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Asymmetrical Pro-Drop in Northern Italian Dialects

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6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I intend to address two basic questions concerning the role of overt morphology in the syntactic process of pro-drop.

The two questions are intrinsically related in a more general perspective aiming to determine how much the presence of overt morphology influences syntactic processes. The empirical domain ranges over subject agreement, subject clitics, and pro-drop in some Northern Italian Dialects, which will be compared with well-known analyses of the diachronic development of French. The picture that will emerge from this investigation will support the view that overt morphology can only favour a given syntactic process, but has no direct role in triggering the development of a given syntactic strategy. This result agrees with the observation made by Alexiadou (Chapter 5 above, p. 000) and Speas (Chapter 2 above, p. 000), who also arrive at the conclusion that morphology is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the emergence of null subjects in a given language.

The first question, which has been much debated in the literature, is: does agreement morphology have immediate import on the selection of the pro-drop parameter? I will consider an analysis in the original spirit of Rizzi's (1986a) work and compare it with a possible solution in minimalist terms, showing that they are equivalent from the empirical point of view.

This work assumes the view of Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998) and Alexiadou (Chapter 5) of pro-drop as EPP checking via head movement of an inflected verb carrying pronominal (or better person) features. It concentrates on the details of how a given head can be marked as +pronominal. In this sense it could also be compatible with a theory like the one proposed by Speas (Chapter 2), but it aims at rendering more precise the definition of 'strong' or

‘+pronominal’ agreement, which, as we will see, is not a morphological concept at all, but a syntactic one.

The second question is: why and how can asymmetric pro-drop systems (i.e. systems with pro-drop only for some persons) exist?

Various cases of partial pro-drop systems have been reported—notably cases like Hebrew described by Shlonsky (1990; 1997) and of Finnish (see Koenenman, Chapter 3 above): there are cases where pro-drop is possible only for first and second person but not for third person, and, vice versa, cases in which only third-person null subjects are allowed (see Kayne (2000), who proposes that pro can only be a third-person pronoun). A distinction between first and second person on the one hand and third person on the other is indeed plausible and has a long tradition in the literature on the topic; the first who proposed it is, to my knowledge, Benveniste (1966),¹ who considered third person as ‘non-person’, a definition which we might translate in formal terms as lacking a feature, or being marked as [−deictic].²

The systems we describe and analyse here are more complex, because the split between pro-drop and non-pro-drop persons runs across the first and second person singular and plural, and hence shows a finer distinction within the domain of deictic persons. Moreover, the licensing conditions seem to vary from one person to another: some persons display null subjects when C° is strong, others when I° is. I will call this phenomenon ‘asymmetric’ pro-drop. Furthermore, the asymmetry among persons has nothing to do with the connection between verbal morphology and the pronominal system which has been noted for partial pro-drop systems. As we will see, asymmetric pro-drop clearly calls for an explanation based on the feature composition of the persons of the verb, not in terms of morphological ambiguity between agreement markers and pronouns. In order to account for the distribution of null subjects in Northern Italian dialects we must resort to a more refined distinction within the domain of [+deictic] persons, namely first and second person singular and plural. We will adopt an analysis of person features which has become quasi-standard by now (see e.g. Manzini and Savoia, forthcoming; Bianchi 2004)) in the precise formulation proposed by Poletto (2000): ‘person’ is not a primitive notion but derives from a combination of the plus

¹ An anonymous reviewer points out that the same distinction is also found in Conklin’s analysis of Hanunoo pronouns: (H. Conklin, H., ‘Lexicographic treatment of folk taxonomies’, in S. Tyler, (ed.), *Cognitive Anthropology: Readings*, New York; Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969, pp. 41–59.

² Here the term [−deictic] is used in the sense of Poletto (2000): first and second persons are [+deictic] because they refer to persons present in the relevant context, while third person is [−deictic] because it signals somebody who is not present in the relevant context (although he/she/they might be physically present in the same place where the conversation is taking place).

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- some verbal forms were strong enough to license a null subject by spec-head agreement (as in (1b)), hence pro-drop was found in all syntactic contexts;
- others still required a strong feature in C° , so pro-drop was possible only when this additional condition was satisfied.

(b) The asymmetry is still visible nowadays:

- those persons that used the configuration in (1b) remained pro-drop;
- those persons that used the configuration in (1a) developed subject clitics.

(c) In some languages the inflected verb never plays any role in the licensing of a null subject, which is performed by a clitic. However, the clitic system still reflects the asymmetry of the Renaissance one: some persons use a clitic in the configuration (1a), others in the configuration (1b).

This will lead us to make some general claims on the split among persons revealed by this diachronic evolution.

6.2 V to C, Haiman's generalization, and middle North Western Romance (NWR)

Let us first consider the rise of asymmetric pro-drop systems (which only admit null subjects for a subset of persons) from a diachronic perspective, and start our investigation by presenting Haiman's (1974) diachronic generalization on the development of subject clitics. Haiman notes that the split within Romance that distinguishes French and NIDs from other Romance languages stems from a property that was already present in the medieval period. He proposes the following generalization:

- (2) The Romance languages that were V₂ in the medieval period developed subject clitics when they lost the V₂ property.

According to Haiman, then, French and the NIDs—which have developed subject clitics—were the only Romance languages that clearly displayed V₂ in the medieval stage. However, much subsequent work, starting from Benincà (1988), who proposes that all Romance varieties including Spanish and Portuguese were V₂, to Fontana (1993) for Old Spanish, and Fischer (2002) for Old Catalan, has shown that all Romance languages had some V₂ properties in the medieval period. V₂ is a complex phenomenon which includes at least two superficial characteristics: subject inversion of the 'Germanic' type, in which the subject occurs between the auxiliary and the past participle, and

the so called ‘linear restriction’, according to which the inflected verb can only be preceded by a single constituent. It is well known that V2 languages can vary with respect to the domain in which they admit V2: some Germanic languages admit V2 only in main contexts, others have generalized V2 also to many embedded domains (including some *wh* contexts⁴). Romance languages obeyed more or less strictly the linear restriction (within the same language there can be variation according to the period considered) but they all share the property of subject inversion. Considering V2 at a more abstract level, i.e. as a structure resulting in essence from movement of the V higher than the subject position (SpecAgrS or SpecT according to the analysis chosen), the generalization is that in all medieval Romance languages the inflected verb had this property, and it is precisely to the loss of this property that scholars refer when they say that Romance lost V2 after the medieval period. The long debate on whether V2 targets a low CP or a high IP projection in Old Romance languages is irrelevant to the purpose of the present work.⁵ For the moment, it is sufficient to note that Haiman’s generalization cannot be maintained in its original form, even though it expresses the intuition that the development of subject clitics must have been connected to a property possessed only by NWR and that was somehow related to the V2 system.

We will therefore propose a reformulation of Haiman’s generalization that has more to do with the way null subjects were licensed in Old Romance than with the V2 phenomenon *per se*. Even if all Old Romance languages were V2, there is another characteristic that distinguished NWR from the other Romance languages. Since the work by Benincà (1983), Dupuis (1988), Hirschbühler (1990), Vance (1989; 1995), Adams (1987b), and Roberts (1993), it is well known that a distinction concerning the licensing of null subjects cuts across Old Romance languages: while Old Spanish and Old Southern Italian varieties display pro-drop in all contexts⁶ (provided the verb is finite), Old NWR can only have a null subject when the inflected verb has moved to C°—hence in main clauses and in a subset of embedded clauses, i.e. those involving

⁴ For a detailed description of the split inside Germanic see Vikner (1995). Old Romance displayed V2 also in embedded domains, including relative clauses similarly to Yiddish and Icelandic, but not in embedded interrogatives.

⁵ One might try to trace the distinction between NWR and the rest of the Romance domain noted by Haiman on the basis of the position targeted by V2. Nevertheless, this would only be a necessary and not a sufficient condition for understanding what is behind Haiman’s generalization. We believe that the crucial property for understanding the partition inside Romance created by the development of subject clitics has to do with the licensing of pro-drop, which might in turn be different according to the target of V2, a further development that we will not pursue here.

⁶ We are leaving aside inflected infinitives here, which are a tangential phenomenon to our topic.

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a CP head higher than Focus/*wh*P.⁷ If the inflected verb does not move to C°, a subject pronoun has to appear. The following examples illustrate the point for French (3) and NIDs (4)⁸ (the null subject is signalled by an underscore _):

- (3) a. Si errerent _ tant en tele maniere
so wandered (they) much in such-a way
qu' il vindrent en la prairie de Wincestre (Artu 16, 66)
that **they** came in the meadow of Winchester
'They wandered so much until they came to the meadow of Winchester'
- b. mes toutevoies s'en reconforterent _ au plus biau qu' il porent (Artu 2, 8)
but nevertheless refl of-it consoled (they) as best that **they** could
'Nevertheless they consoled themselves as best as they could'
- (4) a. E così ne provò _ de più cari ch'elli avea⁹
(Old Florentine, 13C, Schiaffini)
And so of-them tested (he) some-of-the most dear that he had
'And so he tested the most expensive ones he had'
- b. e seria_ stado plu biado s'elo avesse possedù lo reçimento
and would-have-been more happy if he had possessed the power
de la soa mente (Old Venetian, 1370)
of the his mind
'And he would have been more tranquil if he had been sane'
- (5) Or te mostrerai _ Dominidè, que tu lo veras (Serm. Sub. I 116)
now to-you will-show (I) God, (so) that you him will-see
'Now I will show you God, so that you will see him'

(3a) represents a clear case, as it strikingly distinguishes Old Florentine (from now on referred to as Old Italian) from modern Standard Italian: in modern Italian the subject of an embedded clause can have a null subject and is

⁷ Roberts (1993 and references) considers two distinct periods in Old French: the older one, in which *pro* is licensed through government by an additional AgrS₂ head, and the second one (which includes the second half of the 13th c.), in which *pro* is licensed through government by the inflected verb in C°, and hence depends on V₂. We will take into account only the second period, because it is parallel to the NIDs and because the data coming from the earlier one could be subject to debate as to their interpretation.

⁸ All examples reported here are taken from Benincà (1984: 10; 1988: 12 ff.). For a statistical treatment of the French data we refer to Roberts (1993 and references).

⁹ Although the particle *e* 'and' is found at the beginning of the clause, the sentences reported here are not coordinations. The particle *e* in Old Italian is used as a Null Topic licenser: when *e* is present at the beginning of a clause, this has the same Topic as the preceding sentence (see Benincà and Poletto (2002) for a detailed description of the phenomenon, which is quite pervasive); therefore a considerable number of examples begins with an *e*.

interpreted as coreferent with the subject of the main clause. This is not the case in Old Italian, where the pronoun is lexically realized in the embedded clause. On the other side, pro-drop is allowed when the inflected verb moves to C° as in main contexts.

