



English *let alone* construction: A discourse-oriented nonderivational approach*

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Kwon, Young-Kook and Jong-Bok Kim. 2022. English *let alone* construction: A discourse-oriented nonderivational approach. *Linguistic Research* 39(3): 547-566. The expression *let alone*, starting to be used as an NPI (negative polarity item) in the 1760s, displays peculiar syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties that are quite unpredictable from general grammar rules. This paper investigates these grammatical properties further while referring to the attested data extracted from corpora like COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English). It also discusses several challenges to the postulation of clausal sources and application of move-and-delete operations. The paper then sketches a discourse-oriented construction approach that could offer a more feasible account for its general as well as idiomatic properties. In particular, it shows how the construction in question is interrelated with other related constructions such as parenthetical subordinating clauses modifying a nonveridical situation as well as ellipsis constructions that require a parallelism condition between an ellipsis clause and its antecedent clause. (Dongduk Women's University · Kyung Hee University)

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1. Introduction

The expression *let alone* is typically used after a negative statement to emphasize that the statement also applies even more to the referent of its (bracketed) complement (Fillmore et al. 1988; Toosarvandani 2008b; Toosarvandani 2009; Harris 2016):

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- (1) a. Brian would never even read : a newspaper, let alone [a book].
- b. I hardly have time to think these days, let alone [relax].

In these examples, let alone has a remnant complement (a book and relax) which is associated with its correlate (underline waved). With these two in a contrastive focus relation, the first clause including the correlate expresses the improbability of a negative statement, and the expression let alone plus the remnant, which we call LA CONSTRUCTION, at the same time describes a more general, related situation that has not happened, either.

According to the dictionary Merriam-Webster (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>), the first known use of let alone in this sense is in the year of 1765. Ever since then its uses have increased as also seen from Table 1. The raw frequencies as well as normalized frequency values (PM) of the expression in COHA (Corpus of Historical American English) show that their uses have steadily increased in Modern American English.

Table 1: Usage trend of let alone from 1820 to 2010 in COHA

SECTION	ALL	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
FREQ	3126	4	18	39	71	63	62	59	62	80	105	131	127	202	241	266	271	239	305	367	414
WORDS (M)	405	7.0	13.7	15.8	16.5	16.9	18.8	20.1	20.4	22.0	23.1	25.7	27.7	27.4	28.7	29.1	28.8	29.9	33.1	34.8	35.5
PER MIL	7.72	0.57	1.31	2.47	4.29	3.72	3.30	2.94	3.04	3.64	4.54	5.10	4.58	7.37	8.41	9.13	9.40	8.01	9.20	10.54	11.68

At a first approximation, the LA CONSTRUCTION syntactically looks like a type of coordination, joining two focused constituents (correlate and remnant) of the same syntactic category:

- (2) a. Kim never got to [high school], let alone [college].
- b. Kim did not [speak Arabic], let alone [read it].

Semantically, the construction evokes a negative propositional meaning, linked to the one evoked from the first clause. For instance, the second clause in (2) each brings about the propositional meanings of ‘Kim never got to college’ and ‘Kim did not read it’,

respectively. Reflecting these syntactic and semantic properties, Harris (2016), Carlson and Harris (2017), and others suggest that the construction is derived from move-cum-delete operations. For instance, (2a) would be derived from the following:

- (3) Kim never got to high school, let alone [_{FocP} college:] <Kim got to >.

The remnant college moves to the focus position, and the remaining clause (e.g., TP) undergoes ellipsis. This derivation, borrowed from other move-and-delete accounts of ellipsis, such as those for stripping/bare argument ellipsis (Merchant 2003), sluicing (Merchant 2001; Vicente 2015), or fragment answers (Merchant 2004; Weir 2014), then resorts to the clausal source for the semantic resolution.

This paper first reviews key syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the LA CONSTRUCTION that have been noted in the previous literature and discusses further grammatical properties referring to attested data collected from corpora like COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English). The paper, as noted by Fillmore et al. (1988) and Cappelle et al. (2015), points out that the canonical as well as idiosyncratic properties of the construction are hard to follow from the general grammar rules of English, and also discusses several challenges to postulating clausal sources and applying move-and-delete operations. The paper then sketches a discourse-oriented construction approach that could offer a more feasible account for its general as well as idiomatic properties.

