Empty nominal categories in Bangla, Hindi and Malayalam

Takahashi (to appear), building on work in Takahashi (2008a/b), and Şener and Takahashi (2009), re-examines the syntactic status of null argument NPs in languages traditionally referred to as *pro*-drop, and argues that null arguments are in some instances null pronominals (i.e. pro), but in other instances the result of a process of argument ellipsis/AE. The difference between the two types of null argument is suggested to be manifested in the ability of the latter, but not the former, to permit interpretations of sloppy identity. For example, null subjects and objects in Japanese do permit sloppy interpretations, as illustrated in (1), and so are analyzed as instances of AE, but null subjects in Spanish do not, as shown in (2), and are taken to be occurrences of pro, restricted in their interpretation in the same ways that overt pronouns are:

(1) a. John-wa [zibun-no tegami-o] suteta.　　　　b. Mary-mo [e] suteta.
　　　John-Top self-Gen letter-Acc discarded　　　　　Mary-too　　discarded
　　　'John$_i$ threw out his$_i$ own letters.'　　　　　　　'Mary did too.'

　　　= Mary also threw out John's letters (strict)
　　　= Mary also threw out her own letters (sloppy)

(2) a. Maria cree　　　que su propuesta sera　　aceptada.
　　　Maria believes that her proposal will.be accepted
　　　'Maria believes that her proposal will be accepted.

　　b. Juan también cree　　　que *e* sera　　aceptada.
　　　Juan also　　　believes that　　will.be accepted
　　　'Juan also believes that it will be accepted.'
　　　$\Rightarrow$ only strict: *e* = Maria's proposal

The interpretation of null quantificational subjects and objects (e.g. equivalents to: 'John bought three books. Mary also bought _.') shows a similar patterning, in Japanese allowing for strict and sloppy readings where either the same set of elements or a different quantified set of elements is available as an interpretation, but only a strict, same-set interpretation in Spanish.

Takahashi examines two different theories of what may generally permit (or prohibit) the phenomenon of argument ellipsis across languages. The first is an analysis developed in Oku (1998), that the key determinant factor is the availability of SCRAMBLING within a language: following Bosković and Takahashi (1998), it is suggested that those languages which permit scrambling allow for the base-generation of nominals in scrambled positions and genuinely empty nominal arguments (i.e. instances of AE) in theta positions, the interpretative link between such positions being constructed at LF. Japanese, a scrambling language therefore allows for AE, while Spanish, a non-scrambling language does not license AE. The second idea Takahashi considers is the analysis advanced in Saito (2004) that it is crucially the presence/absence of AGREEMENT which determines whether a language permits AE or pro: languages without agreement such as Japanese are taken to license AE, but languages which do have agreement, such as Spanish, do not and only license pro – an 'anti-agreement' effect.

Takahashi correctly points out that in order to assess the two hypotheses against each other, one needs to consider (a) languages which have both scrambling and agreement, and (b) languages which have neither scrambling nor agreement, rather than languages which possess just one of these two properties. Investigating Turkish as a

language of type (a), it is shown that the (anti-)agreement-based hypothesis of AE is very clearly supported, rather than the scrambling-based hypothesis: in those clause types where agreement occurs in Turkish, only strict interpretations are available for empty nominals, whereas in clauses where no agreement occurs, both strict and sloppy interpretations appear to be licensed. A scrambling-based analysis incorrectly predicts uniformity of strict+sloppy interpretations in all clause types. Turning to Chinese as an instance of a language of type (b), a surprising result is reported. Null subjects in Chinese pattern as null pronominals rather than instances of AE, despite the absence of overt agreement in the language. Given such a patterning, it is suggested that Chinese actually does have *covert* agreement blocking AE, and that such an assumption is independently supported by blocking effects with long-distance anaphors in the language.

The preliminary conclusions drawn from Takahashi's study of Turkish and Chinese are interesting, but in clear need of further empirical support from other languages with similar scrambling and agreement-type properties. In this regard, languages from South Asia are ideally positioned to potentially confirm or disconfirm, or call for modification of the direction of the AE analysis put forward by Takahashi. South Asian languages regularly permit scrambling, and show an interesting array of verbal agreement phenomena.   The present paper will report on a broad ongoing study of null argument elements in three South Asian languages which crucially exhibit differing properties of agreement: Bangla, which has verbal agreement in all finite clauses, Malayalam, which does not exhibit any verbal agreement, unlike other Dravidian languages, and Hindi, which shows mixed subject/object agreement patterns depending on the tense value of a clause and ergative/objective case-marking. A full range of null argument data in main and embedded contexts will be reported on focusing on the availability of strict/sloppy interpretations and the presence/absence of agreement marking, allowing for a rigorous testing of the anti-agreement hypothesis of AE. The study will also establish a much broader characterization of the general availability of null arguments in Bangla/Hindi/Malayalam than is currently present in the literature, which is surprisingly lacking in clear descriptions of pro-drop phenomena in South Asian languages.

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