Consistent Null Subject Language-Telugu

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper aims to examine null subjects in Telugu within the Minimalist frame work and argues that Telugu is a full-fledged consistent null subject language. Universally, languages can be classified into two types: Null subject languages and Non-null subject languages. Within the null subject languages, different types of null subject languages have been identified since Rizzi's work on null subjects. They are respectively consistent null-subject, expletive null subject, discourse pro-drop and partial null-subject languages. This paper discusses the phenomenon of null subjects in Telugu and examine where it fits among these four types of languages. Telugu allows null subjects freely both in root and embedded clauses irrespective of whether there is agreement or not*

KEYWORDS: Pro-drop, Consistent null subject, Finite clause, Agreement, Verbal inflection.

I. INTRODUCTION

Telugu is a Dravidian language spoken in Andhra Pradesh. AP consists of three regional dialects Telangana, Rayalaseema and Andhra. Telugu is a nominative-accusative pattern. As Telugu is a morphologically rich language it allows null subjects. It is a pro drop-language. In a pro-drop language, the pronominal subject of a finite clause can be dropped. In other words, it can remain null. For instance, pro-drop languages are Telugu, Kannada, Spanish, Italian, and so on whereas English and French are non- pro-drop languages. The pro-drop languages are also called null subject languages. Perlmutter was the first one who brought pro-drop parameter into the limelight. Subsequently, pro-drop languages have been analyzed in different types/ways by various scholars in the light of recent proposals. It is already known that Telugu allows the verb-subject agreement and it lacks verb-object agreement. Still, null subjects and null objects are freely dropped in this language. Now, we look at some examples and examine how the null subjects and objects are unexpressed in Telugu.

[1] pro(i)   iṇṭi-ki   veḷḷ-aa-**nu(i)**
           home-dat   go-past-1st.sg.N
    (I) went home

[2] pro(i)   iṇṭi-ki   veḷḷ-aa-**vu(i)**
           home-dat   go-past-2nd.sg.N
    (You) went home

[3] ataḍu(i)   pro   koṭṭ-aa-**ḍu(i)**
    he-nom   beat-past-3rd.sg.M
    He beat pro

[4] meemu(i)   pro   koṭṭ-aa-**mu(i)**

    we-nom   beat-past-1st.pl.N

    We beat pro

In the examples (1-2), the 1st person and 2nd person pronominal subjects **neenu**, *'I'* and **niivu** *'you'* are null. Sentences (3- 4) the objects are dropped but these examples need contextual clues to decide who *pro* refers to. In other words, they need discourse or sharing knowledge between speaker and listener. Various scholars proposed different approaches to account the phenomenon of null subject parameter. Eventually, it is observed that there are four types of null-subject languages: 1. Consistent null-subject, 2. Expletive null subject, 3. Discourse pro-drop, 4. Partial null-subject languages. We examine all these types of null subject languages with respect to Telugu and find out where Telugu fits in. In this present study, we argue that Telugu is a full-fledged consistent null subject language.

II. CONSISTENT NULL SUBJECT LANGUAGES

Adopting ideas from Roberts and Holmberg (2010) we account this null subject phenomenon in greater detail in Telugu. It is noticed that consistent null subject languages are most analysed in pro-drop languages. In consistent null-subject languages, all persons in all tenses can feature an unexpressed pronoun. These languages characteristically show 'rich' agreement inflection, that is distinct personal ending on the verb, generally in all tenses. For example, the Romance null subject languages and Modern Greek are paradigm examples of this kind of languages. Here are examples taken from Roberts & Holmberg (2010, pg 6):

Italian
Bevo 'I drink'
bevi
beve
beviamo
bevete
bevono

Now, following are the two diagnostic features of a consistent null-subject language:

(i) the possibility of leaving the definite subject pronoun unexpressed in any person number combination in any tense

(ii) the rich agreement inflection on the verb   Roberts and Holmberg (2010)

At this point, this paper tries to give an explanation to support our claim that Telugu is a consistent null subject language. Taking in to consideration (i) and (ii), we look at Telugu to find out whether it is a consistent null subject language or not.

[1] pro$_{(i)}$ maamiḍi paṇḍu   tinn-ṭaa-**nu**$_{(i)}$

         mango-fruit   eat-non-past-1st.sg.N

   (I) eat mango

[2] pro$_{(i)}$ maamiḍi paṇḍu   tinn-ṭaa-**mu**$_{(i)}$

            mango-fruit   eat-non-past-1st .pl.N

   (We) eat mango

[3] pro$_{(i)}$ maamiḍi paṇḍu   tinn-ṭaa-**vu**$_{(i)}$

         mango-fruit   eat-non-past-2nd.sg.N

   (You) eat mango

[4] pro$_{(i)}$ maamiḍi paṇḍu   tinnṭaa-**ḍu**$_{(i)}$

         mango-fruit   eat-non-past-3rd .sg.M

   (He) eats mango

[5] pro$_{(i)}$ maamiḍi paṇḍu   tinnṭaa-**di**$_{(i)}$

         mango-fruit   eat-non-past-3rd .sg.F

   (She) eats mango

[6] pro$_{(i)}$ maamiḍi paṇḍu   tinnṭaa-**ru**$_{(i)}$

         mango-fruit   eat-non-past-3rd .pl.N

   (They) eat mango

In the above examples, all the pronominal subjects are totally absent. It means that they are phonetically null arguments. It is observed that part of the pronoun spells out as an affix on the verbal inflection to represent the specified pronoun. So, the understood null subjects can be identified by the listener. It is clear in these examples that the personal endings on the verb are distinct. The dropped pronouns are **neenu, meemu, niivu, ataḍu, aame/adi, waaru**. In Telugu, the 1st person and 2nd person pronominal subjects are dropped freely in any context but the 3rd person (pronominal) subject is generally dropped when it is already expressed in an earlier sentence or when the speaker assumes that the listener knows who he is talking about. It is claimed that Telugu is a consistent null subject language since it characteristically shows 'rich' agreement inflection on the verb in all persons.

III. EXPLETIVE NULL SUBJECT LANGUAGES

These languages are sometimes called semi-pro-drop languages. Rizzi (1982: 143) identified two parameters using which one can classify languages in to NSL or non-NSL and so on.

(i) one concerns whether an unexpressed pronoun is allowed at all.
(ii) other concerns whether referential pronouns are allowed to be unexpressed.
Rizzi called the two "related but autonomous parameters"

Now, we look at Telugu data and examine how whether pronouns expressed. In Telugu parameter (i) is positive since it allows referential Null Subject. We will see whether Telugu allows expletive null subjects or not.

[7] *adi/e   bayaṭa   urumutundi

   (it)   outside   thundering-is-nm

   (It) is thundering outside.

[8] e   bayaṭa   ciikaṭi-gaa undi

       outside   dark-adjr   is-nm

   (It) is dark outside.

In Telugu, first is positive second is negative. Expletive null-subject languages are distinguished from consistent null-subject languages in that non- dummy pronouns cannot be left unexpressed.

IV. DISCOURSE Pro-DROP LANGUAGES

These are also called radical pro-drop languages. Roberts & Holmberg 2010 elaborate languages which are typologically and genetically distinct allow null subjects freely, but they seem to be entirely without agreement marking of any kind. Such languages are Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese and others. Is Telugu a discourse pro-drop language? Telugu does inflect for agreement in all persons, as mentioned in section 1. However, agreement is not present in certain types of negatives and modals, in which case we identify the referential content of Null Subject pragmatically. Here are some examples.

[9] Speaker A: aame   iirōju   santaki   po-lee-d-aa?

              she-nom   today   market-dat   go-neg-Q

              Didn't she go to market today?

   Speaker B: pro   iirōju   santaki   po-lee-du

                  today   market-dat   go-neg-def agr

              (She) didn't go to market today

[10] Speaker A: ataḍu   re:pu   ikkaḍi-ki   raa-wacch-aa?

              he-nom   tomorrow here-dat   come-may-Q

              May he come here tomorrow?

Speaker B: pro   raa-wacch

                         come-may

           (He) may come.

           In these sentences there is no agreement whatsoever and the subject is dropped in speaker B's utterances, and the ***pro*** has a definite pronominal interpretation and can refer to any one and the speaker and listener alone know who it refers to. In such sentences, pronouns can be dropped under the appropriate discourse conditions. Huang (1984) and Rizzi (1986a) suggested that the total absence of agreement marking may play a role in facilitating the liberal availability of null subjects in these languages. However, it is difficult to say that Telugu is a full-fledged discourse pro-drop language since it does have agreement in other clauses.Roberts & Holmberg 2010 propose the characteristics of discourse pro-drop languages which distinguish them from consistent null- subject languages are:

(i) general possibility of non-expression/ellipsis of nominal arguments in various functions in addition to the subject
(ii) lack of person agreement marking on the verbs.

           Given that Telugu does allow null arguments in various functions in addition to the subject, we can say Telugu is a discourse pro-drop language. However, since the verb in Telugu always inflects for person feature almost always whenever agreement is present it is difficult to say that it is a full-fledged discourse pro-drop language. What we can conclude from these observations is that Telugu is a partial discourse pro-drop language.

V. PARTIAL NULL SUBJECT LANGUAGES

           It is difficult to establish the main characteristic features to the partial null subject languages. This type of languages allows null subjects under more restricted conditions than the consistent null-subject languages. Roberts and Holmberg 2010 observed three things which distinguish partial null subject languages (Finnish) from consistent null subject languages (Italian) are as follows:

First, only 1st and 2nd person pronouns are freely able to be left unexpressed in any finite context. Second, it is not the case that 3rd person pronouns can never be unexpressed. Third, in partial null-subject languages "generic pronouns can, and must, be null" (Holmberg 2005: 540). In Telugu, all pronominal subjects are dropped as shown in the above section 1. Moreover, Telugu has the rich agreement inflection on the verb so; we conclude that Telugu is a consistent null subject language.

VI. CONCLUSION

           In this paper, we have discussed four identifiable types of null subject language: expletive null subjects, partial null subjects, consistent null subjects, and discourse pro-drop. It is observed that Telugu allows a null subject almost in any finite clause irrespective of whether there is agreement or not. It is argued that Telugu is a full-fledged consistent null subject language as it does inflect for agreement in all persons. It is observed that null subjects can be recovered directly from the agreement on the verb in consistent null subject languages. Telugu is rich in verbal inflection.

VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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