

ON THE FUNCTIONS OF ELLIPSES AND THEIR SEMANTIC PRESUPPOSITION IN ENGLISH- LANGUAGE PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS

In this article we discuss the relationship of ellipses and their semantic presupposition in English-language print advertisements taken from English magazines "Forbes" and "Fortune". The notions of presupposition and ellipsis are universally recognized. Yet, there are few works on their relationship. The methodology of analysis is based on the resolution methods offered by Van der Sandt (1992). Admittedly, presupposition which is one of the key concepts of pragmatics is an implicit assumption about the world or background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted in discourse. Pragmatic presuppositions are beliefs about the context that must be attributed to a speaker, whereas semantic presuppositions are conventional properties of lexical items or constructions; i.e. semantic presuppositions are conventional properties of presupposition triggers. A presupposition trigger is a lexical item or linguistic construction that generates the presupposition.

Ellipsis or elliptical construction refers to the omission from a clause of one or more words that would otherwise be required by the remaining elements. Ellipsis is an implicit reference to some material, either previously mentioned, or somehow inferable. Hence, ellipsis, being the result of the conventional aspect of the sentence, gives way to semantic presupposition.

There are various approaches to the classification of ellipsis but the most commonly accepted one is the distinction of three types of ellipsis: 1. noun-phrase ellipsis (NP-ellipsis). 2. verb-phrase ellipsis (VP-ellipsis). 3. sluicing or clausal ellipsis.

For the analysis of ellipses and their semantic presupposition in English print advertisements we have applied the two main mechanisms of ellipsis resolution offered by Van der Sandt (1992):

- a) Binding (linking the elided material to an accessible antecedent)
- b) Accommodation (if binding is not possible, accommodation is done at some accessible level of discourse).

I. Let's consider an example of *NP-ellipsis* and its semantic presupposition:

(1) "You may have a couple of kids in college this year. **We have thousands**" ("Fortune" 13/10/2008:31).

(1) is an advertisement of a college. The advertisement is built in such a way as to create a feeling of trust and security for the parent readers and make them enroll their children to this college. In the second sentence *We have*

thousands the word *thousands* obviously lacks the prepositional phrase *of kids* or *of them* which is elided. The resolution of ellipsis is done due to binding. Only by linking the elided sentence to its antecedent; i.e. the previous sentence it becomes obvious that the missing phrase is *of kids/ of them*. Hence, the resolved variant will be:

"You may have a couple of kids in college this year. We have thousands of kids/ of them".

The ellipsis is the result of the structure of the advertisement as the advertisement makers tried to emphasize the word *thousands*. Hence, they omitted the prepositional phrase which was already mentioned in the previous sentence and could be easily presupposed from the text of the advertisement. The semantic presupposition generated from (1) is that you can trust us as we have thousands of kids in college and we take care of them all.

II. As it was mentioned above another type of ellipsis is *VP-ellipsis*. For the analysis of this type of ellipsis consider (2) and (3). (2) "Just because your personal treasury is shrinking, it doesn't mean your travel plans should too" ("Fortune" 13/10/2008:69).

Example (2) is an advertisement of a bank that gives loans. It is of particular interest as the part of the predicate, the notional verb *shrink* is elided as a result of the presupposition trigger *too*. In the cases where there is a presupposition trigger, the mechanism of binding or accommodation is used to resolve the elided part. For the resolution of this elided information, the mechanism of binding should be applied. The elided part is resolved due to its antecedent. Thus, the presupposition that comes from the presupposition trigger *too* can be revealed, binding this part of the statement with its antecedent. The presupposed and complete variant of the utterance is as follows:

"Just because your personal treasury is shrinking, it doesn't mean your travel plans should **shrink** too".

And the semantic presupposition generated from the trigger *too* is that your travel plans shouldn't go to the null just because of your shortage of money.

Another example including a lexical semantic presupposition trigger is as follows:

(3) "This sofa design coordinates with everything. **Even nature**" ("Forbes" 29/09/2008:19).

(3) is an advertisement of a company that makes furniture from natural products using less chemical substances and, therefore, causes less harm to the nature. The second sentence of the advertisement *even nature* is elliptical, the subject and the predicate being elided. In the elided utterance the word *even* acts as a presupposition trigger. For the resolution of this elided information, the mechanism of binding should be applied. The elided part is resolved due to its antecedent. Thus, the presupposition that comes from the presupposition trigger *even* can be revealed binding this part of the statement with its antecedent. Due

to binding we can link the two parts of the statement and reveal the elided part which is presupposed from the presupposition trigger *even*. The presupposed and complete variant of the utterance is as follows: "This sofa design coordinates with everything. **This sofa design coordinates even with nature**".

In the resolution of the elided part we have taken also the attributes *this sofa* as they are also essential components of meaning of the subject. However, another possible variant of the resolution is to use the pronoun *it* instead of the phrase *this sofa design*. In this case the resolved sentence would be:

"This sofa design coordinates with everything. **It coordinates even with nature**".

