



Linguistics
GRADUATE SCHOOL



Preposition omission in French sluicing: Two experiments

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OUTLINE

1. Preposition-omission under sluicing

1.1. What's sluicing?

1.2. Two main theories of sluicing

1.3. Two hypotheses on Prep-omission

2. Experiments on French sluicing

1.1. Experiment 1 (pronominal remnant)

1.2. Experiment 2 (nominal remnant)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. What is sluicing?

A type of ellipsis where only a wh-word is left (Ross 1969) \Rightarrow The remnant

- Short questions / Matrix sluice

(1) Speaker 1: I'm thinking **about someone**.

Speaker 2: **About who?**

- Embedded sluices

(2) He told me **about someone** but I don't remember **who**.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. What is sluicing?

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- Short questions / Matrix sluice

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Speaker 2: **About** who?

- Embedded sluices

(2) He told me **about** someone but I don't remember **(about)** who.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.2. What is preposition omission under sluicing?

- For **deletion based analyses** (Ross, 1969; Merchant, 2001): A consequence of preposition stranding:

(3) a. Paul is talking to someone, but I don't know [~~who he's talking to~~]_S

b. Paul is talking to someone, but I don't know [~~to who he's talking~~]_S

- For **direct interpretation approaches** (Ginzburg & Sag, 2000; Culicover & Jackendoff, 2005): A consequence of PP/NP correlate:

(4) a. Paul is talking to someone, but I don't know [[**who**]_{NP}]_S

b. Paul is talking to someone, but I don't know [[**to who**]_{PP}]_S

The problem

Merchant, 2001's **Preposition-Stranding Generalization (PSG)**:

A language L will allow preposition stranding under sluicing iff L allows preposition stranding under regular wh-movement.

Has been **contradicted** by data from many languages: **Brazilian Portuguese** (Almeida & Yoshida, 2007), **Spanish** (Rodrigues et al., 2009), **Czech** (Caha, 2011), **Polish** (Nykiel & Sag, 2009 & 2011), **Greek** (Molimpakis, 2019), **Russian, Serbo-croatian** (Stjepanovic, 2008), **Saudi Arabic** (Alshaalan & Abels, 2020); **Mauritian** (Abeillé & Hassamal, 2019), etc.

1.3. Other hypotheses on Prep-omission

1- Cognitive hypothesis on Prep-omission (or Prep-alternation) (Nykiel, 2012; 2013a,b & 2015) and Nykiel & Hawkins (2020): Minimize form/domain

Minimization / Reduction of the element IF its syntactic and semantic features are given / rendered obvious by the surrounding context.

—→ Full parallelism between the remnant and the antecedent favors the acceptability of the reduction of the preposition.

—→ The informativeness of the antecedent affects the possibility of Prep-omission.

2- Information-based hypothesis: Uniform Information density (Levy & Jaeger, 2006)

Information hierarchy

	+	-----	-
Remnant	which+noun	-----	who/what
Remnant	+prep	-----	-prep
Correlate	prep+noun	----- prep+pronoun -----	implicit
Preposition	Other	-----	à,de

Cognitive/ Information-based hypothesis on Prep-omission

Sluice in a,b less informative than in c,d

Sluice in a,c less informative than in b,d

(5) a. Paul is talking to someone, but I don't know **who**

b. Paul is talking to someone, but I don't know **to who**

c. Paul is talking to a friend, but I don't know **which friend**

d. Paul is talking to a friend, but I don't know **to which friend**

=> **Best versions: b and c**

Hypotheses on Prep-omission

Cognitive / Information-based hypothesis:

- A PP remnant is more informative than an NP remnant
- A sluice with a nominal remnant (*which*+noun) is more informative than a pronominal one (*who, what*)

=> correlation between remnant's category and Prep omission

My brother Steve, who says he read **something** last week, can't remember **what**.

