Pro-forms and ellipsis

• Abbreviating the sentence: sentences can be shortened to avoid redundancy
• pro-forms and ellipsis are syntactic devices for abbreviating constructions
• pro-form: a word which replaces or refers to a longer construction in a sentence: replacement v reference
• antecedent: the word referred back to by a pro-form e.g. the poor girl did not eat, although she was very hungry
• co-reference: when pro-form has same meaning (or reference) as the antecedent
• ellipsis: part of a sentence is left out to avoid repetition e.g. I would like to eat that biscuit but I won’t (eat that biscuit)

Recoverability

• Textual recoverability: full form recoverable from surrounding text - referent is clear from linguistic context e.g. the poor girl did not eat although she was hungry
  – Two types: Anaphoric use of pronoun - antecedent comes before the pronoun; cataphoric use - antecedent follows pronoun
• Situational recoverability: form is recoverable from extralinguistic situation e.g. Is she badly hurt (at the scene of an accident) - referent of pro-form is obvious
• Structural recoverability: form recoverable from knowledge of grammatical structure e.g. he admits (that) he stole the money

Types of pro-forms

• pro-forms used in co-reference include
  – definite pronouns and determiners e.g. she, they, myself, his, theirs, those, that; they often refer to some or all of a noun phrase
  – definite adverbs of time or space e.g. then, there, here; adverbial pro-forms relate to adverbials, e.g. Martha went to the shops and I went there too.
• pro-forms used in substitution can be
  – indefinite pronouns e.g. one(s), some, none, either e.g. I have change. Do you want some?
  – adverbs e.g. so, thus; so can replace an object, a complement, an adverbial or a whole clause
  – the verb do in constructions as do so e.g. I asked him to leave and he did so); Do relates to a part of the clause containing the verb e.g. Martha went to the shops and I did too.

Ellipsis

• Ellipsis: grammatical omission
  – initial ellipsis: initial elements are ellipted e.g. (I) hope he’s there
  – medial ellipsis: medial elements are ellipted e.g. John owns a Volvo and Bill (owns) a BMW
  – final ellipsis: final elements are ellipted e.g. we haven’t found the lost keys but I am sure we will (find the lost keys)
• Recoverability
  – situational ellipsis: in declaratives e.g. (do you) want a drink? (it’s) Good to see you; interrogatives e.g. (have you) Got any money?
  – Structural ellipsis: common in headlines, book titles, notices, diaries; elements often ellipted include determiners, pronouns e.g. US heading for new slump (The US is heading for a new slump)
  – textual ellipsis: anaphoric e.g. I am happy if you are (happy); cataphoric e.g. Those who prefer to stay indoors, can stay indoors

Corpus examples: LGSWE

• Ellipsis in coordinated clauses
  – This gay guy who came into the pub completely fell in love with Ben and was like declaring his undying love (CONV)
  – I thought they were on the seat but they’re not (CONV)
  – The morning was clear, not yet hot, the sky as blank as a canvas being prepared for paint (FICT)
  – You’ve become part of me, and I of you (FICT)
  – The pattern of sex differences was that girls generally scored better than the boys on the money and number pattern items and boys on the measures (ACAD)

Corpus examples

• Ellipsis in comparative clauses
  – She looks older than my mother (CONN)
  – One result was that older people made greater head movements than younger people (ACAD)
• Ellipsis in question-answer sequences
  – 1. A: Have you got an exam on Monday?
    – B: two exams
    – A: what exams?
    – B: German, reading and French oral. French oral’s a doddle.
    – A: Is it? (CONN)
  – 2. A: When’s he coming back?
    – B: Next Friday
    – A: Next Friday, oh right. (CONN)