

Fox and Lasnik (2003) on apparent failure of island repair by VP ellipsis

I. Failure of island violation repair

- (1) *They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't know which they do
[_{VP} ~~want to hire someone who speaks t~~] Merchant (2001)
- (2) Compare (3), which also involves a relative clause island:
- (3) They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't know which (Balkan language) [_{IP} ~~they want to hire someone who speaks t~~] Merchant (2001)
- (4) In fact, Chung et al. (1995) had already claimed that Sluicing and VP ellipsis diverge in this way, concluding that the latter, unlike the former, is an instance of deletion. Their example involved an adjunct island:
- (5) We left before they started playing party games.
*What did you leave before they did [_{VP} ~~start playing t~~]?
- (6) Note, though, that this case, unlike Merchant's, is actually consistent with Chomsky's account (which Chung et al. (1995) do not consider), as the island is not eliminated in (5), unlike the situation in (1).
- (7) Merchant, on the other hand, takes all ellipsis to be PF deletion, and argues that only some islands represent PF effects. Others, especially including relative clause islands, are LF constraints, and their violation therefore cannot be repaired by ellipsis, a PF process.
- (8) (3) is then reanalyzed as:
- (9) They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't know which (Balkan language) [_{IP} ~~she should speak t~~] [See also Baker and Brame (1972)]
- (10) They hired someone who speaks a Balkan language –
Guess which [~~she speaks t~~]
- (11) *They didn't hire anyone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which
- (12) *They didn't hire anyone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which she speaks
Merchant pp. 211-212

BUT cf.

- (13) Noone had a student who worked on a certain Balkan language, but I can't remember which Balkan language Lasnik (2001b)
- (14) *No one had a student who worked on a certain Balkan language, but I can't remember which Balkan language she worked on.

OR even

- (15) They didn't hire anyone who speaks a certain Balkan language, but I don't remember which.
- (16) There are also cases where structure that includes the island must exist in the Sluicing site in order to license an item in the Sluicing remnant:

- (17) Every linguist here complained because Language published a certain kind of review of his latest book, but I'm not sure just what kind of review of his latest book
- (18) *Every linguist here complained because Language published a certain kind of review of his latest book, but I'm not sure just what kind of review of his latest book every linguist complained because Language published
- (19) *What kind of review of his latest book did Language publish
- (20) Every linguist_i met a philosopher who criticized some of his_i work, but I'm not sure how much of his_i work [~~every linguist_i met a philosopher who criticized t~~]
- (21) Each of the linguists met a philosopher who criticized some of the other linguists, but I'm not sure how many of the other linguists
- (22) !How many of the other linguists did the philosopher criticize
- (23) Consider now Merchant's PF islands: COMP-trace effects; derived positions (topicalizations, ?subjects)
- (24) It appears that a certain senator will resign, but which senator [~~it appears that t will resign~~] is still a secret [adapted from Merchant p.185]
- (25) Sally asked if somebody was going to fail Syntax One, but I can't remember who [~~Sally asked if t was going to fail Syntax One~~] Merchant p.185, from Chung et al. (1995)
- (26) She said that a biography of one of the Marx brothers is going to be published this year, but I don't remember which [~~she said that a biography of t is going to be published this year~~] [adapted from Merchant p.185]
- (27) Recall the apparent failure of island violation repair with Merchant's LF island:
- (28) *They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't know which they do [~~_{VP} want to hire someone who speaks t~~]
- (29) Surprisingly, we find the same apparent failure of repair with Merchant's PF islands [Lasnik (2001)]:
- (30) *It appears that a certain senator will resign, but which senator it does [~~appear that t will resign~~] is still a secret [that-trace]
- (31) *Sally asked if somebody was going to fail Syntax One, but I can't remember who she did [~~ask if t was going to fail Syntax One~~] [if-trace]
- (32) *She said that a biography of one of the Marx brothers is going to be published this year, but I don't remember which she did [~~say that a biography of t is going to be published this year~~] [subject condition]
- (33) And now notice that parallel 'failure of repair' obtains even when there was no violation in the first place.
- (34) Extraction out of an embedded clause is typically fine and Sluicing is just as good, but VPE is bad:

