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EXPLETIVES AND SUBJECT POSITIONS IN FINNISH

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Ever since Luigi Rizzi's influential works on pro drop (Rizzi 1982, 1986) the standard view has been that a pro drop language is also a semi pro drop language, so called. In other words, if a language allows null referential pronouns, it also allows null nonreferential (expletive) pronouns. We will show that this is not quite true: There is at least one language in the world which allows pro drop but not semi pro drop, namely Finnish. Finnish allows referential null subjects, presumably licensed by the subject-verb agreement. Yet Finnish has two nonreferential subject pronouns, one corresponding very roughly to English *there*, in terms of its distribution, and the other roughly to English *it*. The two pronouns are exemplified in (1a) and (1b), respectively.

- (1) a. *(*Sitä*) leikkii lapsia kadulla.
 there play children in-street
 b. (*Se*) sataa.
 it rains

As indicated, the expletive pronoun *sitä* is obligatory, in much the same way as the English expletive *there* is obligatory in certain impersonal constructions, while the expletive *se* is optional. One of the questions which we will discuss in this paper is why Finnish does not license empty *sitä*, in spite of being a pro drop language. Another question is, what determines the distribution of the two expletive pronouns? We claim that the case of the pronoun is crucial: the expletive *se* is nominative (the nominative form of the 3rd singular neutre pronoun) while the expletive *sitä* is nonnominative (the partitive form of the same pronoun). Given certain theoretical assumptions, this will explain their distribution and other syntactic properties.

The properties of impersonal constructions in Finnish thus have important consequences for the theory of pro drop. They also have consequences for the theory of argument positions in IP. We will discuss in particular one type of construction where an overt expletive subject occurs together with an overt thematic subject, each occupying distinct A-positions outside VP. This construction thus provides direct evidence of the split-I hypothesis, according to which the traditional I is at least two functional, projecting heads, each licensing a spec-position, both of which may host a thematic subject. The construction is similar to the Icelandic one discussed in Jonas and Bobaljik (1993).

1. Pro drop and semi pro drop in Finnish

It is standardly assumed, ever since Taraldsen (1980), that the null subject in pro drop languages such as Italian, Spanish, and generally "the European type" of pro drop languages, is licensed by Agr. There is another type of pro drop languages, which might be called "the East Asian type," where null pronominals are apparently not licensed by Agr; see Huang (1984), Rizzi (1986) and Jaeggli and Safir (1989) for discussion. We will not consider the latter type of pro drop at all in this paper. Thus, notions like 'null subject' and 'pro drop' etc. refer to the European type (unless stated otherwise). The reason why some languages, for instance English, does not allow null subjects is, again according to standard views, that in these languages Agr is not "rich," or "strong" enough, i.e. it does not have the features required, to license pro in spec(IP)/spec(AgrSP).

Rizzi (1986), following Travis (1984), discusses languages which have an intermediate status in that they allow null subjects in impersonal sentences but not in personal sentences. There are, in fact, two types of intermediate, "semi pro drop languages," those which allow only null nonargumental subjects (for instance German), and those which allow null nonargumental and quasi-argumental subjects, typically subjects of weather predicates, (for instance Yiddish or Icelandic). Assuming that the every occurrence of null subjects is an occurrence of pro, Rizzi (1986) lists the following cases:

- (2)
- a. no occurrence of pro (English)
 - b. pro = nonargument (German)
 - c. pro = nonargument and quasi argument (Yiddish)
 - d. pro = non-argument, quasi argument, and referential argument (Italian).

(Rizzi 1986: 541)

They are exemplified in (3):

- (3)
- a. *Have \emptyset been any news? (English)
 - b. Wurde \emptyset getanzt?! *Hat \emptyset geregnet? (German)
was (there) danced/ has (it) rained
 - c. Hefur \emptyset rignid?! * \emptyset er seinn. (Icelandic)
has (it) rained / (I) am late.
 - d. \emptyset sono stanco. (Italian)
(I) am tired

Following Travis (1984) Rizzi assumes that pro is subject to two conditions: it must be *licensed* and it must be *identified*. On the basis of this

hypothesis, Rizzi(1986) proposed that two parameters, one concerning licensing and one concerning identification, are involved, distinguishing among the four types of languages, as follows:

- (4) a. Agr does not license pro (English)
 b. Agr licenses pro, but identifies no features (German)
 c. Agr licenses pro, and identifies number (Yiddish)
 d. Agr licenses pro, and identifies number and person (Italian).

