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# Ineffable narratives in Spanish: Another case of overgeneration by e-GIVENness

**Abstract:** In this paper, I present a new case of overgeneration for the semantic view on identity in ellipsis. Concretely, I show that a radical version of the semantic approach to the identity condition on ellipsis, in particular, one with the notion of mutual entailment at its heart, wrongly predicts as grammatical cases of TP-ellipsis in Spanish where a (formal) present tense feature on T in the antecedent entails a (formal) past tense feature in the elliptical constituent and vice versa. However, this is not attested: present tense cannot serve as a suitable antecedent for formal past tense in TP-ellipsis contexts, regardless of pragmatic entailment. On the basis of this and other new observations in the realm of tense and ellipsis, several consequences for the theory of identity in ellipsis, on the one hand, and the proper representation of tense in natural languages, on the other, are also discussed.

**Keywords:** e-GIVENness, syntactic identity, historical present, Spanish, ellipsis

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## 1 Introduction

One of the main questions for the theory of ellipsis is whether ellipsis resolution is syntactically or semantically determined. In Merchant's (2008) words:

Two general approaches to this question have been pursued: one, that the elided XP must be syntactically (LF-structurally, in current formulations) isomorphic to an antecedent, and two, that the elided XP must be semantically equivalent to an antecedent. *Both views have weaknesses: generally, the syntactic isomorphism approach undergenerates, while the semantic identity approach overgenerates.* [Merchant 2008: 134, emphasis mine]

Here, the semantic identity approach specifically refers to the e-GIVENness theory of ellipsis. Simplifying somewhat, for a syntactic constituent C in the complement of an [E] feature, C can be elided only if there is a mutual entailment

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relation between C and some antecedent A in the linguistic (sometimes, also discursive) context. The semantics for the [E] feature is the following (see Merchant 2001 and 2004):

- (1)  $[[E]] = \lambda p: e\text{-GIVEN}(p) [p]$
- (2) An expression E counts as e-GIVEN iff E has a salient antecedent A and, modulo  $\exists$ -type shifting,
  - i. A entails F-clo(E), and
  - ii. E entails F-clo(A)
- (3) The F-closure of  $\alpha$ , written F-clo( $\alpha$ ), is the result of replacing F-marked parts of  $\alpha$  with  $\exists$ -bound variables.

The notion of *entailment* in (2) is defined in Schwarzschild's (1999) sense as a type of pragmatic entailment, where the rules underlying F-marking depends "on what the speaker *presents* as GIVEN" (Schwarzschild 1999: 151). It is this particular conception of semantic-pragmatic identity that will be under inspection here.<sup>1</sup>

As for the syntactic approach to identity, several implementations of the identity condition have been proposed either as complementary to some semantic dimension or as the main, maybe unique, aspect of the theory of identity (see Tancredi 1992, Rooth 1992, Fiengo & May 1994, Saab 2003, 2009, Merchant 2008, 2013, Chung 2006, 2013, Tanaka 2011, and Thoms 2014, among many others). For the purposes of the argument to be made here, I adopt a simple version of the syntactic identity condition, according to which antecedent and elided must be formally identical in the sense that every syntactic-semantic feature present in the elliptical constituent must have an identical feature in the antecedent in the syntax/LF.<sup>2</sup>

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**1** Other semantic approaches to semantic identity, such as Romero (1998), Elbourne (2008), or Takahashi & Fox (2005) will not be particularly discussed, although some of them could be considered as variants of Merchant's semantic-pragmatic approach (Romero 1998, for instance). Again, the main point under consideration here is whether or not the theory of ellipsis makes use of pragmatic entailment as a crucial ingredient. Of course, even laxer proposals like Culicover & Jackendoff's (2005) inferential mechanism of recoverability will face the same problems to be discussed below.

**2** The reference to syntax (or LF, I will remain neutral on this aspect) is crucial here. In a model in which morphophonology comes after syntax (e.g., Distributed Morphology) the locus of identity, syntax or PF/LF, makes crucially different predictions as far as identity effects in ellipsis are concerned. Whenever identity is abstractly defined in the syntax or LF, we can avoid the problem of the so-called partial identity effects which usually refers to morphophonological differences between the antecedent and the elliptical constituent (e.g., agreement differences).

- (4) Ellipsis: A constituent C can be elided if there is a constituent C' identical to C in the syntax/LF.

Merchant's observation on the predictive power of different conceptions on the identity condition is somewhat expected when comparing (1) and (4): *e*-GIVENness does not require formal identity to the extent that even radically different forms can feed ellipsis whenever mutual entailment is met. The opposite is not true: semantics cannot feed syntactic identity.<sup>3</sup>

As rightly pointed out by Merchant in the above quote, both approaches find empirical challenges in one or the other direction (over vs. undergeneration, as already mentioned)<sup>4</sup>, although recent research seems to favor the syntactic approach over the semantic one (see in particular Merchant 2013, for recent discussion and references, and Chung 2013 for a mixed approach).

