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P-stranding, evasion, and what they (might) mean for ellipsis identity

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► **To cite this version:**

Troy E Messick, Viviane Déprez, Megan Gotowski. P-stranding, evasion, and what they (might) mean for ellipsis identity. *Current Issues in Comparative Syntax 2: Boundaries of Ellipsis Mismatch*, Aug 2023, Online, United States. hal-04282158

HAL Id: hal-04282158

<https://hal.science/hal-04282158v1>

Submitted on 13 Nov 2023

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P-stranding,
evasion, and
what they
(might) mean
for ellipsis
identity

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P-stranding, evasion, and what they (might) mean for ellipsis identity

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August 31, 2023

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Thanks to my co-authors

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Viviane Déprez (Rutgers) and Meg Gotowski (Pomona)

The ellipsis site and its antecedent

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When we encounter an ellipsis site, intuitively we take the meaning of the missing phrase to be related in some way to its antecedent. In many (simple) instances, it appears we can “copy and paste” the antecedent phrase into the ellipsis site.

(1) Randall walked along the rode and Rita did Δ too.

Mismatches are possible

What has puzzled linguists for decades now (and the reason for the workshop) are instances where this simple “copy and paste” procedure does not work.

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 - Vehicle Change of R-expressions (Abels, 2022; Fiengo and May, 1994)

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- ϕ -feature mismatches in Predicate and NP ellipsis (Bobaljik and Zocca, 2011; Ranero, 2021; Sprouse et al., 2022; Sudo and Spathas, 2020)
- Vehicle Change of R-expressions (Abels, 2022; Fiengo and May, 1994)
- Short and Cleft Sources in sluicing (Barros, 2014; van Craenenbroeck, 2010; Rodrigues et al., 2009; Vicente et al., 2021)

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It has been shown that gender of elided DPs can mismatch from their antecedent (in restricted ways).

- (2) O Paulo é ator e a Fernanda também é Δ
The Paulo is actor and the Fernanda also is Δ
'Paulo is an actor and Fernanda is too.' Bobaljik &
Zocca (2011: ex. 2)

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Elided R-expressions can seemingly undergo ‘vehicle change’ such that an R-expression of one type in the antecedent can be replaced with another type in the ellipsis site (again in restricted ways).

- (3) John believes himself to be heroic and he said that Mary does Δ too.
 Δ = believe him to be heroic Fiengo & May (1994: 206 ex. 24)



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Cleft and other types of copula continuations have been argued to exist for sluicing for a number of reasons. For instance, p-or-q sluices have no isomorphic continuations and may only occur in languages where clefts are possible continuations.

- (4) Either something's burning, or Sally's baking a cake again, but I don't know which Δ
 $\Delta =$ it is Barros (2014: 50 ex. 55a)

Sources of mismatches

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Mismatches force us to either weaken the identity condition on ellipsis or give enrich the morphosyntax in some way (or a combination of both)

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Today, I want to focus on looking at an argument from French that P-stranding under sluicing in a non-p-stranding language derives partially from the possibility of cleft sources (following RNV, Barros and others for different Romance languages).

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 - Voice mismatches in VP-ellipsis
 - ϕ -feature mismatches in Predicate and NP ellipsis
 - Vehicle Change of R-expressions
 - **Short and Cleft Sources in sluicing**

Clefts in French Sluicing

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■ Roadmap

- Background: Sluicing, p-stranding generalization, and cleft analyses of apparent counter-examples
- Background: French sluicing, Orphan vs. grammatical prepositions in French
- Acceptability judgment experiment: Design, results and discussion
- Comparison of the cleft approach to recent analysis of p-stranding in Spanish in Stigliano 2022
- General discussion about what this means for ellipsis identity

Some terminology

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A sluicing construction like (5) is represented schematically in (6).

(5) [John met *someone*], but I don't know [[*who*] Δ].

(6) [A-Clause ... *correlate* ...] [[*remnant*] E-Clause]

I will sometimes use the term **presluice** to refer to the elided clause before ellipsis takes place. (e.g., this ellipsis site derives from a cleft presluice)

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- (7) **Preposition stranding generalization** (Merchant, 2001)

A language L will allow preposition stranding under sluicing only if L allows preposition stranding under regular *wh*-movement.

- (8) a. Who did John talk about?
b. John talked about someone, but I don't know who
John talked about

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- (9) **Preposition stranding generalization** (Merchant, 2001)

A language L will allow preposition stranding under sluicing only if L allows preposition stranding under regular *wh*-movement.