An important underlying assumption is that a referential NP must be specified for number and person. See Falk (1993) for a thorough discussion, and an elaboration of this theory of pro.

This theory predicts that a language which allows null referential subjects should also allow null quasi-argumental subjects and null non-argumental subjects; it takes less to license quasi-argumental pro than it takes to license referential pro, and even less to license nonargumental pro (see Jaeggli and Safir (1989:31)). Indeed, many pro drop languages which have been studied in the literature conform to this scenario, for instance the Semitic languages Hebrew and Arabic (see e.g. Schlonsky (1988)) and the Slavic languages (see Franks (1990)). Finnish does not, however. Finnish has referential pro drop, illustrated in (5).

- (5) (Minä) ole+n väsynyt.
 I be+1SG tired

The traditional view is that this is made possible by the agreement morphology, which is rich enough in Finnish, distinguishing three persons and two numbers for all verbs and auxiliaries, in all tenses and moods. Yet Finnish has two expletive pronouns, one nonargumental, hence corresponding very roughly to English *there*, and one quasi-argumental, corresponding to English *it*. We repeat the examples (1a,b):

- (1) a. *(Sitä) leikkii lapsia kadulla. b. (Se) sataa.
 there play children in-street it rains

As indicated, *sitä* is obligatory in this construction, while *se* is optional. The pronoun *sitä* is the partitive form of the 3rd person singular neutre pronoun, while *se* is the nominative form of the same pronoun.

Both constructions (1a,b) are colloquial. Especially (1b) is considered to be very substandard, but it is still very common and geographically wide spread in spoken Finnish. Constructions with the expletive *sitä* are extremely common, although they tend to be avoided in written Finnish.

Thus it seems that Finnish is a counterexample to Rizzi's (1986) theory of pro drop.

Some objections might be raised at this point: One is that Finnish, especially colloquial Finnish, is not really pro drop, since subject pronouns are in fact often not dropped. The appropriate characterization seems to be that Finnish has truly optional pro drop, unlike e.g. Italian which has obligatory pro drop. On the other hand, it is not clear that the expletives are only a property of

colloquial but not standard Finnish. Expletives are considered not to belong to good style. However, we can claim that a sentence with an expletive is not *ungrammatical* in standard language.¹

Another objection is that even standard, written Finnish is only partially pro drop in that only 1st and 2nd person pronouns can be null.

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| (6) | (Minä) ostin kirjan.
I bought+1SG book | (Me) ostimme kirjan.
we bought+1PL book |
| | (Sinä) ostit kirjan.
you(SG) bought+2SG book | (Te) ostitte kirjan.
you(PL) bought+2PL book |
| | *(Hän) osti kirjan.
he/she bought+3SG book | *(He) ostivat kirjan
they bought+3PL book |

One may hypothesize that the reason why the expletive pronouns cannot be null is that they are 3rd person, contra Rizzi's hypothesis that expletive pronouns have no person. Of course, morphologically the expletive pronouns are 3rd person.

Our first objection against this hypothesis is the following: Another language which displays the same partial referential pro drop as Finnish is Hebrew; see Schlonsky (1988). However, as mentioned above, Hebrew conforms to Rizzi's typology of pro drop languages: it has null quasi-argumental subjects and null nonargumental subjects². This is in line with Rizzi's hypothesis that expletive pronouns do not have person, and therefore do not fall under "the 3rd person condition" (the condition that 3rd person pronouns must be overt). Thus the overtness of the Finnish expletives can hardly be explained as a consequence of the 3rd person condition.

Second, note that the expletive (quasi-argumental) pronoun *se* is truly optional, being commonly dropped even in colloquial Finnish (and almost obligatorily in standard Finnish), unlike referentially used *se* "it," which falls under the 3rd person condition.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|---|----|--|
| (7) | a. | Nyt (se) taas sataa
now EXPL again rains | b. | Nyt *(se) näki minut.
now it saw me |
|-----|----|---|----|--|

Again, this supports Rizzi's hypothesis that only referential NPs have person. Not being referential, expletive *se* does not fall under the 3rd person condition.

