

A GLANCE AT THE TRUE SELF
OF SHAKESPEAREAN ELLIPSIS

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ABSTRACT

Stated simply, ellipsis is here seen possessed of the seeds, very pressingly felt, of a medium through which anaphora works. The layers built into the article include the contextual dependence of ellipsis and its essentially backward reference. And finally, the sobering truth is that ellipsis does not so much anchor in anaphora as is tugged between anaphora (*endophoric reference*) and deixis (*exophoric reference*).

0. Introduction

There is a timeless and universal quality about ellipsis that cannot be approached outside of anaphoric or deictic reference. Since the reality of ellipsis tirelessly taps into nuances deeper-seated than the mere unspoken, then pursuant to this observation, the best means have to be established of stripping and laying these nuances bare. In short, ellipsis, in its cohesion-fueled power, is not far removed from reference or substitution; hence the call for an anaphoric/deictic frame.

1. The anaphoric side of ellipsis

1.1. Contextual dependence

Just when one concedes that about any notion of ellipsis can be felled with the stroke of a pen by a linguist, unless that stroke inserts some flawed methodology into the entire scheme, along comes an aspect of it that makes a little propitious bow into every approach, no matter how "dimmed" the lights whereby ellipsis is viewed. So firm are the ties binding elliptical structures to a base of surrounding discourse that scholars honor it as an inexhaustible mine of interpretational

wealth by mutual agreement. Even with the definition of ellipsis thinned out to transformational reduction, the participation in the stream of context is made manifest. That stream of context, or discourse, manages the neat trick of perfectly shoring up appropriate leads for every elliptical unit arising at a variety of points along its banks. It is a continuum in which divisions into before and after announce their weighty primacy over all else. As ellipsis treads this path of directionality that dictates that those leads, more scientific phrasings are antecedents, be placed in the tight grip of the "before" section of the discourse (from the standpoint of an elliptical item, of course), so do its mechanics ineluctably gain traction as yet another anaphoric vehicle.

To better position ourselves to appreciate the right image of ellipsis we should perhaps further sift through its more basic expositors. It is with distrust that we look upon a much-cherished account of ellipsis propelled by restoring elliptical structures to their alleged "original shapes" by virtue of their contexts. What is thus rendered up, more often than not, turns into an entity drained of its real-life charge. Unless the complete sentences are actually shown to be employed by speakers, Grochowski (1979) notes, the phenomenon of ellipsis does no more than hover like an unborn shape in linguistic atmosphere: there is nothing to be ellipsed. This formulation is a display of the tension between an elliptical unit and the theoretical full variant thereof, which could have been used instead, a comparison as vital for the approach as it is tenuous in the way of defining ellipsis. More importantly, the formulation lets the anaphoric self of ellipsis slip past safely unnoticed and the cohesive links remain shielded.

How can ellipsis attract a deluge of attention in the sphere of anaphora and thereby amass some significant life force? With every pretension abandoned to posing a problem with many imponderables, ellipsis, or more precisely the effects thereof, is all a-vibrant with traits evocative of any proform, which is a point made by Hardt (1999). What adds that special dimension to elliptical items is their emergence as little patterns embroidered on the rich tapestry of discourse, whose meanings become diluted the instant they are torn out of their matrix. The broken circle of interpretability is only supported by the information that lies waiting in the slit of the unsaid. The outer shells of complementary meanings, always writ large, are the straws by which readers cling, carefully guided, to the body of text with a view to extracting from it very specific hints. (1) orchestrates its own construal along the following lines:

- 1) Bra.: To prison, till fit time
of law, and course of direct session,
call thee to answer (*Othello* I, 2: 84-86).

The reader is left standing at the threshold opening onto vast possibilities as long as the search is for the subject NP and the VP, the outer shell of the mean-

ing with which the PP *to prison*, in its incomplete being, pulsates. Cloaked in the veil of the invisible syntactic safeguards as it were, the only fitting complement of the message delectably unfolds for the reader, transfixed in the lines of the preceding text:

- 2) Oth.: – Where will you that I go,
And answer this your charge? (*Othello* I, 2: 82-83).

The interpretational trail glides from the elliptical (1) to its antecedent of (2); and the proform meaning localizes itself in (1) but the very spark of thorough comprehensibility is kept aflame by the engulfing discourse.

Always poised on the brink of crossing the line to the complete meaning and so endowed with an inner core of anaphoric strength, every elliptical item blends the proform reading with a hint of what is invisible to the naked eye within its own confines, if fully fledged elsewhere. It is the immaterial syntactic slot, the gap, the veritable emptiness that traces its scattered, as it were, dimensions, whereby it puts ellipsis in consonance with reference or substitution, the inner sanctum of anaphora. By that token, ellipsis is inlaid in the tablet of referentially handicapped expression, curable not so much by triumphant insertion of the displaced meaning and structure as by converting the unspecified into an irrepressible sprinkling of antecedent, anaphor pairs over a discourse landscape. Consequently, ellipsis is never detached from the long-unstoried imperative that it strive to shed and shake the complacent foundations of the deletionist bent.

