



A Contrastive Approach of Pro-Drop Parameter in English and Arabic

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Abstract

The present paper investigates the pro drop parameter in English and Arabic and to show under which circumstances both languages allow this parameter. It has been suggested that English is non-drop language while Arabic is not, accordingly the paper tries to uncover that although English is a non-drop language but it allow it in certain constructions under certain conditions. The paper begins with a brief review notation of pro-drop, and then discusses and provides some examples of the manifestations of the parameter under scrutiny both in English and Arabic successively. In this regard, the work tries to answer the following question: what are the differences and similarities of pro-drop in English and Arabic? In association with this aim, it is hypothesized that although English is a non-drop language it allows this parameter in certain circumstances. To achieve the aim of the work a comparison is held between the two languages based on the examples that elucidate this parameter.

Keywords: pro-drop; universal grammar; control theory; null subject.

مقاربة تقابلية لخاصية إسقاط الضمير في اللغة الإنجليزية واللغة العربية

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة خاصية إسقاط الضمير في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، وتهدف إلى الكشف عن السياقات التي تسمح فيها كلتا اللغتين باستخدام هذه الخاصية. تفترض الدراسة أن الإنجليزية تُصنّف كلغة غير مُسقط للضمير في مقابل العربية التي تُعد لغة مسقطة للضمير، لكنها تحاول إثبات أن الإنجليزية - رغم ذلك- تسمح بإسقاط الضمير في تراكيب محددة تحت شروط معينة. تبدأ الورقة بعرض نظري موجز لمفهوم إسقاط الضمير، ثم تُقدم أمثلة توضح مظاهر هذه الخاصية في كل من الإنجليزية والعربية على التوالي، مع إجراء مقارنة تحليلية بينهما. وتسعى الدراسة للإجابة على السؤال التالي: ما أوجه الاختلاف والتشابه في تطبيق خاصية إسقاط الضمير بين اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية؟ لتحقيق هذا الهدف، تعتمد الدراسة منهجاً تقابلياً لتحليل الأمثلة المستخلصة من السياقات اللغوية لكلتا اللغتين، مع التركيز على الحالات التي تسمح فيها الإنجليزية باستخدام الضمير الضمني على عكس تصنيفها النظري. وتخلص النتائج إلى أن إسقاط الضمير في الإنجليزية يخضع لقيود نحوية ودلالية تختلف جذرياً عن العربية، مما يؤكد تفاعل العوامل النحوية العالمية مع الخصائص التركيبية الفريدة لكل لغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إسقاط الضمير؛ النحو العالمي؛ نظرية التحكم؛ الفاعل الضمني.



1. Introduction

In Chomsky's universal grammar, pro-drop, also referred to as 'Null Subject Parameter', is a parameter used to test whether a sentence can drop or omit the subject without effecting its structure or without effecting what that sentence tries to point out. This proposed phenomenon is mainly based, in some languages, on the omitted subject pronouns (UKEssays, online).

Generally, it is a term used to specify the types of variety that a grammar concept exhibits across different languages in government-binding theory. It is proposed that there are no traditional grammar codes, but rather concepts that in various languages have a subtly different shapes. For example, a head parameter defines the head positions in sentences. The pro-drop parameter decides the possibility to exclude the subject of a sentence. Parameter setting is known for defining parametric values for such languages. The general method, which has ever since come to be extended outside of syntactic contexts, has been called the Principles and Parameter Theory (PPT) of universal grammar (Crystal, 389:2008).

The present approach sets itself to make a comparison between two languages: English and Arabic. The aim of this comparison is test how this parameter functions in both languages. The method followed in the study is present a theoretical account of the concept in as it is expounded in English and Arabic grammars with illustrative examples in both. The examples are then accounted in showing whether or not the two languages exhibit the same behavior regarding this principle.

2. General Overview of the Pro Drop Parameter

The pro drop can roughly refer to the act of (dropping the pronoun). The pronouns can be dropped, in certain languages, when they are logically or linguistically inferable. Some scholars in the field refer to the same phenomenon of pro-drop as (the null/zero anaphora) (Hornstein, et al, 2005: 4). Crystal (2008: 389) states that pro-drop is used in 'Government and Binding theory' to refer to the possibility of suppressing the subject of a clause. He adds that English is regarded as a non-drop language. Bussmann (1996: 949) defines the pro-drop parameter as "The parameter which determines whether a language is a pro-drop language or not. A positive setting of the parameter allows an empty pro-element to be identified by its governor. This is the case in pro-drop languages".

