A NULL SUBJECT IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH: *A PRINCIPLES AND PARAMETER APPROACH*

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to show how a language with rich agreement inflection like Early Modern English, has null pro subject allowed in the structural subject position of finite clauses, whereas in a language with poor agreement morphology like Present-day English it is not allowed. It further illustrates that the rich AGR(eement) inflections in Early Modern English serve to identify the null pro subject, since the feature-content of the latter (i.e. the pro) can be recovered from the AGR morpheme on the verb morphology. Following Chomsky's (1993) Principles & Parameters theory, I show how the nominative Case and agreement features of the (pro) subject are allowed and how the tense features of the verb attract other features from the weak position in Early Modern English.

Key words: null pro subject vs non null subject, strong vs weak inflectional positions and features; movement operation, Principles & Parameters; Theory; raising, Early Modern English, rich verb inflections and poor verb inflections.

Introduction

The paper examines the syntax of the null subject in Early Modern English (EME), making contrastive analysis with Present-day English (PDE) where appropriate. In particular, the aim of this paper is to determine just what options are there in the phenomenon of null subjects and in what components of the language that has them they are found. The paper also shows how the pro- drop parameter works. The motivational factor in this project is that there seems to be a parametric variation between (EME) and PDE languages as to whether they allow finite verbs in sentences to have null subjects or not. The null subject parameter is a dimension of variation between languages according

to whether finite declarative and interrogative allow null pro subject or not, (Radford, 1997:266). This parameter was introduced by Chomsky in the Early 1980s. He saw the distinction as linked in Universal Grammar, (Matthews, 1997: 250-251). The null subject language also (and originally) called the 'pro-drop parameter, is a language which allows finite declarative or interrogative clauses to have a subject with grammatical or semantic properties but no overt phonetic forms (not clearly seen). The phenomenon of a null subject parameter determines whether a subject of a finite declarative or interrogative clause can be suppressed or not (Chomsky 1986), (Radford 1997:266). Haegeman (1999:3) postulates that null subjects are base-generated non-overt subjects. This means that they must be recognized as sentence elements or constructions even though they do not exist in those positions. The languages that have a null pro subject in the finite declarative and interrogative clauses are EME and Italian. See the EME examples of null subject in 1a) and 1b). I appeal to Principles and Parameters Theory (P&P) by Chomsky (1993), which distinguishes languages in which verbs must have an overt subject from those that need not have it. Empty categories that have no overt phonetic form and thus inaudible or silent in languages such as EME play a central role in this theory of grammar

1(b)   Wilt come. (Stephano's words in the Tempest, III. ii).

1(b)   Hast stole it from her? (Iago, Othello, III. iii).

Etalian is called a pro-drop language as it also has a suppressed subject or one with a value zero, and so has constructions such as 2) below.

(2)   Sei simpatico (literally meaning)
         are nice,   (meaning You are nice.)

By contrast, Present-day English is not a null subject language, and so does not allow the subject to be omitted in the type of structure in 2). The word order, Sei simpatico *Are nice* in example 2) is ungrammatical in English, as shown in (3)

3(a) *Are happy

However, the situation of a null subject does not apply to the covert subject (not there) found in imperative clauses like sentence 4) below or the covert PRO subject found in control or equi(valent) structures like 5). The (a) examples in 6) and 7) have overt subjects for the complement clauses. The relative clause with a zero or null relative pronoun in example 8) has a covert subject.

4(a) Shut the door!
4(b) Open the gate!

5(a) The prisoners tried to **PRO** escape from jail.
5(b) Students tried to PRO abscond from hostels.

6(a) We would like [you to stay]

6(b) We would like [to stay]

7(a) We don't want [anyone to upset them]

7(b) We don't want [to upset them]

8(a)   Someone--you saw.

8(b) The dog that you gave food is sleeping.

The zero or null relative pronouns in example 8(a) has no phonetic form and thus silent. However, as I have already stated, these constructions are not the objects of study in this paper as Present-day English is a non-null subject language. Subjects are obligatory in Present-day English.

Present-day English is one language in which such a subject is obligatory, as in 9(a), but not simply *has arrived* as in 9(b). The subject constituent in the 9(a) structure is overt or visile. But the structure in 9(b) is ungrammatical.

9(a) Nelly has arrived.
9(b) *Has arrived

In fact, there is a general linguistic principle which requires that every sentence must have a subject. Where there is no overt subject, the principle forces us to insert an expletive subject *it* in the English sentences, such as 10(a) and 10(b). An expletive form is a dummy element that does not have any semantic content (or no meaning) such as *it* and *there*. It is usually used to give a subject less sentence a shape.

10(a) It would surprise me if Louis abandoned her job.
10(b) It is impossible that Louise should abandon her job.