The ellipsis is the result of the lexis of the advertisement, in this particular example - the word *even*. The semantic presupposition drawn from the presupposition trigger *even* is as follows:

The sofa is designed to coordinate even with nature; i.e. it is comfortable both for people who use it and for nature, as no chemical products are used in the production and less harm is done to the environment.

III. The third main subtype of ellipsis is *sluicing* or *clausal ellipsis*. A sluicing construction is one in which the sentential part of an interrogative clause is elided. An example of this kind of ellipsis is as follows:

(4) "A brand, your brand, is an immensely powerful thing. More than just product, packaging, distribution and marketing, every brand is a statement of values and beliefs that share this planet with the culture at large. As such, every brand has the opportunity to do more than just advertise - to stand for something powerful, to impact culture in a positive, often profound way. Whether it's a brand of car, computer, or minty fresh toothpaste. These are the brands that today's consumer wants to engage with. **Brands that have something to say. Brands with a point of view. Brands that matter.** This is the way we view every single brand that walks in the door at StrawberryFrog. Can a humble toothpaste brand really change the world? Call us. **We'll be happy to show you how**" ("Fortune" 17/09/2007:13).

(4) is an advertisement of a marketing company that helps to make advertisements and brands. Advertisement (4) is built in such a way as to convince the reader that brand-making is a significant part of any product and it can really influence the way people perceive the product. In the first three highlighted sentences *Brands that have something to say. Brands with a point of view. Brands that matter* the introductory *these are* is elided. The resolution of the missing part is done binding the elided sentence with its antecedent. Obviously, the part *these are* is elided in all the sentences mentioned above in order to avoid the repetition of the same phrase, make the utterance shorter and add expressiveness to the advertisement. In the last highlighted sentence *We'll be happy to show you how* a whole clause is elided which can be resolved due to binding. Only by linking the elided sentence to the previously mentioned

sentence *Can a humble toothpaste brand really change the world?* it is possible to resolve the elided clause that should be placed after the interrogative pronoun *how*. In this case the ellipsis is aimed to avoid the repetition of the information which can be easily presupposed from the text of the advertisement. Hence, the complete variant of the elided parts is as follows:

“... These are the brands that today's consumer wants to engage with. **These are** brands that have something to say. **These are** brands with a point of view. **These are** brands that matter... Can a humble toothpaste brand really change the world? Call us. We'll be happy to show you how **humble toothpaste brand can really change the world**”.

The semantic presupposition is that in reality brands are very important and this company will help your business to find such a brand that will have a message to carry and will represent a point of view. The company assures that they can show you how even a toothpaste brand can significantly change the world. When analyzing examples of ellipsis in advertisements it is difficult to give exact classification of types of ellipsis as one example often contains several elliptical sentences. The examples mentioned above display that the main method of the resolution of the elided information is binding; i.e. referring to the antecedent. But in some cases there is no need to link the elided sentence to its antecedent, and the resolution of the elided information can be done from the isolated sentence itself.

Another important issue as regards ellipsis and presupposition is *functions of ellipsis*.

Different linguists state different functions of ellipsis. Some of the functions that the usage of ellipsis carries out in the language are as follows:

- a) speaker's economy or force of unification
- b) hearer's economy or force of diversification
- c) removal of ambiguities in the sentence
- d) introduction of ambiguities in the sentence
- e) establishment of discourse coherence
- f) positive politeness strategy

We claim that the most important functions of ellipsis in advertisements are: speaker's economy, hearer's economy and positive politeness strategy. Hence, we shall dwell on these functions in particular.

The notion of speaker's economy as a driving force behind ellipsis can already be found in the work of Zipf (Zipf 1949). By not expressing sentence elements whose presence is not essential for the meaning of the sentence, the speaker can communicate more with fewer words. This is particularly true in print advertisements as the space provided for the advertisements in press can be limited. Besides, advertisement makers don't want to bore their readers with long lines of explanations of products. They try to omit the information which can be inferred from the context by the readers. Their aim is to make the advertisement

concise, correct and attractive for the reader. Thus, they omit those elements of the sentence which are not essential for the meaning of the sentence. However, if the force of unification or speaker's economy were to apply unboundedly, the result would be a vocabulary of just one word. Because this never happens, there must be another force at work which has opposite effect of promoting a distinct meaning for every word. This force is called the force of diversification, or hearer's economy (Horn 1993). With respect to ellipsis the interaction of these two forces results in ellipsis only being possible if the reader/hearer is able to recover the missing information. Advertisement (5) is an illustration of above claimed. (5) **"Nothing taken away. Nothing added. Maybe it was perfect to begin with"** ("Forbes" 19/05/2008:79).

