

Go to many weddings? – Situational ellipsis in Newfoundland English

It is a well-known fact that anaphoric pronouns as well as operators can be omitted in casual speech in English, which is referred to as situational ellipsis as in (1).

- (1) a. (I) Told you so.
b. (It) Serves you right.
c. (I'm) Sorry.
d. (I'll) See you later. (examples from Quirk *et al.* 1990:256)

As Quirk and his co-authors describe it, “[t]ypically situational ellipsis is initial, especially taking the form omission of subject and/or operator; *eg (Do you) Want something?* In such cases, which are restricted to familiar (generally spoken) English, the ellipsed words are those that normally have weak stress and low pitch.” (*ibid.*)

However, the recoverability of the omitted word(s) is not always that easy. In the examples in (2) from a corpus of Newfoundland English, ellipsis is (a) not always initial and (b) difficult to “undo” without a larger context.

- (2) a. A: Ø Never heard tell anyone killed a moose?
B: No, no, Ø was nar moose around here till, when they done the roads, about '66.
b. We'd all be together, Ø Ø be an army of us.
c. So Ø usually make a day of it.
d. A: The cook room, how did they build it, I mean, was that built before or after the stage was built?
B: No, no, Ø had their stages there, they already had their stages there.

A detailed study of over 400 examples of situational ellipsis in present-day Newfoundland English reveals that it is far more wide-spread than generally assumed. The omission of “unrecoverable” items such as dummy subjects (*it, there*) is common as in (2a) and (2b), as is ellipsis in non-initial position as in (2c). Another frequently encountered feature is “cataphoric ellipsis”, where the omitted pronoun is used in the second (or third) possible slot as in the utterance as in (3).

- (3) a. A: Have you ever been lost in the woods or-?
B: Yes, miself and mi Mother were lost one night.
A: Yeah.
B: Ø Went down berry picking we got up in this in this thick woods and out of it
 ↑ we couldn't get.
b. A: What about fairies and ghosts and stuff?
B: Ø got to say, Ø don't recall any of it being mentioned at all when I was growing up, we were not a superstitious family at all.

This paper is going to summarize the findings from the corpus study and discuss them from a sociolinguistic as well as theoretical point of view.

Reference: Quirk, Randolph, Sydney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik. 1990. *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.