In Principles and Parameters theory, the subject position in 10(a) and 10(b) is required to be filled either by an argument or an expletive (subject position or Spec IP). That is the left edge of the sentence. If there is no argument to fill the subject position, an expletive is inserted in [Spec, IP]

Background on Early Modern English

Early Modern English is a period of history of the English language exemplified by a variety of English found in Shakespearean plays and poems written in the period from around 1580 to 1620. EME was very rich in the system of subject-verb agreement inflections. Verbs and auxiliaries had distinct second person singular forms ending in / -st/t /, as in, canst/couldst, dost/didst, art, wilt/wouldst and shalt/shouldst. Alongside the third person singular present tense forms ending in / –s /, EME also had forms ending in / -th /, so that there was an alternation between does/doth, drops/dropeth, (Morapedi, 2014:348). See examples below showing the inflected verb from the bible and Shakespearean plays in 11(a) and 11(b), (Morapedi 2017).

11(a) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.   PSALM 23, verse 1-6 (Pp873-874).
11(b) Then hadst thou an excellent heard. (Sir Tobby, Twelfth Night, or what you will
                                                  1.iii)

In contrast, Present-day English is mainly associated with the period from 1700 to the present, (Aitchson, 1996:178). Present-day English is very much impoverished in terms of inflections, especially as compared with EME.   The verb phrase is not heavily

inflected as most of the inflections have fallen out of use. In fact, PDE is only left with a few inflections, such as the third person singular /-s/ with its variant /-es/ for present, a past tense form /-ed/; the present participle /-ing/ for progressive aspect and gerund, and the /-en/ past participle for the perfective aspect (Radford, 1997:30). Grammatical aspects such as tense, aspect, and voice and the negative forms are usually expressed periphrastically, using constructions with auxiliary verbs like the **Be** form and its variants (*is*, *was*, *are*, *were*, *am*); **have** form and its variants (*has* and *had*) and **do** form; and its variants *(does*, *did* and *done)*. See exam 12(a) through to 12(c) below showing infected verb from Present-day English.

12(a) He make**s** me to lie down in green pastures.
12(b) He is kill**ing** the snake now.
12c) Tom has kill**ed** the snake.
12(d) She did kill the snake yesterday.

Method of collection and Organization of Data

Data from Early Modern English language was collected from Shakespearean plays and poems, as well as the bible (e.g. King James' version), whereas Present-day English data were collected from 'A comprehensive Grammar of the English Language' by Rudolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik (1985).   Data collected were arranged into two major categories: declaratives and interrogatives. Data had to be organized, subject less clauses clauses with tense, free inversion of simple sentences and *wh*-movement of subject in order to make a comparison between EME and PDE to account for the differences in the occurrence and non-occurrence of the null subjects in the two languages, respectively.   Most of the EME examples in the paper are not found in the ordinary Present-day reader.

Principles and Parameters Theory

The approach that I rely on in comparing and analyzing data from Early Modern English and Present-day English is Principles and Parameters Theory (P&P), a generative theory developed by Noam Chomsky, (1993). P&P model was developed during the 1980s and 1990, in works ranging from Chomsky's 1981 book Lectures on Government and

Binding to his 1995c book *The Minimalist Program*. The theory postulates that universal properties of natural language grammars reflect the operation of a set of universal grammatical principles. Chomsky and other generativists grammarians consider language to be innate and 'wired'' to the human brain rather than being learned from environment. Generative Grammar has its traces from the book titled 'Syntactic Structures' by Chomsky in 1957. P&P theory as a component of Generative Grammar maintains that the grammatical variations found between languages can have their properties defined in terms of a restricted set of parameters (structural differences found in languages), (Radford, 1997:269).

The Universal Grammar lays down principles, but each language has the liberty to pick and choose the parameters along which those principles are realized. P&P theory is suitable for the data presented in this paper since it accounts for the parametric variations existing between EME and PDE, in null subjects parameter, which include the declarative and interrogatives. The theory, which started as phrase structure rules confining themselves to simple sentences was later developed into Transformational grammar to cater for elements that have undergone movement in the sentence structure. The basic sentences were referred to as Deep structure, and the sentence with words moved about, such as verb movement and wh-movement in interrogative constructions and noun phrase movement in passive constructions, was called the surface structure (Radford, 1988:401).

In Principles & Parameters theory, Early Modern English finite Inflectional position is a strong head and as such triggers the movement of main verbs from the verb position to Inflectional position of inflectional Phrase (henceforth IP). The strength of Inflectional position in EME English is associated with the fact that it is rich in its subject-agreement inflection. Similarly, the capacity of the head Complement to trigger *Wh*-movement from the verb complement position has to do with its strong *Wh*-feature. Conversely, the failure of overt movement in Present-day English is attributable to the fact that verbs have impoverished subject-agreement inflections and as such are interpreted at Logical Form. Logical form refers to the abstract representation of the sentence in Principles & Parameters theory.

Declarative

Observe that all the italicized verbs in Early Modern English declarative sentences in 13a) through to 13c) have missing subjects. The examples are followed by the paraphrased sentences.

13(a) *Sufficeth*, I am come to keep my word. (Petruchio, Taming of the Shrew, III. ii)
 (It's enough that I have come to keep my word.

13b) *Lives*, sir. (He is alive, sir) Iago, Othello, IV. I,
     (in reply to How does Lieutenant Cassio?

13(c) *Would* you would bear your fortunes like a man! Iago, Othello, IV.i
      (I wish you would bear your fortunes like a man)

Interrogative sentences

Early Modern English allowed finite verbs and finite auxiliaries to have null subjects, as in 14(a) through to 14(c). Subjects are missing in all the sentences in 14)

14(a)   Has anymore of this?   (Trinculo, The Tempest, II. ii)
14(b)   Can'st not rule her?   Leontes, Winter's Tale, II. ii)
14(c)   Art going prison, Pompey? (Lucio, Measure for Measure, II. ii)

Sentences in (14) suggest that Early Modern English is a null subject. It is, a language in which a finite verb has a null nominative pronoun subject conventionally designated as *pro*, affectionately known as little *pro*. Conversely, Present-day English is a non-null subject language. The counterpart of examples in 14(a), 14(b) and 14(c) would require an overt subject, as in the italicized overt subject *you*, in 15).

15(a)   Have *you* any more of this?
15 (b)   Can *you* not rule her?
15(c)   Are *you* going to Prison, Pompey.

This suggests that a finite or Inflectional position can have null nominative *pro* subject in a language like Early Modern English where finite verbs carry rich agreement morphology, and thus raise to Inflectional position, but not in a language like Present-day English, where finite verbs have impoverished agreement morphology and remain in situ in the position in which they were first merged (or created). The null subject such as 14a) will have a derivation shown in example 16), where the question mark denotes a null yes-no question operator.

16) [CP ? [C Has] [IP pro [T *t*] VP [V anymore of this?]]]

In example 16), the auxiliary 'has' originates in Inflectional or Tense position and then moves to fill the strong interrogative complement, leaving a trace (*t*) behind in Inflectional or Tense position. The null *pro*-subject occupies the canonical Spec-IP position. An auxiliary 'has' licenses (or allows) a null subject. It is a third person singular form and, therefore, tells us that its *pro*-subject must also be third person singular, since there is an agreement relation between the two. This occurs because the agreement morphology carried by verbs and auxiliaries in EME is rich enough to allow us to identify or determine the person/number properties of a *pro* subject. This, therefore, means that finite verbs or auxiliaries in EME can have null subject by virtue of the relatively rich agreement inflections they carry (Radford, 1997).   On the contrary, Present-day English does not allow the use of null subjects in questions. For instance, the *thou* forms are no longer found in Present-day English.

Another parametric variation between Early Modern English interrogatives and Present-day English interrogatives is that the lexicon in EME is operational in forming the interrogatives, whereas PDE uses the auxiliary for such an operation. Sentence 17a) and 17b) which are in the orders verb-object adjectival and verb-object (comes Caesar) adverbial (to the capital) adverbial (tomorrow) suggest that EME is a null subject language in that the finite verb *makes* and *comes* have a null nominative pronoun subject

conventionally designated as *pro*. This situation was also shown in declarative examples 13a) and 13b) above.

17a) Makes me forgetful?(Cassius, Julius Caesar 5, iii)

17a) Comes Caesar to the Capitol tomorrow? (Cicero, Julius Caesar I, iii)

Although no subjects are actually present in the sentences 17a) and 17b) the forms of the verb *makes and comes* with the –s inflection indicate that the subjects are 3rd person singular. Example 17a) above will have a derivation such as 18).

18) a. [CP? [C makes] [IP pro [I t] [me forgetful?]