If it were the case that both Finnish expletives were optional, being only optionally realized overtly, then Finnish would not be a problem for Rizzi's (1986) theory. In that case even nonargumental pro could be licensed in Finnish, which is what the theory predicts. But the expletive *sitä* is obligatory in a number of Finnish constructions very much the same way as *there* is obligatory in certain English impersonal constructions. Compare (8) and (9): In (8) one can choose between moving the object argument to subject position, or inserting an expletive. (What is not permitted is leaving the subject position empty.

- | | | |
|-----|----|-----------------------------|
| (8) | a. | *∅ have arrived two men. |
| | a. | Two men have arrived. |
| | b. | There have arrived two men. |

Similarly in Finnish, you can move an argument from inside VP to (what looks like) the subject position, or insert an expletive. What is not permitted is leaving the subject position empty.

- (9) a. * \emptyset leikkii lapsia kadulla. c. Lapsia_i leikkii e_j kadulla.
 play children in-street children play in-street
 b. Kadulla_i leikkii lapsia e_j. d. Sitä leikkii lapsia kadulla.
 in-street play children there play children in-street

That is to say, the subject position of a finite clause cannot be null in Finnish, except if it can be interpreted as referential or quasi-argumental *pro* (we will later propose a more precise characterization of the 'subject position').

It should be pointed out that the word order in (9a) is acceptable if the verb is focused, most clearly if the verb bears a question-affix or a focus-affix.

- (10) a. Leikkii+kö lapsia kadulla?
 play+Q children in-street
 'Are there children playing in the street?'
 b. Leikkii+päs lapsia kadulla.
 play+FOC children in-street
 'Sure there are children playing in the street.'
 c. Leikkii lapsia kadulla.

(10c) is acceptable, with focal stress on the verb, and an interpretation close to that of (10b). We claim that the verb has moved to C in all three constructions, where it is affixed with a question or focus marker. The question and focus affixes are always affixed to the first constituent of the sentence, as expected if they are generated in C. We may analyze the verb in (10c) as having an empty focus affix. We claim that the subject position in (10a,b,c) is not empty, but filled with an argument moved from VP. The analysis is roughly (11):

- (11) [CP [C' leikkii_i [IP lapsia_j [I' I_i [VP e_i e_j kadulla]]]]]

This analysis is supported by the fact that (12a) is not well formed, in contrast with (12b,c):

- (12) a. *Onko leikkinyt lapsia kadulla?
 have+Q played children in-street
 b. Onko lapsia leikkinyt kadulla.
 c. Onko kadulla leikkinyt lapsia?

The reason why (12a) is not good is that the subject position is empty. As expected, it can be saved by insertion of *sitä*:

- (13) Onko sitä leikkinyt lapsia kadulla.
 have+Q EXPL played children in-street

The expletive can also be inserted in (10a,b,c), as predicted, in which case of course it blocks movement to the subject position. Compare (10) and (14).

- (14) a. Leikkiikö sitä lapsia kadulla?
 b. Leikkiipäs sitä lapsia kadulla.
 c. Leikkii sitä lapsia kadulla.

So, one crucial question is: why is (9a) ungrammatical? We will propose an answer to this question below. However, before doing so, we need to discuss the precise structure of the finite clause in Finnish and the distribution of the two expletives.

2. Distribution of *se* and *sitä*

One can expect to find an expletive in a sentence that does not have a real subject. In addition to the pro drop, Finnish has several syntactic constructions with a finite verb but no overt subject. They are illustrated in examples (15)-(20). However, the expletive can also appear in a sentence with a nominative subject, as is the case in (20). These structures are called Transitive Expletive Constructions, TECs.