In this paper, I present a new case of overgeneration for the semantic view on identity in ellipsis. Concretely, I show that a radical version of the semantic approach to the identity condition on ellipsis, in particular, one with the notion of *mutual entailment* at its heart, wrongly predicts as grammatical cases of TP-ellipsis in Spanish where a formal present tense feature on T in the antecedent undoubtedly entails (in the above sense) a formal past tense feature in the elliptical constituent and vice versa. However, this is not attested: present tense cannot serve as a suitable antecedent for formal past tense in TP-ellipsis contexts, regardless of mutual entailment.

On the basis of this fact, a main conclusion that I advance here is that syntactic identity not only cannot be dispensed with, as in the radical semantic

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<sup>3</sup> The semantic view finds its more radical version in the claim that ellipsis can operate even across languages (see, specially, Merchant 2004 who also quotes Stainton 1997):

(i) A: *Evales to potiraki sti tsanda?* [Greek]  
 put.PAST.2sg the cup in.the bag  
 'Did you put the cup in the bag?'  
 B: *No, I didn't.*  
 (Merchant 2004: 700, footnote 12)

However, recent works on ellipsis and code-switching by Merchant and others show that code-switching under ellipsis must obey some sort of syntactic identity (see Merchant 2014 and the references therein). The basic assumption, of course, is that identity refers to abstract morphemes in the syntax and not to actual exponents at PF, as in Saab's (2009) approach. If this assumption is made, then cases like (i) are treated on a par with other putative cases of syntactic mismatches (see Saab 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Well-known arguments against syntactic isomorphism are found in Merchant (2001). For arguments against *e*-GIVENness as originally formulated by Merchant (2001), see, in particular, Saab (2009), Hartman (2009), Tanaka (2011), Chung (2006, 2013) and Merchant (2013).

approach, but it should be regarded as a crucial ingredient of the theory of ellipsis resolution (*pace* the recent conclusion reached by Chung 2013, for whom syntactic identity, although necessary, plays a very limited role in ellipsis).

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I briefly describe TP-ellipsis in Spanish, showing that the tense node in this kind of ellipsis is part of the silent site. In Section 3, I show that a form of the historical present cannot serve as an antecedent of a formal past node, even when *e*-GIVENness seems to be respected. In section 4, on the basis of new evidence, I suggest a bound variable representation for the historical present in order to capture the entire set of data to be discussed here. As we will see, the behavior of tense under ellipsis parallels the behavior of referential and bound pronouns, a conclusion that is in consonance with Partee's (1973) classical findings. Section 5 concludes.

## 2 Spanish TP-ellipsis

I will focus on the structure of a specific kind of TP-ellipsis in Spanish, which involves at least a remnant and a polarity particle preceding the elliptical gap (see, among others, López 1999, Depiante 2004 and Saab 2009, 2010):

- (5) a. *Juan desaprobó a María pero a Ana no.*  
 Juan failed ACC María but ACC Ana not  
 'Juan failed MARÍA, but not Ana.'
- b. *Juan no desaprobó a María pero a Ana sí.*  
 Juan not failed ACC María but ACC Ana yes  
 'Juan did not fail MARÍA, but he did fail Ana.'
- c. *Juan desaprobó a María y a Ana también.*  
 Juan failed ACC María and ACC Ana too  
 'Juan failed MARÍA and Ana too.'
- d. *Juan no desaprobó a María y a Ana tampoco.*  
 Juan not failed ACC María and ACC Ana neither  
 'Juan did not fail MARÍA and Ana neither.'

Let us assume that the correct analysis for TP-ellipsis corresponds essentially to the analysis sketched in (6), where the remnant is analyzed as a clitic left dislocated constituent (see Depiante 2004, and Saab 2009, 2010):

- (6)  $[_{TopP} \text{remnant}_i \text{Top} [_{\Sigma P} \Sigma_{[E]} \{TP \dots CL_i + T \dots$

The [E] feature on  $\Sigma^0$  is the same proposed by Merchant (2001), and much subsequent work (see van Craenenbroeck & Lipták 2006 for an attempt to param-

eterize the [E] feature). A functional projection with an [E] feature triggers the deletion or non-pronunciation of its complement, which, in the case at hand, is the TP. For the time being, the main point to stress is that the category affected by ellipsis is really a TP and not, for instance, a *vP*. I will follow here the arguments given by Zagona (1988), among others.

First, as is well known, Spanish TP-ellipsis does not allow stranded auxiliaries. In this regard, compare the ungrammaticality of (7a) with the translation of the same example in English in (7b), which is fully grammatical:

- (7) a. \**Juan ha salido y Pablo ha también.*  
 b. *Juan has left and Pablo has too.*  
 (Zagona 1988: 95)

Second, as observed in Brucart (1987), Murguía (2004) and Saab (2009), Spanish TP-ellipsis does not tolerate differences in tense features between the antecedent and the elliptical gap (but see footnote 15 for a crucial refinement):

- (8) \**En el pasado, María ha leído mucho y Elena en el futuro ~~habrá~~ ~~leído~~ ~~mucho~~ también.*  
 in the past María has read a-lot and Elena in the future will-have read a-lot also  
 ‘María has read a lot in the past and Elena in the future will have too.’  
 (adapted from Murguía 2004: 86)

These two facts follow straightforwardly if the category affected by ellipsis in Spanish is at least TP as in (6) and not *vP*.

