

Chapter 14

The null subject parameter meets the Polish impersonal -NO/-TO construction

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This squib argues that null generic inclusive subjects are found in consistent null subject languages not only in the passive voice, as maintained by Fassi Fehri (2009), but also in the active voice – in the so-called -NO/-TO construction. However, the null subject of the -NO/-TO construction is not logophoric, so it does not receive its inclusive reading by being anchored to the Speech Act, where the [Speaker] and the [Addressee] features are located (D'Alessandro 2007; Sigurðsson 2004; Bianchi 2003). It is proposed that the interpretation of the null subject of the -NO/-TO construction is dependent on a binding relation with a null Topic (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007) that is merged in the C-domain.

1 Introduction

According to Roberts & Holmberg (2010: 12), there are four types of null subject languages (NSL):

1. Expletive null subject languages (German, Dutch)
2. Partial null subject languages (Finnish, Russian)
3. Consistent null subject languages (Italian, Greek)
4. Discourse pro-drop languages (Chinese, Indonesian)

Expletive null subject languages allow for subject expletives to be null. Partial null subject languages allow for a generic subject to be null, as in (2), but 3rd person subjects have to be overt, as in (3).



- (1) Finnish (Holmberg 2010b: 200)

Tässä istuu mukavasti.

here sits comfortably

‘One can sit comfortably here.’

- (2) Finnish (Holmberg 2005: 539)

**(Hän) puhuu englantia.*

S/he speak.3sc English

‘S/he speaks English.’

In consistent NSL all subject pronouns regardless of the person and tense can be null. Indefinite null subjects, on the other hand, have to be overt. Holmberg (2010a: 92) illustrates this difference by contrasting Brazilian Portuguese (BP), a partial NSL, with European Portuguese (EP), a consistent NSL.

- (3) Brazilian Portuguese (Holmberg 2010a: 92)

É assim que faz o doce.

is thus that makes the sweet

‘This is how one makes the dessert.’

- (4) European Portuguese (Holmberg 2010a: 92)

É assim que se faz o doce.

is thus that SE makes the sweet

‘This is how one makes the dessert.’

In BP the subject pronoun corresponding to the English *one* is null. In EP the overt pronoun *se* is used. Holmberg (2010a) notes that this generalization only concerns those generic pronouns that have an inclusive reading; that is, they denote people in general including speaker and the addressee. On the other hand, pronouns that express exclusive generic reading, which is equivalent to generic *they* in English (as in *They eat a lot of cheese in France*), can be null in consistent NSL.

The reason why this is the case is that, according to Holmberg (2005; 2010a), consistent NSL have an unvalued D-feature in T(ense), which is valued by an A-Topic (Frascarelli 2007). This means when a null Φ P (‘phi-phrase’; 3rd person deficient pronoun) enters into an Agree relation with T and, as a result of this, is incorporated in T, it can be interpreted as definite, referring to an individual or a group. But it also means that a null subject cannot have a generic interpretation; is, it cannot refer to people in general. Therefore, in order to express a generic

meaning, consistent NSL have to resort to a variety of ‘overt strategies’. Thus, they may express it with an overt pronoun of *SI/SE*-type. Partial NSL, on the other hand, do not have an uD in T that could be valued by an A-Topic. As a result, an incorporated Φ P can only receive an indefinite interpretation.

More recently, Fassi Fehri (2009) has argued for a qualification of these generalizations, claiming that generic inclusive null pronouns are actually found in consistent NSL, contra Holmberg (2005; 2010a), but only in the passive voice.

In this squib, I present evidence from Polish, a consistent NSL (Sigurðsson & Egerland 2009), that null generic inclusive subjects are found in the active voice – in the so-called -NO/-TO construction. I also show that the passive construction identified in Fassi Fehri (2009) shares a number of morphosyntactic properties with the -NO/-TO construction, suggesting that the construction in question may need to be actually reanalyzed as an active construction. The observation that null generic subjects can be found in consistent NSL suggests that a more fine-grained typology of null subjects is needed.