My brother Steve, who says he read **an interesting book** last week, can't remember **which book**. Nykiel (2017, pp. 7-8)

Hypotheses on Prep-omission

Realization of correlate	PP remnant	NP remnant	Total remnants
contentful	42(24.1%)	132(75.9%)	174(100%)
non-contentful	53(39%)	83(61%)	136(100%)

Realization of remnants by correlate content (Nykiel, 2017, p. 18)

FRENCH

According to **deletion-bases theories**, Prep-omission in French should **not be possible** because **Prep-stranding is not possible**:

(6) * Anne l'a offert à quelqu'un, mais je ne sais pas qui. (Merchant, 2001, p. 115)

Anne offered it to someone, but I don't know who.

(7) * Qui est-ce qu'elle l'a offert à? (Merchant, 2001, p. 115)

Who did she offer it to?

FRENCH

For Merchant, *avec* is different from *de* and *à* , but he admittedly only asked 3 speakers (not from France):

Elle a parlé avec quelqu'un, mais je ne sais pas (**avec**) qui. (Merchant, 2001, p. 115)

She talked with someone, but I don't know (with) who.

(8) ? Qui a-t-elle parlé avec?

Who did she talk to?

FRENCH

Smirnova and Abeillé (2021) found two examples *de omission* in contemporary French (Frantext):

(9) – L’adresse de Rosine Portinari, tu l’as pas ? – Qui ça ? (Thérame, 1985)

The address of Rosine Portinari, you don’t have it? – Who that?

(10) – “La ville de Jaufré Rudel !” “Qui ça?” (Garat, 1984)

“The village of Jaufré Rudel!” “Who that?”

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is preposition omission under sluicing acceptable in French with *à* (*to*) and *de* (*of*) => (the most frequent prepositions) ?
2. Does the remnant's category play a role?



2. METHODS: EXPERIMENTS

2.1. Experiment 1: Pronominal remnant

2.2. Experiment 2: Nominal remnant

2.1. EXPERIMENT 1: PRONOMINAL REMNANT

Materials, participants and setting:

Items	20	
	10 with <i>à / to</i>	10 with <i>de / of</i>
Tested wh-remnant	<i>Qui / Who</i>	
Conditions	4	Preposition + Ellipsis - Preposition + Ellipsis Preposition – Ellipsis - Preposition - Ellipsis
Lists	4 (Latin Square Design)	
Participants	40 native speakers of French (Prolific, paid 1.8GP)	
Hosting website	Ibex Farm	

2.1. EXPERIMENT 1: PRONOMINAL REMNANT

Items	Conditions	Example
<p>J'ai parlé à un ami I talked to a friend</p>	Preposition + Ellipsis	À qui?
	- Preposition + Ellipsis	Qui?
	Preposition - Ellipsis	À qui as-tu parlé ?
	- Preposition - Ellipsis	Qui as-tu parlé?
<p>Je me méfie de cet artiste I am suspicious of this artist</p>	Preposition + Ellipsis	De qui?
	Preposition + Ellipsis	Qui?
	Preposition - Ellipsis	De qui te méfies –tu ?
	- Preposition - Ellipsis	Qui te méfies-tu ?

2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

Online experiment: Acceptability judgment task

Personne A :
J'ai parlé à un ami.

Personne B :
Qui ?

(pas du tout acceptable) *(très acceptable)*

Cliquez sur les chiffres pour répondre.

2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

Online experiment: ‘Good French’ Judgment

Est-ce que cette phrase correspond à un bon français, c'est-à-dire à un français qui correspond à la norme ?

