Revisiting the Null Subjects in Malayalam

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Abstract: The paper endeavors to reanalyze the empty subject constructions in Malayalam which has traditionally been classified as instances of pro-drop. Malayalam exhibits a lack of overt subject-verb agreement (Arsher & Kumari, 1997) and this forecloses the language from retrieving the referential properties of the dropped subject from within the sentence; instead, it is recovered from the context. Thus Malayalam is classified as a discourse pro-drop language in which the discourse is claimed to be licensing the omission of arguments (Holmberg 2007). This paper projects the claim that the null subjects available in Malayalam are not yielded by the pro-drop phenomenon, but by ellipsis. This entails that the null subjects in Malayalam do not involve the empty pronominal pro but are derived at by PF deletion as in the case of classic ellipsis. The evidences come from the detailed discussion on the syntactic and interpretational features Malayalam null subjects share with ellipsis.

Key Words: Null subject, Discourse pro-drop, Ellipsis, Sloppy Reading

I.   INTRODUCTION

The terms "Null subject parameter" and "pro-drop parameter" are used alternatively in current literature to indicate this phenomenon that allows phonologically null subject in the tensed clauses in languages like Italian, Czech, Arabic, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, etc. (Hyams 1989, Jaeggli & Safir 1989). Malayalam, one among the four major Dravidian languages spoken in the southern part of India, permits free omission of NPs in the subject position and hence it is considered as a pro-drop language (Jayaseelan 1999). In fact this phenomenon is considered as a typological feature of South Asian languages (Subbarao 2012). However, Malayalam differs from other South-Asian languages in that they lack overt subject-verb agreement. According to Chomsky (1981), null subject constructions are possible in pro-drop languages because AGR (agreement), a feature of INFL, governs the empty category in each case. The occurrences of null subjects are determined by the identification principle (Chomsky 1981), which requires the major referential properties of the pronoun to be recovered from some other parts of the sentence for it to be omitted. Thence this phenomenon is generally thought to be present in languages with rich agreement system as the agreement marking on the verb is rich enough to retrieve the reference of an eliminated argument. This necessitates a thorough study of the pro-drop phenomenon in Malayalam. As was proposed by Jaeggli and Saffir (1989), it may be the case that, a rich agreement is not a necessary feature to include a language in this set. But then, it is important to question the status of Malayalam as a pro-drop language since the null subjects discussed so far in the literature to justify this claim shows a discrepancy. See, for example, Jayaseelan (1999) provides the following examples to prove the point that Malayalam is a pro-drop language.

(1) *wannu-oo?*
      came - Q
   "Has come?" (Pg-6; ex: 7a)

According to him, in Malayalam, a pronoun can be readily omitted in a context where its referent can easily be guessed. If both the speaker and the listener share knowledge about the referent of the subject, then the question (1) is acceptable. He considers the deletion of this type as an instantiation of the pro-drop phenomenon. However, this inference sounds spurious. These pronoun deletions are conditioned by the context rather than a sentence internal factor like agreement. If this is what meant by the pro-drop phenomenon, then the phenomenon does not seem to belong to the group of parameters in UG, since this kind of sentence constituent omission is universal. English, which is widely considered as a non-pro-drop language also allows this kind of deletion in a conversation as shown in the following examples.

(2) a. (Am I invited to the party?)
b.   e Must be, surely.
(3)   e Seems to be quite noisy over there.   (Weir 2008, Pg-7; Ex: 5c & e)

Nevertheless, the sentence (1) allows an unfilled subject position. If it does not qualify as an empty pronominal subject, what is it indeed? We intend to investigate whether null sentence constituents that Malayalam exhibits

resemble the null arguments attested in pro-drop languages. Note that the omission of sentential elements in Malayalam is not restricted to the subject position alone. It appears that any sentence constituents can be omitted in an appropriate context. This enables spoken dialogues to be economic in the sense that the speaker need not utter each sentence constituents to convey to the listener what he intends, often leading to a fragmentary appearance of sentences.