The term 'pro-drop' is originated from Noam Chomsky's *Lectures on Government and Binding*. This parameter, accordingly, regards languages such as Spanish and Italian as pro-drop languages, while English and French may not (Webelhuth, 1995: 216).



2.2 Pro Drop in English

As mentioned earlier that the notion of pro-drop is presented by Chomsky in his Government and Binding theory (GB), there are sub theories inside it; "they are theta theory, case theory, binding theory, bounding theory, and control theory". GB is frequently depicted as 'modular' theory because of the way that these theories all interact among each other. It is suggested by exponents of GB theory that the principles of syntax are fundamentally the same and they are operative almost in all languages. In spite of this given fact, these principles might have different formulas in different languages. Therefore, GB is frequently referred to as 'the principles and parameters' approach (Crystal 2008:206).

The present paper will limit itself in presenting a brief explanation of 'control theory' only since the pro drop is explained under it and since the present paper is concerned with pro drop only.

2.2.1 Control Theory

Control theory works on the abstract pronominal element of a sentence (PRO) in such a way to determine its potential reference. For instance, a PRO of an embedded infinitival clause which is regarded as a subject is accordingly said to be within the domain of control of the subject of the main clause which is called the controller. This can be found in certain constructions and especially after verbs such as promise. Conversely, the PRO is said to be within the domain of the control of the object of the verb if it comes after verbs like persuade, in this case it can be referred to as (it is non-subject control). The following examples illustrate this condition:

(1) *I* promised Jane *PRO* to leave.

(2) I persuaded Jane *PRO* to leave (Crystal, 2008:107).

2.2.2 Pro or Null Constituents

2.2.2.1 Null subjects

According to Radford (2009: 92) null subject in English does have three different types, they are as follows:

A. Imperative Sentence

In this type of null subject, the construction is basically lies in second person, contrast (3a) with (3b) in the following:

(3) (a) Never lose *your* temper! (b) * Never lose *their* temper!

The (3a) is a correct sentence where the construction under scrutiny (pro drop) is clear in the second person. If the pro drop is attempted with the third person, the results would be an ill formed sentences as in (3b). This indicates that English does have this construction in this particular case.



B. Truncated Null Subject

In this second type of null subject in English, the construction is confined to a set of particular occurrence that cannot be generalized. A truncated sentence is the sentence that has been shortened without losing its logical meaning or appropriate grammatical structure. Accordingly, this kind of null subject can be found in informal styles of English that are basically spoken. So, a subject pronoun of any type can be dropped from the sentence if and only if it is the first word in that sentence, and if it is unstressed and non-contrastive. In (4a) and (4b) the italicized subject pronouns of the sentences can be dropped without affecting the sentences since they have undergone the aforementioned conditioned:

- (4) (a) *I* can't select any good book. (b) *I* guess I dropped it at home (Radford,2009: 93).

C. Nonfinite Clauses

The third type of null subject in English is found in nonfinite clauses. It has been called nonfinite null subject. This occurs when a nonfinite clause has no overt subject. The bracketed infinitive clauses in the following examples illustrate this construction:

- (5) (a) We would love [*you* to depart]. (b) We would love [to depart].
(6) (a) We don't like [*anybody* to disappoint them]. (b) We don't like [to disappoint them]

In addition to the pro elements discussed above, there exist in English other constituents that can be dropped, such as **Null Auxiliaries** as in:

- (7) He *could* have assisted her, or [she have assisted him] (Radford, 2009:98-100).

The sentence in (7) is an elliptical variant of "*she could have assisted him*", and that the tense constituent "*could*" in the second clause has undergone a specific type of ellipsis called gapping. "Gapping is a grammatical operation which allows the head of a phrase to be given a null spellout and so be silent when the same item occurs elsewhere within the sentence, and is so called because it leaves an apparent gap in the phrase where the head would otherwise have been" (ibid).



Null Tense in Indicative Clauses is also found in English. The following sentences for example illustrate this:

- (8) (a) He loves arrangement. (b) He loved arrangement.

