On the interaction of word formation and ellipsis
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Despite the usefulness of head movement over the past 30 years in deepening our understanding of a range of empirical phenomena — verb second effects, verb-initial clause structures, and lexical decomposition, among others — the modular status of head movement has long been at the center of controversy, since at least Chomsky 2000. In part this is because core theoretical commitments of the Minimalist program have made it difficult to integrate head movement theoretically. The evidence weighing in favor of any particular analysis (among them remnant movement, re-projection, PF movement) is subtle and can be difficult to verify. In this talk I introduce the results of ongoing research by Gribanova and Harizanov (in progress), whose position is that many of these tensions can be resolved by factoring what we think of as head movement into two categories: syntactic and postsyntactic operations, each with its associated properties and consequences. We distinguish between cases of word composition, in which syntactically independent pieces are amalgamated morphophonologically via postsyntactic operation, and cases of genuinely syntactic movement, which do not involve word formation. I demonstrate that this theoretical move, once fleshed out, turns out to be fruitful in resolving a range of otherwise deeply mysterious questions related both to the formation of the Russian verbal complex, and to its behavior in elliptical contexts.

Investigations of the interaction between head movement and ellipsis often focus on configurations in which there is verb movement out of an elided constituent — Verb Stranding Ellipsis (VSE). A representative Russian example of verb-stranding TP ellipsis with verb movement to a higher Pol head (Gribanova, To appear) is in (1).

(1) a. Poslala li Evgenija posylku v Moskvu?
   send.PST.SG.F Q Evgenija package.ACC to Moscow.LOC
   ‘Did Evgenia send the package to Moscow?’

   b. Ne poslala / Poslala.
   NEG send.PST.SG.F / send.PST.SG.F
   ‘She didn’t. / She did.’

An important question about VSE constructions involves the identity condition on ellipsis and its interaction with head movement: must the parts of the verb that originate inside the ellipsis site match their respective parts in the antecedent verb? Investigations of Hebrew (Goldberg, 2005a,b) and Irish (McCloskey, 2011, 2012) demonstrate that there is a strict matching requirement on the stranded and antecedent verbs in VSE, even if the relevant verbs are contrasted.

(2) Irish obeys the vic: no verb stem mismatch under contrast (McCloskey, 2012)

   a. * Níor cheannaigh mé teach ariamh, ach dhíol.
      NEG-PAST buy I house ever but sold
      ‘I never bought a house, but I sold one.’

   b. * Cé gur mhol an bainistéoir na himreoirí inné, cháin
      although C-[PAST] praise the manager the players yesterday criticized
      inniu.
      today.
      ‘Although the manager praised the players yesterday, he criticized them today.’

Some discussions of this required matching effect, known as the Verbal Identity Condition (VIC), have suggested that it forces a view of head movement as uniformly postsyntactic: the relevant heads will be in the ellipsis site at narrow syntax, making them relevant for any isomorphism requirement imposed by ellipsis licensing (Schoorlemmer and Temmerman, 2012).
By contrast, if the head movement were syntactic and could leave a trace, then prominent theories of ellipsis licensing would permit mismatch of the extracted verbal parts under contrastive focus, just as this is permitted in cases of phrasal movement out of ellipsis sites (e.g. *I know which boy the teacher praised* but not which girl the teacher praised).

A little-discussed observation is that whether the VIC applies in all circumstances varies by language: in Russian, VSE constructions require verb stem matching only as a default, permitting mismatches between the antecedent and stranded verbs’ stems in discourse situations involving lexical contrast on the relevant verbs (Gribanova, 2013; Gribanova, To appear).

(3) Russian does not obey the VIC: permits verb stem mismatch under contrast
   a. Naˇ sel li Paˇ sa knigu v biblioteke?
      find.PST.SG.M Q Paˇ sa book.ACC in library.PREP
      ‘Did Pasha find a book in the library?’
   b. Net, poterjal.
      No, lose.PST.SG.M
      ‘No, he lost (the book in the library).’

Similar findings obtain for Swahili (Ngoyani, 1996), Hungarian (Lipták 2013) and European Portuguese (Santos, 2009). We therefore have a situation in which one language group (Hungarian, Russian, etc.) behaves as if the head movement is syntactic, while the other (Irish, Hebrew) behaves as if it is postsyntactic. I contend that this is only an apparent contradiction; it is, rather, completely expected on a view wherein both a postsyntactic amalgamation operation and a narrow syntactic movement operation can apply to heads, as in Gribanova and Harizanov (in progress).

To substantiate this approach, I provide a principled examination of the Russian verbal complex, demonstrating that there is a syntactic head movement step in the derivation of (3) which, crucially, leaves a trace that can give rise to the type of mismatch effects we find in phrasal movement out of ellipsis sites. This movement step involves no word formation, yields the kind of discourse effect (polarity focus) we associate with genuine syntactic movement, and produces *MaxElide* effects in elliptical contexts (Gribanova, To appear) — all of which point to its syntactic status. The investigation therefore raises the possibility that crosslinguistic variation with respect to whether VSE constructions obey the VIC may result from the kind of head movement that is involved in the derivation of the VSE construction in a given language.

References