What this work is about

We present new data from Catalan Sign Language (LSC) involving ellipsis phenomena and their interaction with role shift. The data provides:

- New evidence in favor of a QUD treatment of ellipsis;
- A uniform treatment of indexical expressions in attitude reports under role shift.

Role shift in sign languages

Role shift (RS) is a construction commonly used in sign languages to report utterances or thoughts from an agent’s perspective (the attitude holder).

RS licenses indexical shift: in the scope of an attitude verb, 1st and 2nd person pronouns ((ix and ix2) get their reference from the reported context (Quer 2005, Schlenker 2017).

In LSC, other indexicals like the locative ad-verb HERERE tend to shift as well (see (5), (6)).

The interaction of ellipsis and role shift in sign languages

Cecchetto et al. (2015) argue that in Italian Sign Language (LIS), RS has interpretive consequences on the elided clause (C_E) regarding the availability of so-called strict-sloppy readings (Dahm, 1973):

(1) GIANNI, SAY IX3, MARIA KISS. PIERO SAME.

‘Gianni, said that he kissed Maria. Piero, did (say that he/, kissed Maria ), too.

RS: sloppy √ strict

(2) GIANNI, SAY [IX3, MARIA KISS]. PIERO SAME.

‘Gianni, said that he kissed Maria. Piero, did (say that he/, kissed Maria), too.

RS: sloppy √ strict

Cecchetto et al. (2015) justify the sloppy reading in (2) by positing a covert role-shift operator (Schlenker 2017) allowing context shift in the elided VP.

LSC data 1: strict/sloppy readings of IX1

In Catalan Sign Language (LSC) no such alternation is observed: both strict and sloppy readings are available in (3), regardless of RS being involved. Moreover, the C_E can take the matrix VP (a) or the embedded VP (b) as the antecedent (C_A).

(3) a. GIORGIA, SAY IX3, ALEX LIKE I-AX-IX3, JORDI TOO. (video)

No RS: sloppy √ strict

‘Giorgia, said that she likes Alex, like I-AX-IX3, Jordi too.

b. GIORGIA, SAY [IX3, ALEX LIKE I-AX-IX3], JORDI TOO. (video)

RS: sloppy √ strict

‘Giorgia, said that she likes Alex, like I-AX-IX3.

Background contextual information is crucial in predicting the availability of the different readings.

LSC data 2: strict/sloppy readings of HERE

We also tested the behavior of the locative indexical HERERE under RS-ellipsis in LSC. The data shows that, given the appropriate context, HERE can also generate a strict-sloppy distinction:

(5) Context: Marina and Jordi are co-workers in the same enterprise, but in different cities. Marina works in Paris and Jordi in London, and they mainly work online. They separately call the speaker in Barcelona to tell her about their work.

a. MARINA, SAY IX3, WORK HERE LIKE, JORDI TOO. (video)

No RS

‘Marina, said that she, likes to work here[ix3], like, Jordi too.’

b. MARINA, SAY [IX3, WORK HERE LIKE], JORDI TOO. (video)

RS: strict

‘Marina, said that she, likes to work here[ix3], with him, Jordi, (said that he, likes to work here[ix3], with her/too).’

(6) a. MARINA, SAY [IX3, HERE WORK TOGETHER LIKE], JORDI TOO. (video)

RS: strict

‘Marina, said that she, likes to work here[ix3], with him, Jordi, (said that he, likes to work here[ix3], with her/too).’

b. MARINA, SAY [IX3, HERE WORK TOGETHER DISTANCE LIKE], JORDI TOO. (video)

RS: sloppy

‘Marina, said that she, likes to work here[ix3], with him, Jordi, (said that he, likes to work here[ix3], with her/too).’

In (6), HERE can be interpreted as referring to Marina’s location (strict reading) or Jordi’s (sloppy reading).