II. MALAYALAM NULL-SUBJECTS

Based on the behavioural pattern of the null subjects in different languages Biberauer et al. (2010) proposed a four-class typology of null subject languages, which includes consistent null subject languages, partial null subject languages, discourse null subject languages, and expletive null subject languages. Consistent null subjects like Italian, Spanish, Khasi, Quecha, etc. allow the subject pronouns to be unexpressed in all persons in every tense. The systematic patterning of the null subjects in the consistent null subject was traditionally been treated as an aftermath of "the rich agreement" system. The INFL specified for [+AGR] is said to license the null subjects (Rizzi, 1982). In partial null subject languages like Finnish, Hebrew, Bavarian, etc the null pronominal subjects are permitted only in certain selected contexts. Expletive null subject languages/ semi-pro drop languages like German, Dutch, Afrikaans, and several creoles permit phonologically null expletive subjects but not referential null subjects (Bayer 2013). Discourse null subject is a term coined to refer to such languages that fall out the agreement based approach to the pro-drop phenomenon, like Chinese and Japanese that entirely lack overt agreement features (Huang, 1989). These languages retrieve or identify the referential features of the omitted elements with contextual cues. Malayalam is treated as a discourse pro-drop language (Holmberg 2007, Neelman & Szendori 2007). The following examples explicate that Malayalam does not exhibit subject-verb agreement, yet the language permits null subjects. The referential properties of such omitted elements are retrieved from the context.

(4)   a. *avan viiṭ-ṭil unto*?
   He house-Loc be.PRS.Q
   'Is he there in the house?'
b. *paaccu paRaŋŋ-u e viiṭ-ṭil illaa-nnu*
      Pachu *say-PST   house-LOC not-COMP*
      'Pachu said he is not there in the house'
(5)   a. *ramee ṣ aaḷu eng-ana?*
      Ramesh person how-be.PRS
      ' How is Ramesh (as a person)?'
   b. *e keṭṭ-atə   e   miṭukkan aaɲə enn-aaɲə*
      hear.PERF-NMLZ   smart be.PRS comp-PRS
      LIT: 'What I heard is that he is smart'

In (4b), the null subject of the embedded clause is taken as 'he' which refers to the subject of the question in (4a). In (5b) both the matrix and the embedded subjects are missing. The former is interpreted as referring to the speaker (hence the pronoun 'I') and the latter as the subject of the question (5a). In both the sentences, the verbs do not overtly agree with the subject and leave the language with no option of inferring the referential properties of the null subjects from the agreement inflection on the verb.

Bayer (2013) claimed that in addition to the lack of a verbal person agreement marking, discourse pro-drop languages differ from consistent null subject languages in that they allow nominal arguments to be unexpressed in functions other than just the subject. This is true of Malayalam; it permits other sentence constituents also to be null (see 6).

(6)   a. *Ente peena eviTe?*
   My pen   where?
      Where is my pen?
b.   *e jIva eTutt-u*
      Jeeva take-PST
   'Jeeva took it.'

In (6b) the object is null, yet the sentence is felicitous. The example (7c) presents a sentence where an object and a postpositional phrase are null.

(7)   a. A: *innale avan viiṭ-il vannu*
Yesterday 3SG.M home-LOC come-PST
      'He came home yesterday'
b.   B*: enniṭṭə?*
   'And?'
c.   **A:** *oru vidattil ɲaan paraŋŋ-u-viṭṭ-u*

somehow 1SG say-PTCP-send-PST
'Somehow I sent (him) back'

Another significant feature of Consistent pro-drop languages that differentiate them from discourse pro-drop languages is that they permit null subjects in default condition whereas overt pronouns are typically used to indicate a change of topic, focus or contrastive subjects (Camacho, 2013). This is exemplified with the Khasi sentences in (8).

