

Null Subjects in Old English

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AIM OF THE PAPER: *To argue that OE has pro drop and it can be added to Sigurdsson's (2011) list of languages that have Romance-style pro drop.*

ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER
§1 ✂ Sigurdsson's (2011) edge linking
§2 ✂ OE data
§2.1: <i>To argue that Old English is a genuine pro drop language.</i>
§2.2: <i>To link the verbal agreement with the subject to the licensing of pro drop in OE.</i>
§2.3: <i>To argue that the topic that licenses the null subject is the aboutness-shift one, and that the position to which the null argument moves in the C-domain is Spec FinP.</i>
§3 ✂ Conclusion

1. SIGURDSSON'S EDGE LINKING

[I] SIGURDSSON (2011)

Overt and silent definite arguments require C/edge linking for interpretation at the relevant interface. ---> (2)

✂ THIRD-FACTOR PRINCIPLE

Evidently, development of language in the individual must involve three factors: (1) genetic endowment, which sets limits on the attainable languages, thereby making language acquisition possible; (2) external data, converted to the experience that selects one or another language within a narrow range; (3) principles not specific to FL. Some of the third factor principles have the flavor of the constraints that enter into all facets of growth and evolution... Among these are principles of efficient computation... (Chomsky (2007: 3); cf. Chomsky (2005: 6), Gelderen (2011: 9))

[II] THREE MAIN TYPES OF NULL SUBJECTS

- i. Chinese-type discourse drop ⇒ SUBJECTS LINKED BY LONG-DISTANCE TOPICS ✂ NOT DISCUSSED
- ii. Romance-type pro drop ⇒ AGREEMENT ON THE VERB IN ITALIAN = AN INCORPORATED PRONOUN
1st person agrees with the speaker feature in the C-domain.
2nd person agrees with the addressee feature in the C-domain.
3rd person agrees with an aboutness-shift topic in the C/edge.
- iii. Germanic-type topic drop ⇒ NULL TOPICS MOVED TO SPEC CP ---> (1)

(1) Dutch

a. NULL SUBJECT TOPIC

Komt morgen terug.
pro comes tomorrow back
 'She/He will come back tomorrow.'

b. NULL OBJECT TOPIC

Heb ik niet gezien.
pro have I not seen
 'That/Him/Her, I haven't seen.'

(2) C/Edge-Linking Generalization

Any definite argument, overt or silent, *positively* matches at least one CL_n in its local C-domain, CL_n ∈ {Λ_A, Λ_p, Top, ...}.

✂ MATCHING ⇒ AGREE

[III] PROHIBITION OF TOPIC DROP IN GERMANIC

- i. an adverbial or other phrasal element sentence-initial. ---> (3a)
- ii. subordinate clauses ---> (3b)
- iii. interrogative clauses ---> (3c)

(3) Dutch

a. SENTENCE-INITIAL ADVERBIAL ELEMENT

* Waarschijnlijk komt morgen terug. ✂ TOPIC MOVEMENT TO SPEC CP BLOCKED
 probably comes *pro* tomorrow back (MATCHING TO A CL_n IMPOSSIBLE)
 'She/He will probably come back tomorrow.'

b. SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

* Ik denk dat komt terug.
 I think that *pro* comes back
 'I think she/he comes back.'

c. INTERROGATIVE CLAUSE

*Komen terug?
 come pro back
 'Will they/you/we come back?'

✂ Successful C/edge linking of the null argument in V2 languages occurs when the null argument moves to the C-domain across the intervening element in C.

(4') PDE

- a. TOPIC DROP OF FIRST PERSON
 Might see you tomorrow.
- b. TOPIC DROP OF SECOND PERSON
 Shouldn't have done that!
- c. TOPIC DROP OF THIRD PERSON
 Comes here often apparently.

- d. TOPIC DROP OF EMBEDDED SUBJECT
*I know that comes late.
- e. TOPIC DROP WITH INITIAL ADVERBIAL
*Now come late.
- f. OBJECT DROP
*I haven't seen .

