Licensing and Identification of empty subjects in Maithili

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Abstract— *The present paper explains licensing and identification in Maithili in relation to other null subject language within Minimalist approach. It shows Maithili is consistent null subject language and also allows thematic and non-thematic pro. Maithili allows null subject in both of the clauses either in root clauses or in embedded clauses. Many scholars have developed their theories regarding null subject language. But, I am going to focus on well-known linguists who worked on pro-drop parameter in the field of linguistics. Various scholars with different theories give their ideas on pro from traditional to minimalist framework. Further we deal with licensing and identification of pro. Licensing and Identification are two independent processes but are closely interrelated. This paper investigates various properties of pro in Maithili and verbal morphology.*

Keywords— ***pro-drop, null subject, finite clause, verb agreement, honorific degree.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Maithili belongs to Indo-Aryan languages spoken by the 30 million of people in two bordering Nation-India and Nepal. In India, Maithili is basically used to communicate in North Bihar. It is highly honorific language. The degree of Honorificity in Maithili is clearly divided into three categories: honorific, non-honorific and middle honorific. Maithili honorificity has many grades, i.e. high, low, mid. Like many other South Asian languages it shares many of the typological features of South Asian language. The basic unmarked word order in Maithili is SOV (subject, object, verb) pattern. World languages can be initially classified into two types. They are namely pro-drop languages and non-pro drop languages. As we know that pro drop is not universal it varies language to language. A preliminary question is: what are the characteristics of a (PDL) Pro-drop language which differ from NPDL (non-pro drop language)? In this paper we will discuss about the role of thematic and non-thematic (expletive) pro in Maithili root clauses. In Maithili the verbal Inflection is determined by person and honorific grade of the subject. Some cases honorificity of object can take over subject to mark agreement onto the verb. Ramawatar Yadav (1996) proposed two-dimensional verb agreement in Maithili, i.e. primary and secondary agreement. In primary agreement verb copies the person and honorific features of the subject. Whereas in secondary agreement verb copies both

features, i.e. subject and object. Now, we examine pro-drop and non- pro-drop languages in detail.

1.1. Pro-drop language

A pro-drop language is a language in which certain classes of pronouns may be deleted. Pro drop languages are also called as null subject languages. Now, we see how pro-drop takes place in Maithili with suitable examples.

1. a. Ө   jae-b
        go-FUT.1

    I will go.

    b. həm   Ө   dekh-əl-iəuk

    I   see-PST-(1+3NH)

    I saw you.

In the above examples 1(a&b) subjects and objects are freely dropped in any context and pro present syntactically but not phonetically. In the sentence 1 (a) *jae-b* 'go' is primary verb agreement which reflects tense, person and honorific grade whereas in 1 (b) *dekh-əl-iəuk* 'see' is secondary verb agreement reflects tense, person and honorific grade. In secondary verb agreement the verb copies both features, i.e. subject and object at the same time which can't be separated. Hindi is one of the pro drop languages it allows pro in various types of sentences.

1.2. Non pro-drop language

Non-pro drop languages don't allow dropping the pronouns in a finite context. Pronouns are always present

overtly in such non-pro drop languages. These types of non-pro drop languages are called as non-null subject languages. Examples of non-null subject languages are like English, French etc. Consider the following English examples.

2. a. Do you come tomorrow?

   b. *Do (pro) come tomorrow?

   c. are you coming to college today?

   d.* are (pro) coming to college today?

Since English is non-null subject language it doesn't allow pro drop in the sentences. If we observe the above sentences 2(b,d) are ungrammatical. Similarly, French also doesn't allow null subjects in the sentences.

II.   VARIOUS PROPOSALS OF PRO DROP PARAMETER

Perlmutter (1971) firstly introduced the notion of Pro-Drop Parameter (PDP) in the field of linguistics. Pro-drop parameter is a parameter that determines whether a language is a pro-drop language or not. In case of pro-drop languages parameter allows an empty pro-element to be identified by its governor. Languages, lack of subject actually have both null version of 'thematic and expletive', and this properties correlates with syntactic properties. Now, we discuss on major pro-drop parameter proposals given by the different linguistics after Perlmutter (1971).

2.1. Noam Chomsky Proposal (1982)

Chomsky followed Teraldsen's (1978) opinion and formulated the PDP (1981) that allows empty pronominal subject in a matrix clause or finite clause. Chomsky suggested (1981) 'Rule R' (affix hoping) may apply either in syntax or in PF in PDL's while it permits only in NPDL's. By applying 'R Rule' in Italian language, the subject position becomes ungoverned at Surface Structure permits 'pro'. But when we come on English language the PF component, the subject is governed at S-Structure and 'pro' is ruled out. Torrego (1981) pointed out the 'Rule R' does not account for Spanish. So Chomsky (1982) abounded the concept of 'pro-drop' in tensed clause is PRO in PDL's formulated a new empty category called pro. Again Chomsky returned to the original position that the pro-drop parameter to rich AGR.

