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# Deletion in Clausal Ellipsis: Remnants in the Middle Field

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# Deletion in Clausal Ellipsis: Remnants in the Middle Field

## **Abstract**

We compare two views of ellipsis and its place in grammar. One view holds that ellipsis is a form of prosodic reduction (optional omission of deaccented material). An alternative and currently dominant view holds that ellipsis is more syntactic than this, requiring remnants of deletion to undergo extraction to a clause-peripheral position in narrow syntax. We discuss some general problems of this approach and go on to provide a novel set of data involving modal particles in German, which we show to be incompatible with its fundamental assumptions. Our conclusion is that the move-and-delete theory of ellipsis should be abandoned, and deletion properly confined to the phonological component.

# Deletion in Clausal Ellipsis: Remnants in the Middle Field

Dennis Ott and Volker Struckmeier\*

## 1 Introduction

In this paper, we contrast two views of ellipsis: one according to which ellipsis is deletion of distressed material, and an opposing view which holds that ellipsis is deletion of designated *syntactic* domains.<sup>1</sup> We introduce a set of data involving modal particles in German that militate strongly against the second view while being fully compatible with the first. The discussion will focus on clausal ellipsis only, ignoring other, typologically more restricted types of incompleteness, such as VP-ellipsis, pseudogapping, etc.

## 2 Two Views of Ellipsis

Chomsky & Lasnik (1993:564f.) propose to view ellipsis as extreme phonological reduction, optionally silencing intonationally marked (“deaccented”) material. On this view, a fragment response as in (1B) derives from the pronounced sentential form in (2) (here and where required below, capitals coarsely indicate stress, small italics unaccented material).

- (1) A: Who did Mary talk to yesterday? B: JOHN.  
(2) *She talked to* JOHN *yesterday*. → ~~*She talked to*~~ JOHN *yesterday*.

On this approach, elliptical constructions are “formed within the phonological component, not by operations of the overt syntax” (p. 565). Call this the *Phonological-reduction Hypothesis*, PRH (see, e.g., Rooth 1992, Tancredi 1992, Vanden Wyngaerd & Zwart 1999, Hartmann 2000).

A partially opposing view that takes ellipsis to be a genuinely syntactic phenomenon has since crystallized in the wake of Merchant’s (2001, 2004) work on sluicing and fragment responses. Merchant argues that a fragment response as in (1B) above is derived by syntactic A’-movement of the remnant and subsequent deletion of TP, paralleling sluicing following *wh*-movement.

- (3) [<sub>FP</sub> JOHN F<sub>E</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> she talked to *t* yesterday]] → [<sub>FP</sub> JOHN F<sub>E</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ~~she talked to *t*~~ yesterday]]

A core assumption of this alternative approach is that deletion is triggered by an ‘E-feature’ borne by a licensing head (a focus head as above, or C in sluicing). Remnants move to the specifier of this head, thereby escaping the ellipsis site (TP, on this approach). Call this the *Move-and-Delete Approach*, MDA (see, e.g., Brunetti 2003, Heck & Müller 2003, Wang & Wu 2006, Toosarvandani 2008, Nakao 2009, Ortega-Santos et al. 2014, Weir 2014, Boone 2014).

The MDA introduces a systematic asymmetry between elliptical and non-elliptical forms, in that derivation of the former necessitates movements not required for the latter. As a result, the MDA requires movement that is otherwise illegitimate even in simple cases like (1B), since English does not normally front answer-type foci (cf. Brunetti 2003 on Italian).

- (4) A: Who did Mary talk to yesterday? B: #JOHN she talked to yesterday.

The assumption that (1B) derives from (4B), rather than from the independently available (2), is problematic on theoretical grounds as well as with regard to learnability, in that it requires the learner to acquire a special syntax for the elliptical case (Noam Chomsky, p.c.). The problem is even more severe for bare quantifiers like *everyone* or NPIs like *any book* and other categories that resist A’-fronting, but can nevertheless surface as ellipsis remnants (Valmala 2007, Weir 2014).

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\*Thanks to Noam Chomsky, Jason Merchant, Luis Vicente, and the audience at PLC 39 for discussion.

<sup>1</sup>We will not consider non-deletion approaches to ellipsis here (e.g. Lobeck 1995, Chung et al. 1995, Culicover & Jackendoff 2005, Valmala 2007). To our mind, the (empirical and conceptual) evidence in favor of deletion is decisive, at least in the case of clausal ellipsis; see also footnote 7.

