ELLIPSIS AS A COHESIVE DEVICE IN ENGLISH AND POLISH:
A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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0.1. Opening remarks

Ellipsis as a cohesive device in sentence connection merits a closer
contrastive analysis not only because of its pedagogical implications, but more
importantly because of its high frequency of occurrence and significant dif-
f erences that English and Polish in this very instance reveal. Skopen and Swiecz-
kowski (1976) begin their paper on ellipsis with a kind of motto: "A command of
ellipsis is a part of knowing a language", and observe further that ellipsis is
part of that framework of grammatical structure within which the members of
a culture can express their ideas. Strangely enough, these and other similar
statements do not seem to have stimulated a wide-scale attack on ellipsis in
contrastive studies. In contrast to other structural phenomena of language the
study of ellipsis has still remained an underestimated domain, especially as
regards its cohesive function in sentence connection. The former phenomenon,
however, has been rarely touched upon in standard grammars of English and
thus, apart from Quirk et al. (1972:708) — ellipsis in dialogue, the study of
Halliday (1976) constitutes a praiseworthy exception. Neither has ellipsis paved
its way in applied linguistics in spite of the commonly shared view among the
teachers of English that to master ellipsis (above all verbal ellipsis) in English
means to have a command of a great portion of English grammar.

As a matter of fact, much of what has been said about ellipsis within the
sentence applies for the ellipsis among sentences in context. The structural
properties or ellipsis remain unaltered. In sentence connection, however, ellip-
sis takes on one more function; that of a text-forming element. To examine
the elliptical constructions that occur in sentence connection in the syntactic
level, we shall have to concentrate mainly on ellipsis dependent on linguisti
context (contextual ellipsis) leaving aside such problems as ellipsis in subjectless clauses for instance. In other words, we shall concentrate on such structures contained in $S_1$ whose understanding and interpretation are based on the preceding $S_1$, or strictly speaking, on the preceding item contained in that sentence which serves as a source if missing information for the elliptic item to follow and constitutes a structural clue for ellipsis. Accordingly, we shall discuss such cases of ellipsis which fall under the postulated formula:

$$S_1 \begin{cases} \text{NP (H)} \\ \text{VP (Lv, Mv, Op.)} \end{cases} + S_2 (\Theta)$$

where $S_1$ contains either a noun phrase (that contains a head), or a verb phrase (that contains a lexical verb, modal verb, or operator) or clause, all of which are ellipted in $S_2$. Similarly to Gunter (1974) by linguistic context we shall mean the immediately foregoing sentence ($S_1$ uttered by someone other than the ellipsis maker in $S_2$).

In our analysis of ellipsis we shall adopt the division applied by Halliday, based on the criterion of the grammatical function of the ellipted item. Thus, we shall discuss nominal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis respectively.

1.0. Nominal Ellipsis

To avoid terminological discussion on the components of a noun phrase we shall adopt the description of a nominal group presented by Halliday (1976) which, in fact, corresponds to that of Quirk (1972) and is accepted by most standard grammars. (For a more detailed contrastive analysis of noun phrase in Polish and English see: Fisiak et al. 1978; 55 ff.). We shall view then, the primary structure of a nominal group as (M) $+$ (H) $+$ (Q) i.e. Prep/Modifier + Head + Qualifier (Postmodifier).

Halliday observes (1976:148) that the principal function of nominal ellipsis is that of upgrading a modifier to function as head. Thus, in the context:

1 a) Which do you prefer: the Italian cars or the English cars?

b) The Italian are better, I think.

1 a') Ktòre samochody włoskie, włoskie czy angielskie?

b') Mysł, że włoskie są lepsze.

