Island violations in stripping constructions

1. Introduction

In clausal ellipsis, a constituent moves out of a clause, and then the clause gets deleted (Merchant 2004, van Craenenbroeck & Merchant 2013). This squib discusses three types of ellipsis, which are all clausal ellipses by this definition. They are sluicing, fragment answers, and bare argument ellipsis (also known as “stripping”). In sluicing, the constituent that moves out of the ellipsis site and survives ellipsis (the remnant) is a wh-phrase (who in ((1))). Fragment answers are answers to questions, and the only overt constituent is the remnant (Pat in (2)). Stripping reduces the second conjunct in a coordinated structure; it requires a remnant (Chris in (3)) and one more element (usually not or also). The element that coordinates structures (usually but or and) is optional.

(1) Some one here speaks Wampanoag – guess who?
(2) A: Who speaks Wampanoag? B: Pat
(3) Pat speaks Wampanoag, (but) not Chris

Since Ross (1969), it has been observed that the remnant movement in some sluicing sentences and fragment answers can appear to violate island constraints, despite the fact that movement generally respects islands. Take (4a) and (4b) as examples.

(4)a. They hired someone who speaks a Balkan language – guess which!

    (Sluicing; Merchant 2001:209)

    b. A: Does Abby speak the same Balkan language that someone in your class speaks?
        B: Yeah, Charlie.¹

(5)a. … guess which?

    (Relative Clause; someone who speaks t]!

    b. B: Yeah, Charlie; Abby speaks [the same Balkan language that t, speaks]]

¹
Without ellipsis, it is not possible to move a wh-phrase out of a relative clause:

(6)*… guess which they hired someone who speaks!

There have been many proposals for the seemingly exceptional island-violating behavior of clausal ellipsis (Ross 1969), Lasnik (2001 & 2005), Merchant (2001 & 2004), and Griffiths and Liptak (2014), to name a few. These proposals fall into two categories. The first, represented by Merchant (2004), depends on the assumption that the syntactic operations involved in clausal ellipsis are different. Specifically, the remnant movement in sluicing targets a different position from the movement in fragment answers and stripping. The second type of proposals argues that sluicing, fragment answers, and stripping involve the same syntactic operations, and the remnant movement targets the same position. Most accounts in the second type have focused on sluicing and fragment answers, such as Griffiths and Liptak (2014). Yoshida et al. (2019) is the only one that specifically argues that stripping and sluicing behave uniformly in island violations.

This squib agrees with Yoshida et al.’s claim of the uniform behavior of stripping and other clausal ellipses, but differs in the explanation. I follow Barros et al. (2014) in arguing that the apparent ability of stripping to violate islands is an illusion created by the evasion strategy – a parse that does not involve any islands. This argument crucially assumes uniformity of stripping and other types of clausal ellipsis: if stripping has the same underlying operations as sluicing and fragment answers, the evasion strategies available to sluicing and fragment answers should also be available to stripping.

Section 2 provides six arguments that the evasion strategy saves island violations in stripping, two of which are adapted from Barros et al. (2014), and the other four are my
own. It is worth noting that Yoshida et al. (2019) explicitly rejected the evasion strategy as a source available to stripping. Subsection 2.6 responds to this critique, argues that the examples studied by Yoshida et al. don’t have the evasion strategy for independent reasons. Once these extraneous factors are controlled for, the evasion strategy is in fact available to stripping and can save island violations. Section 3 concludes the squib.

2. Arguments for the evasion strategies

Before presenting evidence for the evasion strategies, let me first spell out what they are. The two evasion strategies relevant to us are the short source and the copular source.

Merchant (2001) proposed that the so-called “short source” – ellipsis of a subpart of the antecedent clause that doesn’t include the island – creates the illusion of relative clause island violation in sluicing. Under this analysis, (4a) is fine because it has a parse whose elided phrase does not contain any island (7). In this parse the wh-remnant still moves out, but it does not cross any island. This parse contrasts with (6), whose elided phrase is isomorphic to the antecedent. I call the isomorphic parse the long source.

(7)... guess which [he speaks German]!

Merchant (2001) and Barros et al. (2014) suggested that the elided subject in the short source is an E-type pronoun in the sense of Evans (1980). This E-type pronoun covaries with the binder of the subject trace in the relative clause in first conjunct:

(8)They hired someone λi who t speaks a Balkan language, guess which [he speaks]!

