

## Ellipsis in Appositives and the Syntax of Parenthesis

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**Synopsis.** Parenthetical expressions raise delicate questions about the division of labor between sentence grammar and discourse grammar. This paper sheds light on their nature by investigating the crosslinguistic syntax of non-restrictive nominal appositives (as in *I met an old friend, John Smith, at the pub today*). I argue that parentheticals of this kind have an underlyingly clausal syntax (*I met John Smith at the pub today*), masked by ellipsis under identity with the host clause. This analysis is shown to lend support to a conception of parentheticals as “orphan constituents,” i.e. as integrated into their host clauses not syntactically but only discursively [3, 7]. This is a welcome result, as it implies a material simplification of UG *vis-à-vis* the specialized machinery required for syntactic treatments of parenthesis [8, 9, 4].

**Background.** Non-restrictive appositives (NAPs) manifest various properties that distinguish them from non-parenthetical constituents (including adjuncts) [1, 2]: they are optional, truth-conditionally vacuous ‘supplements,’ prosodically isolated from their host clause (comma intonation), can have independent illocutionary force, fail to satisfy or violate V2, are strong islands for subextraction into the host, etc.

- (1) a. I met an old friend, *John Smith*, at the pub today.
- b. John saw someone, (*perhaps*) *his mother?*, near his house.
- c. \**What<sub>i</sub>* did John receive a gift, *a book about t<sub>i</sub>*, for his birthday?

Facts of this kind have led researchers to relegate the relation between parentheticals and their hosts entirely to discourse [3, 7], or, alternatively, to devise specialized modes of structure-building to accommodate the disjunct nature of parentheticals, such as de Vries’ *Par-Merge* or Potts’ *COMMA*-feature [8, 9, 4].

Problematic for either approach is the fact that NAPs do seem to permit certain syntactic interactions with their hosts. For instance, in languages with morphological case, (non-predicative) NAPs systematically match their anchor in case (2), and host-internal elements are capable of binding into NAPs (3).

- (2) a. Ja videl doč’ Lavrova, *Katju*, včera v Moskve.  
I.NOM saw daughter.ACC Lavrov’s Katja.ACC yesterday in Moscow  
‘I saw Lavrov’s daughter, Katja, in Moscow yesterday.’ (Russian)
- b. Ich habe meinem Nachbarn, *dem Peter*, gestern geholfen.  
I have my.DAT neighbor the.DAT Peter yesterday helped  
‘I helped my neighbor, Peter, yesterday.’ (German)
- (3) a. Every man<sub>i</sub> talks to one person, (*probably*) *his<sub>i</sub> mother*, at least once a week.
- b. Juan<sub>i</sub> encontró algo raro, *un libro sobre sí mismo<sub>i</sub>*, en la tienda.  
Juan found something weird a book about himself in the store  
‘Juan found something odd, a book about himself, at the store.’ (Spanish)
- c. \*Er<sub>i</sub> hat Susanne, *Peters<sub>i</sub> Mutter*, gestern in der Stadt getroffen.  
he has Susanne Peter’s mother yesterday in the city met  
\*‘He ran into Susanne, Peter’s mother, in the city yesterday.’ (German)

Reflecting *bona fide* syntactic relations, such facts (and others I discuss, such as scope connectivity) are at odds with the aforementioned indications of the extra-sentential status of NAPs. They also sharply distinguish NAPs from other types of parentheticals, which strictly preclude external dependencies:

- (4) a. Every guest<sub>i</sub>, he<sub>k/\*i</sub> had just arrived, complained about the food.
- b. Nadie<sub>i</sub> estaba preparado, como él<sub>k/\*i</sub> admitió más tarde, para las bajas temperaturas.  
nobody was prepared as he admitted later for the low temperatures  
‘Nobody was, as he later admitted, prepared for the low temperatures.’ (Spanish)

A theory of NAPs must explain what distinguishes a case like (3a) from clausal parentheticals as in (4), and more generally how connectivity in NAPs can be reconciled with their parenthetical nature.

**Proposal.** The starting point of my analysis is the observation that the grammatical ambivalence of NAPs parallels that of ‘afterthoughts’ (5) and fragment responses (5b). These, too, are extra-sentential constituents manifesting the same range of connectivity effects [5, 6], as shown below.

- (5) a. Ich habe meinem.DAT Nachbarn gestern geholfen, *dem*.DAT *Peter*. (cp. (2b))  
 b. A: Who does every man<sub>i</sub> talk to at least once a week? – B: (*Probably*) *His*<sub>i</sub> *mother*. (cp. (3a))

Building on deletion analyses of these constructions [5, 6], I argue that NAPs have an underlying full clausal structure parallel to their host clause. On the surface, this clausal structure is masked by phonological reduction (ellipsis) of redundant material, retaining a fronted focal constituent (= the NAP):

- (6) [<sub>host</sub> every man talks to one person<sub>i</sub> • at least once a week] (= (3a))  
 [<sub>NAP</sub> *his*<sub>k</sub> *mother*<sub>i</sub> [~~every man<sub>k</sub> talks to t at least once a week~~]]

Clausal ellipsis in NAPs straightforwardly explains connectivity as a result of parallelism of the two clauses: *his mother* in (3a) is bound and assigned case within the elliptical clause in (6), not from within the host clause, in accordance with its extra-sentential status. As part of a separate clause, the NAP is nevertheless structurally external to the host, accounting for the parenthetical properties of NAPs, such as comma intonation (reflecting clausal boundaries), ‘invisibility’ for V2, opacity for extraction, etc. Where no such clausal parallelism obtains, as in cases like (4) and predicative appositives (which I address briefly), connectivity is obviated. The deletion analysis accounts directly for further properties of NAPs, such as the possibility of NAP-internal sentence adverbs (as in (1b), (3a)) and their negatability:

- (7) A: I saw one of my neighbors, *Peter*, last night. – B: No, that was (your neighbor) John you saw.

Importantly, this analysis of the *internal* syntax of NAPs has direct implications for their *external* syntax, i.e. their relation to the host. To see this, consider the following schematic representation of (6) = (3a) after linear interpolation of the elliptical NAP clause ( $\Delta$  represents deleted structure):

- (8) [<sub>host</sub> every man talks to one person [<sub>NAP</sub> *his mother*  $\Delta$ ] at least once a week]

Assume, hypothetically, that the elliptical NAP is syntactically integrated into its host clause [9, 4]. Given that the meaning of  $\Delta$  is recovered under identity with the host, this entails that  $\Delta$  is contained in its own antecedent. Syntactic integration of NAPs thus leads to a regress problem, rendering deletion antecedent-contained and hence irresolvable.

I show that that there is no general ban against parentheticals entering into ellipsis resolution, and that the same identity conditions hold here as in other cases of clausal ellipsis [5] (prohibiting syntactic deviations such as voice mismatches), and hence that recoverability of deletion is irreconcilable with the assumption of structural integration. The conclusion, thus, must be that NAPs are not structurally embedded within their hosts, but linearly interpolated in production only. Time permitting, I will discuss some implications of this result for putatively semantic theories of NAPs [8].

**Conclusion.** Research on parenthesis has traditionally sought to relegate the phenomenon to either side of the grammar vs. discourse divide. Focusing on NAPs, whose syntactic interaction with their hosts is unusual among parentheticals, this paper shows that matters are more complex. NAPs are elliptical ‘reformulations’ of their host clause, akin to afterthoughts and fragment responses; hence, the internal syntax of NAPs falls squarely within the purview of sentence grammar. Ellipsis under identity with the host however entails that their interpolation cannot be syntactic, given that deletion is recoverable.

## References

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