Old Spanish and Old Southern Italian, on the contrary, are just like their modern counterpart in this respect, as null subjects are found in all contexts, not only when the inflected verb has moved to C° :

(6) Spanish

et desque _ llegaron assu padre a Cananea (Fontana 1993)
and when (they) arrived at the father in Cananea
'and when they arrived at his father's house in Cananea'

Southern Italian

(7) a. et li Romani fece incontenente quello ke _ li dixè

(*Le Miracole de Roma*, 25)

and the Romans made immediately what that (they) them told
'and the Romans immediately did what they had been told'

b. et incontenente _ fo aperto lo celo (*Le Miracole de Roma*, 65)

and immediately (it) was open the sky
'and immediately the sky cleared'

Benincà (1984; 1988) notes this distinction between the two pro-drop systems within Romance; we refer her to her work for a more detailed picture of the data.

Let us for the moment leave aside the theoretical problem underlying the two different pro-drop systems, and reconsider Haiman's generalization from this perspective. We can reformulate it in the following way:

(8) Only those languages that had pro drop depending on I to C have developed subject clitics when V2 was lost.

In this way Haiman's generalization makes sense within the present framework, because it is not directly dependent on the V2 phenomenon which existed in all Old Romance languages, but is mediated by the pro-drop system, which was parasitic on V2 only in NWR. Therefore, the development of subject clitics does not depend directly on V2, but is a straightforward consequence of the loss of the pro-drop licensing context.

More precisely, we can conceive the insertion of subject pronouns as the only alternative device to satisfy the EPP feature in TP once the pro-drop licensing context was lost with the loss of the V2 property, namely verb raising to a position higher than TP/AgrSP. These pronouns, then, have further developed into weak elements (in modern French) or even to inflectional

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heads (in the majority of the NIDs¹⁰). If this line of reasoning is correct, we predict that NWR should have become totally non pro-drop immediately after the loss of V2 (i.e. in the Renaissance period), giving rise to a symmetric system with subject pronouns for all persons, like modern French. Alternatively, they might have developed into the complementary symmetric system, becoming totally pro-drop languages, like modern Italian; this could result from a new licensing context for pro through spec-head with the inflected verb. Neither prediction is borne out. As we will see, both cases are unattested in the period immediately following the loss of V2. Instead, NWRs have developed asymmetric pro-drop systems. Some of them still maintain this type of system, which gives us the advantage of testing our predictions on a living language. The analysis of these systems is presented in sections 6.3 and 6.4.

6.3 The development of French and Northern Italian

6.3.1 *The Renaissance period*

In the Renaissance period both middle French and middle NIDs developed asymmetric pro-drop; null subjects were allowed in all contexts (main and embedded clauses) for some persons, while other persons had a more restricted pro-drop system. As anticipated in the introduction, the split between the persons that are pro-drop in embedded declaratives and those that are not cuts across the deictic persons. This section on French essentially reports what Roberts (1993) and other authors quoted there (e.g. Adams 1987b; Hirschbühler and Junker 1988; Vance 1989) have stated on Middle French, and does not contain any original research. Here, the analysis of Middle French is instrumental to our analysis of the development of subject clitics and pro-drop restrictions in NIDs.

Let us first consider the schema illustrating the situation in middle French as it is presented by Roberts (1993). He notes that V2 is not lost altogether, but that some V2 contexts still remain stable even after the medieval period: he assumes that V2 was completely lost by the beginning of the sixteenth century. The loss of V2 is, however, not abrupt: there is a period in which V2 is still optionally possible, though no longer obligatory.

From the fourteenth century on the French texts present:

- an increased number of V>2 orders;
- an increase of subject-initial clauses;

¹⁰ Probably Franco-Provençal varieties have a system more similar to French than to other NIDs, as standard tests on coordination suggest.

- a decrease of inverted subjects (which were clear positive evidence for the acquisition of V to C): Vance (1989: 157) notes that the class of adverbs that allow for non-inverted subject increases dramatically.

Roberts draws the conclusion that the V2 system is weakening and that, although V2 structures are still possible, V2 is no longer obligatory. Given that pro-drop depended in Old French on I to C, we expect some changes in the pro-drop system as well. There are indeed such changes: in Middle French the class of contexts that allowed null subjects is apparently enlarged, but the possibility of licensing a null subject becomes sensitive to the person of the verb.

Vance (1989) shows that in Middle French there are three contexts for null subject licensing: matrix V1, embedded V1 clauses, and embedded V2 contexts.

As for matrix V1 clauses of the type in (9), Roberts (1993: 147ff.) assumes that they are AgrSPs, and not CPs; hence when CP is not realized, the head of AgrS (which is the highest head in the structure) can license pro in the structural relation of spec-head agreement:

- (9) a. Et me dist l' on depuis
and to-me says one since...
'And one tells me since...'
- b. Se appensa de faire ung amy qui a son besoing la secourrait
refl. thought of making a friend who to her need he would-help
'And she thought of getting a friend who would help her if needed'

These cases are analysed by Roberts as AgrPs because they do not obey the Tobler–Mussafia¹¹ law, and because subject-initial clauses were (according to his general analysis of Middle French) AgrSPs.

Other contexts in which pro-drop is licensed are V1 embedded clauses. However, in non-wh contexts the only persons that can be pro-drop are first and second plural (see Hirschbühler (1992: 77 ff.) for second person and Vance (1989: 219 ff.) for first person):¹²

¹¹ The Tobler–Mussafia law says that a clitic pronoun cannot be found in first position in the clause: it either has an XP or requires the verb to raise in front of it.

¹² Vance (1989: 167, 239), from whom the examples are quoted, also reports one case of first person singular, which could be relevant for the comparison with the NIDs, were also first-person singular works like first and second person plural. Given that only one case is reported, however, I will leave this aside here. The texts examined by Vance and quoted are here *Le Petit Jehan de Saintré* and *La Queste del Saint Graal*.