1. très bon
2. assez bon
3. pas très bon
4. mauvais

2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

Predictions

Deletion-based theory

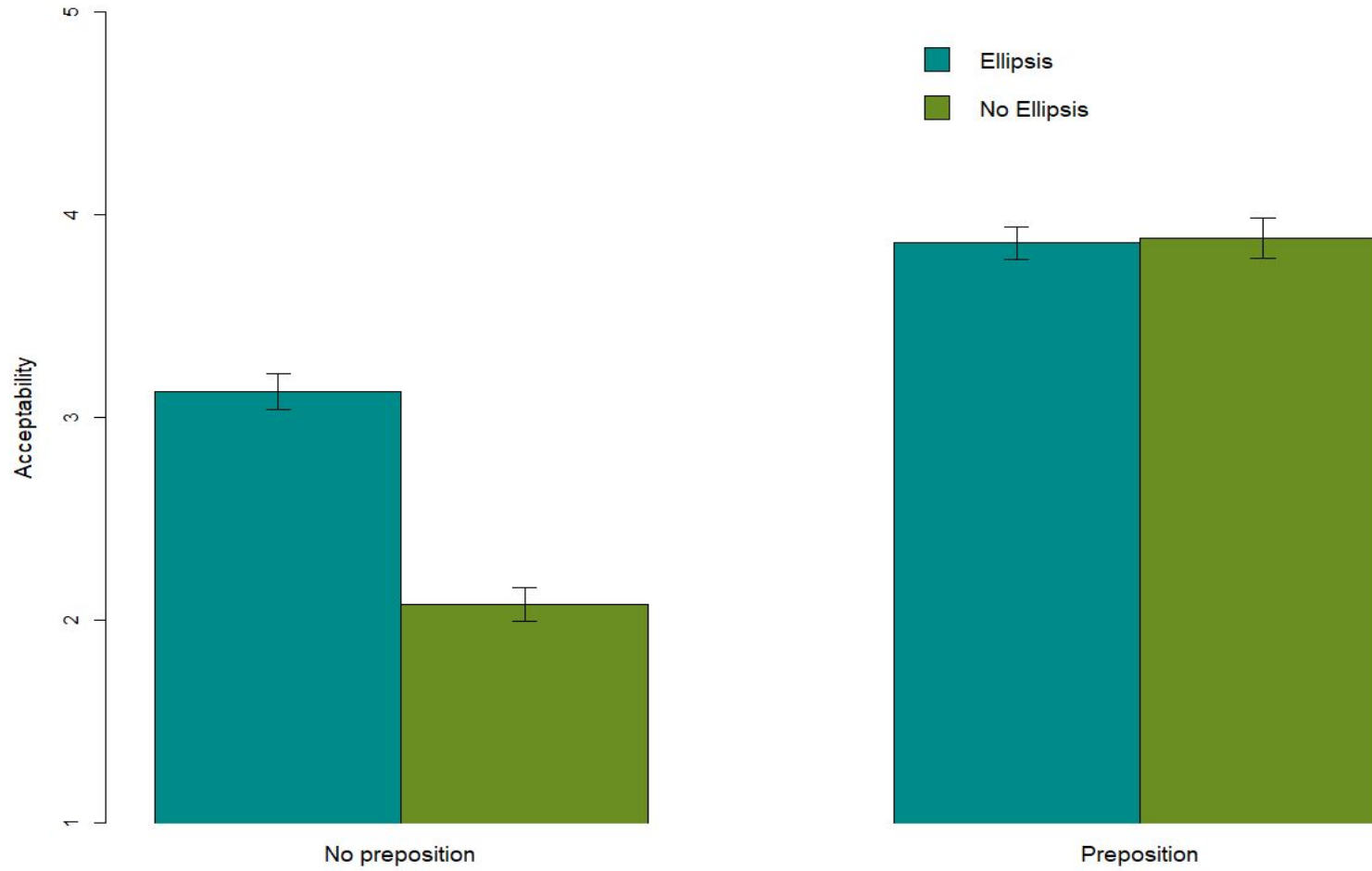
Sentences without prepositions are rated low, with or without ellipsis

