Classification of the elliptical sentences in the question-answer dialogue unity in modern English language communication

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Abstract. The article provides an arrangement of different points of view of Russian and foreign linguists on the versatile issue of ellipsis and elliptical sentences. It shows how these constructions are described within the formal-grammatical, textual, stylistic, logical, comparative and communicative approaches; and the correlation between ellipsis and syntactic anaphoric zero qualification is given. The second part of the article is devoted to the statistics of different types of elliptical sentences based on the established basic models of elliptical sentences in question-and-answer dialogue unities of the modern English language communication. The author identifies five structural models of elliptical sentences in the question-answer dialogical unity of the modern English language. They are: one-member elliptical interrogative and answer sentences with noun, pronoun, adjective and adverb as a key component; one-member elliptical sentences with functional parts of speech as a key component: an elliptical question presented by question words, conjunctions; and elliptical answers in the form of conjunctions, interjections, prepositions. Then come one-member elliptical answer yes-and no-sentences; two-member elliptical general and special questions with direct word order; two-member elliptical answer sentences with the incomplete structure of the predicate and also two-member elliptical interrogative and answer sentences with represented members.

1 Introduction

Usually, the oral form of communication in modern world is carried out in a dialogical form. Structural-semantic coupling of two replicas in the dialogue forms a minimal communicative unit — dialogical unity (DU). Question-answer DU is the most common type of syntactic structure that encourages the development of any dialogue. One of the varieties of dialogical unity is the question-answer dialogue unity with the elliptical sentence represented in the question, in the answer or in the question and the answer at the same time.

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2 Materials and Methods

The material of the study was the morphological expression of elliptic sentences in binary question-answer dialogue units in modern English. In this research paper the following methods were used:

- the method of continuous sampling,
- statistical analysis of selected units,
- their classification,
- generalization of the properties identified during the analysis,
- comparison and description of the results obtained.

3 Results

Much attention is being paid to the elliptical sentence in linguistics as a specific phenomenon of modern world communication. Up to now in linguistics there is not a single unified point of view on the essence of these sentences and as E.A.Romanenko underlines “the elliptical sentences classifications are often not clearly defined and contradictory” [1]. Each branch in linguistics did not ignore ellipsis but considered it from its own position. In accordance with the formal grammatical approach elliptical sentences were considered as structures in which one or some members of the sentence, conforming to the scheme of the standard two-member English sentence, were omitted. Sometimes foreign and Russian grammarians view ellipsis as zero anaphora: “within structural approaches, two tacks can be discerned: the null anaphora approach and ‘deletion’. The latter ranges from the traditional formulation of a deletion transformation …to more recent proposals. According to this approach, the syntax of an ellipsis is in general just the same as the syntax of its nonelliptical counterpart, but subject to some kind of operation or constraint which induces no pronunciation” [2]. Prof. M.Y. Blokh also writes that “the textual zeroing of the subject–pronoun may be likened to the textual zeroing of different constituents of classical analytical verb forms” [3].

Ellipsis was also treated as a complicate and heterogeneous speech process in psycholinguistics. Seagal K. speaks about the synchronical study of ellipsis [4]. And he underlines that “the synchronical study of ellipsis, on the one hand, makes the evidence that the turn to the process and to the elements of process modeling is not alien to modern linguistics, and, on the other hand, the acknowledged actions with these or those speech structures are reflected to different degrees in the processes” [5].

In text linguistics the elliptical sentences are described as the separate syntactic constructions that receive functional status due to the context and extralinguistic support. These reduced language structures are being studied in different styles: newspaper style, belles-lettres style, etc. Newspapers with ellipsis in their headings are popular with the readers and possess the greater chance of being read. A.B. Salame, K.M Amirhanova write that “among the most frequent type of ellipsis in newspaper headings is the omission of the article, then the omission of the verb “to be”;…. the omission of the sentence subject does not take place so often” [6]. The ways to translate elliptical headings in newspapers is being studied in the theory of translation too. “There are no ready-made algorithms to translate these structures from English into Russian”, writes A. O.Ysupova [7]. In the belles-lettres style the elliptical sentences are being studied as the personal features in the creative work of this or that author [8]. I.V. Kamagina also provides the difference between ellipsis, zero language signs, implicitness constructions and zeugma (on the material of the Russian language): “in the elliptical sentences the verb predicate is usually missing while in the sentences with syntactical zero the missing parts are the linking verbs….When making explicit the sentences with implicitness there is a possibility of double semantic
representation of the syntactical units while in the elliptical sentences it is absent”. She attempts to distinguish these linguistic phenomena based both on existing and newly found mechanisms [9].

