Pro-drop without a parameter

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This talk has two main goals: (i) to argue that the traditional hypothesis of a *Pro-Drop Parameter* (PDP) should be abandoned and (ii) to advance a novel account which characterizes PD (pro-drop) as an option by default and non-PD as the blocking of ellipsis, due to independent factors, such as the morphological impoverishment of the inflectional head.

1 Against a PDP. Without necessarily questioning the foundations of the parametric approach to variation, I argue that PD is not to be accounted for in terms of a syntactic/lexical parameter.

1.1 PD is an epiphenomenon even in parametric approaches. Approaches to PD widely (though often implicitly) assume that to a large extent, variation in patterns of PD is a by-product of parametric variation in other aspects of the grammar, such as the morphosyntactic properties of T and/or nominal expressions (Neeleman & Szendröi 2007, Saito 2007, Roberts & Holmberg 2010, Barbosa 2013). In other words: they do not propose an actual *PDP*.

1.2 PD does not satisfy all the criteria for parametric variation. It does not display large-scale clustering effects (Newmeyer 2005), and I argue that given Smith & Law's (2009) criteria, it cannot be characterized as being strictly discrete (since it displays a wide variety of patterns across languages, with e.g. partial PD, (im)possibility of null objects, etc.), or strictly exclusive (since null subjects are not allowed in all constructions in PD languages).

1.3 Pro-drop is a uniform phenomenon. I argue that parametric distinctions should not be made between types of PD. In particular, languages with *vs.* without agreement are not as different w.r.t PD as standardly assumed. Just as in Japanese-like languages, in agreement languages the interpretation of null subjects depends on discourse factors (Frascarelli 2007). Furthermore, as I show, sloppy reading of null subjects is not limited to languages with no agreement, since it can also be observed in e.g. Spanish (1) (*pace* Oku 1998, Takahashi 2010).

(1)   A. María cree   [que su   trabajo le exigirá   tiempo].
          María believes that self's job   CL require.3sg time

          Lit. María believes that self's job will require time to her.

      B. Ana piensa [que [e] le dejará   días libres].
          Ana thinks that   CL leave.3sg days free

          Lit. Ana thinks that [e] will allow holidays to her. ✓*Sloppy*

2 The proposal. Building on work on East Asian languages by authors such as Oku (1998), Saito (2007) and Takahashi (2010), I propose to extend the DP-ellipsis analysis to the whole PD phenomenon. A consequence is that variation will have to be accounted for in terms of conditions on DP-ellipsis.

2.1 Non-PD. What must be explained then is why ellipsis of subjects is not allowed in e.g. German or English. In the spirit of previous approaches (Rizzi 1986, Barbosa 1995, 2013, Ordóñez & Treviño 1997), I propose that agreement plays a relevant role in this regard. However, the novelty is that ultimately agreement will not be characterized as a requirement on PD, but rather as a potential blocker of the ellipsis operation at PF.

Non-PD languages such as German display an important amount of regular syncretism in agreement morphology, often called 'poor agreement' (*cf. Taraldsen's Generalization* (Taraldsen 1980)), which reflect identity at a deep morphological level (*cf.* Müller 2006, Albright & Fuß 2012). Frampton (2002) and Müller (2006, 2008) argue that these regularities derive from

operations of *impoverishment* that delete (values of) φ-features on T in the morphological component, and which then give rise to a "retreat to the general case" in the insertion of inflectional markers (which takes place in accordance with the Subset Principle). Building on this hypothesis, I argue that impoverishment also explains the non-PD status of German-like languages. More precisely, I propose that (2) filters out DP-ellipsis in these languages:

(2) *φ-Identity Constraint on DP-ellipsis*
     A DP can be elided iff the values of its φ-features are identical to the values of the φ-features present on the head that assigns Case to it.

I assume that ellipsis is an operation of PF-deletion (*cf.* Merchant 2001) and that rules of impoverishment apply in the post-syntactic component, prior to PF (Embick & Noyer 2007). Given that in German, after Agree with the subject DP, φ-features on T undergo impoverishment, then at the point at which ellipsis applies, their values will be different from those on the DP. In this configuration, (2) blocks ellipsis of the DP. In sum, non-PD languages with 'poor agreement' are languages in which φ-features on T, affected by independent operations, are formally too distinct from the DP's for the latter to be elided.

2.2 Back to PD languages. There is no rule of impoverishment of φ-features in languages with 'rich agreement' such as Spanish or Italian (*cf.* Müller 2006, 2008). In these cases, the input to ellipsis is the same as the output of φ-Agree, which results in the values of φ being identical on e.g the subject DP and its Case-assigner T. Thus (2) is satisfied, and DP-ellipsis is not blocked. Finally, in languages without agreement (Japanese, Korean), since there are no φ-features on heads such as T, (2) applies vacuously, and here too, ellipsis will be possible.

2.3 A different model for PD. In the last part of the talk I briefly discuss the model of PD that emerges from the approach put forth above. Since ellipsis applies at the end of the derivation and is subject to semantic and morpho-syntactic constraints (Johnson 2001), operations of very different types can affect its output. This model thus paves the way for explaining the important amount of variation observed in the patterns of PD across languages.

3 Summarizing, the central claim of the talk is that it is not necessary to postulate a PDP to account for variation in PD. I propose an analysis where PD is reduced to an operation of ellipsis, and develop a derivational account of the non-PD phenomenon in German-like languages, in terms of independently motivated rules of impoverishment.

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