A Dilemma with Accounts of Right-node Raising

Bradley Larson
University of Maryland

Introduction

There is a dilemma in current studies of right-node raising (RNR): The main approaches to the construction make fundamentally contradictory predictions that account for overlapping sets of data points. In this paper I argue that no single current analysis can account for the range of data and argue against the possibility that the analyses work in concert to account for the data. That is, given that current analyses each account for some but not the entirety of the documented data, there are two logical possibilities: 1) None of the analyses are correct. 2) More than one analysis is correct in its limited purview and duties are shared such that all the data is accounted for. I argue for the former.

Under the second option introduced above, RNR is derived either by means of one particular operation or a different one. That is, the term “right-node raising” is better seen as a surface-level description for a family of derivations: some stemming from an application of the first operation, the others via the second (as argued by Barros and Vicente (2010)). If this were the case it would be a sharp departure from the assumptions of most work in RNR and require critical investigation. When investigated further, there turns out to be no motivation to analyze RNR as being derived in two entirely separate ways. This being the case, the RNR dilemma remains.

1 Background
There has been much recent work on the derivation of RNR, and theories fall fairly neatly into three groups: ellipsis, multidominance, and movement. All previous work argues that RNR is derived via multidominance rather than ellipsis (or movement) (or vice versa)\(^1\).

Ellipsis accounts of RNR (as in Wilder 1997, Giannakidou and Merchant 1998, Hartmann 2000, Abels 2004, Bošković 2004, Ha 2008 and others) maintain that an RNR sentence like that in (1) is at some earlier stage in the derivation like that found in (2). The underlined string in the first conjunct is elided phonologically (3). This produces the effect of having a single string of words interpreted in both conjuncts while only appearing in one.

(1) Ivan bought, and Ivy read, the newspaper
(2) Ivan bought the newspaper, and Ivy read the newspaper.
(3) Ivan bought the newspaper, and Ivy read the newspaper.

The advantage to such a view rests in the fact that the elided material in the first conjunct shows effects found in traditional VP-ellipsis. For example, both VP-ellipsis and RNR display vehicle change effects (see Fiengo and May, 1994). The index of an R-expression can “change vehicles” and become associated with a pronoun in the same syntactic position if the R-expression is elided. Constructions that would otherwise run afoul of Principle C can be rescued by ellipsis (and vehicle change in turn) in (4) and by hypothesis in (5). This fact has, as yet, found no explanation in multidominance theories of RNR. Take it as a premise that vehicle change effects arise solely out of ellipsis.
Susan is thinking of firing John, and he thinks she will [fire John].

John hopes that Susan won’t [fire John], but the secretary knows that she will fire John.

Multidominance accounts of RNR (McCawley 1982, Wilder 1999, DeVos and Vicente 2005, Bachrach and Katzir 2008, Gracanin-Yuksek 2007, Grosz 2009, Larson 2009 and others) propose that the “shared material” is literally introduced (read Merged) into both conjuncts simultaneously as in (6). Under one of many linearization schemes (see Wilder 1999 or Bachrach and Katzir 2008), the shared material appears in the rightmost position while interpreted in both conjuncts.

This approach has the advantage of plausibly accounting for cumulative agreement in RNR. Cumulative agreement (7) is found when subjects from separate conjuncts function together to effect plural agreement on a shared verb. This fact has not yet found explanation in ellipsis theories of RNR. Take it as a second premise that cumulative agreement is a result of multidominance alone (see Grosz 2009 for details).
Alice is happy that Iris, and Claire is proud that Diane, {have/*has} negotiated with the manager.

In short, there is a dilemma. There are RNR sentences that are amenable to ellipsis analyses though not multidominance ones, and there are RNR sentences amenable to multidominance analyses though not ellipsis ones. The common tack in the RNR literature is to suppose that a single theory is correct and to work on its empirical shortcomings: an “exclusivist” hypothesis. But this is not the only logical possibility. There is another possible approach in which both theories are correct, though limited in scope: an “eclectic” hypothesis. I will argue presently that, while this is a conceivable tack, the eclectic hypothesis is descriptively inadequate and an exclusivist approach is more parsimonious and should be assumed.

