

Sprouting and the structure of *except*-phrases*

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1. Introduction

Following Rudin's (2019: 275) suggestion, this paper investigates the structure of *except*-phrases based on sentences like (1) (see Rudin 2019: 274, ex. 39). The *why*-sprout is ambiguous between the two readings spelled out in (a) and (b):¹

- (1) Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don't know why
- a. ... nobody liked the movie, except John. (People usually like trashy movies.)
 - b. ... John liked the movie. (He usually likes George Clooney.)

The 'nobody reading' in (1a) will follow from any functioning account of sprouting. The sprout takes the main clause as antecedent, just as for a vanilla case of sprouting like (2):

- (2) Mary liked the movie, but I don't know why
- a. ... Mary liked the movie.

The 'John reading' of the *why*-sprout in (1b) is puzzling, however. Prominent accounts of clausal ellipsis cannot deliver it from the main clause (with or without the *except*-phrase) as antecedent (Rudin 2019: 275). For example, Merchant (2001) argues for mutual entailment between the antecedent and elided clauses; but *John liked the movie* does not entail *Nobody liked the movie*(, *except John*).² Meanwhile Chung et al. (1995) propose that the ellipsis site

*Many thanks to Tim Hunter for advising; talk audiences at NELS and UCLA; poster visitors at the Penn Linguistics Conference, 22-24 March 2019 (PLC 43) and Sluicing and Ellipsis at 50, University of Chicago, 12-13 April 2019 (Sluicing+@50); several anonymous reviewers; Patrick Elliott and Rodrigo Ranero; and Johanna Benz for German. The errors are ours.

¹It could be that John and no-one else liked the movie for one and the same reason; for example, because it was romantic. Then the 'John reading' collapses with the 'nobody reading'. But the two readings of (1) are in principle distinct, as brought out by the bracketed continuations.

²At best, there is unidirectional entailment from *Nobody liked the movie, except John* to *John liked the movie*. In this vein, see section 3.3.

is a pro-form, which is substituted by a copy of the antecedent at LF; but the mismatching subjects—*John* vs. *Nobody*—means there is no one antecedent to copy over. Thus the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout cannot be the main clause. What is needed is an antecedent where *John* and *liked the movie* are together.

We argue that the *except*-phrase in (1) itself contains elided clausal structure, which in turn provides the required syntactic antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout. In subtly different kinds of *except*-phrases like (3), which we argue do not contain clausal structure, there is no antecedent to support the ‘John reading’, which therefore disappears:

- (3) Nobody except John liked the movie, but I don’t know why
- a. . . .nobody liked the movie, except John. (People usually like trashy movies.)
 - b. #. . . John liked the movie. (He usually likes George Clooney.)

This pattern supports the view that clausal ellipsis requires a syntactic antecedent, and reveals diversity in the structure of *except*-phrases.

In outline, the next section lays out our proposal in the context of independent arguments for clausal *except*-phrases. Section 3 shows that the availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the potential presence of elided clausal structure in the *except*-phrase; as predicted by our analysis, and not by a plausible alternative analysis in terms of entailment. Section 4 adds negation to the puzzle in view of a version of (1) with *everyone* in place of *nobody*, before section 5 concludes.

2. Proposal: *except*-phrase antecedents

We propose that the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout in (1b) is a clausal ellipsis site in the *except*-phrase. The claim that there can be clausal structure in *except*-phrases has cross-linguistic precedents in Spanish (Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012), Egyptian Arabic (Soltan 2016), and Malagasy (Potsdam 2018). The same is plausible for English based on pronounceability as a crude but simple proxy in (4); we might think that elided clausal structure is present in (a) along the lines in (b) given that we can pronounce a clause in that position in (c):³

- (4) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John.
 b. Nobody liked the movie, except John ~~liked the movie~~.
 c. Nobody liked the movie, except John liked the movie.