First, I present a brief overview of morphosyntactic properties of the Polish -NO/-TO construction and compare them to those of an Arabic passive construction identified in Fassi Fehri (2009). Next, I discuss possible interpretations of the null pronoun in the -NO/-TO construction and touch upon some of the possible consequences it may have for the internal structure of pronouns (Harley & Ritter 2002).

2 The morphosyntactic properties of the -NO/-TO construction in Polish

The -NO/-TO construction uses an uninflected verb form with a -NO/-TO suffix and can only refer to the past. It has been classified as ‘active indefinite’, and not passive (Kibort 2004; Dziwirek 1994; Śpiewak 2000)¹. The reason for this is that it can occur with transitive and intransitive verb types and with accusative case on the direct object argument. It is illustrated by the examples in (5)

- (5) a. *Bywano tam często.*
 were.IMP there often
 ‘[One/They] used to come/be there often.’

¹The passive analysis of the -NO/-TO construction has been supported by the diachronic argument; that is, the -NO/-TO form was historically a neuter nominal passive participle used with neuter passive subjects (Siewierska 1988; Kibort 2004).

- b. *Dopiero w 1988 roku odczuto ponownie potrzebę odtworzenia*
only in 1988 year felt.IMP again need reconstitution,
Towarzystwa Przyjaciół ‘Ossolineum’.
Society Friends ‘Ossolineum’
‘It wasn’t until 1988 that [one/they] felt the need to reconstitute the
Society of the Friends of “Ossolineum”.’ (adapted from Kibort 2004:
259)
- c. *Kupowano tutaj dużo chleba.*
bought.IMP here a-lot-of bread
‘[One/They] bought a lot of bread here.’

What is more, the construction in question is ungrammatical with a passive auxiliary and a passive by-phrase (Lavine 2005), as given in (6).²

- (6) *(*Zostało) znaleziono pieniądze w restauracji (*przez kelnera).*
(AUX.PASS) found.IMP money in restaurant (by waiter)
‘[One/They] found money in the restaurant.’

As for the null subject of the -NO/-TO construction, the fact that it is projected is confirmed by the fact that it participates in control and binding.³ Bondaruk & Charzyńska-Wójcik (2003) observe that the -NO/-TO impersonals can share their subjects with embedded infinitive clauses (7), with present and past participle forms, and in subject-raising constructions.

- (7) *Próbowano zrozumieć ten problem.*
tried.IMP understand.INF this.ACC problem.ACC
‘[One/They] tried to understand this problem.’

With regard to binding, Kibort (2004) observes that the covert subject of the -NO/-TO is also capable of binding reflexive and reflexive-possessive pronouns that need to be bound by the subject. The former is illustrated by the example in (8).

²For a full overview of the differences between the -NO/-TO construction and the passive, see Kibort (2004).

³Babby (1998) maintains that there is no subject in the -NO/-TO construction at any level of representation. The affixation of the passive morpheme ensures the dethematisation of the subject whereas the impersonal inflectional ending -o is used only when the external argument (i.e. subject) is not selected. This, according to Babby (1998), confirms that the sentence is truly subjectless. Babby (1998) argues that the canonical subject position non-obligatory, and suggests that in the -NO/-TO construction it is simply not projected.

- (8) Polish (Kibort 2004: 273)

*Oglądano siebie/się w lustrze.*⁴looked.IMP self/SIE_ę in mirror

'[One/They] looked at oneself/themselves in the mirror.'

The null subject of the -NO/-TO construction has been argued to be either *pro*_{arb} (Dziwirek 1994) or *PRO*_{arb} (e.g. Maling 1993; Lavine 2005). However, contrary to *PRO* found in infinitival clauses, the null pronoun in the subject position in the -NO/-TO is always interpreted as human. Secondly, the null subject of the -NO/-TO does not require control (Kibort 2004), contrary to *PRO*. Finally, the subject of the -NO/-TO construction is only compatible with adjectival predicates that are *MASC.PL* whereas the *PRO*_{arb} in Polish uncontrolled infinitivals patterns with adjectival predicates that are *MASC.SG*, as in (9) (Lavine 2005: footnote 26).

