

Non-finite *pro* and its licensing conditions in a partial pro-drop language

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A pro-drop language makes use of lightweight pronouns that can be silenced phonologically. In some null-subject languages, such as Italian, pro-drop is connected to finite agreement (Chomsky, 1981, Rizzi, 1982). In contrast, certain languages lacking agreement morphology, such as Chinese, license empty pronouns contextually (Huang, 1984). More recent accounts have suggested that contextual licensing has its fingerprint also in null-subject languages where agreement has a prominent role (Frascarelli, 2007, Cole, 2010). In this paper, we find support for the notion that agreement and discourse work together for null pronouns in a partial pro-drop language, Finnish. Specifically, we show that (i) due to extensive use of non-finite agreement, Finnish has a non-finite *pro* (\neq PRO) in addition to the finite *pro*, and (ii) the distribution of both finite and non-finite null pronouns is regulated by agreement and discourse properties. Here is how:

It is well-known that Finnish is a *partial* pro-drop language: whereas 1st and 2nd person pro-drop occurs freely, 3rd person pro-drop is more restricted (Vainikka and Levy, 1999, Holmberg, 2005, Holmberg and Sheehan, 2010). These studies have concentrated on finite *pro*. However, Finnish exhibits full agreement on nouns, adjectives, adverbials, postpositions, and non-finite verbs. Some examples:

- (1) a. minun auto-ni, minun siivoamiseksi-ni, minun löytämiseksi-ni
my car-1SG my cleaning-1SG my finding-1SG
'my car, the cleaning done by me, the finding of me'
- b. sinun ostama-si auto, sinun lähella-si, sinun lähtiessä-si
your bought-2SG car your near-PX/2SG your while-leaving-INF-2SG
'a/the car bought by you', 'near to you', 'while you left'

Most of these non-finite contexts, too, permit 1st and 2nd person subject arguments to be silenced due to agreement, as expected from a null subject language, and an overt pronoun is typically interpreted as emphasized. Moreover, silencing the 3rd person subjects is restricted, as expected from a partial pro-drop language (2a). And finally, exactly as in finite contexts (Holmberg and Sheehan, 2010), the 3rd person null subject can be licensed by a suitable c-commanding antecedent, as in (2b).

- (2) a. (minun) auto-ni pestiin. *(Hänen_i) auto-nsa_i pestiin.
my car-PX/1SG was.washed his/her car-PX/3SG was.washed
'My car was washed.' / 'His/her car was washed.'
- b. Pekka_i pesi (hänen_i) auto-nsa.
Pekka washed his/pro car-PX/3SG
'Pekka washed his car'.

A theory of pro-drop that restricts the phenomenon to the finite domain might thus be too narrow in its scope. Gathering evidence from both finite and non-finite domains, we show that the partial non-finite pro-drop in Finnish is regulated by three mechanisms. A necessary condition is that there is overt agreement between the pronominal and a proxy head. A second condition has two parts. When a null pronominal finds its way to the derivation, it first searches for a structurally c-commanding antecedent (cf. 2b). Finnish is thus a "partial pro-drop

language” not in the sense of rejecting third person null pronouns, but in the sense that the third person null pronouns, unlike first and second person pronouns, are actually anaphors. Yet this is still insufficient to capture the whole picture. We show that if no suitable structural antecedent is found, in some circumstances the null pronominal can look for an antecedent from the discourse (cf. Italian third person pro-drop). Some examples:

- (3) a. Tämä on [[Jeren_i ottama kuva] pro_i siskosta-an Jade_ista]
 this is Jere’s taken picture sister.of-PX/3SG Jade.of
 ‘This is the picture that Jere took from his sister Jade.’
- b. Minä näin [kuvat pro_i autosta-an jotka Pekka_i oli ottanut]
 I saw pictures car-PX/3SG which Pekka had taken
 ‘I saw the pictures of his car that Pekka had taken.’
- c. [[pro_i Äiti-nsa nakoiset] pojat_i] ovat onnellisia.
 mother-PX/3SG looking boys are happy
 ‘Boys looking like their mother are happy.’
- d. pro Äiti-nsa lähtee mukaan ja onkin ihan kivaa matkaseuraa.
 mother-PX/3SG comes along and is quite nice travel.company
 ‘His/her mother will come along, and she is quite nice travel company.’

This is however only a last resort strategy in Finnish: it takes place *only if* the structural antecedent search fails, and even then only in a curiously restricted sense (we will also say something about what this restricted sense comes to). Interestingly, then, Finnish third person null pronouns are anaphors that can reluctantly peek into the discourse repository when necessary for concocting a semantic interpretation. This is what its “partial pro-drop” profile comes to. These findings seem potentially interesting to us, as they reveal an interesting mixture of syntactically conditioned pronominal and anaphoric behavior that might be useful in narrowing down the correct theory of anaphora, null pronouns and pro-drop.

References

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