- | | | | |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| (15) | Weather predicates: | | <u><i>se</i></u> / <u>??<i>sitä</i></u> |
| | a. <i>se/sitä</i> sataa | b. <i>se</i> /?? <i>sitä</i> tuulee | |
| | EXPL rains | EXPL is-windy | |
| | 'it rains' | 'it is windy' | |
| (16) | Extraposition: | | <u><i>se</i></u> / <u>*<i>sitä</i></u> |
| | <i>se</i> /* <i>sitä</i> oli mukava että sait sen työpaikan | | |
| | EXPL was nice that you got it+ACC job+ACC | | |
| | 'it was nice that you got that job' | | |
| (17) | Partitive Construction: | | <u><i>sitä</i></u> / <u>??<i>se</i></u> |
| | <i>sitä</i> /?? <i>se</i> leikkii lapsia pihalla | | |
| | EXPL plays children+PART in-yard | | |
| | 'there are children playing in the yard' | | |
| (18) | Passive: | | <u><i>sitä</i></u> / <u>*<i>se</i></u> |
| | <i>sitä</i> /* <i>se</i> väsyttään nykyään helpommin kuin ennen | | |
| | EXPL get-tired+PASS nowadays easier than before | | |
| | 'these days people get tired easier than before' | | |
| (19) | Generic Subject Construction: | | <u><i>sitä</i></u> / <u>*<i>se</i></u> |
| | <i>sitä</i> /* <i>se</i> väsyy nykyään helpommin kuin ennen | | |
| | EXPL gets-tired nowadays easier than before | | |
| | 'One gets tired these days easier than before' | | |
| (20) | Transitive Expletive Construction (TEC): | | <u><i>sitä</i></u> / <u>*<i>se</i></u> |
| | <i>sitä</i> /* <i>se</i> ovat nämä lapset jo oppineet lukemaan | | |
| | EXPL have these children already learnt to-read | | |
| | 'these children have already learnt to read' | | |

As (15)-(20) show, the expletive is sometimes *se* and sometimes *sitä* depending on the construction. The distribution of *se* and *sitä* can be generalized as in (21):

- (21) *Se* is licensed iff the predicate does not have a subject argument.
Sitä is licensed elsewhere.

In a verb's argument structure, the subject argument is the one that in an unmarked finite declarative sentence is realized as the subject of the sentence (for more details, see Nikanne (forthc.)) The partitive construction, the passive, the generic subject construction, and the TEC are all constructions where the predicate verb must have

- (24) a. [AgrSP Lapset_i [AgrS' leikki+vät [VP t_i t_j pihalla]]]
 children play+3PL in-yard
 '(The) children (are) play(ing) in the yard'
- b. Ihminen väsy nykyään helpommin kuin ennen
 human-being get-tired+3SG nowadays easier than before
 'Man gets tired these days easier than before'
- c. Nämä lapset eivät ikinä olisi oppineet lukemaan
 these children not+3PL ever have+COND learn+PASTPTC to-read
 'These children would never have learnt to read'

If Spec(AgrSP) is not occupied by the subject, it is possible to move some other element there (cf. Nikanne (forthc.)). Note that *Islannissa* 'in Iceland' and *pihalla* 'in the yard' in (25) have no contrastive reading.

- (25) a. Islannissa sataa (Weather predicate)
 in-Iceland rains
 'Its raining in Iceland'
- b. Pihalla leikkii lapsia (Partitive Construction)
 in-yard play+3SG children
 'There are children playing in the yard'

4. Subject positions and the position of the expletive

We will argue for the assumptions in (26):

- (26) a. *Sitä* and *se* are always in Spec(AgrSP)
 b. If the Spec(AgrSP) is occupied by an expletive, the subject, when it is not contrastive, can stay in the Spec-position of any available category between AgrS and VP.

Given that Spec(CP) is the contrast position, an element left of an expletive must have a contrastive reading, assuming that the expletive is in Spec(AgrSP). This seems to be true:

- (27) a. sataa se/sitä
 rains EXPL rains
 'it actually RAINS'
- b. mukava se oli että sait sen työpaikan
 nice EXPL was that you got it+ACC job+ACC
 'Nice, I must say, it was that you got that job'
- c. Pihalla sitä leikkii lapsia
 in-yard EXPL plays children+PART
 'IN THE YARD, it seems, there are children playing'
- d. Nykyään sitä väsyttään helpommin kuin ennen
 nowadays EXPL get-tired+PASS easier than before
 'THESE DAYS people get tired easier than before'
- e. helpommin sitä nykyään väsyä kuin ennen
 easier EXPL gets-tired nowadays than before
 'I tell you, these days one gets tired MUCH EASIER than before'
- f. nämä lapset sitä ovat jo oppineet lukemaan
 These children EXPL have already learnt to-read
 'Look at these children, they have already learnt to read'

Almost any constituent can be moved to the left of the expletive, but--apart from those sentence adverbials that can adjoin AgrSP (e.g. *kai* 'probably')--only one constituent, and that constituent always has a contrastive reading.