(8) a. *pro ŋa/phi/u/ka-theed kɔt*
        1SG/2SG/3MSG/3FSG-buy   book
     'I/you/he/she bought a book'

     b. *ŋa/phi/u/ka-theed kɔt   ma- ŋa/phi/u/ka*
        1SG/2SG/3MSG/3FSG-buy   book   NOM-1SG/2SG/3MSG/3FSG
        'I/you/he/she bought a book'
        Lit: 'It was I/you/he/she who bought a book'

   c. *ma- ŋa/phi/u/ka   ŋa/phi/u/ka-theed   kɔt*
      NOM-1SG/2SG/3MSG/3FSG   1SG/2SG/3MSG/3FSG-buy book
      'I/you/he/she bought a book'
      Lit: 'as for me/you/him/her, I/you/he/she bought a book'

In a consistent null subject language like Khasi when the null subjects are substituted with overt pronouns, it results in the topicalization or focalization of the subject. This implies that in such languages sentences with a pronominal subject lack it by default. However, Malayalam does not have this property; sentences with an overt pronoun and a null pronoun yield the same interpretation as shown (9a) and (9b).

(9)   Q: *aval enthu mEdiccu?*
         'What did she buy?'
a.   A: *aval pustakam mEdicc-u*
   'She book buy-PST'
        b. *e pustakam mEdicc-u*
         ' (she) book   buy-PST'

This confirms the claim presented in Holmberg (2007) and Neelman & Szendori (2007) that Malayalam is a discourse pro-drop language. However, the question remains whether discourse pro-drop languages are indeed pro-drop languages. Note that not all the occurrence of an empty subject position in a finite clause can always be treated as an instance of the pro-drop phenomenon since they might have resulted from ellipsis or topic drop or even due to some phonological process (like the omission of the initial unstressed constituent of a sentence (Weir, 2008)). Even if the proposition that discourse pro-drop languages do not qualify as pro-drop languages is true, it is evident that these languages permit the subject (not just subject) position of a finite clause to remain empty. This warrants an explanation.

III. ELLIPSIS ANALYSIS OF MALAYALAM NULL SUBJECTS

A bulk of research in this area was largely focused on answering two questions:
 i. Is agreement the only licenser of pro-drop?
 ii. Do languages like Chinese and Japanese which lack overt subject-verb agreement qualify as pro-drop language?

Most of these works attempted to address these questions either by extending the scope of pro-drop phenomenon by replacing the agreement hypothesis with morphological uniformity hypothesis (Jaeggli & Safir, 1989) or other such features that is uniformly found in all languages that are claimed to be "pro-drop" or by creating sub-groups within the large groups of pro-drop languages to accommodate the "pro-drop" languages that falls out of the agreement explanation. However, we believe that before manipulating the parameter to conciliate all languages that are claimed to be pro-drop, it is of high priority to verify the "so-called pro-drop phenomenon" that a language claims to exhibit.

Apart from the pro-drop phenomenon, topic drop and ellipsis also yield null subjects in a language. Topic drop is the phenomenon where a sentence-initial element is dropped (Nygard, 2013). The omission of a topicalized subject is very frequent in several registers in diaries as discussed by Haegman (1990) and also in letters and postcards and written interviews. In all these registers the linguistic subject is contextually salient and can easily be omitted. It is generally assumed that topic drop sentences are subject to the restriction that [spec, CP] is not realized and hence topic drop languages like German can only drop either subject or object at a time. The omission is restricted to the sentence-initial topic position (Jaeggli & Safir, 1989) which certainly is not the case in Malayalam. Ellipsis is generally defined as the optional non-expression of sentence elements. Weir

(2008) refers to Trask (1993), who explains ellipsis as "any construction in which some material which is required for semantic interpretation and which could have been overtly present is absent, but immediately recoverable from the linguistic context particularly when that material is overtly present elsewhere in the sentence". In ellipsis, the omission is optional, i.e. a corresponding non-elliptical version that would provide the same interpretation will always be felicitous as in (10) and (11).

(10)   e/I Don"t think you can do it.

(11)   e/I "thought you are good"

Ellipsis is not restricted like the topic drop. Not only referential arguments but also expletive subjects can be omitted and elements other than arguments can also be silent. There might not be structural antecedents in discourse ellipsis which can identify the elided element as there is no lexical element higher up in the structure. Ellipsis is unacceptable in *out of the blue* contexts. The interpretation of the elliptical element is carried out via discourse. In other words, the process is deictic: There is some element in the situational context in which the sentence is produced that fixes the content of the phonetically empty element. The process of ellipsis results in gaps that are syntactically present, yet have no phonetic realization.