Specifically, we take the ellipsis in the *except*-phrase to be bare argument ellipsis, or “stripping”, following Merchant (2005) for a pair like (5). The answer is focus-fronted, followed by deletion of the TP from which the answer has moved (compare Ross 1969 on sluicing). The stripping analysis applies to the *except*-phrase from (1) as in (6):

- (5) Q: Which movie did Jason like? A: Thunderheart [~~Jason liked t_{TP} Thunderheart~~].

³For concreteness, we adopt the PF-deletion approach to ellipsis (Merchant 2001).

- (6) [A Nobody liked the movie], except John [~~*E t_{John}* liked the movie~~].

The rest of this section reviews some independent arguments for clausal structure in *except*-phrases, before using it to account for the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout in (1b).

2.1 Clausal structure in *except*-phrases

This subsection presents two arguments that *except*-phrases can contain elided clausal structure. First, multiple exceptions (7) (Potsdam and Polinsky 2019). The sentence in (a) from Moltmann 1995:260 has two universal quantifiers and two exceptions in a single clause-final free *except*-phrase. Since *John with Mary* is not a constituent, the *except*-phrase is taken to have an elliptical clausal source with multiple focus-fronting, as in (b):

- (7) a. Every boy danced with every girl, except John with Mary.
b. . . ., except John with Mary ~~*t_{John}* did not dance *t_{with Mary}*~~.

Second, *except*-phrases show modification (8) and binding (9) connectivity with embedded clauses in ways that differ surprisingly from superficially similar-looking phrases without *except*. In (8), the *except-when*-phrase can modify John’s running in (a). On the face of it, the availability of this interpretation is odd, since the *except-when*-phrase is not attached to the embedded clause; being to the right of a main clause modifier, it is indisputably in the main clause on the surface, and cannot have arrived there by extraposition, which is clause-bounded (Ross 1967, Baltin 1981). Indeed, the reading where the *except-when*-phrase modifies the embedded clause is unavailable without *except*: (b) can only have the strange meaning that Mary’s writing is weather-dependent. The availability of the embedded clause reading in (a) is explained if we postulate elided clausal structure as in (c). The *except-when*-phrase originates as attached to the embedded clause prior to focus-fronting and clausal ellipsis:

- (8) a. Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports [except when it’s raining].
b. Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports [when it’s not raining].
c. Mary writes [that John runs] in her reports [except [when it’s raining];
~~Mary writes [that John runs *t_i*] in her reports~~].

Pronominal binding (9) (cf. Potsdam 2018 for Malagasy) exhibits a similar pattern of embedded clause connectivity. In (a), *his* can be bound by *every boy*. This is odd, since variable binding usually requires c-command. Indeed, a bound interpretation is unavailable in the absence of *except* in (b). The availability of the bound reading in (a) is explained if we postulate the elliptical clausal structure in (c). The *except-when*-phrase focus-fronts from a position where it is c-commanded by an elided *every boy*:

- (9) a. Mary writes that Susan looks after every boy_{*i*} in her reports, except when it’s his_{*i*} birthday.
b. *Mary writes that Susan . . . every boy_{*i*} in her reports when it’s his_{*i*} birthday.

- c. Mary writes that Susan looks after every boy_i in her reports, except [when it's his_i birthday]_j ~~she writes that Susan looks after every boy_i t_j in her reports.~~

2.2 *Except-phrases as elliptical antecedents*

With independent arguments in hand for the potential presence of clausal structure in *except*-phrases, we can now link it to the meaning of sprouts. We propose that the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout in (1b) is the ellipsis site in the *except*-phrase.

With clausal ellipsis as in (6), the *except*-phrase provides the antecedent to support the ‘John reading’ of (1b)—*John* and *liked the movie* are now together. Syntactic identity between \langle_{E2} and \langle_{A2} in (10) brings the ‘John reading’ into line with standard cases of sprouting like (2):⁴

- (10) [_{A1} Nobody liked the movie], except John \langle_{A2} [_{E1} ~~*t_{John}* liked the movie~~],
but I don't know why \langle_{E2} ~~John liked the movie~~.