- (10) a. *Pjon milise me?
who she.spoke with
'Who did she speak with?'
- b. I Anna milise me kapjon alla dhe ksero
The Anna spoke with someone but not I.know
*(me) pjon
with who
'Anna spoke with someone but I don't know with who.'

Many Counterexamples

Merchant himself noted that there are apparent counterexamples to the PSG, and in the years since many authors have noted issues with the PSG in numerous different languages (Almeida and Yoshida, 2007; Fortin, 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2009; Sato, 2011).

- (11) a. *Quem que a Maria dancou com?
Who that the Maria danced with
'Who did Maria dance with'?
- b. A Maria dancou com alguém, mas eu não
the maria danced with someone, but I not
lembro (com) quem
remember (with) who
'Maria danced with someone but I don't
remember who.' Almeida & Yoshida (2007:350
ex. 5-6)

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Fitting in the counterexamples

While there have been many ways researchers have attempted to account for the problematic cases, one fruitful avenue of research has been to suggest that apparent p-stranding under sluicing in fact does not involve p-stranding at all but instead involves a cleft presluice (Rodrigues et al 2009, Barros 2014, van Craenenbroeck 2010). Though see (Sag and Nykiel, 2011; Stigliano, 2022)

- (12) O João falou com uma menina mas eu não sei
The João talked with a girl but I not know
qual é a menina coma qual João falou
which is the girl with the which João talked
'João talked with a girl but I don't know which.' (RNV
2009: ex 7)

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In arguing against cleft sources for English sluices, Merchant gives a number of diagnostics that he uses to control for the possibility of a cleft preluice (Merchant, 2001).

- (13) a. Harry was there, but I don't know who else was
there
- b. #Harry was there, but I don't know who else it was

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Else is incompatible with clefts due to the fact that it leads to a semantic anomaly when composed with the meaning of the cleft pronoun (Barros, 2012).

- (14) a. Jack left, but I don't know who else left.
b. $\lambda p. \exists x[\text{human}(x) \ \& \ x \neq y_j \ \& \ p = \hat{\text{left}}(x)]$
- (15) a. #Jack left, but I don't know who else it was
b. $\lambda p. \exists x[\text{human}(x) \ \& \ x \neq y_j \ \& \ p = \hat{\text{left}}[z] = x]$

Else-modification meets P-stranding

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At least in the languages where *else* modification is incompatible with clefts, Rodrigues predicts that p-stranding should not be possible with *else* modification since it would rule out the possibility of a cleft preluice. This is the case for Spanish.

- (16) Juan ha hablado con una chica rubia, pero no
Juan has talked with a girl blonde, but not
sé *(con) qué chica más
know (with) what girl else
'Juan has talked with a blonde girl, but I don't know
with what other girl' RNV (2009: ex. 27a)

Looking at French

In an appendix, RNV 2009 discuss French. Like the other Romance languages we have discussed so far, French does not allow for p-stranding under *wh*-movement, but it is possible in sluicing.

- (17) a. *Qui tu as dansé avec?
Who you have danced with
'Who have you danced with?'
- b. Jean a dansé avec quelqu'un, et je ne
Jean has danced with someone, and I NEG
sais pas qui
I NEG who
'Jean has danced with someone but I don't know
who.'
- RNV (2009: ex. 70 & 72)

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Unlike Spanish, at least with the preposition *avec*, p-stranding under sluicing is still possible with *else* modification.

- (18) Jean a dansé avec Marie, mais je ne sais
Jean has danced with Marie, but I NEG know
pas (avec) qui d'autre
NEG (with) who else.
'Jean danced with Marie, but I don't know who else.'
RNV (2009: ex. 77)

Looking at French: A twist

While this appears to be the case for *avec*, other prepositions seem to behave differently.

- (19) Les policiers ont parlé à quelqu'un mais on se
The police have spoken to someone but we SE
demande (à) qui
ask (to) who
'The police have spoken to someone, but we wonder
who.'
- (20) Les policiers ont parlé à ce garçon et on se
The police have spoken to this boy and we SE
demande *(à) qui d'autre
ask (to) who else
'The police have spoken to this boy and we wonder
who else.'

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The puzzle in a nutshell

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Some prepositions, like *avec*, can be dropped in sluicing even when there is *else* modification. Other prepositions, like *à*, can only be dropped in instances where *else* modification has not taken place. How and Why does this difference exist?

French sluicing

Compared with other Romance languages, sluicing in French (dialects) is relatively understudied (Dagnac, 2019; Gotowski, 2022; Ott and Therrien, 2020). We assume that French sluicing is the result of movement + deletion. One piece of evidence for this is that remnants can show reconstruction effects.

