Head-Based Syntactic Identity in Sluicing
Deniz Rudin — drudin@ucsc.edu

Sluicing is an elliptical construction in which a wh-phrase is stranded as the result of TP deletion, licensed when some relation of identity obtains between the antecedent and the <ellipsis site>.

(1) **Paul ate**, but I don’t know what <Paul ate>.

The sluice in (1) provides an argument against a syntactic conception of the identity relation: the antecedent VP has no structural object, but the elided VP does. Merchant (2001) proposes a semantic conception of the identity relation: the antecedent and ellipsis site must entail each other, modulo $\exists$-type shifting and focus closure (Schwarzschild 1999). However, the data show that a purely semantic identity condition is inadequate (Chung 2013). Argument structure mismatches are impossible under sluicing (2), as is stranding a ‘sprouted’ preposition in the ellipsis site (3):

(2) * They loaded a truck with hay, but I didn’t see onto which truck <they loaded hay>.
(3) * I donated, but I can’t remember which organization <I donated to>.

I argue for a purely syntactic conception of the identity relation.

(4) **SYNTACTIC CONDITION ON SLUICING:**

Given a prospective ellipsis site $\alpha$ and its antecedent $\beta$, non-pronunciation of the phonological content associated with any head $h \in \alpha$ is licit only if $h$ has a STRUCTURE-MATCHING CORRELATE $i \in \beta$, where a head $i$ STRUCTURE-MATCHES a head $h$ iff $i$ and $h$ are dominated by an identical chain of nodes, and a head $i$ can be a CORRELATE for a head $h$ iff $h$ and $i$ are the same lexical item.

This syntactic identity condition is flexible enough to allow (1) to be grammatical, as each head that goes unpronounced by virtue of the ellipsis process has a structure-matching correlate in the antecedent—the presence of a structural object position doesn’t alter the chain of dominators over either elided head. But (4) is rigid enough to rule out (3), because the elided preposition has no correlate in the antecedent, and (2), because the elided hay is not structure-matched by its correlate in the antecedent, which is embedded in a PP.

Further complications come from novel data regarding left-peripheral mismatches:

(5) **Sally cooks** every night; she learned how <to cook> from her father.
(6) **Your plant is alive**, but you can never be sure for how long <your plant will be alive>.
(7) **I needed to solve the problem**, but it wasn’t clear how <I could solve the problem>.
(8) **Save for retirement.** When you’re older, you’ll see why <you should save for retirement>.

Mismatches of finiteness (5), tense (6), modality (7) and illocutionary force (8) are possible under sluicing. These facts are problematic for both syntactic and semantic accounts of sluicing. I allow for such mismatches by enforcing (4) only over heads originating within vP. Following Langacker (1974), I take the restriction of identity in sluicing to the verb and its arguments to be one of many cases in which the syntax treats material describing a core event in a more privileged way than material describing the relation of that event to the current state of the world (e.g. tense) and to the beliefs and desires of the speaker (e.g. modality).

Upshot: enforcing syntactic identity **LOCALLY**, head by head, instead of **GLOBALLY**, over the entire ellipsis site, derives known syntactic restrictions on the grammaticality of sluices without ruling out attested syntactic mismatches. Doing so renders semantic identity conditions redundant.