

Sigurd Farstad Iversen

Bachelor's thesis

[Here are] problems for ellipsis

And the limits of current sententialist approaches

May 2021

NTNU

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Faculty of Humanities

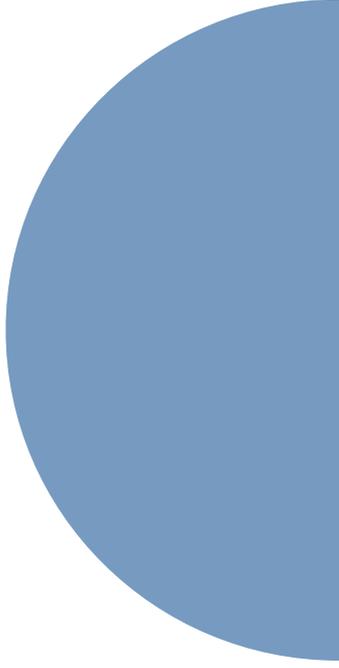
Department of Language and Literature



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Abstract

This bachelor's thesis considers nonsententials like *Freedom for Navalny* and *A coffee for me (please)*, and the position that such nonsententials contain more syntactic material than what is immediately perceivable. The claim that these 'incomplete' structures really are 'full' sentences at some subsentential level have motivated many works arguing for various ways of reconstructing the missing material. Among the most elaborate approaches, Merchant (2004, 2010) argues for a handful of methods, e.g., drawing from the morphological features of nonsententials, their contextual 'rifeness', and proposing a set of constantly available syntactic items accessible at any time. Progovac (2006), on the other hand, redefines the sentence arguing that nonsententials are simply small clauses without Tense, while for discourse-initial nonsententials, Weir (2020) proposes a small amount of syntactic structure, a null P, to account for problems of previous approaches. The thesis evaluates the explanatory scope of each of these approaches, and weighs them against their predictions. Overall, it is argued that, currently, under sententialist approaches, features such as case behave unpredictably, while many nonsententials cannot be accounted for, and that therefore, the sententialist position remains unwarranted.

Keywords

Nonsententials; sententialism; case; ditransitive; discourse-initial

Contents

Abstract	i
Keywords	i
Acknowledgements	iv
Abbreviations	v
1 Introduction	1
1.1 General outline	1
1.2 A definition for the DBA	2
1.3 A map for the reader and other technicalities	2
2 Previous approaches and their critics.....	3
2.1 Preliminary information	3
2.2 Sententialist approaches.....	3
2.2.1 Ludlow	3
2.2.2 Merchant	4
2.3 Nonsententialist approaches.....	6
2.3.1 Stainton.....	6
2.3.2 Culicover & Jackendoff	7
2.3.3 Ginzburg & Sag.....	8
2.4 'Middle-road' approaches	9
2.4.1 Progovac.....	9
2.4.2 Weir.....	10
2.5 Summary.....	11
3 Discussion	12
3.1 A scope for ourselves.....	12
3.2 Short answers – nonsententials with antecedents.....	12
3.3 Lacking antecedents.....	15
3.3.1 Modal alternations	15
3.3.2 POCs but not so much DOCs	20
3.3.3 Summary	21
3.4 Discourse-initial nonsententials and underlying verbal constants.....	21
3.4.1 Scripts.....	21
3.4.2 Ditransitive verbal constants.....	25
3.4.3 Summary	30
3.5 Root small clauses.....	30
3.6 Weir's null P.....	32

3.6.1	Limits of Progovac's analysis.....	32
3.6.2	The subsentential proposal.....	32
3.6.3	Case and θ -role assignment.....	36
4	Conclusion.....	39
5	References.....	40

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Abbreviations

1 st	first person	P	preposition
2 nd	second person	PAST	past (tense)
3 rd	third person	PF	phonetic form
ACC	accusative	PL	plural
BA	bare argument	PRES	present (tense)
BAE	bare argument ellipsis	POC	prepositional object construction
C	complementiser	NP	noun phrase
Conj.	conjunction	PP	prepositional phrase
CP	complementiser phrase	SG	singular
DAT	dative	SSH	simpler syntax hypothesis
DBA	ditransitive bare argument	SUB	subjunctive
DEF	definite (marker)	T	tense
DOC	double object construction	TP	tense phrase
DP	determiner phrase	VOC	vocative
FUT	future (tense)	VP	verb phrase
GEN	genitive		
HPSG	head-driven phrase structure grammar		
IMP	imperative		
INF	infinitive		
INST	instrumental		
MGG	mainstream generative grammar		
NOM	nominative		

1 Introduction

1.1 General outline

In this thesis, we will consider the extent to which underlying syntactic structure can be posited for nonsententials, with an additional focus on nonsententials such as “Freedom for Navalny!”. The term nonsentential, as it will be treated here, refers to any utterance, specifically an acceptable utterance that lacks traits associated with ‘full’ sentences (e.g., a verb). Examples may be replying simply “John” to the question “Who just left?” or walking into a café and saying “A coffee for me, please”. A significant part of the thesis will consider nonsententials like the latter and the protest-chant type nonsententials like “Freedom for Navalny”, which I have named ditransitive bare arguments (henceforth, DBAs). The debate I will contribute to, as Weir states, “concerns exactly how (...) propositional meaning is recovered, from the nonpropositional meaning these fragments appear to have on the surface” (2020, p. 3). The abundance of literature on ellipsis in general compared to DBAs necessitates that my thesis draws upon major works within ellipsis, rendering the discussion fairly general at times. Specifically, however, my thesis will discuss “the conflict between the fact that [nonsententials] obey syntactic licensing conditions and the substantial impediments to reconstructing a syntactic structure” (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2005, p. 254). This conflict has produced numerous accounts on the extent of syntactic (and semantic) structure underlying nonsentential utterances. This thesis is situated within a framework of mainstream generative grammar (MGG) in which I argue that DBAs, specifically, demonstrate a considerable difficulty for approaches that attempt to account for them by reconstructing anything that includes a verbal element or more (see section 2.2). Further, I argue that even the most minimally reconstructive approaches (see section 2.4) face significant, explanatory insufficiencies. The arguments presented in the critique that follows are not intended to disprove the possibility of a sententialist account of nonsententials, nor to claim a ‘flat’ structure of language, but rather to illustrate that current, sententialist approaches have not demonstrated sufficient evidence to warrant the claim that there is subsentential structure to these “incomplete” utterances. I have also hypothesised that current work (considered in this thesis) would not be able to account for the case distribution in all nonsententials, consequently grammatical case is considered thoroughly throughout this thesis. Now, to begin to explain why I have found DBAs to be interesting in this discussion, we must first ask what ditransitive bare arguments are.

1.2 A definition for the DBA

The reader will understand by now that this thesis is concerned with nonsententials of a ditransitive nature. The label, 'bare argument' is taken from Culicover and Jackendoff's (2005) bare argument ellipsis (or BAE), referring to a lone-standing argument (or arguments) which in our case is either DPs or PPs (see later discussion on Weir, section 2.4.2, and 3.6). Regarding the modifier 'ditransitive', ditransitive constructions are associated with utterances containing a verb that has two arguments, most commonly a theme and a goal (recipient, or even benefactive). In grammatical case terms, in 'fully' sentential structures the theme is normally realised in the accusative case, while the goal is realized in the dative. Interestingly, English, as many other European languages, have two manners in which the ditransitive is constructed. One, most often called the double object construction (henceforth, DOC) is constructed with the goal preceding the theme, as seen below:

- (1) He gave his dog a treat.

As with many verbs, *give* alternates optionally between the DOC form as seen above, and the following:

- (2) He gave a treat to his dog.

Here, the goal is introduced within a prepositional phrase. This construction is called the *to*-construction, or the 'dative' construction; however, due to the fact that most if not all of our examples are associated with indirect object functions and various versions of dative case, we will henceforth refer to this as the prepositional (object) construction (POC). Having laid out the basics, please consider the following:

- (3) Freedom for Navalny!

Assuming that the chant above can be interpreted as a demand for freedom to be given or granted to Navalny, we have our theme, freedom, and our goal, Navalny. But what we do not have is a verb. These kinds of nonsententials are what we will call DBAs.

1.3 A map for the reader and other technicalities

The thesis is structured in the following manner. In section 2, we will first move through the two extremes within the debate, the ('harder') sententialist approaches, followed by their nonsententialist critics. In our discussion, many examples of Lithuanian, Russian, and varieties of Norwegian are provided, all of which have been verified by several native speakers. Though all examples are meant to carry meaningful content, propositionality will not be discussed directly

in this thesis. Also, as this thesis is concerned with the sententialists' (or perhaps more accurately, reconstructionalists') fundamental claim and not the many nonsententialist alternatives, the burden of proof falls on the affirmative side, i.e. those who propose underlying structure. Consequently, the literary weight falls on these proposals, which will be tested against the relevant counterarguments.

2 Previous approaches and their critics

2.1 Preliminary information

The debate I will contribute to, as Weir states, “concerns exactly how (...) propositional meaning is recovered, from the nonpropositional meaning these fragments appear to have on the surface” (2020, p. 3). The importance of this debate can best be illustrated by the problem it might pose to mainstream (transformational) generative grammar, if it turns out that semantics can better account for what traditionally have been the role of syntax. The arguments overall surround “the conflict between the fact that [bare arguments] obey syntactic licensing conditions and the substantial impediments to reconstructing a syntactic structure from the antecedent” (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2005, p. 254). An example of such syntactic licensing conditions could be, as will be especially relevant in this thesis, the manner in which certain verbs or other word categories can govern which grammatical case (accusative, genitive, etc.) will manifest on a given word (typically within a DP). What follows in sections 2.2-2.4 is a summary of central literature that deals with ellipsis. It is sorted into three overgeneralized camps. These consist of: ‘harder’ sententialist approaches, those who largely posit (syntactically) underlying words and phrases to account for nonsententials’ surface structure; nonsententialist approaches, those who to a relatively small extent, if any, employ underlying syntactic structure to account for nonsententials; and a third camp I term ‘middle-road’ approaches, based on Weir’s self-categorization (2020).