- (21) Chaque linguiste_i a critiqué une partie de ses_i;
each linguist has criticized a part of his
travail mais je ne sais pas combien de ses_i;
work but I NEG know not how.much of his
travail
work
'Each linguist criticized part of his own work, but I
don't know how much of his own work.'

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A piece of evidence that the remnant must be *ex situ* comes from sluices with *pourquoi*. While most questions in French can occur with *wh-in-situ*, *pourquoi* must occur *ex situ*. [Gotowski examples]

- (22) a. Pourquoi tu ris? 
Why you laugh
'Why are you laughing?'
- b. *tu ris pourquoi
you laugh why
'You are laughing why?'

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Sluices with *pourquoi* are perfectly acceptable.

(23) Jean mange quelque chose, mais je sais pas
Jean eat some thing, but I know not
pourquoi

why



'Jean is eating something but I do not know why.'

Quoi-sluices

A potential issue for a move and delete approach to French sluicing is that the form *quoi* appears in sluiced clauses, but is typically found when left in situ.

- (24)
- a. Que/*Quoi regardes-tu
what watch-you
'What are you watching?'
 - b. Tu regarde quoi/*que
you watch what
'You are watching what?'
 - c. Jean mange quelque chose, mais je ne sais
Jean eat some thing, but I NEG know
pas quoi/*que
not what
'Jean is eating something, but I don't know what.'

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Gotowski's solution in a nutshell is to analyze *que/quoi* as allomorphs. *Que* is inserted when the interrogative pronoun is structural adjacent to the verb. *Quoi* is an elsewhere form. Sluicing destroys the environment for the *que* VI rule to apply, hence the elsewhere form surfaces.

- (25) a. [+wh -human] ⇔ *que* / ___ +V
b. [+wh -human] ⇔ *quoi* / elsewhere

Given these data, we assume that Ross/Merchant's classic move and delete analysis of sluicing is applicable to French (though see our discussion later).



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Returning to P-stranding data, as far as we are aware, all Ps can be omitted in sluicing without *else* modification. However, only a subset of Ps can be omitted with *else* modification. (Here we are putting aside Lafontaine French, which allows for P-stranding under regular *wh*-movement). Based on traditional judgment collection, we categorized Ps into the following two groups.

- (26) a. **Ps that can be omitted with or without else-modification:** *avec* (with), *pour* (for), *derrière* (behind)
- b. **Ps that can be omitted only without else-modification:** *à* (to), *de* (of), *par* (by)

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These groupings seem to correlate with another property of French prepositions: their ability to occur as **Orphans** (i.e., without a complement) (Authier, 2016; Zribi-Hertz, 1984). The group that always allows for P-omission can also act as Orphans.

- (27) a. Je voyage toujours avec cette valise
I travel always with this suitcase
'I always travel with this suitcase.'
- b. Cette valise, je voyage toujours avec
this suitcase, I travel always with
'This suitcase, I always travel with (it).'
- Zribi-Hertz (1984: ex. 1-2)

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The group that only allows P-omission without *else* modification cannot act as Orphans. Following the literature we refer to these as **Grammatical** prepositions.

- (28)
- a. J' adore aller à Paris
I love go.INF to Paris
'I love to go to Paris.'
 - b. *Paris, J' adore aller à
Paris, I love go.INF to
'Paris, I love to go to (it).' Zribi-Hertz (1984: ex. 33)

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Despite first appearances, orphanhood does not seem to be derived via movement as the dependency can occur across islands.

- (29) Cette valise, J'ai concu l'hypothese que
this suitcase, I.have concieved the.hypothesis that
Marie pourrait voyager avec
Marie might travel with
'This suitcase, I have conceived the hypothesis that
Marie might travel with (it).' Zribi-Hertz (1984: ex.
30)

The gaps found in the Orphan prepositions are analyzed as null pronominals similar to resumptives.

Our hunch

- The correlation between Orphanhood and the possibility of P-omission with *else*-modification is not coincidental, but stem from the same source.

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- The correlation between Orphanhood and the possibility of P-omission with *else*-modification is not coincidental, but stem from the same source.
- P-omission with grammatical prepositions is only possible with a cleft presluice. Once you control for that possibility through the use of *else*-modification, P-omission is no longer possible.

