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Contrast and Verb Phrase Ellipsis: Triviality, Symmetry, and Competition  

This talk, based on my recent UCLA dissertation, argues that contrast is crucial to verb phrase ellipsis (VPE). The contrast requirement comes to light from studying the interaction of VPE with triviality, symmetry, and competition. In some trivial sentences (1), VPE is ungrammatical for lack of contrast. With symmetrical predicates (2), symmetry creates semantic identity that overcomes mismatching form, but can also lead to contrast failures. And in MaxElide effects (3) (Schuyler 2001, Merchant 2008), contrast (cf. Griffiths 2019) offers a more promising account for the ungrammaticality of VPE than competition from sluicing:

(1) If John is wrong, he is *(wrong).
(2) John wanted to dance with Mary, but she didn’t want to (dance with him).
(3) John should eat something, but I don’t know what (*he should).

Click here to see the colloquium program for the Spring semester

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