Conversely, Present-day English is a non-null subject language. The language no longer allows the use of null subjects in questions. The PDE counterpart of 17a) and 17b) would require the italicized overt subject shown in 19). Furthermore, the interrogative in PDE would insert the operator *does* (insertion of do-support) in the inflectional position and undergoes a subject-verb inversion operation yielding a construction such as 19). PDE carries agreement morphology and so auxiliary verbs raise.
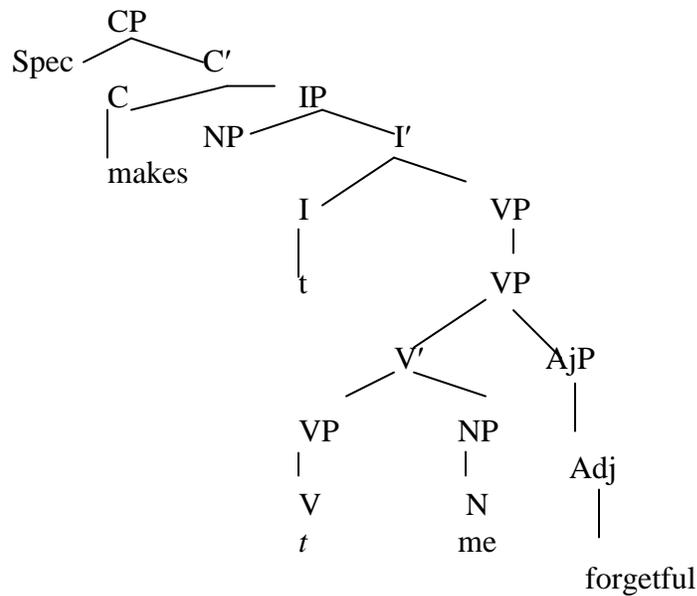
(19).   *Does* he make me forgetful?

A finite verb in Present-day English sentences in 19) has no null nominative pro-subject because subjects are required in this version of the English language. The Deep-structure for sentence 17a) will be as in 20) when mapped in the form of a tree diagram,

20(a)

CP
Spec
C   C′
IP
NP   I′
I   VP
V′   AjP
VP   NP   Adj
V   N
makes   me
forgetful?
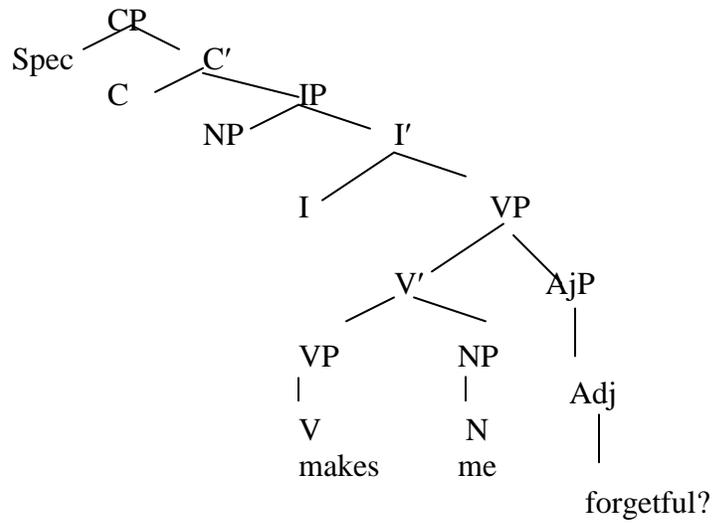
The Surface structure for 17a) is as in 20b)

20b)

CP
Spec   C′
C   IP
makes
NP   I′
I   VP
t   VP
V′   AjP
VP   NP   Adj
V   N
t   me
forgetful

In sentence 20(b), the verb *makes* moves from the verb position (its original place) of Verb Phrase to Inflectional position of Inflectional Phrase and is subsequently moved to Complement position of Complement Phrase having been triggered by the strong Q(uestion) features of Complement (Morapedi, 2007: 321). On the contrary, PDE finite verbs have impoverished agreement morphology and as such, it would be difficult to

predict the subject from them. Further, they remain in situ (original place) and do not raise to a higher position.

Although Government Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981) sees the subject position *pro* as empty, it still recognizes the presence of the subject in the S(urface)-structure. It, therefore, follows that the empty category pro is properly governed by the *INFL(ection)* which itself is a proper governor because it has lexical properties. In that case, the empty category of subject is licensed by the AGR(ment) feature of *INFL(ection)* in the S(urface)-structure, whereas in the non-null-subject language like Present-day English, the empty category *pro* is not properly governed and so *INFL(ection)* is not a proper governor. For instance, the English S(urface)-structure [pro INFL *makes*] in (20b) would be ungrammatical because *INFL* constituent cannot properly govern *pro*. It does not have the lexical properties, (Cook, 1988).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that Early Modern English has null subjects which can be traced from *pro* forms, whereas Present-day English has subjects required. Missing subject cannot be traced through *pro* in PDE. The phenomenon of null subject has also been explained through Principles and Parameters Theory which shows the parametric variations in the syntax of declaratives and interrogatives in EME and PDE. These variations are associated with properties of functional heads. EME finite Inflectional position is assumed to be a strong head and as such triggers the movement of main verbs from the verb position to Inflectional position of Inflectional Phrase. It has been shown that PDE does not have null subjects and as such sees the position *pro* as empty.

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