Ellipsis and the Question Under Discussion

Following a.o. Keshet (2015), Elliott et al. (2016) and Kehler (2016), we argue that ellipsis phenomena are sensitive to the Question Under Discussion, or QUD (Roberts, 2012).

Under that view, discourse is viewed as a hierarchical set of question-answer pairs aimed at sharing statements about “the way things are” (Stalnaker, 1978). Participants in a conversation aim at answering these questions following a defined strategy of inquiry that relies on prosodic, semantic and pragmatic cues.

We follow Kehler (2016) in adopting the following rule for ellipsis licensing (inspired by Roth’s (1992) focus-matching constraint):

(τ) Ellipsis QUD matching condition

Kehler (2016)

τ Als C_A and target clause C_E for which [C_E] ∈ [[C_A]]_ς, QUD\{C_E\}_ς

In words, if the meaning of the antecedent is part of the alternatives that the target clause denotes, then the QUD corresponds to that set of alternatives.

Person features presuppositions are disregarded under ellipsis

In order to explain the lack of differences between 3rd person and role-shifted 1st person reports in (τ), we suggest that our LSC data support the claim that person features are ignored during the computation of ellipsis (Rullmann 2004, Heim 2006, Spadas 2009, Jacobson 2010, Sauerland 2013, Roberts 2020 a.m.o.)

Supporting data can be found in gapping structures in LSC, where person features on agreement verbs like GIVE are uninterpreted in a similar fashion:

(8) MARINA, JORDI/watch, GIVE, MARC, JORDINA, PLAN (give, give, give), (video)

‘Marina gave Jordi a watch and Marc Jordina a plant.’

(LSC, Zorzi 2018:343)

In (ab), the indexical person feature associated with the first person pronoun IX is ignored in C_E allowing readings identical to those available with anaphoric 3rd person pronouns.

Ellipsis targets the Main Point of Utterance

We explain the different readings in (a) in terms of accessible QUDs identified by the addressee.

The QUD is identified on pragmatic grounds by identification of the VP (matrix or embedded) that serves as the Main Point of Utterance (MPU; Simons 2007, 2019), which defines at-issue content.

In (ab), the matrix VP is interpreted as the MPU and, consequently, as the relevant antecedent for ellipsis, whereas in (ab), the embedded VP is considered at-issue.

QUDs for both interpretations will differ accordingly:

(9) a. [C_A (a) ]_ς (‘I.Δεκατέρας said that Alex in w) ]

QUD = the set of possible answers to the question Who did x say that x likes Alex ?

b. [C_E (a) ]_ς (‘I.Δεκατέρας said that Alex in w) ]

QUD = the set of possible answers to Who likes Alex?

To capture the above data, we propose to augment Kehler’s 2016 QUD-matching condition in (τ) with a constraint on MPU sensitivity:

(10) Ellipsis QUD matching condition (revised)

For any antecedent C_A and target clause C_E for which [C_E] ∈ [[C_A]]_ς, QUD\{C_E\}_ς

The interaction of ellipsis with context-shift

The data in (ab) and (6) suggests that ellipsis-induced alternatives in C_E are sensitive to the different types of contexts available in C_E without RS, the utterance context fixes the interpretation of indexicals in C_E whereas RS blocks its availability as a parameter for their interpretation.

In role-shifted structures such as (ab) and (6), the utterance context is not considered at-issue anymore: only the embedded, reported context is, constraining the available referents for both IX and HERERE in C_E.

Being not-at-issue, the denotation of the indexical pronoun in (ab) as the speaker is excluded in order to avoid presupposition failure between first-person morphology and NMMs signaling role-shift (cp. Zucchi 2004).

A similar reasoning applies to (6), where the relevant focus alternatives needed to license ellipsis take into account the respective locations of the antecedent subject Marina and the contrastive remnant of the elided sentence Jordi, but not that of the speaker.

References

Scan the code above in order to access the references ! Comments much welcome, than you david.blunier@unige.ch, giorgia.zorzi88@gmail.com

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