Ellipsis and the QuD: sluicing with nominal antecedents
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**Sluicing “New Words”**

**Definition:** Sluicing is a form of ellipsis that targets clauses under interrogative wh-phrases.

**(1)** a. She was murdered by someone, but we don’t know who has been murdered.
   b. Joe was murdered, but we don’t know who has been murdered.

*No New Words* generalization (Chung, 2006, ex. 29):
Every lexical item in the numeration of the sluice that ends up (only) in the elided IP must be identical to an item in the numeration of the antecedent CP.

This constraint has been adopted by various proposals from different theoretical perspectives since, including Merchant (2007, 2013) and AnderBois (2014).

**Capture (1):** “New Words” violate syntactic and possibly semantic identity.

**Identity theories**

**Central claim:** Sluicing is acceptable only if the elided material is identical to some antecedent constituent in the linguistic context semantically and/or syntactically.

**QUD theories**

**Central claim:** Sluicing is acceptable only if the sluice denotes a Question under Discussion (QUD) that is salient in the context.

**Challenge:** Capturing (1) requires the QUD (Who did it) to be unavailable in this context, which is a priori implausible.

**Inquisitive Semantics approach to QUD availability:**
- QUDs are made salient by “inquisitive elements” (additional quantifiers, indefinites, disjunctions, or conditionals) in the antecedent clause.
- In the absence of inquisitive elements (1), the theory relies on “issue bridging” whereby a suitable QUD is inferred.
- Restricting the context’s “issue-raising capacity” to the antecedent is unnecessarily restrictive and problematic (Kotek & Barros., 2018).

**Top-down cues are reasonably well understood; bottom-up constraints remain largely mysterious.**

Our approach: measure ‘QUD availability’ experimentally (Expt 3)

**Research strategy**

**Research question:** Are “New Words” really impossible to elide?

**Expt 1:** Are the canonical cases as clear-cut as assumed in the literature? Are there cases that involve the ellipsis of “New Words” and are nonetheless reasonably acceptable?

**Expt 2:** What about sluices with nominal antecedents?

**Expt 3:** Can variance in nominal-antecedent sluices be explained in terms of QUD availability?

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**Conclusion**

We set out to test the “No New Words” generalization, which prohibits the ellipsis of material not present in the antecedent clause. Expt 1 found that canonical cases often found in the literature do follow the bimodal distribution the generalization predicts (Figure 1), but there are also cases that achieve high levels of acceptability (Figure 2) despite eliding elements beyond those provided by the antecedent clause (Figure 3).

We then compared two classes of theories of sluicing with respect to their predictions for nominal-antecedent sluices: theories that assign a structural role between the elided material and its antecedent; and those that require the sluiced question to be a salient QUD. Our experimental results favor QUD theories over identity theories.

1. We found a high amount of variability in the acceptability of sluices with nominal antecedents, with some cases achieving peak acceptability (Expt 2).
2. Some (but not all) of the variance in acceptability can be explained in terms of ‘QUD availability’ (Expt 3).

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**Final Remarks**

1. While the contrast in (1) remains to be explained (Figure 1), the “No New Words” generalization is overately entrenched (Figures 2 and 4).
2. QUD availability may be necessary, but it doesn’t seem to be sufficient: the QUD (Who murdered Joe?) is clearly insufficient for felicitous pronominal reference.
3. In light of the comparison analogy: Parete’s marbles (Heim, 1982) similarly suggest that ‘referent infelicity’ alone is insufficient for felicitous pronoun reference.

(a). I dropped ten marbles and found all but one.
(b). I dropped one marble and found only nine of them.

If it is probably under the sofa.

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**Result Visualizations**

**Figure 1:** Acceptability (x%; y; z) of nominal-antecedent sluices (grey) along with acceptable (white) and unacceptable (black) fillers.

**Figure 2:** Mean acceptability of “New Words” items across conditions.

**Figure 3:** Group-level mean acceptability (left) and number of “New Words” (right).

**Figure 4:** Acceptability (x%) of nominal-antecedent sluices (grey) along with acceptable (white) and unacceptable (black) fillers.

**Figure 5:** Acceptability (y) as a function of items by ‘QUD availability’ (x).

**Figure 6:** Acceptability increases as a function of QUD availability (f = 1.826, p = 0.037).