- (9) a.
- Jest ważne [PRO być szczęśliwym / *szczęśliwymi].*

is important *PRO* to.be happy.INSTR.SG / *happy.INSTR.PL

'It is important to be happy.'

- b.
- PRO wyglądano na *szczęśliwego/ szczęśliwych.*

PRO look for *happy.MASC.ACC.SG/ happy.MASC.ACC.PL

'They looked happy.'

3 Fassi Fehri (2009)

Fassi Fehri (2009), focusing on data from Arabic, confirms that in Arabic, just as in Italian, null 3rd person pronouns can only receive a definite/referential reading (i.e. *she/he*). They cannot be interpreted as non-referential or generic. A generic or arbitrary interpretation can, however, be found, as Fassi Fehri (2009) observes, when a verb appears in its passive form, as in (10) and (11).

- (10) Arabic (Fassi Fehri 2009: 4)

Y-u-jlas-u hunaa waqt-a l-istiraahat-i.

3-PASS-sit-IND here time-ACC the-brake-GEN

'One sits here at brake time.'

⁴In Polish the reflexive pronoun *siebie* 'self_{acc}' is, in very restricted contexts, interchangeable with a multifunctional enclitic form *się* (see Nagórko 1998 and Kibort 2004).

- (11) Arabic (Fassi Fehri 2009: 6)
Wa-y-u-xraj-u la-hu yawm-a l-qiyaamat-i kitaab-an.
 and-3-PASS-bring-IND to-him day-ACC the-resurrection-GEN book-ACC
 ‘And someone will bring to him a book the day of the resurrection.’

As illustrated by (10) and (11), the kind of passive construction discussed by Fassi Fehri (2009) can occur with both transitive and intransitive verbs, and it does not support a *by*-phrase. Contrary to personal passives, in the passive construction in question objects are not promoted to the subject position, and they retain their accusative case, as in (11) above. What is more, the null subject of the Arabic construction binds reflexives/reciprocals, and it controls the subject of a participial clause. This is illustrated by the examples in (12) from Fassi Fehri (2009: 17).

- (12) Arabic (Fassi Fehri 2009: 17)
Y-u-ġ-t-asal-u hunaa.
 3-PASS-ref-wash-IND here
 ‘One washes oneself here.’
- (13) *Y-u-tasallalu ard-an fard-an Sabra l-hawaajizi*
 3-PASS-infiltrate individual-ACC individual-ACC across the-barriers
dafimiina baʕ d-un baʕd-an.
 supporting.PL.ACC each-NOM each-ACC
 ‘People will infiltrate through barriers, supporting each other.’

A very brief overview of the morphosyntactic properties of this Arabic passive suggests that the properties displayed are not those typical of canonical passives, as identified Blevins (2003)⁵, but rather strikingly similar to those of the Polish -NO/-TO construction, which has been traditionally analysed by Slavic linguists as ‘active indefinite’ (Wierzbicka 1966; Doros 1975; Brajerski 1979; Bogusławski 1984; Siewierska 1988; and Rozwadowska 1992). It may be then that this Arabic construction should be reanalysed as active. Space limitations, however, do not allow for a more in-depth analysis of this issue to be carried out here.

⁵For Blevins (2003: 512) ‘passivisation is a detransitivising operation that deletes a subject term in the argument structure of a verb’. The logical subject can then be reintroduced into the structure by means of an oblique phrase. Impersonalised verb forms, on the other hand, ‘preserve the lexical transitivity of their input retain an unexpressed subject that characteristically determines an active indefinite interpretation and may even provide an antecedent for reflexive pronouns’ (Blevins 2003: 508).

4 The interpretation of the subject in the -NO/-TO construction in Polish

The covert subject of the -NO/-TO impersonal triggers masculine plural marking on adjectival and nominal predicative complements, suggesting that the null subject is specified as 3^{PL}.MASC. Despite its specification, however, it can be used with reference to participants that are other than masculine, plural or speaker and addressee exclusive (Kibort 2004). Kibort (2004) notes that as long as the inflectional criteria are fulfilled, the construction can be found in a variety of contexts, implying that the referent of the agent is non-masculine, as in (14); or that it is other than 3rd person or plural, as in (15a).