In advertisement (5) of whiskey part of the predicate, the auxiliary verb *is* is elided to meet the principle of economy, making the advertisement sound simpler and more expressive. In this example the resolution of the elided part can be done based solely on the sentence itself, no additional context is needed. Thus, the presupposition that lies beneath the elided part can be easily resolved and there is no need to refer to the antecedent part or context. The presupposition that lies beneath the elided part and the complete variant of the sentence is as follows: "Nothing is taken away. Nothing is added. Maybe it was perfect to begin with".

The semantic presupposition generated from the structure of the sentences is that the product was perfect from the very first day of its production, and it remains perfect nowadays, as well. The presupposition is semantic as the meaning is generated from the sentence itself.

Another reason of frequent occurrence of ellipsis in advertisements is the usage of positive politeness strategy. The advertisement makers omit part of the message trying to establish a good relationship with the reader and trying to soften the Face Threatening Act. They try to establish contact with the reader creating a friendly, non-official atmosphere. And one of the means of creating this kind of atmosphere is using ellipsis in the message, as ellipsis often occurs in dialogues, question-answers. Thus, the usage of ellipsis in print advertisements is intentional, specifically designed to have stylistic effect upon the reader and engage into a dialogue with the reader. Example (6) substantiates this point.

(6) **"Read any good books lately? You probably haven't.** In fact, the only things you've read lately are stacks of presentations detailing the options for your next strategic move. But that's why we're here. We can pair your dedication with the integrated power of our entire institution – focused on emerging and mid-sized companies in select industries – to help you identify and successfully execute on your best opportunities. Then we can all catch up on a little light reading" ("Fortune" 17/09/2007:61).

(6) is an advertisement of a company that offers financial counselling to other companies. The first two sentences are elliptical, being the result of the

structural peculiarities of the advertisement. The aim of the advertisement is to address directly to the owners of companies. Thus, the elided subject and predicate group create an impression that the advertisement makers try to establish dialogue with the reader. Hence, the usage of the elliptical sentences in this case aims to soften the Face Threatening Act and engage into dialogue with the reader. In the first sentence *Read any good books lately?* the missing parts can be easily resolved from the isolated sentence, whereas in the second sentence *You probably haven't* linking is done to its antecedent to resolve the whole predicate group which was already mentioned in the preceding sentence. The complete variant is as follows: "**Have you** read any good books lately? You probably haven't **read any good books lately...**"

The aim of asking this kind of question is to use positive politeness strategy and establish a good relationship with the reader. In fact, the advertisement makers themselves answered the given question. Thus, the semantic presupposition is that we know that you haven't read any good books lately, we know the reasons and we can help you.

Summing up the analysis of the three main types of ellipsis: NP-ellipsis, VP-ellipsis, clausal ellipsis it can be claimed that there are only a few cases where ellipses and their semantic presupposition were the result of lexical items; i.e. presupposition triggers *too*, *even*. In the majority of cases ellipses and their semantic presupposition are the result of the conventional aspect of the text; i.e. structural and syntactic peculiarities of the advertisements.

As for the functions of ellipsis in English-language print advertisements, the main principles applied were those of *speaker's/hearer's economy* and *positive politeness strategy*. The principle of economy helped to avoid unnecessary repetition of words and phrases already known from the text of the advertisement, adding brevity and expressiveness to them. Whereas the positive politeness strategy helped to overcome the Face Threatening Act mainly in advertisements where there was question-answer. This principle helped to establish dialogue with the reader creating a feeling of informality and friendliness for the reader.

Remarkably, for the resolution of the elided information in English-language print advertisements the mechanisms of *binding* and *accommodation* were applied. The elided sentence was linked to its antecedent and accommodated within the whole text of the advertisement. In some cases, however, there was no need to apply these mechanisms as the elided information could be easily resolved within the elided sentence itself without referring to the antecedent.

In sum, ellipsis and semantic presupposition are closely connected notions, and the resolution of the elided information is largely dependent on its semantic presupposition.

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Զեղչված անդամի գործառնությունների և դրա իմաստաբանական կանխենթադրույթի շուրջ անգլալեզու տպագիր գովազդում

Սույն հոդվածի նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել զեղչված անդամը և դրա իմաստաբանական կանխենթադրույթը անգլալեզու տպագիր գովազդում: Զեղչված անդամի և իմաստաբանական կանխենթադրույթի կապը բացահայտվում է զեղչված անդամի վերականգնման միջոցով: Այս նպատակով կիրառվում են Վան դեր Մանդեթի առաջարկած երկու մեթոդները՝ կապակցելություն և հարմարեցում: Վերլուծության արդյունքում հանգում ենք այն եզրակացության, որ զեղչված անդամի վերականգնումն ու դրա իմաստի վերհանումը պայմանավորված է դրա իսկ իմաստաբանական կանխենթադրույթով, որն ապացուցում է այս երկու երևույթների սերտ փոխկապակցվածությունը: