

# Syntax II (LING 610): Assignment #1

## Null Arguments and Agreement Morphology

Due Thursday February 19th.

### I. European Portuguese

In section 4 of Kenstowicz' paper he provides an argument from Beni-Hassan Arabic that licensing of the null-subject *pro* is dependent on the presence of *person agreement* on the verb that *pro* agrees with. Kenstowicz' argument is based on the contrast between subjunctive and participial clauses in Beni-Hassan Arabic. The subjunctive shows agreement but no tense marking, and licenses null-subjects, whereas the participial shows tense but no agreement marking, and fails to license null-subjects.

Now consider the following facts from European Portuguese (Raposo 1989). A typologically rare property of European Portuguese, which has accordingly received a good deal of attention, is the existence of infinitival (i.e. tenseless) forms of the verb which are nevertheless marked for agreement with the verb. The examples in (1–2) show the inflected infinitive appearing as part of a complement clause of the verb **ver** *see*.

- (1) Eu vi os meninos ler-em o livro  
I saw the children read(inf)-agr the book  
'I saw the children read the book.'
- (2) Eu vi os meninos a ler-em o livro  
I saw the children to read(inf)-agr the book  
'I saw the children read the book.'

The small, but as we shall see important, difference between (1) and (2) is the presence of the preposition *a* before the infinitive in (2). Following Raposo's terminology, we shall call (1) the Bare Infinitive construction (BIC), and (2) the Prepositional Infinitive construction (PIC).

One difference between the BIC and PIC constructions is that the BIC allows null subjects (3), whereas the PIC does not (4).

- (3) Eu vi *pro* roubar-em o automovel.  
I saw *pro* steal(inf)-agr the car  
'I saw them stealing the car.'
- (4) \* Eu vi *pro* a roubar-em o automovel.  
I saw *pro* to steal(inf)-agr the car  
'I saw them stealing the car.'

Why this difference? A clue to the reason for the difference can be found in the case used on overt pronouns when they are the subject of the BIC and PIC. The subject of a BIC is nominative (5), whereas the subject of a PIC is accusative (6).

- (5) Eu vi eles trabalhar-em  
I saw they(nom) work(inf)-agr  
'I saw them working.'

- (6) Eu vi os a trabalhar-em  
I saw them(acc) work(inf)-agr  
'I saw them working.'

The facts in (3–4) pose a problem for Kenstowicz' generalization that null subjects are licensed by agreement, given that both BIC and PIC show agreement on the infinitival. Taking into account the sentences in (5–6), suggest a way of modifying Kenstowicz' generalization about the licensing of null-subjects in order to accommodate the facts from European Portuguese.

Your answer to this question must be clearly stated, though you may find that you need to write very little to answer it adequately.

## **II. The Polysynthesis Parameter**

Read chapter 1 of Mark Baker's book *The Polysynthesis Parameter*, and write a brief commentary/review of the view that he proposes there. In particular, try to explain and comment on the distinction that Baker draws between what he calls *microparameters* and *macroparameters*. Does Baker's notion of syntactic parameter differ fundamentally from the kinds of parameters that we have seen, such as the *null subject parameter*? What role, in Baker's view, does morphology play in determining cross-linguistic variation in syntax?