As per the discussions so far on ellipsis, prima facia the null subjects available in Malayalam seem to fit into the ellipsis account. In section II we have seen that in Malayalam the deletion is not restricted to the subject and that the language does not exhibit null-overt pronoun variation in the interpretation. As required for Ellipsis, Malayalam null subjects always require a preceding context i.e. it occurs only when preceded by a context from which the subject can be identified or when the subject is known to both the speaker and the listener.

(12)   a. *avaḷ   nannaai uRaŋŋ-i*
3SF   well   sleep-PST
          'she slept well'

b.   *e nannaai uRaŋŋi-i* e   well   sleep-PST
 '(she) slept well'

(12b) is generally perceived as infelicitous in the domain of writing. If in a conversation the sentence is uttered without a linking discourse that would supply the referential properties of the elided constituent, the listeners always tend to fill the gap with the first person singular subject *ɲaan*. Thus, a native speaker would judge (12b) as felicitous, but if uttered in isolation this sentence does not seem to make any sense. In a conversation, the first and second personal pronouns are generally omitted in Malayalam. A preceding linguistic context is not always necessary to license such omission. This follows from the fact that utterances by default have two discourse referents viz. the speaker and the addressee (Prince, 1981). Thus the common tendency is always to attribute the referential features of the speaker to the omitted subject in a declarative sentence and of the addressee in an interrogative sentence (Martin, 2003) as can be seen in (13) and (14). If not preceded by a context, the sentence (13) is always interpreted as "the speaker saw Mammootty yesterday". In interrogative sentences such as (14) where no antecedent is available in the discourse, the dropped constituent is attributed with the referential properties of the second person singular pronoun *nii* "you" and is interpreted as referring to the addressee.

 (13) A: *e mammuuṭṭi-ye   kaṇṭ-u*
Mamootty-ACC see-PST
          '(I) saw Mammootty'

(14) A: *e eviṭe   poo-ŋu?*
          where   go-PRS
          'Where are (you) going?'

Note that the third-person pronouns cannot be dropped freely without a preceding context as the dropped elements in such cases will always be interpreted as 1st or 2nd person pronouns but never the 3rd person person pronoun as can be seen in (15).

(15)   e *kaṭay-il   poo-kum-o?*
          shop-LOC go-FUT-Q?
          'Will you go to the shop?'

The only reading available for (15) is "whether the addressee (you) will go to the shop?" unless the speaker signals by using non-linguistic cues that he/she is refereeing to someone in the context other than the addressee. The sentence (16) provides such an instance where the speaker signals or points to someone in the discourse, and the deleted pronoun get the referential features of third person feminine pronoun.

(Context: Pointing to a girl)

(16) A: e *manuvi-nte sahoodari aaŋə*
Manu-GEN sister   be.PRS
  '(she) is Manu"s sister'

Recollect the fact that Malayalam verbs do not bear any overt agreement marker and the referent of the deleted pronoun is identified from the discourse. On the other hand for a constituent to be omitted in pro-drop languages

it has to be identified from within the sentence. Pro-drop involves indirect identification, whereby a deleted element is identified through the agreement inflection on the verb. It can never go for sentence external or non-linguistic identification (see the four strategies of identification discussed in Nygard 2013). The only possibility of retrieving the referential properties of the omitted argument in Malayalam is from the context as discussed; i.e. sentence externally. Thus Malayalam null subjects exhibit close affinity towards the null subjects yielded by ellipsis as this mechanism also does not usually have a sentence internal antecedent.