'Italian' which is an epithet and consequently acts as modifier, is upgraded to function as head, or in other words, 'Italian' functions as modifier in 1a, and as head in 1b. We can, therefore, speak of the noun phrase in 1b as an elliptical nominal group. At this very point we should stress the importance of context and the role it plays in sentence connection. Thus, 1b divorced of its context would be completely meaningless if it were not for the source of information supplied from the preceding nominal group 1a. Accordingly, "... a nominal group that is elliptical presupposes a previous one that is not, and is therefore cohesive, (...) and may always be replaced by its full, nonelliptical equivalent" (Halliday 1976:148). Ellipsis occurs as well with noun phrases consisting of head only. In such cases the head is ellipted altogether:

2 a) George failed the examination.

b) Didn't he tell you that I passed.

2 a') George nie zdal egzaminu.

b') Nie powiedział ci, że ja zdalsem?

The examples in English and Polish we have provided so far reveal close structural similarity as regards their elliptical structures. Let us examine now the following set of instances:

3 a) Here are my six white shirts.

b) Where are yours?

c) What about yours?

d) Let me see the next.

e) May I choose the best for myself?

f) I prefer mine.

3 a') Oto sześć moich białych koszul.

b') Gdzie są twoje?

c') Jak tam twoje/twoja?

d') Pokaż mi następne/następna?

e') Mogę wybrać najlepszę/najlepszą dla siebie?

f') Włóć swoja/swoje.

The first difference that turns up in the above is that of number. This can be accounted for as follows: neither the adjective in English nor the possessives in the adjectival function are marked for the singular/plural distinction. Hence, the elliptical 3c, 3d, 3e, and 3f irrespective of their context may presuppose your shirt vs your shirts (3b), the next shirt vs next shirts (3d), the best shirt vs the best shirts and so on, provided the distinction of number is signalled by the verb as in 3b. Alternatively, there are instances of nominal ellipsis where English allows for two interpretations whereas in Polish due to the case forms which clearly distinguish between plural/singular number, the interpretation becomes more specific. This, however, in no way impoverishes the English system which to solve the ambiguity may resort to substitution, eg. Let me see the one vs Let me see the next one or the best one vs the best ones as in 3d, c. This does not refer to the possessive pronouns mine, yours etc, which will always remain ambiguous (compare 3f). The same holds true for gender the lack of which may cause some ambiguity or hesitation as to which head is presupposed in;
reference rather having the function similar to that of pronouns. Let us compare:

8a) Two students were standing in front of the building.
    b) Both were called in.

8a') Dwaj studenci stali przed budynkiem.
    b') Wezwano obydwu do środka.

9a) The students and professors were standing there, too.
    b) Both were called in.

9a') Studenci i profesorowie stali tam również.
    b') Wezwano jednych i drugich do środka.

Obydwu in 8b' entails the elliptical noun from the previous context i.e. Obydwu studenci. Jednych i drugich in 9b' on the other hand, stands for or refers back to the two nouns students i profesorowie respectively, for we cannot have: *"Wezwano jednych i drugich studentów i profesorów...". The distinction between obydwaj and jedni i drugi allows us to avoid ambiguity which arises in the case of English both that may constitute an indetermined cohesive tie as in:

10a) John and Mary played ball with their younger friends.
    b) Both were having good time.

10a') John i Mary grali w piłkę z młodszymi kolegami.
    b') Obydwie świetnie się bawili.
    c') Jedni i drugi świetnie się bawili.

where the cohesive ties can be interpreted as follows:

10b) — both=(John + Mary) + (their younger friends)
    b') — obydwie=(John and Mary)
    c') — jedni i drugi=(John + Mary) + (z młodszymi kolegami)

Thus, the semantic interpretation of jedni i drugi in contrast to obydwaj is wesępy (all).

Jedni i drugi, moreover, can occur in singular with positive or negative meaning contrasting with English both and neither, for example:

11a) Did John write the short story or the poem?
    b) Both.
    c) Neither.

11a') John napisał opowiadanie czy wiersz?
    b') Jedno i drugie.
    c') Ani jedno ani drugie.