2 Eclectic Hypothesis Arguments.

It is difficult to determine how one could attack or defend the eclectic hypothesis. Barros and Vicente have devised on that is particularly ingenious. I adopt it here, though I come to quite different conclusions than they do. First present a specific RNR construction that can, by hypothesis, only be derived by ellipsis. Such a sentence will have a signature “prompt” that unambiguously marks it as such. For example, what one may dub morphological mismatch can only be derived via ellipsis, not multidominance. The mismatch in question here is the difference in person between my and her. In (8), despite the fact that the overt possessive pronoun in the second conjunct is different in person from the one interpreted in the first conjunct, the phrase in the first can be elided:
(8) I didn’t [pass my math exam], but I’m sure that Alice will, pass her math exam.

The sentence in above can be interpreted such that the speaker did not pass his own exam and Alice did not pass her own exam. This is possible in ellipsis generally (9). That this interpretation is possible will be a prompt for ellipsis-derived sentences.

(9) Ivy has slept in her office, but I haven’t [slept in my office]

Multidominance accounts predict that for (8) the possessive pronoun her should have the same interpretation in each conjunct, because there is simply no elided pronoun to relate to the other nominal. As such, multidominance cannot be the source of (8).

Second, present an RNR sentence with a prompt that can only be derived by multidominance. For example, the sentence displaying cumulative agreement above ((7) repeated here as (10)) cannot be derived by ellipsis because such an account would predict singular agreement with the verb as in (11) below. But through the simultaneous Merge of two subjects with the T head, cumulative agreement can be achieved via multidominance (again, see Grosz for details).

(10) Alice is happy that Iris, and Claire is proud that Diane, {have/*has} negotiated with the manager.

(11) *Alice is happy that Iris has negotiated with the manager, and Claire is proud that Diane, has negotiated with the manager.
Finally, construct examples which have the prompts of both ellipsis- and multidominance-derived RNR sentences like (12) below. If these combination sentences are unacceptable, it follows that neither the ellipsis or multidominance accounts can reduce to one another (i.e. neither account can produce both prompts). In effect, both are needed to account for the data. If the combination sentence is acceptable, then one (or both) of the analyses is superfluous.

(12) *Alice is happy that Iris [negotiated her salary with the manager ], and Claire is proud that Daniel, have negotiated his salary with the manager.

In (12), since there is cumulative agreement, the sentence must have been derived via multidominance. As such, the morphological mismatch reading is not possible. On the surface, that (12) is unacceptable under the relevant interpretation suggests that the eclectic hypothesis is correct. But as we will see below, this is deceiving and the exclusivist hypothesis is superior.

3 Evidence Against the Eclectic Hypothesis
In what follows I investigate arguments for the eclectic hypothesis. The arguments are presented as suites of constructions: an ellipsis exemplar, a multidominance exemplar, and a test combination sentence. I show that when appropriate test conditions are applied the sentences remain acceptable and arguments for the eclectic hypothesis fail to hold.
3.1 Suite One

In the suite of examples introduced above, it was shown that morphological mismatch is generally possible in RNR, just not when there is cumulative agreement. The sentence showing morphological mismatch however is not minimally different from the test sentence in (12).\(^3\) In order to make these sentences true minimal pairs, the ellipsis exemplar should have the same pre-gap structure as the test sentence. In (13) below, the reading with a bound pronoun in the first conjunct is unavailable.

(13) *Alice is happy that Iris [can spell her name], and Claire is proud that Daniel, can spell his name.

Here, even when multidominance is not necessary to derive the sentence, morphological mismatch of this sort is not licensed.\(^4\) Since the mismatch is not allowed in sentences like (13), the fact that morphological mismatch is also not allowed in (12) (i.e., a sentence like (13)) does not show that cumulative agreement is what blocks it.

3.2 Suite Two

Another suite of examples involves a similar ellipsis-induced morphological mismatch paired with a multidominance-derived interpretation of *different*. The example of morphological mismatch is shown in (14). Here the verbal morphology is mismatched (like the VP-ellipsis examples discussed in Lasnik (1999)). The verb in the shared element is in its infinitival form despite the fact that it is interpreted in the first conjunct in its past participle form.
(14) Alice has [worked on binding], and Iris wants to, work on binding theory.

This sentence is paired with (15) in which *different* can be interpreted with a so-called internal reading. The reading in question being the one in which Alice and Iris work on different topics from each other. Bachrach and Katzir 2008 following Abels 2004 claim that this interpretation arises from multidominance and not from ellipsis:

(15) Alice must, and Iris should, work on different topics.

