Head Movement as a PF phenomenon: evidence from identity under ellipsis

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The status of Head Movement (HM) is the subject of fierce debate in the literature: while some researchers take HM to be a narrow syntactic phenomenon with LF-effects, others propose that it takes place in the phonological component. The latter stance was first suggested by Chomsky (1995 et seq.) – and later followed by e.g. Boeckx & Stjepanović 2001, Hale & Keyser 2002, Harley 2004, Platzack to appear – to overcome certain problems facing HM. Broadly, these problems are: (i) HM generally lacks semantic effects and (ii) HM violates well-established principles of narrow syntax, like the extension condition and the c-command requirement on copies. Given the Y-model of the grammar, these problems are considered evidence that HM cannot be part of narrow syntax or the semantic component. The only remaining option is that HM is a PF-phenomenon. In this talk, we provide a new argument in favor of the ‘HM at PF’-view, based on an identity requirement on HM out of an ellipsis site.

In “V(erb)-stranding VP-ellipsis (VPE)”, a main verb has undergone HM from its base position, contained within the VPE site, to a position outside the elided constituent (Doron 1990; McCloskey 1991; Cyrino & Matos 2002; Goldberg 2005; Gribanova 2010). A Brazilian Portuguese (BP) example is given in (1).

(1) A Ana não leva o computador para as aulas, porque os amigos também não levam.
   the Ana not brings the computer to the classes because the friends too not bring
   ‘Ana does not bring her computer to the classes because her friends don’t either.’
   [Brazilian Portuguese, Cyrino & Matos 2002:180]

Cyrino & Matos (2002) convincingly argue that BP V-stranding VPE is not just a case of (multiple) argument drop. Although BP allows for null direct objects, other internal arguments cannot be dropped. The example in (1) contains a silent goal argument, which can only have been elided.

Crucially, the verb ‘surviving’ the ellipsis process in V-stranding VPE is subject to a strict lexical identity requirement: it must match the verb in the antecedent in its root and derivational morphology. When the verb is not identical to its correlate, V-stranding VPE is not possible. This is illustrated in (2) for BP; for other languages, such as Irish, cf. Doron 1990; Goldberg 2005; McCloskey 2007; Gribanova 2010.

(2) Quando a Ana pôs / * colocou os óculos na mesa, a Maria também pôs.
   when the Ana put / * placed the glasses on the table, the Maria too put
   ’When Ana put / * placed the glasses on the table, Maria did too.’
   [Brazilian Portuguese, Cyrino & Matos 2002:182]

Contrary to X*-movement, XP-movement out of an ellipsis site is not subject to such a strict lexical identity requirement (cf. Goldberg 2005; Saab 2009; Thoms 2010a).

This verbal identity requirement shows that, although the verb itself is not elided in V-stranding VPE, it is subject to the same identity requirement as elements contained in an ellipsis site. As is well-known, elided elements have to be interpreted identically to their correlates in the antecedent of the ellipsis site (cf. Merchant 2001; Chung 2006; Hartman 2009; Thoms 2010a,b for suggestions on how to define identity with respect to ellipsis). The observation that the verb
in V-stranding VPE is subject to the same identity requirement as elements inside an ellipsis site shows that verb movement, i.e. HM, takes place after ellipsis. Only then, the verb is in an elided constituent at LF.

On Merchant's (2001 et seq.) approach to ellipsis, a head licensing ellipsis carries an E-feature [E]. This feature causes the complement of this head to be unpronounced at PF and to be interpreted identically to its correlate in the antecedent at LF (cf. supra). Under this approach, the observation that HM has to follow ellipsis leads to the conclusion that HM cannot take place in the narrow syntax. If this were the case, the verb in V-stranding VPE would be outside the complement of the [E]-bearing head when the derivation reaches LF and would therefore not be subject to the identity requirement, contrary to fact. If, however, HM is a PF-operation, it follows straightforwardly that the verb in V-stranding VPE is subject to the same identity requirement as elements inside the ellipsis site. When the derivation is shipped of to the CI-interface, the verb is still in its base position, i.e. contained within the ellipsis site.

As such, the Verbal Identity Requirement constitutes strong evidence in favor of HM at PF and is therefore essential to the ongoing debate on the status of HM.

Word count: 747

References
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