This leads us to still another observation that both in 11b cannot be realized in Polish by obydwaj in 11b' as the coreferential nouns in the previous context
2.1 Main/Lexical Verb Ellipsis

Halliday (1976) observes that any verbal group not containing a lexical verb is elliptical. However, a structural phenomenon that works in the system of one language does not have to hold true in the other. As we shall see below, English and Polish manifest in this respect a considerable discrepancy. Let us compare the following set of examples:

15a) Mary won't sing tonight.
   b) She might tomorrow.
   c) She could tomorrow.
   d) She should tomorrow.
   e) She must be at meals.
   f) She would if I asked her.
   g) She will tomorrow then.

15a') Mary nie będzie śpiewać dzisiaj wieczorem.
   b') Mogłaby jutro ...
   c') Mogłaby jutro ...
   d') Powinna jutro ...
   e') Musi mimo wszystko ...
   f') Śpiwalaby gdybym ją poprosił.
   g') Wice zaśpiewa jutro.

It follows from the above that there is a group of English modsals which in this type of sentence connection find their close corresponding modal form in Polish and allow for lexical verb ellipsis (compare 15b — e, 15b' — e'). The difference arises with will, would, shall, whose equivalence in Polish is, as a rule, the repetition of the lexical verb (compare 15f, g, 30f, g'). The above structural difference results from; firstly, the lack of a structural would counterpart in Polish, (its equivalent is the infflected form of a verb marked for conditional mood, eg. -bym, -byś, -by etc.) and secondly, the misleading similarity of Polish auxiliary być as a future marker będzie to the English modal will. Let us repeat after Piśak (1978:123ff) that "the English modsals shall, will used as modsals expressing intention or prediction do not have any counterparts in Polish". Thus, we face instances where lexical ellipsis cannot occur in Polish and is expressed by the repetition of the verb or the ellipsis of the whole predication, eg:

16a) Who will take the exams if Mary won't?
   b) He will.

16a') Kto będzie zdawać egzamin, jeśli Mary nie zechce?
   b') On. (On będzie zdawać).

17a) I'm afraid they will do it.
   b) They won't, believe me.
Obawiam się, że to zrobić.
Nie zrobić, wierzę.

However, the contrast between English modal will and Polish future tenses in the light of ellipsis still requires certain comments. In the first place we know that will has two equivalents future imperfective or future perfective tense, e.g. będę pisac/pisal vs napisać. It can be easily noticed that future perfective never occurs with ellipsis in S (compare 17b'). Likewise, we cannot have:

18a) I will wait till John returns.
b) I will, too.
c) I won't.
18a') Zaczekam aż John wróci.
b') *Ja będę teź. (Ja też., or Ja też zaczekam).
c') *Ja nie będę. (Ja nie., or Ja nie zaczekam).

What makes ellipsis in Polish impossible in the above is the very lack of the auxiliary in the preceding sentence. When it comes to the future imperfective, however, the verdict about the acceptability of some elliptical rejoiners becomes more complex. Let us compare the following:

19a) I will be waiting here till John returns.
b) But I won't.
19a') Będę tu czekać aż John wróci.
b') Ale ja nie będę. (Ale ja nie).
20a) I won't be waiting here till John returns.
b) But I will.
20a') Nie będę tu czekać aż John wróci.
b') Ale ja będę. (Ale ja tak).
21a') Who will be waiting for John?
b) I will.
c) Mary will.
21a') Kto będzie czekać na Johna?
b') *Ja będę. (?)
c') *Maria będzie. (?)
22a) Why is Mary cooking dinner?
b) Because I won't.
c) Because my wife won't.
22a') Dlaczego Maria gotuje obiad?
b') *Bo ja nie będę. (?)
c') *Bo moja żona nie będzie. (?)

The sentences 19b' and 20b' sound emphatic. More naturally we would have the alternative forms Ja tak/nie. For most native speakers of Polish the acceptability of 19b' and 20b'

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It is not easy to establish an exhaustive list of restrictions or conditions as regards the będzie + ellipsis structure, as there seem to be many exceptions and individual preferences as to its acceptability. That is why the example provided in 15g' might be "Wiec będzie jutro" and would to many pass as cohesive. What we can do is to give a minimum of three conditions under which the discussed ellipsis can occur:

1) S₁ Affirmative future imperfective.
S₂ Negative contrastive response.
2) S₁ Negative future imperfective.
S₂ Positive Contrastive response.
3) S₁ Yes/no question in future imperfective.
S₄ Negative answer, e.g.
Will you be playing with me? No, I will not.
Będziesz się ze mną bawić? Nie, nie będę.

