Gapping is not low coordination

Gapping (a subtype of verbal ellipsis) has provoked a considerable number of studies during the last 40 years, from the seminal works of Ross (1970) and Neijt (1979) to more recent work by Johnson (2009) and Toosarvandani (2013) that appeal to the height of coordination to explain what Gapping is. These approaches analyse Gapping as ATB-extraction from the coordination of vPs. The contribution of this talk is to present and discuss some problematic data for such assumptions from Russian. The Russian conjunctions i ‘and’ and a ‘and’ differ in their ability to license Gapping. The use of i ‘and’ renders the Gapping clause ungrammatical, while the use of a ‘and’ results in a perfectly acceptable sentence.

(1) a. *Ja s’el sup, i Maša ćela. b. Ja s’el sup, a Maša ćela.
   I ate soup and Mary ate
   kašu.
   porridge

I argue that an analysis which differentiates i ‘and’ and a ‘and’ by the height of coordination is untenable. I present 3 arguments against low coordination approaches. Russian has a set of initial coordinators that license Gapping. They can be defined as a subclass of conjunctions that are merged at the beginning of each coordinated conjunct.

(2) Libo myši zašuršat na ěrdake, libo krysy zašuršat v podvale.
   either mice rustle on attic or rats rustle in basement

Russian initial coordinators do not float. Hence, the claim that they originate at the vP-level and subsequently move to the TP-level is not borne out:

(3) *Myši libo zašuršat na ěrdake, krysy libo zašuršat v podvale.
   mice either rustle on attic rats or rustle in basement

Russian also has a set of subordinators with the meaning of while that license Gapping:

(4) Miša učit reči Cicerona, v to vremja hak Saša učit islandskie
   ‘Michael learns Ciceros speeches, while Alex learns Icelandic
   sagas
   sagas
   ‘Michael learns Ciceros speeches, while Alex learns Icelandic sagas’

A theoretical argument against low coordination is its incompatibility with the Copy theory of Movement (the beans / rice problem). Consider the sentence John ate beans and Peter ate rice. The ATB-movement of the vPs creates a chain ⟨ate beans/rice; ate beans; ate rice ⟩. The issue here is the content of the highest copy which prevents the proper chain reduction, since all members of the chain must be identical to be reduced.