentence *We know why Jose lives in Canada*, but only what's *not* within the scope of [E], namely, *we know why*.

Turning to syntax, there is variation across languages with respect to where [E] can appear. For instance, in English, the feature [E] can take a VP as its complement, as in *Jose lives in Canada but we don't [E]_[VP live in Canada]*; in German, [E] cannot so appear. (There are issues in syntactic theory about what gives rise to such variation. Happily, such details needn't detain us.) What will prove especially important about its syntax for our purposes is that [E] appears on a node in a tree, and operates on its sister node. Equally crucial is that the licensing condition for [E] is *not* that the precise syntactic material that follows it should appear in prior discourse. Instead, [E] is licensed when the right sort of "similar content" is present in prior discourse. This is

what allows for the well-formedness of sentences like *John likes his own dog and Mary too*: The omitted syntactic material, viz. *likes her own dog*, is not in fact present in the prior clause, but a similar content is (more on this later).

Taking (1) as our example once again, the syntactic tree for the second conjunct, *we know why*, would thus be something like (3):



We hear only *we know why* because [E] applies to its sister, the IP node to its right. And this is licit because the content JOSE LIVES IN CANADA is present. (Identical contents are a subcase of “similar” ones.)

That [E] always operates on its sister node leaves one with an immediate problem: How is ellipsis of a nonconstituent to be accounted for? Consider, for example, what material would have to be omitted from a complete source sentence to account for the following attested case. Meera is putting jam on her toast. As she scoops out the jam, she says, *Chunks of strawberries*. It would seem that the source sentence would be something like *This jam contains chunks of strawberries*. But *This jam contains*, the part elided, cannot be the sister of [E], because *This jam contains* is not even a constituent. Nor is this problem merely a feature of the example *This jam contains chunks of strawberries*. A similar problem arises fairly generally: Typically we need to elide a nonconstituent to arrive at what was actually pronounced. Thus take *London* as an answer to *Where is Jim going to?* The omitted material would seemingly be *Jim is going to*, patently not a constituent. The heart of the difficulty, of course, is that when one retains a constituent from a complete sentence, as in ellipsis, what’s taken away is not, as a general rule, itself a constituent: Prune a tree to leave a single node, and what’s re-

moved won't, even typically, be a constituent. But then how can Merchant's [E] apply in the general case?

One might take refuge in the idea that there is [E]-style ellipsis, for when a constituent is elided, and then other kinds of ellipsis. For instance, there are familiar apparent exceptions to constituent-only deletion, like *John loves hot salty beans and Mary corn*, where the omitted element seems to be the nonconstituent *loves hot salty*. But the familiar exceptions are limited in scope. In contrast, allowing rules to operate on the collection of nodes that would be required to derive *Chunks of strawberries* from *This jam contains chunks of strawberries*, and related cases, would leave us with no constraints at all on what things can be the targets of syntactic processes. In short, the "only constituents" generalization might admit of a few exceptions; but it's worth saving what we can.

Being well aware of this problem, Merchant proposes an ingenious solution: When we seem to have nonconstituent deletion, what is really going on is movement of the pronounced material to the front of the sentence, with [E] operating on the node out of which that material was moved. Taking the *London* example again, the idea is that the real source sentence is:

- (4) $London_1$ [E]_[IP Jim is going to t₁]

Notice how nicely this works. [E] is licensed because the question *Where is Jim going to?* affords the right sort of content. [E] applies to a constituent, its sister. And the only part predicted to be pronounced is *London*.

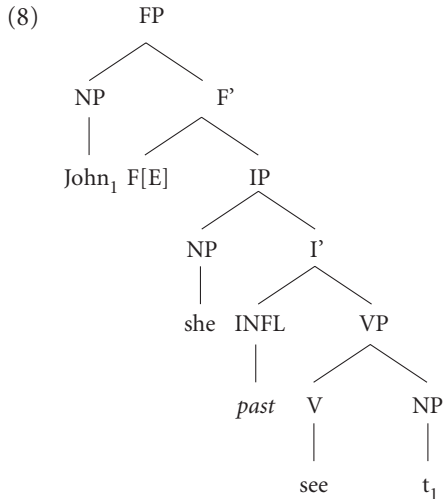
Let's take a second example of movement-then-deletion, and fill in some extra details. Merchant notes that (5) and (6) constitute a perfectly fine discourse:

- (5) Who did she see?
 (6) John

Even such a non-discourse-initial example seems problematic, however, because it seems like the abbreviated answer (6) derives from the full sentence (7), with the omitted material being *She saw*:

- (7) She saw John

The problem is that *She saw* is patently not a syntactic constituent of (7). Merchant's suggestion, applied to this example, is that the source sentence for the answer *John* is actually (8), with his [E] feature taking the entire embedded sentence as its complement, and *John* having moved into focus position:



(A word about notation: “FP” is FocusP. FP is a structure that sits above an ordinary sentence, and that creates a spot into which a focused item can move. For the details, see Rizzi 1997.) Given that *John* has moved out of the structure to which the [E] feature applies, we hear that word and nothing else. Given that the thing omitted is an IP, however, we do not have deletion applying to a nonconstituent.

I have rehearsed, albeit briefly, the phonology and syntax of [E]. I’ve also introduced Merchant’s suggestion that movement comes into play when we have (seeming) cases of nonconstituent ellipsis. I turn now to the semantics of [E]. Here, things are a bit complicated. In VP ellipsis, [E] stands for a function from a propositional function to a propositional function. In sluicing, [E] stands for a function from a proposition to a proposition. (That is, at the level of extension, [E] stands for something of Montagovian type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, \langle e, t \rangle\rangle$ in VP ellipsis, and something of type $\langle t, t \rangle$ in sluicing.) Taking sluicing as our example, this function works as follows. If the input proposition is appropriately related to the content of the linguistic antecedent, the function in question outputs the input proposition. Continuing with example (1), for instance, if the proposition input to the denotation of [E] is JOSE LIVES IN CANADA, then the function in question outputs this very proposition. That’s because this proposition is appropriately related to the content of the antecedent sentence, *Jose lives in Canada*. In particular, the two contents are identical; and, as noted earlier, that’s a subcase of “appropriately related.” Having been output, this content is then passed up the tree, ultimately serving as the argument for WE KNOW WHY. Crucially, the function denoted by [E] does not always output the very proposition input. It does so only when the input is appropriately related to the antecedent sentence. For example, if in (1) the argument to the function denoted by [E] had been FISH SWIM, then the function would fail to provide an output. That input would make the whole derivation of the semantic content crash. Thus does the “appropriately related” constraint on [E]’s de-

notation explain why sentence (1) cannot mean JOSE LIVES IN CANADA AND WE KNOW WHY FISH SWIM.