1.2. Backward reference

As we strip the shroud of mystery away from ellipsis, the process progressively rolls out its dynamics and two-faceted identity: anaphoric and deictic reference. Underscored in the immensity of text through its incompleteness, an elliptical item would be not only a solitary and forlorn but also a meaningless point of linguistic expression were it not for an unappeasable declaration of its intimacy with a richer being. Before we move any further we should perhaps, only marginally, consider a piece of Modern English prose; this is what one of the chapters of Knowles' 1966 novel closes down on.

Neil was looking at him analytically; then he said, "We can talk that over when you're up in - did you say two days? Fine. Rest. You look terrible, like a Jap prisoner of war or something. Come on, Georgia, Dad," his manner becoming pleasant and superficial, "get better, boy. You look like a Jap prisoner of war. Yes, helping find repair parts for the plane might be a good way for you to start, that might be appropriate." Cleet glanced almost fiercely up at him. "Because you like working around planes, don't you," said Neil with a

small smile. That's it, said Cleet to himself as the three of them went out the door. He knows
(Knowles 1966: 82).

It may not be instantly obvious what he knows from that excerpt but every bit of the hidden meaning is to be pursued with backward glances, so to speak; there is no text to propel us forward. The sample very tellingly battles all doubts about the direction of the reference of ellipsis to a halt. And so does a quote from Shakespeare.

- 3) All.: Dead?
Bra.: Ay, to me:
She's abus'd, stol'n from me and corrupted (Othello I, 3: 58-60).

By a strict logical reckoning, the ensuing lines are not nearly the ones that treasure up the complexion of the sense of the "Dead?" phrase. Indeed, the phrase in and of itself receives no absolute interpretation from those lines. If anything, it emerges from them a shade less cloudy, but not clarified. Less cloudy, in that it moves through a process of extension, collecting a most probable predicate reading "to be". Not clarified, in that nothing more elaborate than a "she", itself an anaphor, produces itself as the subject reading. What this kind of analysis does is sustain the air of certainty hanging over the order of our discourse processing, which stipulates that we know what a referentially deficient unit conveys when we come upon it. And formally, it stabilizes ellipsis inside the arena of referential apparatuses. Hence the consistent play of ellipsis with anaphora in "preserving a hold on issues and objects already mentioned in the discourse, and therefore familiar to the reader/listener" [translation mine] (Cichońska 1984: 325). Within this frame of specification, anaphora, along with ellipsis as its essential implementation as we may conclude, sees discourse congealing into a unity unsoiled with redundancy.

Everything that has been said so far can be analogized to "ellipsis in miniature", that is, squeezed inside the sentential bounds. Hardt (1999) remarks that the Government and Binding Theory keeps the quotidian selves of anaphors in subjection in the sense that they are only excused from backward reference if they stand in a non-c-commanding relation to their antecedents. Otherwise, they come as subsequent to the antecedents. This regularity in anaphors has, of course, been observed before Hardt (1999) as well, e.g. Evans (1980). "Miniellipsis" is ultimately interpretable through the same lenses, e.g. (4) would be discarded since *She will* does c-command and precede the dependent clause. To reverse the order of the clauses and ellipses renders a valid sentence – (5).

- 4) *She will_i when she's ready to talk_i.
5) When she's ready to_i, she will talk_i.

This is a kind of depth to which intrasentential discourse, innocent of such a constricted setting, cannot penetrate. What matters is, however, the equally un-deviating advance that ellipsis makes upon regular anaphora in each of its reflections.

2. The deictic side of ellipsis

The other facet of ellipsis, its accommodation to exophoric reference, inspires conceptual controversy. Especially, it finds a voice of dissent in Warner (1993), who feels that the closer the approximation of ellipsis to deictic reference the more the emergent structures lose their elliptical value: their antecedents do not have a palpably linguistic presence. Admittedly, deixis and anaphora stand out in discrepancy, thus the duality endemic to incomplete utterances comfortably placed in the service of both phenomena. Now, would it be justifiable to bar non-linguistic reference to ellipsis, let their relation be masked by a different label? Instances of language-bred ellipsis link up the various elements of the discourse as if to ever intensify their direct and directionalized encroachment upon one another – this is the anaphoric connection, one "between linguistic expressions" (cf. Cichońska 2000: 75). On the level of "interaction itself" is where the deictic connection springs into being between a linguistic expression and a situational prompt (cf. Cichońska 2000: 75). Just as direct and directionalized, the connection is possibly a little more dynamic given the erratic qualities of the situational context. The linguistic side needs to be given a "face" by noting its gap and following the syntactic clues as to the anticipated extralinguistic bridge, which may be projected onto written discourse if need be, e.g.

- 6) [Enter Sailor]
Duke: Now, the business?
Sail.: The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes (Othello I, 3: 15-16).

Ellipsis then does not seem, at close quarters, to lose its standing when extended past the point of purely linguistic antecedence any more than pronouns, as embodiments of reference, do.

3. Conclusion

Through systematic acts of attaching elliptical phrases to their antecedents, whether they be linguistic or not, a scenario is set out that holds reasonable promise of success. And more importantly, the association has no physical edge to it; it transpires not on the plane of outward discourse representation, or reconstruction, but on that of discourse comprehension exclusively.

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