With subjects, the focus-fronting movement involved in stripping is string vacuous, from spec-TP to the left edge. Focus-fronting is starker with a non-subject exception. Unsurprisingly, (11) is ambiguous along the same lines as (1). While the ‘nobody reading’ (a) takes the main clause as antecedent, the ‘John reading’ (b) of the *why*-sprout takes as antecedent the elided clausal structure of the *except*-phrase in (12), as in (10):⁵

- (11) Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John, but I don't know why
a. ... Sam introduced nobody to Mary, except John. (People usually like Mary.)
b. ... Sam introduced John to Mary. (John is not a nice guy.)
- (12) [_{A1} Sam introduced nobody to Mary],
except John \langle_{A2} [_{E1} ~~Sam introduced *t_{John}* to Mary~~],
but I don't know why \langle_{E2} ~~Sam introduced John to Mary~~.

Thus our proposal solves the puzzle of the two readings of the *why*-sprouts in sentences like (1) or (11). Each reading is supported by a different syntactic antecedent: whereas the

⁴To be more precise about traces and identity in (10), identity holds between \langle_{A1} and \langle_{E1} based on the A-bar traces of QR-ed *nobody* and focus-fronted *John*, similar to (5). Identity holds between t_{John} in \langle_{A2} and *John* in \langle_{E2} along similar lines to identity between t_{who} and *them* in (i) (Merchant 2001):

- (i) [_{A1} Chris likes someone], and I know who \langle_{A2} [_{E1} ~~Chris likes *t_{who}*~~],
but I can't remember why \langle_{E2} ~~Chris likes them~~.

⁵The indirect object in (11) ensures this is an instance of free rather than connected *except*, which will be an important distinction in the next section.

‘nobody’ reading (a) takes the entire main clause as antecedent, the ‘John reading’ (b) takes just the elided clausal structure of the *except*-phrase.⁶

3. Prediction: the ‘John reading’ covaries with clausal *except*-phrases

The previous section proposed that the antecedent for the ‘John’ reading of the sprouted clause in (1) is the elliptical clausal structure of the *except*-phrase. We therefore predict that the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout will only be available only when there is clausal structure in the *except*-phrase to serve as the antecedent. Without such clausal structure, the ‘John’ reading will lack an antecedent, and should disappear. This section shows that the prediction of our analysis is borne out: the availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the presence of clausal structure in the *except*-phrase. We show as much for *except*-phrases in various positions, *except for*, and exceptive phrases in German, all of which tells against a plausible alternative analysis in terms of entailment.

3.1 *Except (for)*

Recalling (4), (13) uses pronounceability as a simple, if crude, proxy to diagnose whether clausal structure can be elliptically present when no clausal structure is pronounced. Clause-final *except* admits a pronounced clause in (a),⁷ lending support to the presence of the elided structure in (6). Connected (b, cf. 3) and clause-initial (c) *except*, on the other hand, do not admit pronounced clausal structure:⁸

⁶Repair effects block an argument for elliptical *except*-phrase antecedents based on sluicing rather than sprouting. Sluicing repairs island violations, famously as in (i) (Ross 1969); (a) has the elliptical structure in (b), but does not incur the same relative clause island violation as its pronounced counterpart in (c):

- (i) a. They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I can’t remember which.
- b. ..., but I can’t remember which ~~they want to hire someone who speaks~~ *t*.
- c. *...; but I can’t remember which they want to hire someone who speaks *t*.

In this light, consider the sluicing version of (1) in (ii). The correlate *some boy* is in the *except*-phrase. The sluice in (a) is unambiguously about the boy who liked the movie. Given our proposal, we might be tempted to conclude that there must be clausal structure in the *except*-phrase to serve as the antecedent for the sluice, as in (b). But the antecedent could just as well be the entire first conjunct, with sluicing repairing the otherwise illicit wh-extraction in (c):

- (ii) a. Nobody liked the movie, except some boy, but I don’t know (bidk) which boy.
- b. ..., except some boy ~~*t*_{some boy} liked the movie~~, bidk which boy ~~*t*_{which boy} liked the movie~~.
- c. ..., except some boy, bidk which boy ~~nobody liked the movie~~, except ~~*t*_{which boy}~~.