The TECs in (28) include the functional categories Agr, Neg, T, and Aux. Following standard assumptions of head movement, we must conclude that the negation morpheme *ei* has moved to AgrS (it carries the agreement suffix: *ei+vät*) and the auxiliary *ole* has moved to T (it carries the conditional suffix: *ol+ist*).

- (28) a. AgrS T Ptc
 Sitä eivät [nämä lapset]_i olisi ikinä oppineet t_j kävelemään
 EXPL not+3PL these children have+COND ever learn+PTC to-walk
 'These children would never have learnt to walk'
- b. Spec(CP) AgrS T Ptc
 [Nämä lapset]_i sitä eivät t_j olisi ikinä oppineet t_j kävelemään
 these children EXPL not+3PL have+COND ever learn+PTC to-walk
 'These children, they would never have learnt to walk'
- c. Spec(CP) AgrS T Ptc
 kävelemään_i sitä eivät [nämä lapset]_j olisi ikinä oppineet t_j t_j
 to-walk EXPL not+3PL these children have+COND ever learn+PTC
 'To WALK, at least, these children would never have learnt'
- d. AgrS T Ptc
 *sitä [nämä lapset] eivät olisi ikinä oppineet kävelemään
 EXPL these children not+3PL have+COND ever learn+PTC to-walk
- e. AgrS T Ptc
 *[Nämä lapset] eivät sitä olisi ikinä oppineet kävelemään
 These children not+3PL EXPL have+COND ever learn+PTC to-walk
- f. Spec(CP) AgrS T Ptc
 Kävelemään sitä eivät olisi [nämä lapset] ikinä oppineet.
 to-walk EXPL not+3PL have+COND these children never learn+PTC
- g. AgrS T
 Sitä eivät olisi [nämä lapset] ikinä oppineet kävelemään
 EXPL not+3PL have+COND these children ever learn+PTC to-walk
- h. AgrS T
 Kävelemään sitä eivät [nämä lapset] oppisi
 to-walk EXPL not+3PL these children learn+COND
 TO WALK, at least, these children would not learn
- i. AgrS T
 ??Kävelemään sitä eivät oppisi nämä lapset
 to-walk EXPL not+3PL learn+COND these children
- j. AgrS Ptc
 sitä olisivat nämä lapset oppineet kävelemään
 These kids EXPL have+COND these children learn+PTC to-walk
 'These children would have learnt to walk'
- k. AgrS Ptc
 Nämä lapset sitä olisivat oppineet kävelemään
 These children EXPL have+COND learn+PTC to-walk
 'THESE CHILDREN/These children would have learnt to walk'

- l. Spec(CP) AgrS Ptc
 Olisivat_i sitä t_j nämä lapset oppineet kävelemään
 have+COND EXPL these children learn+PTC to-walk
 'These children WOULD have learnt to walk'
- m. Spec(CP) AgrS Ptc
 *Olisivat_i sitä t_j oppineet nämä lapset kävelemään
 have+COND EXPL learn+PTC these children to-walk

What these examples show, is that the expletive always immediately precedes the element (negation, auxiliary, or verb) that is inflected for subject agreement. The expletive, in turn, can be preceded by one element, but that element always has a contrastive reading (23b,c,f,h,k,l). If the expletive is in the contrast position (23d) or below AgrS (23e), the sentence is ungrammatical. The conclusion is, almost inevitably, that the expletive is in Spec(AgrSP).