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- (10) Mais que soions en la chambre, nous rirons
 but when (we) are in the room, we will-laugh
 ‘But when we are in the room, we will laugh’
- (11) Madame, je feroie tuout ce que me voudriés commander
 madame, I will-do all that which me (you) wish to-command
 ‘Madame, I will do everything you will tell me’

According to Roberts (1993: 180ff.), the distribution of *pro* in Middle French is thus the following:

- (12) a. Any *pro* is possible when AgrS is the highest head (i.e. no CP is projected).
 b. Any *pro* is possible in +wh embedded clauses.
 c. In non-wh, non V2 embedded contexts only first and second person plural *pro* is possible.

Roberts’s analysis is thus that, while *pro* was licensed under government in Old French, it is licensed either by government (in V2 contexts and wh embedded clauses) or by spec-head agreement in Middle French V1 matrix clauses, in declarative non-V2 embedded clauses.

In the sixteenth century, French lost *pro*-drop entirely. Roberts proposes that this loss is connected to the loss of *pro*-drop licensing through government. His hypothesis is the following: in Middle French two distinct structural configurations could license *pro*: government and spec-head agreement (see (1a,b)). When the government licensing configuration was lost, the Agr head (being – pronominal) was not strong enough to become the unique *pro* licenser. Hence, *pro*-drop was lost entirely, due to the disappearance of the government licensing condition. We will see that some Northern Italian dialects have never lost licensing through government and still have a system similar to the Renaissance one.

6.3.2 *Renaissance Northern Italian*

A partially parallel system is found in Renaissance Venetian and Paduan (sixteenth century; cf. also Poletto (1995) for Renaissance Milanese and Bergamasco): some persons have regular *pro*-drop licensed via spec-head agreement, others have *pro*-drop licensing only when C° has strong features.

Given that the texts considered here belong to the sixteenth century, we do not expect to find any instances of residual V2, and hence there is no licensing of *pro* through the “old” V2 system.

In fact, Renaissance Venetian and Paduan are similar to their modern counterpart in that they are no longer V2, except for some residual contexts

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(main interrogatives, optative and counterfactual clauses) which are the same as allow V2 in the modern varieties (see e.g. Munaro 1999). They present an asymmetric system, however, like the one described in section 6.3.1 for French, in particular the cases in (12b,c): some persons (first and second person plural and first person singular) are regularly pro-drop both in main and in embedded clauses; others are sensitive to a strong feature in C° .

As Vanelli (1987) notes, in this period null subjects are more numerous in embedded than in main clauses. So the situation is reversed with respect to the medieval period, where pro-drop was licensed only by V to C, which generally occurred in main contexts: Vanelli does not draw any distinction between persons, but the persons sensitive to strong C° are second singular, and third person singular and plural. In particular, null subjects for these persons are found only in embedded clauses when an element like *si* 'if', a wh-operator, or a subjunctive complementizer occupies C° .¹³

The other persons (first singular and plural and second plural) are regularly pro-drop in all domains, including main and embedded interrogative and declarative clauses. The following examples illustrate regular pro-drop of first person singular and plural and second person plural in main clauses, where, due to the loss of V2, C° is not strong.¹⁴

- (13) a. *Ve suplico ...* (Calmo 72¹⁵)
 (I) you pray,
 'I pray you'
- b. *Havemo buo notitia che ...* (Calmo 129) ...
 (we) have had news that ...
 'We heard that ...'
- c. *Dirè a Ser Zuan che ...* (Ruz. 107)
 (you+pl.) will-say to Sir Z. that ...
 'You will tell Sir Z. that ...'

¹³ Venetian and Paduan differ from French in that main contexts never allow pro-drop of second singular and third person singular and plural. However, the period considered here is the 14th c. and not the 14th–15th. This might be an indication that pro-drop in V1 main clauses in Middle French is still connected to the V2 system, and not to spec-head agreement as Roberts suggests.

¹⁴ Throughout this chapter I provide no statistical indications. The reason is that statistical data concerning the occurrence of pronouns are not relevant in this case, given my claim that their occurrence depends on the syntactic configuration. Once the right syntactic configuration is selected, the system is completely regular.

¹⁵ The texts examined for this period are the first 100 pages of a collection of letters written by the scholar Andrea Calmo (*Le Lettere*,) and his comedy *La Spagnola* for Venetian. For Paduan, the first 100 pages of Ruzante's collection of plays was used. For philological reasons, only the sentences spoken by the character played by Ruzante were considered.

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The same is true in embedded *wh*-contexts:

- (14) a. Quando aspetemo suto (Calmo 111)
 when (we) expect dry weather
 ‘When we need dry weather...’
 b. Co avesse ben dissenao (Calmo 73)
 when (I) had well dined
 ‘When he had finished eating...’
 c. Si volè scambiar tuto (Calmo 94)
 if (you+plr) want to exchange everything
 ‘If you want to change everything...’

