

Ellipsis in Paston Letters

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1. Introduction.

In speech there are materials left unexpressed but understood for various reasons, e. g. to avoid redundancy. This is called ellipsis. Linguistic theory tries to explain how these missing materials are interpreted in natural languages.

W. Chao (1988) is an attempt to investigate ellipsis in the framework of the Government and Binding theory. He asserts that the elliptical constructions should be grouped into at least two major classes. The head-minus (H^-) class, in which the major phrasal heads are missing in the elliptical structure, must be generated in D-structure as the output of the defective X' -schema (1). The head-plus (H^+) class, whose missing element is always a single constituent, is pronominal in nature and should be interpreted in the same way as pronominals. He predicts that the H^- constructions will display remarkably little variation from language to language, while the range of H^+ manifestations is considerably more diverse (W. Chao '88 : 8).

- (1) $X'^- \rightarrow (\text{SPEC}) (X'^-) Y^*$
 $X'^- \rightarrow Y^*$

This paper is an attempt to study the elliptical construction in Paston Letters. I adopt W. Chao's way of classification, and try to

characterize how ellipsis in Middle English differs from that of present-day English.

2. Head-minus Class.

This class includes Gapping and Stripping. Gapping deletes indefinitely many occurrences of a repeated main verb in a conjoined structure (J. R. Ross 1970 : 250), leaving two major constituents.⁽¹⁾ See (2). Stripping is a rule that deletes everything in a clause under identity with corresponding parts of a preceding clause, except for one constituent (and some times a clause-initial adverb or negative) (Hankamer and Sag 1976 : 409). See (3) and (4). An adjunct can be added in stripping. See (5).

- (2) I ate fish, Bill rice, and Harry roast beef.
- (3) Alan likes to play volleyball, but not [Sandy--].
- (4) John gave chocolates to Mary, and [__flowers__] too.
- (5) John sings, and [__very well] too.

The constructions which belong to this class lack the lexical head of the predicate. Whenever any of the complements of the θ -marking head are not realized, the head itself as well as the other higher verbal elements in the clause must also be missing (W. Chao '88 : 11-2). See (6) and (7).

- (6) *John will give chocolates to Mary, and [send__ to Sue].
- (7) *John should give chocolates to Mary, and [will__ to Sue].

H~ ellipsis crucially requires local syntactic antecedents, and in this respect can be considered as an anaphoric process (in the GB sense)

(Ibid. p. 78).

Stripping is allowed in PL. See (8) ~ (19).

(8) as for my doughtyr your wyfe, che faryt well, blyssyd be god, as a woman in hyr plyte may do, and all your sonys and doughtrys.⁽²⁾ (PL020001-3)

(9) \$at \$ere was a thryfty woman come forby \$e watteryng and fond \$e wey stoppyde, and askyd hym ho had stoppyd the weye ; and he seyde they that had pore to 3 eue it, (PL023011-4)

(10) they that haue seid worst of yow seid better of yow than i herd hem sey thys twelmoneth day, and in substance contrary to all olde tales. (PL035021-2)

(11) to do as largely as she shall be disired, or largelyere. (PL200027-8)

(12) ther - fore in any wyse send me word in hast how your brothere doth, and ye bothyn, for i shall not ben wele at eas till i know how that ye do. (PL213005-7)

(13) wherffore i hope thys next terme ther schall be a weye taken and an ende ; (PL248046-7)

(14) for he louythe nowthe syr w. y. in con - clusion, nor me nowther, (PL248058-9)

(15) thys mater maye not be wyst to noo body but to my moodre and yowe onlye, nowther to syr james ner noo bodye. (PL248069-1)

(16) i pray yow be ware off yowr guydyng, and in chyff off yowre langage, (PL263025-6)

(17) item, i praye yowe late the mesure by pakthred be taken, or ell mesured by yerde, how moche is from the northe gate ther the

brygge was at gressham to the sowthe wall, and in lyke forme from the este syde to the west ; (PL264022-4)

(18) and thus whytner my lady mokk me or theye i woote nott. (PL269026-7)

(19) he seid he was infeffid aswell as ye ; (PL644030-1)

Gapping is also allowed. See (20)~(31).

