AGREE TO REMAIN SILENT: THE SYNTACTIC LICENSING OF ELLIPSIS

INTRODUCTION
In this paper I discuss intriguing data from two elliptical phenomena, British English do (BE do) and Dutch modal complement ellipsis (MCE). These ellipses provide a paradox: they allow subject extraction out of the ellipsis site, suggesting that deletion of syntactic structure is involved, but objects cannot be extracted, which hints at a proform analysis for the ellipsis site. In order to solve this puzzle I develop a theory of ellipsis licensing in terms of Agree. This implies that the head licensing ellipsis and the elided material do not have to be in a head-complement relation, contrary to previous licensing accounts. Furthermore, I argue that ellipsis takes place in the course of the derivation. Consequently, it not only has an effect on PF, but also on the syntax. The combination of these two claims explains the ban on object extraction in BE do and MCE, making a deletion analysis tenable for both ellipses.

THE MAIN DATA: AN EXTRACTION PUZZLE
Extraction out of an ellipsis site is seen as a foolproof test for detecting deleted structure: if extraction is allowed, the ellipsis site has to contain enough syntactic structure to host the trace, whereas if extraction is impossible, the ellipsis site is claimed to be a null proform. However, the contrast between subject and object movement out of the ellipsis site in Dutch MCE (cf. (1), Aelbrecht 2009) and BE do (cf. (2), Baltin 2007) disrupts such a pattern. In the non-elliptical counterparts in (3) such restrictions do not hold. Hence, the limited extraction is caused solely by ellipsis.

(1) a. Die broek MOET nog niet gewassen worden, maar ze MAG wel [+_gewassen_ worden], al [+_gewassen_ worden], (derived subject extraction is allowed) already [+] become 'Those pants don’t have to be washed yet, but they can be.'

b. * Ik weet niet wie Anne MOET uitnodigen, maar ik weet wel wie ze niet [uitnodigen] (object extraction is disallowed)

'I don't know who Anne has to invite, but I do know who she isn't ALLOWED to.'

(2) a. ?* George might seem to enjoy that, and James might do [enjoy that], too.

b. ? The river will freeze solid, and the lake will do [freeze solid] too, (derived subject extraction is allowed)

c. * Although I don't know who Ed will visit, I do know who Aga will do [visit].

(3) a. Ik weet niet wie Anne MOET uitnodigen, maar ik weet wel wie ze niet [uitnodigen]. (object extraction is disallowed)

is allowed invite

'I don't know who Anne HAS to invite, but I do know who she isn't ALLOWED to.'

b. Although I don't know who Ed will visit, I do know who Aga will visit [who].

THE SOLUTION, PART 1: LICENSING ELLIPSIS VIA AGREE.
Ellipsis requires a licensing head (cf. Lobeck 1995; Johnson 2001 and Merchant 2001), which according to the literature triggers ellipsis of its complement. I show, however, that there can be material between this licensor and the ellipsis site. In other words, ellipsis is not licensed via a head-complement relation. Instead, I argue that ellipsis is licensed via Agree.

Consider the case of English VP ellipsis (VPE). Zagona (1982) and Lobeck (1995) argue that the licensor of VPE is a T head, because VPE is only possible in the presence of a finite auxiliary or modal, or the infinitival marker to, all of which occupy T (cf. (4a-b). Non-finite auxiliaries, which arguably do not raise to T, do not license VPE (cf. (4c), Aelbrecht 2009).

(4) a. Julia can draw an elephant, but George can't [draw an elephant].

b. I have never travelled to America. Have you [ever travelled to America]?

c. * I hadn't been thinking about it, but I recall Max having been [thinking about it].

Consider now the example in (5), where the finite modal is followed by non-finite auxiliaries that are not included in the ellipsis site. This implies that the licensor and the ellipsis site do not have to be in a head-complement relation.

(5) a. She must be [able to] do more [than].

b. It turned out that he was [likely to] think that [he].
The solution, part 2: Ellipsis during the derivation. 

A second ingredient of the analysis is that ellipsis takes place as soon as the licensor is merged, i.e. ellipsis happens during the derivation. When the Agree relation is established, the ellipsis site is sent to PF, marked for ellipsis, and becomes inaccessible for any further syntactic operations. Any element that has not vacated the ellipsis site by then is stuck and will be elided. This implies that the projections between the ellipsis site and the licensor play a crucial role in determining the extraction possibilities.

Such an analysis explains the extraction contrast between subjects and objects in MCE and BE do. Consider MCE first: the embedded TP projection occurs between the ellipsis site and the licensing modal (cf. (6)b, Aelbrecht 2009). Hence, the subject, which moves to the embedded [Spec, TP] prior to the merger of the modal, escapes ellipsis (cf. (7)a). The object on the other hand, does not have an escape hatch between the licensor and the ellipsis site and, as a result, is necessarily elided. In BE do the licensor is little v do and the ellipsis site is VP. A derived subject (cf. (2)b) is attracted to [Spec, vP] and escapes ellipsis (Baltin 2007), because all operations triggered by the same head occur simultaneously. Again, the object does not have an escape hatch out of the ellipsis site prior to ellipsis, and is deleted (cf. (7)b).

Time permitting, I show that this analysis can also be applied to ellipses without such limited extraction, such as VPE, sluicing and pseudogapping, hence taking the next step towards a unified analysis for all ellipses.

References