The data in (28) also show that subject argument in a TEC is located between AgrS and VP. When there are several functional categories in the sentence, the subject argument has several choices. The subject argument stays in Spec(PtcP) (or Spec(AuxP)) (as in (23f,g)), but it can also raise up to Spec(TP). However, the subject cannot stay in VP, as (28i) and (m) show. Another piece of evidence that the subject argument is raised out of VP is that it must be specific. According to Diesing's and Jelinek's recent work (1993), there seems to be a universal tendency that specific subject arguments are moved out from VP. The subject in a position lower than Spec(AgrSP) must be specific, as shown in example (29):

- (29) ??Sitä eivät lapset ikinä oppineet kävelemään
 EXPL not+3PL kids ever learn+PTC to-walk

This means that the Finnish TEC provides direct evidence of at least two distinct subject A-positions between C and VP, since two positions can be lexically realized simultaneously. Of course this is not surprising: Ever since Pollock (1989) it is widely recognized that the traditional I is at least two distinct heads (AgrS and Tense) each projecting a sentential phrase and each licensing its own spec-position. Unless auxiliary hypotheses are added to the theory, the 'Split I hypothesis' actually predicts that subjects could occur in (at least) two distinct positions in the IP-domain, namely spec(AgrSP) or spec(TP). Given the existence of expletive pronouns as fillers of nonthematic spec-positions, the possibility of TECs is also predicted. Initially these predictions were not recognized, however. Instead, the fact that subjects seemed never to occur lower than spec(AgrSP), or else were inside VP, in the languages studied initially (mainly English, French, Italian), led a number of researchers to postulate that spec(TP) is universally not a possible landing site for subjects. For instance Rizzi (1990) assumes that spec(TP) is an A-bar position; see also Branigan (1992) and Chomsky (1993). In retrospect, this was unnecessary. Recent research indicates that languages vary with regard to the availability of spec(TP) as a (possibly final) landing site of the subject. Jonas and Bobaljik (1993) and Jonas (1994) argue that spec(TP) is available as a final landing site of the subject in Icelandic (see also Holmberg (1993)). We have shown here that spec(TP), or more correctly, any spec-position between VP and spec(AgrSP), is a possible final landing site of a thematic subject in Finnish.

5. Expletives and case

In this section we will do two things: We will first propose an explanation of the generalization (21). That is we want to suggest a deeper explanation of why the sentences in (30), featuring the wrong expletive, are ill formed.

- (30) a. **Se leikkii lapsia kadulla.*
it play children on-street
b. **Se väsyä helposti.* (generic interpretation)
it tire easily
c. **Se ovat nämä lapset oppineet lukemaan.*
it have these children learnt to-read

Secondly we will propose an explanation of why you need an expletive at all in these constructions, that is why (30) are also not good, even though Finnish is a pro drop language which licenses empty subject pronouns in other contexts.

- (31) a. **Leikkii lapsia kadulla.*
play children on-street
b. **Väsyä helposti.*
tire easily
c. **Ovat nämä lapset oppineet lukemaan.*
have these children learnt to-read

We will propose that (30) and (31) are ill formed for the same reason. The generalization (21), repeated here, is explained by (32):

- (21) *Se* is licensed iff the predicate does not have a subject argument. *Sitä* is licensed elsewhere.
(32) a. *Se* is [+NOMINATIVE], *sitä* is [-NOMINATIVE].
b. A nominative NP is interpreted as the subject argument of the predicate verb if the predicate verb has one in its lexical argument structure.

(32a) is based on the morphological form of the pronoun: *se* is the nominative form of the 3SG pronoun ('it', but colloquially also 'he/she'), *sitä* is the partitive form. (32b) claims that there is a connection between case form and position in the argument structure of the predicate: If the verb has a subject argument to which it assigns a theta role R, then a nominative pronoun in subject position will be interpreted as being that argument, receiving role R (i.e. as heading an A-chain which is assigned R). But then there cannot be another argument in the structure competing for R, which is what there is in (30). For instance in (30c), the verb *oppia* 'learn' has two obligatory arguments, one assigned the role of learner (the subject role), and one the role of the body of knowledge or skill which is learned. By virtue of (32b) the nominative pronoun *se* is interpreted as heading an A-chain receiving the role of the learner. But so is the nominative NP *nämä lapset*. Since the two NPs cannot be coindexed/cannot be members of the same chain, the sentence violates the theta-criterion: it has too many arguments.³

Consider (30b): the verb *väsyä* 'tire' takes one argument, a subject

argument, assigned the role of the person or thing getting tired. By virtue of (32b) the nominative pronoun *se* is interpreted as heading an A-chain receiving that role. That is to say, *se* is interpreted as a referential pronoun. Under this reading the sentence is grammatical, meaning 'It (e.g. the horse) gets tired easily', or colloquially 'He/She gets tired easily'. However, the sentence cannot contain an additional, phonetically empty argument with a generic interpretation without violating the theta criterion. That is to say, it is ill formed with the reading 'One gets tired easily.'

