

# NOTES ON REGISTER VARIATION AND SUBJECT ELLIPSIS IN COORDINATION

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**Abstract.** The present paper examines the distribution and interpretation of non-overt subjects in second conjuncts, focusing on the specificity of this pattern in abbreviated written English. The data shed further light on the nature of subject omission in specific written registers and in particular show that neither a pro-drop analysis nor a topic drop analysis is adequate.

**Keywords:** subject omission, second conjunct subject ellipsis, coreference, abbreviated written register, global topic, pro-drop.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

While English is not a pro-drop language and hence the subject of a finite clause must be overt, there are exceptions to this general rule. In non-initial (to be referred to as ‘second’ here) conjunct clauses a subject may be left non-overt (Godard 1989: 499), as in (1).

- (1) a. I have eaten a lot of meat and (I) have/\*(he) has drunk too much wine.  
b. He is meeting Mary today and (he)/\*(I) will ask her for a date.

A categorical restriction on second conjunct subject ellipsis is that the subject of the non-initial conjunct has to be coreferential with that of the initial conjunct: ellipsis of a subject of the second conjunct referentially distinct from that of the first conjunct is ungrammatical as suggested by the parenthesized alternatives in (1), which comes down to saying that the conjunct clauses somehow share the subject.

On the other hand, anecdotal evidence from journalistic prose like that in (2) might be taken to suggest that the coreference condition on second conjunct subject ellipsis may be violated:

- (2) a. Singles ranking has drifted in past year but \_\_\_ is former mixed doubles champion (Profile text: Heather Watson, *Times*, July 1 2019, Sports, page 53, col 3)

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b. **Anthony Watson**

Playing on the wing can be a lonely existence and \_\_\_ didn't touch the ball for an hour – given a hospital pass on his own try line. (*Observer*, February 7 2021, Sport, page 3, col 4, 'How they rated'.)

c. **Mark Wilson**

Called in to add work-rate and breakdown nous. The former is a given with Wilson but \_\_\_ had his work cut out at the latter. (*Observer*, February 28 2021 Sport page 3, col 5, 'How they rated'.)

d. **Luke Cowan-Dickie**

Lineout throwing came under pressure from Ireland but \_\_\_ stuck to the task well. (*Observer*, March 21 2021 page 3, col 5, 'How they rated'.)

These data will be examined in the light of a general discussion of the syntactic analysis of second conjunct subject ellipsis (henceforth CSE). We will use a broadly generative framework, adopting a particular cartographic view on the position of subjects in syntax.

## 2. RESTRICTIONS ON NON-OVERT SUBJECTS IN SECOND CONJUNCTS

### 2.1. Non pro-drop languages

SCSE has been analysed in a number of different ways (Goodall 1987; Camacho 2003; Bjorkman 2013, 2014, etc.), which we won't review here. For now, we will adopt the 'small conjunct analysis', according to which the shared subject effect in SCSE is the outcome of the coordination of smaller constituents contained in one clausal domain and in which the subject nominal is extracted from both conjuncts 'Across the Board' to land in the 'shared' canonical subject position, which scopes over both conjuncts. Concretely, in line with Cardinaletti (1997, 2004), Rizzi & Shlonsky (2006), and Haegeman (2017), we adopt the functional articulation for finite clauses in which the functional layer TP hosts agreement and temporal specifications and a dominating functional layer SubjP is the locus of the canonical subject. Haegeman (2017) captures SCSE by assuming that coordination may conjoin TP-size constituents, in which case SubjP becomes a dominating shared layer. Thus, the unique subject in the specifier of SubjP scopes over both conjuncts. (1a) would be represented as in (3). For motivation for this analysis we refer to the paper cited.<sup>4</sup>

- (3) [SubjP I [TP t have eaten a lot of meat]]  
and  
[TP t have drunk too much wine]]

The small conjunct derivation typically captures SCSE with a quantificational subject (Godard 1989, Wilder 1997), in which the shared quantificational subject scopes

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<sup>4</sup>As noted by an anonymous reviewer, there are obviously many alternative analyses available, but these are not the focus of our paper.

over the two conjuncts. As seen in (4a), the quantifier (*no one*) binds a possessive pronoun (*his*) in the second conjunct. Binding is correctly derived because the shared subject *no one* c-commands over both conjuncts (4b). We return to some details of the derivation below.

- (4) a. No one has read the message and has not felt it his duty to react.  
 b. [SubjP No one [TP t has [vP t read the message]]  
 and  
 [TP t has not [vP t felt it his duty to react]]]

For completeness' sake, observe that, of course, coordination is not restricted to SubjP layers. In particular, coordination can also apply to other types of constituents: (5a) illustrates coordination at the vP layer and (5b-e) illustrates coordination of CPs.

