What can if-stripping tell us about ellipsis?

Introduction: This study aims to reveal what structure is elided in a type of clausal ellipsis construction called Stripping [1]: (1a). Specifically, we argue that in Stripping and other types of clausal ellipsis, e.g., Sluicing, one of the layers of CPs in an articulated CP system [2] undergoes ellipsis, [3] based on a detailed examination of Stripping in if-clauses (If-stripping: 1b). Such an analysis, we show, explains some properties of these constructions: e.g. apparent violations of the ‘Embedded Stripping Generalization’ [4] and the lack of overt complementizers in matrix sluicing [3].

(1a) John drinks whiskey, but only scotch.

Background: A long-standing generalization of Stripping has been that Stripping is restricted to coordination contexts [1]. Recently, however, it has been shown that Stripping is possible in subordination contexts, but only when the subordinated clause has no overt complementizer: (2).

(2) They said it would be done last year, then they thought (*that) THIS year.

This 'Embedded Stripping Generalization' (ESG), makes stripping stand out against other clausal ellipsis constructions. For example, sluicing can appear in subordination contexts as in (3). The ESG also distinguishes Stripping from Gapping, which is strictly restricted to coordination contexts.

(3) They said it would be done last year, but do you know when exactly?

If-stripping: Stripping seems to be possible in subordination contexts with an overt complementizer. For example, in (1b), the remnant follows overt complementizer if: thus If-stripping is a potential counterexample to the ESG. One may argue that If-stripping is not an example of Stripping, instead involving copula or cleft structures, and thus not contrary to the ESG [4: footnote 14]. However, If-stripping shows signature properties of clausal ellipsis. First, If-stripping is possible over implicit correlate (5a), which is incompatible with the copula-clause analysis [6].

Second, in such a context, If-stripping shows Binding Condition C (BCC) connectivity effects. Thus in (5b), coreference between the pronoun and the name is impossible. Importantly, when the pronoun is embedded within a DP and the c-command relation is removed, coreference is possible: (5c). BCC connectivity effects suggest that the ellipsis site is associated with structure parallel to that of the antecedent clause.

(5a) They were selling some pictures. If (*it was) of John, his mother will be upset.

(5b)-c. *He*/-His, sisters were selling some pictures. If of John, his mother will be upset.

Third, as [6:690] shows, the be ashamed of construction allows for clausal complements only when the clausal complement is fronted. The clausal complement of the be ashamed of construction can be the remnant of If-stripping. Furthermore, in (6c) that cannot be omitted, indicating movement.

(6a) John is ashamed of that he drank too much. (6b) That he drank too much, John is ashamed of.

(6c) John is ashamed of something. If *(that) he drank too much, then he shouldn't be.

One may argue that if is not a complementizer, therefore if-stripping is not problematic to the ESG. There seem to be examples that indicate that if is indeed a complementizer. First, transitive verbs may take an if-clause as a complement (e.g., prefer), standing in a selectional relation with if, like other complementizers. Second, prefer can co-occur with a DP or an if-clause, and do-so replacement tests suggests that if-clause is indeed a complement (7a-b). Third, prefer is compatible with if or that, but not with whether, i.e., prefer engages the selectional relation with c-head.

(7a).b. John prefers scotch/if Mary goes and Susan does so (too) (*wine/*if Tom goes).

(7c) John prefers if/that/*whether Mary goes.
Finally, conditional-if blocks subject-Aux inversion, thus competing for a position with the inverted Aux, which is traditionally analyzed as moving to C-position [7].

(8)a. If Mary had left, John would be happy. (8)b. (*If) Had Mary left, John would be happy.

In sum, If-stripping involves clausal ellipsis like other types of stripping, and if in If-stripping is a complementizer. Based on these observations, we contend that If-stripping is a case of Stripping involving clausal ellipsis which is embedded in a subordinated clause 'topped' by a complementizer if.

**Proposal:** The distribution of If-stripping follows straightforwardly from an analysis of clausal ellipsis in which ellipsis targets a lower CP [3,6,7] in the articulated CP-system [2] namely Finiteness Phrase (FinP) headed by that. The fact that an overt Aux does not appear in matrix sluicing follows from such a analysis ([3:331]): ellipsis targets FinP, and the remnant in sluicing lands in the Focus Phrase (FocP) which is generated higher than FinP.

(9) A: He visited somebody. B: [\textellipsis Who [\textellipsis (*did) [\textellipsis he visited]]]?

[3]'s analysis can be extended to If-stripping. First, it is plausible that the remnant lands in FocP, because it bears focus stress, and If-stripping is most felicitous in a contrastive context, which are properties of a focused constituent. Second, the complementizer if precedes the remnant, thus if should head a higher CP than focus. Because conditional clause is related to illocutionary force [8,9], we argue that if is a head of Force Phrase (ForceP). Thus the structure of if-stripping should be like:

(10) [\textellipsis if [\textellipsis whiskey [\textellipsis [\textellipsis]]]]

This analysis predicts that if there is a configuration where an overt Force\textasciitilde can co-occur with an overt Fin\textasciitilde, then Force\textasciitilde should appear to the left of Fin\textasciitilde, and in such a configuration, Force\textasciitilde and the remnant may survive clausal ellipsis, but Fin\textasciitilde must be elided. French if-clauses may involve a complementizer que, a cognate of that, (11a): in If-stripping, que must be elided but si, "if" survives ellipsis: (11b).

(11) A: Theresa apportera un vin ou du whisky.

Theresa will-be-bringing a wine or a whisky.

(11)a. B: Si (qu') elle apportera un vin, je voudrais un vin rouge.

If that she will-be-bringing a wine, I want a wine red

(11)b. B: Si (*que) un vin, je voudrais un vin rouge.

If (*that) wine, I want a wine red

"A: Theresa will bring wine or whisky. B: If wine (she brings t), I want a red wine."

These examples suggest that complementizer que "that", whether it in the highest head or not, cannot survive ellipsis. This analysis also captures the absence of that in the embedded stripping in (2): FinP is the target of ellipsis. The dynamic phase account, however, doesn’t predict if-stripping to be possible since if would be the highest projection, thus elliding a domain containing the remnant.

(12) [\textellipsis if [\textellipsis whiskey [\textellipsis Fin [\textellipsis]]]]

**Embedded Topicalization:** Embedded topicalization (13) poses a potential problem for the FinP ellipsis analysis: topics seem to be above FinP, but as in (13), that must precede the topic. This is not predicted if that is generated lower than Topic. Following [11] we suggest that that can occupy a position higher than FinP in embedded topicalization contexts and be raised to ForceP but more research is needed to determine what constrains this possibility.

(13) John thinks that geography, Jane loves to study. [4: 352]

**Conclusion:** In sum, we argue that the unacceptability of embedded Stripping like (2) is due to the distribution of the complementizer that, rather than a constraint against Stripping with overt complementizers. A thorough analysis of If-stripping shows that if is a complementizer and that If-stripping seems to be true embedded Stripping. We use cross-linguistic observations of declarative complementizers to show that ‘that’ is generated lower than ‘if’, and that ‘that’ is trapped in the ellipsis site since its host, FiniteP, is targeted by deletion.