2. Key grammatical properties

2.1 Syntactic properties

At first glance, the remnant of the LA CONSTRUCTION seems to be of the same syntactic category of the corresponding correlate. This appears to be the case from the following attested data from the corpus COCA:

- (4) a. I couldn't figure out how those syllables made [_{NP} that word], let alone
 [_{NP} that meaning of the word]. (COCA 2018 FIX)
 b. There's no way that a company can be [_{AP} progressive], let alone [_{AP}

- successful]. (COCA 2012 BLOG)
- c. She had no special purpose [PP in Los Angeles], let alone [PP in the entertainment industry]. (COCA 2012 FIC)
- d. I don't have the energy to [VP go to the grocery store], let alone [VP make anything decent]. (COCA 2015 MOV)
- e. So we're still at the stage where we don't even know if [S it was a bomb], let alone [S it was a bomb from ISIS]. (COCA 2015 SPOK)
- f. None of the riders with them see [CP that they know each other], let alone [CP that they're conversing]. (COCA 2018 FIC)
- g. We didn't know [Wh-clause who we were], let alone [Wh-clause who the other might be]. (COCA 1999 MAG)
- h. I can not function [AdvP properly], let alone [AdvP comfortably], without Archie Goodwin. (COCA 2002 TV)

The examples illustrate that the construction occurs in a wide variety of syntactic environments where ordinary coordinating conjunction occurs, leading many to take *let alone* as a coordinating conjunction (e.g., Fillmore et al. 1988; Carlson and Harris 2017; Harris and Carlson 2019).

However, it is not hard to find examples where the correlate and the remnant of the LA CONSTRUCTION have non-identical syntactic categories. Corpus data yield quite a great number of such examples:

- (5) a. I never [VP-fin touched the tickets], let alone [VP-ing having them in my possession]. (COCA 2012 WEB)
- b. In those early days, it seldom felt [NP anything], let alone [AP warm]. (COCA 2000 FIC)
- c. I didn't even know [S he'd been an actor], let alone [CP that he'd been in this]. (COCA 2018 FIC)
- d. Well, didn't think of [NP that today], let alone [S when I was younger]. (COCA 2014 SPOK)
- e. I haven't had the chance [PP for a break], let alone [VP-inf to make a phone call]. (COCA 2011 SPOK)

Simple coordination would disallow the coordination of these unlike categories.

In addition, the construction differs from typical coordination in several respects. For instance, ordinary coordination has no positional restriction: they can occur in the sentence initial, medial, and final position. However, the LA CONSTRUCTION hardly occurs in the initial position of a text:

- (6) a. He was incapable of leading a bowling team, let alone a country.
 b. It may not be easy to persuade the GOP, let alone the country, to accept the bill.
 c. *Let alone a country, he was incapable of leading a bowling team.

There are also examples where the correlate is not adjacent to the remnant:

- (7) a. That's the only option if one wants to have [any facility] at all, let alone [a winning skill]. (COCA 2012 BLOG)
 b. Most moms can barely get [five minutes] to go to the bathroom alone, let alone [a whole chunk of time] all just for you (COCA 2012 BLOG).

To take the construction as a coordination for such examples, it is required to introduce other ad hoc syntactic operations.

As also noted in Fillmore et al. (1988: 515-516), there are many syntactic environments that distinguish between ordinary coordination and LA CONSTRUCTION. Unlike ordinary coordination, LA CONSTRUCTION does not allow topicalization (data from Fillmore et al. 1988):

- (8) a. Shrimp and squid, Moishe won't eat.
 b. *Shrimp let alone squid Moishe won't eat.

The two also behave differently in *it*-clefts:

- (9) a. It is shrimp and squid that Max won't eat.
 b. *It is shrimp let alone squid that Max won't eat.

In addition, VP ellipsis is possible in ordinary coordination, but in general disallowed in the LA CONSTRUCTION:

- (10)a. Max won't eat shrimp but Minnie will.
 b. *Max won't eat shrimp let alone Minnie will.