- (5) a. You should [vP talk to her] and [vP try to convince her].  
 b. [CP Do you have Rizzi's paper] and [CP can you send it by email]?  
 c. [CP Have you read Rizzi's paper] and [CP what did you think of it]?  
 d. [CP He called an ambulance] but [CP why did he contact me]?  
 e. [CP That book, I like] but [CP this book, I do not approve of]. (Wilder 1997)

The analysis also captures the left-edge restriction on SCSE, as shown by, among others, the fact that it is not compatible with subject-auxiliary inversion. This restriction follows because in the case of subject-auxiliary inversion, the fronted finite auxiliary in the second conjunct will have to move to a head position to the left of the canonical subject (say Int) and if in the case of SCSE the second conjunct is restricted to TP, with a shared SubjP, this configuration will not include a position to host the inverted auxiliary in the second conjunct. This is shown in (6a): in this pattern, the subject is in SubjP but crucially it is not shared across the conjuncts, as represented in (6b). Observe that, in contrast, SCSE becomes licit in (6c) because in this example coordination affects vP layers and as a result the dominating projections TP, SubjP and IntP are all shared in the coordination, and as a result the subject in SpecSubjP is part of the shared constituent.

- (6) a. I will talk to her but how will \*(I) be able to convince her?  
 b. [CP [SubjP I [TP t will [vP t talk to her]]]  
 but  
 [IntP how will [SubjP I [TP t will [vP t be able to convince her]]]]  
 c. Should I talk to her and try to convince her?  
 d. [IntP should [SubjP I [TP t should [vP t talk to her]]]  
 and  
 [vP t try to convince her]]]

## 2.2. Pro-drop languages

While we assume that SCSE is available in pro-drop languages such as Italian, it might at first sight appear as if the coreference condition does not extend to all non-overt subjects in second conjuncts: in Italian (7), the subject of the first conjuncts and the non-overt subjects of the second are not coreferential. Italian being a pro-drop language, the pronominal subjects of the first conjuncts are in fact also non-overt, but this is tangential to the issue at hand.

- (7) a. Faceva            freddo  
 make.PAST.3SG    cold  
 e            avevo            dimenticato        i miei guanti  
 and        have.PAST.1SG    forgotten        the my gloves.  
 ‘It was cold and I had forgotten my gloves.’
- b. Ho            visto    il direttore        ma        diceva  
 have.1SG        seen    the director        but        say.PAST.3SG  
 che    non    aveva            ancora    mandato        il rapporto.  
 that    NEG    have.PAST.3SG    yet        sent            the report  
 ‘I have seen the director but he told me he hasn’t sent the report yet.’

These data do not mean that Italian can violate the coreference condition on SCSE; rather such examples are the outcome of the coordination of two full-fledged clauses, of which, crucially, the second has the non-overt subject which is available in Italian. Indeed, what constitutes a second conjunct in (7) could also simply have been a free-standing finite clause (8). In contrast, the analogue in (9) is not acceptable in standard English: English not being a pro-drop language, the free-standing second finite clause must have an overt subject, which obviously can but need not be coreferential to that of the preceding clause.

- (8) a. Faceva            freddo.  
 make.PAST.3SG    cold.  
 Avevo            dimenticato        i miei guanti  
 Have.PAST.1SG    forgotten        the my gloves.  
 ‘It was cold. I had forgotten my gloves.’
- b. Ho            visto    il direttore.        Diceva  
 have.1SG        seen    the director        say.PAST.3SG  
 che    non    aveva            ancora    mandato        il rapporto.  
 that    NEG    have.PAST.3SG    yet        sent            the report  
 ‘I have seen the director. He told me he hasn’t sent the report yet.’
- (9) a. I have eaten a lot of meat. \*(I) have /\*(he) has drunk too much wine.  
 b. He is meeting Mary today. \*(He) /\*(I) will ask her for a date.

In Italian second conjuncts, a non-overt subject is compatible with inversion, so Italian (10a) contrasts with English (10b):

- (10) a. Hai            fatto bene        di contattarmi  
 Have.2SG        done well        to contact-me  
 ma    come    hai            fatto    per trovarmi?  
 but    how    have.2SG        done    for find-me
- b. You did well to contact me, but how did \*(you) manage to find me?

This is again not surprising, because we can again assume that in (10) two full-fledged clauses are coordinated in which the second has a non-overt subject, an option unavailable to English:

- (11) a. Hai fatto bene di contattarmi.  
 have-2SG done well to contact-me.  
 Come hai fatto per trovarmi?  
 how have-2SG done for find-me
- b. You did well to contact me. How did \*(you) manage to find me?

