

An Interface Approach to Stranded Prepositions: A Case of Swiping

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This paper examines the interface properties of stranded P(reposition)s in English swiping. Offering empirically and theoretically based arguments against Nakao et al. (2006) (N et al.), I argue that the licensing conditions on swiping should be captured in prosodic terms, and that their conclusion that PP shift does not leave a copy is not tenable. My claim is that swiping is licensed when the P at the right edge of an Intonational Phrase is prosodically strong, conforming to the default phrasal prosody in English, i.e. right-edge heaviness. An advantage of the prosodic approach to swiping is that the gradient acceptability of swiping sentences follows from the gradient nature of prosodic prominence.

N et al.'s argument is crucially based on the contrast in (1): complement PPs license swiping, against the longstanding generalization that only implicit arguments and adjuncts do (Rosen 1976), when the PP is shifted as in (1b). Adopting Merchant's (2002) givenness condition on swiping in (2), they claim that PP shift does not leave a copy and hence P-stranding ellipsis, i.e. swiping, like (1b) is possible. I will argue against their analysis of swiping on empirical and theoretical grounds.

First, as N et al. themselves note (p.297, n.1), not everybody finds the contrast in (1). My consultant says that (1a) and (1b) equally improve if the P in the first conjunct is reduced after the stressed verb, and the sentence-final P is stressed. This is shown in (1'). This contrasts with the degraded (1'') where the sentence-final P is reduced after the stressed wh-word. Thus, the contrast in (1) is dubious and this problem seems to stem from the fact that N et al. did not control or pay sufficient attention to the prosody of the sentences in (1).

Given that the contrast in (1) is not as clear as N et al. assume, their conclusion that PP shift does not leave a copy is not tenable either. Furthermore, PP shift licenses parasitic gaps, as shown in (3). Assuming the standard analysis of parasitic gaps which says that they are parasitic to real traces, (3) shows that PP shift leaves a PP trace (or copy under the Copy Theory of movement).

Related to this point, N et al. differentiate between PP shift and wh-movement, arguing that unlike the former, the latter leaves a copy and hence does not license swiping. Their argument is based on (4). Although my consultant agrees with this judgment (see (4'a)), he finds (4'c) better than (4'a, b). This suggests that ill-formedness of (4'a, b) be due to the formality of *whom*, which is against the colloquial character of swiping. Here arises a clash of registers (Merchant 2001:124, n.8). Moreover, my consultant notes that swiping like (4) or (4') is blocked by alternative expressions in (5). In sum, ill-formedness of (4) does not necessarily indicate that wh-movement fails to license swiping.

Paying attention to the prosody of swiping, I argue that swiping is licensed when the stranded P is prosodically strong, e.g. (1'). This is supported by the fact that implicit arguments license swiping as in (6) and (7). In these cases, there is no occurrence of the same P in the first conjunct and hence the stranded P can bear stress easily. Likewise, when the stranded P is contrastively focused and bears focal stress, swiping is licensed, as in (8) and (9). In these cases, it does not matter whether the sentence involves PP shift or not, or wh-movement or not.

I claim that the prosodic condition on stranded Ps in swiping is due to the general ban on prosodically weak elements in sentence-final position (Erteschik-Shir and Strahov 2004:315-6). English is an intonation language with mobile prosodic prominence, and may assign various degrees of prosodic prominence to a P depending on how much it is focused on. An advantage of the proposed analysis is that the gradient acceptability of swiping is attributable to the gradient nature of prosodic prominence. Assuming a derivational, phase-based model of syntax-PF mapping (Chomsky 2000, Kratzer and Selkirk 2007), I argue that p-stranding is allowed in syntax as long as relevant syntactic conditions are satisfied, but it may be ruled out at PF. Thus, it is prosodic prominence that directly determines the acceptability of swiping, and semantic prominence such as focus is only indirectly

relevant (contra Takami 1992). Related to this is the fact that p-stranding is rare cross-linguistically (Van Riemsdijk 1978) and limited to languages with mobile prosodic prominence, and so is swiping.

PP shift

- (1) a. *John talked to someone yesterday, but I don't remember who to.
b. ?John talked yesterday to someone, but I don't remember who to. (N et al: 297)
- (1') a. (?)John TALKED to someone yesterday, but I don't remember who TO.
b. (?)John TALKED yesterday to someone, but I don't remember who TO.
- (1'') a. ?John TALKED to someone yesterday, but I don't remember WHO to.
b. ??John TALKED yesterday to someone, but I don't remember WHO to.
- (2) The content of the focused P should not be [structurally] given.
(Merchant 2002: 306, as adopted by N et al:299)

Parasitic Gap

- (3) John talked, before introducing himself, to the dancing girl on the stage.
(in the sense that John talked to the girl before introducing himself to that girl.)

Wh-movement

- (4) *I wonder [to whom] John talked [~~to whom~~], but you know who to. (N et al.: 299)
- (4') a. ?*You don't remember to whom John talked, but I remember who to.
b. ?*You don't remember whom John talked to, but I remember who to.
c. ??You don't remember who John talked to, but I remember who to.
- (5) a. ?You don't remember who John talked to, but I remember who.
b. You don't remember who John talked to, but I do.

Implicit argument

- (6) a. John spoke yesterday, but I don't remember who TO.
b. John gave a talk yesterday, but I don't remember who TO.
- (7) You don't remember when John talked, but I remember who TO.

Contrastive focus

- (8) a. (?)John talked to someone about something yesterday, but I don't remember who TO or what ABOUT.
b. (?)John talked yesterday to someone about something, but I don't remember who TO or what ABOUT.
- (9) You don't remember WITH whom John talked, but I remember who ABOUT.

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