As observed so far, the LA CONSTRUCTION seems to be a type of coordination when considering that the correlate and its remnant have the same category. However, other facts also indicate that they behave quite differently from simple coordination.

2.2 Semantic and NPI properties

In terms of semantics, as discussed by Fillmore et al. (1988) and Toosarvandani (2008a) and noted earlier, the LA CONSTRUCTION evokes a propositional meaning. Consider the following:

- (11)a. She's never left the city, let alone the country.
 b. These images were not arbitrary, let alone trivial.

Both of these would have the following at-issue entailments:

- (12)a. $\neg\text{leave}(i,\text{city}) \wedge \neg\text{leave}(i,\text{country})$
 b. $\neg\text{arbitrary}(i) \wedge \neg\text{trivial}(i)$

The meaning representations here also indicate that the LA CONSTRUCTION expresses a proposition that differs from the first clause in the identity of the internal argument or the function. To be more precise, the differences of the two propositions have to do with the contrasting correlate and remnant. This semantic property may give a motivation to derive the LA CONSTRUCTION from an underlying clause source (Toosarvandani 2008b).

Another key property of the expression *let alone* is that it behaves like an NPI (Fillmore et al. 1988; Toosarvandani (2008a), and others). It typically occurs in an 'affective' environments when *any* can appear. Observe the negative environments where the LA CONSTRUCTION is licensed:

- (13)a. We do [not] need grains to survive, let alone thrive. (COCA 2012 BLOG)
 b. I have [never] heard any of the artists I knew mention it, let alone talk about some desire to join it. (COCA 2012 BLOG)

- c. I was sick for so long and could [hardly] get out of bed, let alone play or take care of her. (COCA 2012 FIC)
- d. His children were [no longer] willing to visit him, let alone talk to him on the telephone. (COCA 1996 FIC)
- e. [Not] many people get to play tennis professionally, let alone play at Wimbledon. (COCA 2017 MAG)
- f. It's [hard] to breathe in high places, let alone talk. (COCA 2009 FIC)
- g. There is [scarcely] room to breathe, let alone play. (COCA 2000 NEWS)
- h. It finally replied and walked back to its alcove [without] pouring drinks, let alone providing the proper fork. (COCA 2015 FIC)

In addition, inherently negative predicates and adverbs can also license the construction, as they do typical NPIs:

- (14)a. The doctors [doubted] that he would ever walk again, let alone play golf. (COCA 2017 MAG)
- b. It is [inconceivable] that a Palestinian state could be created, let alone thrive, with these settlements. (COCA 2012 MAG)
- c. Professors say that students are [ill-prepared] to write a meaningful paragraph, let alone read important books (COCA 1990 ACAD)
- d. This Yucca Mountain is the most [difficult] to see, let alone understand. (COCA 2001 MAG)

The LA CONSTRUCTION also occurs in the scope of quantifiers like *few* and *most*:

- (15)a. [Few] cared whether the poor could eat, let alone read. (COCA 2015 MAG)
- b. [Most] PC users avoid thinking about, let alone preparing for, computer disasters. (COCA 2004 MAG)

Such data seem to support the idea that *let alone* occurs in the downward entailment (monotone decreasing) situations, as do other NPIs.¹ This condition also is supported

¹ For instance, *Few cats are white* entails *Few large cats are white*, but not the other way around. In this sense, *few* in this position is downward entailing.

from the fact that the construction also occurs in *if* conditional or *before* clause:

- (16)a. You better do what we discussed, [if] you want to stay alive, let alone stay on as CEO. (COCA 2015 TV)
- b. The date's announced [before] anything exists, let alone a script. (COCA 2012 BLOG)

However, note that there are several non-downward entailment environments where NPIs as well as LA CONSTRUCTION are licensed. For instance, interrogatives and expressions like *only* license the LA CONSTRUCTION as well as NPIs:

- (17)a. Is China and Russia allotted the privilege to even sit on this council, let alone wield Vito power ? (COCA 2012 BLOG)
- b. What recourse do the voters down there have, let alone the Gore campaign? (COCA 2000 SPOK)
- c. We clearly only touched the surface, let alone scratched it. (COCA 1991 SPOK)

In addition, we could observe that *let alone* quite frequently occurs in comparative constructions, which is upward entailing (Hoeksema 1983):

- (18)a. He had [more] problems than he could handle himself, let alone burden anyone else with. (COCA 2012 FIC)
- b. I started to receive far [more] requests than I could respond to, let alone satisfy. (COCA 2012 WEB)
- c. I would have been lucky to get you two or three [more] minutes, let alone months. (COCA 2010 FIC)

These data seem to support the idea that just like English NPIs, *let alone* occurs in nonveridical contexts. The nonveridicality theory of polarity suggests that NPIs appear in nonveridical contexts including modal, intensional, generic, downward entailing contexts, and nonassertive contexts like questions, imperatives, and conditionals (Zwarts 1995; Giannakidou 1998, 2009). All these environments do not express certainty about, or commitment to, the truth of the proposition in question, and thus are nonveridical. The

data we observe support the idea that *let alone* appears in a nonveridical environment.

2.3 Scale and pragmatics

From a pragmatic point of view, the LA CONSTRUCTION brings about a presupposition for a scale contrast. As noted in Carlson and Harris (2017), Toosarvandani (2008b) and others, there is a scalar contrast between the two clauses with a correlate and its remnant. For instance, (19a) would have the scale in (19b):

- (19)a. He never left the city, let alone the country.
 b. the city < the country

The scale of the remnant construction is more general than the scale of the correlate (clause). The violation of this presupposition or background entailment is not generally allowed (Toosarvandani 2008a):

- (20) #He never left the country, let alone the city.

However, there could be examples where the scale is quite context-dependent. For instance, we could have examples where the correlate and the remnant can be replaced:

- (21)a. Kim never went to France, let alone Germany.
 b. Kim never went to Germany, let alone France.

For (21a), going to Germany is more preferred or more popular than going to France, but for (21b), it is the other way around. The speaker offers two propositions in his/her scale: the first position to the hearer while at the same time offering the second one from the LA CONSTRUCTION which is more general. Henceforth, in terms of the scale of emphasis or informative degree, the first proposition is stronger and more informative than the second one. Consider the following pair of attested examples:

- (22)a. Councils haven't got the cash, let alone the time and manpower. (COCA 2018 NEWS)

- b. But I had no extra time or energy for golf, let alone money for the greens fee. (COCA 1992 NEWS)

As noted here, the two examples have ‘case/money’ and ‘time’ in contrast, but each has a different scale. The difference comes in the prominence: in (22a), the prominence is on the cash, while in (22b) it is on the time. The speaker places more emphasis on the first one than on the weaker statement of the second one.

Fillmore et al. (1988) note that the remnant is contextually given, while there is no such a restriction on the correlate. However, our corpus data show that an indefinite NP typically representing not given but new information quite often serves as the remnant²:

- (23)a. Stepping Stones possibly falls under being a strange name for a book let alone [a romance book]. (COCA 2010 BLOG)
 b. Fifty dollars Confederate won’t buy [a pocket knife], let alone [a repeating rifle]. (COCA 1992 FIC)
 c. I’m not strong enough to fight [one goblin], let alone [a whole hunting party]. (COCA 1992 FIC)
 d. It provides little guide, let alone [a blueprint or a model], for future action. (COCA 1990 ACAD)

The data support the idea that the LA CONSTRUCTION just requires the first proposition or the correlate is more prominent (highlight or salient) than the second proposition or the remnant. That is, the former is perceived as more standing out of the context in question than the latter.

3. Move-and-delete approaches

As noted earlier, the coordination-like properties as well as propositional meaning of the LA CONSTRUCTION could give motivations for a clausal ellipsis. With this, Harris (2016) and Carlson and Harris (2017) accept the following hypothesis:

² Among the total 8,247 tokens of the LA CONSTRUCTION from COCA, 984 tokens (about 12%) are indefinite NP remnants. This also implies that we could not identify the remnant as given information.

- (24) Clausal ellipsis hypothesis (Harris 2016: (6)):
The second constituent in *let alone* coordination always contains an elided vP or CP with a remnant topicalized into a focus position.

The hypothesis would then lead to the following clausal derivations for the LA CONSTRUCTION in question (&P means *and*-phrase):

- (25)a. I can't drink tea, let alone coffee.
b. [&P[&P let alone] [DP coffee_i] [TP I can drink t_i]]
- (26)a. I can't drink tea, let alone make it.
b. [&P[&P let alone] [VP make it_i] [TP I can t_i]]

As represented here, the remnant DP or VP first moves to the focus position, and the remaining TP undergoes ellipsis. With the assumption that the negative meaning comes from *let alone*, this move-and-delete process is an obligatory process, unlike other typical elliptical constructions, as seen from the following:

- (27)a. *I can't drink tea, let alone I can drink coffee.
b. *I can't drink tea, let alone I can make it.

Possible motivations for the move-cum-delete with the postulation of clausal source can be found from some connectivity effects. For instance, the PP remnant matches with its correlate:

- (28)a. Many of the best performances were never reissued on LP, let alone on CD.
b. Blew hadn't intended to return to her home state, let alone to such an isolated outpost.

The remnant can be a reflexive too:

- (29)a. What choice is there if you can't afford to take your kid, let alone yourself.
b. He can barely sit up, let alone protect himself and his family.

c. I can't find out what I'm accused of or why, let alone defend myself.

As noted earlier, such connectivity effects have given motivations to assume that *let alone* combines with its putative clausal source (Harris 2016; Carlson and Harris 2017). One immediate question that arises is then what makes this ellipsis obligatory, unlike typical elliptical constructions like sluicing and stripping (e.g., *I wonder who (Todd met)*). It is quite unnatural to have a full sentence after *let alone*. For instance, the putative sources of (25) and (26) are unacceptable:

- (30)a. *I can't drink tea, let alone I can drink coffee.
- b. *I can't drink tea, let alone I can make it.

Also note that we cannot simply assign a negation meaning to *let alone* since it can occur in non-negative contexts like questions and comparatives:

- (31)a. How did you get here, let alone find me?
- b. The gaming/geek community needs more people like you, let alone the atheist movement.
- c. Todd would be able to go to work, let alone to an amusement park.

There is no negative meaning assigned to the construction here. The complexity also comes from examples like the following:

- (32)a. She'd need a higher chair if she were to use the desk, let alone not to appear dwarfed by it. (COCA 2011 FIC)
- b. Fishing with high explosives is dangerous and illegal — let alone not very sporting. (COCA 2013 ACAD)

In such examples the remnant itself has a negator, inducing a negative statement. This implies that we could not assign a negative meaning to *let alone*.

The process of positing clausal sources becomes complicated when the construction appears in the sentence medial position:

- (33)a. To go through this at all, let alone publicly, is extremely difficult.

- b. It may not be easy to persuade the GOP, let alone the country, to accept the full Santorum canon.

The postulation of clausal sources for such cases requires a cataphoric interpretation, but in real-time processing, there is no need to wait until the end of sentences to assign a proper meaning to the construction. Further note the following attested examples from the corpus TIME:

- (34)a. A shortage of [fuel] and [lubricating oil], let alone gasoline, would be disastrous to industry.
 b. That he was likely to [break his own mark], let alone approach Nurmi's, was a possibility which appeared so remote to sportswriters last week.

In all these examples, the correlates here could be located in the syntactic islands. These then could challenge move-and-delete operations that rely on syntactic locality (cf. Merchant 2001).

4. A construction-based non-derivational approach

Observing that syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties of the LA CONSTRUCTION are not easily predictable from general grammar rules, Fillmore et al. (1988) take it as an independent construction. This paper also follows this direction, but tries to develop it together with a discourse-oriented construction perspective (Kim 2015; Kim and Nykiel 2020).

The LA CONSTRUCTION is related to other constructions that share certain grammatical properties but has its own. Departing from the previous one, we take *let alone* to be a type of subordinating marker. The construction is similar to parenthetical constructions, as illustrated in the following (Fillmore et al. 1988):

- (35)a. There were plenty of things [everybody] believed in, but not [Georgia].
 b. I'd denounce you on behalf of [Helen], if not [Bob].
 c. [Some] might say she was no better than an animal, although not [me].
 d. I think I will trust [Merriam Webster] on these, rather than [you].

All these constructions have a remnant as well as a correlate, both of which are of the same syntactic category. In addition, the conjunction and the following remnant induce a propositional meaning. Such grammatical behavior is also observed in its synonymous expressions including *much less*, *still less*, *even less*, and *not to mention*:

- (36)a. I don't even know what's happening in Boston, much less the world.
 b. The weather here is gorgeous, not to mention the wonderful food.

These examples also behave quite in a similar manner: the two contrasting expressions and evocation of a propositional meaning. Considering all these, it is reasonable to assume that the LA CONSTRUCTION also belongs to this family of construction.³

Another key property of these constructions concerns ellipsis properties. This allows quite a flexibility in terms of the possible remnant (or complement) that follows the conjunction. As suggested by Fillmore et al. (1988) and others and further discussed in this paper, the expression following *let alone* behaves like elliptical fragments yielding a propositional meaning. It has been well-noted that all elliptical constructions bear focus as well as 'parallelism' conditions between the clause including the ellipsis and its antecedent clause (see, among others, Sag 1976; Kehler 2000; Hardt and Romero 2004; Hartman 2011; Merchant 2016; Thoms 2016; Stockwell 2018). This parallelism can be informally stated as follows:

- (37) Parallelism condition (Hardt and Romero 2004):
 Ellipsis requires that there be some phrase E containing the ellipsis and some antecedent phrase A in the discourse, such that [A] is or contextually implies a member of F(E).

For instance, in the VPE sentence *Kim likes wine, and Lee does too*, the first conjunct can be a member of F(E), as in (38a), since its focus value is the set of propositions as in (38b):

- (38)a. [[Kim likes wine]] \in F([Lee likes wine]) (VPE: Lee does, too)
 b. {P | $\exists x.P = x$ likes wine}

³ The detailed hierarchical network including the construction is left open, but we could suggest that it is a subtype of subordinating-clausal constructions, not coordinating constructions.

The same condition is required for an LA CONSTRUCTION example like *Kim didn't read a newspaper, let alone a book*. The first conjunct *Kim didn't read a newspaper* can be a member of F(E), as in (39a), since its focus value is the set of propositions as in (39b):

- (39)a. $\llbracket [\text{Kim didn't read a newspaper}] \rrbracket \in F([\text{Kim didn't read a book}])$
 b. $\{P \mid \exists x.P = \text{Kim didn't read } x\}$

The example thus satisfies the condition in (37).

The LA CONSTRUCTION has its parallel, linguistic antecedent where the antecedent clause implies there is a member of F(E). Note that the parallelism condition will block tautologous conditional examples like (40b) (cf. Stockwell 2018):

- (40)a. *Kim didn't read [a newspaper], let alone [a newspaper].
 b. *Kim did not [speak Arabic], let alone [speak it].

Both of these are unacceptable since the two are not in sufficient contrast.

As noted by Kehler (2000), Hardt and Romero (2004), the parallelism condition for ellipsis is a condition on discourse structure. This can be formalized as the following (Kim and Runner 2022):

- (41) Elliptical Construction:

$$\textit{elliptical-cxt} \Rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SEM } E \\ \text{FOC } \textit{nelist} \\ \text{CNXT} \mid \text{PRESUP } \textit{parallel-rel}(A, E) \end{array} \right]$$

The specified constraints here hold not only for typical elliptical constructions like sluicing and stripping but also for those like the LA CONSTRUCTION. The constraints also reflect the observed generalization such that ellipsis clause (E) has at least one FOC expression (*nelist* is a nonempty list). In addition, the contextual (CNXT) constraint requires its meaning (SEM) E to be in a parallel-relation with its antecedent A. The parallel relation, evoked in the context, can be interpreted such that two situations are parallel when the variables in the antecedent and the elided clause are bound from

parallel positions (see Griffiths and Lipták 2014 for a similar formulation). This condition would account for the following contrast:

- (42) a. Brian would never even read a newspaper, let alone a book.
 b. $\text{never.read}(b,n) \approx \text{never.read}(b,b)$
- (43) a. *Brian would never even read a newspaper, let alone give him a book.
 b. $\text{never.read}(b,n)^\neg \approx \text{never.give}(b,h,b)$

In addition to these general constraints on elliptical constructions, the LA CONSTRUCTION has its own constructional constraints as we have seen. The construction needs to (syntactically or contextually) modify (MOD) a nonveridical situation, and further it denotes a more prominent (or more improbable) situation than the LA CONSTRUCTION situation. These constraints, as we have noted, are contextually controlled. These can be represented in a formal feature structure format:

- (44) LA CONSTRUCTION (\uparrow *elliptical-cxt*)

$$\text{let-alone-cxt} \Rightarrow \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SYN} \mid \text{MOD} \left\langle \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{nonveridical} \\ \text{IND } s0 \end{array} \right] \right\rangle \\ \text{SEM} \mid \text{IND } s1 \\ \text{CNXT} \mid \text{PRESUP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{cxt-scale } s0 < s1 \\ \text{more-prominent}(s0,s1) \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

We have noted that if the sentence in question does not observe these situations, it is infelicitous. For instance, both (45a) and (45b) are unacceptable since the first situation $s0$ is more general in the given contextual scale than the second situation $s1$ evoked from the LA CONSTRUCTION. Further, the former is less-prominent than the latter:

- (45) a. #He was incapable of leading a country, let alone a team.
 b. #The doctors doubted that he would ever play golf, let alone walk.

As such, the direction we pursue here relies on the contextual information referring

to the discourse structure in question. Note that the LA CONSTRUCTION is often used in real-life dialogues (data from Corpus of American Soap Operas):

- (46)a. So how do I get her to like me, Mikey? Let alone anything else.
 b. I'm not even fit to wash your car, am I? Let alone touch you.
 c. Hard to imagine anything ever being there. You know? Let alone what happened.

The antecedent clause of the LA CONSTRUCTION in each case is out of the sentence boundary. For such examples, we could not assume either coordination or subordination. The proper resolution of the LA CONSTRUCTION here requires us to refer to the discourse structure evoked from the previous sentence. For instance, uttering (46a) would evoke the QUD (question-under-discussion) in (47a). The LA CONSTRUCTION needs to evoke the QUD in (47b) to satisfy its constructional constraints in (41) and (44):

- (47)a. QUD of the first clause: $\lambda_x[\text{get}(\text{I}, \text{her}, \text{like}(\text{her}, \mathbf{me}), x)]$
 b. QUD of the LA CONSTRUCTION: $\lambda_x[\text{get}(\text{I}, \text{her}, \text{like}(\text{her}, \mathbf{k}), x)]$

The first *wh*-interrogative clause is a non-assertive, nonveridical situation so that the LA CONSTRUCTION can modify. The Parallelism Condition on the construction requires the LA CONSTRUCTION to evoke a QUD like the situation given in (47b): the two situations differ only in the object value of the predicate *like*.

Since this discourse-based analysis basically refers to the discourse structures in context, it requires no tight syntactic identity between the antecedent clause and the LA CONSTRUCTION, and further allows island insensitivity, whose data we repeat here (data from the corpus TIME):

- (48)a. He was lucky to be alive, let alone playing golf.
 b. A shortage of fuel and lubricating oil, let alone gasoline, would be disastrous to industry.

In (48a), the antecedent clause has an infinitival VP as a correlate, but the remnant is a participial VP. In (48b), the LA CONSTRUCTION refers to the coordination structure. The present analysis just requires two parallel situations with contrasting focus expressions.

It has no need to refer to the syntactic structures.

5. Conclusion

The LA CONSTRUCTION, as noted in the previous literature, displays quite peculiar syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties while sharing some key properties with other related constructions. These properties are hard to be regulated by general grammar rules or predicted from simple syntactic operations.

We have noted that the construction cannot be simply taken to be a coordination since it also displays non-coordinating properties. Departing from the previous literature, the paper has argued that it is a family of subordinating constructions that modifies a nonveridical (non-assertive) situation. The coordination-like properties are from the Parallelism Condition on the family of elliptical constructions. For the proper resolution of this fragmental construction, we have suggested a discourse-based constructional approach. This discourse-oriented approach places further contextual constraints on the construction with respect to the contextual scale and prominence between the antecedent situation and the situation evoked from the LA CONSTRUCTION. This direction seems to be much more feasible to account for its flexible distributions in real-life situations including dialogues.

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