Sloppy reading as a diagnostic tool

        Another argument in favour of ellipsis analysis of Malayalam null subjects follows from the interpretation possibilities of the null constituents. Ellipsis differs from the pro-drop phenomenon in the kind of empty category involved. It is argued that ellipsis does not employ any empty categories like pro, PRO, or traces (Cheng, 2013). Instead, in ellipsis, it is just the case that the elided element is phonologically null but syntactically active. This means that a constituent is elided only at the PF and the syntactic representation of the sentence remains completely intact for the interpretation at LF. It is argued that the syntax of ellipsis matches its semantics and it is the phonology of the elliptical sentence that deviates from its non-elliptical counterpart. The ellipsis site is a fully-fledged syntactic structure. Therefore, at the interface, nothing much change compared to the non-elliptical one, but the phonology leaves a part of the sentence unpronounced (Aelbrecht, 2010). However, empty subjects in pro-drop languages are best been analyzed as "pro". pro is an empty category-present as such in the lexicon- identified as [+pronominal,-anaphoric] and silent in nature (Rizzi, 1986). Overt pronouns and silent arguments are both subject to condition B of the binding theory. On the one hand, both have to be free in their domain, i.e. the covert as well as the overt pronoun cannot be bound by a c-commanding DP in its domain but can be bound from outside (by a DP in the main clause). Note that even though an empty category represents a constituent that is syntactically active and phonologically null it is different from an elided constituent. It is not the case that an empty category replaces a pronoun in the S-structure. Consider for example the [+pronominal, +anaphoric] empty category PRO in the given sentence.

(17) He asked him [PRO to go]

(18)* He asked him [he to go]

PRO is projected in the subject position of the infinite clause in the d-structure. If it is the case that PRO replaces an overt pronoun in S-structure, then both (17) and (18) should have been grammatical. But, this is not the case. Empty categories are items that are there in the mental lexicon of a speaker. We assume PRO to be there in the subject position of an infinite clause and serves to satisfy the functions that projection principle demands. The same argument holds for pro. We have observed the interpretation difference that is triggered when an empty pronominal subject pro is replaced by an overt pronoun. However, in ellipsis, the element that is elided is unexpressed only in PF but is present in all other syntactic levels. This is probably why ellipsis is optional, and an elliptical sentence and its non-elliptical counterpart do not yield any difference in the interpretation.

        This difference provides us with a significant tool to test whether the null subject in a language is yielded by pro-drop or ellipsis. Takahashi (2008, 2010) suggests that ellipsis of a nominal category results in the availability of sloppy interpretations of pronouns understood to be present within the elided nominal, whereas the occurrence of a null pronominal pro in an argument position permits only strict co-reference possibilities with pronouns/anaphors within preceding (overt) NP antecedents. Consider the Japanese data provided in Takhashi & Sener (2010).

(19) a. *Taro-wa [zibun-no kodomo-ga eigo-o sitteiru to] itta.*
      Taro-TOP self-GEN child-NOM English-ACC knows that said
     Lit. 'Taro said that self's child knew English.'
  b. *Hanako-wa [e furansugo-o sitteiru to] itta.*
     Hanako-TOP French-ACC knows that said
    Lit. 'Hanako said that *e* knew French.'
  i. Hanako said that Taro's child knows English. (strict)
  ii. Hanako said that his own (Hanako's) child knows English. (sloppy)

The null subject construction in (19b) is preceded by (19a), and that the null subject in (19b) is somehow anaphoric to the subject in (19a). In this context, (19b) is ambiguous between the two readings: either (i) 'Hanako said that Taro's child knows English', which is called the strict reading, or (ii) Hanako said that his own (Hanako's) child knows English, which is called the sloppy reading. When (19b) has strict reading, it may contain a pronoun in the subject position. For example, see the following English sentence.

(20) a. John said [his son knows English]
    b. Ram said [he knows French]

(20a) is taken to antecede (20b), where the subject of the embedded clause is a pronoun anaphoric to the subject of the embedded clause in (20a). When we use a personal pronoun as in (20b), the sentence is not ambiguous

and only has strict reading. If the null subject in (19b) was unanimously an empty pronoun, we would expect the sentence to be like (20b), being restricted to the strict interpretation. Since (19b) can have sloppy reading in addition to the strict reading, we need something other than an empty pronoun for the null object. And argument ellipsis just provides us with what is needed. According to the argument ellipsis analysis of null arguments, (19b) is analyzed as in (21b), where the subject position is occupied by the full-fledged noun phrase *self's son* in the syntactic and semantic component, and it is elided in the PF component to yield a null subject construction. It is the availability of a fully-fledged lexical item in the elliptical site that would give rise to such sloppy interpretation in (21b).

(21)a. *Taro-wa [zibun-no kodomo-ga eigo-o sitteiru to] itta.*
      Taro-TOP self-GEN child-NOM English-ACC knows that said
      'Taro said that self's child knew English.'
    b. *Hanako-wa [zibun-no kodomo-ga furansugo-o sitteiru to] itta.*
      Hanako-TOP self-GEN child-NOM French-ACC knows that said
      Lit. 'Hanako said that self's child knew French.'

On the basis of this observation, Takahashi argues that Japanese null subjects are instances of Argument ellipsis and not pro-drop. In the same way, Oku (1998) classifies Spanish, a language that does not permit sloppy reading in similar sentences, as pro-drop language. Thus, if null subjects in Malayalam are empty pronoun –pro, then those null subject constructions should not yield sloppy reading.

Do Malayalam null subjects yield sloppy reading?
      Takahashi (2013) claimed that Malayalam null subjects yield neither sloppy interpretation nor strict interpretation. However, it looks like this claim is not true. See the example he has provided.

(22) a. *John paRanju [tan-te kuTTI English samsaarikkum ennu]*
      John said   self-GEN child English will.speak   comp
      'John said that his child would speak English.'
b.   *Mary paRanju [e French samsaarik'k'um ennu].*
  'Mary said that e would speak French.'

He says that (22b) can be interpreted neither strictly nor sloppily. The only interpretations available are the ones where the null embedded subjects refer to matrix subjects: thus (22b) only mean that 'Mary said that she (Mary) would speak French. However, native speakers confirm that when anteceded by (22a), (22b) could have both strict and sloppy interpretations. It is true that if (22b) is considered in isolation, it can only mean that 'Mary said she (Mary) knows French. In fact, native speakers are of the opinion that when (22a) antecedes (22b), it is very unlikely for the null subject to refer back to the Matrix subject. The following example sentences with null subject also yield these two readings.

(23) a. *Meera paRannu [tan-te amma pOlIs aaNennu]*
      Meera   said   self-GEN mother police COP COMP
      'Meera said that her mother is a Police officer.'
    b.*Madu-um paRannu [e pOlis aaNennu]*
  Madu-also said   police COP COMP
  'Madu also said that e is police officer.'
i.   Madhu also said that Meera's mother is a police officer (strict)
ii.   Madhu also said that Madhu's mother is a police officer (sloppy)

(24) a. *cinnu [tante makan skooLil aaNu ennu] karut-i*
      Cinnu self-GEN son school-in COP COMP think-PST
      'Chinnu thought that her son is at school.'
    b.*snEha [toosanu poyathaaNu enn-um] karut-i*
      Sneha tuition   go-PST-NMLZ-COP COMP-CONJ think-PST
i.   and Sneha thought he went to tuition (Chinnu's son) [strict reading]
ii.   and Sneha thought her son went to tuition (Sneha's son) [sloppy reading]

 Simpson et al. (2013) have observed that there are only certain instances (like example 25) where the subject of an embedded finite clause can be omitted. They agree that in such cases the sloppy interpretations of null subject positions are permitted.

 (25)a. *[tan-te teacher vaLare nalla-van aanə ennə] anil vicaaticc-u*
    Self-GEN teacher a lot good-NZL COP Comp anil think-PST
    'Anil feels his teacher is very nice.'
    b.*[_ vaLare kaNisakkaran aanə ennə] ravi vicaarikk-unnu*
    a lot   strict   COP C   ravi think-PRES
i.   Ravi feels he is too strict (Anil's teacher).   [strict reading]
ii.   Ravi feels his teacher is too strict (Ravi's teacher). [sloppy reading]   (ex 42, pg 114)

However, Simpson et al. have noticed that in Malayalam sloppy readings are not available when it comes to null quantificational subjects. (26) is a Japanese example that Takahashi has provided to demonstrate null quantificational subjects (and objects) in this language allow strict and sloppy readings.

(26) a. *Taroo-wa sannin-no sensei-o sonkeishiteiru*

      Taroo-TOP 3-gen teacher-ACC respects

      'Taroo respects three teachers.'

   b. *Hanako-mo e sonkeishiteiru*

     Hanako-also respect

     'Hanako also respects e.'

    i. Hanako respects three teachers too. (sloppy)

    ii. Hanako respects them too. (strict)

With the following example sentence (27) Simpson et al. claim that these two readings are not available in Malayalam if a quantificational phrase subject is elided. He argues that such cases can only have a strict reading (referring to the same set as the QP in a preceding sentence).

(27)   a. *muunu pujari-maar anilin-e kanu-waan vann-u*

  three priest-P anil-ACC see-INF came-PST

  'Three priests came to see Anil.'

     b.*raviy-e kaanaan-um vann-u*

   ravi-ACC see-UM came-PST

     '(They) came to see Ravi too.' [only strict reading]   (ex 14, pg 108)

However, the unavailability of the sloppy reading is an aftermath of the position occupied by the NP *muunnu puujaarimaar* 'three priest' in this sentence. See the example (28) where the infinite clause 'to see Anil' precedes the subject NP 'three priests'. Here a sloppy reading is easily available for (27b) as shown with (28b).

(28)   a. *aniln-e kaanu-waan moonu pujari-maar vann-u*

  Anil-Acc see-INF three priest-P come-PST

     'Three priests came to see Anil.'

    b.*raviy-e kaanaan-um vann-u*

  ravi-ACC see-UM came-PST

     'They came to see Ravi too'   [strict reading]

     'Three priests came to see Ravi too' [sloppy reading]

(27b) yields only a strict reading because here 'three priests' has Topical reading; in unmarked sentences, the infinite clause precedes the subject in Malayalam (as in 28a). Thus in (27b), the null subject is a continuing topic and yields only strict reading.

We conclude that Malayalam null subjects give rise to both strict and sloppy reading. This and the other features of these empty subjects we have discussed in the beginning of this section present strong case in favour of treating the null subjects available in Malayalam as instances of argument ellipsis.

IV. DISCOURSE PRO-DROP AS ELLIPSIS

     This section tries to bring forth a typological and terminological clarity. We have seen that in the traditional typological classification of pro-drop languages (Biberauer et al. 2010), Malayalam is treated as a discourse pro-drop language. However, Null subjects in Malayalam are elided arguments and not pro-drop. Japanese is one other language that is treated as discourse pro-drop languages in Biberauer's classification and it is also shown to exhibit subject NP ellipsis (Takahashi 2008, 2010, 2013). Then, do we require a class of languages labelled as discourse pro-drop languages? Biberauer et al.'s classification might have been done with a preconceived notion that all the occurrence of null subjects in any language is amenable to pro-drop analysis. The lack of a rich verbal agreement paradigm in some null subject languages was the primary trigger for them to create this subclass. By the look of it, languages listed under the label 'discourse pro-drop' mostly yields null subjects by ellipsis and do not involve pro. Then, labelling them as discourse pro-drop languages will result only in further confusions and there seems to have no benefit to retain this term.

     It is better not to equate the null subject with pro-drop. Let's take 'null subject' as a cover term for both pro-drop and ellipsis. Pro-drop is licensed under agreement and ellipsis is yielded by PF deletion. To confirm this suggestion, of course, one has to reanalyze the null subject phenomenon in all those languages labelled as discourse pro-drop languages.

V. CONCLUSION

     It follows from the above discussion that Malayalam null subjects are better analyzed as elided arguments based on the interpretational possibilities of the null subject construction in the language. This entails that the null subjects in Malayalam do not involve the empty pronominal pro but are derived at by PF deletion. A question that needs to be answered now is 'what permits ellipsis in a language?'We need to further study the

properties of the nominal elements in the language to be able to answer this question. The availability of bare NPs in a language might be the factor that permits argument ellipsis in a language as suggested in Simpson et al (2012). However this requires further research.

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