Assuming the evasion strategy is also available to stripping, the stripping sentence in (9) should have two potential parses: the long source (9a), whose remnant German crosses a
relative clause island, and the short source (9b), whose remnant does not cross any island, and whose elided subject refers to the person they hired.

(9) They hired someone who speaks French yesterday, not German.
   a. … not German, [TP they hired [someone who speaks+\]].
   b. … not German, [TP she (= the person they hired) speaks+\]].

I will present evidence shortly that suggests that the short source in (9b) is available.

Before that, let me introduce the other evasion strategy, the copular source. Barros et al. (2014) argued that the sluicing sentence in (10) has two potential parses, the long source (10a), which involves a left branch island violation (ban on the extraction of the prenominal modifier), and the copular source (10b), which involves a predicational copular sentence (Mikkelsen 2005), and does not contain any island. They suggested that the elided subject in the copular source is an E-type pronoun that covaries with the object in the first conjunct, and roughly equals the car they bought.

(10) She bought a big car, but I don’t know how big.
   a. … but I don’t know [how big], [TP she bought a t\ car].
   b. … but I don’t know how big [TP it (= the car she bought) was+\]].

Following this analysis, the stripping sentence in (11) also has two potential parses:

(11) They bought a blue car, not green.
   a. They bought a blue car, not green, [TP they bought a t\ car].
   b. They bought a blue car, not green, [TP it was+\]].

Having spelled out the evasion strategies, I will now discuss two arguments for them in sluicing, and show that they can be replicated for stripping. Then I will present four new diagnostics for the evasion strategies by taking advantage of properties of stripping that sluicing does not have. Notice that the evasion strategies and the long source for sluicing often have the same meaning ((7) and (6); (10a and b)). I will show that once we
manipulate the second conjunct in stripping constructions carefully, we can get the evasion strategy to take on a different meaning from the long source. Crucially, in those cases, we get the meaning of the evasion strategies, suggesting that they are available.

2.1. Arguments for evasion strategies in sluicing can be replicated for stripping

Barros et al. (2014) provided two arguments for the evasion strategies in sluicing. They follow the same logic: if an apparently island-violating stripping sentence is saved by the evasion strategy, then when we block the evasion strategy, stripping cannot appear to violate island constraints any more. They showed this is borne out for sluicing by using two different ways to block the evasion strategies: non-existent antecedents and non-predicative adjectives. I replicate these arguments for stripping here.

First, non-existent antecedents can block the evasion strategies. Since both evasion strategies use the E-type pronoun, their availability is directly correlated with the availability of the E-type pronoun. The use of the E-type pronoun presupposes that its referent exists, and the E-type pronoun can’t refer to someone that does not exist:

(12)  a. *They hired no one who speaks French yesterday, {she/the person} does not speak German.
     b. *No one bought a blue car, {it/the car} was not green.

Since a non-existent antecedent rules out the E-type pronoun and therefore the evasion strategies, we would expect stripping to not appear to violate islands anymore. This prediction is borne out:³

(13)  a. */??They hired no one who speaks French yesterday, not German.
     b. */??No one bought a blue car, not green.

Second, non-predicative adjectives block the copular source because the copular source requires a predicative adjective. *Hard is a non-predicative adjective, and can only mean
hardworking in a modifier position (*hard worker*), but not in a predicational position.

(14) shows that the copular source is bad with *hard*, whether there is ellipsis or not:

(14)  *They hired a lazy worker, (he was) not hard.*

Example (14) differs from (11) in whether the remnant can be predicative. Because this is a delicate judgment, I conducted an informal judgment survey, where I asked seven speakers to rate (11) and the ellipsis version of (14) on a scale of 1-7; the mean ratings for (11) and (14) were 5.3 and 2.3 respectively, suggesting a real contrast between them.

### 2.2. Evidence 1: Availability of the short source when the long source is available

Having replicated the arguments in the literature for stripping, I will present four new pieces of evidence for evasion strategies. They set up the stripping sentence in contexts that disambiguate the evasion strategy from the long source. In these contexts we can get the reading of the evasion strategy, suggesting its availability.

