

No matter how thin you slice it, it's still the same ol' unconditional

Matthew Hewett, University of Pennsylvania (Joint work with Karlos Arregi) · NELS 57

All research on *ellipsis*—the phenomenon wherein linguistic material goes missing on the surface but remains interpreted—must grapple with at least the following four questions: 1. What is a possible **target for ellipsis**? 2. What is the **timing of ellipsis** vis-à-vis other grammatical operations/modules? 3. What kind of **identity condition**, if any, holds of sentences with elided material? 4. How is the content of the elided material **recovered** (i.e., how do speakers know what's missing)?

In this talk, we offer a novel perspective on answering these questions by examining ellipses in **unconditional sentences** in Spanish and English, which display unconventional properties. Such ellipses are exemplified by the *short* unconditionals in (1a) and (2a), where surface non-sentential constituents appear to go proxy for full(er) clauses; compare the *long* unconditionals in (1b) and (2b) (i.a., Culicover 1999, Gulli 2003, Quer and Vicente 2009, Arnold and Borsley 2014, Šimík 2020).

- (1) a. [Haya [lo que haya pasado]], el seguro lo cubre.
[has.SUBJ [what has.SUBJ happened]], the insurance it covers
b. [Haya pasado [lo que haya pasado]], el seguro lo cubre.
[has.SUBJ happened [what has.SUBJ happened]], the insurance it covers
'No matter what happened, the insurance covers it.'
- (2) a. No matter [what the weather], I'll be there.
b. No matter [what the weather may be], I'll be there.

We argue, for the first time, that **missing material in unconditionals is deleted by ellipsis** and that Spanish long unconditionals like (1b) involve ellipsis, despite surface appearances. Beyond demonstrating this shared elliptical core, we document numerous divergent properties of elliptical unconditionals in the two languages and argue that each uniquely informs our understanding of ellipsis.

In Spanish, unconditional clauses are biclausal, with an embedded free relative, and ellipsis in (1a) occurs in the higher clause. This ellipsis is unconventional because: (i) It looks like auxiliary-stranding VP ellipsis, which is not otherwise attested in Spanish (Saab 2022a); and (ii) Even material that survives deletion must have a matching correlate in the free relative (compare (3), which has a tense mismatch; see Quer and Vicente 2009).

- (3) *[Hubiera [lo que haya pasado]], el seguro lo {cubre / cubría}.
[has.SUBJ.PST [what has.SUBJ.PRS happened]] the insurance it {cover.PRS / cover.PST}
(intended:) 'No matter what (had) happened, the insurance {covers / covered} it.'

Ellipsis in the English short unconditional in (2a) is also unconventional: (i) Ellipsis strands a *wh*-phrase and a subject and elides T, unlike sluicing or VPE; (ii) This ellipsis is obligatory antecedentless; and (iii) The missing material must be recoverable without an antecedent.

We develop a **move-and-delete analysis** of elliptical unconditionals on which they involve TP ellipsis triggered by a feature on Fin. In Spanish, this is the familiar [E]-feature that imposes identity requirements on elided material (e.g., Merchant 2001). To explain why remnants of unconditional ellipsis are subject to identity, we make the novel claim that **ellipsis of a constituent can be undone by syntactic operations**, entailing that ellipsis is a syntactic operation (e.g., Aelbrecht 2010, Müller 2011, Saab 2022b). In English, on the other hand, unconditional ellipsis is triggered by a different type of [E]-feature that imposes no identity requirements (Stigliano 2022, 2025); such ellipsis is restricted to material that is **recoverable without an antecedent**.

In summary, we propose that ellipsis in unconditionals: 1. **targets constituents**; 2. is a **syntactic operation**; 3. can be subject to **strict (syntactic) identity** (Spanish) **or not** (English); and 4. is restricted by a **recoverability condition** distinct from identity.

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