The properties of lexical ellipsis in English (with modals) also extend to auxiliaries be and have, in progressive and perfective tenses. As Polish has no special structural means to match English progressive vs. non-progressive, perfective vs. non-perfective distinction, therefore, no such instances of lexical ellipsis are possible (cf. Fistak 1978:111 ff.). In this case, the equivalent of lexical ellipsis in Polish is either the repetition of the lexical verb or the omission of the whole of the predicative, e.g:

24a) He has been coming here since yesterday.
b) I know he has.
24a') Przychodzi tu od wcześnie.
b') Wiem, że przychodzi. (Wiem).

As we have noticed earlier there are instances of lexical verb ellipsis common to Polish and English when the non-modal verb is presupposed by modal (com-
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Mógł być zjazany przez policję.
I zastraszony.

where the ellipted elements are: *may have been* and *mógł być*. What brings about the main difference as regards modal/operator ellipsis in the two languages is the non-existence of the category 'operator', the lack of tense operators (auxiliaries) *be* and *have* in Polish, which make operator ellipsis in this language impossible, eg:

Was she crying?
*No, laughing.*

Plakaj?
*Nie, śmiała się.*

What have you been doing?
*Learning English.*

Co robiles?
*Uczyłem się angielskiego.*

We can speak, therefore, of the non-existence of this kind of operator ellipsis in Polish due to the functional and structural difference in verb phrase structure, and the fact that the features of tense aspect and person are, in Polish, already signalled in the lexical verb itself. The same holds true for the modals *will* (*would*) (as discussed above) whose counterparts in Polish are lexical verbs in their respective tense and mood.

Mention should be made as well of operator ellipsis in English with non-finite verbal clauses having the structure to be + present participle where the operator to be can be omitted in *S*₂, eg:

What would you like your children to be doing?
*Helping their mother.*

Co chciałbys żeby twoje dzieci robily?
*Zabę pomagaly matce.*

The lack of correspondence between *32b* and *32b*’ is caused by the non-existence of the to be + present participle structure in Polish. The structure in Polish which corresponds to the purpose construction in English is the complementizer *żeby* + the past tense third person form. It can be moreover observed that the elliptical response in *32b* lacks, as it were, the cohesive power that can be traced in *32b’*. *32b* if deprived of the preceding context, might be interpreted as a possible response to a number of contexts:

What would you like to be doing?
What are they doing?
What will they be doing?  Helping their mother.
What were they doing?
In Polish the responses would echo the structural signals in $S_2$. Thus, we would have: pomagać, pomagając, pomagać, pomagał swojej mame, respectively.

4.0. Clausal Ellipsis

In this section we shall mainly concentrate on differences that occur between clausal ellipsis in the two languages under analysis. Thus, we shall not be concerned with the analysis of the principles and interdependencies of verbal ellipsis and the clause already presented in details in Halliday (1976:194 ff.). Neither shall we discuss the numerous instances where clausal ellipsis reveals a close correspondence in the two languages as in:

33a) Peter will be there.
   b) Are you sure?
   c) Peter tam będzie.
   d) Jesteś pewien?

To begin with, we have to emphasize the fact that clausal ellipsis is directly bound up with the already discussed lexical verb and modal/operator ellipsis. This follows from the very structure of the verb phrase, that is to say, it depends on which verbal element is elided. Consequently, a clause can be looked at as having a two-part structure that consists of a modal element plus propositional element where any of them can be omitted (cf. Halliday 1976:197). What constitutes the greatest difference between English and Polish is, as a matter of fact, the propositional ellipsis in English answers to questions. Let us compare the following set of examples:

34a) Have you finished your work?
   b) Yes, I have.
   c) No, I haven’t.
   d) John has.
   34a’) Skończyłeś pracę?
   b’) Tak, (Skończylem).
   c’) Nie, (Nie skończyłem).
   d’) John skończył.
35a) Is John going to school tomorrow?
   b) Yes, he is.
   c) No, he isn’t.
   d) Mary is.
   35a’) Czy Janek idzie do szkoły jutro?
   b’) Tak, (Idzie).
   c’) Nie, (Nie idzie).
   d’) Maria idzie.