The elliptical sentences correlation statistics in different language styles is shown in the work of Ibrayeva D. A. who writes that the elliptical sentence “despite structural incompleteness and external difference, possesses semantic completeness, language full value and is actively used in speech”. She calculated that ellipsis in speech comprises 33%, in belles-lettres literature-28%, in the complex sentences- 4%, in two member sentences-6%, in one member sentence -10% [10].

Being universal linguistic phenomenon for many world languages elliptical sentences are widely studied in the comparative linguistics. I.I.Bass writes that ellipsis is one of the main features of the Japanese language from the ancient times and investigates it in business and belles-lettres styles; she analyses the reduced forms of the hieroglyphs, the group ellipsis and elliptical chains types, coming to the conclusion that "the absence in the Japanese business texts the vast majority of the elliptical structures which is the prominent feature of other styles, mainly belles-lettres style, can be explained by the necessity of accurate information providing its only one way interpretation"[11]. Ellipsis is studied on the material of the Chinese language by Li Jinxiang. Li Jinxiang writes that “ellipsis and the concept of “zero anaphora” are closely connected with each other. And if we understandellipsis in the wide meaning of the word then we can say that “zero anaphora” is one of the ellipsis variants…. ellipsis is a speech phenomenon which is studied from the meaning and form correlation in grammar while “zero anaphora” is the term of the structural mechanism of discourse generating taking into account the text structure” [12].

M. K. Tutarishewa makes the point of her scientific research ellipsis in the different structure languages and writes that “in such polycultural languages as Russian, English, Adygh where ellipsis is observed the structural types of ellipsis can be the same and different. And even if they are the same still their models frequency differs [13].

In accordance with the communicative approach the elliptical sentences reveal their dependence on linguistic and extralinguistic contexts when forming their semantic structure. It is under the influence of extralinguistic situation that elliptical sentences get their vivid pragmatic character. And these structures are widely studied from the pragmatisal point of view.

In modern linguistics symbols of logics are increasingly used to interpret the question-answer DU. With a propositional approach to the question-answer dialogic unity, it is characterized by the existence of a single presupposition, the syntactical form of the answer is denoted as a propositional function from the question or, vice versa, the question acts as a prepositional function of the answer. Indeed, in the view of R.G. Collingwood, logic of questions and answers stands out as propositive logic. He states: “The proposition belongs to a question-and-answer complex which as a whole is «true» in the proper sense of the word; within this complex it is an answer to a certain question, the question is what we ordinary call a sensible or intelligent question” [14].

M.E. Usmanova shows too that ellipsis in the English and Tadjik languages is closely connected both with linguistics and logics. Thanks to the laws of logics, language traditions and the presuppositional utterance conditions the missing elements of the elliptical sentences can be restored in different languages. According to M.E. Usmanova the presuppositional utterance conditions constitute one of six main criteria of ellipsis identification: “while disclosing this phenomenon one must turn to the structural sentence form taking into consideration its obligatory and nonobligatory parts... the situational conditions of speech, the message communicative address, the relations between discourse parts, the law of language economy and the presuppositional utterance conditions” [15].
The structure, semantics and statistics of the elliptical sentences in English dialogue
unities
In this article we followed the structural-semantic approach to the essence of the
elliptical sentences in modern English and try to prove that the semantics of the elliptical
interrogative and answer sentences can only be clarified when taking into account the
contextual and situational conditions of their formation. Therefore, in the question-answer
communicative acts the most relevant factors that influence the semantic structure of
elliptical sentences are context, situation and presupposition. In the question-answer DU of
the modern English language the elliptical sentence gets a linguistic status of the proposal
of semantic-functional dependence on the presuppositions or context or situation.
Consequently, the linguistic extra-linguistic factors play the important role for the
formation of the content plane and expression of the elliptical sentences in the question-
answer DU of modern English.

All of the above mentioned things allowed us to determine the English elliptical
sentence as a particular linguistic structure, deviating from the standard two member
sentence in lacking these or those members of the sentence; we view them as the center for
the integration of contextual or situational information. The elliptical structuring in
question-answer DU is a demonstration of semantic-communicative coherence of a
dialogical text in which it acquires a semantic communicative sufficiency. The study of
elliptical sentences in the question-answer DU of modern English requires also a
comprehensive pragmatic approach. This allowed us to identify the basic elliptical
structural models in the composition of question-answer DU and to describe the semantic
function of these structures, both primary and secondary, i.e. pragmatically determined. The
complex analysis of elliptical sentences in the question-answer DU of modern English
suggests that this linguistic form acts as a product of structural-semantic and pragmatic
interaction of question and answer. It possesses certain structural models, the account of
which is necessary for subsequent semantic description.