2.2. Rizzi Proposal (1986a)

Rizzi (1986a) theory of null subjects can occur two parameters are involved, a licensing parameter and identification parameter. For null subjects, they must be

(a) licensed and

(b) identified.

Rizzi (1986a) followed Taraldsan (1978) and gave light on the importance of rich agreement to license NSs. According to Rizzi (1986a) person-number are enough to licensing NSs. Language like Chinese which lacks verbal agreement, since it allows empty subjects. On the other side Rizzi (1986a) points out that the person-number is enough to license null subjects.

2.3. Jaeggli and Safir's proposal (1989)

Jaeggli and Safir (1989) proposed Morphological Uniformity which distinguishes PDL and NPDL's. Morphologically Uniformity are inflectional /paradigm in a language is morphologically uniform if the paradigm has either only underived inflectional (stem) forms or only derived inflectionl form (stem+affixes). According to morphological informality language has paradigm with Morphological system. Languages like Spanish, Germanic, etc. Maithili comes under Morphological Uniformity. This language is Morphological Uniformity because it has such type of paradigm which is suggested by Osvaldo Jaeggi & Kenneth J. Safir (1989). In this language every paradigm has its own affixes under verbal inflection. In other words, we can say that paradigm is uniform of all its form are morphologically complex or if none of them are. If the paradigm is mixed, that means, if some of its form will be Stem+affixes and some of its form will be only stem then we can say that it is not Morphological Uniformity. Through given example in English and French, we will see how Morphological uniformity is violated.

2.4. Null Subject parameter

Perlmutter (1971) firstly argued on pro-drop parameter (PDP) or NSP. Jaeggli& Safir (1989) pointed out that null subjects are permitted in all and languages are morphologically uniform inflection paradigm. The basic observation on null subject languages like Spanish, Italian is that:

- ability to drop the pronoun
- that- trace filter
- free subject inversion

Languages from the entire world will have these features or none of them. Spanish and Italian [+pro-drop] having the properties and English and French [-pro-drop] don't have these features. Null Subject languages (NSLs) have certain properties or parameters which differ from non-NSLs. Rizzi's (1982) work on null subjects have been observed that NSLs like Italian, Spanish and non-NSLs like English & French as cited in (Camacho, Jose 2). Many scholars have given their proposals regarding null subject

parameters. Holmberg and Roberts (2010) observed that there are four types of null subject parameters:

    i. Consistent null-subject languages

    ii. Expletive null-subject languages

    iii. Discourse null-subject languages

    iv. Partial null-subject languages.

By analysing these types, we can say that Maithili comes under consistent null subject language type. Maithili can drop the pronoun in any tense. It is noticed that tense and agreement is always present in all Maithili root clauses. However, Maithili allows dropping the pronouns in any tense.

III. A TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THEMATIC AND EXPLETIVE PRO IN MAITHILI

Rizzi (1986) argued that null pronouns are licensed by a governing head and have their semantic content recovered by the features of that head i.e. represented by subject verb agreement in thematic subject pro. These approached created the some issues for some null subject languages like Chinese, Japanese, and some East Asian languages. C.T.J Huang (1984, 1989) tried to resolve this problem by applying variable analysis and his General Control Rule (regarding PRO/pro). His proposal was proved unsatisfactory by Xu (1986), Xu & Langendoen (1985) and Y. Huang (2000). In Jaeggli & Safir proposed that thematic null subject can be considered only in morphologically uniform languages. These languages have either feature like identifying morphology throughout their verb paradigm or no identifying morphology throughout their verb paradigm.

But these features are not suitable for some of the languages like Norweign, Swedish & Danish lack both verbal morphology and thematic null subjects. Cole (2010) mentioned in his paper that overt pronouns are necessary in languages with weak agreement to give an importance that AGR through the spec agreement. It is not required in rich AGR languages and also not necessary in languages lacking AGR for person and number. Spec is only one personality who makes the clear concept regarding the absence of thematic null subjects in Swedish by relating it to the presence of Adjective, Nouns and Determiners in that language. After that her concept was countered by the concept of the absence of subject verb agreement and thematic null subjects by Danish, Norwegien, Afrikans, etc. (Tomoika, 2003), (Neelena & Szendari, 2007), (Franscarelle, 2007) work on these thematic null subject languages are not so much successful.

