TOWARDS A UNIQUE ACCOUNT FOR PRO-DROP
Maia Duguine (UPV/EHU, HiTT & U. Nantes)

Overview. I argue in favor of a unified approach to the pro-drop phenomenon, in terms of the PF condition in (A), based on an deletion/ellipsis analysis of dropping (cf. Holmberg 2005).

(A) A DP can be deleted iff it stands in a c-command relation with a head with the same p(erson)-feature and the same index.

P-valuation. A head H will have the same p-feature as a DP by means of φ-AGREE. The assumption that transmission of the referential index is part of φ-AGREE (cf. Sigurðsson 2004, Bianchi 2006) ensures that (A) concerns only the DP that entered the AGREE relation with H.

Advantages of (A). An account of pro-drop based on p-AGREE has different advantages: (i) The majority of the world languages (89% of those reported in Haspelmath et al. 2005; cf. also Gilligan 1987) are Null Subject Languages: more than an exception, pro-drop is the rule. (ii) It gives a uniform account of pro-drop (no need for dividing 'rich agreement-based pro-drop' and 'no-agreement-based/discourse-based pro-drop'; cf. Jaeggli & Safir 1989). (iii) It spells out the intuition that 'it is only nuclear grammatical functions that can be interpreted as pro' (Mohanan 1983).

Two ways of blocking pro-drop. (A) is a PF a post-syntactic condition based on the syntactic operation AGREE. Thus, DP-deletion will be blocked either (i) if the DP does not enter a φ-AGREE relation or (ii) if a morphophonological operation previous to (A) affects the p-feature on H. I show that both can in fact be observed:

i. Not AGREEing. Pro-drop is not a uniform phenomenon in pro-drop languages: it is not the case that 'droppable' arguments can always drop freely. I discuss three such cases. In Tagalog and Malagasy (1)-(2), external and internal arguments can be dropped, but not automatically (Himmelman 1999, Pearson 2005). DPs in Bantu languages are subject to a similar alternation (Baker 2003). Finally, in Basque dative objects are overall subject to pro-drop (Ortiz de Urbina 1989), but as I show, that is not always an option (3).

I show that in these alternations, pro-drop is possible only when a head enters a φ-AGREE operation with the DP (i.e. that (A) holds). I present two types of evidence: (i) The strong implicative relationship between φ-AGREE and agreement: in languages with overt agreement, the pro-drop alternation patterns exactly with the agreement alternation; i.e. the absence of agreement morphology corresponds the impossibility of pro-drop (3). (ii) The fact that DP-movement is a corollary of φ-AGREE (Chomsky 2000): in languages with DP-movement, the pro-drop alternation patterns with the movement alternation; i.e. the impossibility of movement corresponds to the impossibility of pro-drop. This is illustrated in Malagasy (4) with a NPI signaling the vP boundary (Paul & Travis 2006): the DPs to its right correspond to the ones that can be dropped, and the ones to its left to those that cannot (cf. the word order and the pro-drop pattern in (1)-(2)).

ii Impoverishing the p-feature. The case of non-pro-drop languages such as German (5) is also accounted for by (A). In a Distributed Morphology approach, Müller (2005) argues that impoverishment operations on agreement morphemes (such as German (6) for instance) affect pro-drop. I adapt this analysis by proposing that the impoverishment of p-features drives the condition (A) not to hold. For instance, in German, an agreement morpheme with the φ-specification (7b) which is the result of AGREE with the 1st person plural DP wir (7a) ends up as in (7d) after impoverishment by (6) (Müller 2005), i.e., with a p-feature that does not correspond to that of the DP. Thus (A) does not hold and the DP cannot be deleted. This result converges with Rohrbacher’s (1999), where the person feature is shown to be crucial for pro-drop.

Summarizing, the present work develops a theory of pro-drop (i) that does not rely on the existence of different types of pro-drop languages and (ii) that straightforwardly signals which DPs will be the possible targets of dropping and which will not. Data from alternation structures
in different languages are discussed; these structures, as they constitute minimal pairs, provide evidence in favor of condition (A).

(1) a. Mamangy an’i Tenda izy/[e].  
Malagasy
AT.visit Obl.Det Tenda he
'The person visiting Tenda.'

b. Vangian-ny/*[e] i Tenda
Malagasy
AT.visit Det Tenda he
'Tenda, he is visiting.'

(2) a. Vangian’-i Naivo izy/[e].  
Malagasy
TT.visit Det Naivo him

b. Mamangy azy/*[e] i Naivo.
Malagasy
AT.visit Det Naivo (Pearson 2005)

(3) a. Jonék haurrei/[e] dirua eman die.
Basque
Jon.ERG children.DAT money.ABS give 3SG.Abs.3sgErg.3plDAT

Jon.ERG children.DAT money.ABS give 3SG.Abs.3sgErg

(4) a. Tsy nanapaka ity hazo ity tamin’ny antsy intsony i Sahondra.
Malagasy
NEG PST.AT.cut this tree this PST.P.GEN.DET knife NPI Sahondra

b. Tsy notapahin’i Sahondra tamin’ny antsy intsony ity hazo ity.
NEG PST.TT cut. GEN.S. PST.P.GEN.DET knife NPI this tree this

(5) *Ich denke, dass [e]gesungen habe ]]
German
I think that sung have

(6) [+1] → Ø/[-2,+pl]_

(7) a. [+1, -2, +pl] (wir 'we' DP)

b. [+1, -2, +pl] (abstract agreement morpheme after AGREE with wir)

c. [-2, +pl] (abstract agreement morpheme after impoverishment by (6))

References


Schütze, C., 1997, INFL in child and adult languages, PhD Diss., MIT, Cambridge, MA.