⁷Cf. Reinhart (1993: 363), who rejects (13a) as a contradiction. Example (13a) may sound better with *do*-insertion to carry polarity focus; that is, *Nobody liked the movie, except John DID like the movie*; likewise for (16a), below. See section 4.1 for more on *DID*.

⁸The judgements are clearer with subject remnants as in (13), but the same point could be made with non-subject remnants along the lines of (11).

- (13) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John [liked the movie].
 b. *Nobody except John [liked the movie] liked the movie.
 c. *Except John [liked the movie], nobody liked the movie.

We infer from this unpronounceability that connected (b) and clause-initial (c) *except* cannot take clausal complements. Hence in (14), unlike clause-final *except* (a), connected (b) and, more surprisingly,⁹ clause-initial (c) *except*-phrases cannot contain elided clausal structure:

- (14) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John t_{John} ~~liked the movie~~.
 b. *Nobody except John t_{John} ~~liked the movie~~ liked the movie.
 c. *Except John t_{John} ~~liked the movie~~, nobody liked the movie.

No clausal structure should mean no ‘John reading’. This prediction is borne out in (15):

- (15) a. Nobody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why. = (1)
 Reading: nobody / John
 b. Nobody except John liked the movie, but I don’t know why. = (3)
 Reading: nobody / *John
 c. Except John, nobody liked the movie, but I don’t know why.
 Reading: nobody / *John

Thus we correctly predict the ‘John reading’ to track the potential presence of clausal structure in the *except*-phrase, as diagnosed by the proxy of pronounceability.^{10, 11}

⁹Attempting ellipsis with connected *except* (14b) would give rise to a problem of antecedent containment. See Vostrikova 2019a:74f. on Persian.

¹⁰We should emphasise that pronounceability is a proxy only, since some clausal ellipses cannot be pronounced. With (13), we tested whether the perfectly grammatical clause *John liked the movie* was admissible in certain positions, so issues surrounding repair effects in clausal ellipsis did not arise (recall note 6). But in (i), the ‘John reading’ is supported in (a) by clausal structure that is not pronounceable. On our approach, the ‘John reading’ is generated by doubly the elliptical structure in (b). The violation involved in moving *John* out of the bracketed wh-island is repaired by ellipsis. Without ellipsis, (c) is ungrammatical (even by the standard set by (ia) in note 8). Note that *why* must sprout from above the wh-island, since sprouting from within islands is ungrammatical (Chung et al. 1995); accordingly, (a) is unambiguously about the reason for Chris’s wondering, not the reason for the introducing:

- (i) a. Chris will wonder who introduced nobody to Mary tomorrow,
 except John, but I don’t know why. Reading: nobody / John
 b. Chris will wonder [who introduced nobody to Mary] tomorrow,
 except John ~~Chris will wonder [who introduced t_{John} to Mary] tomorrow~~,
 but I don’t know why ~~Chris will wonder t_{why} [who introduced John to Mary] tomorrow~~.
 c. *Chris will wonder [who introduced nobody to Mary] tomorrow,
 except John Chris will wonder [who introduced t_{John} to Mary] tomorrow.

¹¹Vostrikova (2019b) identifies Spanish (Pérez-Jiménez and Moreno-Quibén 2012), Persian and Bulgarian as languages where exceptive deletion is mandatory (cf. comparative deletion): exceptive phrases that can be

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The prediction that the ‘John reading’ depends on antecedent clausal structure is borne out more subtly with sentence-final *except for* in (16).¹² There is interspeaker variation as to whether *except for* admits pronounced clausal structure (a). We infer that *except for* admits (elided) clausal complements only for some speakers (b). The ‘John reading’ is available in (c) for exactly those speakers who accept pronounced clausal structure in (a):

- (16) a. %Nobody liked the movie, except for John liked the movie.
b. %Nobody liked the movie, except for John *t_{John}* liked the movie.
c. Nobody liked the movie, except for John, but I don’t know why.
Reading: nobody / %John