The absence of any satisfactory solution to the problem regarding thematic null subject languages, Cole concluded that subject verb agreement must where the overt thematic pronouns coincide with its presence. Molvyn Cole (2009) concluded two diagnostic features for thematic null subjects i.e. mention below.

i. By reference to an antecedent in context.

ii. By subject verb AGR upto the point of morphological maximality.

Cole (2009) also argued that languages which are rich agreement inflections have thematic null subject and languages such as Chinese which have recoverable context. Consider some of the list of NSLs.

  i. Chinese- no verbal morphology

  ii. Spanish- subject verb agreement for person and number

  iii. Bengali- subject verb agreement for person and honorific grade

  iv. Maithili- subject verb agreement for person and honorific grade

Now, it is clear that one requirement for thematic null subjects are morphological maximality which we can see in the above mentioned data. Morphological maximality refers that the maximum extent to which null subjects can be recovered by agreement in the language i.e. number, gender, and person. As we see person and number in Spanish, person in Bengali and Maithili but absence in Chinese. So, thematic null subjects in Chinese recovers it's meaning from contextual items. We look Spanish has rich verb agreement but still thematic null subject is recovered by contextual items.

3. Juan llegaba   a case   θ
Tenia   las llaves

   Joan arrives-3S.IMPERF to house.   have-1/3S IMPERF the keys

   Joan was arriving home. He had the keys.

Through the example (3), it is established that, in Spanish where thematic null subjects are not recovered by agreement, it can be recovered by contextual items. It is also observed in most of the languages like Italian, Portuguese, Turkish, Hindi, etc.

Languages like Chamorro and Irish, the subjects must be null when verb shows person subject agreement. Maithili is a pro drop language. It doesn't allow gender and number feature. Maithili shows person and honorific grade (H, NH, MH) feature. Here, referential content of pro can be recover by person and honorific grade feature. Subjects may be thematic or expletive (non-thematic). And some of

the languages allow both type of subject to be null or any of them. There are four possible combinations of null/overt and expletive/thematic subjects, which are mentioned below:

i. Null thematic subjects/null expletive subjects
ii. Overt thematic subjects/null expletive subjects
iii. Null thematic subjects/overt expletive subjects
iv. Overt thematic subjects/overt expletive subjects

(Camacho, Jose, 2013)

Most of the languages like Spanish, Chamorro & Quechua have both combinations of null thematic subjects/null expletive subjects. Whereas, York Creole shows that thematic subjects can be overt but expletive are null as cites in (Camacho, Jose, 2013). Finnish allows thematic subjects can be null but /some expletive are obligatory overt. At last, English and French show both types of clauses i.e. pronominal or expletive.

Maithili allows thematic pro in root clauses as well as embedded clauses. Consider the following examples.

4. i. pro æ-l-e

come-PST-2NH

You came.

ii. pro ge-l-ah

go-PST-3H

He went.

iii. həm   bujh- əit   chi   [ki pro   æ-l]

i understand-IMPERF AUX.PRE.1 [COMP come-PST-3NH]

I understand that he came.

iv. [jɔ pro   bʰukʰ ləgə-l-u tə] ahã kʰiəh læ-b

[if   hungry   feel-FUT-2H then] you eat   take-FUT.2H

If you feel hungry you will eat.

Maithili allows null subjects freely, which is grammatically acceptable. The dropped pronominals are *həm* 'I', *tu* 'you' *o* 'he/she'. The verb reflects tense,

person, aspect, and honorific degree (H, NH). Maithili doesn't show number and gender; it allows person and honorific grade (H, MH, NH).

Now, we look some data of expletive pro in Maithili.

5. i. bɔrsæi   ch-ai

rain   AUX-AGR.3NH

It is raining.

ii. ek-ta   raja   rah-æl

one-CLAS   king   be-PST.3NH

There was a king.

iii. lagait   ạịch   [ki   o   nạị kha-it]

seems   AUX.PRE.3NH   [that he/she not eat-FUT.3NH]

It seems that he will not eat.

Expletive NS is not phonetically present but it exists. It always shows 3rd person, singular, agreement. Maithili allows expletive null subjects in root and embedded clauses as shown in

5(i-iii). The content of pro can be recovered by the verb which reflects tense, person and honorific degree(NH).

IV.   VERB AGREEMENT IN MAITHILI

Maithili verbs are marked with tense, mood and aspect. The Maithili verb encodes the person and honorific grade of the subject noun phrase. The verb agreement inflection is determined by person and honorific grade of the subject. In some cases honorificity of object can take over subject to mark agreement onto the verb. The honorificity has many grades in Maithili, i.e. high, low, mid. Yadav (1996) talked about two-dimensional agreement in Maithili, i.e. primary and secondary agreement. In primary agreement the verb copies the person and honorific features of the subject. Whereas in case of secondary agreement verb copies both features i.e., subject and object. The Agreement is overtly realized between Verb and NP (noun phrase). The verb changes its form according to PNG (person, number and gender) of the Subject. In all languages these features may not be overtly present across the world. The Basic type of verb agreement in Maithili is person and honorific grade of the subject.

V.   LICENSING AND IDENTIFICATION

The concept of pro puts emphasis on the licensing and identification of pro in NSLs. Languages which shows rich agreement is required to license NSs. To identifying the content of NSs, it is necessary to recover them. Thus, NS is licensed by verbal agreement and identified by finite I or T in NSLs.

5.1. Licensing of pro

Finite clause allows null subjects with or without AGR. In Maithili, we have seen that pro can occur without AGR. Of course, tense is mandatory to license a pro in Maithili. Person feature is mandatory for pro. Maithili shows person feature and honorific grade not gender and number features. Null subjects are licensed by rich verbal agreement in NSLs. Following Taraldsen (1978) argued on the importance of rich agreement to license null subjects. The person and number play a crucial role to recover the content of pro. On the other hand, Rizzi (1986) argues that person feature is enough to license 'pro'. In Maithili, the relationship between verbal agreement (primary and secondary) and null subjects are argued. Languages like Chinese, Japanese, etc which lack verbal agreement allow null subjects.

As we already know that pro occurs in the subject position of finite clauses. Another features of pro is that Infl +Tense in NSLs. PRO occurs in non-finite clause of non-NSLs whereas a pro occurs in finite clause. There are two features that determine the null subject parameter i.e. 'Licensing' and 'Identification'. Licensing refers a situation for null subjects of any NSLs. And identification of pro can be determined by rich agreement on verb or by other means. NSLs like German which drop expletive subjects whereas Italian drops both thematic as well as expletive subjects.

According to Jaeglli & Safir (1989), *'thematic pro must be identified, whereas the non-thematic pro needs to be licensed alone'.* This means only thematic null subjects can be identified, whereas non-thematic null subjects needs to be licensed. Many languages which show only expletive, inflectional morphology is not rich for finding the referential content of pro. A thematic null subject has theta-roleso it needs to be licensed only, its referential content of pro can be easily identified. Languages which are rich in inflectional morphology, the referential features of pro can be identified. Languages like Italian, Spanish, and the referential content of pro can be recovered by agreement.

5.2. Identification of pro

As we discussed already about Jaeggli & Safir (1989) opinion that NSs can be thematic and non thematic He points out that identification of pro is important for referential value of NSs. NSs in German are not referential so that it can't be identified by finite I. Identification takes place through $\emptyset$ features (number, gender, person). Rizzi's work (1986a) widely accepted throughout nineties and till today as cited in Homberg & Roberts, 2010.

i.Licensing: pro is case marked by X^0_y ,where y is parameterised.

ii.Identification: pro inherits $\emptyset$ features values of X^0_y.

The verbal morphology played a crucial role in the study of null subjects and the concept of pro drop parameter for the identification of null subjects. Rizzi work (1982, 1986), the rich agreement verbal morphology on finite verb allows speaker to find out the person, number, gender of an empty subject. Agreeing morphology also plays a crucial role to the licensing of null subject (Coqnola, 2018). Therefore, Morphology richness of null subject languages allow to satisfy the requirement that all sentence has subject (EPP property).

However, null subjects are not limited to languages with rich agreement. In radical/discourse NS languages with poor agreement system languages like Chinese, Japanese, Thai, etc.allows null subjects inspite of poor agreement. Radical null subject languages proposed that NSs can be traced out through discourse or context as well as verbal morphology. The identification of NSLs, takes place through topic antecedent and a mechanism of feature inheritance. The approach of null subject is the combination of verbal agreement and presence of antecedent in the context give a vital role in the identification of NSs. Cole (2009, 2010) argued on identification of NSs occurs through Agree and context identification. Morphologically, the identification of null thematic subjects need the maximal agreement. It is find out those languages don't require the same number of features for realization of agreement in order to identify null subject (PNG). Cole (2009) point out that null thematic subject may needs an antecedent in the discourse to be identified. In Radical/discourse null subject languages, the empty category can be traced out without the overt category (contextually strong languages without AGR).

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