Now, the semantic and the syntactic approaches to ellipsis differ in how the identity of the complement is calculated. As an illustration, consider a simple sentence like (9):

- (9) [*Yo*]<sub>F</sub> [*TP* *fui al cine*] y [*María*]<sub>F</sub> *también* [*TP* *fue al cine*].  
 I went to.the cinema and M. also went to.the cinema

As for the mutual entailment approach, it is easy to see that the antecedent A entails E and vice versa once the F-marked parts both in the antecedent and in the second conjunct are replaced with  $\exists$ -bound variables (*modulo* agreement values).

- (10) A:  $\exists x$  [*x fui al cine*]  
 E:  $\exists x$  [*x fue al cine*]

In (10), A entails E and E entails A and, as a consequence, E is subject to deletion at PF. As for the syntactic approach, let us assume that the complement of [E] has to match all the syntactic and semantic features present in the antecedent, including the value of lexical Roots (*modulo* inflectional agreement and other morphophonological properties; see footnote 2). Other LF conditions (e.g., parallelism and accommodation, as in Fox 2000, for instance) may also play a role in this conception of the identity condition. At any rate, in the case at hand, both the antecedent and the elided constituent are formally identical under any approach to the identity condition on ellipsis.

Let us return for a moment to the example in (8). How is tense calculated for the purpose of ellipsis in this particular case? On an *e*-GIVENness based approach, it seems necessary to assume that formal tense has to be given regardless of the temporal adjuncts in the left periphery of each conjunct (a controversial assumption, perhaps). Under this assumption, (8) is correctly ruled out because [[perfect past]] does not entail [[perfect future]] and vice versa. On the other hand, under the syntactic approach, (8) is trivially derived as a failure on the identity condition (i.e., [perfect past] ≠ [perfect future]). Since both approaches may explain in some way the attested pattern, cases like these do not allow us to evaluate the theories in competition. Let us then examine how each approach fare with respect to a novel type of data in the domain of tense and ellipsis.

### 3 Ineffable narratives under ellipsis

A good case to explore the consequences of the two approaches to identity in the domain of tense is the historical present in Spanish, which entails – in the sense of entailment we have already discussed – a past meaning once the proper contextual conditions are met. Consider, for instance, the narrative in (11), with a present form, whose rendition with a past form is given in (12):

- (11) *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando una*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.I drinking a  
*cervecita en el bar y entonces veo a mi mujer*  
 beer in the bar and then see.I ACC my wife  
*besándose con mi mejor amigo.*  
 kissing with my best friend

‘Guess what happened to me yesterday! I am drinking a beer in the bar and then I see my wife kissing my best friend.’

- (12) *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estaba tomando una*  
 guess what me happened yesterday was.I drinking a  
*cervecita en el bar y entonces vi a mi mujer*  
 beer in the bar and then saw.I ACC my wife  
*besándose con mi mejor amigo.*  
 kissing with my best friend  
 ‘Guess what happened to me yesterday! I was drinking a beer in the bar and  
 then I saw my wife kissing my best friend.’

The so-called historical present has been in the focus of different disciplines from narratology to sociolinguistics (see Fludernik 2012 for a recent overview). Here I will be concerned only with oral narratives typically attested in everyday conversations and not with written texts (literary or not). I assume that – although related – oral and written narratives might be distinguished at least in functional terms (see Wolfson 1978 for a first approach to the problem and Fludernik 1991 for an important reconsideration). Oral narratives have been a prominent area of study in sociolinguistics at least since Labov & Waletzky (1967) and Labov (1972). Among other aspects, the debate centers on: (i) the structural organization of narratives in general, and (ii) the function of the verbal forms in such structures. With respect to (i), the consensus is that narratives are structured in a set of well-distinguished subparts in which verbal meanings combines in complex ways with (con)textual properties to produce different narrative effects. As for (ii), and only with reference to the historical present, the debate is whether or not the classic view on the historical present as a subjective way of evaluating facts in the past (by rendering them more vivid) is correct. Thus, in his studies on the use of the historical present in narratives, Wolfson (1978, 1979) challenged the classical view by pointing out that the historical present does not have a meaning by itself: what actually matters is the shifting between formal past tenses and historical uses of the present. According to him, the function that this tense shifting performs is basically to separate one event from another. However, Wolfson’s approach has been questioned by Schiffrin (1981) on the basis of English narratives and, also, by Silva-Corvalán (1983) on the basis of Spanish corpora. In this respect, studies from narratology have contributed to this debate by drawing a more complex picture of the structure and function of narratives, in general, and the historical present, in particular (among many others, see Fleischman 1985, 1990 and Fludernik 1991, 1992 and the references therein). Here, I will adopt the gist of Fludernik’s (1991) characterization of narratives in terms of a double tier structure (a plotline and an off-plotline schema, as explained in footnote 6 and below).

In generative grammar, the historical present has received little attention. An important exception is Kiparsky (1968), who proposes a syntactic transformational approach for this particular use of the present in early Indo-European languages. His basic claim is that in such languages the historical present is just a syntactically past tense which is transformed into present by a rule of conjunction reduction. Nevertheless, Kiparsky rejected the transformational analysis for modern Indo-European languages on the basis of the different patterns of distribution in each type of languages. My findings in this paper corroborate Kiparsky's claim on modern Indo-European languages; concretely, although the entire set of new empirical observations to be made here asks for a syntactic analysis of the historical present, such an analysis is incompatible with an underlying representation of a [past] feature for this special use of the present.<sup>5</sup> I postpone the discussion of this alternative analysis until Section 4.