In sum, when there is (elided) clausal structure in the *except*-phrase, as diagnosed by the proxy of pronounceability, the ‘John reading’ is available; this is the case for clause-final *except* (a), and *except for* (16) for some speakers. When there is no such clausal structure,¹³ there is no syntactic antecedent to support the ‘John reading’, which therefore disappears; this is the case for connected *except* (b), clause-initial *except* (c), and *except for* (16) for some speakers.¹⁴

3.2 German

German, like English, is a language where clausal structure can be pronounced in only some exceptive phrases. As predicted, the availability of a ‘Hans reading’ of a *warum*-sprout co-varies with the pronounceability of clausal structure in the exceptive phrase. With *außer* (17), ‘except’ (a), no clausal structure can be pronounced (b), and a *warum*-sprout (c) is unambiguous—there is no ‘Hans reading’:

diagnosed as clausal (cf. section 2.1) cannot contain pronounced clauses. We predict that clausal exceptives should support ‘John readings’ of *why*-sprouts, regardless of pronounceability.

¹²Rudin (2019:274f., ex. 39) exemplifies with *except* (i). But he also traces the observation back to Merchant (2001 pg.22, ex. 32i), who has *except for* (ii); and back to the quoted film itself (iii) (*Thunderheart*, 1992):

- (i) Nobody liked the movie except Jerry, and I have no idea why — hes usually very highbrow.
(ii) Nobody’ll talk to you, except for old Wakasha. I have no idea why.
(From the context it’s clear this means, “I have no idea why old Wakasha will talk to you.”)
(iii) A: They don’t want you here. Ain’t nobody gonna talk to you.
B: Fine.
A: Except for the wica’sa wakan, and I don’t know why.
B: The who?
A: The man who sent me to find you. Says he has some information for the FBI.

¹³Cf. Harris (1982), who derives all exceptive phrases from full underlying clauses.

¹⁴Thus the availability of the ‘John reading’ cuts across the distinction between free and connected exceptives (Hoeksema 1995).

- (17) a. Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans.
 everyone liked the Film, except Hans
 ‘Everyone liked the Film, except Hans.’
- b. *Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans mochte den Film (nicht).
 everyone liked the film, except Hans liked the film (not)
- c. Jeder mochte den Film, außer Hans, aber ich weiß nicht warum.
 everyone liked the film, except Hans, but I know not why
 ‘Everyone liked the film, except Hans, but I don’t know why.’
 Reading: jeder / *Hans

With *nur . . . nicht* (18), ‘only . . . not’ (a), on the other hand, clausal structure can be pronounced (b), and the ‘Hans reading’ is available for the *warum*-sprout (c):

- (18) a. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans nicht.
 everyone liked the film, only Hans not
 ‘Everyone liked the film, only Hans didn’t.’
- b. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans mochte den Film nicht.
 everyone liked the film, only Hans liked the film not
 ‘Everyone liked the film, only Hans didn’t like the film.’
- c. Jeder mochte den Film, nur Hans nicht, aber ich weiß nicht warum.
 everyone liked the film, only Hans not, but I know not why
 ‘Everyone liked the film, only Hans didn’t, but I don’t know why.’
 Reading: jeder / Hans

Thus German and English pattern alike with respect to the circumstances which license the ‘John/Hans reading’: when there can be clausal structure in the exceptive phrase, the ‘John/Hans reading’ is available; in its absence, the ‘John/Hans reading’ is likewise absent.

3.3 Against a semantic analysis

Our syntactic proposal correctly predicts that the availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the presence of clausal structure in the *except*-phrase. As such, it fares better than a semantic analysis that might attempt to source the antecedent for the ‘John reading’ from the entailment properties of *except*-phrases. The entailment in (19) could supply the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprouts in (1), either directly (Kroll 2019) or indirectly by licensing the construction of another syntactic object (Fox 2000):

- (19) Nobody liked the movie, except John. \Rightarrow John liked the movie.