C always blocks C/edge licensing.
 ✂ NULL SUBJECT MOVEMENT TO THE C-DOMAIN

2. OLD ENGLISH

[IV] Pro drop in OE is licensed by agreement on the verb (as in Italian). ✂ INCORPORATED PRONOUN

2.1. OLD ENGLISH SUBJECT PRONOUNS, OVERT AND NULL

[V] THREE TYPES OF SUBJECT PRONOUNS IN OE ---> (6)

- i. h-pronoun (also used as a reflexive) ✂ ANAPHORIC (BUT NOT REFERENTIAL)
- ii. independent demonstrative ✂ TOPIC-SHIFTING/EMPHATIC
- iii. null subject (pro) ✂ ANAPHORIC

(6) Talking about the warriors present in the hall:

Wæs þeaw hyra þæt hie oft wæron an wig gearwe wæs seo þeod tilu. Sigon þa to slæpe
 was custom their that they often were one war ready was that people good pro sank then to sleep
 'It was their custom that they were always ready for war. They were good people. They went to sleep.'

(Beowulf 1246–51; punctuation and capitalization as in the facsimile edited by Zupitza (1959))

[VI] Null subjects (pro drop) occur in OE (with variation among texts). ---> (7)&(8)

(7) SENTENCE-INITIAL ADVERBIAL ELEMENT

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard
 now pro must praise heaven.kingdom's guard
 'Now we must praise the lord of the heavenly kingdom.'

(beginning of the Northumbrian version of Caedmon's Hymn, Cambridge University Library Ms. M, aka the Moore Manuscript)

(8) SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

Nearwe genyddon on norðwegas.
 anxiously pro hastened on north.ways
 'Anxiously, they hastened north.'

(Exodus 68, Krapp 1931 edition)

✂ ① FREQUENT ---> (9)-(13)

② DIFFERENT FROM OHG/OF IN HAVING PRO DROP IN SUBORDINATE CLAUSES, NOT LICENSED BY V-MOVEMENT ---> (14)

2.2. THE ROLE OF AGREEMENT

[VII] ROMANCE-TYPE PRO DROP

⇒ AGREEMENT ON THE VERB IN ITALIAN = AN INCORPORATED PRONOUN

1st person agrees with the speaker feature in the C-domain.

2nd person agrees with the addressee feature in the C-domain.

3rd person agrees with an aboutness-shift topic in the C/edge.

OE: First and second person pronouns are less frequently dropped than third person ones. ⇒ PERSON SPLIT
 ✂ LOSS OF OVERT AGREEMENT ON THE FIRST AND SECOND PRONOUNS' VERBS
 1st person verbal agreement = uninterpretable ϕ -feature ($u\phi$) on T (= true agreement)
 2nd person verbal agreement = uninterpretable ϕ -feature ($u\phi$) on T (= true agreement)
 3rd person verbal agreement = interpretable ϕ -feature ($i\phi$) on T (= incorporated pronoun)
 ⇒ LICENSES 3RD PERSON PRO DROP UP TO LATE OE

---> Table 1 (Berndt (1956)), Table 2 (Campbell (1959)) & Table 3

Table 1

Null and overt subjects in Lindisfarne and Rushworth Gospels (percentages represent overt subjects)

	Lindisfarne		Rushworth	
	Section 1	Section 2	Section 1	Section 2
1SG	9/212 (= 96%)	9/656 (= 99%)	6/191 (= 97%)	21/528 (= 96%)
1PL	0/53 (= 100%)	1/120 (= 99%)	1/44 (= 98%)	2/100 (= 98%)
2SG	16/103 (= 87%)	22/308 (= 93%)	12/90 (= 88%)	22/226 (= 91%)
2PL	10/206 (= 95%)	21/428 (= 95%)	20/168 (= 89%)	62/302 (= 83%)
3SG	445/116 (= 21%)	1292/225 (= 15%)	223/246 (= 54%)	995/186 (= 16%)
3PL	263/108 (= 29%)	618/154 (= 20%)	130/141 (= 52%)	528/124 (= 19%)

☞ TWO (ANGLIAN) DIALECTS: ① Northumbrian (§1 and §2 of Lindisfarne and §2 of Rushworth)
 ② Mercian (§1 of Rushworth)

Table 2

Subject-verb agreement pattern for weak verbs in Old English when the subject precedes the verb

Present		Preterite	
Singular	1 -e	Singular	1 -de
	2 -(e)s(t)		2 -des(t)
	3 -(e)ð		3 -de
Plural	-að	Plural	-dun, -don, -dan

☞ 1ST AND 2ND PERSON SINGULAR (PRESENT TENSE) ENDINGS REDUCED

Table 3

Lindisfarne and Rushworth inflections on strong indicative verbs with and without a pronoun (based on Berndt 1956:94–131)

	Lindisfarne (section 1)		Rushworth (section 1)	
	With pronoun	Without	With pronoun	Without
1SG	-o	-o	-e	-u
2SG	-as, -es, -s, -st	(none)	-es(t), -ast, -st	-est
3SG	-eð, -es, -as	-eð, -es, -as, -æs	-eþ, eth, -aþ	-eþ, -aþ, -æþ, -iþ

---> (15)

[VIII] NUMBER SPLIT IN PRO DROP: SINGULAR > PLURAL

First and second person plural pattern with the singular in occurring with more often with an overt subject.

In cases where the subject follows the verb, first and second plural endings are more reduced than third.

[IX] SUMMARY

- Pro drop occurs in all persons, but more with third person than with first and second.
- Verb movement is not required for pro drop to occur.
- Pro drop occurs without the null subject having to move to the C-domain.

HISTORICAL CHANGE: early OE: $i\phi$ on T	☞ pro drop possible
↓ REANALYSIS	
late OE: $u\phi$ on T in 1st and 2nd person agreement	☞ person split in pro drop
$i\phi$ on T in 3rd person agreement	

2.3. THE NULL SUBJECT'S TOPIC

[X] THREE TYPES OF TOPICS ---> HIERARCHY IN (16)

- aboutness-shift topic ☞ NEWLY INTRODUCED
- contrastive topic ☞ INDUCING ALTERNATIVES WITHOUT IMPACT ON THE FOCUS VALUE
- familiar topic ☞ TYPICALLY UNSTRESSED AND PRONOMINAL

(cf. Sigurðsson (2011), Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007))

(16) Aboutness-Shift Topic (ST) > Contrastive Topic (CT) > Familiar Topic (FT)

(Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007: 89))

---> (17)

- (17) *Italian*
Io, inglese non l'avevo mai fatto.
 I(ST) English(FT) not it-have never done
 'I never studied English before.'
 (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007: 96))
 ✎ ST > FT
- [XI] INTERPRETATION OF PRO (1)
 The interpretation of referential pro does not depend on the agreement features of the licensing head, but on a matching relation with the local Aboutness-shift Topic.
 ---> (18)
- (18) *Italian*
il mio capo, come diceva Carlo... [] è un exreporter... [] è stato in giro per il mondo...
 the my boss(ST) as used-to-say Carlo pro is a former reporter pro has been all over the world...
 [] mi ha preso in simpatia solo...
 pro me has taken in liking only
 'My boss, as Carlo used to say, he is a former reporter, he has been all over the world, he likes me.' (Frascarelli (2007: 703))
- [XII] INTERPRETATION OF PRO (2)
 Familiar topics continue the aboutness-shift topic.
 (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007: 111-112))
 ✎ ABOUTNESS-SHIFT/FAMILIAR TOPIC ---> (19)&(20)
- (19) Oft **Scyld Scefing**, sceaþena þreatum monegum mægþum meodo setla of teah egsode eorl syððan
 often Scyld Scefing(ST) shadows crowd many family mead benches away took scared brave-men since
 [] ærest weard feascraft funden
 pro early became poor found
 'Often Scyld Scefing took away mead-benches from the crowd of warriors, from many people, after he had once been discovered poor.'
- (20) **he**, þæs frofre gebad [] weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þah. oð þ him æghwylc þara
 he(FT) that consolation waited pro grew under clouds honor grew till that him every those
 ymb sittendra ofer hronrade hyran scolde gomban gyldan þi wæs god cyning.
 around sitting across sea obey should tribute pay that was good king
 'He was consoled for that. He grew up. His honor grew until every one of the neighboring people on the other side of the sea had to obey him and pay tribute. He was a good king.'
 (*Beowulf* 4-11)
- [XIII] APPARENT PROBLEMS
- i. *pro drop unpredictable*

“[T]he use of weak pronouns in a [null subject] language can be considered as a stylistic means to restate the Aboutness-shift Topic, which is idiosyncratic to individual speakers.” (Frascarelli (2007: 713))
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- ii. *types of topics licensing pro in OE*

They are aboutness-shift topics, continued by familiar topics (and Λ_A and Λ_P). ---> (6')-(8'), (21) & (9')-(13')

