Two (potential) differences between VP ellipsis and pseudogapping

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Verb phrase ellipsis and pseudogapping are often treated as variants of the same process [1-6]. In both something verbal is elided. In VP ellipsis the verb and all of its arguments are elided, while in pseudogapping, the verb is elided stranding one of its arguments (see (1), from [6]). We present two novel experiments examining potential differences between VP ellipsis and pseudogapping.

(1) VPE: Some have served mussels to Sue but others wouldn’t <serve mussels to Sue>.
   PG: Some have served mussels to Sue while others have <served> swordfish.

Merchant [7] discusses one potential difference between the two constructions: VPE can seemingly tolerate syntactic mismatches between the antecedent and ellipsis clauses, while pseudogapping cannot (see (2)). He argues that the asymmetry follows from a difference in the height of ellipsis: the elided constituent includes the voice feature on \( v \) in pseudogapping, but not in VPE, so [voice] is subject to syntactic identity for pseudogapping but not VPE. We note, however, that the Merchant’s VPE examples enjoy an unfair advantage. VPE mismatch examples can be improved in sentences involving auxiliary, rather than argument, focus [8]. Pseudogapping, unlike VPE, requires argument focus, and not aux focus. To level the playing field, argument focus VPE and pseudogapping must be compared directly.

(2) VPE: This problem was to have been looked into, but obviously nobody did <look into this problem>
   PG: *Roses were brought by some, and others did <bring> lilies

Experiment 1 did just that by testing the acceptability of sentences like (3-4) (and no-ellipsis controls), using magnitude estimation [9]. Results: Main effects of Ellipsis \((p<.0001)\) and Mismatch \((p<.0001)\): Ellipsis judged less acceptable than No Ellipsis, Mismatch less acceptable than Match. Mismatch-Ellipsis interaction \((p<.0001)\): Mismatch less acceptable than Match only with Ellipsis; Mismatch-EllipsisType \((p<.05)\): Mismatch penalty greater for VPE than Pseudogapping. Ellipsis-Mismatch-EllipsisType \((p<.05)\): Mismatch-Ellipsis interaction stronger for VPE than Pseudogapping (see Figure 1). Discussion: mismatch affects both VPE and pseudogapping, but is more severe in VPE (contra Merchant’s predictions).

(3) Match
   VPE: Andy accused Jill, and Matt did <accuse Jill>, too.
   PG: Andy accused Jill, and Matt did <accuse> Beth.

(4) Mismatch
   VPE: Jill was accused by Andy, and Matt did <accuse Jill>, too.
   PG: Jill was accused by Andy, and Matt did <accuse> Beth.

Another dimension in which VPE and Pseudogapping might differ is anaphoricity. Kehler [10] argued that VPE—as opposed to gapping—is anaphoric because it can take place across a discourse and allows cataphoric reference. By those criteria, pseudogapping, like gapping, is not anaphoric, thus providing an additional difference between VPE and PG (5-6). Experiment 2 tested this by embedding sentences like (3-4) in either “resemblance” or “cause-effect” discourse relations, which should affect only anaphoric processes (VPE but not PG). Results: Both PG \((p<.0001)\) and VPE \((p<.05)\) judged less acceptable than
NoEllipsis. Mismatch less acceptable than Match ($p<.05$), Cause-Effect Relation less acceptable than Resemblance ($p<.05$). Mismatch-Ellipsis for VPE ($p<.0001$) but not PG: Mismatch penalty greater with VPE than without, Ellipsis-Mismatch-DiscRelation marginal for VPE ($p<.08$) but not PG ($p>.6$): Mismatch-Ellipsis interaction stronger for Resemblance than Cause-Effect, for VPE but not PG (see Figure 2). **Discussion**: discourse manipulation affected VPE and not PG, consistent with the claim that VPE is anaphoric while PG is not.

(5) **Across discourse**

**VPE**: A. Bill will make a statement blasting the media. B. Hillary will, too.

**PG**: A. Bill will make a statement blasting the media. B. *Hillary will the newspaper reporters.

(6) **Cataphoric reference**

**VPE**: If Hillary will, Bill will make a statement blasting the media.

**PG**: *If Hillary will the newspaper reporters, Bill will make a statement blasting the media.

Though VP ellipsis and pseudogapping may differ syntactically, Experiment 1’s results contradict the “height of ellipsis” distinction proposed by Merchant [7]: VP ellipsis was more sensitive to voice mismatch than pseudogapping when compared in similar examples. VP ellipsis and pseudogapping do appear to differ on the dimension of anaphoricity as suggested by the effect of discourse relation on VP ellipsis and not pseudogapping observed in Experiment 2.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**References**: