

THE PUZZLE OF COMPLEMENTATION IN TURKISH

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Abstract

The languages which do not require overt pronouns are called pro-drop languages (Chomsky, 1981). These languages have a property of “null subject.” In this study, I investigate the properties of the null pro in Turkish. In particular, I am interested in whether this element has the properties that make it equivalent the overt pronoun (e.g., *o* ‘s/he/it’) or to some other anaphor (*kendisi* ‘self- 3SGAgr’).

In the literature, there are some claims that the null pro in Turkish is the null version of overt pronoun (Erguvanlı Taylan 1984; Turan 1996; Öztürk 1999; Altan 2013). These studies state that there are differences in overt and null pronouns’ requirements. Null subjects in Turkish are pure pronominal pro, as demonstrated by Kornfilt (1984). She demonstrates how, in line with the Principles of Binding Theory (Chomsky, 1981), null subjects and reflexives and reciprocals are in complementary distribution on the one hand. If pro were an anaphor, it would appear in precisely the same places as anaphors, according to Kornfilt (1984). Gürel (2002, 2004) does not agree with the idea that overt pronoun and null pronoun have the same properties, she says that “(...) there is a contrast between overt and null pronouns in both referential and bound variable antecedent contexts in Turkish.” (Gürel, 2002, p. 73) Gürel thinks that *kendisi* can be the null pro which is syntactically prone to less requirements instead of the genderless pronoun “*o*” (s/he, it). Similarly, Dinçtopal-Deniz (2023) states that “the null pronominal pro and the overt pronoun *o*’s [...] distributions are the same only in (in)direct object positions; in possessive phrases and subject positions, they vary in their referentiality.” (p. 82) The question of what the null pro is and how it operates in Turkish is still debated in the literature. In this paper, I will explain how the null pro is neither a counterpart of the overt pro nor the null version of an anaphor *kendisi* ‘self- 3SGAgr’

According to Gürel (2002, 2004, 2006), in Turkish, the null pro and *kendisi* ‘self-3SGAgr’ behave identically in particular aspects and both *kendisi* and null pro violate the Binding Principles (Chomsky, 1981) by having “anaphoric and pronominal” attributes. Her studies state that pro is the “null form” of the reflexive *kendisi* and not the overt pronoun *o* ‘s/he/it’. In (1), we see that the overt pronominal subject of the embedded clause cannot grammatically co-refer with the matrix subject, even though the two are in different clauses, and therefore, the Principle B of the Binding Theory should be satisfied. Examples (2) and (3) show that both a null pro and an overt anaphor *kendisi* are allowed in the same position.

- (1) Elif_i [o-nun*_{i/k} kazan-acağ -1] -nı söyle-di.
 Elif s/he-Gen win -NomFut -3sgposs -Acc say -Past
 'Elif_i said (that) she*_{i/k} would win'
- (2) Elif_i [*pro*_{i/k} kazan-acağ -1] -nı söyle-di.
 Elif win-Nom-Fut-3sgposs -Acc say -Past
 'Elif_i said (that) *pro*_{i/k} would win'
- (3) Elif_i [kendi-si-nin_{i/k} kazan-acağ -1] -nı söyle-di.
 Elif win-Nom-Fut-3sgposs -Acc say -Past
 'Elif_i said (that) (her)self_{i/k} would win' (Gürel, 2002, p. 73)

In short, Gürel (2002, 2004) states that there are distinctions between overt and null pronouns' coreferential possibilities when *o* is considered as the overt equivalent of the null *pro*. When overt pronouns and null pronouns are compared, they vary in their interpretive features since *pro* correlates with another overt pronominal, *kendisi* as shown in (3).

We would expect *kendisi* to have the same coreferential possibilities as null *pro*. The sentences in (4) and (5) presents data with the coreferential differences in the presence and absence of the anaphor *kendisi*. The sentence in (5) shows that when *kendisi* is not overt, the reflexive coreferential possibility is lost whereas (4) holds the reflexive coreferentiality.

- (4) Kazım_i [kendi-si-nin_{i/k/j} kazan-ma -sı] -nı*_{i/j} isti -yor.
 Kazım self-Agr-Gen win -mA -3SGAgr -Acc want-3SG.IMPF
 'Kazım wants himself/him/her to win.'
- (5) Kazım_i [kazan-ma -sı] -nı*_{i/j} isti -yor.
 Kazım win -mA-3SGAgr -Acc want-3SG.IMPF
 'Kazım wants him/her to win.'

These sentences show us that *kendisi* can facilitate both referential & coreferential readings. Nevertheless, the absence of *kendisi* results in having only referential meanings excluding the reflexive meaning. Thus, we can say that the genitive *kendisi* does not hold as a null *pro* as the exclusion of it ends up in a different interpretation. I showed that *kendisi* cannot be the null *pro* based on the shifts in the referential & coreferential readings.

Hence, while Gürel's data represented (1), (2), and (3) show that null *pro* cannot be an exact equivalent of an overt pronouns, the data in (4) & (5) show that it cannot be an exact equivalent of *kendisi*. Then, null *pro* in Turkish must be a property that fits in various structures based on the meaning salient in the context. The question of what the null subject could be in Turkish requires more investigation. In this study, the difference between overt *pro* and null *pro* is shown. In the current literature, the features of overt pronoun, null pronoun and pronominal *kendisi* is not fully investigated and reported. This study fills the gap in the literature and present properties null pronoun in Turkish.

Keywords: null *pro*, PRO, Binding Theory, referentiality, Turkish

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