- (35) They said they heard about a Balkan language, but I don't know which Balkan language they said they heard about
- (36) They said they heard about a Balkan language, but I don't know which Balkan language
- (37) *They said they heard about a Balkan language, but I don't know which Balkan language they did
- (38) Similarly for extraction out of an object NP:
- (39) They heard a lecture about a Balkan language, but I don't know which Balkan language they heard a lecture about
- (40) They heard a lecture about a Balkan language, but I don't know which Balkan language
- (41) *They heard a lecture about a Balkan language, but I don't know which Balkan language they did
- (42) Even short movement of a direct object shows rather similar behavior:
- (43) They studied a Balkan language but I don't know which Balkan language they studied
- (44) They studied a Balkan language but I don't know which Balkan language
- (45) ??They studied a Balkan language but I don't know which Balkan language they did
- (46) Is VPE blocked when Sluicing is available (Merchant's MaxElide, sort of 'Delete as much as you can')?
- (47) Someone solved the problem.
Who (?did)?
- (48) Is a VPE site precluded from containing a WH trace?
- (49) I know what I like and what I don't Merchant p.58 [See Fiengo and May (1994) for similar examples.]

II. Towards a Solution [This section is based on Fox and Lasnik (2003)]

- (50) The constraint seems to be specific to VPE, and seems limited specifically to circumstances where an indefinite antecedes a WH-trace. In fact, in other circumstances, VPE can even repair actual island violations:
- (51) *[How interesting] did Brio write [a *t* novel]
- (52)a Pico wrote a more interesting novel than Brio did
b Pico wrote a more interesting novel than [*Op* Brio did write a *t* novel]
Kennedy and Merchant (2000)
- (53) For the ill-formed VPE cases above, which contrasted with the Sluicing examples, the fact that VPE deletes a smaller portion of the structure than Sluicing (IP ellipsis) could be relevant.
- (54) But first, a prior question: Why can an indefinite antecede a WH-trace?
- (55)a An old idea: a WH expression combines an interrogative and an indefinite. (See, among many other references, Stockwell et al. (1973, p.606)
b The 'trace' is the indefinite.

- (56) Fred said that Mary talked to a certain girl, but I don't know which girl <~~Fred said that Mary talked to t~~>
- (57) Suppose, following Chung et al. (1995), that the indefinite must be bound by existential closure in a way that is parallel to the wh-dependency in the sluiced clause
- (58) And suppose, contra Merchant (2001), that formal parallelism is required for ellipsis. This is satisfied since the variables in the antecedent and the elided clause are bound by parallel operators and from parallel positions.
- (59) Now notice that in the structure shown, there are no intermediate traces in the elided portion (in angle brackets), indicating that there were no intermediate landing sites in the movement.
- (60) If there had been successive movement, under plausible assumptions the relevant portions of the antecedent and the ellipsis site would not be parallel, and this would prevent ellipsis.
- (61)a This seems to be problematic under the assumption that successive cyclic movement is required by considerations of locality.
 b But as discussed earlier, considerations of locality are nullified under deletion (island repair, as in the proposal of Chomsky (1972) or Lasnik (2001a)).
- (62) But why is there no 'repair' with VPE?
- (63) VPE involves deletion of a smaller constituent than the clause that is elided in sluicing (VP vs. TP):
- (64) which girl [_{TP} he T [_{AspP} did <_{VP} ~~say that I talked to g(girl)~~>]]
- (65) *Fred said that Mary talked to a certain girl, but I don't know which girl he did
- (66) The unacceptability of VPE follows if we assume that one of the two remaining maximal projections, AspP or TP, is an 'island' that must be circumvented by adjunction or repaired by deletion. [This roughly follows the claim of Chomsky (1986) that all XPs are potential barriers.] Since the island is not deleted, the escape hatch is required, and a violation of Parallelism is unavoidable.
- (67) An interesting consequence of this line of analysis: Movement must not be allowed to proceed in one long 'island-violating' step followed by short successive steps. If this were allowed, the ellipsis site could lack any intermediate traces, making it parallel to its antecedent. And the undeleted portion could be free of *s.
- (68) Metaphorically, when you enter the subway, once you have chosen the express, you can't switch to a local train at a local stop.
- (69) This line of reasoning straightforwardly covers the badness of the classic island situations discussed by Merchant.