

7. Conclusions

7.1. The status of agreement in the Romance null subject languages

In this thesis it has been argued that agreement morphology is *uninterpretable* in Romance NSLs. As such the *uninterpretable* phi-features in I are valued by the subject and deleted before LF, but remain at PF as agreement morphology. This kind of approach, it has been proposed, has theoretic and empirical advantages over an approach based on the idea that agreement morphology is *interpretable* in Romance NSLs. Theoretically, the former is appealing as it makes use of an existing PF-economy principle to derive null subjects, coupled with a simple difference in the featural specifications of I. This enables us to derive null subjects without further stipulation, thus adhering closely to the idea of universal grammar and limiting parametric variation to the properties of a functional head (in this case a [uD] feature on I). In empirical terms, the proposal captures the facts that (i) not all preverbal subjects in Romance NSLs appear to be CLLD, and (ii) SVO, rather than VSO is the unmarked word order in Romance NSLs.

7.2. The EPP and free inversion

Chapters 2 and 3 provide ample evidence of an active EPP in Romance of the type 'merge XP'. This is supported by the fact that SVO is the only felicitous unmarked word order in EP and Italian. In Spanish, VSO order is also possible without the subject receiving narrow focus, but only where another XP (topic/focus) occupies spec IP. Instances of free inversion reduce to (i) inversion forced by narrow focus on the subject, (ii) locative inversion with a null fronted locative, and (iii) expletive associate constructions, giving rise to definiteness effects. The first of these types of 'inversion' is dependent on the availability of PF-deletion of spec IP, and as such implies the possibility of null expletives cross-linguistically. The second is reliant on the availability of null locatives.

Word order differences between the languages appear to be due partly to prosodic interface conditions. Thus, Spanish and Italian allow PF-'lowering' of a subject

where it receives narrow focus. This is because prosodic interface conditions override normal PF conditions which force the spelling out of the highest copy at PF, meaning that the lowest copy in a chain is spelled out. In English, French and EP this does not occur, but rather an invisibility condition allows the assignment of nuclear stress to ignore defocalised elements (cf. Zubizarreta 1998). This kind of variation, it is proposed, might not be parametric in nature.

7.3. Case

The word order facts in Romance suggest that a case assignment parameter not unlike that proposed by Koopman and Sportiche (1991) is also required. Spanish and Italian, unlike the other languages, appear to check Case in-situ via agree: in our terms the [uI] nominative Case feature is weak. However, in EP and French nominative Case is a strong/greedy [uI*] feature, which requires movement to spec IP. If D is a functional projection, then this parameter satisfies the requirement of being a property of a functional head. Where Case is strong, the only way a subject can surface outside spec IP in these languages is if it enters the derivation with [Focus] or is moved to a Topic position. In all the languages, however, as is the case in English, low subjects can value their Case feature if they are merged as the specifier of a complex PP. This accounts for the fact that low non-focused subjects are permitted in all languages in instances of locative inversion.

7.4. Null referential subjects

Null referential subjects in Romance NSLs are deleted in the phonological component under non-distinctness with the head I.¹ Deletion obtains where I bears an uninterpretable [uD] feature. This is the formal representation of the 'null subject parameter'. Note that the richness of agreement morphology is an effect of this [uD] feature, rather than a trigger for it. In order for deletion to obtain, a DP must be a proper subset of the feature specification of the head with which it agrees. Where this is true, and there is no PF-visibility constraint blocking it, deletion obtains.

¹ Or in a split IP, the head Agr.

7.5. Null expletives

It is proposed that null expletives do exist, with the LF interpretation of an existential quantifier. In languages lacking a PF-visibility requirement on spec IP, these expletives are deleted under non-distinctness in the phonological component. In languages such as English, this deletion is blocked, even though non-distinctness obtains.

7.6. Partial pro-drop in Romance

Brazilian Portuguese has a negative setting for the NSP, that is to say it lacks a [uD] feature on I, meaning that the deletion of referential null subjects under non-distinctness is blocked. However, BP lacks a PF requirement for spec IP and so licenses null locatives and expletives. BP also allows movement from finite clauses via a peripheral Topic position. This gives rise to null bound embedded subjects. As such, the null subjects licensed in BP are also the result of deletion.

7.7. Final conclusions and future research

The aim of this dissertation was to re-assess the null subject parameter (NSP) in the light of recent theoretical advances through the careful examination of a number of Romance languages. Crucially, it has been argued that an analysis which attributes null subjects to a parameterised EPP fails to make the correct empirical predictions, even for Romance, when subjected to scrutiny. In fact, the examination of this small group of languages has revealed that the effects traditionally associated with the NSP cannot be derived from a single parameter. Rather, three interacting parameters, and prosodic interface conditions are required in order to capture the level of micro-variation attested:

Posited parameters

(1) *Rich agreement parameter*

I lacks/bears a [uD] feature.

(2) *PF-interpretability parameter*

I lacks/bears a *, where * requires the specifier of I to be spelled out at PF.

(3) *Weak/strong nominative Case parameter*

Nominative Case feature [uI] lacks/bears *, where *requires movement to spec IP.

These facts, coupled with prosodic interface conditions and differences in the way topic/focus is assigned can account for the full range of variation.

It has been shown that the null subject parameter is intricately connected with many additional parametric effects, as Rizzi (1982) and Chomsky (1981) first proposed. The availability of free inversion crucially relies on the availability of null locatives, which in turn depends upon the negative setting of a PF-visibility condition on spec IP. Future research will consider how the possibility of that-trace violations and long wh-movement fit into this analysis. Note, however, that Rizzi's (2004a) recent claim that that-trace effects are due to the availability of null expletive pronouns² and hence low extraction of subjects, suggests a possible line of inquiry.

² In this case, deleted expletives.