

Small clause predicates and sluicing*

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Abstract. This *Commentaire* bears out a prediction of Anand et al.’s (2021b) syntactic identity condition on sluicing. Identity is calculated over argument domains as small as small clauses. With extraction of a small clause subject, sluicing is possible where only a small clause predicate has an antecedent.

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This *Commentaire* bears out a prediction of Anand et al.’s (2021b) syntactic identity condition on sluicing: sluicing is possible where only a small clause predicate has an antecedent.

Drawing on the Santa Cruz sluicing data set (Anand et al. 2021a), Anand et al. (2021b) (AHM) show that sluicing is possible with small clause (SC) antecedents. An example is (1) (AHM: exx. 14e, 17); MODAL stands for a modal of “vague or ambiguous force or flavor” (AHM: 8), while BE reflects the implied presence of a copula (AHM: 14f.):

- (1) With [_{SC} the campaign on hold] – and who knows
for how long [[the campaign]_i MODAL BE [_{SC} *t*_i on hold]] –
Biden is left without any regular way to make his case to the electorate.

In (1), the entire small clause is shared between the preceding discourse and the ellipsis site. AHM (exx. 24a, 26a) show further that sluicing is possible where only the subject of an elided small clause has an antecedent. In (2), the antecedent consists only of the nominal *a presidential race* (which receives an E-type anaphoric interpretation in the ellipsis site). The small clause predicate *when*, meanwhile, is extracted as the *wh*-remnant:

- (2) Bradley said that he has not shut the door to
[a presidential race], though he would not say when_j
[[that presidential race]_i MODAL BE [_{SC} *t*_i *t*_j]].
SC = [that presidential race [when]]

AHM argue that sluicing does not require syntactic identity for the whole elided constituent; viz. the appearance of MODAL and BE in (1) and (2), among other possible mismatches they document in the TP domain in terms of polarity, tense, modality, and finiteness. Rather, sluicing requires syntactic identity over ‘argument domains’ (AHM: 15; cf. Rudin 2019 for vP). Since small clauses are argument domains, syntactic identity is satisfied in (1). The small clause is again the relevant argument domain in (2). However, elements moved out of the ellipsis site do not require an identical antecedent (a freedom that elsewhere allows for sprouting). Hence the elided small clause subject alone satisfies syntactic identity, based on its nominal antecedent. Further, AHM (p. 17) “predict that there should be cases just like [(2)] except that they involve extraction of the subject of the small clause rather than its predicate. If such cases exist, they have not so far been observed.”

This prediction is borne out in (3). The small clause subject *which items* is extracted, with only the small clause predicate *buy one get one free* finding an antecedent:

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- (3) The sign says [buy one get one free], but it doesn't specify which items; [t_i BE [SC t_i buy one get one free]].
 SC = [which items [buy one get one free]]

The small clause structure assumed in (3), with the *wh*-remnant as the subject and the pricing offer as the predicate, is supported by the contrast in (4):

- (4) a. [The videos]_i are [SC t_i [buy one get one free]].
 b. * [Buy one get one free]_i is/are [SC t_i [the videos]].

The observation of sluicing where only the small clause predicate has an antecedent strengthens the argument that sluicing requires syntactic identity over argument domains. Further examples – both, like (3), involving prices – are given in (5) and (6):

- (5) Stallholder: “Two fifty the dozen!”
 Shopper: “Which fruit_j [t_j BE [SC t_j two fifty the dozen]]?”

- (6) *Looking for cheap diesel*
 The lowest price on the BP sign is [three dollars and ten cents],
 but I can't make out which fuel_j [t_j BE [SC t_j three dollars and ten cents]].

References

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