Null Tense in Subjunctive Clauses in which the tense is only found in the underlying representation of the sentence and it does not have an overt realization, as in:

- (9) a) She requested [that he *have* a second chance].

- b) The nurse insisted [that he not get out of bed].

The null counterpart of (should), which takes up the head Tense position of Tense Projection, is thought to be present in such phrases. If so, the partial structure of a statement such as (9b) will be as follows

- (10) He [should] not get out of bed, the nurse said. (Radford, 2009: 106)

Besides the above mentioned categories of dropping, there are other cases that will not be mentioned here because of the limited nature of the present paper.

3. Pro Drop in Arabic

3.1 Missing Subjects in Arabic

Arabic permits missing subjects in the subject position of tensed clauses. The following examples demonstrate missing subjects:

- (11) قرأ Ø
 كتاباً he
 a book read
 [He read a book].

- (12) كتبت Ø
 رواية she
 a novel wrote
 [She wrote a novel].

The subject position of each sentence above is devoid of an overt subject, and each sentence is grammatically correct. Therefore, Arabic exhibits a significant resemblance to other null-subject languages that have a high degree of agreement with respect to this attribute of the null-subject parameter. (AlAlamat, 2014).

3.2 Pro-Drop in Imperative Sentences

Imperative sentences in Arabic can allow the subject to be dropped. It can be realized as in (انت - you). In (13) the verb (ساعد - help) that designates imperative mood and this is equal to the counterpart verb of English:

- (13) ساعد Ø
 الناس The people
 The people Ø help



[Help the people]

Sentences like these are called in Arabic "Equational Sentence" which usually lacks to tense (Wright, 1967: 76).

3.3 Pro Drop in Embedded Clauses

Pro drop occurs in embedded clauses, these clauses can take the subjunctive mood that allows the pro drop as seen in:

(14) \emptyset يكتب النص أن المعلم تمنى
the text write that the teacher wished

[The teacher wished that he write the text]. (Benmamoun and Choueiri, 2013: 108)

3.4 Pro Drop in WH-Embedded Clause

The pro-drop in Arabic extends to other embedded clauses. It can occur in "wh-embedded clause". In this clause, a pro appears in final position. The null subject can be figured out as (I) as shown in:

(15) لا اعرف ماذا اقول ؟
Say what know I don't

[I don't know what to say] (ibid)

3.5 Pro Drop in Adverbial Embedded Clause

Null subject in can occur in adverbial embedded clause too. The pro has hidden form revealed in past tense of the embedded verb as in:

(16) غادر علي عندما انهيت الحديث
The speech finished when Ali left

[Ali left when I finished the speech] (Safir, 1985: 39).

4. Pro Drop in English and Arabic

4.1 Similarities

- The pro drop parameter is found in English and Arabic although English is regarded as one of the non-drop languages.
- In both English and Arabic, the dominant position where the dropping is strongly manifested is the different positions of subject.
- In imperative sentences of the two languages the subject can be dropped.
- The subjunctive mood of sentences in both English and Arabic allows the possibility of dropping some certain constituents.

4.2 Differences



- i. Arabic is more explicit than English concerning the pro-drop parameter, particularly, in considering the Arabic as a pro-drop language and the English as a non pro drop language.
- ii. The main types of dropping in English are those of the subject, the auxiliary, and the tense, whereas in Arabic the subject can be dropped in embedded clauses of different types.
- iii. In English there is a null auxiliary but this kind of dropping is not found in Arabic.
- iv. In English the tense can be dropped in certain construction where it is not possible in Arabic.
- v. In English there is what is called the truncated null subject which is not found in Arabic.
- vi. Arabic can drop subjects in *wh* and adverbial embedded clauses and this type of dropping is found in English.

5. Conclusion

In terms of what is presented earlier, it can be concluded that the pro-drop in both languages is partial, i.e. it occurs in specific positions and constrained constructions. Taking the fact asserted by different syntax references that English is a non-drop language, nonetheless, it appears that English allows the occurrence of this parameter in limited positions. Being compatible with most of the linguistic theories that concentrate on the economy principle in language, it seems that dropping is one of the good ways to achieve economy. Although some elements can be dropped, still they have some tangible representations in the analysis of the deep structure of sentences that have undergone dropping.

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