The discussion so far focuses on sentences that appear to violate islands (the relative clause islands and the left branch islands), which might lead us to think that the short source is only relevant to these sentences, but it does not have to be. Consider (15), which does not contain any island. By using *and also German* in the second conjunct, the short source of (15) has a different meaning from the long source.

(15) They said someone speaks French yesterday, and also German.
    a. … and also German, [他们在他说了法语] Long source
    b. … and also German, [她说他昨天说了一门德语] Short source

The long source (15a) is compatible with a scenario where they talked about two different people, one who speaks French, and the other who speaks German. The short source (15b), on the other hand, is not compatible with this scenario, and requires the person
they discussed to speak both French and German. (15) is compatible with both scenarios, suggesting that both sources are available, in particular the short source is.

2.3. Evid. 2: Availability of the short source when the long source is unavailable

This subsection follows the logic of the previous one by showing that we can get the reading of the short source, which is distinct from the reading of the long source. Consider (16), which differs from (15) minimally in that its first conjunct contains an island, which as we will see, apparently makes the long source disappear. I put the two potential parses of (16) below, which have different truth conditions:

(16) They hired someone who speaks French yesterday, and also German.
   a. … and also German, [\[they hired \[\text{someone who speaks t, yesterday}\]\]]. \textit{LongS}
   b. … and also German, [\[\text{she (= the person they hired) speaks t}]]]. \textit{Short source}

The island-violating parse (16a) is true if they hired two monolingual speakers, a French speaker and a German speaker. The short source (16b) is only true if they hired a bilingual speaker who speaks both French and German.

In an informal survey I asked seven native speakers to rate (16) on a scale of 1-7. Six speakers rated it 7, which is consistent with my finding that apparent island violations are possible in stripping. I further asked those six speakers how many people were hired. All but one said only one bilingual person was hired, and the other speaker said it is possible that either one bilingual was hired, or two monolinguals were. Thus, all the speakers can get the short source reading, an indication that the short source is present for (16).

Because (9) is very similar to (16), we may infer that (9) also has the short source.\textsuperscript{4}
2.4. Evidence 3: Contradictory contexts

This subsection takes advantage of the discovery made in the previous subsection that for most speakers, when the first conjunct contains an island, as in (16), the long source reading disappears. If the evasion strategies produce the only available parse of such stripping sentences, then when these evasion strategies are blocked, the corresponding stripping sentence can no longer appear to violate islands. This subsection and the next each discusses a different way to block the evasion strategies.

Recall that the short-source reading, as in (16b), relies on hiring a bilingual speaker. We can thus block it with a contradictory context by using a monolingual in the first conjunct, as in (17), and the sentence becomes ungrammatical:

(17) *They hired a monolingual who speaks French yesterday, and also German.

Example (17) is bad because neither of its two potential parses (18a-b) is possible. The long source (18a) is not available (due to the presence of the island, as was the case for (16b)). The short source (18b) is blocked by the use of a monolingual in the antecedent.

(18) a. *They hired a monolingual who speaks French yesterday, and also German;
[\[\text{they hired} \quad \text{a monolingual who speaks t.}\]].

\[\text{Long source}\]

b. #They hired a monolingual who speaks French yesterday, and also German;
[\[\text{she (= the person they hired) speaks t.}\]].

\[\text{Short source}\]

We can likewise block the copular source of a left-branch island-violating stripping sentence by using a contradictory context, as in (19). (19) cannot appear to violate the left branch island because neither of its two potential parses (19a-b) is possible. The copular source (19b) runs into a contradiction because the car they saw can’t be both clean and dirty. If the long source (19a) were available, (19) should be fine, and mean that they saw
two different cars, a clean one and a dirty one. The ungrammaticality of (19) suggests that the long source cannot be available.

(19) *They saw a clean car, and also dirty.
   a. *They saw a clean car, and also dirty; \( \text{[TP they saw a t-car].} \) \( \text{Long source} \)
   b. #They saw a clean car, and also dirty; \( \text{[TP it was t].} \) \( \text{Copular source} \)

2.5. Evidence 4: Connector that is not compatible with the evasion strategies

This subsection provides another argument that the evasion strategy must be the savior of the apparently island-violating stripping sentences like (9) and (11) by using a coordinator that is not compatible with any evasion strategy. Stripping in a structure coordinated with this element must strictly obey island constraints.