2.2 The limited ellipsis strategy

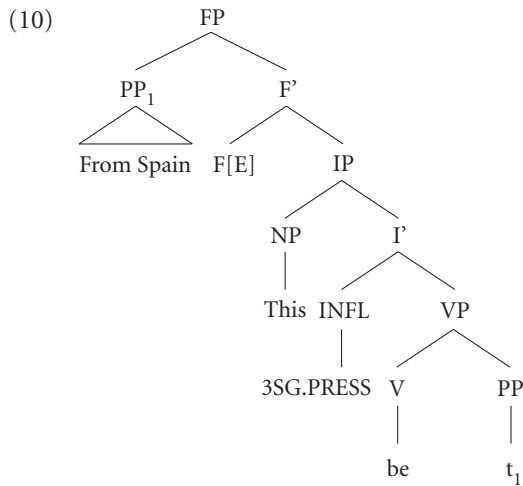
I said that Merchant's story has two facets. Having just explained the first, viz. the application of [E], sometimes preceded by movement, I turn to the second facet. As noted, the mechanism about to be introduced is specifically designed to allow for the appearance of "fragments" in linguistically discourse-initial position. To see why this second facet is required, recall that the function that [E] denotes will only output a proposition if the argument is appropriately related to the proposition expressed by the linguistic antecedent – which seemingly requires that there *be* one. To handle this kind of case, Merchant offers another astute suggestion. He says, in effect, that there are two exceptions to his generalization about what the content of the input proposition must be appropriately related to. First, when [E] appears as sister to the verb phrase [_{VP} *do it*], [E] can output a propositional function as long as the linguistic or nonlinguistic context resolves what *it* refers to. Second, when [E] appears as sister to a sentential constituent that consists of (a) a demonstrative or expletive subject and (b) the copula, then [E] can output a proposition if a referent for the subject is salient and the "existence predicate" is manifest. (Let's not pause to consider what the latter would amount to.) Merchant writes:

In short, I'm proposing a kind of "limited ellipsis" analysis, one in which a demonstrative (such as *this/that* or a pronoun in a demonstrative use) or expletive subject and the copula are elided – given the appropriate discourse context, which will be almost any context where the speaker can make a deictic gesture, and where the existence predicate can be taken for granted. (2004:725)

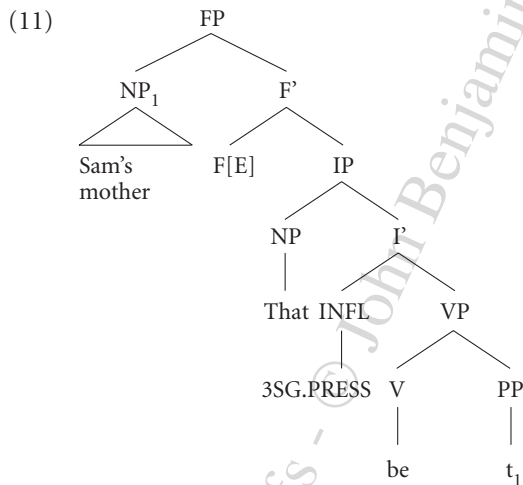
It may help to illustrate both kinds of case. So, suppose that two people look into a room, and see a horrible mess on the floor. Alison says, *Lauren*. Alison here gets across that Lauren did it, even though there is no linguistic antecedent. Merchant's story, applied to this case, is that Alison really produced (9):

(9) [_{IP} Lauren [[E][_{VP} did it]]]

The [E] feature is licensed here, despite the lack of a linguistic antecedent, precisely because an awful mess is a very salient thing indeed – enough so that the context determines that *it* refers to the mess. That's how the verb phrase [_{VP} *do it*] works. Here are two examples of full (embedded) sentences being omitted. Suppose Juhani holds up a letter and says *From Spain*, thereby asserting of the letter that it is from Spain. Merchant will claim that what Juhani actually produced is not the bare phrase [_{PP} *from Spain*], but rather the sentence in (10) – a sentence that has been subject not just to ellipsis but to movement (viz., focus fronting) as well:



To give another example, if Juhani points at a woman and says *Sam's mother*, thereby asserting of the woman that she is Sam's mother, Merchant's view would have it that Juhani produced the sentence (11):



I should address, on Merchant's behalf, a natural objection to this means of dealing with the lack of a linguistic antecedent. Syntactic ellipsis is something that happens within the language faculty. It isn't a matter of the agent as a whole "guesstimating" what sentence the speaker had in mind. Rather, as one used to say, it's a matter of specifically linguistic *competence*. But, goes the objection, Merchant seems precisely to be letting nonlinguistic context, real-world facts, feed syntactic ellipsis. There is, however, a ready reply to this imagined worry. On Merchant's (2004) view there are only two exceptional cases. So, when the language faculty encounters syntactic ellipsis without an appropriate linguistic antecedent, there are only two possibilities for what

must be filled in: [_{VP} *do it*] or [_{IP} *this/that* [_I *is t*]]. Picking between these may indeed require appeal to the extralinguistic environment; but disambiguation, which is essentially what would be going on here, has never previously been thought to threaten the autonomy of the language faculty. What's more, it's part of the proposal that these unpronounced structures will only be employed when appropriate referents for their indexicals are salient. And, here again, this kind of assignment of reference to indexicals is something that everyone must grant to be linguistically tractable, even in linguistically discourse-initial situation – because we find it in sentential speech. (See King & Stanley 2005 and Stanley 2000 for related points.)

In short, we have one exception in a VP ellipsis construction, and one in a sluicing-type clausal deletion: The argument to [E]'s content in these two exceptional circumstances does not need to be appropriately related to a propositional content expressed by a prior *linguistic* item.

2.3 Advantages

Some advantages of Merchant's proposal are already clear. Unlike just about every previous attempt to treat between-sentence "fragments" as syntactic ellipsis, Merchant can handle cases that seem to involve nonconstituent deletion. That's the role of movement. What's more, as he notes, appeal to movement explains some otherwise quite puzzling "anticonnectivity" effects. These are cases in which the word/phrase used in isolation behaves differently than it does in the seeming source sentence.

