

Lesson 11 / Handout 11a

ELLIPSIS

= substitution by nothing; grammatical omission

- as with substitution, ellipsis may be nominal, verbal, or clausal

Match the three labels (1., 2., 3.) with the examples (a, b, c):

Positional categories of ellipsis:

3 categories of ellipsis according to where the ellipsis occurs within a construction:

1. INITIAL: the initial elements are ellipsed

2. MEDIAL: medial elements are ellipsed

3. FINAL: the final elements are ellipsed

a) John owns a Volvo and Tom (owns) a BMW.

b) I'm happy if you are (happy). I know that we haven't yet set the record straight, but we will (set the record straight).

c) (I) hope he's there. (Of) course he's here. (The) fact is I don't know what to do. (I'm a) afraid he won't be there. (Do you) want a drink? (Have you) got any money? (I'm) sorry I couldn't be there. (I'll) see you later.

Put the examples below (a – l) under the appropriate label (1., 2., 3.). There is always „e.g.“ to indicate where an example (or possibly more examples) should occur:

1. NOMINAL ELLIPSIS = elliptical noun phrases;

- usually results from final ellipsis, i.e. heads and any postmodifiers tend to be ellipsed; omission of the head of a noun phrase:

e.g.

2. VERBAL ELLIPSIS:

- the dominant type is final

- typically, the subject and operator (and perhaps other auxiliaries) remain, and the predication is ellipsed:

e.g.

- another kind of verbal ellipsis omits everything except the lexical verb:

e.g.

3. CLAUSAL ELLIPSIS:

- involves ellipsis of the whole clause or the whole clause except for an introductory word:

e.g.

- a *to*-infinitive clause may be omitted if it functions as the complementation of a verb or adjective.

An elliptical *to*-infinitive clause may consist of just the introductory unstressed particle *to*:

e.g.

- in the negative, *not* is placed before *to*:

e.g.

Examples:

a) *Somebody has hidden my notebook, but I don't know who / why / where .*

b) *Has she been crying? - No, laughing.*

c) *She borrowed my pen, although I told her not to .*

d) *Tomorrow's meeting will have to be our first or our last .*

e) *I'm happy if you are .*

f) *If I could have bought a ticket, I would have .*

g) *He had to admit that Sarah's drawings were as good as his own .*

h) *We're bound to win the prize some day. Yes, but when ?*

i) *You can borrow my pen, if you want to .*

j) *You will speak to whomever I tell you to .*

k) *Tom will be playing, but I don't think Martin will (be) .*

l) *Somebody ought to help. Shall I ask Peter to ?*

References:

Greenbaum, S. and R. Quirk (1990) *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*. Harlow: Longman.
(Chapter 12, pp. 255-261)