

The Identity of Silence:  
Acquiring the Identity Condition on Sluicing

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**Abstract**

A fundamental issue in research on ellipsis is the identity condition which must hold between elided material and its antecedent in order for ellipsis to be licensed. This debate is of particular significance in the case of sluicing – the ellipsis of an IP – since there are many attested examples that challenge the traditional definition of identity in structural terms, suggesting alternative semantic and processing approaches. This paper considers the identity condition on sluicing from an acquisition perspective, testing young children’s knowledge of sluicing and the licensing conditions upon it. Using a Grammaticality Judgement task, it is shown that the youngest children (average age 4;10) reject sluicing as ungrammatical, whereas the older group (average age 7;2) judge sentences the same way as adult controls. Given that the youngest children also reject non-sluiced control sentences, the paper concludes that their initial difficulty stems from their having not fully acquired embedded questions.



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