(20) and on the wedynsday after cam john paston, the thursday john dam and william bakton. (PL033005-6)

(21) And there ys owyng yow by som man for vj yeere, som man for vij yeere, and som lesse and more to the somme of c li. before Myghellmasse ; (PL053008-10)

(22) and hough be it that in his presumptuose and ondiscrete demenyng he gaf bothe me and yow cause of displeasir, and to other of my seruauntes ille exsaumple, (PL072032-4)

(23) it was tolde me by rythe a worshipfull man that loveth you rythe well, & ye him, (PL117002-3)

(24) malt ys sold her but for xij d., and whet ij s. or xxvj d. at thys time and otys xij d. (PL221030-1)

(25) and as for any discharge that i promysed at the boroeng off the xx li. whan i leyde the pleages ther-fore, i thought not but that your vncl e shuld a boroed them owte, and i to haue had my pleages as well as he his. (PL224009-2)

(26) by occasion of which variance dyvers of the seid feoffez of the seid maneres, londes, and tenementez haue thereof made estat, summe to oon persone and summe to other, (PL252023-5)

(27) also the goodely menes wherby ye best can entrete my cosyn

syr w. c. at the seyde day, wse them to cawse hym, iff itt wyll be, to come, ye in hys companye and he in yowr in cheff at yowr cheff schew, and m. r. and he in com-pany ; (PL258037 - 41)

(28) I can gete no man that wyll geue at the most more than xxij d. fore a quarter, fore soo men selle dayli at the moste, and sumtyme xx d. a combe. (PL688004 - 6)

(29) but ye were departyd as well from Yermouth yistirday as this day from Castre. (PL825008 - 9)

(30) than he rehersyd a- 3 en the trespace that he xulde a do in hese water... a selyd hym a qwentans and he hym a nother, and thus they partyd laste ; (PL872054 - 6)

(31) and robert had issue edmund and walter, which edmund the elder bare as his father, and his brother, because he married glanviles daughter, a cheife indented golde, the field silver flowret azure ; (PL897047 - 50)

3. Head-plus Class.

There is at least one H+ category in the constructions belonging to this class, and the missing element must be a single consituent. This class includes 'do it anaphora' (32), where no ellipsis takes place, as well as the following elliptical constructions ; 'null complement anaphora' (33), VP Ellipsis (34) and Sluicing (35) (W. Chao '88 : 77). Sluicing deletes everything but the preposed constituents of an embedded question, under the condition that the remainder of the question is identical to some other parts of the sentence, or of a preceding sentence (J. R. Ross 1969 : 252).

- (32) No one thought John would leave until he actually did it.
(33) John suggested that we leave, and Bill agreed.
(34) John left yesterday, and Bill did too.
(35) Somebody left, but we don't know who.

This class does not involve the defective X'-schema. The missing element belonging to this class is licensed by the local H+ head as an empty category (W. Chao '88 : 80).

There is Sluicing in PL. See (36) ~ (40)

(36) and that john pampyng roode for a dyscharge fore yow and that he hathe sped well ; but hoghe, that wot i nott. (PL263054-7)

(37) ye haue a lytell chaffyd it, but i can not tell howe. sende me worde whether ye be in better hope ore werse. (PL263064-5)

(38) item, there be in london many flyeng talys seyng that ther shold be a werke, and yit they wot not howe. (PL275015-6)

(39) & som men seye that he is goon owt off the mownte, men wot not to what plase, & yit leffte a greet garnyson there weell fornysshyd in vytayll and all other thyng. (PL284017-9)

(40) I am enformyd \$at my goode maystyrrys James Radclef and Robert Radlef intendyn to take awaye my pore good and catall... be what menys I wot not. (PL709001-4)

There is VP ellipsis. See (41) ~ (48). But these are not typical cases of VPE. The subject in the elliptical clause is usually missing, and VPE is used to express the tense difference.