Direct interpretation approach

Sentences without prepositions are rated low only without ellipsis

2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

Results



2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

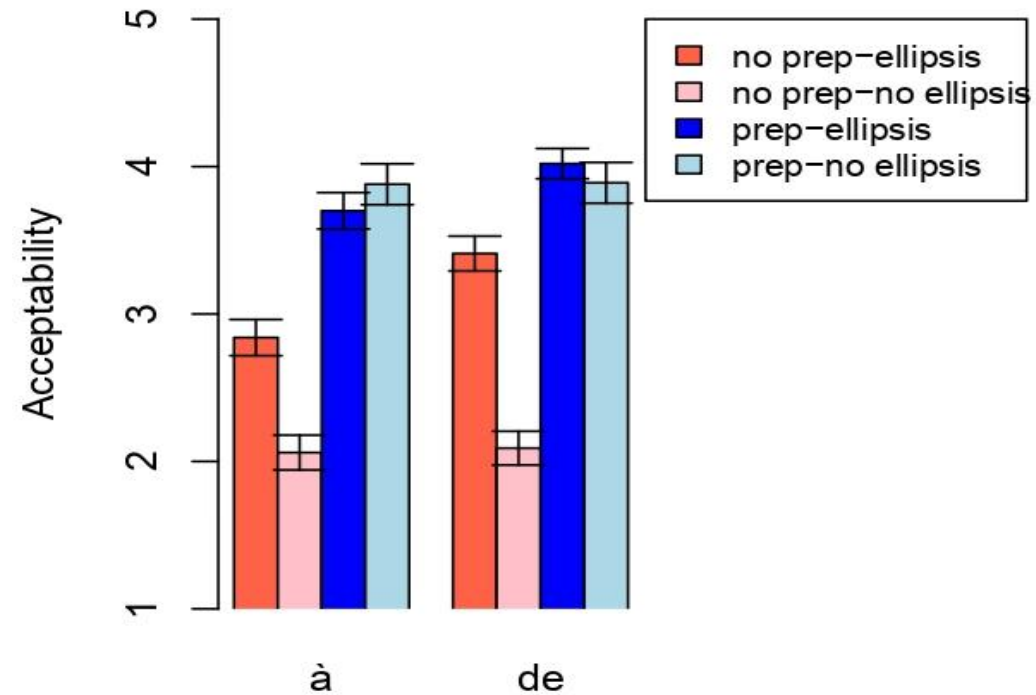
Results

Rating results

Conditions	<i>p</i>-value
Preposition / No preposition	6.62e-16 ***
Ellipsis / No ellipsis	0.0148 *
Interaction: Preposition * Ellipsis	1.52e-09 ***