If a predicate has no thematic subject argument, as in the case of weather verbs or extraposition adjectives, then a nominative pronoun will not cause any theta-theoretical problems. Let us assume that it is characteristic of weather predicates and extraposition adjectives that they have a subject argument as part of their argument structure, but this argument is not assigned any theta-role. This distinguishes weather and extraposition predicates from ergative predicates, which do not have such a semantically empty subject argument. By virtue of (32b), the subject pronoun in *se sataa* 'It's raining' will be interpreted as the subject argument of the predicate, but since the predicate does not assign a subject theta role, this is innocuous: *se* will be interpreted as an expletive.

As mentioned, the expletive *se* is never obligatory. That is to say, Finnish licenses empty quasi-argument pro, in the terms of Rizzi (1986). But, as discussed in section 1, Finnish does not allow empty nonargumental expletives, i.e. empty *sitä*-expletives. We now suggest that the reason why Finnish permits empty *se* but not empty *sitä* is precisely that Finnish is a pro-drop language, with agreement strong enough to license referential and quasi-argument pro. The effect is that the sentences in (31) are analyzed as having an empty pronoun in subject position, but the wrong sort of pronoun, namely *se*, the nominative pronoun. We arrive at this result as follows:

Following Holmberg and Platzack (in press), we assume that "strong Agr", characteristic of pro drop languages and (possibly) semi pro drop languages of the Yiddish-Icelandic type (see (2-3) above) is inherently nominative. This means that it can spec-head agree only with a nominative specifier. It does not mean that it necessarily must have a nominative specifier (cf. the possibility of oblique subjects in Icelandic: Sigurdsson (1989)), but it can be coindexed only with a nominative specifier. That is to say, the finite verb can agree only with a nominative argument; a generalization which holds true in Finnish and many other languages. Now, if spec-head coindexing is obligatory in the sense that it must take place if it can, and if empty categories do not have any intrinsic features (a standard assumption ever since Chomsky (1981: ch. 6)), then an empty specifier of nominative Agr will be coindexed with Agr, and hence inherit nominative case. That is to say, it will be interpreted as a nominative pronoun, in Finnish either as a 1st or 2nd person referential pronoun (if Agr has those features) or as *se*. So for instance (33a) will have the same structural analysis as (33b). As discussed above, (33b) is ruled out by the theta criterion. Consequently, so is (33a).⁴

- (33) a. *Ovat nämä lapset oppineet lukemaan.
 have these children learnt (to) read
 b. *Se ovat nämä lapset oppineet lukemaan.
 it have these children learnt (to) read

Comparing our theory to Rizzi's, summarized in section 1 above, note that the feature [+nominative] plays a role similar to that of [+number] in Rizzi's theory. Nonreferential subject pronouns (overt or not) are [-nominative], while quasi-referential and referential subject pronouns are [+nominative]. In addition referential pronouns have person. We were led to this categorization primarily by the morphological properties of the expletive pronouns in Finnish. Replacing number with case, in this way, is not an unwelcome move, since the postulation that expletive *it*, overt or covert, has number but not person seems quite ad hoc (see, however, Falk (1993) for historical facts apparently supporting Rizzi's theory).

If pro drop languages all have nominative Agr, and if empty spec(AgrSP) always inherits this feature as a result of spec-head coindexing, then pro drop languages should in general permit empty *it*-expletives, but not empty *there*-expletives, just like Finnish. This prediction seems easy to falsify. As mentioned, many pro drop languages conform to Rizzi's (1986) generalization according to which pro drop languages allow non-argumental pro. However, there are some exceptions to this generalization, even within Italian, the cardinal European pro drop language, as discussed by Haider (1990). Impersonal passives are not accepted in Italian, nor are constructions like (34b), contrasting with (34c).