This coordinator is Russian \( a \), which is often translated as ‘whereas’. It coordinates conjuncts that oppose each other semantically. In the following example, Oleg’s fondness of football contrasts with Roma’s dislike of it.

(20) Oleg ljubit futbol, a Roma ne ljubit.
    Oleg likes football, whereas Roma not likes.
    ‘Oleg likes football, whereas Roma doesn’t.’ (Based on Jasinskaja&Zeevat 2009:4)

Russian allows stripping in general, and stripping can apply in a coordination with \( a \):

(21) Oleg ljubit futbol, a Roma net.
    Oleg likes football, whereas Roma no.

An important fact about Russian \( a \) is that it is not compatible with any evasion strategy discussed earlier. This can be shown by the badness of coordination with \( a \) when we spell out the evasion strategy overtly in the second conjunct. (22) spells out the short source, and (23) spells out the copular source:

(22) *Oni vchera nanjali kogo-to, kto govorit po-francuzski, a ona
    They yesterday hired who-EI who speaks at-French, whereas she
ne govorit po-nemecki.
not speaks at-German.
Intended meaning: ‘They hired someone who speaks French yesterday, whereas she
does not speak German.’

(23) *Oni kupili sinuju mašinu, a ona okazalas’ ne zelēnoj
They bought blue car whereas she turned.out not green
Intended meaning: ‘They bought a blue car, whereas it turned out not to be green.’

Notice that the English translations of (22) and (23) also sound bad. I will not attempt to
answer why they do so in this squib, but only wish to point out that for our purpose here,
just knowing this property of $a$ suffices, and we can use it to block the evasion strategies.

Recall my discovery that for most speakers, the apparently island-violating stripping
sentences (9) and (11) are fine because they are saved by the evasion strategies. Since the
Russian coordinator $a$ is not compatible with any evasion strategy, stripping in a structure
coordinated by $a$ cannot be saved, and should always respect island constraints.

I will first show that Russian has relative clause islands, but does not have left branch
islands. Then I will show that as expected, stripping in $a$-coordination cannot violate the
relative clause island, but can have left branch extraction.

First, (24) shows that in Russian, relative clauses are islands to movement:

(24) *[Na kakom jazyke], oni nanjali čeloveka, kotoryj razgovarivaet t?
On which language they hired person which speaks?
Intended meaning: ‘Which language is s.t. they hired the person who speaks it?’

As expected, stripping with $a$ cannot violate the relative clause island, as in (25).

(25) *Oni vchera nanyali kogo-to, kto govorit po-francuzski, a
They yesterday hired who-El who speaks at-French, whereas
po-nemecki net.
at-German no.
Intended meaning: ‘They hired someone who speaks French, but not German.’

Unlike English, Russian allows left branch extraction:
(26) [Kakogo cveta], oni kupili [DP t, mašinu]?
   What color they bought car
   ‘What is the color such that they bought a car of that color?’

   In a-coordination, the remnant can be left-branch extracted, as is expected:

(27) Oni sinuju mašinu kupili, a zelēnuju/*zelēnaja net.
   They blue.ACC car.ACC bought whereas green.ACC/*NOM no
   ‘They bought a blue car, but not a green car.’

   Both adjectives in (27) must have accusative case due to case concord with the object noun. The accusative case on the remnant suggests that it must come from the long source rather than the copular source, which would give it a different case (nominative).

   Thus, by using a-coordination, I rule out the evasion strategies, one of the two possible parses, and what’s left is the long source. As expected, stripping in a-coordination cannot violate island constraints anymore.

2.6. Yoshida et al.’s (2019) rejection of the evasion strategy

Yoshida et al. (2019) presented experimental results showing that the evasion strategies can’t be the reason why stripping can violate islands. This subsection addresses this claim. They constructed stripping examples where the remnant is an R-expression that is co-indexed with the matrix subject in the antecedent. If the matrix subject must be repeated in the elided phrase, it would c-command the trace of the remnant, violating Condition C. If the matrix subject does not have to be repeated, there will be no Condition C violation. One example is (28).

(28) Joe: While Joe was singing, she noticed the student who met with Bill.
   Bill: *No, with Mary.  
   (Yoshida et al. 2019:1536)

(29a-b) spell out the possible derivations for the response in (28). In the long source (29a), the matrix subject she c-commands the trace of the remnant, incurring a Condition
C violation. The short source (29b), if available, avoids such a violation because it does not include the matrix subject.\(^5\) (28) received low ratings from subjects, suggesting that the short source is not available.