2.2 Sententialist approaches

2.2.1 Ludlow

One of the ‘harder’ sententialist approaches is demonstrated by Ludlow (2005). Ludlow’s view is derived from principles of generative grammar, more specifically the Minimalist Program (MP). He states that “there is much more to a sentence than meets the eye” (p. 95) for instance, silent pronouns such as PRO generally assumed to be present but unpronounced in infinitival clauses (see 4 below). Thus, he finds no fundamental problem in supposing underlying structure for nonsententials. In his paper (2005), he states:

“The view that I am defending is that in more cases than not (...) at least one level of representation is a fully inflected clause.” (pp. 95-96)

Then, he answers the following central questions, giving a negative answer to both:

Q1: Does the grammar generate non-sentential structures?

Q2: Can one utter non-sentential structures and thereby perform a genuine speech act in which propositional content is communicated?

The only exception to his negation is ‘code’. His own example of this is, e.g., if the word “apple” is explicitly established to mean “someone has a gun”. Ludlow’s arguments mainly surround the lack of explanation demonstrated by nonsententialist approaches such as the absence of ‘obvious’ explanation for certain cases of ungrammaticality (p. 101):

(4) [Watching some friends bungee jumping off a bridge]

Wanna?

- a. ≠ *(Do you) want (him) to (jump)?
- b. = (Do you₁) want PRO₁ to (jump)?

Regarding (4), reconstruction explains would explain the contraction from the only interpretable underlying syntax. In contrast, if nonsententials are unrestricted by underlying linguistic material, the reason may seem unclear. Ludlow’s arguments are perhaps problematic in two ways. Firstly, he does not engage with much counterevidence such as the common difficulty of determining the underlying structure. Secondly, he does not question what qualifies as sentential (see 2.4.1 on Progovac), ‘fully’ inflected, or propositional, in much detail. However, highlighting the controversy, if correct, ‘sub-sentential speech’ seems inconsistent with MGG. In Ludlow’s view, perceiving what *appears* to be nonsentential, one must either posit ‘complete’, underlying structure, or reject minimalism all together. Thus, sententialism is a constraint within the “theoretical superstructure of linguistic theory” (p. 107), and, if “yanked out of the theory then the theory collapses like a house of cards” (p. 105). In what follows, we consider a specific implementation from the work of Jason Merchant.

2.2.2 Merchant

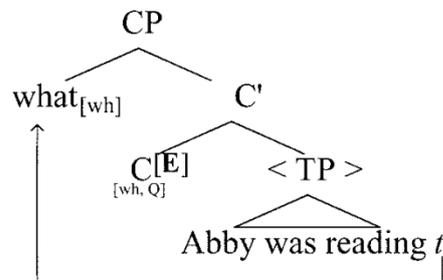
Merchant (2004), bases his analysis of nonsententials on his analysis of sluicing. He proposes a feature [E] which heads a relevant CP and which deletes the subsequent material (see 6 below). The phonology restated from Merchant is seen below (2004, p. 671):

(5) $\phi_{TP} \rightarrow \emptyset / E_$

In short, “E instructs the post-PF phonological interpretative component not to parse its complement” (p. 671), i.e. E’s complement is not pronounced as illustrated below (p. 670):

(6)

- a. Abby was reading something but I don’t know what [E] [Abby was reading *t*]
- b.



Perhaps most important is Merchant’s extension from his sluicing analysis to nonsententials (see below) This will be called the move-then-delete approach, comprised of fronting (what is left in the fragment) followed by deletion after [E]. Consider the fragment below (2004, p. 673):

(7)

- a. Who did she see?
 - b. John.
- [John [E] [_{IP} she saw *t*]]

Generally, ellipsis requires actual linguistic material from which the nonsentential can be derived. Consider then for instance (8) (p. 716):

- (8) [Two friends are sitting at campus when someone walks by. One of them signals to the other by raising their eyebrows, not saying or signing anything linguistic.]
Some guy she met at the park.

Without any prior linguistic material, we have no (overt) linguistic material from which the nonsentential can derive underlying structure. Thus, for cases where the fragment lacks such antecedents, Merchant’s second contribution is his ‘limited ellipsis analysis’. This analysis posits potentially underlying structure in “any context where the speaker can make a deictic gesture” (p. 725), i.e., demonstratives, pronouns, expletives, and a copular *be*. Hence, we may reconstruct as follows:

- (9) [_{FP} some guy she met at the park₁ [E] [_{TP} he’s *t*₁]]

Importantly, for such fragments, Merchant assumes “nominative case, not the accusative or other case” (p. 725). If the reader thinks such would yield accusative in English (e.g., *(That’s) me! /her!*

/him!], then remember that Merchant’s account is restricted to languages such as Greek they exclusively yield nominative (see 2.4.1). Merchant also includes [VP do-it] among this set, which, being a VP, may be a crucial factor in whether such a set could overgenerate potential reconstructions resulting in ‘unacceptable ambiguity’ (2004, pp. 730-731), especially considering what VPs may be posited for DBAs. However, for many cases (closely related to DBAs), deictics cannot apply. Consider for instance (10) (p. 183):

- (10) [At a vendor]
 Vody (požalujsta)! (Russian)
Water.GEN please
 ‘(Some) water (please)!’

We cannot reconstruct [*It’s*] *water!* nor [*Is there*] *water?* So, for these, Merchant appeals ‘scripts’, which he continues to defend (2010) after criticisms such as Stainton’s (see 2.3.1). Merchant acknowledges that previous methods do not apply, and that an account for the genitive case in *vody* is needed. Merchant argues that the “formulaic conventional character” of such situations allows contingency effects from underlying verbs like *xoču* ‘I want’, licensing genitive, to be retained in (10)¹ (cf. nominative-marked nonsententials)². Assuming variation in degree of conventionality and the case present, this argument seems interesting.

2.3 Nonsententialist approaches

2.3.1 Stainton

In criticising Merchant (2004), Stainton asserts “not (...) that syntactic ellipsis never happens between sentences” (2006, p. 94), but that it cannot occur everywhere. Consider the following:

- (11)
 a. I couldn’t eat the worm, but John did it
 b. *I couldn’t eat the worm, but John

According to Merchant (2004), [_{IP} [John] [E] [_{VP} did it]] should be theoretically possible, but (11b) is ungrammatical. As (12) demonstrates, this is not because such nonsententials cannot embed (Stainton, 2006, p. 105):

¹ This argument is further used in Merchant (2010) to bolster an argument of ‘slot-filling’ which will not be discussed in any detail in this thesis.

² See also later discussion in 2.4.2 on Weir’s proposal (2020) for something that may account for genitive in *vody* by other means.

(12) If they cover less than 30% of the lawn, a mild pesticide; if they cover more than that, DDT. (p. 105)

Thus, Stainton argues that Merchant's [E] feature predicts the wrong results. Additionally, he points out how certain languages – such as Malagasy – do not allow the fronting required for the fragments they exhibit. Besides his objections to the move-then-delete approach, he also notes empirical problems on Merchant's limited ellipsis analysis. Consider the following (p. 111):

(13) [A knock on the door is heard]

- a. The man from Paris.
- b. #And Betty is too.

However, since Merchant's limited ellipsis analysis allows deictics and copular *be* to be interpreted without linguistic antecedents, (13b) should be licensed by the potential reading seen below:

(14) [_{IP}The man from Paris [E] [_iis there]]

Therefore, it is not clear on Merchant's account how (13b) is ungrammatical. Consequently, as an alternative view, Stainton proposes a representational-pragmatic approach where elided words (from a sententialist standpoint) are external objects, properties, etc., which are 'grasped' through perception and subsequently 'combined' outside of the language-specific faculty. The major difference is that Stainton replaces 'hidden' linguistic structure with Mentalese representations. Stainton admits the mystical impression of his proposal, but objects to this suspicion as it would be equally mystical to posit that one grasps 'unheard' linguistic material. One could see this as a *tu quoque* fallacy, however, Stainton elaborates extensively on why 'pure' sententialist approaches remain incomplete.

2.3.2 Culicover & Jackendoff

In *Simpler Syntax* (2005), Culicover and Jackendoff presents fundamental problems in MGG and propose the Simpler Syntax Hypothesis (SSH). They ground their hypothesis, still, "thoroughly within the generative tradition" despite divergence from MGG. In contrast MGG, SSH proposes constraint-based formal technology, has no "hidden" structure, removes 'syntactocentrism', claiming a lexicon not (completely) separate from the productive grammar. Moreover, they claim an evidential conflict with the predictions of MGG using BAE. Consider the following (p. 244):

(15)

A: Let's get pizza.

B: OK – pepperoni?

[cf. *Let's get pepperoni pizza? Understood as *OK, should we get pepperoni pizza?*]

Based on their interpretation, they deem pragmatics a necessary role and the “degree of syntactic parallelism (...) a negotiable secondary factor”.