Second-person singular and third-person singular and plural only have pro-drop when C° is strong. The following cases are residual *wh*-contexts in which C° contains a [+*wh*] (16) or a subjunctive feature (15) (which is much rarer and we just mention it here for completeness):

- (15) Dirè a Ser Zuan che _ la guarda ben (Ruz. 107)
 (you) will say to Sir Zuan that (he) it+fem. looks+subjunctive well
 ‘You will say to Sir Z. that he looks after her well’
- (16) a. si_ no resta altro
 if (it) not remains anything else
 ‘if nothing else is left’
 b. com fa l’orsa quando_ se guz gi ongi (Ruz. 105)
 as does the bear when (she) herself sharpens her claws
 ‘as the bear does when it sharpens its claws’
 c. che uta la zente co _ li vede, se ghe inchina (Calmo 75)
 that all the people when (she) them sees, refl. bows
 ‘that everybody bows when they see them’
 d. si farae meglio ... (Ruz. 102)
 whether (they) would-do better
 ‘whether they would have better’

Examples of subject pronouns (in bold) when licensing via a strong C° is lacking are the following:

- (17) a. El m’ha lagò le cavale ... (Ruz. 78)
 he to-me has left the horses..
 ‘He left me the horses’
 b. El e par che l sarave cossa giusta (Calmo 111)
 it to-me seems that it would-be thing right
 ‘This seems to me to be the right thing’

- c. Un passo i no farè (Ruz. 74)
 a step I not will-do
 'I will not move'
- d. Te no vissi mà (Ruz. 91)
 you not saw never
 'You never saw'

The same is true for postverbal subjects, which require a subject pronoun in the preverbal position:¹⁶

- (18) El viene quel so fraelo (Ruz. 94)
 he comes that his brother
 'That brother of his is coming'
- (19) L'è sta suspeso le prediche al Sior Geronimo (Calmo 15)
 it is been suspended the sermons for Sir Geronimo
 'The sermons to Sir G. have been suspended'

Summing up, we have the following distribution of null subjects in Renaissance Venetian and Paduan:

(20)	Main clauses	Embedded –wh	Embedded +wh
1sg.	+	+	+
1pl.	+	+	+
2pl.	+	+	+
2sg.	–	–	+
3sg.	–	–	+
3pl.	–	–	+
pro postverbal subject	–	–	+

In order for this description of the facts to be correct, we need to show that the subject pronouns occurring when pro was not possible were not clitic heads at this stage of evolution, but real XPs. Following Vanelli (1987), who applies the standard tests of relative ordering with negation (21a–f) and lack of subject clitic doubling (21g,h), we can show that third-person subject pronouns at this stage were not clitic heads, but at most weak pronouns in the sense of Cardinaletti and Starke (1999):

¹⁶ Real expletive subjects can either be pro-drop or have a subject pronoun; expletive pro co-occurring with postverbal subjects requires the preverbal pronoun. This shows that there must be a difference between the two contexts—a line of research which is potentially very interesting, but which I will not develop here.

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- (21) a. E no podeva tior (Calmo 66)
not could take
- b. ...che te no vissi mà (Ruz. 91)
... that you not see never
'that you never saw'
- c. La no vaga a mio conto (Calmo 79)
she not goes on my behalf
'She cannot go on my behalf'
- d. El no puol eser altrimenti ca benedeto (Calmo 94)
he not can be other than blessed
'It can only be blessed'
- e. E no se inganemo (Calmo 66)
we not ourselves mistake
'We are not wrong'
- f. ...c'un passo i non farè (Ruz. 74)
... that a step they not will-make
'I will not move'
- g. Ognon vorà acomodarse de si bela stampa (Calmo 66)
everybody will-want take of such beautiful picture
'Everybody will want such a nice picture'
- h. Un'arma longa fa star indrio el so nemico (Calmo 96)
a weapon long makes stay behind the his enemy
'A long weapon keeps the enemy away'

A survey of a great number of varieties belonging to this domain would surely strengthen our observations; but in many cases this is not possible because of the lack of texts from this period for many dialects. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the asymmetric pro-drop system splits the persons into two classes: those that require an additional strong feature overtly realized within the CP domain and those that do not. Moreover, it seems that the split does not run according to the most plausible and well-attested person division, i.e. first and second versus third, as is the case with partial pro-drop quoted in the introduction, but includes only part of the deictic persons, first and second plural probably being the core case, with the possible addition of first person singular.

Furthermore, it is a fact that not all NIDs have developed such an asymmetric pro-drop system when they have lost V2; at this stage of development some dialects already display what will become invariable clitics in the modern dialects, in part or throughout the whole paradigm. We examine here another Veneto dialect, Polesano, which represents an interesting case for

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understanding the split inside the paradigm we are investigating,¹⁷ because the split among persons is found even though a subject pronoun is always present. (Bolognese seems to have the same system during the same period; we use here examples from Polesano because it has maintained the system throughout its evolution.)

In this dialect there are no cases of pro-drop during the Renaissance, in the sense that a pronoun (in bold) is always present, also for first person singular and plural and second person plural:

- (22) a. **A** digh dunca (Polesano)
I say then
b. **T m** insegn
you me teach
c. **Al** vegnia
he came
d. **La s** lamintava
she self complained
e. **A v** pusì mo pinsar vu
you yourself can now think YOU
f. **che i j** diseven ...
that they to-him said
g. **l'intraviegn**
it happened

Note that a subject pronoun is present even for non referential subjects as in (22g).

(23) shows that also in Polesano, as already illustrated for Venetian and Paduan, subject pronouns are not clitic heads at this stage, but real XPs; (a) the subject pronoun is not present when a DP subject is realized; (b) the subject pronoun occurs before the preverbal negative marker (contrary to their modern counterparts); (c) a subject pronoun can be omitted in coordinated structures (contrary to their modern counterparts).

- (23) a. **Una zentildona de** Guascogna andò peleginando... (Polesano)
a lady from Guascogna went pilgrimage
'A lady from Guascogna went to a pilgrimage'

¹⁷ The data are all taken from the *Novella del Re di Cipro*, a translation of one of Boccaccio's short novels collected in the Renaissance by the scholar Lionardo Salviati and published in 1875, together with many more contemporary versions by the philologist Giovanni Papanti.

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- b. La non trovava luogh
 she not found place...
 'She could not find a place'
- c. la i andò dinanz e si _ i diss
 she to-him went in-front and so (she) to-him said
 'She came in front of him and said'

On the other hand, it seems that in Polesano the clitic *a*, which appears with first person singular and plural and second person plural, already has the properties it displays in the modern dialects: it always clusters with the complementizer (cf. (24)), while this is not the case with other pronouns.

- (24) a. cha possa imparare
 that+I can learn
- b. cha intend
 that+I understand

Leaving aside the problem of the categorial status of subject pronouns in this period, it is a fact that pro-drop is never found in this language; but note that the subject pronoun of first person singular and plural and second person plural is an invariable element, *a*, which is found in the same contexts where in Venetian and Paduan we find pro-drop. The particle *a* is clearly not a pronoun expressing person and number features, as is the case for second person singular and for third person singular and plural. Evidently, the element *a* is not a well-behaved subject pronoun but must be realized for purely syntactic reasons, given that it does not seem to have any morphological distinction. Hence, the split between the two sets of persons remains, although it surfaces in a different form. Moreover, the clitic *a* in modern NIDs has been analysed as a CP element occurring inside the CP domain (cf. Benincà 1983; Poletto 2000), not as a true subject clitic within IP. Because of the lack of data in the corpus it is not possible to show incontrovertibly that at this point in the history this element was already within CP. Nevertheless, the data in (24) seem to suggest that it already had the status of a CP element. We will leave this question open, noting that if this were true we would have another case in which a strong C allows null subjects.

6.4 The modern stage

As is well known, French has lost both pro-drop types, the regular and the CP-dependent one; it has become a non-pro-drop language. Nevertheless, French has two series of subject pronouns, weak and strong. Moreover, the subject

pronouns currently analysed as weak pronouns are the ones that can occur in the preverbal subject position (see Cardinaletti and Starke 1999), while the strong forms are found in dislocated or focalized positions.

Note, however, that no systematic morphological change occurred from Middle to Modern French in the verb agreement paradigm; more precisely, first and second person plural are still morphologically distinct from the other persons, and nevertheless they have an obligatory subject pronoun in the same way as the other persons. We will show that the same thing occurred in Venetian and Paduan, which have changed their syntactic system without any change in verbal morphology. On the other hand, Polesano too has changed its system for second person singular without changing its morphology. Therefore, our first question concerning the effect of agreement morphology on the availability of null subjects is already answered: morphology is not the immediate trigger for null subjects. We will come back to this in section 6.5. For the moment we simply state that the loss of null subjects is not always connected to a morphological loss in the paradigm.

6.4.1 *Modern Polesano*

As already noticed by Benincà (1983) for Paduan and by Poletto (1996) for Polesano, NIDs have developed different types of subject clitic. Leaving aside finer distinctions, which exist but are not relevant here, we can follow Poletto (1996) in splitting the class of subject clitics into two main groups: clitics that are within IP and clitics directly merged in the CP domain. I will also follow the analysis that both clitic groups are heads in the NIDs. The tests distinguishing between the two groups have by now become standard and have already been mentioned in section 6.3; we will summarize them here.

(a) The first test is the position of the clitic with respect to the preverbal negative marker: while IP clitics occur after the preverbal negative marker, CP clitics occur before it:

- (25) a. A no vegno (Polesano (Loreo dialect))
 SCL not come
 ‘I do not come’
 b. No la vien
 not SCL comes

This split is straightforwardly explained by the hypothesis that some clitics are in CP and others in IP, although the test provided by negation is still ‘too gross’ to provide clear evidence for the exact position of the two types: there might be subject clitics in IP which occur higher than NegP but lower than CP (and in fact there are such cases, although not in the dialects we consider

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here: cf. Poletto (2000)). So, this test simply shows that this type of clitic is higher than ‘agreement’ subject clitics, but it does not show yet where the clitic is located.

(b) A second test is the possibility of repeating the clitic in coordinated structures including an object:

- (26) A canto co ti e balo co lu (Loreo)
 SCL sing with you and dance with him
 ‘I sing with you and dance with him’
- (27) a. *La magna patate e beve vin
 SCL eats potatoes and drinks wine
 b. *Ti magni patate e bevi vin
 SCL eat potatoes and drink wine

The clitic *a* can be omitted in the second conjunct of a coordination, while IP clitics are necessarily repeated. Once again, the coordination test shows that there are at least two types of subject clitics, but does not constitute strong evidence in favour of the idea that some clitics are merged within the CP domain.

(c) The test that clearly reveals that this is the correct hypothesis is the clustering with the complementizer (already mentioned in section 6.3 for Renaissance Polesano):

- (28) a. Ara ch’a vegno (Loreo)
 look that-SCL come
 ‘Look, I am coming’
 b. *Ara che a vegno
- (29) a. No so s’a vegno
 not know if+SCL come
 ‘I do not know whether I will come’
 b. *No so se a vegno
- (30) a. Ara che el vien (Loreo)
 look that SCL comes
 ‘Look, he is coming’
 b. Ara ch’el vien

The contrast between (28b)/(29b) and (30a) shows that clustering with the complementizer is obligatory only for the *a* clitics, and can only be explained by saying that it is the complementizer itself that is merged lower than the clitic and then adjoined to it.¹⁸ The three tests mentioned above consistently point to the direction that *a* is located higher than the IP clitics.

¹⁸ The possibility of (30b) is a different type of phenomenon, a purely phonological process due to *allegro* speech.

