

Partial pro-drop at the interfaces: A comparative analysis
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1. Introduction and goal. This paper explores the licensing conditions governing the realization of referential null subjects in consistent and partial pro-drop languages, comparing the grammaticality and interpretation of null (and weak) thematic subjects in Italian, Russian Standard Spanish (SS) and Caribbean Spanish (CS) in different clausal types.

2. Background for the analysis. Based on Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl's (2007) interface analysis of Topics, Frascarelli (2007) provides evidence that in a language like Italian a thematic *pro* in preverbal position receives a value (i.e., a referential index) from the local A[aboutness-Shift]-Topic. A *Topic Criterion* is thus proposed that correlates core grammar with discourse requirements. Following this Criterion, the high Topic field in the C-domain contains a position in which the [+aboutness] feature (an "extended EPP feature") is encoded and matched (via Agree) by the local (3rd person) null subject. Crucially, Topic maintenance across sentences implies the existence of Topic chains and silent Topics: when continuous the A-Topic is not overtly realized; rather, a silent (1b) or low-toned (1c) G[iven]-Topic matches the [+aboutness] feature and enters an Agree relation with the local *pro*:

- (1) a. *Gianni_k, ha detto che pro_k/lui_k (L*) ha comprato una casa.*
 'John_k said that (he_k)/he_k bought a house.'
 b. [_{ShiftP} Gianni_k [_{IP} pro_k ha detto [_{ForceP} che [_{FamP} <Gianni_k> [_{IP} pro_k ha comprato una casa]]]]]
 c. [_{ShiftP} Gianni_k [_{IP} pro_k ha detto [_{ForceP} che [_{FamP} lui [_{IP} pro_k ha comprato una casa]]]]]

Later investigation on the interpretation of different types of Topics in diverse clause types led Bianchi & Frascarelli (2010) to propose an *Interface Root Restriction* (IRR), according to which IS-phenomena that affect the conversational dynamics (CG management, Krifka 2007) must occur in clauses endowed with illocutionary force that implement a conversational move. This is exactly the case of A-Topics, as they trigger an update of the discourse context. The prediction is that an A-Topic chain can only be started from a root (-like) C-domain.

3. Silent A-Topics. Assuming the Topic Criterion and the IRR, this paper deals with new data as, for instance, the apparent possibility that a *pro* can take as its antecedent an element that is not a Topic but, rather, a DP that is in the Comment (or the Focus) of the previous sentence:

- (2) a. *Alla fine, quando ha parlato Leo_k, pro_k ha convinto tutti.* (Italian)
 b. *Al final, cuando ha hablado Leo_k, pro_k ha convencido a todos.* (Spanish)
 'At the end, when Leo spoke, (he) convinced everybody.'

It will be argued that cases like (2) do not challenge the Topic Criterion; rather, they show that in a consistent NS language like Italian or Spanish an A-Topic can be silent not only if continuous, but also when heading a Topic chain. Hence, in (2) a silent A-Topic <Leo> must be assumed in the local C-domain of the 'illegitimate' *pro*. Evidence is provided by the fact that the latter does not allow a non-specific interpretation. Consider the interpretation of *una guardia* in (3a), and the interpretation of a null subject in a (possible) continuation like (3b):

- (3a) *Ogni angolo della banca è sorvegliato da una guardia.* (∀/∃)
 'Every corner of the bank is guarded by a policeman.'
 (3b) *....pro fuma come un matto!* (*∀/∃)
 '...(he) smokes like a mad!'

If the antecedent of *pro* were the DP *una guardia* a distributive reading of the indefinite should be still available in (3b), contrary to facts. This (and further) evidence supports a matching analysis of *pro* with a silent (necessarily specific) A-Topic in the local C-domain.

4. Partial NS languages: working hypothesis and proposal. Holmberg, Nayudu and Sheehan (2009: 60) underline that "null subjects in partial NS languages are optional in some contexts where they are obligatory in consistent NS languages and [...] excluded in some

contexts where they are allowed in consistent NS languages”. The authors argue for a syntactic Locality Condition, according to which (a) *pro* is only allowed if controlled by an antecedent in a higher clause (excluding Topic chains), and (b) the relevant control relation is not allowed across another subject, regardless of phi-features. Some type of local control is also proposed for Russian, with an additional NOM Chain requirement (i.e., a compelling nominative antecedent) for embedded null subjects (Tsedryk 2013). Hence, in partial NS languages an external reference is supposed to be excluded, as is shown below for Russian:

- (4) *Lev_k skazal čto pro_{k/*z}/on_{k/z} kupil dom.*
 ‘Lev_k said that (he_{k/*z}) / he_{k/z} bought a house.’

The present analysis will show that the situation is not so clear-cut and that Russian informants allow both for an external interpretation of *pro* and for non-local antecedents. Similar remarks hold for Caribbean varieties of Spanish (cf. Ordóñez & Olarrea 2006, Camacho 2013). Partial *pro*-drop properties of CS listed in the literature are, for instance, the preference for preverbal over postverbal subjects (¿*Qué tú compraste?* ‘What did you buy?’) and the overuse of subject pronouns in allegedly non-emphatic contexts:

- (5) *Yo quiero que tú me traigas carne cuando yo te llame.* (Villa-García et al. 2010)
 ‘I want you to bring me meat when I call you.’

We argue that these properties can be derived from the Topic chain available in the sentences.

5. Aim of the paper, claim and predictions. The final aim of this paper is to establish whether and how a Topic chain analysis can be extended to partial NS languages, so as to reduce the difference between consistent and partial NS languages to (global) interface restrictions imposed on IS-phenomena and to (specific) conditions imposed on the interpretation of Topic chains (w.r.t silent A-Topics and Topic maintenance across sentences). To this purpose, an online survey has been created for a *systematic comparative analysis*. Informants will be asked for a judgment concerning both the grammaticality and the interpretation of null subjects in different structural contexts (conveniently randomized), also comparing the interpretation of an overt pronoun in the same contexts.

In particular, null subjects will be examined under bridge verbs (4) and factive verbs (in sentences equivalent to (6)), in adverbial clauses (both in fronted and final position (as in (7a-b)) and in matrix sentences (cf. (2) above). The Control requirement will be checked through sentences comparable to (8), while Locality (and related intervention effects) is tested by means of interposed subjects endowed with different inflectional features (as in (9a-b)):

- (6) Leo is sorry that Leo thinks that **pro** will lose the race.
 (7a) Leo can come if **pro** finishes the work. (6b) If **pro** finishes the work, Leo can come.
 (8) Leo’s talk made it clear that **pro** was not guilty.
 (9) a. Leo thinks that the children say that **pro** will win the race.
 b. Leo thinks that I said that **pro** will win the race.

Evidence will be provided that the Topic Criterion can be considered a *macro-parameter* of NS languages, while the properties and asymmetries of partial NS languages can be reduced to a *meso-parameter* based on restrictions operating at the interface levels of analysis.

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