Sluicing in echo/reprise questions provides another dramatic example. Consider the following German dialogue:

- (5) A: Wen hat [inaudible] geküsst?      B: WER?!  
       who.ACC has                           kissed           who.NOM  
       ‘Who did [inaudible] kiss?’           ‘WHO?!’

The MDA assigns B’s sluiced echo question the pre-deletion structure in (6a), where the echoic *wh*-phrase is extracted from TP (presumably by means of focus fronting, see below), rather than that in (6b), with the *wh*-remnant *in situ*. The problem, now, is that (6a) differs in meaning from (5B): left *in situ* and bearing no accent, the second, accusative *wh*-phrase receives an indefinite interpretation, yielding the meaning indicated in the translation.

- (6) a. WER hat wen geküsst?  
       who.NOM has who.ACC kissed  
       ‘WHO kissed someone?’  
       b. Wen hat WER geküsst?  
       who.ACC has who.NOM kissed  
       ‘Who(m) did WHO kiss?!’

On the MDA, the learner thus needs to figure out not only that the echoic *wh*-phrase undergoes exceptional focus fronting, but also that the resulting structure in (6a) somehow receives not its ordinary interpretation but that of (6b). While some mechanism can surely be devised to achieve this result, the very problem is a mere artifact of the MDA. Of course, by simply permitting (6b) as the form underlying (5B) we sidestep all of these problems—but such a move is unavailable to the MDA, requiring as it does deletion of a non-constituent.

Problems of this kind amplify further once cases involving multiple remnants are taken into account, which on the MDA require movements that are otherwise altogether illicit. For instance, multiple sluicing as in (7) requires multiple-*wh*-fronting; ‘*why*-stripping’ (8B) requires exceptional fronting of the secondary remnant; and ‘swiping’ (9) requires post-fronting inversion of the *wh*-phrase and its associated preposition.

- (7) Some student gave a gift to some prof, but I don’t know which student to which professor.  
 (8) A: Peter kissed Mary last week.   B: Why Mary?  
 (9) John went to the movies, but I don’t know who with.

In short, unlike the PRH, the MDA assumes a special syntax for elliptical forms. What constrains this special syntax? On all versions of the MDA we are aware of, evacuation movements are assumed to be restricted to F-marked constituents (see, e.g., Ortega-Santos et al. 2014, Boone 2014, Weir 2014, Yoshida et al. 2015).<sup>2</sup> Without such a restriction, the MDA would permit evacuation of given material and hence radically over-predict the range of felicitous remnants.

Recall that the MDA’s core assumption (that deletion targets a single, designated constituent) is motivated by the E-feature, which is taken to account for the distribution of ellipsis. For instance, English permits sluicing in *wh*-questions but not in relative clauses because it has a feature  $E_S$  but no feature  $E_{REL}$ ; similarly, English but not German permits VP-ellipsis because English but not German has an  $E_V$  feature, etc. (Merchant 2013, Aelbrecht 2010:96). In our view, this is not an explanatory theory of ellipsis licensing: the E-feature is a descriptive device and ultimately a retreat to a constructionist view of elliptical phenomena (cf. Thoms 2011). Furthermore, given the general optionality of deletion, E must be optionally assigned in the course of the derivation, in violation of the Inclusiveness Condition (Chomsky 1995). Finally, the one substantive empirical prediction made by the approach is patently false: the putative bearers of E, e.g. C-heads in sluic-

<sup>2</sup>Lasnik (2013) argues that the second *wh*-phrase in multiple sluicing undergoes string-vacuous extraposition rather than leftward A’-movement. But unlike English, German does not require the second *wh*-remnant to be a PP (in a literal translation of (7), it would be a dative-marked NP), showing that ordinary extraposition cannot be taken to feed deletion in such constructions (since dative NPs do not extrapose).

ing, never survive deletion (*Someone did the dishes. – Who (\*did)?*).

In short, the E-feature can be dispensed with without any loss in explanatory depth. Crucially, this leaves the MDA without any conceptual motivation for postulating the radical asymmetries between elliptical and non-elliptical surface forms.