- (34) a. *È stato tossito
has been coughed
b. *Non è da tossire
not is to cough
c. Non è da leggere.
not is to read
"It is not to be read."

The explanation could be that, since Italian Agr licenses nominative pro, the constructions (34a,b) are necessarily analyzed as having a nominative subject pronoun, i.e. an *it*-type pronoun, same as in (35), and this is excluded, for the same reason as in Finnish (31a,b,c).

- (35) a. Piove.
(it) rains
b. È pericoloso sporgersi.
(it) is dangerous (to) lean out

Not surprisingly, this account of (34a,b) is not without problems⁵: For one thing, Italian appears to have an empty nonargument expletive in presentational constructions such as (36a). Italian also has an overt *there*-type expletive, used in existential constructions such as (36b):

- (36) a. È stato messo un libro sul tavolo.
has been put a book on the table
b. C'è del vino?
EXPL is wine

How come (36a) is good but not (34a,b), if the only problem in (34a,b) is that they need a nonargumental expletive? It is interesting to note that ergative constructions with a postverbal argument are marginally possible in Finnish with *se* instead of *sitä* (as noted in section 2). This suggests that languages

may vary with regard to these constructions: In some languages the argument of ergative verbs is a 'subject argument' with respect to (21)/(32b), in other languages it is not. We now suggest that Italian belongs to the latter type. That is to say, the expletive subject in (36a) is a nominative *pro*, same as in (35). In the impersonal passive (34a) and the construction (34b) this is not possible since the verb is unergative, and thus has a thematic subject argument (presumably with no space for cross-linguistic variation), although the argument remains implicit in these constructions. A nominative subject *pro* will therefore result in a violation of the theta criterion, by virtue of (32b). At present we have no explanation why the overt nonargument expletive *ci* cannot be used in (34a,b) (**C'e stato tossito*).

Notes

1. One context where all varieties of Finnish have *pro* drop, in all persons, is answers to yes-no questions.

- (i) A: Ostitko sinä kirjan?
bought+Q you book ('Did you buy the book?')
- B: Ostin.
bought+1SG ('Yes.')

Repeating the verb is the standard form of affirmative reply. *Pro* drop is obligatory here in the sense that the pronouns can be realized only in marked cases, for instance if they are contrastive. Arguably this is a different type of *pro* drop, perhaps more closely related to 'East Asian *pro* drop,' mentioned in the text above. Note that the object pronoun is also dropped here, although object drop is generally quite restricted in Finnish (less restricted, though, than in the modern Germanic languages).

2. According to Ur Schlonsky (p.c.) colloquial spoken Hebrew arguably allows some overt quasi-argumental pronouns (the argument concerns whether they are more correctly analyzed as referential pronouns) but definitely no overt nonargumental pronouns.

3. One reason why *se* and *nämä lapset* cannot be coindexed is that they have conflicting features: *se* is singular, *nämä lapset* plural. There is a construction in Finnish where a referential subject pronoun; seemingly in spec(AgrSP), is coindexed with a lexical NP slightly further down the tree, seemingly in spec(TP):

- (i) Ne ovat nämä lapset varmaan jo oppineet lukemaan.
they have these children surely already learned (to) read

The relation between the pronoun and the lexical NP in this "split subject construction" is perhaps best thought of as an appositional relation: the pronoun is a head taking the lexical NP as apposition, although for some reason they must be discontinuous. The relation appears to be similar to the relation holding between *it* and an extraposed clause in the common extraposition construction in English and other languages.

4. Note that *pro* in spec(AgrSP) in (33b) cannot be interpreted as 3rd person plural, which would yield the grammatical split subject construction mentioned in footnote 3, even though the finite verb is inflected for 3rd person plural (the suffix *vAt*). This is excluded since Finnish does not allow null 3rd person pronouns. As discussed, this does not exclude the possibility of expletive, personless but nominative *pro*, i.e. empty *se*.

5. We thank Guglielmo Cinque for pointing out a number of problems, including the ones taken up here.

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