

Russian Nominal Ellipsis: Gender Exponents and Gender (Mis)matches

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Abstract

Mismatches under ellipsis have received attention in theoretical literature, because they can inform our understanding of constraints on ellipsis, the identity condition in particular, the nature of feature (mis)matches under ellipsis, and the structure of the ellipsis site. Bearing these issues in mind, this paper investigates the status of the [GENDER] feature under nominal ellipsis (NE) in Russian (only the masculine and feminine will be considered). Two types of contexts are studied, and their differences are discussed as well: noun phrase ellipsis, NPE (as in *Mary's daughter and Jane's daughter are friends*) and predicate-nominal ellipsis, PNE (as in *Kim is a linguist and Pat is a linguist too*). As in several other Indo-European languages where gender mismatches under ellipsis have been investigated, Russian has three classes of nouns that differ with respect to ellipsis, viz., (i) no ellipsis between masculine and feminine nouns is allowed, (ii) ellipsis can occur freely between masculine and feminine nouns, with either gender in the ellipsis site, and (iii) only feminine is allowed in the ellipsis site. With the goal of expanding the empirical basis of ellipsis studies, this paper presents and analyzes the composition of each class in Russian, comparing it with the composition of the corresponding classes in other languages. Some recurrent properties can be observed, which suggests that the three classes are established on the basis of encyclopedic knowledge; at the same time, the composition of the three classes varies somewhat, as a reflection of more specific morphosyntactic properties of individual languages. With the main classes established, this paper then addresses the general conditions on NPE and PNE in Russian with a special emphasis on epicene nouns and nouns that include different suffixal exponents (in particular, the suffixes *-k-*, *-ess-*, and *-š-*, used to derive feminine nouns); the categorial status of these exponents differs across speakers, and some emerging patterns can be established. The overall results strongly support the syntactic identity condition formulated in Ranero (2020; see also Chomsky 1965), according to which the antecedent and ellipsis site must be featurally non-distinct.