### 3 Unaccented Remnants in Clausal Ellipsis

In our view, the problems noted above suffice to cast serious doubt on the validity of the MDA. We now discuss a set of simple data points involving German modal particles that are squarely inconsistent with its central empirical predictions. The following sentences illustrate modal particles (MPs) in the German middle field (MPs are printed in underlined italics throughout).<sup>3</sup>

- (10) a. Peter hat {wohl / ja} ein paar Leute eingeladen.  
 Peter has PRT a few people invited  
 ‘{Presumably/As you know}, Peter invited a couple of people.’  
 b. Wer hat denn die Leute eingeladen?  
 who has PRT the people invited  
 ‘Who invited the people?’

MPs convey information related to the speaker’s attitude or commitment towards the proposition expressed; like sentential adverbs, they are not part of the propositional content of their host sentences but modifiers at the speech-act level (Zimmermann 2011, Struckmeier 2014).

MPs are unaccented and occupy fixed positions in the middle field, outside of the vP boundary and above adverbials and negation. Unlike any other category in German (including sentential adverbs), MPs are categorically immobile. For instance, they cannot move to the prefield:<sup>4</sup>

- (11) \*Wohl / Ja hat Peter *t* ein paar Leute eingeladen. (based on (10a))  
 PRT has Peter a few people invited

Importantly now, MPs can occur as unaccented secondary remnants in clausal ellipsis (CE). (12) illustrates this for a sluiced question, where *denn* linearly follows the surviving *wh*-phrase (the *primary remnant*); the reverse order is not permitted.

- (12) A: Peter invited a couple of people. B: WEN denn?  
 who PRT  
 B’: \*Denn WEN?  
 ‘Who?’

By contrast, MPs and primary non-*wh* remnants permit either linear order:<sup>5</sup>

- (13) A: Who did Peter invite? B: Seine FREUNDE wohl.  
 his friends PRT  
 B’: Wohl seine FREUNDE.  
 ‘Presumably his friends.’

Note that remnants are not separated by prosodic breaks, precluding an analysis in terms of ‘afterthought’ or self-repair. Furthermore, the primary XP-remnant and the accompanying particle do not form a constituent. This is shown by the fact that the two elements cannot occur together in the prefield of a V2 clause, for instance:

<sup>3</sup>We restrict our attention to the particles *ja*, *wohl*, and *denn*; for a fuller typology, see Thurmair 1989.

<sup>4</sup>This restriction is not due to MPs’ lack of stress, as unstressed categories can occur in the prefield.

<sup>5</sup>Van Craenenbroeck (2005) discusses instances of adverbial modification in sluicing. While he is not explicit about this, his cases, unlike the ones considered here, appear to involve focused adverbial remnants, and are thus less germane to our concerns here.

- (14) a. \*[WEN *denn*] hat er eingeladen?  
           who PRT has he invited  
       b. \*[Seine FREUNDE *wohl*] hat er eingeladen.  
           his friends PRT has he invited  
       c. \*[*Wohl* seine FREUNDE] hat er eingeladen.  
           PRT his friends has he invited

This shows that MPs surviving CE are individual remnants in their own right; they do not simply “tag along” with the primary remnant.<sup>6</sup> Unlike secondary remnants in other constructions (such as those in (7) and (8) above), however, MP remnants are unaccented. In this property, MPs (and sentential adverbs, see below) differ systematically from other categories occurring as secondary remnants, which uniformly require focal stress to be exempt from deletion.

The contrast can be neatly illustrated with different types of adverbs. Sentential adverbs pattern with MPs in being permissible *unaccented* remnants (15B). Other adverbs require contrastive stress ((15B') vs. (15B'')).

- (15) A: Peter seems to have invited some people.  
       B: Und WEN {vermutlich / wahrscheinlich / anscheinend}?  
           and who presumably probably apparently  
           ‘And who did he {presumably/probably/apparently} invite?’  
       B': \*Und WEN {gestern / widerwillig / nach Berlin / nicht}?  
           and who yesterday reluctantly to Berlin not  
       B'': Und WEN {GESTERN/WIDERWILLIG/NACH BERLIN/NICHT}?  
           ‘And who did he {invite {yesterday/reluctantly/to Berlin}/not invite}?’

The difference accounting for this asymmetry is that sentential adverbs, like MPs, are extra-propositional, speaker-oriented modifiers that do not enter into the calculation of truth conditions. By contrast, the adverbs in (15B')/(15B'') are truth-functionally relevant. We return to this crucial point in connection with MPs in Section 3 below. Note that most of the central points of this paper could be illustrated by means of sentential adverbs (even in English). The reason we focus on MPs in German is that these, unlike sentential adverbs, are syntactically immobile.