2.3.3 Ginzburg & Sag

Not unlike Culicover and Jackendoff's hypotheses (2005), Ginzburg and Sag (2000) also approach the issue of nonsententials, and grammar overall, with a similarly ‘flat’-structured and ‘nonreconstructional’ lens. Ginzburg and Sag and their HPSG approach as presented in *Interrogative Investigations* (2000, pp. 295-333), focus mainly on certain forms of sluicing (a) and ‘short answers’ (b) as seen below (p. 296):

- (16)
- a. A: I'm very tired
B: Why?/Since when?
 - b. Who attended the meeting?
Millie.

In short, they pose objections toward (elliptical) reconstruction of syntactic antecedents from nonsententials. Firstly, they reason that there is little motivation in reconstruction if the “putative reconstructed form is not a good predictor” of nonsentential grammaticality (p. 297). Consider (17):

- (17)
- a. A: Did anyone see Mary?
 - b. B: Yes.
 - c. A: Who?
 - d. *Anyone saw Mary.

From (20), they argue that (b) cannot be the antecedent of (c) since that would assume that (b) constitutes the infelicitous (d)³. Secondly, if there is an underlying reconstruction, certain binding constraints would be violated, as in (18) (p. 297):

(18)

³ Given that VP ellipsis is considered valid generally (see below), this argument is somewhat weaker than other, and we will not pursue this any further here.

(A) He doesn't have anything, but she does (have something /*anything).

Section 3.3.1 may, however, be of interest if the difference between the negative polarity item *any* is only modally different from *some* (see also Merchant, 2003).

- a. Who will punish Bill?
- b. He himself/himself/#he/#him.
(#He himself_i/*himself_i will punish Bill_i.)

Thirdly, they identify the problem of antecedentless nonsententials that a reconstruction-based approach must account for⁴. They provide examples such as (19) (p. 298):

- (19) [In an elevator]
What floor?

Lastly, they illustrate the problematic nature of reprise sluices (see below) where the underlying structure must involve an additional illocutionary operator, an extra clause, to make sense (p. 298):

- (20)
- a. Go home Billie!
 - b. Why? (= Why are you ordering me to go?)

2.4 'Middle-road' approaches

2.4.1 Progovac

Progovac's approach as presented in (2006) can be placed within the nonelliptical camp considering the extent to which she employs ellipsis as a solution, however her solution is sentential in essence. While others propose new mechanisms, Progovac appeals to basic theoretical essentials of minimalism. Summarized very briefly, Progovac argues that nonsententials are structures where Tense "has failed to merge" (p. 40) resulting in no finiteness nor structural case marking. Since there is nothing in the bottom-up principle of minimalism that precludes sentences smaller than a TP, a sentence may start 'as a small clause' (p. 40), what she terms 'root small clauses'. Progovac also claims that these nonsententials are "complete syntactic object[s], with no features remaining to be checked", thus not needing additional structure. Subsequently, from her evidence on Default Case, she questions the TP-criterion for 'full' sentential status. Below are (simplified) examples (p. 34):

- (21) [Showing a friend an old video of yourself as a child]
- a. I am dancing
 - b. Me dancing.

⁴ Ginzburg and Sag also includes a case where the antecedent exists but is unreadable from the linguistic context. As this goes undiscussed, it will not be included here.

In (24b) there is no TP, and hence no structural nominative that it could ‘check’ rendering it in Default Case (accusative) which she posits is a lexical feature stored in the lexicon. Progovac’s reasoning on Default Case I suspect will be crucial in analysing DBAs. Additionally, Progovac problematizes two assumptions within MGG. Firstly, she rejects Tense as a criterion for ‘full’ sentences based on the lack of a “real boundary between a phrase and a sentence” (p. 36) in X-bar theory. Secondly, she questions the Tense node as a criterion for situating truth conditions in time. Surprisingly comparable to Merchant’s limited ellipsis analysis, time can be interpreted from “ostension”.

2.4.2 Weir

As Progovac, Weir (2020) would also be found in the syntactic middle ground of ellipsis. Weir analyses a specific group of fragments that he considers problematic on the common polar positions of ellipsis. Here is an example (p. 8):

(22) A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse! (Richard III, act V scene IV)

It is unclear whether there are preestablished linguistic conventions (a script); hence, some other mechanism must account for the utterances above. Weir acknowledges that “base-generated” views could account for the following (p. 9):

(23) A coffee for me, please.

However, accepting Progovac’s analysis for the example above, he questions its overall applicability (p. 10):

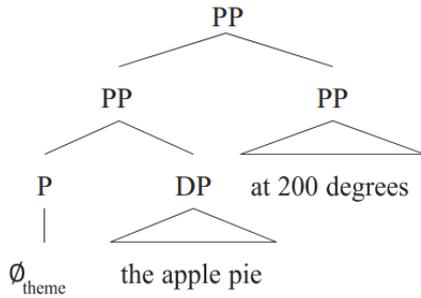
(24) A coffee using that new machine you have, please.

If the *coffee* does not *use* the machine, *using* is ‘verbally’ modifying. This contradicts “surfacist” accounts that lack event arguments for verbal adjuncts such as *using*. Subsequently, throughout Weir’s paper, he argues that to avoid the over- and undergeneration tendencies of current positions (p. 1):

“(…) a small amount of unpronounced syntactic structure is present in such fragments – a null head, crucially not verbal but rather something more akin to a preposition (…)”

An example of this structure is the following (p. 24):

(25)



In discussing the interpretation of DBAs, Weir’s proposal is particularly interesting as it aims for cross-linguistic applicability, attempting to explain a certain distribution of case and theta-role assignment by just a small amount of unpronounced syntactic structure.

2.5 Summary

In extending previous research to my critique, some arguments will be more central. Ludlow highlights problems in the explanatory power of nonsententialist accounts which must be considered but presents few claims of the specific implementation. In contrast, Merchant is important due to his theoretical devices which can be tested against data, but also in his defence against critics. Stainton (2006a,b), Culicover and Jackendoff (2005), and Ginzburg and Sag (2000) on the other hand, provide the most important criticism to sententialist approaches, while also providing separate accounts which will not be considered further in this thesis. The specific sententialist approaches we will examine is, firstly, Merchant (2004, 2010), and if shortcomings cannot be resolved easily, we will, as far as practical, consider Progovac (2006), followed by Weir (2020) a bit more extensively. To these, we must then apply the criticisms of nonsententialist accounts to see to what extent DBAs and nonsententials in general can be justifiably accounted for by sententialism.

3 Discussion

3.1 A scope for ourselves

The discussion that follows this subsection is partly general, but remains particularly attentive to case. Having seen a general overview of previous research, how will we proceed and why consider case and DBAs? Reconstructional claims of a given nonsentential may be supported by traces of anything attributable to superficially imperceivable structure. Consider the following:

(26) [Ordering a coffee in a café]

- a. Q: What would you like?
- b. A: A coffee (please).

If (b) is a ‘fully’ inflected clause subsententially, we must develop methods of predicting all possible nonsententials (and only those). Traditionally, grammatical case has been attributed to specific verbs, commonly absent in nonsententials. But since nonsententials do not lack case-features, we may see them as effects contingent upon underlying structure. So, if *like* (above) requires case (A) and *coffee* displays said case (A), (if this can be generalised) the correspondence may support claiming the underlying presence of the prior structure (e.g., [*I would like*] a coffee). However, the relevance of prior linguistic material and their reconstructional adequacy depends on the nonsentential. Consider for instance the antecedentless DBA below:

(27) [Walking into a café and asking for coffee without any prior dialogue]

A coffee for me (please).

DBAs are also contextually limited as to what preposition and word order can manifest. How nonsententials differ from ‘fully’ sentential equivalents or proposed underlying structures must be accounted for effectively under any approach (including the overall theoretical framework).

3.2 Short answers – nonsententials with antecedents

For short answers generally, i.e., nonsententials with uncontroversially traceable antecedents, case-related connectivity effects are consistent, and thus an advantage for sententialist approaches. Consider for instance the following:

(28)[Two parents are discussing their son’s many attempts at the claw machine.]

- A: Just allow him one more.
- B: Allow who what?

A: Marius one more try.

As the Lithuanian verb *leisti* requires dative, *Marius* will be dative-marked.

(29)

- A: Tik leisk jam dar vieną.
just let.IMP him.DAT yet one.ACC
- B: Kam ką?
what.DAT what.ACC
- A: Mariui dar vieną bandymą.
Marius.DAT yet one.ACC try.ACC

Similarly, if a verb required a different case, the case required will mark the nonsentential.

Consider for instance the instrumental case:

(30)English:

A: The orchester appointed him leader of art.

B: Appointed who what?

A: Him leader of art.

(31)Lithuanian:

- A: Orkestras paskyrė jį meno vadovu.
orchestra.NOM assign.PAST.3rd him.ACC art.GEN leader.INST
- B: (Paskyrė) ką kuo?
(appoint.PAST.3rd) what.ACC what.INST
- A: Jį meno vadovu.
he.ACC art.GEN leader.INST

There are, however, some problems with reconstructing the elided material even when an antecedent is available. Consider the following example:

(32)English:

Q: *Who* are you going to buy *what* (for)?

A: (Just) a chocolate for Marius.

(33)Lithuanian:

- Q: Kam pirksi ką?
what.DAT buy.FUT.2ndSG what.ACC
- A: (Tik) šokoladą Mariui.
(just) chocolate.ACC Marius.DAT

When we apply Merchant's analysis to our DBAs, we expect the following:

(34)Just a chocolate for Marius [E] [I am going to buy]

As acknowledged by Merchant (2004) himself, the move-then-delete approach may often predict word orders which sound – if the underlying structure is included – less grammatical or even entirely ungrammatical. This is the case of Malagasy as pointed out by Stainton (2006). Merchant (2004) illustrates this problem himself:

(35)[German]

Q: Wer hat gestern wen gesehen?
who.NOM has yesterday who.ACC seen
“Who saw whom yesterday?”

A: Der Mann den Jungen.
the man.NOM the boy.ACC
“The man the boy.”

(36)*Der Mann den Jungen hat gestern gesehen.
The man.NOM the boy.ACC has yesterday seen
“The man saw the boy yesterday.”

This argument is just as valid if illustrated by a DBA, and thus, DBAs do not contribute with anything new here:

(37)?*Just a chocolate for Marius, I am going to buy.

Merchant (2004) suggests that this might be due to elliptical ‘repair’ effects not unlike what is seen in islands (see 2004, p.710, or 2003). I do, however, agree with Stainton’s (2006) objection that assuming such effects “*risk[s] (...) making “repair effects” a get-out-of-counterexample-free card*”. Though one might come up with a theoretical ‘plug’ to fix the ‘leak’, if any deviance in short answer reconstruction can be answered by “repair effects may apply”, then the approach has already answered all possible critique and would be virtually unfalsifiable, and consequently, dangerously close to pseudoscientific. There are also other problems (see section 2.3.3)⁵ which

⁵ It has come to my knowledge that certain reflexive DBAs seem surprisingly difficult to construe (see Ginzburg and Sag 2.3.3 for similar arguments). Consider for instance:

(A) [Showing pictures of someone to themselves]

- a. Q: Who did you show to who?
- b. A: ??I showed themselves to themselves.
- c. A: ?Themselves to themselves

This may be interesting for future research.

we will not consider further here. I do not consider these unexplained phenomena sufficient to reject the approach; however, if left unresolved, the affirmative position on the presence of underlying syntactic structure (in short answer) will remain unjustified. Thus, we will move on to cases of nonsententials where the antecedent may be in dispute.

3.3 Lacking antecedents

3.3.1 Modal alternations

Thus far, we have considered examples of nonsententials assuming the relevant antecedents to be present traceable. We will not discuss discourse-initial nonsententials just yet, but rather nonsententials which partly lack antecedents despite clear contingency effects with antecedents. Consider for instance:

(38)English:

- a. B: What are you going to buy?
- b. A: A chocolate.
[B gives A a disapproving look]
- c. A: Something healthier?

Based on (a), (b) can be reconstructed as:

(39)A chocolate [E] [I am going out to buy]

However, reconstructing (c) likewise seems insufficient.

(40)*Something healthier [E] [I am going to buy]?

[Interpreted as: Should I (rather)/ Do you (rather) want me to buy something healthier?]

The interpretational gap seems at minimum to require a modal element, if not an entire clause. Thus, such nonsententials are perhaps best explained as lacking some antecedent(s). The examples above are based directly on Culicover and Jackendoff's (2005) objections as discussed earlier in section 2.3.2. Ginzburg and Sag (2000) also argue from modal alternations and provide evidence of a different nuance:

(41)[At a restaurant with chefs cooking in front of the customers]

- a. Cook us some of that fish and some of that one (please).
- b. Which fish?
≠ Which fish [E] [cook]

[Interpreted as: Which fish should I cook?]

In (b), the antecedent cannot provide the appropriate grammatical mood for the relevant interpretation. In contrast to the imperative antecedent (a), (b) is interpreted as interrogative, not simply asking about the truth of something, but rather the preferences of someone, perhaps equivalent to a subjunctive (hence the *should*). Thus, the nonsentential and its potential reconstruction do not align. However, consider the alternative addition to (b):

(42) Cook which fish?

The presence of *cook* could suggest a salvageable imperative form. If we grant the benefit of the doubt, this would be a general problem not restricted to nonsententials. However, *cook* does not seem imperative in unambiguous languages:

(43) Lithuanian

A:	Kepk	mums žuvį.		
	<i>cook.IMP</i>	<i>us.DAT fish.ACC</i>		
B:	Kurią	(kepti	/*kepk)?	
	<i>which.ACC</i>	<i>(cook.INF</i>	<i>cook.IMP)</i>	

(44) Russian

A:	Prigotov'	nam rybu.		
	<i>cook.IMP</i>	<i>us.DAT fish.ACC</i>		
B:	Kotóruju	rybu	(prigotovit'	/*prigotov')?
	<i>which.ACC</i>	<i>fish.ACC</i>	<i>(cook.INF</i>	<i>cook.IMP)</i>

(45) Norwegian

A:	Steik	oss fisk.		
	<i>cook.IMP</i>	<i>us fish</i>		
B:	(Steike	/*Steik)	kva fisk? ⁶	
	<i>(cook.INF</i>	<i>cook.IMP)</i>	<i>which fish</i>	

We could remain agnostic about the modal nature of the English *cook*, given its superficial indistinguishability. However, modal alternation is more plausible based on its cross-linguistic occurrence⁷. So, how do we account for antecedentless switching between moods (here, imperative and interrogative/subjunctive)? Consider the following:

(46)

a. B:	Kå	pirksi?
	<i>what.ACC</i>	<i>buy.FUT.2ndSG</i>

⁶ The form *kva* also translates to *what* but functions here as the longer phrase *kva for ein*, meaning *which*.

⁷ It is not the whole picture. In Norwegian, the imperative may manifest if imitated (e.g., '*Steik*' *kva fisk*); however, this is a bit like being asked "*How are you?*" replying "*What do you mean 'how are you?'*".

- b. A: (Tik) šokoladą.
(just) chocolate.ACC
- c. A: Ką nors sveikesnio?
something.ACC healthier.GEN

The ‘full’ sentence equivalent of (c) cannot be (47a), but preferably (47b). This adds an entire clause including *want*, i.e. a more significant deviation than simply an underlying *should* which may be workable for English.

(47)

- a. #Ar pirksiu ką nors sveikesnio?
Conj.⁸ buy.FUT.1stSG something.ACC healthier.GEN
- b. Ar nori kad nupirkčiau ką nors⁹
Conj. want.PRES.2ndSG that buy.SUB.1stSG something.ACC
 sveikesnio ?
healthier.GEN¹⁰

However, one may, exclusively for Lithuanian, consider another potential reconstruction:

- (48) [Ar (man) nupirkti] ką nors sveikesnio?
Conj. (me.DAT) buy.INF something.ACC healthier.GEN
 “Should I buy something healthier.”

Consequently, for languages capable of expressing the subjunctive without additional clauses, we may posit less constantly available structure. In addition to a constantly available subjunctive, general interrogatives require the same treatment. Notice the initial particle *ar* used for polar questions (yes-no questions) and consider the following:

- (49)[A student has tested his cookie-baking skills and made cookies for the entire dormitory. As Marius walks in, the student, hoping to have someone like his cookies, declares his confidence in Marius’ appetite.]
- a. B: Mariau, tu nori sausainių.
Marius.VOC you.NOM.SG want.2ndSG cookies.GEN
 “Marius, you want cookies.”
- b. C: Aš?
I.NOM

⁸ This polar question marker *ar* is generally referred to as a conjunction, hence the abbreviation *Conj.*

⁹ Notice also the Lithuanian *nupirkčiau* necessarily occurring in the subjunctive (also used as a conditional).

¹⁰ Genitive case here is required by the preceding *ką nors*.

- “Me?”
- c. B: Taip.
Yes
“Yes.”
- d. C: Taip, labai noriu!
Yes very want.1stSG
“Yes, I really want cookies!”

A ‘fully’ sentential equivalent of (b) could be as follows:

- (50) Ar aš noriu sausainių?
Conj. I.NOM want.PRES.1stSG cookies.GEN
“Do I want cookies?”

However, Marius is not actually asking whether he himself wants cookies. Consider the more accurate (51):

- (51) Ar klausiai, ar aš noriu sausainių?
Conj. ask.PRES.2ndSG whether I.NOM want.PRES.1stSG cookies.GEN
“Are you asking whether I want cookies?”

Another, less ideal possibility could be the following:

- (52) Ar tu manęs klausiai?
Conj. you.NOM.SG me.GEN ask.PRES.2ndSG
“Are you asking me?”

For both, freely applicable clause-size structures are required, but for the latter, case-related connectivity effects must be ignored (see the genitive above). At minimum, items like *ar* must be constantly available, and still the reconstructions of (51) and (52) remain insufficient¹¹. Conclusively, we must postulate (several) freely applicable modal items. If this adds to Merchant’s limited ellipsis analysis, our set of constantly potential underlying syntax could produce considerable ambiguity:

- (53)[Two students are reading from a wall of pictures of Nobel Prize winners from their university when one stops at some specific portrait.]
A: Ivar Giæver, Lars Onsager, May-Britt...

¹¹ Though we will not discuss missing clauses further, I suspect that many nonsententials will ideally require additional clauses since there are many different moods (cross-linguistically) and only a limited number of English modal auxiliaries.

B: Famous?

The most intuitive reconstruction would probably be as follows:

(54)Famous [E] [is X-name]?

However, there are at least a number of possible reconstructions which are not even considered.

(55)

- a. Should X-name be famous?
- b. Do you want X-name to be famous?
- c. Is X-name going to be famous?

These interpretations seem unavailable; however, how and why would our set of constants – if always available to resolve ellipses – not produce them? Also, consider this:

(56)[Two young friends are walking through a forest when they find a house with a newly mowed lawn. After playing for a while around the house they hear the sound of a car.]