Here is a first example. Notice that certain items that have both negative and "free-choice" readings cannot occur unembedded with their negative reading in linguistically discourse-initial position – even when they can so occur in a supposed source sentence. Thus if the issue of what Max will choose not to read is in the air, I cannot assert, with *anything*, that *Max will choose not to read anything*. I cannot do this even if the hearer could use the context to infer that this was meant: Regardless, *anything* cannot be used in its negative sense here. Even in such a discussion, *anything* could only be used to mean that Max will just randomly pick, among the options, which book will go unread. The question is: Why is the former interpretation not available?

There's a simple answer on the story according to which subsentence use is genuine, and the appearances reflect the reality: *Anything* is occurring in isolation, unembedded; hence it appears without a negative polarity item as a licenser; so, it can only be read as "free choice," that is, as "whatever." In short, because there is no licenser if subsentential speech is genuine, *anything* simply can't be read negatively in the situation described. Apparently, however, there is no answer forthcoming on the ellipsis account, since the sentence *Max will choose not to read anything* is fine when read negatively (indeed, when read in that way, the sentence sounds better); and this could serve as a source sentence. Why, given this, can't one simply elide all the words but the last, thereby yielding the negative existential reading? This is the (first) puzzle of anticonnectivity.

Merchant's move-then-delete account affords an elegant solution. To get *anything* on its own, it must first be fronted. Otherwise deletion would have to apply to the nonconstituent *Max will choose not to read* __. Thus the source sentence is not *Max will choose not to read anything* but rather (12). However, in sentence (12), with *anything* fronted, we only find the free-choice reading. The negative existential reading is not available.

(12) Anything, Max will choose not to read

So, what at first looks like a problem for ellipsis accounts, turns out to be evidence in favor of Merchant's story: Such anticonnectivity is what we should find.

Here is a second example. The case assignment one finds on subsentences is often different from what appears on the corresponding item within sentences. Thus in reply to the question, *Who likes Elvis best?*, the sentential answer is *I like Elvis best*. But if the question hasn't been explicitly asked, though it's clear that it's at issue, the "fragment" answer is *Me!* not *I!* Or again, Korean has both case-marked noun forms and caseless forms, each apparently occurring unembedded.² Morgan (1989) notes that when embedded in a sentence, the caseless NPs are ill formed – hence they presumably cannot appear in the supposedly sentential "source" from which a fragment is derived. Yet those forms can be used on their own, to perform speech acts. These examples initially suggest that (syntactic) ellipsis is not going on. Otherwise, these items would carry the case that they do in the source sentence. Instead, the words and phrases are appearing unembedded. Thus, again, anticonnectivity effects pose a problem. As before, however, Merchant's view elegantly explains why case markings differ in certain fragments. It's because fronted elements exhibit different case, and on his view the things "left over" have been fronted.

The foregoing advantages derive from the movement aspect of Merchant's view. Consider now what the licensing conditions on [E] account for. One of the most important objections facing syntactic ellipsis accounts is that bare phrases can occur as speech acts *without a linguistic antecedent*. Yet, from the earliest treatments of ellipsis in generative grammar, theorists have insisted on "the recoverability of deletion." That is, whatever the speaker omits via ellipsis must be recoverable by the hearer. This, in turn, seemed to require that the right kind of linguistic material be present – that, it seemed, was precisely what permitted the recovery of the elided structure. Some even urged that *identical* linguistic material must be present if ellipsis is to be licit. For, short of that, it would not be possible to recover precisely the material deleted. (See Sag 1976 and Barton 1990 for discussion.) All of this suggests very strongly indeed that, whatever is going on when people start a discourse with a word or phrase, it cannot be syntactic ellipsis. Merchant improves the situation for the syntactic ellipsis theorist on two fronts. First, he suggests, on independent grounds, that there need not be the exact same syntactic material in prior discourse. Instead, similar content can do the trick. Second, as explained, he introduces two kinds of ellipsis constructions that don't need even that kind of licenser: [_{VP} *do it*] and [_{IP} *this/that* [_I *is t*]].

Consider now two additional advantages. First, as with syntactic ellipsis stories generally, because the “fragments” derive from full sentences, the view easily handles certain familiar “connectivity effects”: that the case markings on subsentences frequently mirror those on sentence constituents; that we find binding, and binding violations, of kinds that also appear in sentences; and so on. These parallels are easily explained if appearance seemingly in isolation is really just a subcase of appearance in a sentence. (See Morgan 1973, 1989 and Ludlow 2005 for related points.) Second, Merchant notes a series of otherwise very curious syntactic island effects that are automatically explained if fronting-then-deletion is indeed taking place. Finally, Merchant contends that his account is more conservative and simpler, on the grounds that it doesn’t necessitate “a revision of the systems of form-meaning mappings” (2004:663), nor does it require enriching “the pragmatic interpretive component” (2004:717). Since on his view hearers actually recover complete sentences when they (appear to) encounter mere words and phrases, the usual semantic rules that assign propositions to sentences apply here as well. Thus no extra pragmatic processing is required. And, insofar as the ellipsis that goes on is independently attested, there are no additional changes to the grammar either.

I end this section with what may be the most important, yet seldom noticed, advantage of Merchant’s account. Any syntactic ellipsis account of the appearances must meet what I call the “Not-Just-Recasting” constraint. This is the requirement that what the theorist means by “syntactic ellipsis” is incompatible with a genuine word or phrase being used to perform a speech act. That is, the constraint is that the appeal to “ellipsis” not be just a soothing deployment of this *word*, while essentially restating the appearances with which I began. Merchant’s story, unlike some others, really does meet this vital constraint: If he is right about linguistically discourse-initial cases, then nonsentential accounts are plain wrong.

3. Empirical objections

Those who wish to resist the appearances with which I began, by appeal to syntactic ellipsis, have faced an uphill battle. Merchant makes important strides forward. The familiar worries about syntactic ellipsis without a linguistic antecedent can be met, says Merchant, if we simultaneously: (a) lessen the restrictions on what counts as an acceptable antecedent, to something about content rather than about form (a lessening that he argues is independently motivated) and (b) posit a “limited ellipsis” account for linguistically discourse-initial cases. He argues further that some data that are troublesome on familiar syntactic ellipsis accounts – licensing of negative polarity items, deviant case assignment, apparent omission of nonconstituents, and so on – can be dealt with if we recognize that deletion sometimes occurs only after movement to focus position has taken place. Despite these tactical successes, I think the battle to treat all (speech act realizing) “fragments” as elliptical is ultimately lost. (More specifically, I remain especially unconvinced by his treatment of linguistically

discourse-initial cases – I remain open to the idea that he is right about direct answers to questions, for instance.) In fact, I think there are empirical problems with each of the key features of Merchant’s account: the [E] feature, movement when one seemingly has nonconstituent deletion, and the “limited ellipsis” gambit. (I will take them in turn.) In addition, the alleged advantage of simplicity is illusory.