- (6') *Talking about the warriors (= ST) present in the hall:*
Wæs þeaw hyra þæt **hie** oft wæron an wig gearwe wæs **seo**, þeod tilu. [] Sigon þa to slæpe
was custom their that they often were one war ready was that(FT) people good pro sank then to sleep
'It was their custom that they were always ready for war. They were good people. They went to sleep.'
(*Beowulf* 1246–51; punctuation and capitalization as in the facsimile edited by Zupitza (1959))
✎ PRO LICENSED BY A FAMILIAR TOPIC
- (7') Λ_{Ai} Λ_{Pj} Nu []_{i+j} scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard
now pro must praise heaven.kingdom's guard
'Now [we] must praise the lord of the heavenly kingdom.'
(beginning of the Northumbrian version of *Caedmon's Hymn*, Cambridge University Library Ms. M, aka the Moore Manuscript)
✎ PRO LICENSED BY Λ_A AND Λ_P
- (21) Past these, with many a hindrance, Moses led **his people**, (= ST). And two nights after **they**, (= FT) escaped their foes God bade the noble prince to make encampment about the town of Etham in the marchlands, with all his force, a mighty army, and tumult of the host. **With anxious hearts they**, hastened on their northward way. (= (8'))
(lines 61–69, from <http://omacl.org/Junius/exodus.html>)
- (8') Nearwe [] genyddon on norðwegas.
anxiously pro hastened on north.ways
'Anxiously, they hastened north.'
(Exodus 68, Krapp 1931 edition)
✎ PRO LICENSED BY AN ABOUTNESS-SHIFT/FAMILIAR TOPIC

(9') *Talking about Hrothgar (= ST):*

Him_i on mod bearn þæt healreced hatan wolde medoærn micel men gewyrcean
 him(FT) to mind came that *pro* palace command would meadhall large men build
 'He thought that he would order his men to build a big hall, a big meadhall.'

(*Beowulf* 67-69)

✂ PRO LICENSED BY AN ABOUTNESS-SHIFT/FAMILIAR TOPIC

(10') *Talking about sea-demons (= ST):*

þæt syðþan na ymb brotne ford brimliðende lade ne letton
 that *pro* since-then never on broad waterway seafarers passage not let
 'that they after that never kept people from passing that water'

(*Beowulf* 567-569)

✂ PRO LICENSED BY AN ABOUTNESS-SHIFT/FAMILIAR TOPIC

(11') *Beowulf (= ST) is described and speaks:*

Gegrette ða gumena gehwylcne...
pro greeted then men every

Λ_{Aj} Nolde ic sweord beran wæpen to wyrme gif ic wiste hu wið ðam aglæcean elles meahte
 not-wanted I sword bear weapon to dragon if I knew how *pro* against that monster else might
 'He greeted then the men... I would bear no sword, weapon against the dragon, if I knew what else I could do against the monster.'

(*Beowulf* 2514-2520)

✂ PRO LICENSED BY AN ABOUTNESS-SHIFT/FAMILIAR TOPIC

PRO LICENSED BY Λ_A

(12') sume men_i secgað þæt þa beteran wæren þonne nu sien

some men(ST) say that then better were than *pro* now are
 'Some men say that the tides were better than than they are now.'

(Alfred, *Orosius*, Bately 1980 edition, 49.3)

✂ PRO LICENSED BY AN ABOUTNESS-SHIFT TOPIC

(13') Ða wæs sum begen annanias gehaten. and his wif saphira_i **hi**_i cwædon him betweenan þæt **hi**_i
 then was some thane Ananias named and his wife Saphira(ST) they(FT) said them between that they(FT)
 woldon bugan to þæra apostola geferrædene:
 would bend to the apostles' fellowship

namon þa to ræde þæt him wærligor wære þæt hi sumne dæl heora landes wurþes æthæfdon
pro took then to council that them better was that they some part their land's worth withhold
 weald hu him getimode.
 in-case how them befell

'There was a thane, Ananias, and his wife, Saphira, and they said between themselves that they wanted to join the fellowship of the apostles. They then proposed to the council that it was better for them to keep part of their land's worth to themselves in case anything should happen to them.'