- a. I think someone is coming and...
- b. I think someone is coming and [we should not be here]

If the set of constantly available syntax is in fact constant, (b) should be a relatively plausible interpretation of (a). However, this seems like a bit of a leap. Also, if entire clauses may be posited following conjunctions, which should follow given our current set of constants, what stops us when there is little to no linguistic structure? Consider these additions to the latter example context:

(57)

- a. John?
??John [should we be here]?
- b. [John receives a questioning look from his friend]
[Should we be here]?

Admittedly, (b) is a little absurd, however the *reductio ad absurdum* is valid and remains to be answered. Since the claim is that the limited ellipsis analysis (and its necessary additions) is *constantly* available, we are faced with whether and why syntax could not be constructed (covertly) with minimal or indeed, no linguistic material. Now, let us see what problems DBAs present for reconstruction when partially lacking antecedents.

3.3.2 POCs but not so much DOCs

There seems to be an overall tendency that POCs work better than DOCs as nonsententials.

Consider the following DBAs:

(58) Indicative-indicative

- a. Oh, I remember when you gave Marius one of those.
- b. Yeah, and Urté one of these.
- c. Yeah, and one of these to Urté.

(59) Interrogative-interrogative¹²

- a. Who did I give which one?
- b. Mom the best one?
- c. The best one to mom?

(60) Imperative-imperative

- a. John, give Mary this one.
- b. Yeah, and yo, Sue. *Otto this one.
- c. Yeah, and yo, Sue. This one to Otto.

In the ones above, there is no modal deviation between antecedent and nonsentential, and the indicative and interrogative POCs seem workable. However, the imperative example fails. Compare the following:

(61) Interrogative-indicative

- a. Who did you give which one?
- b. ?Him that one.
- c. That one to him.

(62) Indicative-interrogative

[Giving someone bad news about something they had forgotten from the night before.]

- a. You gave him the car.
- b. *Who what?
- c. ?What to who?

(63) Interrogative-imperative

- a. Could you remind me who to give which one? (specific intonation)
- b. ??John that one, now!¹³

¹² For this one specifically, it could be helpful to keep in mind that it is the same person asking consecutive questions.

¹³ It may be possible to reconstruct a declarative (e.g., *You are to give John that one, now!*) from this intended imperative example; however, if we imagine an angry military officer yelling this command, it is hard to see how such a reconstruction is appropriate.

- c. ?That one to John, now!
- (64) Imperative-interrogative
- a. Give us one of each.
 - b. *Which of you which one?
 - c. Which one for which of you?

Even though some POCs, clearly, are not fully acceptable at all times, they work better than their DOC counterparts. However, since we should be able to reconstruct the relevant underlying syntax, this fact is simply mysterious for a sententialist approach like Merchant's.

3.3.3 Summary

Clearly, if the interpretation of partially antecedentless nonsententials correspond to their underlying structure, and missing structure can be reconstructed from a set of constantly available items, then modal elements must be included in said set. However, this set overgenerates to "unacceptable ambiguity", predicts ungrammatical POCs, and cannot explain certain missing clauses. While Culicover and Jackendoff use similar results to claim a primary pragmatic/semantic influence, I do not take such a strong position. Rather, I argue that these evidences indicate, as held in Ginzburg and Sag (2000), that reconstructions are not sufficiently predictive. Now, we will consider nonsententials that occur without any linguistic material immediately uttered prior to them.

3.4 Discourse-initial nonsententials and underlying verbal constants

In this section, we introduce antecedentless nonsententials, after which we consider previously developed and hypothetical sententialist proposals. Firstly, we turn to the notion of 'script' which I argue should be avoided if one wishes to maintain a theoretical framework in which proposing underlying structure makes sense at all.

3.4.1 Scripts

When considering for instance DBAs, we could expect Merchant to claim that some of these are examples of 'scripts'. In these subsections, we consider a few problems in assuming actual syntactic influence of such 'scripts'.

3.4.1.1 The coffee-example

Merchant (2004) invokes 'scripts' to explain the grammatical case seen in nonsententials occurring in certain contextually rich situations. The general idea is that this case is 'expected'

from a relevant verb (see also 3.4.2 on underlying verbs). Let us consider the which Merchant (2004) first uses to illustrate ‘scripts’ (2004, p. 730):

(65)

a. Greek¹⁴

[Ferte mou] (enan) kafe (parakalo)!

bring.IMP me a coffee.ACC please

Bring me (a) coffee (please)!

b. Russian

[Dajte mne] vody (pozhalejsta)!

give.IMP me water.GEN please

(Some) water (please)!

Firstly, attributing partitive genitive underlying verbs like *give / dajte* is incorrect as verbs, at least in Russian, Lithuanian, and French, cannot predict the partitive. It is, however, limited to certain nouns (Luraghi & Huumo, 2014, pp. 379-399). This case (partitive genitive) unlike many others, does not indicate (spacio-)grammatical relations or thematic roles but something akin to number, “partly functioning as determiners or indefinite quantifiers” (p. 1). In the coffee-example, it functions as an indefiniteness marker (cf. uncountable markers) distinguishing a noun from a potentially countable interpretation. Consider the following:

(66)

a. Paduok man vandens.

give.IMP me.DAT (some) water.GEN

“Give me some water.”

b. Paduok man vandenį.

give.IMP me.DAT (the) water.ACC

“Give me the water (bottle).”

If one wished to predict the partitive genitive, evaluating the semantic and conceptual limitations of the noun in question may be more beneficial. Consider for instance:

(67)

a. Paduok man pieno / piena.

give.IMP me.DAT milk.GEN milk.ACC

¹⁴ One should perhaps be careful when including the word *please* since this word in certain languages (e.g., Greek and Lithuanian) is a ‘fully’ inflected, case-assigning verb. For instance, *prašau* in Lithuanian requires genitive (not partitive), and *parakalo* in Greek requires accusative, both roughly translatable to “I request/beg”.

“Give me (some) milk / the milk (carton)”

- b. Paduok man *butelio / butelį.
give.IMP *me.DAT* *bottle.GEN* *bottle.ACC*

“Give me (some) bottle/ the bottle”.

Having cleared up the issues with this specific example claimed to suggest the presence of ‘scripts’, we will now consider the problems with ‘scripts’ more generally.

3.4.1.2 Theoretical problems for ‘scripts’

When first hearing the word *script*, we face the yet-to-be-resolved issue of defining what a ‘script’ constitutes and whether it *can* be defined. Merchant (2004), in presenting the previously discussed coffee-example, brings up what Stainton calls DI_{null} , or as Merchant describes it, ‘truly discourse-initial contexts’, in which participants have less (or nothing) to predetermine the content of the dialogue. Merchant states that:

“[A]ny interaction between a potential customer and a vendor is a discourse context rife with context, and clearly is far from any kind of exemplification of DI_{null} ” (Merchant, 2004, p. 719)

Firstly, in criticising Stainton’s categorisation of certain contexts as linguistically ‘null’, I firmly agree that it is profoundly difficult to imagine such a context. However, this is also the problem with scripts. We can assume that any linguistic activity presumes some kind of interactive capability, like e.g., functioning sensory organs and some method of transmitting information. Consequently, whatever the context, some information would be accessible, and even a lack of information may be perceived as threatening, or in other words, contextually ‘rife’. The scope of ‘scripts’ then seems either all-encompassing, or gradual as perhaps imagined by Merchant (2004, 2010)¹⁵. Would ‘scripts’ then be measured by contextual frequency across a linguistic community, or if otherwise, how? If by frequency, could ‘scripts’ manifest partially, or would a ‘script’ suddenly gain the ability of providing unpronounced, syntactic structure at a critical point of frequency? Secondly, proposing this level of explanatory relevance to conventionality, or essentially, memory, has another problematic aspect to it. If memory provides us with constant access to a context-based range of dialogues or syntactic constructions, could this not replace much of the underlying structure proposed in MGG? Consider the following:

(68) Lithuanian

- a. Man rūpi augalai.

¹⁵ Merchant (2004) categorises ‘scripts’ as ‘highly conventionalised’ which I take to indicate that there is a scale with a low end of conventionality as well, i.e. a gradual definition.

me.DAT *worry.PRES.3rd* *plants.NOM*

“I care about plants.”

b. Aš pasėjau sėklą.

I.NOM *sow.PAST.1stSG* *seed.ACC*

“I planted a seed.”

The nominative-marked DPs are (most naturally) placed at different sites. Normally, we would appeal to formal operations and underlying structural reasons for why case is assigned differently here. However, if memory can provide the complexity of ‘scripts’ based on associations with individual situations, could it not also provide the required placement and case of DPs based on individual verbs? Also, would not this be of a lesser mental load and thus a more effective, and more likely use of memory? Now, consider the following DBA:

(69) Viena kavą man (prašau).

one.ACC *coffe.ACC* *me.DAT(please)*

“One coffe for me (please) ”

Under Merchant’s approach, we would either have to propose a ditransitive verb constantly available as an extension of his limited ellipsis analysis (e.g., *give* or *bring*)¹⁶, or propose ‘scripts’ with one or more relevant ones being covertly present. However, memory could just as easily, or perhaps more easily, have us remember that accusative marks the DP when the DP is requested¹⁷. So, if there is nothing that limits ‘scripts’ appropriately (preferably found on independent grounds), using ‘scripts’ to propose underlying structure seems somewhat self-defeating. A third aspect with ‘scripts’, I would argue to be problematic, is how it relates to the theoretical framework more broadly. If we have no method of defining or limiting ‘scripts’, could we avoid appealing to memory for all other facets of language? By now, the reader might ask what the real problem is if we simply follow evidence for ‘scripts’. To this, I would respond that the argument is not meant to ‘debunk’ the idea, but rather to say that it has already been thought of, though perhaps not in MGG¹⁸. In essence, appealing to ‘scripts’ may cause the minimalism Merchant adheres to to seem excessively complex compared to approaches that rely solely on memory and domain-general functions in explaining grammar. Thus, one could, perhaps a bit hyperbolically, question the need for the hierarchies of generative grammar if frequency-based, memorised constructions must be applied to account for such phenomena as case distribution.