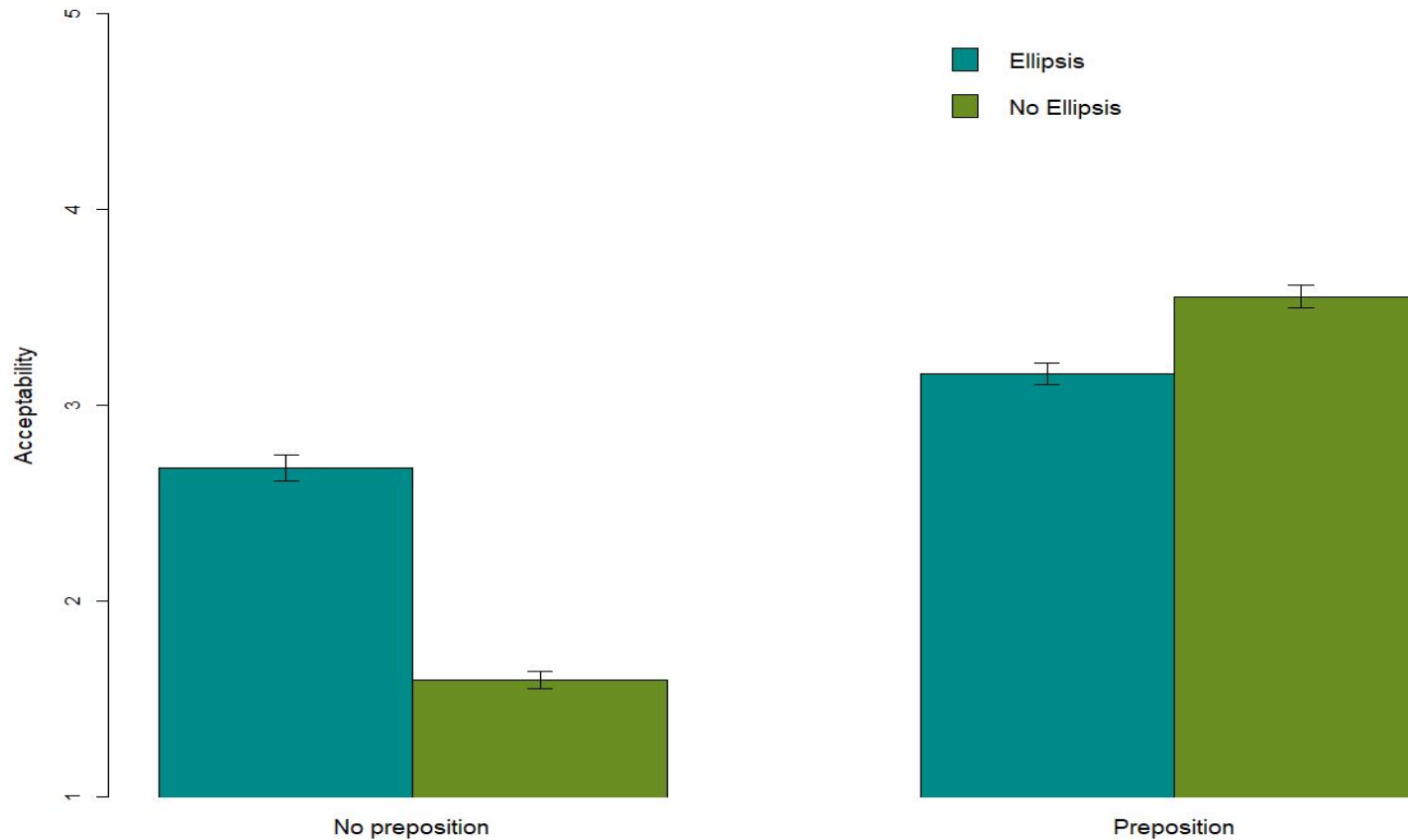
2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

Preferences of the omission of *à* vs. *de*



2.1. EXPERIMENT 1:

Results of 'Good French' Judgment



EXPERIMENT 1 Results

- Preposition omission under sluicing is acceptable in French (a non-P-stranding language) ⇒ PSG not supported.
- There is a clear preference for the structures including prepositions (unlike English, as in Polish)
- There is a difference between *à* and *de*: *de* was rated slightly better than *à* with ellipsis, with or without preposition. This difference between prepositions is not expected if the -prep +ellipsis condition is supposed to be ungrammatical.
- The difference in the preferences might be due to other non-syntactic factors (e.g. information density)

2.2. EXPERIMENT 2: NOMINAL REMNANT

Materials, participants and setting:

Items	20	
	10 with <i>à / to</i>	10 with <i>de / of</i>
Tested wh-remnant	<i>Quel / which + Noun</i>	
Conditions	4	Preposition + Ellipsis - Preposition + Ellipsis Preposition – Ellipsis - Preposition - Ellipsis
Lists	4 (Latin Square Design)	
Participants	47 native speakers (Prolific, paid 1.8GP)	
Hosting website	Ibex Farm	