### 3. REGISTER-SPECIFIC SUBJECT OMISSION AND COORDINATION

#### 3.1. Register-specific subject omission

As is well known, in addition to non-overt subjects in finite clauses as a result of SCSE, subject omission in finite clauses is also attested in the English register of abbreviated writing, as shown in (12).

- (12) Today had my second Covid jab. Feel much safer now. Saw my best friend for lunch. Has not changed much, over all these months.

Again, register-specific subject omission in finite clauses is not unrestricted, as has been amply discussed in the literature (see Schmerling 1973, Thrasher 1977, Napoli 1982, Van Valin 1986, for early accounts, and for recent accounts a.o. Haegeman 1997, 1999, 2013, 2017a,b, Weir 2012). Just to mention two restrictions: like English SCSE, register-specific subject omission (from now on RSSO) is governed by a left edge condition: as was the case in SCSE illustrated in (6a), the (pronominal) subject in the second clause in (13a), which displays subject auxiliary inversion, cannot be omitted. In addition, RSSO is a root phenomenon: in embedded domains subject omission is not attested (at least not in the majority of dialects: see Ihsane 1998, Haegeman and Ihsane 1999, 2002 for discussion) and (13b) is rejected by informants.

- (13) a. I will talk to her tomorrow. How will \*(I) be able to convince her?  
 b. She became despondent when \*(she) found the roses infested with aphids.

Haegeman (2013, 2017a) captures the distributional restrictions on RSSO in terms of structural truncation (Rizzi 2006): the idea is that while in the unmarked case, full clauses have to be projected up to the CP layer to ensure the encoding of illocutionary force (in ForceP), in the relevant abbreviated registers the clausal projection may terminate at a lower level, i.e. SubjP (cf. (14)). Thus, SubjP becomes the root, which allows the specifier to be non-overt. We do not have the space to motivate this account here but for a full account, see Haegeman (2013, 2017a) and also in Haegeman and Stark (2020).

Obviously, if RSSO is dependent on the clausal projection terminating at the level of SubjP then it will of necessity be incompatible with subject auxiliary inversion because being located above SubjP, the landing site required to host the inverted auxiliary (and the inverted *wh*-phrase), will not be available (15):

- (14) a. Will talk to her tomorrow.  
 b. [<sub>SubjP</sub> we [<sub>TP</sub> t will [<sub>VP</sub> t talk to her tomorrow]]]
- (15) a. How will \*(I) be able to convince her?  
 b. [<sub>FocP</sub> how will [<sub>SubjP</sub> I [<sub>TP</sub> t t<sub>will</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> t be able to convince her]]]

In addition, embedding will not be available because embedded domains would also enforce a continued projection beyond SubjP. For full discussion of all restrictions see Haegeman (2017a), Haegeman and Stark (2020).

### 3.2. Conjuncts and register-specific subject omission

#### 3.2.1. The data

Recall that SCSE depends on coreference of the deleted subject with the subject of the first conjunct. (16) is attested in diary writing (see (20a), but it would be unacceptable in the regular spoken or written register because second conjunct ellipsis is not available with the subject of *found* construed as first person.

- (16) \*The big crab tree in the lane has failed to produce any apples, but \_\_\_ found others with fruit.

Recall that we provided the data in (2), repeated in (17), as evidence that the coreference restriction on SCSE appears not to be categorical after all. These data were drawn from the sports pages of journalistic prose, and they are found in so-called ‘global topic’ (Matushansky 1995) texts, in which a segment of text is dedicated to one specific topic, here the performance of a sports person. The segment is often set off typographically from the main body of the news page. Importantly, though, global topic texts pattern with diary writing in terms of subject omission (see Haegeman 2017) and we will show how the data in (2) reveal an empirical property of RSSO which has gone unnoticed in the literature (except for Haegeman and Stark 2019, 2020) and which we illustrate below with additional data.

- (17) a. Singles ranking has drifted in past year but \_\_\_ is former mixed doubles champion (Profile text: Heather Watson, *Times*, July 1 2019, Sports, page 53, col 3)
- b. **Anthony Watson**  
 Playing on the wing can be a lonely existence and \_\_\_ didn’t touch the ball for an hour – given a hospital pass on his own try line. (*Observer*, February 7 2021, Sport, page 3, col 4, ‘How they rated’.)
- c. **Mark Wilson**  
 Called in to add work-rate and breakdown nous. The former is a given with Wilson but \_\_\_ had his work cut out at the latter. (*Observer*, February 28 2021 Sport page 3, col 5, ‘How they rated’.)
- d. **Luke Cowan-Dickie**  
 Lineout throwing came under pressure from Ireland but \_\_\_ stuck to the task well. (*Observer*, March 21 2021 page 3, col 5, ‘How they rated’.)