Finally, other important observations and analysis of the historical present in the generative tradition are Hornstein (1990), Nunes (1994) and, recently, Schlenker (2004). However, these analyses are more semantically-based with little reference to the underlying syntax of the historical present.

At any rate, the fact that in (11) the speaker presents the past meaning as given is out of debate in each of the (sub)-disciplines briefly mentioned above. This follows in part from the substitutability assumption. In Wolfson's (1979) words: "HP [historical present] contrasts with other uses of the present in narrative by virtue of substitutability with the past tense." (Wolfson 1979: 172)

This stylistic operation of substitution can be done to the extent that a temporal anchor is present in the discourse, among other relevant conditions. In the case in (11), the temporal adverb *ayer* 'yesterday' performs this anchoring function. Regardless of the fact that stylistic substitution is functionally restricted within the narrative (see, among others, Schiffrin 1981), substitution in whatever direction (from past to present or vice versa) does not affect the truth conditions of the underlying propositions in any relevant sense. Crucially, it also does not affect GIVENness in Schwarzschild's (1999) sense, either.

Now, notice that in (11) the hearer has the option of interrupting the discourse of the speaker but only if the answer is in the formal past, not in the historical present form, a fact not previously noted, as far as I know:

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<sup>5</sup> Kiparsky's (1968) analysis makes different predictions for early Indo-European languages, but this is, obviously, hard to test. Yet, an allomorphic analysis for some uses of the historical present in other modern languages could be proven correct, in which case the relevant experiments could be constructed.



- (13) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando una*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.I drinking a  
*cervecita en el bar ...*  
 beer in the bar  
 ‘Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar ...’
- B: *¡Qué casualidad! Ayer yo también estaba tomando*  
 what coincidence yesterday I also was drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar.*  
 a beer in the bar  
 ‘What a coincidence! Yesterday, I was also drinking a beer in the bar.’
- B’: *¡Qué casualidad! #Ayer yo también estoy tomando*  
 what coincidence yesterday I also am drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar.*  
 a beer in the bar  
 ‘#What a coincidence! Yesterday, I am also drinking a beer in the bar.’

It seems that pragmatic restrictions prevent the reintroduction of the historical present into the hearer’s discourse. As noticed by an anonymous reviewer, the restriction seems to bear on the distinction between 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person. However, this is not generally the case. Consider, for instance, the following example, which shows that changing the 1<sup>st</sup> person for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in a context similar to (13) makes no difference.

- (14) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando una*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.I drinking a  
*cervecita en el bar ...*  
 beer in the bar  
 ‘Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar ...’
- B: *¡Qué casualidad! Ayer Juan también estaba tomando*  
 what coincidence yesterday J. also was drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar.*  
 a beer in the bar  
 ‘What a coincidence! Yesterday, Juan was also drinking a beer in the bar.’
- B’: *¡Qué casualidad! #Ayer Juan también está tomando*  
 what coincidence yesterday J. also is drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar.*  
 a beer in the bar  
 ‘#What a coincidence! Yesterday, Juan is also drinking a beer in the bar.’

Consider now the opposite situation, where the hearer has the option of using the first person in an historical present discourse whenever the speaker first introduced the hearer as a character of his own narrative.

- (15) A: *Ayer, vos entrás y apagás la luz en medio de*  
 yesterday you enter and turn.off the light in middle of  
*la fiesta. ¡Estabas tan borracho!*  
 the party. were.you so drunk  
 ‘Yesterday, you enter and turn off the light in the middle of the party. You were so drunk!’
- B: *No, yo no apago la luz. ¡Y no estaba borracho!*  
 no I not turn.off the light and not was.I drunk  
 ‘No, I do not turn off the light. And I was not drunk!’

The difference between sequences like (13B’) and sequences like (15B) seems to be that those examples in which the hearer is allowed to use the historical present are cases where there is some sort of continuation or correction of the speaker original discourse. What the hearer cannot do is use the historical present to introduce a new narrative, which includes, for instance, new characters and situations.

This restriction can be captured under the double tier structure of narratives proposed by Fludernik (1991, 1992), according to which the historical present can only occur within the plotline of the narrative, but not within the different types of off-plotline that are abundantly attested in conversational narratives.<sup>6</sup> Clearly,

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6 In Fludernik’s own words:

What I will call the *plotline* includes the following elements: the initial abstract and orientation sections; the *incipit* (the clause defining the onset of action by means of a temporal specifier: *one day, on Monday* etc.); the narrative clauses which are temporally ordered as well as high-tone background units within the complicating action span [...]; and the sections entitled *resolution, final evaluation, and coda*. *Off-plotline* are all parenthetical remarks – clearly marked off by pauses, lower volume and pitch as well as by increased or slow-down tempo. The off-plotline basically includes two kinds of elements – embedded orientation and commentary.