¹⁶ See section 3.4.2 for more on such verbs.

¹⁷ See the further discussion on these kinds of DBAs in section 3.6.

¹⁸ Approaches that I would consider already has this memory aspect of ‘scripts’ as a major tenet could be, e.g., construction grammar, usage-based approaches and cognitive grammar.

3.4.2 Ditransitive verbal constants

Assuming, as discussed, that the preconditions for ‘scripts’ pose a significant challenge to MGG, we will now put ‘scripts’ aside (avoiding any potential paradigm-shifts) to test to what extent the coffee-example and similar nonsententials can be accounted for by sententialism. Initially, the accusative-marked nonsententials of the coffee-example is a rather strong indication of underlying syntax. Now, if we cannot propose ‘scripts’ for these situations, the remaining option within Merchant’s approach is to see whether any verbal element may be added to the limited ellipsis analysis. If we consider the coffee-example, verbs like, e.g., *give* or *make*, may be hypothesised as the underlying verb. We will now begin by looking at some comparable DBAs to evaluate whether there is a verb that may account for all the necessary nonsententials.

3.4.2.1 Preliminary examples

Imagine any context similar to that of a rally, protest, strike, or music festival, in which one could come across hearing the typical slogans, mottos or even straight-forward demands. A typical example many might recognise is the slogan of the Black Panthers (also known from John Lennon’s song).

(70)Power to the people!

Or perhaps even more interesting, though of course less recognisable, from the rallying cries of Yugoslavian socialists:

(71)Death to fascism, freedom to the people!

Discourse-initial DBAs may also manifest more commonly, and from individuals rather than crowds. Consider the following:

(72)[An aunt being startled but happy after her entire family jumps forward from the behind the sofas of her apartment yelling “surprise”.]
Such an effort just for me?

Furthermore, we might have cases like the following:

(73)[Suddenly feeling unequally treated in response to others receiving gifts]
A car for my brother and just a bike for me?/!¹⁹

Taking the earlier perspectives of Merchant and Ludlow, what should we expect?

¹⁹ In this example we could alternate between a question and an exclamation based on intonation.

3.4.2.2 Predicting the goal

As I have hypothesised that explaining the goals of nonsententials, the indirect objects, are less problematic, we will first look at how this might be done. For (70), we could propose *give* as the underlying verb, fairly unproblematically:

(74) Power to the people [E] [give]!
(*give.IMP*)

However, if we try to do the same for the Yugoslavian slogan, the reconstruction seems a bit off.

(75)??Death to fascism [E] [give].

Should anyone still argue that this is the correct reconstruction, I could perhaps concede that the protesters using this chant interprets some kind of transfer of *death* to *fascism*, but if the underlying syntactic constant is in fact the actual verb *give*, then why would there be any difficulty in yelling *give death to fascism*. However, in my judgement, many of the associations of the verb *give* seem absent in this example. Even the idea of ‘giving to a ideology’ is undeniably somewhat strange. Thus, *give* is not quite sufficient. Alternatively, we might propose *want*, which is arguably better as we have already established that similar modal elements must be constantly available. Consider the following:

(76)
a. Power to the people [E] [I/we want]
b. Death to fascism [E] [I/we want]²⁰

Yet, if we consider the example below, *want* seems inaccurate as well.

(77)#Such an effort just for me [E] [I/we/you want]?
“Do I/we/you want such an effort just for me?”

This individual example would perhaps ideally have some underlying *make* as in *did you make such an effort just for me*. However, this would not fit the other, arguably more common, examples. Furthermore, considering the next example, we might initially want to reinvolve *give* as a potentially explanatory underlying constant, however, *give* requires *to*-PPs, not *for*-PPs²¹. A better underlying verb is perhaps *buy*. Consider the example below:

(78)A car for my brother and just a bike for me?/!

²⁰ There is a certain ambiguity to the number of the subject here, not unlike the ambiguity inherent to the English imperative (cf. the ambiguous number of the pronoun *you*). Due to this similarity, I do not consider it problematic.

²¹ Also see Weir (2020) who makes the same point.

“Did they buy/ They bought a car for my brother and just a bike for me?/!”

We should perhaps not accept an underlying *buy* even in this context as it is not obvious that anything was *bought* necessarily. A more generally applicable verb could be *provide* but such a verb also possesses some superfluous connotations and seems as strange as ‘giving death to fascism’. Returning to Merchant’s limited ellipsis analysis, it seems that such an analysis does not meet the interpretations of the nonsententials either.

(79)

- a. Power to people [E] [it is]!
- b. Death to fascism [E] [it is]!
- c. Such an effort just for me [E] [is it]?
- d. A car for my brother and just a ticket for me [E] [is it]?/[it is]!

We could, of course, as we have discussed earlier, include underlying modal constants similar to *should*, thus enabling something along the lines of *there should be* or *should there be* for interrogatives. However, this reconstruction is also a bit awkward:

(80)Such an effort just for me [E] [should there be]?

Another counterargument against proposing these underlying verbal constants, as pointed out Weir (2020) concerning the legitimacy of ‘scripts’, is the fact that English discourse-initial DBAs are not DOCs but mostly if not always POCs. This is problematic if the reconstruction includes a ditransitive verb. Consider the following (p. 12):

(81)[Out of the blue café-situation]

- a. A coffee for me.
- b. ?*Me a coffee.²²

In summary, we have three options when attempting to predict the goal of a DBA using reconstruction. Firstly, we could propose ‘scripts’ and risk jeopardising certain fundamental aspects of minimalism consequently making reconstruction unnecessary. Secondly, we could continuously expand the set of underlying syntactic constants *ad hoc* to account for every potential exception, and thus, inevitably reaching ‘unacceptable ambiguity’ at some point. Thirdly, we could propose an entirely new mechanism, e.g. a ditransitive verbal PRO-form of some sorts, however limiting this mechanism to the relevant linguistic material, i.e. preventing the mechanism for overgenerating, might be difficult (see later discussion on Weir’s null-P). Also, this

²² An issue that may come up, is that this exact goal-then-theme order that is not allowed in English, seems perfectly fine in languages like Lithuanian (e.g., *Man kavą*); however interesting this is, I suspect I may fall into a discussion on scrambling. Therefore, I leave it to the interested reader to find out whether this is significant.

last option does run the risk of adding another complexity to the overall framework, leaving the framework as a whole at risk of becoming prey to Occam's Razor, in comparison to other frameworks that might provide simpler explanations.

3.4.2.3 Predicting the theme

In addition to the problems of reconstructing the appropriate verb to account for the goal, doing it while accounting for the theme does not make easier. For instance, if we propose a singular underlying ditransitive verbal constant, we could not predict the following nominative:

(82)Smrt	fašizmu,	sloboda	narodu!
Death.NOM ²³	fascism.DAT	freedom.NOM	people.DAT

The same is true for Ukrainian, Lithuanian²⁴ and Lithuanian:

(83)			
a.	Smert'	Rosiyi.	
	<i>death.NOM</i>	<i>Russia.DAT</i>	
b.	Mirtis /	*Mirtį	Rusijai.
	<i>death.NOM</i>	<i>death.ACC</i>	<i>Russia.DAT</i>
c.	Kuolema	Amerikalle.	
	<i>death.NOM</i>	<i>America.DAT</i>	

However, one will also find similar slogans with themes marked by accusative.

(84)[Russian]		
	Svobodu	navalnomu
	<i>freedom.ACC</i>	<i>Navalny.DAT</i>
	"Freedom for Navalny"	

(85)[Lithuanian]		
	Laisvę	Lietuvai!
	<i>freedom.ACC</i>	<i>Lithuania.DAT</i>
	"Freedom for Lithuania"	

²³ The Serbo-Croatian noun for death is superficially ambiguous to whether it is in the nominative or the accusative.

²⁴ If in fact a linking verb could account for these, then it is highly likely that Lithuanian should allow "themes" in the instrumental case as verbs like *be* and *become*, or ditransitive verbs like *assign* either allows or requires instrumental case.

If scripts do in fact explain this variation, which at least intuitively seems plausible despite how this would affect MGG, then we might avoid the above and consider less conventional ones:

(86)[Rolandas runs out the door to get to work forgetting his keys. As he realises, he turns and yells the following back to his son still standing in the hallway while holding his hands together at shoulder-height as if to receive something transferred quickly through the air.]

Man raktą!

Me.DAT key.ACC

“(The) key (lit. to/for me)!”

The gesture in (86) is comparable to the hand gesture correlated with most nonsententials where one would propose an underlying *give* (see below)²⁵:

(87)Vandenį (prašau).

water.ACC (request.1stSG)

In the key-example, it is more or less a given that Rolandas communicates to his son that he should *throw* the keys to him, however, it is both hard to propose that *throw* should be constantly available, and that it could apply universally. Thus, it is of little help to the sententialist not wanting to overgenerate.

3.4.2.4 Weir’s (lack of) null-Vs

Additionally, Weir (2020) also provides a notable counterexample to proposing underlying V(P)s to account for nonsententials. Consider the following:

(88)Could you [VP] the water

If there is some unpronounced verbal structure that is constantly available, then such a structure should also be available for ‘fully’ sentential utterances. This seems to be possible for some verbs in Germanic languages in particularly restricted usages, however, proposing a freely applicable underlying VP does not immediately imply such restrictions, and thus, this would predict ungrammatical results.