3.1 An empirical problem about [E]

The central interest of Merchant’s account for my purposes is his attempt to extend his analysis to utterances in linguistically discourse-initial position. That’s how he attempts to explain away the appearances with which I began. Nevertheless, my discussion will extend beyond those difficulties with his proposal that arise specifically for the discourse-initial subcases. In particular, the next few objections apply to Merchant’s overarching account of ellipsis, wherever it is applied.

Beginning with [E], the fundamental problem that I want to raise has to do with its distribution. On Merchant’s view, as on ellipsis accounts generally, the same sound can correspond here to a word or lexically headed phrase, there to a sentence. There is the phrase [_{NP} *Several men from Segovia*], but there is also the same-sounding sentence [_{IP} [_{NP} *Several men from Segovia*][E][_{I'} *did it*]]. Of course this rampant ambiguity of sound patterns might itself strike one as an unhappy feature of the view. But let’s put that aside. What I want to focus on is a prediction that follows from the postulation of elliptical sentences that sound just like words/phrases: They ought to embed where sentences, elliptical or otherwise, can. That’s because, on this proposal, the posited items just *are* (elliptical) sentences. In this regard, notice the ill-formedness of (13) and (14) as compared to the perfectly grammatical (15) and (16):

- (13) *If there is graffiti on the wall, then several men from Segovia
- (14) *If several men from Segovia, then the job will be poorly done
- (15) If there is graffiti on the wall, then several men from Segovia did it
- (16) If several men from Segovia did it, then the job will be poorly done

Merchant and other ellipsis theorists can explain why (13) and (14) are bad on one reading, of course, namely the one where the embedded element is an NP. But they cannot explain why it isn’t good on another, viz. the (supposed) reading on which an elliptical sentence appears.

Another example may help make the point. On Merchant’s view, there is an elliptical sentence of the form [_{IP} [*John*][E][_{VP} *did it*]]. It is pronounced just like the ordinary name *John*, but it is not syntactically a name at all. Given this, here once again is the problem. The counterpart of this sentence without [E], namely [_{IP} [*John*][_{VP} *did it*]], embeds just fine in the context (17). Witness (18).

- (17) I couldn’t eat the worm, but [_{IP} ___]
- (18) I couldn’t eat the worm, but John did it

In contrast, when we substitute the alleged sentence [_{IP} [John][E][_{VP} did it]] in (17), the result is terrible:

(19) *I couldn't eat the worm, but John

The obvious explanation for this is that there really is no "elliptical sentence" [_{IP} [John][E][_{VP} did it]] with feature [E] in it.

To be clear, the point is not that apparent words and phrases can never embed in what look like sentential contexts. To the contrary, there are some cases where just this sort of thing seems to happen. Thus if a garden expert is asked how to eradicate grubs, she could say: *If they cover less than 30% of the lawn, a mild pesticide; if they cover more than that, DDT.* The point, rather, is that what appear to be words and phrases frequently cannot embed even when, on Merchant's syntactic ellipsis account, there is a perfectly appropriate same-sounding sentence that should embed.

Another note, to clarify: It matters that I have picked cases of [_{VP} do it] omission to pose the objection, since in the move-then-slurce cases, Merchant's view will predict the right result at least in English. English sentences that have undergone movement to focus position do not embed easily, so we don't expect the (alleged) elided versions to do so either. For example, *If from France that is, then it's dangerous* is very awkward at best; this alone would account for the unacceptability of *If from France, then it's dangerous* in English. But when movement doesn't happen before deletion, this explanation is not available.³ Speaking of movement, I turn now to another objection.

3.2 An empirical problem about movement

It is crucial for Merchant's view that movement to the left periphery frequently occur in "fragments" – whether in an answer to an explicit question, or in linguistically discourse-initial position. At least in many cases, what moves is what we hear, for Merchant. The problem is that in numerous cases the content asserted can't be accounted for by fronting-then-deletion, because what we hear could not have been so moved.

Consider first an example from English. A teacher has been reading a story to her pupils about how the Pope has a fondness for beer mixed with tomato juice. To test her students' comprehension skills, she asks: *The Pope likes beer and what?* The correct answer could be given as *Tomato juice*. Using just this bare phrase is a perfectly fine way to assert the proposition THE POPE LIKES BEER AND TOMATO JUICE. But consider what the sentential source would have to be for this answer, on Merchant's account:

(20) [_{FP} [_{NP} Tomato juice]₁ [_{F'} [E] [_{IP} [_{NP} The Pope]₁ [_{I'} 3SG.PRES [_{VP} like [_{NP} beer and t₁]]]]]]]

The corresponding nonelliptical version, *Tomato juice the Pope likes beer and*, is patently ungrammatical. So surely (20), which merely adds [E], is ungrammatical too. But then why is it possible to use this phrase to assert this proposition? Or again, suppose according to the story being read that the Pope sleeps on a rock-hard bed. The

question *The Pope sleeps on a hard what in the story?* can receive the answer *Bed*. A proposition is conveyed here without difficulty. But *Bed, the Pope sleeps on a hard in the story*, from which Merchant would derive the fragmentary answer, is nearly word salad. The examples can easily be multiplied.

One might complain about such examples that they aren't genuinely answers to *interrogatives*. What's used, instead, are declaratives with focal stress – echo questions. That's true enough, but it's entirely beside the point. The issue, after all, is not which background conditions allow one to assert THE POPE LIKES BEER AND TOMATO JUICE with *Tomato juice* – interrogatives, echo questions, or something else again – but the mere fact that one can state this proposition at all, with *Tomato juice*. To see this, note that it would be just as problematic for Merchant if, as seems perfectly possible, nonlinguistic context made clear that the teacher wanted to know what the Pope likes with beer, and the mere phrase was apparently used in reply. Merchant could not account for that either.