[Fludernik 1991: 370, her emphasis]

Fludernik’s examples only refer to situations in which both the plotline and the off-plotline correspond to a unique speaker. The type of examples we are exploring here, instead, supposes that the hearer can contribute to both tiers in different ways.

the interruption made by the hearer in (13B') is not part of the plotline of the speaker's discourse and, consequently, the present form has to be analyzed as indicating regular present tense, but this is impossible because of the presence of the adverb *ayer* 'yesterday'. Indeed, if such a past adverb were absent in (13B'), then the present interpretation would be perfectly possible (although unnatural in this case in particular because of the presence of the locative adjunct). Therefore, the novel fact noticed with respect to (13) provides additional evidence for Fludernik's approach, summarized in the following passage:

*The distinction between plotline and off-plotline levels of oral narrative correlates with tense usage. In the off-plotline sections, that is to say in embedded orientation and commentary, the tenses relates deictically to the narrators's [sic] present moment of discourse. The present tense refers to the present, even in the embedded orientation, when there is an explanation of some general states of affairs which may still be valid at the time of the telling [...]*  
[Fludernink 1991: 373, emphasis mine]

At any rate, whatever the ultimate explanation of the pragmatic restriction at work in (13B') is, it allows us to control an experiment for testing the mutual entailment theory of ellipsis. What this approach to ellipsis predicts is that an elliptical answer to the speaker discourse should be fine even if the antecedent is in the historical present and the elided constituent contains a verb in the formal past, because there is mutual entailment between them. However, this prediction is not borne out:

- (16) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.1sg drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar ...*  
 a beer in the bar  
 'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar ...'
- B: *¡Qué casualidad! Yo también ~~\*estaba/#estoy tomando~~ una*  
 what coincidence I also was/am drinking a  
*cervecita en el bar.*  
 beer in the bar  
 '#What a coincidence! Me too.'

Notice that the answer is fine if the antecedent is in the formal past:

- (17) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estaba tomando*  
 guess what me happened yesterday was.I drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar ...*  
 a beer in the bar  
 ‘Guess what happened to me yesterday. I was drinking a beer in the bar ...’
- B: *¡Qué casualidad! Yo también estaba ~~tomando~~ una*  
 what coincidence I also was drinking a  
*cervecita ~~en el bar~~.*  
 beer in the bar  
 ‘What a coincidence! Me too.’

As already noticed, there is no ban against a narrative serving as suitable antecedent *per se*. In this respect, consider the following fragment:

- (18) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando una*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.I drinking a  
*cervecita en el bar y de repente [<sub>IP</sub> aparece cierta*  
 beer in the bar and suddenly appears certain  
*persona que conocés].*  
 person that know.you  
 ‘Guess what happened to me yesterday! I am drinking a beer at the bar and suddenly certain person you know appears.’

The boldfaced IP may be a suitable antecedent for a sluicing fragment like (19B) below. Notice that in this case a non-elliptical answer can be given using the present tense as a narrative (19B’). This indicates that the pragmatic restriction previously discussed is not at play; i.e., the hearer’s question is about an episode of the plotline. Of course, a full answer in the formal past is also felicitous here (19B’), although it cannot be a target for deletion, as it would violate the syntactic identity condition on ellipsis:<sup>7</sup>

7 As noticed by an anonymous reviewer, the pragmatic condition that blocks the reintroduction of the historical present in (13B’) is not operative in contexts of coordination. The reviewer provides the following data, where, as expected, ellipsis is possible in (ib).

- (i) a. *Oye, ayer salgo del bar y veo que Luis está fumando ...*  
 listen yesterday leave of.the bar and see that L. is smoking  
*y que su novia también está fumando! Yo creía que lo*  
 and that his girlfriend also is smoking I believe that it  
*habían dejado!*  
 had left  
 ‘Listen, yesterday I leave the bar and see that Luis is smoking ... and that his girlfriend is also smoking. I believed that they had stopped smoking!’

- (19) B: *¿Quién aparece?*  
 who appears  
 B': *¿Quién aparece?*  
 who appears  
 B'': *¿Quién apareció?*  
 who appeared

Thus, the novel data presented in this paper favor the syntactic approach to ellipsis resolution. A mutual entailment-based theory predicts that the answer (16B) should have an elliptical alternative because “yesterday *x* **is** drinking a beer” entails “yesterday *y* **was** drinking a beer” and vice versa. As for the syntactic approach, (16B) is odd for exactly the same reason as (13B') is odd. Under this view, (13B) – the case where the tense node in the elliptical gap is formally different to its correlate in the antecedent – cannot be a suitable target for deletion because of the identity condition on ellipsis. (13B') can, but then the pragmatic restriction on narrative just presented applies. Thus, the syntactic approach rightly predicts this case of grammatical ineffability.