2.2. EXPERIMENT 2: NOMINAL REMNANT

Items	Conditions	Example
<p>J'ai écrit à un vieil oncle 'I have written to an old uncle'</p>	<p>Preposition + Ellipsis - Preposition + Ellipsis Preposition - Ellipsis - Preposition - Ellipsis</p>	<p>À quel oncle ? Quel oncle ? À quel oncle as-tu écrit ? ? Quel oncle as-tu écrit ?</p>
<p>Je parle du nouveau candidat 'I talk about the new candidate'</p>	<p>Preposition + Ellipsis Preposition + Ellipsis Preposition - Ellipsis - Preposition - Ellipsis</p>	<p>De quel candidat ? Quel candidat ? De quel candidat parles-tu ? Quel candidat parles-tu ? ?</p>

2.2. EXPERIMENT 2

Predictions:

Deletion-based theory

Sentences without prepositions are rated low, with or without ellipsis

Direct interpretation approach

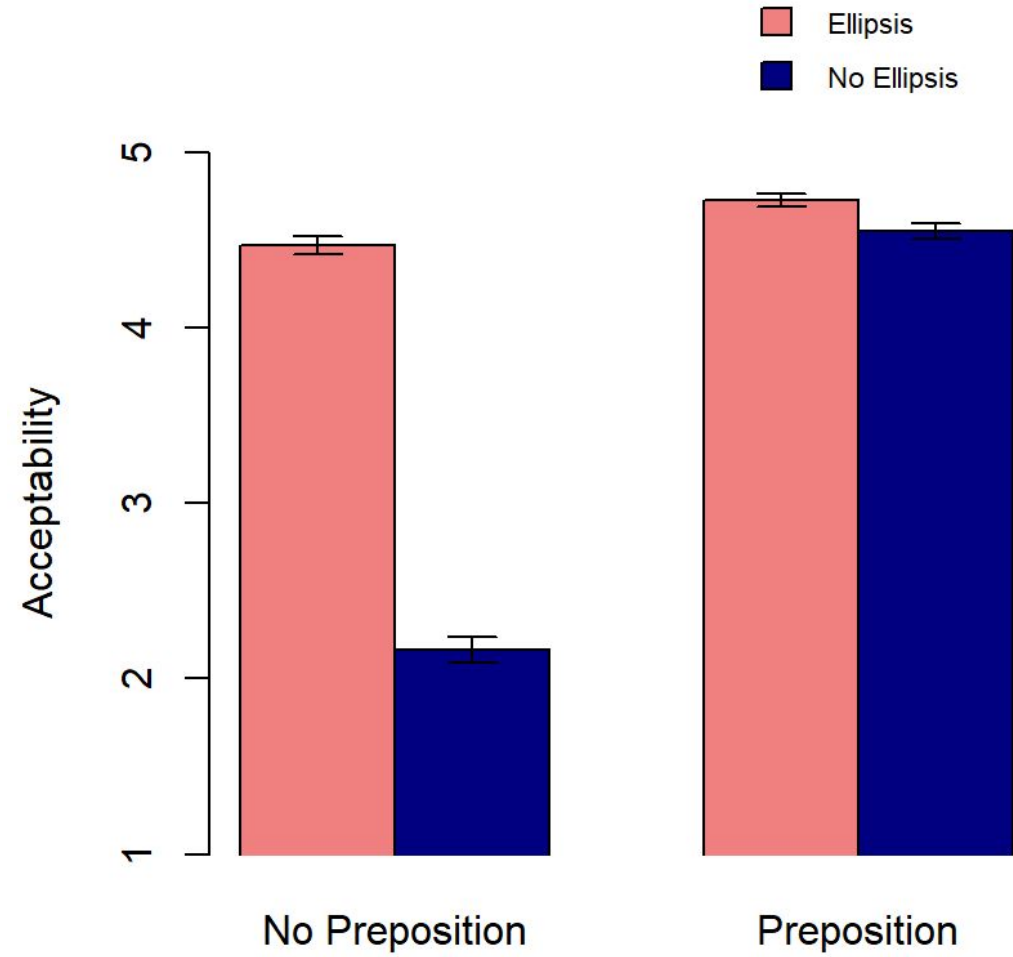
Sentences without prepositions are rated low only without ellipsis