The pattern in (17) is also found in diary style writing. First off, (18) provides an example of ‘regular’ SCSE in diary style writing:

- (18) \_\_\_ Examined a number of Catholic papers, also several copies of Truth, [2] to see what their attitude is to our quasi-alliance with the U.S.S.R. The Catholic papers have not gone pro-Nazi, and \_\_\_ perhaps will not do so. (<https://orwelldiaries.wordpress.com/2011/07/06/6-7-41/>)

In addition to the core grammar pattern in (18), diary style writing displays extra options in coordination. Predictably, first conjunct subject omission is attested (19). (19a) and (19c) can naturally be viewed as resulting from the coordination of two SubjPs, i.e., two truncated structures, each with its own canonical subject position, of which the first displays RSSO.

- (19) a. <https://orwelldiaries.wordpress.com/2009/09/03/3939-greenwich/>  
 [\_\_\_ Have again been traveling etc. ] \_\_\_ Shall close this diary today, & it will as it stands serve as a diary of events leading up to the war.  
 b. [SubjP I Shall close this diary today],  
 &  
 [SubjP it will as it stands serve as a diary of events leading up to the war].  
 c. \_\_\_ Arrived home at 4 p.m. but the electrician had already left.  
 d. [SubjP I arrived home at 4 p.m. ]  
 but  
 [SubjP the electrician had already left].

Returning to the starting point of our paper, examples like those in (2), repeated in (17), which illustrate omission of a second conjunct subject not coreferential with that in the first conjunct,<sup>5</sup> find a parallel in the diary register. (20) illustrates diary style writing (see also Becquet 2000), with (20a-d) attested and (20e) constructed. Recall that (16), the analogue of (20a), is unacceptable in the unmarked register.

- (20) a. Orwell 2010: 175, 6 August 1939  
 The big crab tree in the lane has failed to produce any apples, but \_\_\_ found others with fruit.  
 b. Orwell 2010: 154, 29 June 1939  
 By evening 7 ducks; the eighth shows no signs of hatching but \_\_\_ have put it under the hen for the night.  
 c. Orwell 2010: 221, 25 October 1939  
 Posts are not long enough for gate posts, but \_\_\_ can have an extra piece fitted on if I can get hold of some timber.  
 d. Monday 6 October  
 Met Joan for lunch. She brought a casual and most off hand message from F. and \_\_\_ was boiling with rage at him. I came home in the bus planning

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<sup>5</sup> All attestations are considered acceptable as diary entries by Andrew Weir and by Andrew Radford (p.c).

a letter I would write, saying a few things cruelly. (*A Notable woman, The romantic journals of Jean Lucy Pratt*. Ed. Simon Garfield. Canongate, Edinburgh, 2016, page 253.)

- e. It was cold, but \_\_\_ decided to get myself out of the house anyway. (Andrew Radford, p.c)

It turns out that the availability of this pattern, displayed in (2), (17), and (20), is also predicted by the truncation analysis: the pattern can be analysed as the outcome of the coordination of two truncated clauses (SubjP), each with its own canonical subject position. Crucially, the second of these conjunct SubjPs displays RSSO. Precisely because in finite clauses, structural truncation and subject omission is register-specific, second conjunct omission with non-coreferential subjects remains excluded in the core grammar.

For completeness' sake we add (21) in which both conjuncts display register-specific subject RSSO, and in both cases the subjects are not referentially identical.<sup>6</sup>

- (21) \_\_\_ Made this for a dinner party dessert as one person was dairy intolerant.  
 a. \_\_\_ Was absolutely delicious and \_\_\_ was asked for the recipe.  
 b. \_\_\_ Didn't have an ice cream maker but \_\_\_ was simple to do by hand.  
 (<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/1791/banana-ice-sundaes-with-fudge-sauce>, consulted 9 December 2019)

### 3.2.2. Distributional restrictions on non-coreferential subject omission in second conjuncts

Observe that the non-coreferential second conjunct subject omission discussed here is not totally free. It is, for instance, a root phenomenon: it is not available in an embedded second conjunct (22a); in (22b) subject omission is available with *found*, provided that the containing clause is construed as conjoined with the matrix clause. The two parses with the omission options are given as (22b') and (22b'').

- (22) a. When it had become sunny and \*(we) had decided we would go out for a walk, we became totally drenched.  
 b. She became despondent when the camellia failed to produce flowers and (she) found the roses infested with aphids.  
 b'. [She became despondent [when [the camellia failed to produce flowers] and [\* (she) found the roses infested with aphids]].

