Ellipsis under code-switching: implications for identity and discourse (and lots of new questions)

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Abstract

At first glance, Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VPE) across code-switching sites, as in the following Spanish-English example, represents a challenge to identity-based theories since antecedent and ellipsis site are non-identical in many ways:

(1) *John le vio a Mary* 'John saw Mary' -- Yes, and Bill did too.

I discuss a recent paper, which explores sluicing and VPE across code-switching sites in Greek-English bilinguals in the context of a syntactic-identity account of VPE (Merchant, 2015). I then sketch a discourse-reference model of VPE and argue that it accommodates the relevant data in a more plausible way, albeit while raising many novel questions. Finally, I present pilot data from Spanish-English bilinguals to confirm that English VPE is acceptable even when it depends on a Spanish antecedent. In light of these data I argue that ellipsis under code-switching provides valuable data points for carving out the details of modeling VPE as discourse reference, which has been lagging behind other models in terms of specificity.