

Prosodic licensing in ellipsis

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In this talk, we will review the role of prosody in the understanding of elliptical phenomena, with special attention to ellipsis *licensing* and the connection between ellipsis and deaccentuation.

We will present a case study on aggressively non-D-linked *wh*-phrases in English (with a detour to Dutch), which shows that the distribution of ellipsis remnants is constrained by prosodic factors in addition to syntactic and semantic ones. The data we look at concern the generalization that while *wh-the-hell* expressions cannot be used as remnants in sluicing (1a), they are grammatical in non-elliptical sentences and in the variant of sluicing called swiping, in which an element is stranded to the right of the *wh*-remnant (cf. 1b,c, Merchant 2001, 2002).

- (1) a. *Bill was talking to someone, but I don't know who the hell.
 b. Bill was talking to someone, but I don't know who the hell he was talking to.
 c. Bill was talking, but I don't know who the hell TO.

Using data gathered via experiments conducted with 3 British and 2 American speakers, we will show that earlier proposals inadequately explain this puzzle, and propose a prosodic account that captures the distribution of WTH not only in elliptical but also in other contexts.

Our novel claim is that, *wh-the-hell* expressions cannot bear nuclear stress (NS) and cannot host an intonational phrase boundary tone (T%). Due to this, they are only licensed in prosodic contexts like (2).

- (2) *Prosodic licensing condition of wh-the-hell*: ... ([NS]) ... [*wh-the-hell*] ... ([NS]) ...]T%

As we will show, this account captures the behaviour of *wh-the-hell* more generally, beyond elliptical contexts as well.