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- The correlation between Orphanhood and the possibility of P-omission with *else*-modification is not coincidental, but stem from the same source.
- P-omission with grammatical prepositions is only possible with a cleft presluice. Once you control for that possibility through the use of *else*-modification, P-omission is no longer possible.
- P-omission with Orphan prepositions can come for cleft or Orphan presluices. Hence, even if you control for the cleft presluice, P-omission can still obtain through the prepositions Orphan use. Cf. Saudi Arabic where resumption is argued to be a source of P-omission (Alshaalan and Abels, 2020)

Acceptability Judgment experiment

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To put us on surer empirical footing, we ran an acceptability judgment experiment.

- The design was $2 \times 2 \times 2$
 - The variables we controlled were: P-omission (omitted vs. not omitted), P-type (grammatical vs. Orphan), Else-modification (Else vs. No else)
- The target sentences were randomized with an equal number of fillers.
- 50 French speakers were recruited over Prolific, and were asked to rate the acceptability of a sentence on a scale of 1-5 using Qualtrics.

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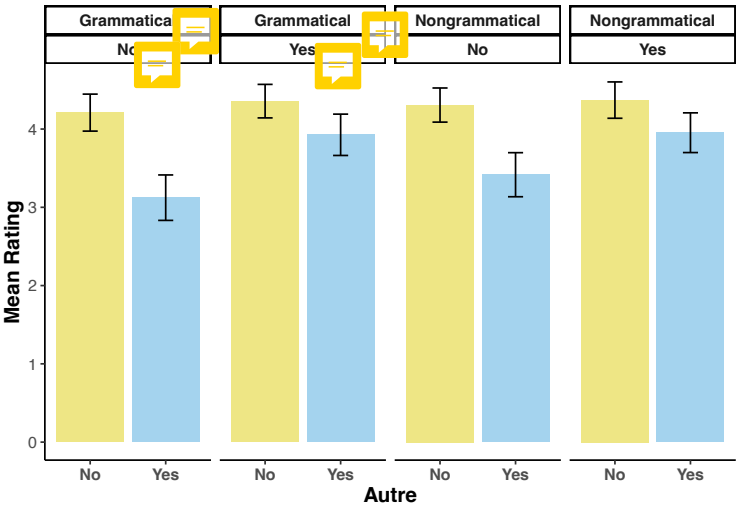
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- While sentences were judged highly, we see a statistically significant drop when *else*-modification is used.
- We also see a small but significant difference between Orphan vs Grammatical prepositions with P-stranding with Orphan with *else*-modification being rated higher than Grammatical omission with *else*-modification.
- The relative means in what we found is in line with what our analysis predicts (with the caveat the absolute means are somewhat higher than we might have expected). We take this as modest support for our proposal.

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Stigliano 2022 gives an alternative analysis for P-omission in (her dialect of) Spanish. Based on P-omission in a number of different elliptical environments, she comes up with the descriptive generalization in (30), on which she bases her analysis.

- (30) P-omission in ellipsis in Spanish is only allowed when the following two conditions are met (a) the remnants correlate in the antecedent does not move, and (b) the remnant does not move.

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Recall that French allows for both wh-ex-situ and wh-in-situ productively. We might expect the possibility of P-omission to differ when a fragment is a response to a ex-situ or in-situ question. This does not appear to be the case. The fragment in (32) can be used as an answer to either of the questions in (31).

- (31) a. Avec qui tu dansais 
with who you dance
'With whom are you dancing?'
- b.  dansais  avec qui
you dance with who
'you are dancing with who?'

- (32) (Avec) Maria
(with) Maria
'(with) Maria'

Implications for Identity

What does this mean for identity?

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What does this mean for identity?

- If it is the case that clefts are possible as a way to allow for P-omission, this appears to  evidence for a mismatch between the antecedent and ellipsis site.

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What does this mean for identity?

- If it is the case that clefts are possible as a way to allow for P-omission, this appears to evidence for a mismatch between the antecedent and ellipsis site.
- Difficult to see how cases fit with a strict syntactic isomorphic condition.

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What does this mean for identity?

- If it is the case that clefts are possible as a way to allow for P-omission, this appears to evidence for a mismatch between the antecedent and ellipsis site.
- Difficult to see how cases fit with a strict syntactic isomorphic condition.
- Also potentially at odds with conditions like “no new words” (Chung, 2005)

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- If it is the case that clefts are possible as a way to allow for P-omission, this appears to evidence for a mismatch between the antecedent and ellipsis site.
- Difficult to see how cases fit with a strict syntactic isomorphic condition.
- Also potentially at odds with conditions like “no new words” (Chung, 2005)
- Cleft mismatches do seem compatible with certain semantic approaches to identity (Focus/QUD-based) or potentially structural approaches that allow for less structure than the antecedent.

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