Reconstructing ellipsis: the case of Gapping in Romanian
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Non-constituent Coordination phenomena (e.g. Right Node Raising, Argument Cluster Coordination and Gapping) remain a challenge for both derivational and non derivational framework relying on phrase structure, the most widespread view being that apparent ‘non-constituents’ involve some ‘elliptical’ process (conceived either as a full (syntactic) reconstruction, i.e. coordination taking place between two full sentences – cf. Hartmann 2000, Merchant 2004, Chaves 2005 –, or as a ‘semantic’ reconstruction with syntactic parallelism, i.e. coordination of a full sentence with a fragment – cf. Ginzburg & Sag 2000, Culicover and Jackendoff 2005).

The basic issue raised by gapping constructions such as (1) (where a complete sentence is coordinated with some elliptical one missing its head verb and possibly some other dependents) is the one raised by ellipsis in general, namely to determine at which level the missing material is to be reconstructed.

(1) a. [John ate an apple] and [[Mary] [a banana]].
b. [Jim flew to London on Sunday] and [[Mary] [to Paris] [on Thursday]].
c. [John tried to begin to write a poem] and [[Bill] [a song]].
d. [John will bring some flowers to Mary] and [either [[Bill] [some wine]] or [[Jane] [some whiskey]]].

Here we provide new data from Romanian against approaches that rely on syntactic reconstruction, with deletion (or some null proform) in the ellipsis site, as schematized in (2a) (arguments: impossibility of verbal reconstruction in all cases; lack of complementizer in some relative or completive fragments, going against a sentential status of the fragment; semantic problems related to adverbial scope or to referential (non)identity of nominals), arguing for an analysis of the gapped conjunct as a verbless fragment, construction available also for short answers (cf. Culicover and Jackendoff 2005).

We then show some problems with accepting parallelism as a strong constraint: the constituents of the fragment may vary from their antecedents, according to grammatical category, case, number of valents or word order, but every constituent of the cluster must obey subcategorization rules imposed by missing predicate. We need a ‘semantic’ parallelism (i.e. Kontrast relation between constituents of the full sentence and elements in the cluster, cf. Hartmann 2000), but not necessarily syntactic symmetry.

Finally we show how a fragment-based analysis such as (2b), with semantic reconstruction can be handled formally within a construction-based HPSG framework. We model syntactic parallelism and semantic reconstruction, building from Ginzburg and Sag 2000 (for syntactic parallelism) and relying on the equational technique of Dalrymple et al. 1991, and Culicover and Jackendoff 2005 (for semantic reconstruction).

Selected References