The Syntax of Sluicing in Hän

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Sluicing as a Type of Ellipsis

• Ellipsis is a process whereby words or phrases that have already been referred to may be omitted.

  John is hunting caribou and Isaac is hunting moose.
  Who is hunting caribou? John is hunting caribou.
  John saw two caribou and Isaac saw two caribou.

• Ellipsis occurs in most if not all languages and is very common in spontaneous speech and dialogue.
Nevertheless, ellipsis *has its own grammar* which is specific to a language. Only certain words and phrases may be deleted in ellipsis, and this is independent of pragmatics (i.e., whether a sentence’s meaning can be recovered)

John is hunting caribou and Isaac is hunting caribou too.

*John is hunting caribou and Isaac is hunting caribou.

Who is hunting caribou? John is hunting caribou.

*Who is hunting caribou? John is hunting caribou.

Who is hunting caribou? John is hunting caribou.

Who is hunting caribou? John is hunting caribou.

Who is hunting caribou? John is hunting caribou.
Sluicing as a Type of Ellipsis, cont’d

• Sluicing is one particular type of ellipsis which occurs in many languages. Sluicing is defined as the deletion of a tense phrase (TP) which minimally includes the subject, object, and verb when these remain in the TP where they are generated.

• What is referred to as the remnant (Toosarvandani 2008) in a sluice is the wh-word that survives the deletion. This wh-word is generated within the TP and moves to the front of the sentence (to the specifier of CP position).
Sluicing in English

• Subject wh remnant:

Someone saw a caribou.
I don't know [who [underline saw a caribou]TP]CP.

• Object wh remnant:

John saw something.
I don't know [what [underline John saw ]TP]CP.

• Adjunct wh remnant:

John saw a moose.
I don't know [where [underline John saw a moose]TP]CP.
Hän

• Dene language of eastern Alaska and western Yukon Territory, (Eagle, AK, Dawson City, YT).

• 7-10 speakers, all over 60 years old.

• One female speaker consulted in this study, originally from Eagle, AK.
Sluicing in Hän

- Hän is capable of sluicing-type constructions. However different patterns are preferred when the remnant is a *core argument* as opposed to an *adjunct* wh-word.
Core Argument Pseudosludging

• When sluices are built on core argument (subject (ex. 1) or object (ex. 2)) remnants, speakers prefer to leave a ‘be’ or ‘do’ verb in the clause, though it can sometimes be omitted if the listener can follow it.

(1a) Jëje [wëdzeyh ʔ’àw]. Do ?(dayzhäk) yä hindey?
Man caribou ate.3s Who did.3s QUES know.2s
‘A man ate caribou. Do you know who (did it)?

(1b) Jëje wëdzeyh ʔ’àw. Do ?(jinch’e) yä hindey?
Man caribou ate.3s Who (it) was.3s QUES know.2s
‘A man ate caribou. Do you know who (it was)?
(2) John nun tr’āwh cha nāh’j’. Ji ?(jinch’e) hishdey ko.
John animal woods in saw.3s what it was know.1s NEG
‘John saw an animal in the woods. I don’t know what (it was).’
Core Argument Pseudosluicing

• For sluice-type constructions with argument remnants, these may actually derive from truncated cleft constructions where the copula (‘be’) is omitted. This type of construction is called a *pseudosluice* (Merchant 2001). Copula omission is commonly occurring as in (3), so the ellipsis can be built on a cleft, without TP deletion, as in (4).

\[(3) \quad \text{Ji} \quad \text{sh-kè’} \quad \text{(jinch’e)}
\]
\[\text{This} \quad \text{my-foot} \quad \text{is.3s}
\]
\[\text{‘This is my foot.’}
\]

\[(4) \quad \text{Jì} \quad \text{(jinch’e)} \quad [nā-hù’]_{CP} \quad \text{hishdey} \quad \text{ko}
\]
\[\text{what} \quad 3\text{s.is} \quad 3\text{s.saw} \quad 1\text{s.know} \quad \text{NEG}
\]
\[\text{‘I don’t know what it is that he saw.’}
\]
When sluices are built on adjunct remnants (ex. 5), no verb remains, and inserting a ‘be’ verb can be ungrammatical (6). This suggests that sluicing type constructions based on adjunct remnants are examples of true sluices and are not derived from cleft constructions.

