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VERBAL MORPHOSYNTAX IN THE BALTIC LANGUAGES

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On some empty categories in Icelandic and Latvian (*PRO* and *pro*)

There is a variety of empty categories in all languages, owing to the principle of the economy of language resources. They are "intrinsically determined." (Poole 2002:219) Empty categories, such as *PRO* and *pro*, can have anaphoric and pronominal features. *PRO* (stands for 'pronominal') or *big PRO* is an "unpronounced subject of infinitivals" (Poole 2002:84) or "nonlexical infinitival subject" (Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson 1992:179). There is also a "null pronominal element which is usually referred to as 'little *pro*'" (Poole 2002:212). In the standard theory, e.g., by Chomsky and Rizzi, *pro* is governed, whereas *PRO* is not. According to Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson, this distinction does not work in Icelandic because there is evidence that *PRO* is both case-marked and governed (1990:37). He even argued that *PRO* is essentially the same phenomenon as *pro* (1992:179). Besides, both *pro* and *PRO* may be referential and arbitrary.

The occurrence and distribution of the empty categories is language-specific.

Two Indo-European languages have been selected for comparison, one Germanic (Icelandic) and the other Balto-Slavic (Latvian). The paper underscores the structural similarity between the two languages. However, despite the overlaps, there also are significant differences.

There are two types of *PRO* constructions – referential or controlled, uncontrolled or arbitrary. The null subjects in Latvia have been examined by Ciematniece-Vogina (Ciematniece 2015, Vogina 2012). In Icelandic, there is an extensive overview by Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson and Höskuldur Þráinsson.

The case assignment of the *PRO* constructions depends on the structure of the phrase and its verb (before or, in some instances, following the *PRO*). The assignation of the complement structure solely depends on the semantic environment.

As concerns the uncontrolled or arbitrary *PRO*, the subject, once explicit, receives the dative case in both languages. Impersonal phrases with the verb *to be* in the infinitive (of the type 'it is good to be x') take the nominative or the dative complements in Icelandic but only the dative in Latvian. The masculine form is used by default in both languages.

As to the the little *pro* construction, Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson singles out four main types of constructions that include little *pro*. Unless otherwise indicated, the same constructions also exist in Latvian. Little *pro* typically occur with 1) the impersonal weather constructions (but not limited to weather verbs only); 2) the impersonal passive constructions (an alternative construction in Latvian but not in Icelandic is one expressing a generalized action by using the (singular or plural) 3rd person form with the subject null-form. Functionally and semantically this usage is parallel to that of the passive voice); 3) the existential/presentative construction (the E/P construction) that includes sentences with a null-subject and a logical (implied) subject; and 4) the extraposition construction. Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson also singles out three more types of less well known null-subject constructions. Among them there is the impersonal present participle construction that does not exist in Latvian.

In conclusion, both languages share similarities in relation to *PRO* and *pro*. The main differences lie in the phrase structure (Icelandic is V2 language but Latvian is not) and the case governance, for instance, the comple-

ment agreement in impersonal phrases. There also discrepancies in case government (attribution) with infinitivals. Finally, there is no expletive pronoun (dummy subject) in Latvian. The traditional argument that rich inflection tends to lead to an increased *pro-dropness* and proliferation of empty categories does not help us explain the differences in the possibility of having non-overt expletive elements in both initial and non-initial position, across tenses and voices (in the passive or active) in Latvian and Icelandic.

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