The Syntactic Determination of Ellipsis and Substitution

A widely explored argument for X’-theory consisted of constituency tests for X’ projections. **One**-substitution could correspond only to an N’ (1a) (cf. (1b) in which one cannot be the head N). In various ‘replacement analyses’ one was analyzed as a pronoun, a full noun or as a semi-lexical head (e.g. Jackendoff 1977, Ross 1967, Schütze 2001). This paper discusses shortcomings for such analyses and argues that one-substitution and NP-ellipsis are interdependent. In addition, it introduces cross-linguistic data that support a more complex approach.

(1) a. I met the [Nstudent of physics] from LA and Sue met the [N’one] from NY.
    b. *I met the [N student] of physics and Sue met the [N one] of chemistry.

There are various similarities between one-substitution and NP-ellipsis. For instance, both in one-substitution and in NP-ellipsis, the DP containing one or a nominal gap (ec) can appear both in coordinate and subordinate clauses (2)-(3b). Brazilian Portuguese (BP) allows only an empty category structure (N-gapping), which shares properties with both English cases, e.g. (3a).

(2) I prefer this house, although I liked the old one, too.
(3) a. Eu prefiro esses livros, ainda que eu gostasse daqueles ec também.
    b. I prefer these books, although I liked those ec, too.

There are various arguments against replacement analyses of one-substitution, which place a lexical N one in the position of both N and N’. For instance, one cannot be preceded by a quantifier or a numeral (4), unless an adjective is present (6b). Such analyses also present problems if lexical insertion proceeds through syntactic merge, which would leave unexplained the restriction of one to intermediate (N’) projections in English.

(4) *many ones/*two ones

I argue in favor of an approach that constraints ellipsis syntactically, affecting phonological spell-out (see Lasnik 1999, Merchant 2003 for related approaches). First, adjunction in the nominal domain is taken to apply to a projection of NP (or even higher, to NumP; Ritter 1991, see (5)). Ellipsis is in principle free to apply to NP-constituents that include or exclude any number of NP-adjuncts (e.g. English (1a), Portuguese 0a)). This eliminates the need to target an X’-projection for the application of NP-ellipsis, one-substitution or N-gapping, addressing a problem for Chomsky (1995a, b) if X’-level becomes “invisible” as a syntactic object (see also Collins 2002 and references therein).

(5) [DP [QP [NumP [AP [N (one)]]]]

Further mechanisms are necessary to explain why certain cases of NP-ellipsis are blocked in English. NP-Ellipsis is linked to the functional projection that directly selects the NP, e.g. NumP (Lobeck 1995), and is determined by whether the agreement represented in NumP and higher DP projections can agree locally with lower projections (e.g. of Adj and N). For instance, in English a non-agreeing adjective intervenes in the local agreement relation between N and Num0 that is required to license ellipsis, leading to the need for one-insertion, contrary to various languages with agreeing adjectives (e.g. Albanian (7), Dutch (Kester 1996), Portuguese (6a), and Spanish).

(6) a. muitos (velhos-PL) amigos-PL/ muitos (velhos-PL) ec
    b. many old friends / *many old ec/many old ones.

(7) Meri blevi makinë e kuqe dhe une bleva ec te zezen. (Albanian)

Mary bought-3s car the red.f.sg and I bought-1s the black.f.sg.

‘Mary bought the red car and I bought the black (one).’

Finally, Portuguese N-gapping has one property that has not been investigated cross-linguistically. It can target either an N’ or N alone (8a), contrary to English NP-ellipsis and one-substitution (8b), which can both target only the N’.

This raises important questions given the existence of restrictions on pro which do not affect the productivity of N-gapping in BP. A second possibility is that the N always agrees with Num0 and higher DP-projections in Portuguese, and can be elided alone, leaving Noun complements out, contrary to English.

(8) a. Eu vi o estudante de arte de NY e a Sue viu o ec de física de LA.
    b. *I saw the [N’student of art] from NY and Sue saw the/those [N(ones)] of physics from LA.
Selected References