

## A Nonrecoverable Deletion

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One of the earliest and least controversial proposals for constraining the functioning of grammatical rules is the general condition on "recoverability of deletion," first proposed in Chomsky (1964, 40-1). Recoverability is achieved by limited syntactic deletions to two cases: either (i) deletion of a specified lexical item or formative, or (ii) deletion of an element which is coreferential with and structurally identical to, or at least nondistinct from, another element in the sentence. In this squib I wish to point out a case of deletion-under-identity which is syntactically nonrecoverable; namely, the loss of a preposition in the process of relativization by deletion. This phenomenon is relatively common in postpositional languages, e.g. Turkish and Japanese, but this fact tends to be forgotten in current discussions on syntactic theory, where recoverability is invoked to block the deletion of a PP containing a relativized NP (see e.g. Chomsky(1976)). Postpositions are usually dismissed as trivial affixes (like case endings) on NP's. What makes the case presented here interesting is that it occurs in a prepositional language.

In modern colloquial Demotic Greek, relative clauses are introduced by an invariant complementizer pou, and the coreferential NP is deleted under identity with the head noun. A different rule optionally deletes unstressed subject pronouns. Thus:

- (1) a. (Ego) ton eida sto sinema.  
I him saw in-the movies  
b. Aphtós eine ó ánthropos [pou eida sto sinema].  
he is the man that I-saw in-the movies

Now consider the case where the coreferential NP is the object of a preposition inside the relative clause. Based on similar constructions in various languages, we might expect to find any of the following possibilities: (i) movement of the NP with pied-piping of the P; (ii) pronominalization of the NP; or (iii) deletion of the NP, leaving a stranded P in surface structure. Since Greek does not allow P-stranding, that leaves the first two options. There is a formal construction with inflected relative pronoun that can be resorted to, but colloquial Greek makes use of a fourth option: (iv) deletion of the NP together with its preposition. Thus:

- (2) a. Áphesa to vivlío páno stó trapézi.  
I-left the book on in-the table  
'I left the book on the table.'  
b. Aphtó eine to trapézi pou áphesa to vivlío  
This is the table that I-left the book  
'This is the table that I left the book on.'

- (3) a. Kanoun ta epipla apó ksylo.  
they-make the furniture from wood  
b. Aphto eine to ksylo [pou kanoun ta epipla]  
this is the wood that they-make the furniture  
'This is the wood that they make the furniture from.'
- (4) a. Paizo me to moró.  
I-play with the baby  
b. Aphtó eine to moró [pou paizo]  
This is the baby that I-play  
'This is the baby that I play with.'

Obviously the deleted preposition is not identical to anything in the matrix sentence, and hence is not syntactically recoverable in the usual sense. The deletion of the entire prepositional phrase may lead to considerable ambiguity. The following sentences are at least three ways ambiguous:

- (5) a. Aphtós eine ó ánthropos [pou agorázi gala]  
he is the man that he-buys milk.  
b. He's the man<sub>i</sub> { who<sub>i</sub> buys milk.  
from whom<sub>i</sub> he<sub>j</sub> buys milk.  
for whom<sub>i</sub> he<sub>j</sub> buys milk.
- (6) a. Aphté eine é gynaika [pou tragoutháei]  
she is the woman that (s)he-sings  
b. She's the woman<sub>i</sub> { who<sub>i</sub> sings  
about whom<sub>i</sub> he<sub>j</sub> sings  
with whom<sub>i</sub> he<sub>j</sub> sings

Naturally, the context in which these examples are uttered will affect which reading will be preferred. So will the choice of head noun; substituting mother, milkman, baby, etc. for man in (5) affects the preferred reading in predictable ways. In cases like (2) where many prepositions are possible: "I left the book on/near/beside/under/in the table," the missing P in the relative clause is assumed to be that P which best fills the primary semantic relation between predicate and shared nominal. Thus the basic reading for (2b) is 'on'; any other prepositional relationship such as 'under' must be explicitly stated, either by an adverb or by resorting to pronominalization of the shared nominal. Again, changing the head noun affects which P is assumed to have been deleted: one leaves things on tables, but in closets.

In conclusion, in all of these examples, it is only the semantic context together with knowledge about possible subcategorizations, and not any kind of identity with some element in the matrix clause, that allows the deletion of the P to be "recovered." While this phenomenon is certainly highly marked, it nonetheless appears to be a linguistic possibility even in prepositional languages that must be allowed for in any empirically adequate theory of deletion.

References:

- Chomsky, N. (1964) Current Issues in Linguistic Theory, Mouton  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (1976) "On Wh-movement," paper delivered at the Conference on  
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