However, this exclusivity entailment is carried by all kinds of exceptive phrases, regardless of whether they are *except* or *except for*, connected or free, clause-final or clause-initial. An account that sources antecedents for ellipsis from the entailment properties of *except*-phrases

would therefore predict that the ‘John reading’ should be available with all *except*-phrases. Such an account is falsified by the disappearance of the ‘John reading’ with connected *except* (15b), clause-initial free *except* (15c), and for some speakers with *except for* (16c).

3.4 Interim summary

Overall, this section has confirmed the prediction of our analysis from section 2. There we proposed that the ‘John reading’ of the *why*-sprout in (1) takes the elliptical clausal structure of the *except*-phrase as antecedent. The analysis predicted that the ‘John reading’ would only be available when there is clausal structure in the *except*-phrase. This prediction was borne out for English and German, where pronounceability served as a convenient proxy for the potential presence of elided clausal structure. Thus our analysis fares better than a plausible semantic alternative in terms of entailment.

The next section confronts the fact that some of our examples—namely (7), and German (17) and (18)—have involved *every* rather than *nobody*.

4. Negation

Our initial example (1) associated an *except*-phrase with *nobody*. But *except*-phrases can associate just as well with universal quantifiers like *everybody* in (20), which exhibits a parallel ambiguity to (1):

- (20) Everybody liked the movie, except John, but I don’t know why
- a. ... ~~everybody liked the movie, except John.~~ (People usually hate trashy movies.)
 - b. ... ~~John didn’t like the movie.~~ (He usually hates George Clooney.)

The ‘everybody reading (a) is uninteresting, as before. But now negation is added to the puzzle of the ‘John reading’ (b). Where before there appeared to be no antecedent where we could find *John* and *like the movie* together, there is now also a mismatch in polarity.¹⁵

In principle, polarity mismatches are tolerable in clausal ellipsis, as evinced by Kroll (2019) in (21) and permitted by Rudin’s (2019) vP-level syntactic identity condition:

- (21) Either turn in your final paper by midnight or explain why
you ~~didn’t turn it in by midnight!~~

From this perspective, there is no syntactic identity problem with the appearance of negation in (20b).

¹⁵The same goes for *except*-phrases with non-subjects; (i) is parallel to (11):

- (i) Sam introduced everybody to Mary, except John, but I don’t know why
- a. ... ~~Sam introduced everybody to Mary, except John.~~ (People tend not to like Mary.)
 - b. ... ~~Sam didn’t introduce John to Mary.~~ (John is a perfectly nice guy.)

Still, we can wonder at which point negation appears, with consequences for the syntax of *except*-phrases. On our analysis, ellipsis is resolved in two steps: first from the main clause to the *except*-phrase; and second from the *except*-phrase to the *why*-sprout. Negation appears in one of these steps, with the two options sketched in (22). If it appears in the first step from the main clause antecedent to the elliptical *except*-phrase (a), then the *except*-phrase may contain sentential *not* (Vostrikova 2019b,a). If instead negation appears in the second step from the *except*-phrase as antecedent to the *why*-sprout (b), then the negative meaning of the *except*-phrase would be contributed by *except* itself (Potsdam and Polinsky 2019):

- (22) a. Everybody liked \rightarrow except John **didn't** like \rightarrow why John didn't like
 \neg like
- b. Everybody liked \rightarrow except John liked \rightarrow why John **didn't** like
 \neg like

The rest of this section gives two reasons to favour the second option—that negation is contributed by *except*—though tempered by the issue of pronounceability.

4.1 Polarity mismatches and *why*-sprouts

The first point in favour of negation being contributed by *except* is that the ‘John reading’ of (20b) then involves a polarity mismatch into a *why*-sprout. Example (21) and many of the other examples in Kroll 2019 provide independent evidence that polarity mismatches are tolerable in this configuration. Thus, taking negation to be contributed by *except* avoids proliferating environments where polarity mismatches are observed; in particular, we don't have to countenance polarity mismatches in (*except*-phrase) stripping.