(5a) John wëdzeyh ė’ài. Ji ha wishdey ko
John caribou eat.3s What for know.1s NEG
‘John is eating the caribou. I don’t know why.’
(5b) John zho dhohtsày. Ji he wishdey ko 
John house 3s.made What with 1s.know NEG 
‘John made a house. I don’t know with what.’

(5c) John jëju näjèh’i. Njè wishdey ko 
John moose 3s.spotted Where 1s.know NEG 
‘John spotted a moose. I don’t know where.’

John lake to 3s.walks What for (it) is 1s.know NEG 
‘John is walking to the lake. I don’t know why.’
Why do adjuncts and arguments act differently?

• Core arguments (subjects, objects) in Hän and many Dene languages are specified for their function by their placement in the sentence.

• SOV word order

(9a) \[\text{Jëje wëdzeyh } \text{ë} \text{àw'} \]\textsubscript{TP}
The man caribou ate.3s
‘The man ate caribou.’

(9b) \#Wëdzeyh \[\text{jëje } \text{ë} \text{àw'} \]\textsubscript{TP}
Caribou the man ate.3s
‘The man ate caribou.’
Argument Topicalization

• An object can occur before a subject if topicalized---where something important occurs at the front of the sentence. But it still must be bound to a pronoun within TP.

(10a)  [Ji wëdzeyh]i  [do  yëi노h’j]\textsubscript{TP}  
This caribou. TOP  who  3s.saw.4  
‘This caribou, who saw it?’

(10b)  [Ji wëdzeyh  do  noh’j]\textsubscript{TP}  
This caribou  who  3s.saw.4  
‘This caribou saw who?’

(11)  Jìi  [tr’äwh  cha  John  #(yëi)noh’j]\textsubscript{TP}  
What.TOP  woods  in  John  3s.saw.4  
‘What did John see in the woods?’
Adjuncts and Freer Word Order

- Adjuncts, by contrast, display fairly free word order in Hän. While speakers prefer to put them between the subject and the object (6b), they can also occur before the subject (6a) or after the object (6c).

(6a) [Tr’äwh cha] John wëdzeyh näh’j’
Woods in John caribou saw.3sg
‘John saw a caribou in the woods.’

(6b) John [tr’äwh cha] wëdzeyh näh’j’
John woods in caribou saw.3sg
‘John saw a caribou in the woods.’

(6c) ?John wëdzeyh [tr’äwh cha] näh’j’
John caribou woods in saw.3sg
‘John saw a caribou in the woods.’
• Wh-adjuncts in questions also display free word order (7), even when more than one adjunct is present (8).

(7a) [Ji ha] John wëdzeyh ḵ’aw’?
What for John caribou ate.3s
‘Why did John eat the caribou?’

(7b) John [ji ha] wëdzeyh ḵ’aw’?
John what for caribou ate.3s
‘Why did John eat the caribou?’

(7c) John wëdzeyh [ji ha] ḵ’aw’?
John caribou what for ate.3s
‘Why did John eat the caribou?’

(8a) Njè tr’āwh cha John wëdzeyh nāh’j’
Where woods in John caribou saw.3s
‘Where did John see a caribou in the woods?’

(8b) Tr’āwh cha njè John wëdzeyh nāh’j’
winters in where John caribou saw.3s
‘Where did John see a caribou in the woods?’
• Adjuncts therefore show no canonical position from where they would originate, but can appear in a number of places.

• The key idea here is that arguments (subject and object) require something in TP so the listener can retrieve its grammatical function; Adjuncts can occur almost anywhere, including outside of TP (before the subject) so it’s not surprising that sluicing-type ellipsis constructions pattern differently in the language according to whether the remnant is an argument or an adjunct.
Future Research

• More speakers, other Dene languages
• Understand not only grammaticality but the preferred patterns speakers use.
• Sluicing with embedded questions (What did John say that Mary ate _?, John said Mary ate something, but I don’t know what John said Mary ate _). Rice (1989) suggests that in Slavey wh-adjuncts (or adverbials) move based on the inability to be extracted outside of an embedded sentence.
• Direct and indirect discourse verbs. Rice (1989) indicates these display structural differences in Slavey, but these have not been studied in Hän.
Conclusion

• Sluicing-type constructions are available in Hän, and on the surface appear similar to sluicing in other languages.
• There are different preferred patterns for sluices based on argument and adjunct remnants, so they likely are derived from different constructions.
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