²⁵ It might be possible that the gesture itself functions as a case assigner. Consider for instance:

(A) (Hand gesture used)

a. Vandenį.

(No hand gesture used)

b. ?*Vandenį.

I will not consider this possibility here as I think this would need more firm base. However, it does not seem overly implausible, at least intuitively.

3.4.3 Summary

To summarise this discussion on to what extent we can account for DBAs using either ‘scripts’ or underlying verbal constant, we must review the major problems. Firstly, regarding ‘scripts,’ the most promising contexts in which we might propose underlying syntax is that of the more conventionalised DBAs, examples being protest chants, slogans, and the like. However, if we choose to do so, we face theoretical impasses: a) that scripts lack a firm definition and that the concept itself is difficult to define due to its seemingly gradual nature; and b), that affording language use and memory such explanatory power in regards to syntax might jeopardise many structuralist approaches to language, such as MGG. Hence, parts of the theoretical framework might start to resemble that of usage-based approaches, or that of construction grammarians, making MGG and/or minimalism seem overly complex. Secondly, in proposing underlying ditransitive verbal constant, it is not clear that there is a singular verb that can apply for all the relevant nonsententials (without overgenerating). Thus, we turn to some different approaches to antecedentless nonsententials.

3.5 Root small clauses

Moving on from verbal constants, we consider whether DBAs can be explained by Progovac’s root small clauses. Though Progovac (2006) present few relevant nonsententials, we may postulate from those few.

Progovac relies heavily on Default Case as a notion, and makes an eloquent argument for how this “No-Case” manifests in (root) small clauses such as the following (p. 41):

(89)Him a loser?!

Further, while questioning the requirement of Tense in ‘full’ sentences, she argues that tensed clauses like (90), derive from root small clauses as the above.

(90)They consider [him a loser].

She also makes a reference to small clauses like the following:

(91)Susan/Her having gone, Fred left town.

Yet, though there is a parallel between “not specific Case positions or argument positions” and their (tensed) derivations in English, for Lithuanian, the equivalent small clauses display several cases. Consider the following:

(92)

- a. Jis lūzeris?
 He.NOM loser.NOM
 “Him a loser?”
- b. Jie laiko jį lūzeriu.
they.NOM consider.PRES.3rd him.ACC loser.INST
 “They consider him a loser.”
- c. Jai išėjus, Marius išvyko iš
her.DAT leave.PAST.PART Marius.NOM leave.PAST
from
 miesto.
town.GEN
 “Her having gone, Marius left town”.

As we see, there are three distinct case patterns, one for each of these small clauses. Also, none of the above are ditransitive (at least not in the sense considered here). However, we can construct countless examples similar to the first type (...), where the nonsentential would indeed be a DBA. One might for instance be looking at old photos of sheep farmers holding up large syringes in front of the flock with a plaque reading “*Curing the virus*”, and thus say:

(93) Vaccines for sheep?

Here, as one would expect following Progovac’s reasoning, *vaccines* manifest in the Default Case, which in Lithuanian is nominative (if any).²⁶

(94) Skiepai avims?
vaccine.NOM.PL sheep.DAT.PL

In these specific root small clause cases, it seems that Progovac’s approach harmonises with Merchant’s limited ellipsis analysis, if the left-dislocation is taken into account. Consider the following reconstruction:

(95) Vaccines for sheep [E] [are those]?

²⁶ Though I will not argue for whether or not Default Case is a legitimate term, nominative can be established as the Default Case for Lithuanian granted if Progovac’s judgement of Serbian is correct (2006, p. 50):

- (A) Lietus! / *Lietų!
rain.NOM / rain.ACC
- (B) This is her/Auksė.
 Šita Auksė / ji / *Aukšę / *ja.
this.NOM Auksė.NOM she.NOM Aukšę.ACC her.ACC
- (C) Ji klubo prezidentė!/?
she.NOM club.GEN president.NOM

However, since Merchant’s approach is rather problematic for many other “No Case-themed” DBAs (see below), we would necessarily prefer Progovac’s approach as it explains English cases in a simpler fashion.

(96)[Being surprised of the place of assignment of a given employee.]

Him for them?

*Him for them [E] [is it/ it is]?

However, though Progovac’s root small clauses seem applicable in some cases, they lack the explanatory power to account for certain adjuncts, which we consider in the following section. Since few concrete examples of Progovac’s analysis applies to DBAs, we will remain sceptical as to whether root small clauses have any merit in this area.

3.6 Weir’s null P

3.6.1 Limits of Progovac’s analysis

Weir (2020) illustrates the lack in Progovac’s analysis by demonstrating the semantic relevance of certain modifiers:

(97) A coffee using the new machine (please).

a. $\overset{?}{=}$ [make [a coffee] [using the new machine]]

b. \neq [make [a coffee using the new machine]]

It is clear that many “verbal” modifiers can be added to the nonsentential. Consider the following examples based on Weir’s analysis:

(98)A coffee quickly!

*[A coffee [quickly]]

[A coffee] [quickly]

It is unavoidable that we interpret *quickly* as modifying an act in which *coffee* is the theme; however, there is no place in the root small clause that should allow event modifier. Thus, *quickly* seems to adjoin to a nonexistent part of Progovac’s analysis. In response, Weir (2020) postulates the following underlying structure which we will consider now.

3.6.2 The subsentential proposal

Weir (2020) outlines the small amount of structure that our DPs like *a coffee* are embedded in as headed by a head (X) within a phrase (XP). Assuming that there is such an XP, Weir (2020)

considers both VPs and PPs as candidates for the potential underlying structure. Further, he argues that there are significant issues (see below) with proposing underlying VPs:

(99) [VP] *me a coffee.

(100) *I will [VP] a coffee.

Since there is no immediate reason why a VP could not allow either DOCs, or being embedded within a TP (headed by *will* in this example), a PP seems comparatively less problematic. Now, consider the following example considered by both Merchant (2010, p. 35) and later, Weir (2020):

(101) [A parent may say the following anticipating a a kitchen catastrophe resulting from a child only using one hand when eating/drinking.]

Dvumja rukami.

two.INST hands.INST

“(With) two hands!”

Merchant argues that the instrumental case indicates the underlying verb *pol'zovat'sja* (“use”) which assigns instrumental case; however, Weir (2020), refers to independent research (see Emonds, 1987; and Režac, 2008) to argue that this may suggest an underlying preposition assigning the theta-role *instrument*. This seems plausible considering the preposition in the following example:

(102) (Su) abiem rankomis!

(with) both.INST(/DAT²⁷) hands.INST

“(With) both hands”.

Still, a verb may require such a PP; however, the Lithuanian equivalent verb *naudoti* requires accusative which cannot produce the same nonsentential:

(103)

- | | | | | |
|----|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| a. | [*Naudok] | (su) | abiem | rankomis! |
| | <i>use.IMP</i> | | <i>(with) both.INST</i> | <i>hands.INST</i> |
| b. | Naudok | abi | rankas! | |
| | <i>use.IMP</i> | <i>both.ACC</i> | <i>hands.ACC</i> | |
| c. | #[Naudok] | abi | rankas! ²⁸ | |

²⁷ Many closed class words have inseparable dative and instrumental case forms.

²⁸ The nonsentential *dvi rankas* cannot be interpreted as *(use) two hands* despite the full sentence *naudok(it) dvi rankas*. In fact, this nonsentential sounds more like the following:

(A) Dvi rankas (į viršų)!

“Two hands (in the air)!”

This fact would seem to make Merchant’s argument less likely as there is no reason to believe that Russian would allow for an underlying *use* while Lithuanian would not.

use.IMP *both.ACC* *hands.ACC*

Yet, as many verbs, there is a related verb *naudotis* that does take instrumental case:

(104)

- a. Naudokis abiem rankomis!
use.IMP *both.INST* *hands.INST*
 “Use both hands!”
- b. Naudokis (tuo) su abiem rankomis!
use.IMP *PRO* (*that.INST*) *with* *both.INST* *hands.INST*
 “Use it with both hands!”

Nonetheless, this verb cannot occur with the optional *su* without an ‘implied’ theme²⁹ that is not interpreted from the nonsentential in question (see the structural illustration below):

(105)

- a. [Naudokis [abiem rankomis]]
 b. [Naudokis [PRO/tuo]] [su abiem rankomis]

This strengthens Weir’s analysis considerably compared to Merchant’s, and by extension of such a null P, a Theme-assigning null P should not be implausible³⁰. Interestingly, (105a) would also require an underlying P head with the θ -role instrument³¹ under Weir’s analysis. However, this cannot actually be *su* since if the language user could perceive *su* subsententially in (105a), we would have to explain the interpretation in (105b) as triggered by some other factor or perceivable structure. One possibility is to ascribe the trigger to the overtness of the *su*, however, given that the entire project of sententialism is to explain nonsentential structures by ‘fully’ sentential, covert structure, I fail to see how this would constitute an unnecessarily complex explanation for (a) and (b) above. Thus, we end up with the following underlying structure for (105a):

(106) [Naudokis [[\emptyset _{instrument}] abiem rankomis]]

²⁹It may be of interest to look up ‘radical pro drop’, ‘empty pronouns’, ‘zero pronouns’ or ‘null pronouns’. Also see (Huang, 1984) for a great crosslinguistic exploration of the topic.

³⁰A sententialist approach like that of Merchant’s may want to fall back on the limited ellipsis analysis in this case, and propose that the structure is something like:

(A) [Do it] (with) both hands!