Further, not all speakers accept polarity mismatch examples like (21). An anonymous reviewer who found (21) highly degraded also found (20b) a very hard reading to get. This parallel suggests that there is a group of speakers for whom all polarity mismatches are out. If *except*-phrases contained sentential *not*, we would expect such speakers to reject *except*-phrases that associate with *everyone*; yet these are fine for all speakers. This argues that the polarity mismatch is between the *except*-phrase and the sprout, with *except* contributing negation to its own phrase.

We can also see what happens when we attempt to mismatch negative polarity with emphatic positive polarity. Ranero (2019a,b) argues against Rudin's (2019) privileging of vP for syntactic identity in clausal ellipsis, presenting data from Spanish and Kaqchikel (Mayan) where tense mismatches are bad in clausal ellipsis.¹⁶ He argues that the looseness

¹⁶Ranero (2019a) may be too hasty in concluding that English does not present fertile terrain for ungrammatical tense mismatches if the following examples involve clausal ellipsis, as indicated:

- a. The postman delivered the letter yesterday, not three days ago ~~the postman delivered the letter.~~
- b. *The postman delivered the letter yesterday, not tomorrow ~~the postman will deliver the letter.~~
- c. The postman will deliver the letter tomorrow, not in three days ~~the postman will deliver the letter.~~
- d. *The postman will deliver the letter tomorrow, not yesterday ~~the postman delivered the letter.~~

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of syntactic identity in clausal ellipsis is not a question of height—above or below vP—but featural non-distinctness (cf. Chomsky 1965). With respect to the polarity mismatch in (21) in particular, Ranero argues that the antecedent and elliptical clauses are featurally non-distinct in terms of the presence versus absence of NegP. Expanding on Ranero (2019a,b), assume that emphatic *DID* instantiates a contentful polarity projection (Laka 1990), with features distinct from sentential *not*. We would then expect that polarity mismatches between *DID* and *didn't* are ungrammatical. This is borne out in the version of (21) in (23), where (a) massages the first conjunct from imperative to declarative. Adding emphatic *DID* to the first conjunct makes (b) markedly worse, as predicted by Ranero's non-distinctness condition:

- (23) a. Either he turned in his final paper by midnight or he explained why he **didn't** turn it in by midnight.
b. ??Either he DID turn in his final paper by midnight or he explained why he **didn't** turn it in by midnight.

Returning to *except*-phrases, unlike in (23), there is no contrast between the pair in (24):¹⁷

- (24) a. Everyone liked the movie, except John.
b. Everyone DID like the movie, except John.

The absence of a contrast in (24) suggests that there is no polarity mismatch between the main clause and the elided clausal structure in the *except*-phrase; which in turn argues that negation in the *except*-phrase is contributed by *except* rather than sentential *not*.

In sum, taking negation to be contributed by *except* rather than sentential *not* involves a tolerable polarity mismatch in the familiar environment of a *why*-sprout, and makes correct predictions stemming from Ranero's non-distinctness condition on ellipsis.

4.2 NPIs

The behaviour of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in *except*-phrases provides a second reason to favour the view that negation is contributed by *except*. Vostrikova (2019a: ch. 3.2.2; 2019b: 423) presents (25) in arguing for the opposite view. She argues that the NPI *any* is licensed in (a) by an elided sentential *not* in (b), as is overtly good in (c):^{18, 19}

¹⁷Reassuringly, the 'John reading' continues to be available in (i), with a permissible polarity mismatch between the *except*-phrase and the *why*-sprout:

- (i) Everyone DID like the movie, except John ~~t_{John} liked the movie~~,
but I don't know why John **didn't** like the movie

¹⁸Cf. Moltmann (1995), who dismisses a clausal source for (25a) due to the polarity mismatch in (25b).

¹⁹Vostrikova (2019b,a) shows that *except*-phrases are not downward entailing environments (see also von Stechow (1993:127, ex.14). For example, if John danced with everyone except with girls from his class, it does not follow that he danced with everyone except with *blond* girls from his class.

- (25) a. John danced with everyone, except with any girl from his class.
 b. . . ., except John ~~didn't~~ dance with any girl from his class.
 c. John didn't dance with any girl from his class.

