GRAMMATICAL CLASSIFICATIONS OF ELLIPSES

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Abstract: In this paper an attempt was made to classify and describe elliptical constructions in German spoken language. It was emphasized the fact that in spoken language we should talk about utterances that can consist of several sentences or sub-sentences and have both linguistic and communicative values.
Keywords: ellipses, substantival reference, several reference, linguistic phenomenon, short phrases.

In grammar, ellipses are considered to be utterances that appear to be incomplete and thus not grammatically well-formed. In contrast to classical rhetoric, which sees the ellipsis primarily as a stylistic function of a short form, in the grammatical tradition it is regarded as a violation of the rules, i.e. as a lack or even omission of elements that would be necessary to be able to describe a certain sentence as well-formed.

In grammar, the ellipsis is thus considered a purely syntactic phenomenon from the beginning. In rhetorical grammar, it functions as a linguistic phenomenon that occurs mainly in dialectal or sociolectal utterances due to its syntactic incompleteness (Soloecism, for more on this Eggs 1994: 1044). The author also notes that the ancient grammatical notion of ellipsis, based on the opposition completeness of the written norm vs. incompleteness of the oral language, has been adopted by many contemporary grammarians. One of the first German grammars to devote much space to the ellipsis was Grammatik der deutschen Sprache by Jung (1966: 117):

Unter Ellipse (griech. = das Ausbleiben) versteht man in der Regel ein sprachliches Einsparen auf syntaktischem Gebiete, nämlich das übliche Fehlen von Satzgliedern, die zum Verständnis entbehrlich sind, weil sie sich aus der Situation ergeben.

The author discusses various cases of ellipsis. However, he focuses mainly on written language. Using various examples, he cites elements of the sentence or phrase that can be elliptically erased. Among such elements he counts:

a) the substantival reference word in the case of the adjectival attribute, e.g.
die roten [Rosen] und weißen Rosen
der Zehnte (der zehnte Teil)

b) the attribute (sometimes it applies to several reference words), e.g.
(Guten) Morgen!
(Gesegnete) Mahlzeit!

c) Phrases or parts of phrases, e.g.
Öffne ihm (die Tür)!
(Ich bitte um) Hilfe!
(Wenn das) Ende gut (ist), (ist) Alles gut

There are utterances that can be considered as fixed formulas and therefore they do not require completion by the interlocutor. For example, when he/she hears Mahlzeit, the utterance is understood as a greeting formula used in the German-speaking world at lunchtime. In utterances such as Guten Morgen, or Guten Tag, the reference word can be deleted (Morgen! Tag!) without the risk that the interlocutor has not understood the content of the utterance. (such forms occur relatively often in spoken language). Only such shortened greetings can be considered ellipses, in the author's opinion. The first two examples in c) are often considered as so-called ellipses of action. In so-called one-word sentences or short phrases, the ellipsis is present when the completion of the phrase is possible by the elements existing in the preceding utterance.

In the German language there are a number of verbs for which, depending on the meaning, complements are obligatory or optional. In the case of verbs that absolutely need complements (sich

befinden, setzen, stellen, entstehen), ellipses are then impossible, because such verbs cannot exist in the utterance/sentence alone.

Heidolph et al. (1981: 190-193) also discuss situations in which ellipses have penetrated deeply into the structure of the sentence. Not all constructions in such situations are classifiable as ellipses, in my opinion:

(a) the sentence base of the sentence contains a noun, adjective, or adverb group.

The word group that appears here is a predicative, e.g. (Das ist) Unsinn! (Das war) schlecht! This group of elliptical sentences also includes sentences with prepositional groups with the function of a local adverbial, e.g. (Es ist/liegt/steht) vor Ihnen! (Es ist/ liegt/steht) auf der anderen Seite! In such sentences it can be stated that they classify or evaluate the given units. In connection with the above, again the thesis is confirmed that in short utterances the subject is erased. According to the author, such turns can be filled up only in concrete contexts, i.e. only when they can be completed with verbs that can be taken over from the preceding utterance, or clearly fit into a blank (it happens, for example, in answers to alternative questions, e.g.: – Warst du im Kino, oder? –[das ist] richtig).

b) sentences with only one nominal phrase, which has the function of a subject, e.g. (da kommt) ein Flugzeug! or (da ist) Feuer! The noun phrase characterizes an object (phenomenon) that affects the whole situation. Such an elliptical utterance can also express astonishment or surprise (as in the 2nd example). In my opinion, such short utterances of the type "warning' are not ellipses. They only denote an event/object. They can also be completed in different ways both in the antecedent and in the postfix (e.g. es fliegt/da kommt/siehst du/ ein Flugzeug/kommt/fliegt/ist zu sehen etc.).

c) prompts of the type Den Meißel! (gib den Meißel her!) or when all constituents are deleted from the sentence base except for the accusative objects, such as Hierher! (as an adverbial clause). In the author's opinion, since one is dealing with prompts in this subgroup, one speaks of action ellipses in such a case. In such ellipses, the addressee is required to perform an action or (if it is already performed) to 'extend' it. Ellipses like Schneller! Or Mit der Axt! (Heidolph et al. 1981: 192) require the addressee to make certain modifications to his action.

d) Ellipsis of other clauses in the subject of the sentence. The missing subject is syntactically the subject, such as (Ich) komme gleich wieder! (Das/es) macht nichts!, or a complement, such as (Das) machen wir! (Den/die/das) kenne ich nicht!. Since this kind of ellipses demands high concentration from the listener, it would therefore make sense to count such ellipses among the context ellipses. The argumentation is based on Schwitalla (1979: 73), who speaks of the context ellipsis in such cases, in which "an anaphoric pronoun is omitted to a clause in the preceding clause".