A similar kind of point arises in languages that don't allow fronting of certain kinds of expressions, no matter where they are to be extracted from. For example, Malagasy permits lexical and phrasal answers to questions: In reply to the Malagasy version of *Who does Rabe respect?*, the answer can be the bare name *Rasoa*. More than that, such answers carry the case marking that one expects. In the example just given, for instance, the name *Rasoa* must carry accusative case. In contrast, the question *Who is respected by Rabe?* can also receive the one-word answer *Rasoa*; but in that circumstance, the name must be marked nominative. These two points are illustrated by (21) and (22):

(21) Lexical/Phrasal Answers in Malagasy, Accusative Required:

Q: *Manaja an'iza Rabe?*
 respect ACC-who Rabe
 'Who does Rabe respect?'

A: *An-dRasoa*
 ACC-Rasoa
 'Rasoa'

A': **Rasoa*
 Rasoa(-NOM)
 'Rasoa'

(22) Lexical/Phrasal Answers in Malagasy, Nominative Required:

Q: *Iza no hajain-dRabe?*
 who FOC respect(-PASSIVE)-Rabe
 'Who is respected by Rabe?'

A: *Rasoa*
 Rasoa(-NOM)
 'Rasoa'

A': **An-dRaso*
 ACC-Raso
 'Raso'

So, in Malagasy words and phrases can occur unembedded, with the speaker thereby performing a speech act. And when they so occur, they even carry the requisite case markings. Merchant, of course, will want to claim that these are cases of ellipsis. More specifically, to avoid nonconstituent deletion, he will want to claim that there is ellipsis after movement. Crucially, however, as Keenan (1976) first observed, Malagasy does not allow nonsubjects to front. While (23a) is fine, (23b) is ungrammatical:

- (23) a. Subject fronting:
Rabe no manaja an-dRaso
 Rabe FOC respect ACC-Raso
- b. Nonsubject fronting:
 **An-dRaso no manaja Rabe*
 ACC-Raso FOC respect Rabe
 'Raso, Rabe respects'

(Note that example (23b) involves focus fronting, the kind of particular interest here. This is merely a special case of the broader generalization that Malagasy does not allow fronting of any nonsubject.) Applying this point to our earlier example, even though the bare name *An-dRaso* is well formed, and can be used in this context to say that Rabe respects Raso, Merchant's view cannot capture this fact – because (21A) cannot be derived, as he would wish, from (23b). The sentential source that Merchant's view requires simply is not generated in Malagasy.⁴ Nor is Malagasy a unique language in this regard.

Merchant (personal communication) has suggested that both the English and the Malagasy cases might be the result of repair effects. The latter is an interesting phenomenon in which the “elliptical version” of a sentence strikes us as more grammatical than the “full” version. For instance, contrast the ill-formed (24) with the more grammatical elliptical version of it, in (25):

- (24) *They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which they want to hire someone who speaks.
- (25) They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which.

(The example is from Merchant 2001:4–5.) My response to this is that repair effects may well appear in highly constrained circumstances; however, one cannot appeal to them whenever an ellipsis account seems to make the wrong predictions – at the risk of making “repair effects” a get-out-of-counterexample-free card. What is needed to really mount a rebuttal to these sorts of cases, then, is a positive reason for thinking that these fall under the constrained set of such “escape hatches” – not just the mere existence of such a class. So far, no such reasons have been provided.

What should we conclude from the foregoing? That syntactic ellipsis never happens between sentences? I myself consider that too strong a conclusion, since there remain many cases where the nonsentential analysis seemingly predicts the wrong result: binding violations, island effects, and so on. (I thus disagree with Casielles, Chap. 5, this volume.) Neither can we merely conclude, however, that there are a few extra wrinkles to be accounted for. That's because, in each case where movement-plus-[E] cannot be the mechanism at work, many (if not all) of the earlier problems facing an ellipsis treatment are reinstated: nonconstituent deletion, anticonnectivity with respect to case, and negative polarity.

3.3 Two empirical problems about limited ellipsis

The next empirical objection is specific to subsentences in linguistically discourse-initial position, rather than to Merchant's move-then-delete approach as a whole. It has to do with generality.

Merchant provides a special exception for linguistically discourse-initial cases in which the elements elided are $[_{VP} \textit{do it}]$ or $[_{IP} \textit{this/that} [_{I'} \textit{is t}]]$: [E] can function without a linguistic antecedent when its complement is either of those, as long as it's clear from context what *it* and *this/that* refer to, and as long as *be* is manifest. But there are a whole host of linguistically discourse-initial examples that do not involve the omission of $[_{VP} \textit{do it}]$ or $[_{IP} [_{NP} \textit{this/that} [_{I'} \textit{is t}]]]$. Recall some of the attested examples with which I began. *To Segovia*, said to the cab driver as his passenger enters the car, did not mean TO SEGOVIA DO IT. Assuming this order even makes sense, that gets the content wrong. Nor, of course, did *To Segovia* mean THIS IS TO SEGOVIA.⁵ That proposition, unlike the former one, seems a coherent enough content – one might point at a bus, and assert with *This is to Segovia* that the bus' destination is Segovia – but, patently, that was not the content of the passenger's speech act. What the passenger conveyed was something like TAKE ME TO SEGOVIA. Hence neither of Merchant's exceptions applies to this example. Here is another. *Two black coffees*, if used discourse initially (in the relevant sense) to order something, cannot be assimilated to either of $[_{VP} \textit{do it}]$ or $[_{IP} [_{NP} \textit{this/that} [_{I'} \textit{is t}]]]$. Similar points hold for *Just him* and *Both hands*: Merchant's two exceptions do not account for these either. Finally, if a driver yells out *Jerk!* to someone who has cut him off, he does not mean, *pace* Merchant, either *Do it jerk* or *Jerk this is*.