We identify the following structural models of elliptical sentences in the question-
answer DU of the modern English language. The advantage of our classification consists in
compiling all the diversity of the elliptical sentences of questions and answers to certain
models:

1. one-member elliptical interrogative and answer sentences with noun, pronoun,
adjective and adverb as a key component: And your wife and child? - We shall manage (H.
Pinter). Where shall we find you? - At Horia Praser’s Chambers (E. Segal). What else do
you want to buy? – Everything (G.Hanna);
2. one-member elliptical sentences with functional parts of speech as a key component:
an elliptical questions presented by question words, conjunctions; and elliptical answers in
the form of conjunctions, interjections, prepositions: I want to meet this girl. – When? -
Any time (O’Hara);
3. one-member elliptical answer yes-sentences and no-sentence: Oh, Charlie, will you
introduce your aunt? - Oh, yes. Of course (A. Auckbourn);
4. two-member elliptical general and special questions with direct word order; two-
member elliptical answer sentences with the incomplete structure of the predicate and also
two-member elliptical interrogative and answer sentences with represented members: You a
terrorist? - Of course (A. Hibber). Do you want to be recognized? Do you? -Yes, I do. (J
Donleavy);
5. elliptical sentences (one-member, two-member) as a component of the series of
questions. As a particular structural model, we identified one and two member elliptical
sentences of question and answer with lexical repetition: Who can face truth? Can you? -
Now do not start passing the rotten buck again (T. Williams).
Elliptical questions and answers in DU can be either determined or not determined by the secondary members of sentences: How long will you be gone — Two or three weeks (O’Hara).

4 Discussion

The structural dependence of answers to the questions in modern English DU is reflected in their shortened elliptical way of expression, in the use of structural connectors in communication, i.e. conjunctions, lexical repetitions, pronouns. Elliptical sentences of questions and answers in DU of modern English are the regular, normative feature of the spoken syntax: the evidence is their high usage in texts (4410 elliptical structures were found by us).

Using the statistical method, we found that among the questions the most commonly used are elliptical one-member questions – 879 examples, representing 20% of the total number of examples 4410; among them substantive – 434 examples, verbal – 250 examples, adjectival – 70 examples, pronominal – 70 examples, adverbial – 55 examples).

Elliptical structures in the form of question words in DU-3 are less common in use (300 examples, two-member elliptical questions with direct word order -5% (220 examples) and represented members – 4.3% (190 examples). Elliptical questions as the components of a series of questions amounted to 8% (350 examples). The highest usage have elliptical one-member answer sentences – 26% (1157 examples), among them substantive – 620, verbal – 210, adjectival – 125, pronominal – 115, adverbial — 87 examples in our files. Elliptical yes-answers, no-answers and their modal equivalents form 960 examples of 21.8% and two-members elliptical answer sentences – 2.8% (125 examples);

The lowest usage have the elliptical answering sentences presented by the auxiliary parts of speech – 0.7% (30 examples).

The number of elliptical sentences of questions and answer with lexical repetition is only 4.5% (200 examples). The quantitative distribution of the different structures of elliptical sentences is possible to present schematically (see the diagram).

1 – one-member ES
2 – ES question and answer with lexical repetitions
3 – ES question words
4 – two-member ES
5 – ES with represented members
6 – ES composed multipart issues
7 – answer ES
8 – ES function words
9 – ES lexical set
10 – ES modal equivalents
11 – two-member ES

Fig. 1. The diagram of the quantitative distribution of the various structures of elliptical sentences (ES).
5 Conclusions

So summing up our investigations we come to the following conclusions. In modern world communication question-answer DU with elliptical sentence in modern English is the most common type of syntactic structure that encourages the development of any dialogue. Question-answer DU of the modern English language is a single structural and semantic unit with the interdependence of its components. Elliptical sentence of question or answer in the composition of the DU appears as a structural indicator of this interdependence.

Ellipsis and its result, i.e. elliptical sentence has a long history. It was studied since ancient times and up to the present days. Up to now in Russian and foreign linguistics a single unified point of view on the essence of these sentences is absent. Each trend in linguistics (structural-semantic, logical, pragmatic, textual, stylistic, psycholinguistic, comparative, etc.) treats these language structures in its own way.

We determine the English elliptical sentence in question-answer DU as a particular linguistic structure according to the morphological expression of the present (explicit) members in its structure. And identify 5 main structural types of one member and two member elliptical sentences.

The principle of structural classification of elliptical sentences by volume and the way of the morphological expression of the core (key) component is the same for both the questions and the answers, which made it possible to speak about the identity of their structures (except for those cases when the elliptical questions are presented only by the question words). The structural dependence of answers on the questions in modern English DU is reflected in their shortened elliptical way of expression, in the use of structural connectors in them, i.e. conjunctions, lexical repetitions, pronouns. Elliptical sentences of questions and answers in DU of modern English are the regular, normative feature of the spoken and written syntax: the evidence is their high usage in texts (4410 elliptical structures were found by us). The frequency of their usage differs greatly.

References