We have two related counters to this argument. First, although *any* is c-commanded by *didn't* in (25), it is not in (26). An *except*-phrase containing *any* can happily associate with a universal quantifier in subject position (a); this despite being higher than a putative elided *didn't* in (b), as is overtly bad in (c):

- (26) a. Everyone came, except any boys from Mary's class.
 b. Everyone came, except any boys from Mary's class ~~didn't~~ come.
 c. *Any boys didn't come.

Second, the ellipsis indicated in (25b) deletes a non-constituent. Following the assimilation of *except*-phrase deletion to stripping pursued here, (25a) would instead be represented as in (27). PP focus-fronts beyond sentential negation before deletion of the TP constituent:

- (27) John danced with everyone, except [with any girl from his class]_i;
~~John didn't dance t_i.~~

However, moving an NPI above the surface scope of its licenser, as in (27), generally results in ungrammaticality, as illustrated in (28):

- (28) a. Sam does not like silly pictures of any of his friends.
 b. *Which pictures of any of his friends does Sam not like *t*?

Thus, contra Vostrikova (2019b,a), the behaviour of NPIs in *except*-phrases does not support the elliptical presence of sentential *not*. Rather, it favours the view the negation is contributed by *except* in a higher position, akin to other high negations that license NPIs in subject position, like *doubt* or *nor* in (29):

- (29) a. Mary doubts that any boys came.
 b. Mary didn't go, nor did anyone from Bill's class.

4.3 Pronounceability *redux*

Tempering the arguments of the previous two subsections, the view that negation is contributed by *except* faces a challenge from pronounceability (30) (cf. Moltmann 1995: 262f.). With negation contributed by *except*, the elliptical clausal structure would lack negation, as in (a). But pronouncing the elided structure presumed in (a) is bad in (b). Rather, a fuller version of (30) is pronounced with negation, as in (c). Negation can also be pronounced in concert with stripping in (d). Importantly, neither (c) nor (d) are interpreted as 'double negation'; they mean the same as (30). Thus *except* does not seem to be contributing any negation in (c) or (d):

- (30) Everybody liked the movie, except John.
- a. Everybody liked the movie, except John ~~liked the movie~~.
 - b. *Everybody liked the movie, except John liked the movie.
 - c. Everybody liked the movie, except John **didn't** like the movie.
 - d. Everybody liked the movie, except **not** John.

The same goes for (31) where the main clause is already negative, as it was in (1):

- (31) Nobody liked the movie, except John liked the movie.

In sum, while polarity mismatch considerations and the behaviour of NPIs support the view that negation is contributed by *except*, such an analysis has to overcome the fact that we hear sentential *not* in pronounced clausal *except*-phrases that associate with *every*.²⁰

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the structure of *except*-phrases based on the comings and goings of the ‘John reading’ of *why*-sprouts, which target the exception only. The availability of the ‘John reading’ co-varies with the potential presence of elided clausal structure. Clause-final *except*-phrases contain (elided) clausal structure, which can serve as the syntactic antecedent for clausal ellipsis. Connected and clause-initial free *except*-phrases, on the other hand, do not take clausal complements, so cannot provide such antecedents. Regarding the existence of clausal exceptives, our paper is in broad accord with Vostrikova (2019b,a), who identifies clausal exceptives across a number of languages and proposes a semantics that interprets the clausal structure;²¹ but the syntactic status of negation in clausal *except*-phrases remains an outstanding issue.

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²⁰Perhaps significantly, NPIs are not licensed in clausal exceptives in Spanish, Bulgarian and Persian, the languages where ellipsis is mandatory in clausal exceptives (Vostrikova 2019b).

²¹Vostrikova (2019b,a) analyses clausal exceptives as quantifying over possible situations, where *except*-phrases are standardly analysed as quantifier modifiers (Reinhart 1991, von Fintel 1993, Moltmann 1995). Vostrikova (2019a: ch. 5.1) shows that her semantics can be extended to phrasal exceptives, while stressing that the complications and redundancy involved are only for the sake of uniformity.

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