A possible response would be to increase the inventory of exceptions: It's not just $[_{VP} \textit{do it}]$ and $[_{IP} [_{NP} \textit{this/that} [_{I'} \textit{is t}]]]$ that can be elided without a linguistic antecedent. For *Both hands*, we could say that that the structure employed was something like (26). For *Two black coffees*, the rough structure would be (27). And *Jerk* would be something like (28):

(26) $[_{FP} [_{NP} \textit{Both hands}]_1 [_{I'} [E] [_{IP} \textit{pro} [_{I'} 2\text{SG.PRES} [_{VP} \textit{use t}_1]]]]]]]$

(27) $[_{FP} [_{NP} \textit{Two black coffees}]_1 [_{I'} [E] [_{IP} \textit{pro} [_{I'} 2\text{SG.PRES} [_{VP} [_{VP} \textit{give}_2 \textit{me}]] [_{VP} [_{V} \textit{t}_2] [_{NP} \textit{t}_1]]]]]]]]]$

- (28) [_{FP} [_{NP} Jerk]₁ [_{F'}[E][_{IP} you [_{I'} 2SG.PRES [_{VP} be t₁]]]]]

Spelling this out informally, the crude idea is that speakers produce, in essence, the sentences *Use both hands*, *Give me two black coffees*, and *You are a jerk* – but without pronouncing certain words. They can do this discourse initially (i.e., in the sense of “without an appropriate linguistic antecedent”) because ellipsis of *use*, *give me*, and *you are* are also licensed exceptionally by nonlinguistic context: like *do it* and *this is*, these contents are “thin enough” to be recoverable from a nonlinguistic source. Less crudely, to ensure that what is elided is a constituent, Merchant will insist that what’s strictly speaking employed are the fronted versions, *Both hands* [E] *use*, *Two black coffees* [E] *give me*, and *Jerk* [E] *you are*. We thus have three further exceptions to the general rule about how [E]’s semantics works.

But this doesn’t really solve the problem. To begin with there are some minor worries. First, the nonelliptical versions of these fronted sentences are grammatically peculiar: *Both hands use*, *Two black coffees give me*, and *Jerk you are* are Yoda-speak, not idiomatic English, whereas *Both hands*, *Two black coffees*, and *Jerk!* are perfectly fine. Second, specifically with respect to (28), there’s the issue of why we get *Jerk!* rather than *A jerk!*, since it’s the latter that must appear in object position of the corresponding sentence. (*You are jerk* is ill formed, as is *Jerk, you are*.)

The larger problem is how ad hoc this quickly becomes. For each new kind of case, we need to introduce another exception. To drive the point home, consider some further attested examples. (I leave it to the reader to find the requisite “sources”):

- (29) [Bob is looking a bit lost, trying to find the office that issues keys. He encounters Walt, who clearly works in the building:]
 Walt: Can I help you?
 Bob: Keys
 Walt: Up this way. Just around the corner to your left.
- (30) [Beto notices that Debbie is missing. He crosses the room to her husband Gord:]
 Beto: Have we lost Debbie?
 Gord: Washroom
- (31) [(From *The Hudsucker Proxy*.) Barnes gets off an elevator, looking for Mr. Musburger’s office. He addresses Al, who is working in the hallway:]
 Barnes: Mr. Musburger’s office?
 Al: [Points]
 Al: Not that way. Through the door

Notice too that the more exceptions we add, the more work the language faculty has to do *on the basis of extralinguistic context*. To see the point, recall the worry about Merchant’s “limited ellipsis” strategy that I set aside earlier: Syntactic ellipsis is a language-internal process, went the objection, hence the language faculty can’t use nonlinguistic context to sort out what’s missing in linguistically discourse-initial cases. I responded on Merchant’s behalf that all the language faculty has to do is choose be-

tween [_{VP} *do it*] versus [_{IP} [_{NP} *this/that*] [_{I'} *is t*]]. But the initial objection returns with real force once the list of exceptions expands. Things start to look progressively less like a grammatical derivation, and progressively more like the agent as a whole assessing, on an all-things-considered basis, whether she should fill in *do it, this is, use, give me, you are*, or something else again. (Nor, *pace* Merchant (2004), will appeal to “scripts” help here. For it’s surely the person, and not her subpersonal syntactic competence, that is able to decide which scripts are actually in play.)

Another strategy for dealing with *Both hands* and the other examples, which would avoid the ad hoc charge, would be to introduce a general rule for when [E] can function without a linguistic antecedent. The rule might go like this. Whenever the context, linguistic or nonlinguistic, supplies enough content, [E] can function in a nonstandard way. In particular, if the proposition input into the function denoted by [E] is appropriately related to one of the contextually salient ones (rather than being related to the proposition encoded by the linguistic antecedent, as in the nonexceptional cases) then [E] outputs the very proposition input. Such a general rule is not ad hoc, at least not in the sense of positing new rules for each new case. But Merchant now faces a dilemma. If it’s the whole agent that is applying this rule, rather than narrow syntax/semantics, then we have arrived at a convoluted anti-ellipsis view. That is, if [E] gets reconceived not as a rule within the language faculty, but rather as a pragmatic constraint on what *we interpreters* may take speakers to be asserting – viz., what they are asserting must be among the propositions that are salient – then the Not-Just-Recasting constraint isn’t met after all. The appearances are accepted, though they are redescribed using obfuscating language. That horn of the dilemma is clearly unacceptable. Suppose, then, that it is the language faculty that does the job of checking whether the content input is among the salient propositions. Yet it cannot have access to *all* the propositions that are salient in the context: Only the agent as a whole has access to that. Nor would the language faculty even have access to a significant subset of them, because that’s just not something that narrow syntax/semantics works on. Suppose then that the language faculty deploys just one, or maybe two or three, propositions that are salient – just as happens in the ordinary case, except that here the proposition comes from nonlinguistic context. But if that’s right, the operation of reconstructing a sentence in order to interpret the speaker becomes effectively otiose. In order for the entry condition for applying [E] to be met, something else must have pretty much preselected the asserted proposition from among all those that are salient. But then there’s (almost) no point in constructing an elliptical sentence and then interpreting it, to arrive back at a proposition that has antecedently been identified. In summary, either Merchant’s view, though baroquely reworded in terms of [E], collapses into an anti-ellipsis account, or it’s an ellipsis account that includes what are essentially otiose formal rules.

Having just stressed the wide variety of contents that can be asserted subsententially, and without a linguistic antecedent, let me introduce another problem facing Merchant. As I’ve noted in the past (Stainton 1998), bare words and phrases do not license elliptical constructions in subsequent discourse as easily as sentences do. For instance, if *The man from Paris* is said when a knock is heard at the door, this cannot

be followed by the elliptical sentence *And Betty is too*. (It can be followed by other fragmentary replies, e.g., *Betty too*. But those don't test in the right way for sentencehood.) In contrast, the complete sentence *The man from Paris is at the door* can be followed by this VP ellipsis construction. I inferred, on the basis of this contrast in licensing properties, that what appeared to be a bare phrase really was one – otherwise it *should* license subsequent VP ellipsis. Now, Merchant (2004:727–729) resists this and related examples by suggesting, in light of his claim that only $[_{VP} do it]$ and $[_{IP} [_{NP} this/that] [_{I'} is t]]$ can be used without a linguistic antecedent, that what *The man from Paris* must be elliptical for is $[_{IP} [_{The\ man\ from\ Paris}]_1 [_{IP} that [_{I'} is t_1]]]$. If that were right, my data would be antecedently accounted for within an ellipsis account, since this latter sentence cannot license *And Betty is too*.

