



UNDERSTANDING PRO-DROP A synchronic and diachronic perspective

Location: Department of Humanities, University of Trento, Italy

Dates: 19th June 2014 - 21st June 2014

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Call for Papers

Since Rizzi's (1982) work, it has been known that the typological distinction introduced by Perlmutter (1971) between null-subject and non-null-subject languages is too strict, and that we need to distinguish between different types of null-subject languages. Rizzi distinguishes between languages in which any kind of subject pronoun (referential and expletive) can be dropped and languages in which only expletive pronouns can be null. Huang (1984) observes that some Asian languages instantiate another type of null-subject language, since they can drop subjects quite freely, despite they lack rich agreement morphology.

Recently, a refinement of the typology of null-subject languages has been proposed (Roberts&Holmberg 2010), in which four types of pro-drop languages are identified:

- consistent null-subject languages, such as Italian and Greek, in which a referential subject can be dropped in any syntactic environment;
- radical pro-drop languages, such as Chinese, Japanese and Korean, in which the presence of a null-subject correlates with dropping of nominals in several environments (cf. Huang 1984, Tomioka 2003, Saito 2007, Neeleman & Szendrői 2007);
- expletive null-subject languages, such as standard German, varieties of Dutch and Afrikaans (cf. Biberauer 2010), in which expletive, but not referential subjects can be dropped under certain syntactic conditions;
- partial null-subject languages, such as Finnish, Brazilian Portuguese and Russian, in which “the pronominal subject may remain unexpressed under restricted conditions determined by both the morphological and the syntactic context.” (Roberts/Holmberg 2010:6; cf. also Holmberg, Nayudu & Sheehan 2009 and Holmberg & Sheehan 2010).

The conference aims at advancing our understanding of null-subject languages, in particular of partial pro-drop languages, by bringing together researchers working on empirical (synchronic, diachronic and acquisitional) and theoretical aspects of *pro-drop*.

We are very pleased to announce the following invited speakers:

Manuela Ambar, University of Lisbon

Theresa Biberauer, University of Cambridge



Mara Frascarelli, University of Roma Tre

Helmut Weiss, University of Frankfurt & Anna Volodina, Institut für Deutsche Sprache,
Mannheim

Michael Zimmermann, University of Konstanz

We encourage submissions for 30-minute talks (followed by 10 minutes for discussion) addressing (but not restricted to) the following questions:

- a) Why can referential definite subject pronouns be null in pro-drop languages? Are rich morphology (Rizzi 1982, Neeleman/Szendrői 2007 a.o.), discourse (i.e. pro being licensed by a moved topic, cf. Frascarelli 2007, Grimshaw & Samek-Lodovici 1998, Modesto 2008, Barbosa 2013 a.o.) or ellipsis, cf. Duguine (2013) or a combination of these factors responsible for pro-drop?
- b) What can phenomena such as complementiser agreement found typically in German and Dutch dialects (cf. Bennis/Haegeman 1984, Bayer 1984, Fuss 2005, Gruber 2008, 2013, Haegeman & van Koppen 2012, van Koppen 2012 a.o.) and the presence of subject clitics in Northern Italian dialects (Brandi/Cordi 1981, 1989, Poletto 2000 a.o.), tell us about the relationship between C and T (cf. Chomsky 2008)? Is there a connection between these phenomena and pro-drop?
- c) If null-subjects are a discourse phenomenon, how can the differences between the four types of null-subject languages be captured?
- d) What are the implications of the idea that pro-drop is a discourse phenomenon for the three properties typically connected to the possibility of having silent referential definite pronouns, i.e. (i) rich agreement; ii) absence of the that-trace effects, and iii) free inversion (cf. Rizzi 1982, Roberts/Holmberg 2010)?
- e) What is the core property distinguishing partial from consistent pro-drop languages? Is the identification of a general class of partial pro-drop languages empirically motivated? Can we identify different types of partial pro-drop languages? What is the status of generics in partial pro-drop languages (cf. Holmberg 2005, 2010)?
- f) Can acquisition studies help us to determine what the properties of pro-drop languages are?
- g) It has been claimed that some modern non-null-subject languages went through periods in their history in which they allowed for referential null-subjects (cf. Old English (OE), van Gelderen 2005, Walkden 2012 a.o.) and Old High German (OHG, Axel 2007, Axel/Weiss 2011, Schlachter 2012 a.o.). Conversely, Old Romance (OR) languages have been claimed (Benincà 1984, Adams 1987, Roberts 1993, Vance 1989, 1993 a.o.) to be asymmetric *pro-drop* languages, i.e. languages in which null subjects are much more frequent in main clauses, and much rarer in embedded clauses. Is this confirmed for the great majority of texts, or is it restricted to some texts? Can we speak of dialectal variation? Are there any modern varieties which display such a pro-drop systems?
- h) What are the conditions determining the distribution of null subjects in OE, OHG and OR? Can



OE, OHG and OR be defined as partial pro-drop languages in Holmberg's (2005, 2010) sense (cf. Cognola 2013, Waldken 2013)? Why has the system found in OE, OHG and OR been lost in the modern varieties? Are such systems inherently unstable?

Abstracts should be **anonymous** and **not exceed** two pages (12-point Times New Roman font, with single spacing and margins of at least 2.54cm/1 inch), including examples and references. They should be sent as PDF attachment to federica.cognola@unitn.it. Submissions are limited to a maximum of one individual and one joint abstract per author, or two joint abstracts per author. Please contact Federica Cognola (federica.cognola@unitn.it) for further information.

The submission deadline is **15th April 2014**. Notification: No later than **10th May 2014**.

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