(41) and the tyme of his sute he was apostata, and i trowe is yet, (PL004032-3)

(42) i wold we hade vj sealles yf it myght easly be. (PL035012)

(43) me thynketh that the xl li. makyth the bargeyne certen attwyx john and my fader, and thow it be not, wyth oder mater that i haue it shal be certeyn j-now. (PL035015 - 7)

(44) jamys hobart was sent fro my lord of norffolk hedere, and spake wyth my lord archbyshop, and awnswere he had of my seyde lord and howe my lord tendryd the matere yet, and wyll. (PL242014 - 7)

(45) i vndrestonde that bastarde fauconbryg is owther hedyd or lyke to be, and hys brother bothe. som men seye he wolde haue deseruyd it, and som sey naye. (PL263014 - 6)

(46) item, as for tydyng, the erle off northomberlonde is hoome in -to the northe, and my lorde off glowcester schall afftre as to-morow, men seye. (PL268020 - 1)

(47) for th' eschewyng of the jimportable costes \$at hath ben born by yow, and yet lyke to bee, (PL601011-2)

(48) for the word is righ wilde and haue be sythyn... (PL636010 - 1)

There is 'do so' anaphora. See (49) ~ (55).

(49) for in a general oyer and termynere a supersedeas may dasshal, and so shall not in a special. (PL39013 - 4)

(50) also, remembir yow in any howsold, felaship, or company that will be of good rewle, purevyauns must be had that euery persone of it be helpyng and fortheryng aftir his discrecion and powyre, and he that woll not do so without he be kept of almes shuld be put out of the household or felachep. (PL072025 - 8)

(51) fore i wot wele yt gothe reth nere 3 owr hart, and so doth yt to myn and to othere ; but remembyre 3 ow, and so do i, that we haue

lost of here but a brethele, (PL203064 - 5)

(52) sche xal ful sore repent here leudnes here-aftyre, and i pray
god sche mute soo. (PL203073 - 3)

(53) that 3e thynke that i xuld wryte to 3ow fabylys and ymagy-
nacyons, but i do not soo ; (PL205002 - 3)

(54) neuerthelles in tyme passyd i purposyd that the master of the
colegge scholde haue hadd it, and so ere longe to i hope he schall.
(PL239008 - 9)

(55) and soo i hope she shall to hyre greet joye and all owres.
(PL270036 - 7)

Null argumenss are more extensively used than in Presentday
English. See (56) ~ (65).

(56) where they ware aunswered suche seruice was non vsed to
by there, nor with-yn the sayd citte, atte that tyme of the daye, and
prayd them to departe. (PL048063 - 5)

(57) and if aught lyth in my powere to do that that myght please
yowre lordshep, or cowde fydde any way for water ingham a-vayll and
wurchepe, (PL049025 - 7)

(58) fore cause if there were ony questionys mevyd to hym there
-of that he xwlde telle the trowthe, in cas that the qwestions were
meuyd by ony worchypfwll man, and namyd my lord bowchere, fore my
lord bowchere was wyth the kyng at that tym. (PL116010 - 4)

(59) and as for the replevyn for the cc shype ys not yet servyd.
(PL180058 - 9)

(60) and that they schuld bryng wyth hem fore here expensys
fore ij monythis. (PL176020 - 1)

(61) and as for such dystressys as they had taken here of youre tenauntys shold be delyueryd a-yen in lyke forme. (PL182022 - 4)

(62) and goddys blissyng and myn mvt ye haue both, and sendyw good sped in all in all ywyre maters. (PL209A063 - 4)