This strategy for resisting my point about licensing fails, however, if Merchant is wrong that only $[_{VP} do it]$ and $[_{IP} this/that [_{I'} is t]]$ can be used without a linguistic antecedent – and I've just argued that he is wrong. To see the point, consider the example in more detail. Suppose, with Merchant, that an elliptical sentence is produced. Suppose, with me and contra Merchant, that what one can assert with nonsentences in linguistically discourse-initial position goes well beyond what $[_{VP} do it]$ and $[_{IP} [_{NP} this/that] [_{I'} is t]]$ can account for. I'll try to show that on these suppositions, ellipsis theorists still don't have an explanation for why *And Betty is too* cannot appear after *The man from Paris*. Let's take this in two steps. First, suppose that *The man from Paris* can be used to assert a richly descriptive proposition, for example, THE MAN FROM PARIS IS AT THE DOOR. To allow precisely this content to be asserted, the elliptical sentence used, employing [E], would need to be (32):

(32) $[_{IP} [The\ man\ from\ Paris] [E] [_{I'} is\ at\ the\ door]]$

However, if that sentence had been used, then the elliptical sentence *And Betty is* $[[E] [at\ the\ door]]$ *too* should be licensed on Merchant's view. That's because the content AT THE DOOR is appropriately related to a propositional function expressed by a part of the linguistic antecedent, viz. the elliptical sentence (32). Thus [E] is predicted to output just this propositional function. So, on this first case, the mystery of why *And Betty is too* isn't licensed remains. Second step. In response, one might insist – implausibly in my view – that *The man from Paris* cannot be used to assert such descriptively rich propositions. Goes the idea, in the spirit of Merchant's "limited ellipsis" strategy, the descriptive material in (32) should be replaced by a deictic. Even supposing this, however, the problem remains. If it's not just $[_{VP} do it]$ and $[_{IP} this/that [_{I'} is t]]$ that can appear without a linguistic trigger, then the thing used could be (33):

(33) $[_{IP} The\ man\ from\ Paris [E] [_{I'} is\ there]]$

But taking (33) to be the sentence used equally leaves it a mystery why *And Betty is too* is not licensed. After all, if there really were such a nondescriptive sentence in prior discourse, even it should license *And Betty is too*. Once again, this is because [E] is predicted to output the propositional function IS THERE, on the grounds that this content is encoded by part of the supposed linguistic antecedent.

The dialectic, in summary, is this: I raised an objection to ellipsis treatments on the basis of licensing facts; Merchant tried to explain away those facts by insisting that there wouldn't be the right kind of *sentential* licenser on the correct ellipsis view, because only [_{VP} *do it*] and [_{IP} *this/that* [_{I'} *is t*]] can be used without a linguistic antecedent; I've responded that once this limitation is given up (which it needs to be, to make the approach more generally applicable), the original objection stands. Indeed, it stands even if one insists that the omitted material consist only in "thin" material such as light verbs and deictics.

Here is the second objection to the "limited ellipsis" strategy. Merchant addresses the problem of subsentences appearing in linguistically discourse-initial situation by noting that VP ellipsis and sluicing can so occur as well. Such sentences can be and are used with only a "pragmatic controller." This is just what Hankamer and Sag (1976) and Sag and Hankamer (1977) pointed out, and a host of other authors have followed suit (e.g., Schachter 1977, 1978; Stanley 2000). Thus, Merchant concludes, it's not true that genuine syntactic ellipsis requires a linguistic antecedent; so, in turn, one shouldn't argue from subsentences occurring on their own to their not being elliptical. Merchant is right about the failings of that specific argument. It is too crude. But there is a more subtle argument that he fails to address. Merchant seems, in the end, to grant that using *He won't* or *I don't know why* in linguistically discourse-initial situations is rather awkward. This contrasts with using these as replies to direct questions (hence not in discourse-initial position); and it contrasts with using nonelliptical expressions, for example, full sentences, in discourse-initial position. Neither of those usages is the least bit awkward. It's true, Merchant seems to allow, that there is a "felt difference" between VP ellipsis and sluicing in linguistically discourse-initial position on the one hand, and full sentences or elliptical sentences with linguistic antecedents on the other. And whether or not Merchant himself concedes the point, it's surely *true* that there is a difference between the former usage and the latter two kinds of case. Taking this as background, compare how apparent words and phrases pattern: Putting aside prescriptive sensibilities, subsentences can occur without a linguistic antecedent as freely as nonelliptical sentences can, and without awkwardness. The question that arises, then, is this: Why is there this notable difference between the comparative awkwardness of VP ellipsis and sluicing in linguistically discourse-initial position, and the comparative naturalness of apparent words and phrases in the same position? Put in terms of examples, Merchant leaves us wondering why there should be any difference at all between a linguistically discourse-initial use of *From Spain* about a salient letter or *Sam's mother* about a salient woman, versus saying *I don't know why* out of the blue, about someone climbing a hill. For, on his view, both are straightforward cases of ellipsis. This is the more subtle argument from facts about usage in discourse-initial position that Merchant fails to address.

4. A methodological objection: “Fragments” and simplicity

So far, I’ve highlighted five empirical problems with the move-then-delete view: the inability of alleged “elliptical sentences” to embed in certain sentential contexts; non-sentence uses even when focus fronting isn’t possible; the insufficient generality of allowing only [_{VP} *do it*] and [_{IP} [_{NP} *this/that*] [_I *is t*]] to be licensed directly by the larger nonlinguistic context; the reappearance of an older objection, about licensing, in light of this; and a difference, not captured by Merchant’s account, between the awkwardness of linguistically discourse-initial sluicing and VP ellipsis, versus the naturalness of linguistically discourse-initial subsentence use. I end my discussion with issues about simplicity.