However, I suspect that this would be a rather strange analysis for a Lithuanian as there is no Lithuanian *do it* (or anything similar) that could be proposed.

³¹Though this is not necessary under Weir’s analysis (2020), it would “integrate well” with his proposal (p.20), not to mention being a natural assumption considering that his proposal is partly supported by the fact that this has been suggested (see Režac, 2008; and Emonds, 1987)

Comparably, we are justified in claiming an underlying *su* when the proposed underlying structure mirrors the interpretation of the nonsentential such as in the following cases:

(107) [A parent instructing a child how to eat.]

a. [Russian]

(S) dvumja rukami
(with) two.INST hands.INST

b. [Lithuanian]

(Su) abiem rankomis!
(with) both.INST hands.INST
 [[su] abiem rankomis]

c. [Northwestern Norwegian, Bud]³²

(Mæ) bægge hejpnå!
(with) both.DAT hands.DAT
 [[mæ] bægge hejpnå]

d. [English]

(With) both hands!
 [[with] both hands]

In extending this null P to Theme-assigning null Ps, the fact that many languages have overt Ps dominating a theme-DP may also support Weir's null P. As Weir (2020) argues, if the analysis of the instrumental case above can be accepted, then an extension to accusative cases, or themes, should not be too far of a leap. It is also not uncommon that direct objects, themes, or accusative-marked DPs may be embedded within (overt) PPs. For instance, in Hindi, and related languages, there is a postposition that functions as an accusative case marker (Seržant & Witzlack-Makarevich, 2018). Additionally, it has been argued that for certain verbs in Spanish, an optional preposition serves as an accusative marker (Brugè, 1996). Consider the following from Spanish (Brugè, 1996, s. 41) and a comparable Norwegian example:

(108) [Spanish]

Ayer vimos (a) muchos hombres.
yesterday see.PAST.1stPL (to) many men.PL
 "Yesterday, we saw many men"

(109) [Norwegian]

Ho flytta (på) vogna.

³² The dative case in this dialect is, as for many Norwegian dialects, optional and may occur with or without the preposition *mæ* (among others) but only if the context allows an interpretation that fits the relevant preposition.

she.NOM *move.PAST* *(on/at) cart.DEF*
 “She moved the cart”

Both *a* and *på* in these specific examples do not affect the interpretation of the subsequent DP as a theme³³. The following English example may be comparable:

- (110) [English]
 a. The lack of time decided [\emptyset_{theme}] my outfit today.
 b. He has to decided *on* an outfit for the party today.

These examples may at least serve as evidence that the structure Weir (2020) proposes for nonsententials may already exist for themes. Now, we will turn to some possible shortcomings of Weir’s Theme-assigning null P.

3.6.3 Case and θ -role assignment

3.6.3.1 Nominative-marked themes

The null-P that Weir (2020) postulates seems a temptingly simple and well-working solution to the problems faced in, especially, previous sententialist approaches. However, there are some aspects which still seem mysterious. Firstly, Weir (2020) briefly mentions that the Theme-assigning null P assigns accusative, which, in examples like the coffee-example, seems correct.

- (111) [out-of-the café situation]
 a. Lithuanian
 Kavą.
 coffee.ACC
 b. Russian
 *Vodu.*³⁴
 water.ACC

However, Weir also extends this to his example from Shakespeare, which, a priori, seems like a fair extension of the mechanism; however, such examples do not take accusative, but rather nominative.

³³ In Norwegian example, there may be an aspectual difference when using *på*, perhaps indicating that the action was done just a little, for a short amount of time or only once. The same alteration is possible for other movement verbs like, e.g., *løfte*, *dra*, *kaste*, *hive*, and *rulle*.

³⁴ Since *coffee* is a neuter noun in Russian, nominative and accusative are not immediately distinguishable. Therefore, we have used *water* (a feminine noun).

- (112) [The king stands on the battlefield in need of a horse and offers to swap his own kingdom in exchange for it.]
- a. My kingdom for a horse!
 - b. Mano karalystė už arkli!
my kingdom.NOM for horse.ACC

Yet, similar nonsententials may occur with the accusative case:

- (113) [The vendor giving the customer what was ordered]
- a. One coffee.
 - b. Viena kava.
one.NOM coffee.NOM
- (114) [The king stands outside the city walls having swapped his kingdom for a horse earlier requesting his kingdom returned in exchange for the same horse.]
- a. My kingdom for a horse!
 - b. Mano karalystę už arkli!
my kingdom.ACC for horse.ACC

How do we account for these nominative-marked nonsententials? Perhaps the most immediately imaginable alternative is letting Weir's null P apply to accusative-marked DP themes while falling back on Merchant's limited ellipsis analysis, which is not excluded by Weir (2020), for nominative-marked ones. This method would predict the following reconstruction to be adequate:

- (115) [Here is] one coffee.³⁵
- (116) [#Here is] my kingdom for a horse!

However, this reconstruction is not compatible with the interpretation of all relevant nonsententials. Another option, may be to reinvoke Progovac's root small clauses. However, then the following would not be plausible:

- (117) [Bill, sitting with his friends in the park, decides to trade his beer for something else and walks over to some other students. He comes back to his friends and says the following ending with pose ('ta-da') signalling that he wants some praise for his achievement.]
- a. An expensive cider for a cheap beer using nothing but my natural tradesman skills.

³⁵ Though this is a complete fine sentence, I would still question the reconstruction is semantically identical to the nonsentential. It may be slightly more specific (not necessarily redundant) because one actually understands the nonsentential more along the lines of *the order X is ready, or have been made*.

If the objection put forward by Weir (2020) is valid, that such event arguments would not adjoin to this type of root small clause, then Progovac’s analysis cannot account for these nonsententials. Another option may be to postulate another null P that assign themes nominative, rather than accusative. The structure would then be as follows:

(118) [[\emptyset _{theme/NOM}] one coffee]

Regarding the explanation for the nominative-marked nonsententials discussed here, the least implausible seems to be this last one; however, we should hold significant reservations against this method as it remains mysterious. It appears that even though a ‘Weir-style’ null P may solve many of the reconstructional impediments of earlier, ‘harder’ sententialists, exceptions like nominative-marked themes pose challenges that currently can only be resolved, at best, by a mixture with other approaches like Merchant’s limited ellipsis analysis (or with *ad hoc* extensions in response to unpredicted exceptions). Further, even if the nominative themes could be resolved without appealing to ‘scripts’, we would still need to resolve examples like the following:

(119) [Bill comes up to the librarian’s desk who in response utters the following.]
 Knygos?
book.GEN.SG
 “(Are you looking for) a book?”

Assuming the above being a goal (not a theme), we would also have to explain why some goals are marked genitive while others dative (see, e.g., section 3.4.2.2). Currently, even if we grant every benefit of doubt, sententialist approaches leave the case distribution in nonsententials unexplained. In the following subsection, we discuss this further.

3.6.3.2 Explanatory insufficiencies for null Ps

Though perhaps uncontroversial, we should acknowledge that to categorise an item as belonging to some specific thematic role(s), we must appeal to pragmatic and/or semantic information. Consider for instance the following:

(120)

a.	Kratyk	tavo	rankomis!
	<i>shake.IMP</i>	<i>your.SG</i>	<i>hand.PL.INST</i>
	“Shake/Jiggle your hands!”		
b.	Nekratyk	tavo	rankų!
	<i>NEG.shake.IMP</i>	<i>your.SG</i>	<i>hand.PL.GEN</i>
	“Don’t shake/jiggle your hands!”		

In the above, we can only agree that the word *hands* functions as a *theme* or *instrument* based on the verb *shake*, and even then, we are still left with something in between *theme* or *instrument*, if not both. However, when we do not have any verb or concrete action that can be pinned down, as in the nonsententials we have discussed here, we cannot avoid ambiguity. In Weir’s Shakespearean example, for instance, the ‘kingdom’ may be a theme, an instrument, or even a measure of the trade. Now, reconsider the coffee-example:

(121)

- a. [Giving a coffee.]
 Kava / *Kava.
 coffee.NOM coffee.ACC
- b. [Requesting a coffee.]
 Kava / *Kava.
 coffee.ACC coffee.NOM

However one proposes to explain where case was assigned from (e.g., null Ps), we cannot, currently, explain from structure alone why a nonsentential with a given case-marking is restricted from certain contexts.

4 Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have defended the claim that there has not been demonstrated sufficient evidence to propose underlying structure for nonsententials. Further, I have provided evidence against previously developed and hypothetical proposals of subsentential structure, most of which must be credited to others. A part of this thesis has been spent on what I have called DBAs which mainly illustrate unpredictably ungrammatical nonsententials even for what may be considered short answers, where reconstruction is a less contentious proposition. Even a generous view of the achievements of sententialist approaches must still acknowledge that, in some cases, there are entire clauses missing in any justifiable reconstruction. The harder elliptical approaches like Merchant’s seem to overgenerate the scope of nonsententials to such a degree that ambiguity should become a real issue. In contrast, if approaching nonsententials like Progovac, redefining what constitutes a sentence, we should be limited to a nonsentential repertoire that cannot include event arguments, which is clearly not the case. Weir’s null P, however, seemingly feasible to account for most nonsententials discussed in earlier literature, still cannot explain case distribution in nonsententials nor its limits. Therefore, we conclude that any current theory – along the lines of those discussed here – claiming or requiring ellipsis, predicts incorrect results while failing to account for the diversity of nonsententials. Thus, the claim that nonsententials have underlying syntactic structure has not met its burden of proof.

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