(29) a. Bill: No, with \textit{Mary} \[ i \text{-she, noticed the student who met } t. \] \hspace{1cm} \text{Long source}

b. Bill: No, with \textit{Mary} \[ i \text{-the / the student} \text{-met } t. \] \hspace{1cm} \text{Short source}

I agree that the short source is not available to (28); but when the short source is spelled out overtly, it already sounds odd. The intuition is that \textit{no} can only deny Joe’s main assertion here, but not the content in the relative clause. Thus, the badness of the short source may be due to the setup of this particular discourse. I leave the exact reason for future research, and simply point out that the short source is not available to (28) to begin with. When the short source is available, it does save an island violation.\(^6\)

3. Conclusion

This squib has shown that evasion strategies are not only available to sluicing and fragment answers, but to stripping as well. In particular, it must be the reason why the stripping sentences discussed in this squib appear to violate island constraints. This suggests that stripping should be analyzed no differently from sluicing and fragment answers, and the evasion strategies that are available to sluicing and fragment answers are available to stripping as well.

References

Barros, Matthew, Patrick Elliott, and Gary Thoms. 2014. There is no island repair. Ms., Rutgers University.


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1 I follow Griffiths and Liptak and Barros et al. in calling the entire sentence fragment answer; but strictly speaking, only *Yeah* is the fragment answer, and *Charlie* is supplemental material that is likely derived from stripping.

2 This configuration satisfies the licensing condition on ellipsis that has been proposed in the literature. See Merchant (2001), for example, for a discussion on how it satisfies his semantic identity condition.

3 A minority of speakers were more willing to accept (13a-b) than others. These speakers required a lot of contrastive focus on the correlate (*French and blue*), and expressed the intuition that (13a-b) is correcting the incorrect belief of the conversation partner. That is, (13a) means that the language *x* such that they hired no one who speaks *x* is French, not German, and (13b) means the color *x* such that no one bought a car of *x* color is blue, not green. Barros et al. (2014) also reported interspeaker variation in the judgments for the fragment answer examples parallel to (13a-b) that involve a negative quantifier in the antecedent. Gary Thoms (p.c.) suggested that for the speakers who were more willing to accept such examples, perhaps there is another possible parse, which involves a pronoun *it*:

(i) They hired no one who speaks French yesterday, German, *[it was not]*.

(ii) No one bought a blue car, green, *[it was not]*.

The pronoun *it* refers to the language *x* such that they hired no one who speaks *x* in (i), and the color *x* such that no one bought a car of *x* color. The pronoun *it* is versatile in general. For example, *it* can refer to meta-linguistic antecedents, e.g. in “Who is it?” as a response to door knocks.

4 We may wonder why for most speakers, the long source disappears when the first conjunct contains an island. A simple answer is that the remnant in the long source (16a) crosses the relative clause island, and no movement may
violate the island constraints. This is the position held by Barros et al. (2014). However, Yoshida et al. (2019) presented experimental evidence suggesting that this view may not be right, and that in at least some cases, a movement can violate island constraints, as long as the island structure ends up getting deleted (see endnote 6). This might be the reason why one of my informants accepts the long source reading. I leave to future research exactly when a movement can cross islands, and when it can’t. The focus of this squib is not on the presence or absence of the long source, but on that of the evasion strategies. Therefore, what matters is that everyone finds the short source available.

5 Most of Yoshida et al.’s (2019) discussion actually surrounds another evasion strategy called the cleft source, though they mention that their evidence would argue against the short source as well. Following Barros et al. (2014), I assume that the cleft source is generally not available to contrastive remnants. Since Yoshida et al.’s examples all have contrastive remnants, I assume the cleft source is not available, and do not discuss it here.

6 Is the short source the only savior of island violations in stripping? Yoshida et al.’s experimental results suggest it is not. They showed that stripping can still violate islands even when the evasion strategy is not available, and took this to mean that the long source is grammatical in those cases. This observation raises further questions, since the long source is generally not available for the stripping examples in this paper whose antecedent contains an island. I leave to future research exactly when the long source is available. The picture that emerges from this squib and Yoshida et al.’s results is that both the long source and the evasion strategies can save apparent island violations in stripping.