36a) Should children obey their parents?
   b) Yes, they should.
   c) No, they shouldn’t.
   36a’) Czy dzieci powiniene być posłuszne rodzicom?
   b’) Tak, (Powni).
   c’) Nie, (Nie powni).
37a) Does she speak German?
   b) Yes, she does.
   c) No, she doesn’t.
   37a’) Czy ona mówi po niemiecku?
   b’) Tak, (Mówię).
   c’) Nie, (Nie mówi).

The above instances of propositional ellipsis in English can be accounted for by what Halliday terms as a principle of marked polarity, i.e., the negative vs. positive selection which consists in preserving the modal/operator at the beginning of a verbal group whereas all else can be omitted. The preservation of the modal/operator from the previous context is a peculiar feature of English which has no counterpart in Polish. The positive and negative answers (tak, nie) which in themselves are sufficient entail the ellipsis of the whole clause or a sentence in fact, and might be as well referred to as sentence ellipsis.

It should be mentioned moreover, that in many cases the distinction between ellipsis and substitution is neutralized and both forms are undistinguishable or fused, eg.

Does Mary play piano? No, but John does,

where does can be interpreted as an instance of ellipsis i.e., does=play, or as substitution i.e., does=plays. The possibility of substitution increases, as a matter of fact, the range of cohesive answers to questions in English.

There is still one further context for clausal ellipsis which occurs with what Halliday refers to as rejoinders to statements (1976:214). These rejoinders to the presupposed items which are not questions present a significant structural difference between the two languages. Let us compare:

38a) John is going to come.
   b) Is he?
   38a’) Jonh przyjdzie.
   b’) Czy zby? (Napravidę?) Przyjdzie?
39a) He has just arrived.
   b) Has he?
   39a’) Właśnie przyjechał.
   b’) Czy zby? (Napravidę?) Przyjechał?
40a) John met Mary yesterday.
   b) Did he?
40a') John spotkał wzoraj Mary.
b') Czy żyby? (Naprawdę?) Spotkał?

The utterances marked b, b' are cohesive rejoinders that have the function of querying the preceding statements. In English they take on the form of interrogative clauses with propositional ellipsis similar to the question tags at the end of declarative clauses. The Polish equivalent is a lexical item that corresponds to English really?, indeed? or the repetition of lexical (or modal, operator) verbs with interrogative rising intonation. The former instance, seems to be, however, less frequent. This type of ellipsis, therefore, does not occur in Polish unless we accept the view that czyżyby and naprawdę entail the ellipsis of the whole clause eg: czyżyby+przyjechal, naprawdę+spotkał, etc.

As the final point in the discussion of ellipsis that deserves some attention is the interesting instance of zeugma or zegmatic answers. Zeugma is a rhetorical figure based on ellipsis which as Halliday puts it "... involves a transfer from one element of clause structure to another" (1976:214). Zeugma produces a comic, unexpected effect characteristic of language humour. Zegmatic answers are typical for particular structures of languages and, consequently more often than not, untranslatable. One could provide a number of examples. Let us confine ourselves to some:

41) Wziął ją za żonę? Nie, za nogi.
43) Co wam nauczyłeś zadanie Gos.
44) Pan jest samochodem? Nie, magistrem.

The untranslatability of zegmatic effect is due to the lack of correspondence between collocations in particular languages. Thus, in 42 for example, nakręcić collocates in Polish with both film and zegarek whereas English distinguishes between to shoot a film and to wind a watch. (More detailed comments on zegma are presented in Plett 1975:231 ff.)

REFERENCES


