

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).

It is signaled by non-manual markers (NMMs): **body shift** and **eye gaze contact break** with the actual addressee towards the locus associated with the addressee of the reported context (Fig.1).

RS licenses **indexical shift**: in the scope of an attitude verb, **1st and 2nd person pronouns** (*IX1* and *IX2*) get their reference from the reported context (Quer 2005, Schlenker 2017).



Figure 1: RS NMMs. LSC glosses: SAY (left), IX1 (right).

In LSC, other indexicals like the **locative ad-verb HERE** 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 (Dahl, 1973):

- (1) GIANNI_i SAY IX3_j MARIA KISS. PIERO SAME. No RS: sloppy ✓ strict ✓
'Gianni_i said that he_j kissed Maria. Piero_j did **<say that he_{i/j} kissed Maria >**, too.'

(2) GIANNI_i SAY [_{RS}IX1_i MARIA KISS]. PIERO SAME. RS: sloppy ✓, strict ✗
'Gianni_i said that he_j kissed Maria. Piero_j did **<say that he_{*i/j} kissed Maria >**, too.'

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 (4a) or the embedded VP (4b) as the antecedent (C_A).

- (3) a. GIORGIA_i SAY IX3_j ALEX_k LIKE _{i3-AUX-3_k} JORDI TOO. (video) No RS: sloppy ✓ strict ✓
b. GIORGIA_i SAY [_{RS} IX1_i ALEX_k LIKE _{i1-AUX-3_k}], JORDI TOO. (video) RS: sloppy ✓ strict ✓

(4) Giorgia_i said that she_j likes Alex, and
a. Jordi_j **<said that she_j/he_j likes Alex >**, too. (matrix VP)
b. Jordi_j **<likes Alex >**, too. (embedded VP)

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 HERE** 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_i SAY IX3_j WORK HERE LIKE, JORDI TOO. (video) No RS
'Marina_i said that she_j likes to work here_{Barcelona}. Jordi_j **<said that he_j likes to work here_{Barcelona} >**, too.'

(6) a. MARINA_i SAY [_{RS}IX1_i HERE WORK TOGETHER LIKE], JORDI TOO. (video) RS: strict
'Marina_i said that she_j likes to work here_{Paris} with himj. Jordi_j **<said that he_j likes to work here_{Paris} with her_i >**, too.'

b. MARINA_i SAY [_{RS}IX1_i HERE WORK TOGETHER DISTANCE LIKE], JORDI TOO. (video) RS: sloppy
'Marina_i said that she_j likes to work here_{Paris} with himj. Jordi_j **<said that he_j likes to work here_{London} with her_i >**, 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 (2013), 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 Rooth’s (1992) focus-matching constraint):

- (7) **Ellipsis QUD matching condition** (Kehler 2016)
For any antecedent C_A and target clause C_E for which $\llbracket C_A \rrbracket \in \llbracket C_E \rrbracket^F$, QUD= $\llbracket C_E \rrbracket^F$

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 (3), we suggest that our LSC data support the claim that **person features are ignored during the computation of ellipsis** (Rullmann 2004, Heim 2008, Spathas 2009, Jacobson 2012, 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_a JORDI_b WATCH _{3a}GIVE_{3b}, MARC_c JORDINA_d PLANT _{3c}GIVE_{3d}. (VIDEO)
'Marina gave Jordi a watch and Marc Jordina a plant.' (LSC, Zorzi 2018:341)

In (3b), the indexical person feature associated with the first person pronoun *IX1* is ignored in C_E , allowing readings identical to those available with plain, anaphoric 3rd person pronouns.

Ellipsis targets the Main Point of Utterance

We explain the different readings in (4) 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 (4a), the matrix VP is interpreted as the MPU and, consequently, as the relevant antecedent for ellipsis, whereas in (4b), the embedded VP is considered at-issue.

QUDs for both interpretations will differ accordingly:

- (9) a. $\llbracket C_E (4a) \rrbracket^F = \{ \lambda w. \lambda x. x \text{ said } x \text{ likes Alex in } w \}$
QUD = the set of possible answers to the question *Who did x say that x likes Alex ?*
b. $\llbracket C_E (4b) \rrbracket^F = \{ \lambda w. \lambda x. x \text{ likes Alex in } w \}$
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 (7) with a constraint on MPU sensitivity:

- (10) **Ellipsis QUD matching condition (revised)**
For any antecedent C_A and target clause C_E for which $\llbracket C_A \rrbracket \in \llbracket C_E \rrbracket^F$, QUD_{MPU}= $\llbracket C_E \rrbracket^F$

The interaction of ellipsis with context-shift

The data in (3b) and (6) suggests that ellipsis-induced alternatives in C_E are sensitive to the different types of **contexts** available in C_A : 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 (3b) and (6), **the utterance context is not considered at-issue anymore**: only the embedded, reported context is, constraining the available referents for both *IX1* and *HERE* in C_E .

Being not at-issue, the denotation of the indexical pronoun in (3b) 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, thank you!
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