Returning to the main theme, the facts in (12–13) constitute a serious challenge for the MDA: MPs are immobile middle-field constituents; they cannot be focused/contrasted; yet, they can survive deletion. In short, MPs are predicted by the MDA to be impossible remnants.

Furthermore, the MDA fails to account for the asymmetry between (12) and (13) with regard to the linear order of remnants. In the first case, evacuation movement of *wh*-phrase and MP must result in a fixed order, whereas in the second case the output order must be free. On the PRH, these options simply correspond to the independently generated pre-deletion forms:

- (16) a. WEN hat er *denn* eingeladen?  
       b. \**Denn* WEN hat er eingeladen?  
           ‘Who did he invite?’  
       (17) a. Seine FREUNDE hat er *wohl* eingeladen.  
           b. Er hat *wohl* seine FREUNDE eingeladen.  
           ‘Presumably he invited his friends.’

Unlike *wh*-phrases, focused NPs in German front optionally; as a result, either order of MP and primary remnant is felicitous in the second case. No additional stipulations are required.

Strengthening this point further, we can show that remnants generally replicate middle-field-internal ordering restrictions. While the order of constituents in the German middle field is notoriously free, some categorical restrictions do exist. One requires MPs to linearly precede negation

<sup>6</sup>Note that the fact that MPs can occur in elliptical expressions of this kind constitutes clear evidence for full-fledged sentential syntactic structure underlying these fragments, *pace* the approaches cited in footnote 1.

(18); this restriction is preserved under CE (19).<sup>7</sup>

- (18) Peter hat die Lotterie {*wohl* nicht / \*nicht *wohl*} gewonnen.  
 Peter has the lottery PRT not won  
 ‘Presumably Peter didn’t win the lottery.’
- (19) A: What did Peter win? B: Die LOTTERIE {*wohl* NICHT / \*NICHT *wohl*}.  
 ‘Presumably not the lottery.’

In both (13B’) and (19B), a focal remnant linearly follows an MP remnant. If the latter is in the middle field, the former must be within VP. Hence, not only extra-propositional material, but also focal XPs can remain in non-peripheral positions under CE. As before, proponents of the MDA could deny this conclusion by diluting the MDA so as to permit the required exceptional movements. No such artificial devices are required by the PRH.

Finally, consider more complex cases where MP remnants are linearly intertwined with foci:

- (20) A: Peter invited all kinds of people.  
 B: WELCHE Leute *denn* vermutlich NICHT?  
 which people PRT presumably not  
 ‘Which people did he presumably not invite?’
- B’: Seine FREUNDE anscheinend *ja* AUCH alle.  
 his friends apparently PRT also all  
 ‘Apparently (as you know) he invited all his friends, too.’

Here, unaccented MPs and sentential adverbs are sandwiched between focal remnants; in (20B’), the second focal remnant is in turn followed by a quantifier stranded by the fronted primary remnant. Evidently, examples of this kind are anathema to the MDA. Each remnant would need to be exceptionally fronted individually, crucially in such a way that the resulting left-peripheral cascade faithfully replicate the original order of elements in the middle field. No such contortions are required on the PRH, as we show in the following section.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 *Quo vadis* MDA?

The facts discussed in the preceding section show that two central predictions of the MDA are not borne out: remnants of CE need not be focused, and focused and non-focused remnants alike can remain *in situ* under CE. Recall that focal status is a necessary precondition for remnant extraction on the MDA in order to rule out evacuation of given material from the ellipsis site.

A revised MDA could, of course, handle the facts discussed in the previous section. This revision would effectively deny that remnant evacuation is *bona fide* movement and assign it some special status (Weir 2014 pursues this idea). Alternatively, it could simply be stipulated that exceptional evacuation affects both foci and extra-propositional material. Additional mechanisms would be required to ensure that exceptional remnant evacuation yield only those outputs that are independently generated in the non-elliptical case (see Boone 2014 for such an approach).

While such a descriptively adequate MDA can be devised, it evidently falls short of providing any genuine insight or explanation. This is recognized by proponents of the MDA, who note that for the approach to attain explanatory adequacy, “the postulated movement operations would have

<sup>7</sup> Similarly, multiple MP remnants obey strict ordering restrictions. For instance, the order *ja wohl* is natural, whereas the order <sup>??</sup>*wohl ja* is highly marginal. The same contrast obtains under CE (iB).

