

Avoid Pronoun in consistent and partial pro-drop languages:

An interface analysis

Mara Frascarelli

Università degli Studi Roma Tre

1. Introduction and goal. This paper explores the licensing conditions ruling the realization of referential null subjects in consistent and partial pro-drop languages, comparing the possibility and interpretation of null (and weak) thematic subjects in Italian and Finnish in different clausal types (i.e., root sentences, ‘root-like’ subordinates and (diverse) embedded clauses).

2. Background for the analysis. Building on Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl’s (2007) distinction between Aboutness-Shift (A-) and Familiar/Given (G-) Topics, Frascarelli (2007) presents thorough evidence that in a language like Italian a thematic *pro* in subject position receives a value (i.e., a referential index) from the local A-Topic. Specifically, it is argued that 3rd person null subjects match (through Agree) a [+aboutness] feature, which is base-generated in the C-domain and associated with the A-Topic. The relevant *Topic Criterion* (2007: 721, (39)) also affirms that, when continuous, the [+aboutness] Topic can be null: a crucial ingredient in the interpretation of null subjects, since it implies the existence of Topic chains across sentences, possibly containing silent or destressed *continuing* G-Topics (either DPs or pronouns).

Later investigation on the possibility of different types of Topics in diverse clause types led Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) to propose an *Interface Root Restriction* (IRR), according to which Information Structure (IS) phenomena that affect the conversational dynamics (CG management, cf. Krifka 2007) must occur in clauses endowed with illocutive force that implement a conversational move. In particular, Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) show that A-Topics must occur in clauses endowed with context update potential (i.e., ‘illocutive force’) since they trigger an update of the discourse context. The prediction is therefore that an A-Topic chain cannot be activated from a non-root clause.

3. Working hypothesis and proposal. Holmberg, Nayudu and Sheehan (2009: 60) underline that “null subjects in partial null subject languages are optional in some contexts where they are obligatory in consistent null-subject languages and [...] excluded in some contexts where they are allowed in consistent null-subject languages”. Leaving the former case apart (concerning generic subjects), the present paper concentrates on the second part of this statement, showing that the difference between consistent and partial pro-drop languages can be reduced to (global) interface restrictions imposed on IS-phenomena and to (specific) conditions imposed on the interpretation of Topic chains (with special reference to the properties of *continuing* G-Topics) in the two language types.

References

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