(63) yt greuyth me to thynke vpon yowyr gydeydg after the greet good that 3 e haue had in yowyr rewle sythyn fadyr deyyd, whom god assoyle, and soo symply spendyt as yt hath ben. (PL227024 - 7)

(64) as for othere tythynges is vndrestande here that the q. m. is verrely londyd, and hyre sone, in the west contre, (PL261022 - 3)

(65) god hathe schewyd hym-selffe marveloulye, lyke hym that made all and can vndoo ageyn whan hym lyst ; and i kan thynke that by all lyklyod schall schewe hym-sylff as mervylous ageyn, and that in schort tyme, and as i suppose offtere then onys in casis lyke. (PL261031 - 5)

4. Other Ellipsis.

W. Chao does not deal with the following constructions, which he assumes do not fall in the same class as those in sections 2 and 3 above (W. Chao '88 : 3).

(66) John!

(67) What for?

(68) I read John's.

(69) I read more books than Fred.

(70) John requested and Bill rejected, every single product in the catalogue.

Ellipsis in comparatives is often found in PL. See (71)~(73).

(71) and at euy n a sertyn man suppyd wyth me and tolde me that the patent grantyt to closse but a perch on bred, and that i had clossyd more than the grant of the patent is, as men seyde. (PL023009 - 11)

(72) fore i haue hard seyde the forthere lordys will be here sonere than men wen, i haue arde sayde ore iij wekys to an ende ; and also that 3e xwld com wyth more men and clenliere arayed than a nodere man of 3owre cowntre xwld, fore it lythe more vp-on 3owre worchyp and towcheythe 3ow more nere than odere men of that cowntre, and also 3e be more had in fauore wyth my lordys here. (PL114019 - 24)

(73) that he was not gladder of no thyng that he harde thys towlmonyth than he was ther-of. (PL125021-2)

Lexical heads such as V and N can be missing. See (74) ~ (78).

(74) and he xal dwn and all hys mene and all that ben hys wele -wyllerys. (PL128045 - 6)

(75) i pray yow that ye woll vowchesaff to send me an other sugowr loff, for my old is do. (PL142023 - 4)

(76) for thys ys to wry a lyffe to a-byde you and all youre. (PL180136 - 7)

(77) and be ware how ye ben bownd in any obligacion to any creature but if it be leyd in endifferent handes and trosty for yowre part ; (PL210024 - 6)

(78) as for my lorde, i vnderstande nott yitt whethyre he wylle in -to ingelonde the weke to-fore esterne ore ellys afftre. (PL297022 - 3)

I am not sure whether the following examples (79) ~ (82) are related to Sluicing or not.

(79) to reporte plein answeere of this bylle writen and how sone i

myght haue the seid stoon caried to monesle a-forn seid, and for what price. this werk is for a myll. (PL001020 - 1)

(80) wherefore ye must make a serche what he hath reseyyvid sith ser john fastolff dyed, and what tyme, and therupon ye shall vndirstand what he hath reseyyvid for me and what for hym. (PL076020 - 3)

(81) and for goddes love lete your brothere and ye be ware how that ye walken and wyth what felesshep ye etyn or drynkyn, and in what place ; (PL213007 - 9)

(82) send me word also whome ye wyll desyre to do for yow in this contre, or ellys where, in your absesce, and wryte to them to do for yow and they wyll be the better wyllid to do for yow. (PL224022 - 4)

Right Node Raising places on the right the second occurrence of the identical constituents in the paired clauses, and deletes all original occurrences. The constituent added on the right are always constituents (P. Postal 1974 : 126). See (83).

(83) they ansuered that thei haue shewed my said lord his request, and that he was, and is alwey, so moved and displesid with them that thei dar nomore move him therinne. (PL294040 - 2)

Notes :

- (1) Major constituests are argumensts, complements, or adjuncts of the missing heads or their projections. (W. Chao 1988 : 12)
- (2) Only small letters are used for the examples because of the format of the data base.

References

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