- (i) A: Do we have any idea who Peter invited?  
 B: Seine FREUNDE {*ja* (*wahrscheinlich*) *wohl* / <sup>??</sup>*wohl* (*wahrscheinlich*) *ja*}.  
 his friends PRT probably PRT

Given that a sentence adverb can intervene between the two MPs, these do not form a single “super particle” but constitute separate remnants. This constitutes a problem for the MDA: since MP remnants are featurally indistinguishable, it is not clear how an order-preserving restriction could even be formulated.

to bear the hallmarks of regular, non-elliptical A'-movement" (van Craenenbroeck & Merchant 2013:721). The cases discussed show that this cannot generally be the case.

In view of this result, it seems to us that the only rational move is to abandon the MDA. This short paper is, of course, not the place to develop an alternative theory of CE. Here we would merely like to suggest that it is worthwhile to return to Chomsky & Lasnik's (1993) original PRH.

#### 4.2 Towards an Alternative

The crucial fact distinguishing MPs (and sentential adverbs) from other categories is their extra-propositional character: as noted in Section 2, MPs do not enter into the calculation of truth-conditional propositional meaning. We propose that the domain of deletion in CE is not a designated syntactic constituent (e.g., TP), but the sentential Background (BG) that is entailed by context and thus recoverable. What cannot be part of BG are 1) discourse-new and contrastive elements, by their very nature; and 2) extra-propositional elements, since BG corresponds to the propositional core of the sentence entailed by context. These, then, are the categories spared by CE, understood as optional deletion of the deaccented BG.

Let us illustrate this idea using a simple fragment response; we return to the more complex cases discussed in Section 2 shortly. We assume that focused XPs are syntactically F-marked (Selkirk 1995, Schwarzschild 1999), represented as  $XP_F$ .

(21) A: Who did Mary talk to yesterday?    B: *She talked to JOHN<sub>F</sub> yesterday.*

The presupposition of A's question is  $\exists x.Mary\ talked\ to\ x\ yesterday$ . This corresponds to the BG of B's response, with focal *John* replaced by an appropriate variable and  $\exists$ -closure. The PF-component obligatorily assigns BG a low-flat intonation (21B) and optionally deletes it:

(21) B': *She-talked-to JOHN<sub>F</sub> yesterday.*

With this in mind, let us return to the central cases of Section 2. Recall from (12) that a secondary MP remnant obligatorily follows a sluiced *wh*-phrase:

(22) A: Peter invited a couple of people.    B: WEN denn?  
   who    PRT  
   B': \*Denn WEN?  
   'Who?'

Given the context in (22A), (22B) is derived by optional deletion of the deaccented BG (corresponding, as before, to  $\exists x.Peter\ invited\ x$ ):

(23) WEN *hat Peter denn eingeladen?* → WEN ~~*hat Peter denn eingeladen?*~~

Not being entailed by context and hence not being part of BG, the MP necessarily remains unaffected by deletion, following the fronted *wh*-phrase. Compare this to (13), repeated below:

(24) A: Who did Peter invite?    B: Seine FREUNDE wohl.  
   his    friends    PRT  
   B': Wohl seine FREUNDE.  
   'Presumably his friends.'

As before, BG ( $\exists x.Peter\ invited\ x$ ) is entailed by context (24A). The elliptical forms in (24B) and (24B') are derived by optional deletion of BG; the focused NP fronts optionally:

(25) B: Seine FREUNDE *hat Peter wohl eingeladen.*    → (24B)  
           B': Peter hat wohl seine FREUNDE *eingeladen.*    → (24B')

The more complex cases in (20), repeated below, are handled analogously. Deletion of BG



derives (26a) as shown in (26b), and (27a) as shown in (27b). In both cases, a focused remnant remains in the middle field, as evidenced by the linearly preceding MP.

- (26) a. WELCHE Leute *denn* vermutlich NICHT?  
 which people PRT presumably not  
 b. [WELCHE Leute] ~~hat er~~ *denn* vermutlich NICHT<sub>F</sub> *eingeladen*?  
 ‘Which people did he presumably not invite?’
- (27) a. Seine FREUNDE anscheinend *ja* AUCH alle.  
 his friends apparently PRT also all  
 b. [Seine FREUNDE]<sub>F</sub> ~~hat er~~ *ja* anscheinend AUCH<sub>F</sub> [alle (t<sub>NP</sub>)]<sub>F</sub> *eingeladen*.  
 ‘Apparently, as you know, he invited all his friends as well.’