- (14) Polish (Kibort 2004: 284)
Kochano swoich mężów.
 loved.IMP own.ACC husbands.ACC
 ‘[They] loved [their] husbands.’
- (15) a. Polish (Siewierska 1988: 284, footnote 19)
Mówiono o tym wyżej.
 talked.IMP about this higher
 ‘[One] discussed this above.’ (meaning: ‘As I/we said above’)
- b. Polish (Kibort 2004: 285)
*Proszę pani, ja się nie awanturuję, tylko proszę, żeby mi
 wydano zaświadczenie.*
 issued.IMP certificate.ACC
 ‘Madam, I am not brawling, but only asking that [one] would issue the certificate to me.’ (meaning: ‘... I am only asking you to issue the certificate to me’, said by a customer to an uncooperative clerk)
- c. *A w tym roku na co wydaliśmy najwięcej?*
 and in this year on what spent.1PL the-most
 ‘And what did we spend the most on this year?’
- d. *W tym roku najwięcej wydawano na czynsz.*
 in this year the-most spent.IMP on rent
 ‘This year [we] spent the most on rent.’

The sentences in (15a) demonstrate that the subject of the -NO/-TO construction can refer to a group of people that includes the speaker and the addressee,

suggesting that generic inclusive reading of the null subject pronoun is possible in the -NO/-TO. This observation has further consequences. Firstly, it shows that null inclusive generic subjects are available in consistent NSL in active sentences. If this is the case, then the typology of null subject languages should be revisited. Another point worth mentioning with respect to the subject of the -NO/-TO is a possible bearing it may have on the feature geometry of pronouns (Harley & Ritter 2002). Contrary to the subject of the Italian impersonal SI construction (16) or Polish SIĘ construction, the subject of the -NO/-TO construction is not logophoric. It means that it does not refer back to the ‘reporting’ speaker (in 17).

(16) (D’Alessandro 2007: 173)

Maria e Gianni hanno raccontato che si era mangiato bene in quel
Maria and Gianni have told that si was eaten well in that
locale.

place

‘Maria and Gianni have told that they had eaten well at that place.’

(17) *Maria i Paweł powiedzieli że oglądano te filmy*
[Maria and Paweł]_i said.3PL that pro_{j/*i} watched.IMP these movies
często.
often

(Intended) ‘Maria and Paweł said that they watched these movies often.’

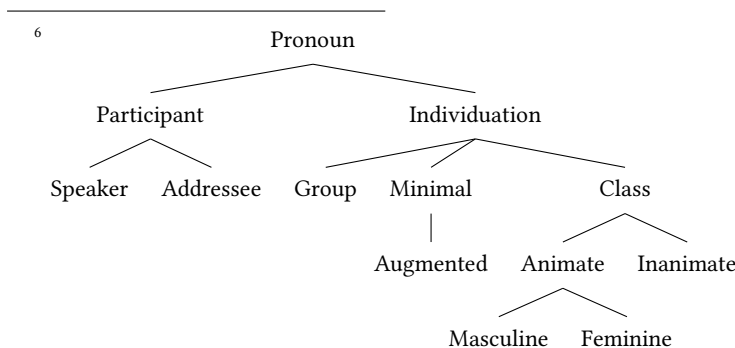
D’Alessandro (2007) reports that *si* in (16) is logophoric. This means that it refers back to the person who reports what happens, rather than to the person who utters the whole sentence. *si* then receives its inclusive interpretation by being anchored to the Speech Act, where the [Speaker] and the [Addressee] features are located (D’Alessandro 2007; Sigurðsson 2004; Bianchi 2003). It is, however, not clear how an inclusive interpretation is achieved with the subject of the -NO/-TO, as it does not refer back to the reporting speaker. It is possible that one of the reasons why the null subject of the Polish construction cannot refer to the ‘reporting’ speaker may have to do with a more general ban on it being bound. Consider the examples in (18) below.

