

Partial Pro-Drop = Zero Exponence + Deblocking

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In this paper, I present a new approach to the phenomenon of partial pro-drop in languages such as Finnish and Bavarian, which is based on the following set of assumptions: First, pro-drop phenomena do not involve a special empty category such as *pro*, but rather result from a (universally available) null spell-out of syntactic terminal nodes corresponding to regular weak pronouns (Holmberg 2005, Neeleman & Szendrői 2005, Roberts 2007). Second, at least in partial pro-drop languages, the licensing of null subjects is sensitive to the inventory of overt pronouns. More precisely, I assume that a null spell-out of weak pronouns is licensed in cases where there is a gap in the existing paradigm of overt (weak) forms. This analysis in terms of ‘de-blocking’ makes crucial use of the Subset Principle (Halle 1997), to the effect that a null spell-out of a weak pronoun becomes available if there does not exist a more specified overt candidate. In addition, I will discuss a set of implications for the general theory of pro-drop, including the licensing of general Italian-style referential pro-drop and the analysis of non-pro-drop languages such as English (and Standard German).