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Sunday, March 8<sup>th</sup>: 2:00-2:30

How to deal with radical pro-drop languages within the framework of minimalism: the spell-out phenomenon

The purpose of this squib is to explore the various accounts that have been put forth about how to handle radical pro-drop languages. The main goal is to propose that radical pro-drop, in order to minimize violations within the minimalist program, is a phenomenon that occurs at PF; a proposal put forth by Neeleman and Szendrői in 2005. This paper begins with a brief background on the theory of pro-drop (i.e. that of the Spanish kind) as well as an explanation as to why languages like Japanese cause problems for this theory. In order to have a better understanding of what radical pro-drop is, a distinction is made between pro-drop, topic-drop, and radical pro-drop. The sections and subsections following the background are devoted to summarizing the earlier hypotheses of radical pro-drop and explaining why they are too problematic to account for this phenomenon. I then explore the spell-out account of dealing with radical pro-drop languages and the remaining sections of this squib I review the problems and questions that remain if we take the spell-out hypothesis to account for these languages. Questions such as: Are there languages that have no agglutinating morphology but allow for radical pro-drop? and Is Chinese a “pure” radical pro-drop? are addressed. The conclusions drawn from this research show that, while I agree with Neeleman and Szendrői’s spell-out proposal, there are too many remaining questions to take their analysis at face value; therefore work needs to be done to address these questions and make the theory more cohesive.

References

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