Here, as before, what is deaccented/deleted corresponds to the proposition entailed by context (the BG), with focal elements replaced by variables and extra-propositional elements ignored. The remnants, being focal or extra-propositional, are excluded from BG and therefore necessarily exempt from CE, regardless of their syntactic position.<sup>8</sup>

On this general conception, CE does not apply to a single syntactic constituent any more than deaccenting does. What unites and distinguishes the deleted material is not a common syntactic mother node but its informational status in discourse.<sup>9</sup> Extra-propositional material can never be part of BG and is therefore automatically exempt from deletion without any special marking. Truth-functionally relevant material, by contrast, can be part of BG: if it is, it is deaccented/deleted; if it is not, it is stressed and thus exempt from deletion. This explains the asymmetry between sentential and other adverbs illustrated in (15). Unlike sentence adverbs, adverb(ial)s such as *yesterday*, *in Berlin*, etc. do enter into the calculation of truth conditions; hence, when they are deaccented, they are part of BG and thus must delete (if deletion applies). When they are (contrastively) stressed, they are thereby marked as exempt from BG and consequently spared by deletion.

Our notion of BG is similar to Jackendoff’s (1972) ‘presuppositional skeleton.’ However, our BG is not a presupposition in the sense of being accepted as true by the interlocutors; it is merely a discourse-accessible proposition that anchors an utterance in discourse. Moreover, and crucially, our BG is not merely the complement of focus, as this would falsely include MPs (and sentential adverbs). Our approach thus departs from the traditional view according to which “only the focused part of a sentence is pronounced [in elliptical constructions]” (Féry & Krifka 2008), or, equivalently, ellipsis is deletion up to F-marking (Reich 2007). Such views fail to take into account extra-propositional, non-focused remnants.

The phonological component must thus comprise (at least) two rules of phonological reduction (cf. Féry & Samek-Lodovici 2006): an obligatory rule of BG deaccentuation,<sup>10</sup> and an optional rule of BG deletion. We leave a detailed formulation of these rules to future work. A substantive open question is why deletion cannot apply partially, i.e. why BG must be deleted *in toto*. (Note that the same is true for deaccenting, *mutatis mutandis*.) We will not attempt to answer this question here, as it is not specific to our approach. A tentative but, we think, plausible speculation is that the obligatory maximization of deaccenting/deletion is due to some version of Heim’s (1991) *Maximize Presupposition!* principle. This issue, too, we leave to future research.

<sup>8</sup>Note that the floating quantifier in (27) is an unstressed subpart of a discontinuous focus.

<sup>9</sup>It might seem that we are proposing that phonological reduction is sensitive to informational status, being able to identify the sentential BG. This would be a misunderstanding of our proposal, however. Deletion can in fact apply freely (with the proviso mentioned below: it must be maximal), but deletion of anything other than BG content will never be recoverable. In effect, then, BG (and only BG) is what can be deleted in the phonological component while ensuring felicitous use of the resulting fragmentary expression; but the mechanisms of phonological reduction are blind to these conditions of use. Note also that the PRH does *not* predict identity conditions on deletion and deaccenting to be congruent, and they are known not to be (see, e.g., Tancredi 1992 on implicational bridging and Merchant 2013 on voice mismatches). To the extent that the additional requirements imposed by deletion follow independently from the absence of any overt signal in this case (as seems likely), such asymmetries do not favor or militate against either PRH or MDA.

<sup>10</sup>While obligatory in a language like German or English, such a rule certainly cannot be universal, given that in many languages givenness and deaccenting appear not to be strongly correlated (Cruttenden 2006). In such languages, BG deletion may be an independent rule that does not piggyback on BG deaccenting.

If our alternative is on the right track, the analysis of constructions such as those in (7–9) above is correspondingly simplified: in multiple sluicing (7), the second *wh*-remnant is *in situ*, and so is the focused NP in the *why*-stripping construction (8).<sup>11</sup> Note that MP remnants provide us with a tool to probe the positions of focal remnants. We can thus independently verify this simple analysis by considering German analogues of (7) and (8), with added MPs:

- (28) B: [WELCHER Student]<sub>F</sub> denn [WELCHEM Professor]<sub>F</sub>?  
           which student PRT which professor  
       B': ??[WELCHER Student]<sub>F</sub> [WELCHEM Professor]<sub>F</sub> denn?  
           'Which student (gave a gift) to which professor?'  
 (29) B: WARUM<sub>F</sub> denn MARIA<sub>F</sub>?  
           why PRT Maria  
       B': ??WARUM<sub>F</sub> MARIA<sub>F</sub> denn?  
           'Why (did he kiss) Maria?'

