

Code-switching as a window into the workings of null subjects

The possibility of licensing a null subject (NS) in a language is typically attributed to a correlation with rich agreement (Taraldsen, 1979; Chomsky, 1981; Rizzi, 1982). Yet, the validity of this correlation, the so-called Taraldsen Generalization, has been challenged given counterevidence from East Asian languages (Huang, 1984) or the inability of Icelandic and German, two richly inflected languages, to license NSs. Thus, the proposals that have subsequently been presented have attempted to incorporate NS languages into a more cohesive and all-inclusive theory of *pro-drop*. The vast majority of these theories argue in favor of the domain of Tense or Agreement (henceforth, T) as being responsible for the licensing and recovery of a NS in a given syntactic environment. Nevertheless, a set of theories has emerged fairly recently (Frascarelli, 2007; Sigurðsson, 2011) that attribute the realm of the Complementizer (henceforth, C-domain) the lead role in the recoverability of the content of a given referential NS (i.e. the features of the NS match those of a CLLD Topic hosted in the C-domain).

Consider the German/Spanish code-switched sentences in (1) and (2), gathered from a German/Spanish consultant. As we can observe, the verb of the embedded clause and its inflection are Spanish (*amenazó*, ‘threatened’) yet the complementizer head is in the opposite language, German (*wen* ‘what-ACC’) in both instances. The crucial difference between both is that in (2) the subject of the embedded clause (*Juan*) has been dropped and, according to the same consultant, this drastically degrades the acceptability of such sentence. This constitutes a surprising finding; following the vast majority of proposals, a NS should be available in (2) as the verb and its inflection (the T-domain) are Spanish, a *pro-drop* language. Sentences (4) and (5) were taken from an English/Spanish consultant. In both examples, the verb of the embedded clause is English (*bought*, ‘saw’) and the complementizer head is Spanish (*qué*, ‘what’). Again, the crucial difference between both is that in (4) the subject of the embedded clause has been dropped. As in (2), dropping the subject degrades the acceptability of (5), according to my English/Spanish consultant. This finding is also surprising as the C-domain being Spanish, a *pro-drop* language, (see González-Vilbazo and López, 2011’s *Phase Head Hypothesis*) would guarantee the availability of a NS in (5).

Given these facts, one pilot study and one full-scale study were conducted. The language pairs under scrutiny were English/Spanish and German/Spanish (i.e. English and German being *non pro-drop* and Spanish being *pro-drop*). 7 English/Spanish and 24 German/Spanish bilinguals took part in each experiment. They completed an Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT) on a 1-7 Likert scale. The stimuli resembled the structure of (1)-(2) and (4)-(5), in which the language of the T and the C heads are in the opposite language and *pro-drop* might have taken place.

The results of both experiments showed that code-switching (CS) itself does not block a NS (see (3), (6)). The results in fact corroborated that *pro-drop* is blocked in sentences where the T-domain is Spanish but the C-domain is either English or German (see (2)). These findings contradict the proposal that only the T-domain is responsible for both the licensing and the recoverability of *pro* and also suggest that the English/German C-domains might be playing a role in the possibility of licensing a NS in such cases. What is more, the results also raise a question to the C-domain proposals. The participants consistently rejected sentences like (5), where the C-domain is Spanish. As we can see, the C-domain being a *pro-drop* language does not warrant the possibility of licensing a NS in the discourse either, as the English/German T-domains seem to be blocking it. These empirical results lead us to propose the novel account that *pro-drop* occurs via the interplay of T and C. I will show that the T-domain seems to determine

whether a NS can be formally (i.e. grammatically) licensed while the C-domain decides whether a NS can be licensed given particular discourse-structural requirements.

Examples

- (1) No sé *wen* Juan amenazó.
(I) not know who-ACC Juan-NOM threatened.
'I don't know who Juan threatened'.
- (2) *No sé *wen* *pro* amenazó.
(I) not know who-ACC *pro* threatened.
'I don't know who he/she threatened'.
- (3) *Ich weiß nicht* a quién *pro* amenazó
(I) not know who-ACC *pro* threatened.
'I don't know who he/she threatened'.
- (4) No sé qué *bought* *María* *with the money she received.*
(I) don't know what bought *María* with the money she received.
'I don't know what María bought with the money she received'.
- (5) *Me pregunto qué *saw* *pro* *when he got out of the store.*
(I) wonder what saw *pro* when he got out of the store.
'I don't know what he/she saw when he/she got out of the store'.
- (6) *I don't know* qué compró *pro* con el dinero que recibió.
I don't know what bought *pro* with the money she received.
'I don't know what he/she bought with the money he/she received'.

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