

MA GRAMMAR / WEEK 02

Ellipsis and recoverability

MA Grammar · Week 2
Quirk et al., Chapter 12

Is every short message elliptical?

Three constructed messages

Ready?
I have eaten.
Bring the handout.

Analytical goals

Locate unexpressed material.
Identify its source.
Test the proposed recovery.
Separate ellipsis from ordinary omission.

Ellipsis needs a recoverable analysis

The absent material must be justified, not merely imaginable.

The fuller version must be grammatical in the intended reading.

A strict case supplies an identifiable source in the text.

Weaker cases depend on the situation or the construction.

Three sources of recovery

Textual

Rana can present. Omar can too.
Recover present from the preceding clause.

Situational / structural

Ready? at the seminar door.
Recover a question from the situation.

The article I cited is useful.
The contact-relative construction licenses
an unexpressed object relative marker.

Direction and position are separate

Anaphoric: Rana will attend, and Omar will too.

Cataphoric: If you can, submit the form today.

In the second example, the following clause supplies the relevant action.

Record both the location of the gap and the direction of recovery.

Work through a strict recovery

Original

The tutor has checked the abstract,
and the students have too.

Reconstruction

The students have checked the abstract
too.

Retained: subject and finite auxiliary.
Unexpressed: checked the abstract.

Ordinary omission is a boundary case

I have eaten. No particular meal need be specified.

She is reading. The object can remain unspecified.

You can if you want. The intended action requires context.

Do not turn every optional complement into a precise textual gap.

Test a proposed reconstruction

A: Have you submitted the form? B: Not yet.

Candidate 1: I have not submitted the form yet.

Candidate 2: I will not submit the form.

Which candidate preserves the contribution of yet, and what is still inferred?

Workshop 1 · Classify the recovery

1. Finished? The tutor points at a draft.
2. Noor has revised the title, and I have too.
3. Although tired, the students continued.
4. I have already eaten.

Classify each case and state how precise the recovery can be.

Drill key · Strength of the evidence

Clear textual recovery

2: revised the title after have.
The auxiliary remains overt.

Other cases

1: situational, with several possible fuller questions.
3: subject and be may be supplied, but this is a verbless clause.
4: an unspecified object is not a strict textual gap.

Workshop 2 · A classroom reply

Professor: “What’s your name?”

Student: “I don’t know.”

Authentic extract · Paul Bloom, PSYC 110, Lecture 7
Open Yale Courses · speaker labels shortened

What complement could follow know?

Does the reply meet every criterion for strict ellipsis?

A sensible recovery can still be weak

The question makes the missing informational content accessible.

The fuller complement needs the respondent's perspective.

Know can occur without an overt complement in ordinary discourse.

Classify the case with a stated degree of confidence.

Text laboratory · Seminar messages

Constructed teaching data

- 1 Tutor: Have you uploaded the handout?
- 2 Student: Not yet. Will do after lunch.
- 3 Tutor: Ready for the discussion?
- 4 Student: Almost. Need one more example.
- 5 Tutor: If you can, include a classroom extract.
- 6 Student: I will. The older file is in the shared folder.

Build a recovery table

Analyse Not yet, Will do, Ready, Almost, Need and can.

For each, separate absent wording from content inferred from the situation.

Explain why I will has a stronger local source than Almost.

Rewrite the exchange formally, then identify two changes in interpersonal tone.

Suggested analysis of the messages

Lines 1–4

Not yet: the upload is incomplete.

Will do: subject omitted, with do referring to the requested task.

Ready?: a situational question.

Almost: almost ready.

Lines 4–6

Need: likely I need, using the speaker role.

Can: include a classroom extract.

I will: include a classroom extract.

Recover the relevant action only.

Challenge the exact-wording claim

Claim: a successful ellipsis analysis always recovers one unique sentence.

Use Ready? and Not yet to test the claim.

Separate recovery of content from recovery of exact wording.

Exit response · Classify a new case

A: Will you present the results? B: If I can.

State the recovered material after can.

Explain the direction of recovery and the evidence for your analysis.

After class · Compare compressed messages

Analyse four short messages and their explicit counterparts.

Record source, recovered wording, confidence and a diagnostic.

Prepare Quirk et al., §§12.53–70.