In each case, the second focused remnant can only marginally precede the MP remnant, reflecting the marginality of focus scrambling (Lenerz 1977). To capture the above facts, the MDA needs to permit exceptional evacuation movements and stipulate that outputs match the independently licensed middle-field orders. By contrast, the PRH simply permits focal remnants to remain in their pre-deletion surface positions. Non-constituent deletion is likewise assumed, on various different grounds, by Sag (1976:300), Hankamer (1979), Den Dikken et al. (2000), Ackema & Szendrői (2002), Abe & Tancredi (2013), and Bruening (to appear), among others.

On PRH assumptions, the phenomenon of swiping (9) dissolves into stranding of a discourse-new preposition that is part of a discontinuous focus, similar to Q-float in (20B'):

- (30) (...but I don't know) [<sub>CP</sub> WHO<sub>F</sub> ~~he went to the movies~~ [WITH *t*]<sub>F</sub>]

Unlike approaches such as Merchant's (2002), this simplest view of swiping (foreshadowed in Ross 1969:265f.) explains its absence in non-P-stranding languages, where the pre-deletion form of (29) is not independently licensed in the first place. Thus, once the dogma of constituent deletion is given up, swiping disappears as a special construction.

Needless to say, this sketch leaves many questions open and raises new ones. Two types of facts in particular are commonly taken to support universal remnant extraction: locality effects, and crosslinguistic P-stranding asymmetries (see references in van Craenenbroeck & Merchant 2013).<sup>12</sup> However, in both domains the facts are murky, and it is in fact far from clear that the putatively relevant effects in CE are congruent with those witnessed in connection with movement. There are many well-known discrepancies between P-stranding under A'-movement and preposition omission/retention under ellipsis, even in English; compare, for instance, Stanton's (in press) examples of illicit P-stranding, which do permit P-omission under CE. CE famously fails to show locality effects familiar from movement in many cases (although it seems likely that this indicates 'evasion' rather than 'repair,' cf. Merchant 2001); and where it does show such effects, they are not necessarily characteristic of A'-movement (e.g., the clause-mate condition on multiple sluicing remnants, cf. Sauerland 1999).

Be that as it may, most important is the fact that the etiology of the (presumably heterogeneous) phenomena labeled 'P-stranding' and 'islands' is not at all understood. But as long as the underlying causes remain unknown, it cannot be assumed with any confidence that locality and (putative) P-stranding effects in CE are the result of movement. Plausibly, whatever is responsible for the relevant effects in connection with movement likewise affects the possible outcomes of deletion operations—'islands' and 'P-stranding' are names of *explananda*, not *explanantia*, after all. Whatever future theorizing will have to say about these issues, it seems clear to us that such potential advantages of the MDA, even where supported by the empirical facts, are strongly outweighed by the range of empirical and theoretical concerns militating against it.

<sup>11</sup>Note that while *Mary* in (8B) is discourse-given, it is contrastive and hence exempt from BG.

<sup>12</sup>Another type of potential evidence for the MDA, as Luis Vicente (p.c.) points out, may come from *wh-in situ* languages that have been argued to display signs of *wh*-movement in sluicing (Takahashi 1994).

## 5 Conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that the distribution of particles in clausal ellipsis constitutes a significant challenge for the MDA. Accommodating these simple cases on the MDA's own terms would amount to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the approach, as extraordinary evacuation movements would move categorically immobile, non-focused middle-field constituents, only to replicate their initial order in the left periphery. We suggest that clausal ellipsis be relegated entirely to the PF-component, as per the PRH: felicitous deletion optionally silences the deaccented sentential Background. This approach, while in need of substantial further elaboration, captures the data in a principled manner while eliminating much syntactic complexity introduced by the MDA. It is, furthermore, fully in line with what we believe should be the default assumption about elliptical constructions, i.e. that they are “formed within the phonological component, not by operations of the overt syntax” (Chomsky & Lasnik 1993:565).

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