When a sentence has the morphological mismatch prompt, the internal reading of *different* is not blocked (16). Following the logic in the above section, it cannot be the case the both ellipsis and multidominance are required. In fact, it suggests that neither approach is correct given the conceptual mutual incompatibility discussed earlier.

(16) *Licit internal reading of* different

Alice must [work on different topics], and Iris ought to be, working on different topics.

This fact is not predicted under the eclectic account. Prompts from both multidominance and ellipsis are present in a single sentence and the sentence is acceptable under the intended reading.
3.3 Suite Three

In another set of examples, vehicle change is the prompt for ellipsis (17) and is this time paired with cumulative agreement (18):

(17) She, fears, but Bob is not worried, that Alice, might lose the election.

(18) Alice fears that Iris, and Claire worries Diane, {have/*has} decided to nominate Esther.

When both of these prompts are present in the same sentence, the result is ungrammatical with the vehicle change reading:

(19) *She, fears that Alex, and I worry that Bob, have decided to nominate Claire,.

But there is an important difference between the test sentence and the model ellipsis sentence. Note that in sentence (19), the R-expression Claire is separated from its antecedent by another R-expression. This is quite different from the sentence in (17). When that sentence is altered so as to be more similar to the test sentence, it disallows the vehicle change reading as well. Given this, there is little reason to blame cumulative agreement for the lack of vehicle change.5

(20) *She, fears that Alex thinks, but Bob is not worried, that Alice, might lose the election.
3.4 Suite Four

In another suite of examples, ellipsis-induced vehicle change (21) is paired with the multidominance-induced internal reading of different (22).

(21) She thinks that he must, but Bob fears that he won’t, come up with a topic that satisfies Alice.

(22) Alice absolutely must, and Iris is obliged to, come up with different topics.

When both of these prompts are introduced in the same sentence, both the vehicle change reading and the internal reading of different can be licit simultaneously, contrary to the eclectic hypothesis’ prediction:

(23) She thinks that she absolutely must, and Bill fears that he won’t, present different topics to Alice’s supervisor.

3.5 Suite Five

In a final suite of sentences, I introduce a new prompt for multidominance accounts and pair it with verbal morphological mismatch. Noted by Sabbagh (2007), a universally quantified NP that is shared between the conjuncts can take scope over indefinites outside the shared material (24). This could not have been derived by ellipsis, assuming that this type of scope taking depends on covert quantifier raising. It would require covert across-the-board movement which Bošković and Franks (2000) have argued does not exist.
(24) Some woman hates, and some man loves, every dog in the pound.

When the above sentence is altered such that there is an ostensibly ellipsis-derived morphological mismatch, the sentence retains an interpretation in which the universal QP scopes high, again suggesting that the eclectic approach is incorrect:

(25) Some woman must, and some man ought to be, working with every student.

4 Conclusion
While a logical possibility, the eclectic hypothesis is not empirically supported. In fact, the eclectic approach has been shown to make exactly the wrong predictions when the test conditions are controlled sufficiently and should thus be discarded. We are unfortunately left with the dilemma we started with. The study of RNR is at an impasse: the current analyses cannot account for the facts on their own, and as shown here they also cannot account for them when working together.


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1For the sake of space, I will refrain for discussing movement analyses. I would like to point out a compelling movement analysis of RNR in Tagalog (Sabbagh 2008), though see Larson, 2011 for counter-arguments.

2Cumulative agreement seems to be marginal or simply unacceptable for a number of English speakers. The judgments presented here are only of those who find cumulative
agreement acceptable.

3 Something should be noted about the examples in which morphological mismatch are licit in RNR. When their conjuncts are transposed, only they are also licit as traditional VP-deletion. Compare the examples in (8) and (11) with their transposed version in (i) and (ii):

(i) I’m sure Alice will pass her exam, but I didn’t
(ii) *Claire is proud that Daniel has negotiated his salary with the manager, and Alice is happy that Iris.

Sentences like (8) are more likely to involve VP-ellipsis followed by stylistic inversion.

4 It may be argued that there is covert cumulative agreement on the modal in (13). But when this option is removed, vehicle change is still not licensed:

(i) *Alice is happy that Iris’s [performance of her song was a success], and Claire is proud that Daniel’s, performance of his song was a success.

5 Blame seems to reside in the fact that there are more R-expressions in the unacceptable sentences. Even when in the second conjunct, an extra name precludes the vehicle change reading (i). This may be due to a performance-level memory limitation.

(i) *She, fears, but Alex said Bob is not worried, that Alice, might lose the election.