

Unpronounced subjects

We have seen PRO, the subject of infinitives and gerunds:

1. I want [PRO to dance in the park]
2. [PRO dancing in the park] was a good idea

There are languages that have unpronounced subjects in tensed clauses. Obviously, English is not among those languages:

3. irθe (Greek)

came.3sg

‘he came’ or ‘she came’

4. *came

Languages like Greek, which permit this phenomenon are called “pro-drop” languages.

What is the status of this unpronounced subject in pro-drop languages? Is it PRO or something else? Something with the same or different properties from PRO?

Let's follow the convention of calling the unpronounced subject in tensed clauses "little pro", as opposed to "big PRO".

What are the differences between pro and PRO?

-A Nominative NP can appear instead of pro. Not so for PRO:

5. i Katerina irθe
the Katerina came.3sg

'Katerina came'

6. *I hope he/I to come

7. *he to read this book would be great

-pro can refer to any individual as long as Binding Condition B is respected. That is, pro is not “controlled”. Not so for OC PRO.

8. i Katerina_k nomizi oti pro_{k/m} irθe stin ora tis
the K thinks that came on-the time her
'Katerina_k thinks that she_{k/m} /he_m came on time'

9. Katerina_k wants [PRO_{k/*m} to leave]

-pro can yield sloppy or strict readings under ellipsis, exactly like pronouns. Not so OC PRO.

10. i Katerina_k nomizi oti pro_{k/m} irθe stin ora tis
the K thinks that came on-the time her

ke i Maria episis

and the Maria also

‘Katerina_k thinks that she_k came on time
and Maria does too’

=...Maria thinks that Katerina came on time **strict**

...Maria thinks that Maria came on time **sloppy**

11. Sue_i expects [PRO_i to be on time] and
Katie_k does ~~expect [PRO_{k/*i} to be on time]~~ too

Sloppy

-pro can have both the bound variable and the strict reading with certain quantificational antecedents, unlike OC PRO, which can only have the BV reading:

12. Only Peter claimed [PRO to be the winner]

True in 13b, not in 13a.

13a. Peter claimed that he (Peter) won, Jane claimed that she (Jane) won and Roy claimed that he (Roy) won.

b. Peter, Jane and Roy claimed that Peter won the game.

14. Mono i Katerina isxirisθike oti kerdise
only the K claimed that won
'Only Katerina claimed that she/he had won'

exactly like pronouns:

15. Only Peter claimed that he was the winner

strict reading of *he*:

Peter = Only x [x claimed Peter is the winner].

bound variable reading of *he*:

Peter = Only x [x claimed x is the winner].

-pro can be expletive. Not so PRO.

16. echi tria vivlia sto domatio
has 3 books in-the room
'There are 3 books in the room'

17. * to be 3 chairs in the room would be great

-pro is subject to WCO, PRO is not:

18. who_k did [PRO_k washing the car] upset t_k ?

19. pion katigorisise [i jineka me tin opia **pro**
who accused [the woman with who

chorepse

danced

Who $_k$ did [the woman with who he $_k$ danced]
accuse t_k ?

So:

pro differs from OC PRO in some ways and from both OC and NOC PRO in other ways.

And in all tests it behaves like a pronoun.

Plus, pro-drop languages have PRO as well. That is, the tests that we ran on English for the existence and behavior of PRO pattern the same way in pro-drop languages. This means that pro-drop languages have both pro and PRO.

So:

pro is a pronoun.

It is licensed in the subject position of tensed clauses in *some* languages. (This means it also gets Case.)

It is interpreted just like pronouns are (Condition B).

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