(18) a. *Marysia słuchała muzyki kiedy [pro_i] gotowano.*
Marysia_{j/*i} listened.3SC.FEM music when [pro_i] cooked.IMP
‘Marysia listened to music when [they/people] cooked.’

- b. *Marysia słucha muzyki kiedy [pro_j] gotuje.*
 Marysia_j listens.3SC music when [pro_j] cooks.3SC
 ‘Marysia listens to music when she cooks.’

In (18b) the main clause subject *Marysia* is coreferential with the null subject of the subordinate clause. In (18a), on the other hand, such coreferentiality between *Marysia* and a null subject in the subordinate clause is not possible. I propose that this may well be caused by the difference in the feature-geometry make-up of pronouns (Harley & Ritter 2002).⁶ To be more specific, it may be that the [Participant] feature in the geometry is underspecified with respect to the [Speaker] and the [Addressee] features, such that the [Participant] feature cannot be specified any further. Alternatively, it may be that the [Participant] feature is deleted altogether. This null pronoun is then similar to 3rd person pronouns for which the [Participant] feature either does not exist in their featural make-up or is present but underspecified, and as such they can only be bound by Topics and not by logophoric features. Now in order to explain how the inclusive interpretation is attained, I propose that the interpretation of the null subject of the -NO/-TO construction will depend on a binding relation with the null Topic⁷ (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007) that is merged in the C-domain. Consider the extract in (19). The examples (19ii) and (19iii) are answers to (19i).

- (19) (i) *Na co my Polacy wydawaliśmy najwięcej w ubiegłym roku?*
 on what we Poles spent.1PL most in last year
 ‘What did we spend on most last year?’



(Harley & Ritter 2002)

⁷An initial investigation suggests that it may be an Aboutness Topic (Frascarelli 2007), but more research is needed to establish whether this is really the case.

- (ii) *My sądzimy, że wydawano najwięcej na czynsz.*
we_i think.1PL that [pro_j/?_i] spent.IMP most on rent
'We think that [people living in Poland/they/we?] spent most on rent.'
- (iii) *Eksperci sądzą, że wydawano najwięcej na czynsz.*
experts_i think.3PL that [pro_j/_i] spent.IMP most on rent
'Experts think that [people living in Poland] spent most on rent.'

In (19) speaker (i) introduces *my Polacy* 'we Poles' as a Topic. This Topic is then re-merged as a silent copy in the C-domain in (ii). The null subject (*pro*) in (ii) refers back *my Polacy* 'we Poles' as it is an established Topic. If *my* 'we' in (ii) has the same referent as *my* 'we' in (i), which is a Topic, then the *pro* in (ii) may accidentally be coreferential with *my* 'we' in (ii). Crucially, however, for my informants *my* 'we' in (ii) does not have to be coreferential with *pro*, and for some of them it cannot. In other words, those who think do not have to be/cannot be those who spent most on rent in (19ii). In (19iii) again, the Topic *my Polacy* 'we Poles' is remerged in the C-domain, and the null subject *pro* refers back to that Topic, and it cannot be coreferential with the subject *eksperci* 'experts'. These data suggest that for the null subject in the -NO/-TO construction to receive a generic interpretation, it needs to be bound by a Topic.

5 Conclusion

This squib presented evidence that Polish, a consistent NSL, has an impersonal active construction whose subject can receive an inclusive interpretation. The Polish construction shares a number of morphosyntactic properties with a type of a passive construction in Arabic (Fassi Fehri 2009) – a consistent NSL as well – the subject of which can also receive a generic interpretation. It is, however, clear that the range of occurrence of inclusive generic subjects in these languages is very restricted. In the -NO/-TO construction the generic interpretation arises only when the null subject is bound by a Topic that has a generic referent.⁸ It remains to be investigated whether there is any relation between the uninflected verb form used in the -NO/-TO construction and the availability of a generic interpretation that a null subject occurring in it can receive.

⁸According to Frascarelli (2007: 707), an indefinite DP can be a Topic when it is intended as specific indefinite; that is, when it is used to refer to specific type of referent.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in this article follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules' instructions for word-by-word transcription, available at: <https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/Glossing-Rules.pdf>.

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