Merchant suggests that extra machinery is required if we have subsentences being interpreted “directly” (as accepting the appearances requires), rather than via the reconstruction of an elliptical sentence. He thus claims that his ellipsis-based view is simpler and more conservative. This is just not the case. We know that subsentences can be used and understood nonpropositionally: They show up in grocery lists, book titles, and dictionary entries; on street signs, maps, currency, and so on. So, the competence required for assigning a subpropositional semantic content to such items is independently attested. (Merchant grants this, but suggests putting these aside, as another topic (2004:731–732). Say I, that’s not appropriate: Such uses are directly relevant to the present debate precisely because of parsimony issues.) We also know that hearers have the pragmatic ability to go from a semantic content that patently isn’t meant by the speaker, to the proposition that the speaker did mean. This happens in conversational implicatures, indirect speech acts, irony, and the like. And many would argue that it also occurs with various kinds of pragmatic determinants of what is said: precisifying vague words, sense expansion, and so on. (See Carston 2002 for an overview.) So, all of the necessary syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic competences required by those who take the appearances at face value are independently attested. In particular, given word and phrase meanings, the “pragmatic interpretive component” is *antecedently* rich enough to do what’s required to arrive at a proposition asserted. Thus it’s just not true that extra devices need to be introduced on a pragmatics-oriented approach, specifically to handle subsentence use in linguistically discourse-initial position.

It can seem otherwise if one conceives the phenomenon in the wrong terms. This takes me to the title of my chapter. I’ve long maintained that what occurs in the kind of examples at play is not ellipsis – at least not in any sense that would help avoid the appearances. (See Stainton 2005, 2006 for extended discussion.) I would now add that we shouldn’t even think of the cases at issue as fragments. There are two reasons for this.

To begin with, selecting the term *fragment* threatens to beg the question. My trusty *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* defines fragment as: “1. a part broken off; a detached piece. 2. an isolated or incomplete part. 3. the remains of an otherwise lost or destroyed whole... 4. a scrap; a left over piece.” Now, for those who accept the appearances, what are used are words and lexically headed phrases. But words and lexical phrases aren’t detached from a whole, incomplete, remains or leftovers. For instance, the word *jerk* is

patently not a “remnant,” a “leftover piece”; the phrase *To Segovia* isn’t either. The only difference between words and phrases on the one hand, and sentences on the other, is that the latter are headed by things like Tense and Agreement. So, since words/phrases are complete, but “fragments” are not, to think of the things used as “fragments” is ipso facto not to think of them as words/phrases. Thus is the question implicitly begged, by the choice of a label.

The second problem with the term *fragment* is that it suggests that there is one thing, the “fragment,” that is both propositional and (apparently) subsentential. It then seems that those of us who take subsentential speech to be genuine need to introduce something new into the grammar, viz., formatives that are genuine subsentences but that nevertheless express propositions. As Merchant points out, this would “require a revision of the systems of form-meaning mappings” (2004:663). Looked at that way, it does indeed seem more theoretically conservative to maintain, of the one thing, the “fragment,” that it isn’t actually subsentential after all. The problem with this line of reasoning is precisely that it misconceives the alternative way of seeing things. Rather than one thing with two seemingly conflicting properties, those who take subsentence use to be genuine maintain that there are *two* things. On the one hand, there are the subsentences, which are nothing more than our familiar words and phrases, with the standing meaning and syntax thereof. On the other hand, there are fully propositional *speech acts that we perform with those subsentences*. The former aren’t sentential, but they aren’t propositional either – so no new mapping is required. The latter are propositional, yes, but they become so in the usual way: by the interaction of the language faculty with lots of other things. No new grammatical mapping is required – any more than being able to conversationally implicate something about a man’s honesty with Grice’s (34) requires a special form-meaning mapping for this sentence type:

- (34) He likes his colleagues, and he hasn’t been to prison yet

In summary, neither the items deployed nor the actions performed merits the label *fragment*. And neither of them demands new machinery. More than that, it’s really Merchant’s view that introduces new devices: sentences that contain [E], some of which have undergone movement, and that nevertheless do not need linguistic antecedents.

5. Concluding remarks

I’ve just argued that Merchant’s view is not superior as far as simplicity goes. It’s also deficient empirically, both with respect to cases with a linguistic antecedent (*Tomato juice* in response to *The Pope likes beer and what?*) and with respect to linguistically discourse-initial cases (including the three with which I began). I thus conclude that, though a brave and immensely admirable attempt to overcome the uphill battle, Merchant’s proposal to reject the appearances of nonsentential speech acts in

linguistically discourse-initial position, by appeal to movement and syntactic ellipsis, ultimately fails. Ellipsis alone still cannot do the trick.

This conclusion settles the issue of whether the appearances with which I began reflect the reality. They do. Genuinely nonsentential speech acts do occur. It does not settle, however, the larger question of whether syntactic ellipsis ever happens between sentences. (As noted, I myself suspect syntactic ellipsis of that kind does exist.) Still less does it answer what should now become a guiding question in this domain, viz., which account best applies to which subvarieties? This is an issue of great interest. It's also terrifically challenging, both empirically and conceptually. To my mind, it can only be addressed on a case-by-case basis, deploying the evidence and the arguments that continue to come in.

Notes

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1. This example was actually uttered in Spanish: *A Segovia. A la cárcel*. But that complication can be set aside, at least for now.
2. Interestingly, the caseless forms require no linguistic context, though they are also permitted to occur within a discourse context; in contrast, the case-marked forms require overt linguistic context, for example, a question asked. To give an example from Morgan (1989), *nae cha!* ('my car-NO.CASE') can be used by a person on returning to a parking lot, and finding her car stolen. But both *nae cha-ka* ('my car-NOM') and *nae cha-rul* ('my car-ACC') are ill formed in that discourse-initial circumstance.
3. There are languages that are more forgiving about embedding fronted sentences, but that still don't allow embedding of what seem to be bare PPs in sentential positions. Spanish is an example. Thus *Si de María viene, no lo abras* ('If it's from María, don't open it') is quite good, but *Si de María, no lo abras* ('If from María, don't open it') is quite bad. These provide additional problems for Merchant's [E].
4. I am very grateful to Ileana Paul both for the specific Malagasy examples, and for extended discussion of subsentence use in languages with fronting restrictions. By the way, an anonymous referee raised the question of whether these "fragments" might be derived in another way, namely, from Malagasy pseudo-clefts. The answer is (a) that the construction presented here just is the closest Malagasy has to pseudo-clefts and (b) that appeal to clefts would seemingly reintroduce deletion of nonconstituents in any case.
5. It's also worth noting that the [VP *do it*] subcase cannot be applied to languages that lack VP ellipsis. For instance, the attested example *To Segovia* was actually uttered in Spanish. Yet Spanish does not have VP ellipsis – so what's going on in this example couldn't be ellipsis of [VP *do it*].

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