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.

Experiment 1: Test No New Words generalization.
Methods: 27 native English speakers from Mechanical Turk performed a standard acceptability judgment task (1-5 Likert scale) and a free-response paraphrase task in which they paraphrased the sluice in their own words.

Stimuli: 46 "New Words." minimal pairs modeled after (1), see Figure 1.

Results: Figure 3 shows the acceptability of all items.
1. Some nominal-antecedent sluices are impossible. Many of them pattern with acceptable fillers (white bars), all of which are cases the literature agrees are acceptable.
2. Some nominal-antecedent sluices are terrible. Many of them pattern with unacceptable fillers, i.e. cases that the literature agrees are unacceptable.
3. High variance: As a group, nominal-antecedent sluises span the entire range of possible acceptability ratings.


Experiment 2: Test acceptability of sluices with nominal antecedents.
Methods: 63 native English speakers, acceptability judgment task.
Stimuli: 30 sluices with nominal antecedents, like the following.
A: I can’t see your parents in the audience. Did you not tell them about your performance today?
B: I did, but I forgot to tell them {when|where|what about|how long|why}.

Results: Figure 4 shows the acceptability of all items.
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Norming experiment
Goal: Estimate meaning of sluices from Expt 2.
Methods: 31 participants saw the same stimuli as in Expt 2, but instead of judging their acceptability, they provided paraphrases of the sluiced question in their own words.
Purpose: To determine if the paraphrase of each sluice was used in a forced-choice passage-completion task in Expt 3.

Experiment 3: Methods: 63 native English speakers, forced-choice passage completion, using sluice paraphrases from Expt 3.
Stimuli: 30 sluices with nominal antecedents, like the following.
A: I can’t see your parents in the audience. Did you not tell them about your performance today?
B: I did, but I forgot to tell them {when|where|what about|how long|why}.

Results: QUD availability explains some of the variability in acceptability, whereby more predictable questions are more acceptable when sluiced. However, residual variance suggests there’s more to sluicing than QUD availability.

Conclusion: We set out to test the “No New Words” generalization, which prohibits the ellipsis of material not present in the antecedent clause. Exp 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 eliminating 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 account for being intuitive acceptable despite the ellipsis of “New Words,” 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).

Final Remarks
1. While the contrast in (1) remains to be explained (Figure 1), the “No New Words” generalization is overexplained (Figures 2 and 3). QUD availability may be necessary, but it doesn’t seem to be sufficient: the QUD (Who murdered Joe?) is clearly inferable from “Joe was murdered,” yet sluicing that QUD is unacceptable.
2. A related observation: Parfet’s marbles (Heim, 1982) similarly suggest that ‘referent inferability’ alone is insufficient for felicitous pronominal reference.

(a) I dropped ten marbles and found all but one. It is probably under the sofa.
(b) I dropped ten marbles and found only nine of them. It’s probably under the sofa.


...why they should be in the audience.

I did, but I forgot to tell them {when|where|what about|how long|why}.

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3. High variance: As a group, nominal-antecedent sluises span the entire range of possible acceptability ratings.

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