

# What Can Ellipsis Tell Us About the Mechanisms of Sentence Processing?

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Current approaches to sentence processing seek to account for psycholinguistic phenomena in terms of domain-general principles of cognitive processes, suggesting that grammatical structures and rules have little or no role in online processing. Against this background, the processing of ellipsis constructions, which require retrieving and integrating previously processed material, provides a powerful way to test whether and how syntactic structures influence sentence processing in real time.

Two major theories have been put forward to account for this retrieval process: the pointer mechanism and the copy mechanism. The **pointer mechanism** assumes that memory stores content in the form of content-addressable feature bundles, or pointers. According to this view, ellipsis is resolved by matching these pointers based on semantic and cue features, without necessarily accessing detailed syntactic structures. The **copy mechanism**, by contrast, holds that the parser reconstructs the ellipsis site by copying a rich syntactic representation from its antecedent, implying that the structure itself is stored in memory and guides retrieval.

Reporting results from studies on comparative VP-ellipsis and backward sluicing, this talk shows that the resolution of ellipsis depends crucially on the grammatical structure of its antecedent and the material surrounding the ellipsis site. These findings support a copy view of ellipsis processing, suggesting that syntactic representations are maintained and manipulated during online sentence processing.