(d) Further evidence in favour of the hypothesis of splitting subject clitics into two classes, one of which is merged in the CP domain, is provided by the fact that CP clitics are incompatible with other typical CP elements, like *wh*-items and focalized constituents (as originally noted by Benincà (1983) for Paduan):

- (31) a. *Cossa a voto?
 What a want-you?
 'What do you want?'
 b. *Mario a go visto, no Piero
 Mario a have seen, not Piero
 'I have seen *Mario*, not Piero'

(e) Furthermore, a CP head like the temporal complementizer *co* is incompatible with *a*, while its XP counterpart is not. This shows that *a* is located inside the CP domain, but also that it is a head, not an XP, as it interferes with other C° heads.

- (32) a. *Co a vegno
 when a come
 'When I come'
 b. Quando ch' a vegno
 when that a come
 'When I come'

We will not pursue this further here, referring to Poletto (2000) for further discussion on this topic; the status and the position of subject clitics here is instrumental to the analysis of null subjects.

If subject clitics are heads in Polesano, in a traditional account this means that this is also a pro-drop language. Nevertheless, it cannot be pro-drop in the same sense that standard Italian is, because the subject clitic is obligatorily present when no DP subject is realized. The paradigm of simple present in modern Polesano is illustrated in (33):

- (33) a. a magno
 I eat
 b. a te magni
 you eat
 c. el/la magna
 he eats
 d. a magnemo
 we eat
 e. a magnè
 you eat

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- f. *i/le magna*
they eat
- (34) a. *a piove*
it rains
- b. *a pare*
it seems
- c. *A ga telefonà Nane*
it has phoned Nane
'Nane has phoned'

Apparently nothing has changed with respect to the Renaissance period: one could still assume that null subjects are never allowed in this dialect, because there is always an element preceding the inflected verb. Moreover, the asymmetric system is still operative, as some persons have the invariable clitic *a*, others a subject pronoun carrying morphological distinctions.

However, we have shown that both IP and CP clitics are heads, while at least IP clitics were not in the Renaissance system, so something must have changed.

Moreover, a crucial difference between the Renaissance system and the modern system which becomes evident comparing the two paradigms in (33) and (22) is that second person singular only had a subject pronoun in the Renaissance, while today it requires both the CP and the IP clitic, as the sequence in (33b) shows.

In the next section I will propose that the subject clitics in these dialects are connected to licensing and/or identification of *pro*, as they 'support' the inflected verb in either licensing, licensing and identifying, or identifying a null subject; this view can also be translated into minimalist terms.

For the moment, let us simply conclude with the following observations: the system we have here is neither the Standard Italian one, where the inflected verb is always strong enough to license null subjects, nor the non-pro-drop one of French, where there is always a weak (or maybe clitic) pronoun and the inflected verb is never strong.

Moreover, this system still looks asymmetric, because for some persons the clitic resembles real subject pronouns as it morphologically encodes person and number features, while for other persons it looks like an expletive element of some sort.

6.4.2 *Modern Paduan and Venetian*

After the Renaissance period, the contexts of licensing through a feature overtly expressed on C° have been lost. However, modern Paduan and Venetian have also maintained an asymmetric system, in the sense that a

null subject is licensed in two different ways across the verbal paradigm. Once again, second person singular and third person singular and plural require a subject clitic:¹⁹

- (35) a. ti magni
 you eat
 b. el magna
 he eats
 c. i magna
 they eat

In Paduan and Venetian, as in the majority of the NIDs, the status of the subject pronoun has changed: it is no longer a real subject XP but a head. What has not changed is the weak (or –pronominal) status of the inflected verb, which was unable to license a null subject of second person singular and third person singular and plural in the medieval and Renaissance period and which still is: the subject clitic is present because inflection is not strong enough in the case of second person singular and third persons.

As for the other three persons, once again, nothing has changed with respect to the Renaissance period: first person singular and plural and second person plural have maintained their ability to license a null subject in all contexts, and they still retain it:²⁰

- (36) a. magno
 I-eat
 b. magnemo
 we-eat
 c. magnè
 you+pl.-eat

We can conclude that, although all the NIDs have lost the possibility of pro-drop licensing when C° is strong, Venetian and Paduan have maintained the original split between the persons which originated in the passage from the medieval system of pro-drop licensing by I in C° to the Renaissance system.

¹⁹ The examples are taken from Venetian, but Paduan has the same system as far as pro-drop licensing is concerned.

²⁰ Paduan also has a clitic element *a*, which has a different distribution with respect to the one described above for Polesano. As Benincà (1983) proposes, it is a Topic marker located inside a Topic position.

6.5 A general picture

6.5.1 *A survey of the data*

In this section I begin by summing up the data gathered from the investigation of the NWR evolutionary path. I will then try to draw some conclusions concerning the two main questions raised in the introduction by analysing the evolution of Paduan, Venetian, and Polesano and comparing it to French.

The starting point of the analysis is Haiman's intuition (1974) that the birth of subject clitics depends on a property already shared by French and NIDs at their medieval stage, and which set them apart from other Old Romance languages. While Haiman identified this property with V2, basing on work by Benincà (1983), Vanelli et al. (1985), and other authors mentioned above, it has been shown that the correct connection with the development of subject clitics does not involve V2 *per se* but a different type of null subject licensing, which in turn depended on V2. So, languages like Spanish, Catalan, and Southern Italian varieties, which had null subject licensing by the inflected verb similar to their modern counterparts, have maintained null subjects with no variation.