I do not see how the mutual-entailment condition on ellipsis can deal with this issue without losing one of its fundamental premises: that something may count as *given* from information contextually salient in the discourse. Notice that pragmatic entailment is the crucial notion here. For a purely LF-approach to ellipsis, where ellipsis resolution takes place on pure LF structures, one can get the right result trivially: the denotation of [[past]] is different from [[present]], even if [[present]] is semantically vacuous (von Stechow & Heim 2002) or a variable, as I will propose in section 4.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, a LF approach is extensionally equivalent to the syntactic approach at least in this respect.<sup>9</sup> For the pragmatic approach, instead, ellipsis resolution takes place on pragmatic structures. In the case at hand, identity should be calculated after present is translated into past by some rule of

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- b. *Oye, ayer salgo del bar y veo que Luis está fumando ...*  
 listen yesterday leave of.the bar and see that L. is smoking  
*y que su novia también! Yo creía que lo habían dejado!*  
 and that his girlfriend also I believe that it had left  
 'Listen, yesterday I leave the bar and see that Luis is smoking ... and that his girlfriend is too. I believed that they had stopped smoking!'

As shown in the main text, these examples respect Fludernik's (1991) observation that the historical present is part of the plotline of the narrative.

**8** As already noticed, each of these analyses could not be distinguished if the historical present were an allomorph of a [past] tense morpheme, as in Kiparsky (1968) for early Indo-European.

**9** This follows only if there is indeed a difference between LF and narrow syntax in the first place.

narratives (see Hornstein 1990 and, specially, Nunes 1994 for concrete implementations). Whenever [[present]] (or a variable) is converted into past by the presence of some anchor like *yesterday* mutual entailment with a formal past form is automatically triggered. Of course, additional assumptions could be made in order to avoid mutual entailment in this case, although it should be noticed that the ineffable narrative problem is even more severe for the mutual entailment approach than other arguments against it, such as, for instance, the impossibility of some voice mismatches under ellipsis (see, in particular, Merchant 2013). Indeed, at least for some well-known voice alternation phenomena (active-passive, for instance), truth conditions can vary in one or another form (see Merchant 2001). But the past-historical present shift, as already observed, cannot alter the truth conditions of the underlying propositions in any relevant sense. At any rate, I will leave the task of implementing and defending such additional assumptions to the proponents of the mutual entailment theory, which is where the burden of the proof is.

## 4 Morphological effects in the historical present

Before concluding, I would like to stress that the new phenomenon discussed here is by no means restricted to some particularity of the grammar of Spanish. In languages with *vP* and *TP*-ellipsis such as English, for instance, an interesting contrast is found, which strongly corroborates the findings of this paper: ineffable narratives are only attested in contexts of *TP*-ellipsis.<sup>10</sup> I will illustrate this with a dialect of English, Glasgow Scots. In addition to displaying the contrast between *TP*- and *vP* ellipsis, this dialect also has a specific morphological marking for historical present, which is [-s] for any person of the verbal paradigm.<sup>11</sup>

- (20) *So a goes up the shoaps tae get some beer ...*  
 so I go-s to the shop to get some beer  
 ‘So I go to the shop to get some beer ...’

<sup>10</sup> Thanks to David Embick and Gary Thoms for pointing out this contrast to me.

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Gary Thoms for the courtesy of the Glasgow Scots data and extensive discussion.

The fact that the historical present has a special morphological realization indicates that it cannot be reduced to purely semantic-pragmatic factors and that there is, indeed, some syntactic dimension of the phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the same pragmatic constraint operative in Spanish (see the previous section) seems to be at play in the historical present of Glasgow Scots, as well:

- (21) A: *Ye widnae believe wit happened tae me yesterday!*  
 you wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday  
*So a goes up the shoaps ...*  
 so I go-s to the shop  
 'You wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday! So I go to the shop ...'
- B: *#A goes up there yesterday anaw! Didnae see ye there*  
 I go-s to there yesterday as.well didn't see you there  
*mind ....*  
 though  
 'I go there yesterday as well! Didn't see you there though.'

In exactly this same context, stripping – a case of TP-ellipsis – is also ineffable, as shown in (22) below. And this is so for the two reasons adduced for Spanish, namely: (i) because of the syntactic identity condition on ellipsis (if the elliptical T were [past]), and (ii) because of the pragmatic restriction discussed in the previous section (if the elliptical T were historical present).

- (22) A: *Ye widnae believe wit happened tae me yesterday!*  
 you wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday  
*So a goes up the shoaps ...*  
 so I go-s to the shop  
 'You wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday! So I go to the shop ...'
- B: *#Me tae!*  
 'Me too!'

Like in Spanish, if A is in the simple past, as in (23A), stripping is fine, as expected:

<sup>12</sup> Similar observations were made with respect to some American dialects of English, where the historical present can be realized as a zero morpheme in the third person (see Fludernik 1991: 374 for examples and references).

- (23) A: *Ye widnae believe wit happened tae me yesterday!*  
 you wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday  
*So a went up the shoaps ...*  
 so I went to the shop  
 'You wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday! So I went to the shop ...'  
 B: *Me tae!*  
 'Me too!'

By contrast, in vP-ellipsis contexts, where a  $T_{[past]}$  node can be left stranded, the output is grammatical. Compare (22) and (24):

- (24) A: *Ye widnae believe wit happened tae me yesterday!*  
 you wouldn't believe what happened to me yesterday  
*So a goes up the shoaps ...*  
 so I go-s to the shop  
 B: *So did a!*  
 'So did I' (preferred version, Gary Thoms p.c.)  
 B': *Tam did anaw!*  
 'Tam did as well!'