(Ælfric, *Homilies* I, Thorpe 1844-46 edition, 316.22-26)

✂ PRO LICENSED BY AN ABOUTNESS-SHIFT/FAMILIAR TOPIC

[XIV] MOVEMENT OF THE NULL ARGUMENT TO THE C-DOMAIN (IN PDE): WHERE?

below the CLn positions = Spec FinP ✂ EVIDENCE: ICELANDIC ---> (5a)

⇒ MOVEMENT OF THE NULL ARGUMENT TO SPEC FINP UNNECESSARY IN OE

(5') a. *Icelandic*

Nei, Jóhann, Λ_A (=CLn) hef ekk séð hann.
 no Jóhann have *pro* not seen him

'No, Jóhann, I haven't seen him.'

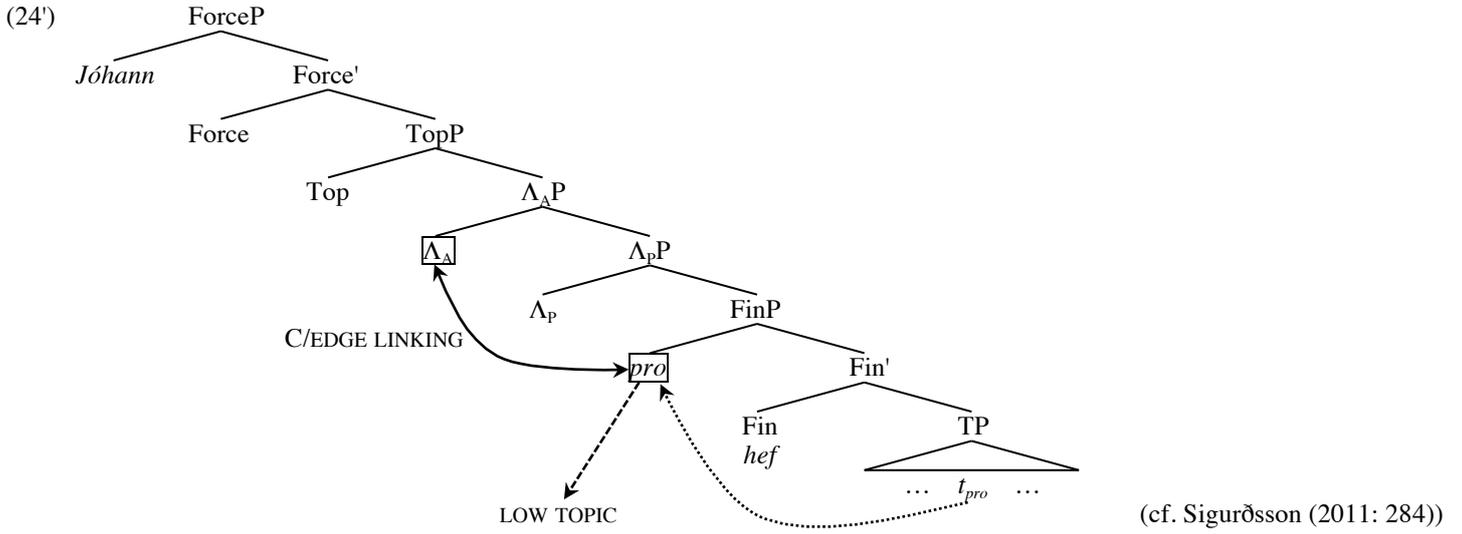
(Sigurðsson (2011: 287))

NOT BLOCKING C/EDGE LINKING (BETWEEN Λ_A AND PRO)

✂ PRO = LOW TOPIC ---> (24')

[XV] MOVEMENT OF THE NULL ARGUMENT TO THE C-DOMAIN: WHY?

C-intervention [...] applies in PF, blocking C/edge linking from being visible and successfully interpreted in the case of a true (ϕ -silent) null argument, whereas it does not affect the C/edge linking interpretation of overt arguments (these being ϕ -visible in PF). (Sigurðsson (2011: 270))



[XVI] SUMMARY

	<i>OE</i>	<i>PDE</i>
<i>Type</i>	Romance-type pro drop	Germanic-type topic drop
<i>Null Argument (Subject)</i>	incorporated pronoun = agreement on the verb	null topic
<i>Feature</i>	<i>iφ</i> (= incorporated pronoun)	<i>uφ</i> (= true agreement)
<i>Movement to Spec FinP</i>	unnecessary	necessary

3. CONCLUSION