Topic: Pro-forms and ellipsis

Pro-forms and ellipsis are syntactic means for abbreviating constructions to avoid redundancy. For example, instead of having the sentence No. 1 we have No. 2 or 3:

1. *He may come tonight, but I don't think he will come tonight.*
2. *He may come tonight, but I don't think he will <u>do so</u>.* (substitution)
3. *He may come tonight, but I don't think he will <u>O</u>.* (ellipsis)

Recoverability can be defined as the ability to interpret and recover the full form (FF) from constructions with pro-forms or ellipsis, e.g. sentence No. 1 from No. 2 or 3.

There are three types of recoverability:

1. **textual recoverability**: the FF is recoverable from a neighbouring part of the text/context (*<u>John</u> is late today. <u>He</u> usually comes late.*)
2. **situational recoverability**: the FF is recoverable from the extralinguistic situation (*Who is <u>she</u>?* - pointing at someone, e.g. a young woman close to the speaker)
3. **structural recoverability**: the FF is recoverable from knowledge of grammatical structure (e.g. optional conjunction *that* in *I know (<u>that</u>) he is clever.*)

Pro-forms and their antecedents can be linked by **coreference**, a linkage of 'cross-reference' between two expressions that refer to the same thing or things (see above the example with textual recoverability). If the relation between a pro-form and its antecedents is not that of coreference, the label **reference** is used (e.g. *Jack got a first prize this year, and I got <u>one</u> last year.*).

Pro-forms

1. **Pro-forms for noun phrases and their constituents**

  - 3rd person pronouns and determiners (*My parents and <u>their</u> dog are in the park.*)

  - indefinite pronouns such as *any, all, both, each, either, some*, and *none* (*When the children arrived, <u>each</u> (of the children/child) was given a present.*)

  - *the same*, implying in all its substitute uses similarity, not identity with the antecedent (*I want my meat well done and David wants his <u>the same</u>.*)

  - *one*, always unstressed, has two plural forms: (1) *some* for indenfinite NPs (singular: *I need a nail/one.* plural: I *need some nails/some.*)

         (2) *ones* for nominal expressions, noun phrase heads, not the whole NPs (*Have you any knives? I need a sharp one. - Take any of the ones on the table.*)

2. **Pro-forms for clauses and clause constituents**

  - the dummy operator *do* is a pro-form for a predicate (*Martin can drive a car, and his sister <u>does</u>, too.*)

  - *do so* functions as a pro-form for a predicate or predication, used especially in formal style both for finite and nonfinite forms (*As no one else has succeeded in solving the problem, I'll try to <u>do so</u> myself.* or *As no one else has succeeded in <u>doing so</u>, I'll try to solve the problem myself.*)

  - *do it, do that, do so* substitute for transitive verbs and their objects (*Are you still trying to solve the problem? - You should have <u>done it</u> by now.*) The pro-form *do that* in contrast to *do it* gives more prominence to the object *that*, it is therefore connected especially with new or contrastive information.

3. **Pro-forms for adverbials**

For example, *here* and *there* can be used for place adverbials, whereas *then* for time adverbials (*If you look in the drawer, you'll find it <u>there</u>.*)

4. **Some notes on pro-forms for some other sentence elements**

So and its negative equivalent *not* can be pro-forms for a *that*-clause functioning as a direct object (*Will they help us? - I hope <u>so</u>.* or *I hope <u>not</u>.*) This use of *not* is restricted mainly to verbs of belief or assumption. Verbs that commonly allow both *so* and *not*: *believe, expect, guess, hope, imagine, presume, reckon, suppose, suspect*, and *think*.

Ellipsis
is grammatical omission. It requires **verbatim recoverability**, that is, the actual word or words that are implied must be precisely recoverable.
Requirements for strict ellipsis:
1. when we insert the missing words we do not change the meaning of the original sentence (_The poor_ need more help. {generic reference} is not identical with _The poor people_ need more help. {specific reference})
2. when we insert the missing words the sentence should remain grammatical:
   He always wakes up earlier than I (wake up). - formal
   He always wakes up earlier than me (wake up). - informal
There are **three categories of ellipsis** according to where the ellipsis occurs within a construction:
1. initial - _(I) hope you like it._
2. medial - _Jill owns a family house and Peter (owns) a cottage._
3. final - _I know I haven't yet finished all my work, but I will (finish all my work)._
Recoverability types of ellipsis
situational ellipsis - the interpretation may depend on knowledge of extralinguistic context (_Get it? Want something? See you later. Television not working_?)
structural ellipsis - the interpretation depends on knowledge of grammatical structure (_We are staying there (for) another three weeks._ - informal) - often confined to written language, e.g. omission of determiners, pronouns, operators, and other closed-class words in block language (headlines, book titles, notices, notes, diaries, telegrams)
textual ellipsis - the interpretation depends on what is said or written in the linguistic context; there are two kinds of ellipsis according to the relative position of the ellipsis and its antecedent: (1) **anaphoric ellipsis** - the interpretation depends on what comes before: _I'm happy if you are (happy)._
(2) **cataphoric ellipsis** - the interpretation depends on what comes after: _Those who prefer (to work) now, can work now._
Depending on the character of the construction in which the antecedent construction and elliptical construction participate, there are two types of ellipsis:
1. **general ellipsis** - where the functional relation between the elliptical and antecedent construction is irrelevant (see below)
2. **special ellipsis** - where the possibilities of omissions are determined by that relation (e.g. coordination, nonfinite and verbless clauses, comparative clauses)
General ellipsis (typically final and anaphoric)
(1) **elliptical noun phrases:** result from final ellipsis, which means that heads and any postmodifiers tend to be ellipted: _Although Helen is the oldest girl in the class, Mary is the tallest O_
(2) **elliptical clauses:** typically, the subject and operator (and perhaps other auxiliaries) remain, and the predication is ellipted: _If I could have bought a ticket, I would have O._ Ellipsis of the whole clause or the whole clause except for an introductory word: A: _We're about to leave soon._ B: _Yes, but when O?_
Appended clause - a type of special ellipsis. It is an elliptical clause (usually parenthetical or an afterthought) for which the whole or part of the preceding or interrupted clause constitutes the antecedent: _I caught the train - just._ It may be viewed as elliptical for: _I caught the train - I just caught the train._