

Is there syntax at the e-site? Acceptability experiments on Saudi Arabic Sluicing

Sluicing is a type of elliptical structure whereby an isolated *wh*-phrase appears in the position of a complete constituent question. Research on sluicing has not yet reached consensus on whether the understood material is present at the e-site or it is not. And if so, what is the relationship between the antecedent and the understood material in e-site. Using data from Saudi Arabic sluicing, I will argue that there is syntactic structure at the e-site, which is restricted to specific structures only.

Objective: This study uses three acceptability experiments on Saudi Arabic to answer three main questions on Sluicing: (i) is there structure at the e-site? (ii) If so, what is the nature of this structure? (iii) and whether there is an effect of identity on ellipsis.

Experiment 1: Previous work on Saudi Arabic sluicing shows that whenever apparent P-stranding is acceptable under sluicing, *wh*-resumption will be available at the e-site. In this experiment, this conclusion is forced. In Saudi Arabic, both ‘when’ and ‘where’ occurs in PPs. However, only ‘where’ is compatible with both *wh*-resumption and *wh*-movement, while ‘when’ is only compatible with *wh*-movement. Since Saudi Arabic is a non P-stranding language, thus, *wh*-movement is blocked as a possible pre-slucose in those cases. In Saudi Arabic *wh*-resumption generally allows apparent P-stranding, thus, *wh*-resumption should be available at the e-site with ‘where’. If there is syntax at the e-site, apparent P-stranding will be acceptable when *wh*-resumption is; i.e. with ‘where’ but not with ‘when’ as *wh*-remnant.

Methods: 7-scale acceptability judgment experiment was conducted on 74 native Saudi speakers. Three 2-level factors were crossed: ellipsis, pied piping, and type of *wh*-remnant.

Results: A significant difference was found between the acceptability of apparent P-stranding with different *wh*-remnants (when/where).

Conclusion: The judgments are modulated by the availability or lack of an acceptable source within the ellipsis site; in particular, when no structure is grammatically available in the ellipsis site, the acceptability of apparent P-stranding under sluicing decays.

Crossed factors	Stimuli	Mean
Sluicing, P-stranding, where	Noaf got.3fs insurance health from place but neg.know.1 where ‘Noaf got health insurance from someplace but I don’t know where she got health insurance’	6.1
Sluicing, Pied piping, where	... from where	6.2
Non-elliptical, P-stranding, where	... where got.3fs insurance health from-it	5.1
Non-elliptical, Pied piping, where	... from where got.3fs insurance health	5.5
Sluicing, P-stranding, when	Noaf study. 3fs from time but neg.know.1 when ‘Noaf has been studying for some time but I don’t know since when she has been studying’.	4.6
Sluicing, pied piping, when	...from when	5.8
Non-elliptical, P-stranding, when	... when study. 3fs from-it	2.5
Non-elliptical, pied piping, when	... from when study. 3fs	4.7

Experiment 2 & 3:

In Saudi Arabic, ‘how much’ can question the degree of the verb (1) or the degree of the adjective (2-3). Interestingly, questioning the degree of the verb is compatible with *wh*-movement (1), while questioning the degree of the adjective is only compatible with either *wh*-in-situ (2) or the copular question (3) but not with *wh*-movement (4).

- (1) how much likes.him the.restaurant?
'How much did he like the restaurant?'
- (2) reem saw.3fs girl tall how much?
'how tall a girl did reem see?'
- (3) how much tall the.girl that reem saw.her?
'how tall is the girl that reem saw?'
- (4) * how much reem saw.3fs girl tall?

The following on-going 7-scale acceptability experiments examine whether this pattern is seen under sluicing. Mainly, experiment 2 focuses on whether *wh*-in-situ is available at the e-site. 2 factors were crossed: 2-level 'degree' (verb vs. adj.) and 3-level 'ellipsis' (sluicing, non-elliptical in-situ, and non-elliptical ex-situ). Experiment 3 tests if syntactic isomorphism between the antecedent and the e-site affects the acceptability of sluicing. Two 2-level factors were crossed: 'identity' (identity, different) and 'ellipsis' (sluicing, non-elliptical).

Experiment 3 item set example:

Cond.	Crossed factors	Stimuli
1	Graded V, sluicing	The.student benefit from the.course but neg.know how much 'The student benefit from the course but I don't know how much he benefited from the course'
2	Graded V, non-elliptical in-situ	... but neg.know benefit from the.crouse how much
3	Graded V, non-elliptical ex-situ	... but neg.know how much benefit from the.course
4	Graded A, sluicing	The student left.3ms from course hard but neg.know.1 how much 'the student left from a hard course but I don't know how hard was the course'
5	Graded A, non-elliptical in-situ	... left.3ms from course hard how much
6	Graded A, non-elliptical ex-situ	... how much left.3ms from course hard

Experiment 3 item set examples:

Cond.	Crossed factors	Stimuli
1	Identity, sluicing	the.test that wrote.3fs.it fut.be hard but neg.know.1 how much
2	Identity, non-elliptical	the.test that wrote.3fs.it fut.be hard but neg.know.1 how much hard fut.be the.test that wrote.3fs.it 'the test that she wrote was hard but I don't know how hard is the test that she wrote'
3	Different, sluicing	the.teacher wrote.3fs test hard but neg.know how much
4	Different, non-elliptical	the.teacher wrote.3fs test hard but neg.know how much hard fut.be the.test that wrote.3fs.it 'The teacher wrote a hard test but I don't know how hard is the test that she wrote'

If *wh*-in-situ is available at the e-site, no significant difference is expected in experiment 2 between sluicing with grade V (condition 1) and grade A (condition 4). If however, *wh*-in-situ is not available at the ellipsis site, a significant difference is expected. Moreover, if identity has an effect on sluicing, identical sluices (condition 1) in experiment 3 is expected to be significantly more acceptable than different sluices (condition 3).

Conclusion: Three acceptability judgments experiments on Saudi Arabic sluicing were conducted. They are driven by three main ideas: first, the ellipsis site contains silent syntactic structure. Second, whether *wh*-in-situ can occupy the syntactic structure at the ellipsis site. Third, whether syntactic identity has an effect on the acceptability of sluicing.