

Null Generic Subjects in Spanish and the Typology of Null Subject Languages

Null Generic Subjects Crosslinguistically: Holmberg's (2005, 2010) Null Generic Subject Generalization (NGSG) states that only partial null subject languages (pNSLs) like Brazilian Portuguese allow null generic third-singular subjects as in (1) whereas in consistent null subject languages (cNSLs) like Spanish they always receive a definite interpretation (2).

- (1) Naquele quarto *pro* dorme bem. (2) En ese cuarto *pro* duerme bien.
in-that bedroom one sleeps well in that bedroom s/he sleeps well
"In that bedroom one sleeps well." "In that bedroom s/he sleeps well."

This pattern results from lack of a D(efiniteness)-feature on T in pNSLs; in cNSLs T has D. In (1), *pro* is generic due to the lack of D in T; in (2) *pro* is definite because T has D. Holmberg places a special condition on cNSLs whereby the only way they allow generic *pro* is when licensed by special overt morphology, such as reflexive *se/si* in Romance. Novel data in (3) from Spanish not discussed by Holmberg show that cNSLs can have generic third-singular null subjects even in the absence of special morphology, contradicting the above generalization.

- (3) Uno_i duerme bien, cuando uno_i/*pro*_i duerme en ese cuarto.
one sleeps well when one sleeps in that bedroom
"One_i sleeps well when one_i sleeps in this bedroom."

In the adjunct clause in (3), an overt pronoun is possible, but *pro* is preferred. My main claim in this paper is that generic *pro*, just like definite *pro*, is identified in cNSLs by discourse-topic, a situation predicted to not be possible given the NGSG.

Definite *Pro* Identified by Topic: Holmberg et al (2009), following Frascarelli (2007), apply a topic-identification analysis to definite but not generic *pro* in cNSLs. In the second sentence in (4), a null copy of the previously introduced topic, *Juan*, is present in Spec,C. Since this is a cNSL, T has an unvalued D-feature. The topic values the D-feature as [definite], thus giving *pro* a definite interpretation. The relevant part of the structure of (4) is given in (5).

- (4) En este cuarto, Juan_i no puede dormir. En ese cuarto, *pro*_i duerme bien.
in this room John not can sleep in that room he sleeps well
"In this room, John_i cannot sleep. In that room, he_i sleeps well."

- (5) [[_{CP} Juan_i TP [<Juan>_i no puede dormir]]...[[_{CP} <Juan>_i TP [*pro*_i duerme bien]]

If the topic shifts, it does so as an overt pronoun valuing T's D-feature and its null copy is present in the following clauses. This accounts for null subjects in cNSLs which are "always" definite under the NGSG above. However, as shown in (3), cNSLs do allow null generic subjects.

Crucially, Holmberg et al (2009:70) assume topics identifying *pro* are only definite. By rejecting this stipulation, we can apply the same analysis to account for generic *pro* in cNSLs as in (3).

Generic *Pro* Identified by Topic: I extend the topic-identification above to generic *pro*, raising the question of the necessity of a D-feature in cNSLs. In (3), the D-feature in T in the matrix clause is valued [indefinite] by overt *uno*. In the adjunct clause, a null copy of this topic is present valuing D. This satisfies the feature-checking requirement of D and renders *pro* indefinite. An operator in the C-domain values T's tense feature as [generic] and unselectively binds T and *pro*, yielding a generic interpretation. The structure of (3) is given below in (6).

- (6) [[_{CP} Op uno_i TP [<uno>_i duerme bien] [_{CP} cuando <uno>_i TP [*pro*_i duerme en ese cuarto]]

More evidence for topic identification of null generic subjects comes from the data in (7):

- (7) **Pro*_i duerme bien, cuando uno_i duerme en ese cuarto
he sleeps well when one sleeps in that room
Intended: "One sleeps well when one sleeps in that room."

In (7) the order of (3) is reversed and the null subject is ungrammatical. This is because the D-feature in T remains unvalued in the absence of a topic. The potential topic *uno* in the second clause is too low and only serves as the topic of its own clause as shown in (8).

(8) *[[_{CP} ? _{TP} [_{pro_i} *duerme bien*] [_{CP} *cuando uno_i _{TP} [_{<uno>_i} *duerme en ese cuarto*]]*

Note that generics/indefinites can be topics *contra* Holmberg et al (2009:70); in (9) *uno* is the antecedent of null subjects throughout the discourse.

(9) *Cuando uno_i es rico, pro_i viaja mucho. Pro_i puede irse y pro_i no preocupa del dinero.*
when one is rich one travels a-lot one can leave and one not worries of-the money
"When one is rich, he travels frequently. He can leave and not worry about money."

If *uno* comes after the null subject later in the discourse in (9), it is ungrammatical, as in (8).

My analysis predicts that topic-identification of generic null subjects should be possible in other cNSLs. The data in (10) from another cNSL, Italian, support this prediction.

(10) *Uno_i non può pensare bene se pro_i non ha mangiato bene.*
one not can think well if one not has eaten well.
"One cannot think well if one did not eat well."

As in Holmberg's (2005, 2010) analysis of generic *pro* in pNSLs, I posit an abstract operator. This is necessary because neither *pro* nor *uno* are inherently generic. If *pro* had a generic feature it could regularly have a generic interpretation in cNSLs. As shown in (2) above, this is not the case. Nor is *uno* inherently generic; it can receive different readings depending on context.

(11) *Uno es mi amigo.* (12) *Uno prefiere abstenerse.*
one is my friend one prefers abstain-Pron_{se}
"One is my friend." "One prefers to abstain."

In (11) *uno* can only be interpreted as referring to a member of a group of individuals previously mentioned in the discourse while (12) is an example of *uno* as a polite first-person plural. The possibility of different interpretations is evidence the pronoun does not have a [generic] feature.

Comparison with Imp_{se}: *Uno* identifies generic null subjects as a topic. This does not qualify as part of the special morphology condition of the NGSG discussed above, according to which a null subject is licensed by the reflexive clitic in impersonal *se* constructions as in (13).

(13) *En ese cuarto se pro duerme bien.*
in that bedroom Imp_{se} one sleeps well
"In this bedroom one sleeps well."

These two generic constructions differ in several ways, the most relevant here being that *se* only licenses *pro* within its own clause (14) while *uno* can identify *pro* in a neighboring clause via a null copy as topic as shown in (3) and (10).

(14) *Se pro_i duerme bien cuando se/*pro_i duerme en ese cuarto.*
Imp_{se} one sleeps well when Imp_{se}/one sleeps in that bedroom

The ungrammaticality of the null subject in the adjunct clause in (14) is due to the inability of *se*, a clitic, to function as a discourse topic. It is a functional/morphological element that licenses a null subject (Mendikoetxea 2008, MacDonald to appear), but only within its own clause.

Select References: Frascarelli, M. 2007. Subjects, Topics and the Interpretation of Referential Pro: An Interface Approach to the Linking of (Null) Pronouns. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 25:691-734. Holmberg, A. 2005. Is There a Little Pro? Evidence from Finnish.

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