The contrast between (22) and (24) strongly suggests that the problem is to be found in the calculus of the T node. The fact that this dialect of English makes use of a special form for the historical present could be taken as an indication that the feature specification for the tense node is different from the present morpheme. If this is correct, an additional prediction arises, namely: we would not expect that a historical present can serve as an antecedent for a normal present and vice versa. This is correct for cases like (16B), repeated below as (25), where the interpretation that the hearer is drinking a beer at the point of the speech act is very unnatural.

- (25) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.1sg drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar ...*  
 a beer in the bar  
 'Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar ...'  
 B: *¡Qué casualidad! #Yo también ~~estoy~~ ~~tomando~~ una*  
 what coincidence I also was/am drinking a  
*cervecita ~~en el bar~~.*  
 beer in the bar  
 '#What a coincidence! Me too.'  
*Intended meaning:* Now, I am also drinking a beer ...



This is a welcome conclusion for the radical syntactic approach to the identity condition, because if the feature content of the historical and the normal present were the same, then we would predict that the historical present would indeed be a legitimate antecedent for a deictic, elliptical form of the present. The fact that this does not hold true conforms to the general observation that syncretism cannot rescue strict identity effect, under the assumption that identity is not a PF condition, but a syntactic/LF one (see Saab 2009 for more discussion about the relation between syncretism and ellipsis).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in addition to confirming that the contrast found in (16) and (17) is not some idiosyncrasy of the

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**13** Similar considerations about the syncretism problem can be made with the so-called *imperfecto de fantasía* ['fantasy imperfect'] in Spanish, a special use of the *pretérito imperfecto* 'imperfect past' particularly attested in children games, when it comes to the creation of alternative worlds. So in a context in which two children are playing to be special characters in a possible world, the following dialogue is allowed:

- (i) A: *¿Jugamos a que yo era un ladrón de bancos?*  
 play.we to that I was.IMP a robber of banks  
 'Let's pretend that I am a bank robber.'  
 B: *¡Sí! Y yo también era un ladrón de bancos.*  
 yes and I also was.IMP a robber of banks  
 'Yeah! And I also am a bank robber.'

One property of the fantasy imperfect is that the hearer must be part of the alternative world which is being created. In other words, this is a social game in which the plotline is produced in an interactive fashion by the participants of the speech act. For this reason, the hearer can answer with the imperfect as in (iB). This resembles the cases analyzed in the main text with respect to legitimate answers in the historical present (see, for instance, (15B) and (19B')). Of course, like the example in (19B), TP-ellipsis is fully grammatical, as expected:

- (ii) B': *¡Sí! Y yo también era un ladrón de bancos.*  
 yes and I also was.IMP a robber of banks  
 'Yeah! And me too.'

What is impossible is a case in which this special use of the imperfect is a legitimate antecedent for a temporal use of the imperfect. Consider the following scenario:

- (iii) A: *¿Jugamos a que éramos ladrones de bancos?*  
 play.we to that were.IMP robbers of banks  
 'Let's pretend that we are bank robbers!'  
 B: *No, mejor no, mi papá también era ladrón de bancos antes. Mejor juguemos a otra cosa.*  
 no better not my dad also was robber of banks before better  
 play.we to another thing  
 'No, we better not, my dad was a bank robber before. Let's play another thing!'

Here, the hearer ends the game by introducing a temporal use of the imperfect. Even when it seems to be some pragmatic deviation here, maybe related to the use of *también* (the sentence is perfect without it), TP-ellipsis is strongly ungrammatical in the same context:

grammar of Spanish, the Glasgow Scots facts briefly discussed here can also be considered as independent evidence for the claim that the historical present and the deictic present should be represented in a different way in the syntax.

The obvious next question is how to represent such a difference between the present and the historical present in the syntax. Evidently, the postulation of a [historical present] feature would be a mere stipulation. A more promising alternative would be to assume that the historical present is represented as an empty T node, which is interpreted as a variable bound by an operator in the left periphery of the clause, whereas both the deictic past and the deictic present are represented by specified tense nodes ( $T_{[past]}$  and  $T_{[present]}$ , respectively), whose interpretation is determined at LF by mechanisms similar to those applying to referential pronouns in general. In other words, the tense node would parallel the behavior of pronouns in general (Partee 1973). If this is correct, a simplified syntactic representation for the antecedent in (16A) and the elliptical site in (16B) (repeated below in (26A) and (26B), respectively) under the impossible deictic past and deictic present readings should be as shown in (27):

- (26) A: *¡Adiviná qué me pasó ayer! Estoy tomando*  
 guess what me happened yesterday am.1sg drinking  
*una cervecita en el bar ...*  
 a beer in the bar  
 ‘Guess what happened to me yesterday. I am drinking a beer in the bar ...’  
 B: *¡Qué casualidad! \*Yo también.*  
 what coincidence I too

- (27) A:  $OP_x [_{TP} T_x \text{ tomando una cervecita en el bar ...}]$   
 B: \*  $[_{TP} T_{[past]/[present]} \text{ tomando una cervecita en el bar ...}]$

Under this representation the syntactic approach to the identity condition correctly rules out this case as a failure of syntactic identity, given that an

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- (iv) B': *\*No, mejor no, mi papá también era un ladrón de bancos*  
 no better not my dad also was a robber of banks  
 ‘No, we better not, my dad also was a bank robber.’