<sup>6</sup> As also noted by an anonymous reviewer, in such examples one of the two non-overt subjects will likely be first person. We do not consider that this is a grammatical property but rather that while first person omission is always available 'out of the blue', given that the speaker by definition is accessible, two non-coreferential third person subjects require two distinct accessible antecedents. (i) illustrates this possibility, where the final non-overt subject may be interpreted as third person, although first person is the more accessible reading:

- (i) I went to my sister's birthday party. She is a very good cook.  
 \_\_\_ Made vegan cheesecake because one guest was dairy intolerant.  
 \_\_\_ Was absolutely delicious and \_\_\_ was asked for the recipe by several of the guests.



- b'': [[She became despondent [when the camellia failed to produce flowers]]  
and [(she) found the roses infested with aphids]].

This root restriction does not apply to subject omission in pro-drop languages, where embedded subjects can be omitted generally (cf. (7b) above), including in coordinated patterns.

- (23) Perché faceva così freddo  
because make.PAST.3SG so cold  
e avevo dimenticato i miei guanti,  
and have.PAST.1SG forgotten the my gloves.  
sono tornata a casa.  
be.1SG returned to home  
'Because it was so cold and I had forgotten my gloves, I returned home.'

The data thus further confirm that English RSSO is not a kind of register-dependent pro-drop.

### 3.2.3. Register-specific subject omission is not (Germanic style) topic drop

The literature on subject drop contains frequent claims to the effect that RSSO is the outcome of topic drop (Haegeman 1990, Matushansky 1995, Wexler & Matushansky 2002, Sigurdsson & Maling 2010, Sigurdsson 2010, 2011). For arguments against this claim (such as the fact that non-referential subjects can also be omitted) we refer among others to Haegeman and Stark (2020, section 2.2.5.1)<sup>7</sup>.

As shown in the preceding section, the new register specific data on subject omission in second conjuncts as discussed here are additional evidence against a pro-drop analysis of subject drop.

In addition, these data also offer evidence against a German style topic drop analysis, as illustrated in (24).

- (24) a. Gestern wurde mein jüngerer Bruder bereits geimpft  
Yesterday was my younger brother already vaccinated  
Finde Ich irgendwie unfair.  
find I somewhat unfair  
b. Gestern wurde mein jüngerer Bruder bereits geimpft.  
Yesterday was my younger brother already vaccinated  
Finde das irgendwie unfair.  
find that somewhat unfair

Like RSSO, German style topic drop is a root phenomenon (Trutkowski 2016) but unlike RSSO, the judgements in (25) suggest that it is incompatible with a second conjunct: in (25a) an initial topical object *das* 'that' can be non-overt, but the resulting clause with such a non-overt object cannot be coordinated with the preceding clause. In (25b) the initial

<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it is not clear that even in languages with topic drop, such as German and Dutch, subject pronoun omission can be equated to topic drop. We refer to Trutkowski (2016) for German and Van Kampen (2020a,b) for Dutch.

subject *ich* ‘I’ can be non-overt, but the non-overt subject variant of the clause cannot become a second conjunct.

- (25) a.       Gestern           wurde   mein jüngerer Bruder   bereits geimpft  
           Yesterday       was     my younger brother   already vaccinated  
           (und) \*(das) finde Ich     irgendwie unfair.  
           (and) \*(that) find I       somewhat unfair
- b.       Gestern           wurde   mein jüngerer Bruder   bereits geimpft  
           Yesterday       was     my younger brother   already vaccinated  
           (und) \*(ich) finde das irgendwie unfair.  
           (and) \*(I) find   that somewhat unfair

This once again follows from the truncation analysis, whereby the second conjunct can only undergo RSSO if it is SubjP, but topicalisation entails the projection of structure above the canonical subject position and violates the left-edge constraint.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The present paper focusses on subject omission in finite clauses in English. It investigates an apparent exception to the coreferentiality constraint on second conjunct subject ellipsis. It is shown that the pattern is restricted to those registers which independently allow for non-overt subjects in a restricted set of finite sentences. The restrictions applying to the ellipsis of non-coreferential subjects in coordination mirror those on the omission of subjects of finite clauses in specific written registers such as diary writing and global topic texts. It is argued that instances of omission of non-coreferential subjects of second conjuncts arise from full clausal coordination in which the second conjunct allows for subject omission in such registers.

The material further confirms that register specific subject omission in English finite clauses should not be equated to a version of pro-drop or to an instantiation of Germanic style topic drop.

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