Ellipsis of the subject is, of course, one of the methods of eliminating the subject in the sentence. The authors of Grundzüge einer deutschen Grammatik also describe sentences in which (under conditions) the predicate group (i.e. finite verb) is missing, and then there is also ellipsis, e.g. Der Bus! (= The bus is coming!). But one would have to accept that such sentences as Klaus schläft! cannot be subject to ellipsis (e.g. *Klaus!), because the most important condition for their occurrence is that the subject is rheme (Heidolph et al. 1981: 226). Thus, in such a sentence, only the first part can be erased.

Relatively much space is devoted to elliptical structures in Helbig and Buscha's German Grammar (2001: 124). It is noted that there are situations in which the full verbs are either omitted to avoid repetition (e.g. Ohne es (=umstoßen) zu wollen, stieß sie die Kaffeekanne um.) or are superfluous and can be inferred from the context. This is only possible with those verbs which (according to Helbig/ Buscha 2001: 124) express a general doing or an indefinite movement (e.g. Die kleine Tochter muss spätestens um 7 Uhr ins Bett (gehen) or rules what one may (do) do not exist in this game). With auxiliary verbs, we very often have to deal with the omission of the infinitive. This is often the case in spoken language.

In Deutsche Grammatik (1988: 88-89) Engel describes ellipsis as part of communication and the corresponding context. He refers to the phenomenon of the ellipsis in the context of the description of the text and the context:

Die Ellipse, also die Auslassung eines Elements, ist – in zwangloser Alltagssprache – immer dann möglich, wenn die spezielle Charakteristik eines Pronomens oder eines Adverbs anderweitig, d.h. aus Kontext [...] erschließbar ist. Ellipsen setzen also, soll die Kommunikation nicht gestört werden, einen entsprechenden Kontext voraus und wirken insofern verweisend und textkonnektiv. Particularly omittable, according to Engel, are referential pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and adverbs. Very often (according to Engel) we have to do with the ellipsis of the subject (e.g. Wir haben um acht Uhr angefangen. – (das) tut mir leid, (ich) war nicht informiert). With certain verbs, ellipsis of the accusative complement is also possible (e.g. Das ist doch Herr Rothmund! – (Den) kenne ich aber gar nicht). Engel also gives some examples of adverbs from which local, more rarely temporal elements are most likely to be omitted (Engel 1988: 88):

Die waren drei Wochen in Griechenland. – (Da) wollen wir nächstes Jahr auch hin. Kennen Sie das Grödnertal? – (Dort) bin ich noch nicht gewesen.

Das war schon vor dem Krieg. – (Damals) hast du noch gar nicht gelebt.

In Syntax der deutschen Gegenwartssprache (1982: 291) Engel describes different forms of reference among German connectors. He considers ellipsis to be an extreme form of reference that can occur where the phoric function of a (in any case content-poor) referent is ensured by the context. It is also noted that ellipsis usually has anaphoric function, e.g.:

Wird er akzeptieren? – (Das) weiß ich nicht.

Sie kommt schon wieder zu spät. (Das ist ja) unerhört!

The authors of the German-Polish Contrastive Grammar (cf. Engel et al. 2000: 64) believe that ellipsis is highly referential and distinguish the following types of ellipsis:

a) Ellipsis of the noun (in the paper it is counted among the coordination ellipses) - it is noted that in German it is possible in non-spontaneous speech and only in sentence clusters, such as:

Er hat Ela getroffen und (er hat) ein bisschen mit ihr geplaudert.

b) Ellipsis of the pronominal subject (in constraintless dialogues) (typical of spoken texts, considered in the paper as contextual ellipsis), e.g.:

Wo ist Wojtek? – (Er) kann nicht weit sein.

c) Anaphorische Weglassbarkeit von Kasusergänzungen – sie beschränkt sich nach den Autoren auf wenige Verben wie wissen, kennen oder sehen, z.B.:

Wie spät ist es? – (Das) weiß/seh ich nicht.

Text linguists also write about the ellipsis as a form of reference (Silman 1974: 49), who consider the so-called elliptical connection as a form of text linkage. The text reference is (Silman 1974: 49) often generated by blanks, as in the example: I liked Rome very much. Paris less so. The analysis of the recordings shows that elliptically connected elements are also typical for spoken texts.

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