The fact that (ivB') is even worse than (16B) is explained because in the former there is no entailment about both discourses taking place in the same reference time. Evidently, this directly follows from a purely semantic approach to ellipsis. For the syntactic approach to correctly rule out (ivB'), it has to be the case that the syntactic content of both tense nodes in (iiiA) and in (iiiB) were different, a plausible assumption if this is an instance of syncretism (i.e., different semantic-syntactic representations for the same form). Thanks to Pablo Zdrojewski for specific discussion on this point.

unspecified tense node cannot be a suitable antecedent for a specified one.<sup>14</sup> Of course, this hypothesis would require further evidence in the domain of tense under ellipsis. I will leave further inquiry into this aspect for future work.<sup>15</sup>

14 Interestingly, if this representation were correct, it would fall under Thoms's (2014) observation:

- (i) *A variable cannot provide an antecedent for ellipsis of a nonvariable.*  
[Thoms 2014: 16]

More importantly, the representation in (27) would be fully compatible with weaker versions of the identity condition on ellipsis. In particular, this analysis fits very well with the proposal in Thoms (2014), according to which if syntactic identity is not satisfied between a given antecedent and a given potential elliptical phrase, then accommodation of a such an antecedent can be done by the substitution of an unspecified feature for a specified one (among other well-defined structural operations; see Katzir 2007 and Fox & Katzir 2011, for a formal approach to alternatives in the domain of scalar implicatures and association with focus, and Thoms 2014 for its extension to ellipsis phenomena). Crucially, substitution of a nonvariable for a variable is not allowed in Thoms's system. With reference to the relation between the antecedent and the elided phrases in (27), it is clear that this analysis correctly rules out (27B): the variable in (27B) cannot be changed for a nonvariable like a [past] feature which, otherwise, would satisfy identity.

15 In this respect, the behavior of habitual sentences which, unlike episodic sentences (see the example in (8)), seem to allow tense mismatches under ellipsis could be a relevant domain to explore. Consider the following examples:

- (i) a. *¡Qué feliz coincidencia! Antes mi padre trabajaba acá y ahora*  
what happy coincidence before my father worked.IMP here and now  
*yo también* [<sub>TP</sub> *trabajo*—*acá*].  
I also work.PRES.I here  
'What a nice coincidence! My father worked here before and now I do, too.'
- b. *¡Qué feliz coincidencia! Hoy en día yo trabajo acá y antes mi*  
what happy coincidence nowadays I work.PRES.I here and before my  
*padre también* [<sub>TP</sub> *trabajaba*—*acá*].  
father also worked—here  
'What a nice coincidence! Nowadays, I work here and before my father used to, as well.'

As is well-known, most analyses of generic/habitual sentences postulate the presence of some sort of habitual operator (see Krifka et al. 1995 for a detailed overview and a proposal, and Boneh & Doron 2008, 2010 for a recent analysis and references). The proper implementation of this approach is a matter of current debate and, of course, the consequences of such a debate for the theory of identity in ellipsis are crucial. For the radical syntactic approach, it has to be the case that the tense node in habitual and generic sentences is represented as a syntactic variable without feature content. Under this view, the forms realizing the imperfect and the present in the above sentences are dissociated forms (in Embick & Noyer's 2001 sense) occurring only at morphology. This would amount to deriving these cases in a similar way to well-known cases of agreement mismatches in pronominal binding environments:

- (iii) *I turned in my assignment, but most of the other students didn't [turn in their assignment].*  
(Fiengo & May 1994: 218)

## 5 Conclusion

As it stands, the problem of grammatical ineffability in narratives constitutes a novel challenge for the mutual entailment approach to the identity condition on ellipsis. By the same token, it seems that syntactic identity (even if calculated at LF, assuming the syntax/LF division makes any sense in the first place) is much more than a very limited ingredient of the theory of ellipsis (*pace* Chung 2013). An additional consequence of this paper is related to the analysis of the historical present. If my findings are confirmed, then the historical present has to have a particular abstract syntax, which should be distinguished from other uses of the same form. Concretely, I have suggested a bound variable analysis for this particular instance of the present form. Ultimately, if correct, the facts under consideration here would constitute another piece of evidence in favor of the tense/pronoun symmetry (Partee 1973).

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An interesting consequence of the suggestion made here for habituals is that, if correct, it directly predicts why the historical present is incompatible with habitual uses of the present tense.

- (iv) *\*En el pasado, yo suelo fumar un cigarrillo después de la cena.*  
 in the past I use to.smoke a cigarette after of the dinner  
 ‘\*In the past, I smoke a cigarette after dinner.’

A formal past tense with a habitual reading is, of course, perfectly natural in the same context:

- (v) *En el pasado, yo solía fumar un cigarrillo después de la cena.*  
 in the past I used to.smoke a cigarette after of the dinner  
 ‘In the past, I used to smoke a cigarette after dinner.’

The ungrammaticality of (iv) is explained under the bound variable analysis of the historical present: the fact that this use of the present seems to be restricted to episodic readings follows as a problem of overlapping among operators, namely, the same variable cannot be bound by two operators at the same time.

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