Cognitive/Information-based theory

Sentences without prepositions and with ellipsis are rated higher than in Experiment 1 (nominal remnants are more informative than pronominal remnants)

2.2. EXPERIMENT 2

Results



2.2. EXPERIMENT 2

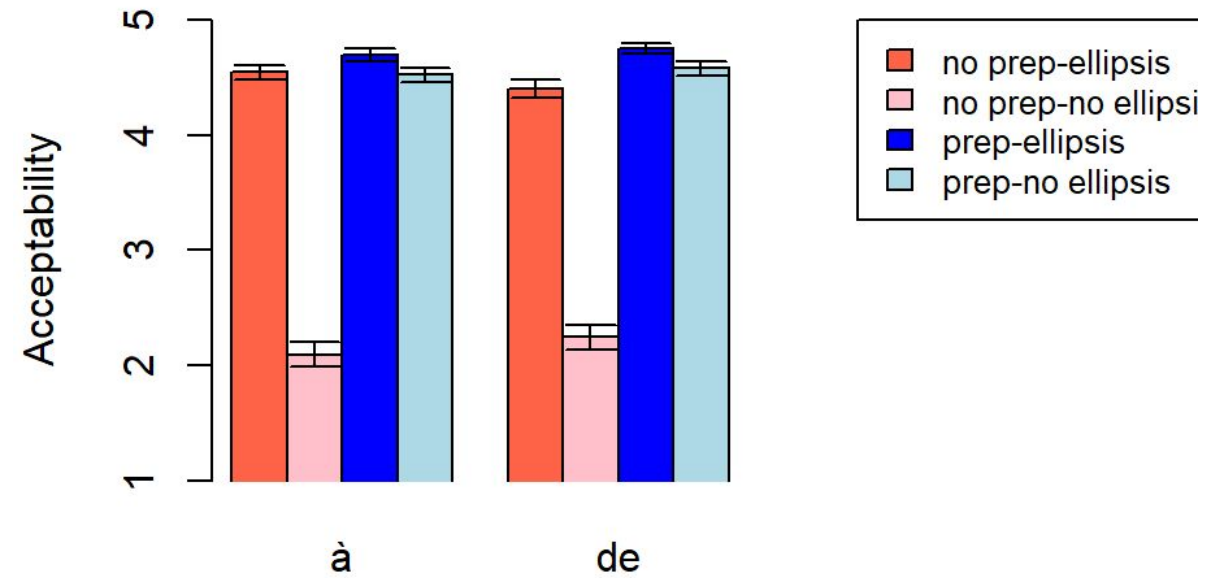
Results

Rating results

Conditions	<i>p</i>-value
Preposition / No preposition	4.05e-12 ***
Ellipsis / No ellipsis	2.67e-15 ***
Interaction: Preposition * Ellipsis	1.24e-10 ***

2.2. EXPERIMENT 2

Preferences of the omission of *à* vs. *de*



EXPERIMENT 2 Results

- Similarly to results of Experiment 1, preposition omission under sluicing is acceptable in French with the nominal remnant *quel*+noun
- -prep+ellipsis is as acceptable as +prep-ellipsis
- Comparison with Experiment 1: -prep+ellipsis is rated better with *quel* +noun than with *qui* (pronominal remnant): Confirmation of cognitive/information-based theory.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

- Preposition omission is possible in French sluicing: It is accepted experimentally \Rightarrow **Against Merchant's PSG** and deletion-based theories of sluicing
- Preposition omission in sluices may occur with weak prepositions, and is preferred with a **nominal correlate** and a **nominal remnant (*quel*)** : **Supporting Nykiel's theory and the information-based approach**
- Omitting the preposition in French sluicing depends on the syntactic and semantic properties of the correlate and the remnant.

Experimental results confirmed by corpus results (Hassen, 2022)

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Thank you!

Merci !