NWR was different because null subject licensing was possible only in V2 contexts. During the Renaissance period NWR lost the V2 property, and as a consequence the null subject licensing context had to change. NWR did not immediately become totally non-pro-drop, as might have been expected, but developed what we called asymmetric pro-drop systems in two forms, depending on the variety. In the first type (French, Venetian, Paduan) second-person singular and third-person singular and plural null subjects were licensed when C° contained a strong feature; otherwise a subject pronoun of the non clitic type was used (see Vanelli (1987) for further arguments in favour of the phrasal status of subject pronouns at this stage). First-person (singular and) plural and second-person plural null subjects were licensed by means of the inflected verb, as is regularly the case in modern Standard Italian.

In the second type (Polesano, Bolognese) there were apparently no null subjects: a subject pronoun was always phonetically realized. Nevertheless, we saw that there are reasons to suspect that the invariable clitic *a* occurring with first person singular and plural and second person plural was already a CP element which licensed a null subject rendering C° strong. Second person singular and the third persons used subject pronouns, which were non-clitic subject pronouns (as shown by tests concerning doubling and ordering with a preverbal negative marker). As will be discussed in section 6.5.2, this system is particularly relevant for the analysis of null subject licensing because it clearly shows that, although C° is involved in the process, it cannot be the element that identifies the features of the null subject, being invariable.

The modern stages of these languages present three distinct developments:

(a) Standard French has totally lost null subjects (although spoken French looks more similar to the NIDs). Both licensing by strong C° and licensing by strong I° are absent in the modern language. Nevertheless, first and second person plural have maintained their morphological distinctions. According to Roberts (1993) this is due to the fact that, in order to license *pro* only by spec-head agreement, verbal inflection has to be pronominal, and this was not the case in French, which lost *pro-drop* entirely.

(b) Venetian and Paduan have maintained an asymmetric system: some persons have null subjects licensed directly by the inflected verb in I° , others need a subject clitic head. Licensing by a strong C° has disappeared in this varieties, replaced by a constant use of the subject pronoun. Subject clitics have become heads, which occupy head positions higher than $T^\circ/AgrS^\circ$ but still within the IP domain. Licensing by strong I° for first person singular and plural and second person plural has remained constant.

(c) Polesano has partially maintained null subject licensing by C° . It has developed a system in which a subject clitic is always necessary for the licensing of null subjects. Some subject clitics are located in IP, the invariable clitic in CP. The two distinct positions of the clitic element still reflect the split between persons typical of the Renaissance asymmetric systems. Licensing by strong I° was never an option in this variety, although the morphological distinctions on verbal inflection are similar to those of Venetian, Paduan, and French.

Through the examination of asymmetric *pro-drop* systems and of their development we conclude that the syntactic system can change even though overt morphology does not. Languages like French, Venetian, and Paduan directly show that strong morphology on the verb can, but need not, license null subjects. French has developed into a non-null subject language, while Venetian has maintained an asymmetric system. In neither case has verbal morphology been altered. In Polesano, strong inflection never played a role, although the necessary morphological distinctions were (and still are) present. The answer to the first question we raised in the introduction is that the relation between morphology and syntax is only one-way: strong morphology on a head can 'feed' syntactic properties as null subject licensing, but this is not necessarily the case. Strong morphology is thus not a sufficient condition for null subject licensing across Romance languages.²¹ The same conclusion is reached by Speas and Alexiadou (Chapters 2 and 5 above).

²¹ This conclusion is compatible with the proposal of Roberts (1993) that, in order to be able to license *pro*, verbal inflection has to be +pronominal (i.e. have an inflectional ending for all persons and have at most one syncretism in the paradigm). Polesano inflection is +pronominal, but still it does not license *pro*.

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Let us now try to make sense of the evolutionary path described above and see what it can tell us about the pro-drop property and the relation between C° and I° , which are the two heads that seem to be involved in the process of null subject licensing.

6.5.2 *The interaction between I° and C°*

The authors who have worked on the phenomenon of pro-drop licensing in Medieval French and NIDs (Benincà 1983; Adams 1987b; Roberts 1993) propose that in Medieval NWR pro is licensed by government and not by spec-head agreement, a solution which has also been proposed for cases of expletive pro-drop licensing in V2 languages like German (see Vikner 1995). Given that NWR was V2 in the medieval period this seems a plausible hypothesis. Note, however, that expletive pro in German is found both in main and in embedded clauses and does not depend on I to C, but just on the C° head being realized. Medieval NWR is different from German because it does not only require that C° is filled by some phonetically realized category; the head in C° also has to be the inflected verb. Benincà (1983) originally noted that in medieval NWR it is only when the inflected verb raises to C° via V2 that pro can be licensed, otherwise a subject pronoun is required. Hence, the structural condition for pro-drop licensing according to this view is:

- (37) Pro is licensed iff:
- (a) the inflected verb has (+ finite) strong features;
 - (b) the inflected verb governs pro.

Given that the inflected verb could govern pro only when it raised higher than T° , the system of pro-drop in NWR depended on V2. As noted above, the loss of the V2 property affected also the pro-drop system, giving rise to the asymmetric system and to different types of subject clitic.

Let us first examine the Polesano system, which is the most conservative one. Renaissance Polesano has simplified the condition in (37) to a government condition:

- (38) Pro is licensed iff it is governed by a strong head.

In Polesano the inflected verb was never strong enough to license pro, which was either licensed by an element in C° (*a*) or not licensed at all, in which case a pronoun was required. Expletive subjects, first person singular and plural and second person plural, were licensed by C° , which was strong when it contained *a*. Referential pro was also submitted to an identification requirement, which was performed by the inflected verb, given that C° does not have any overt agreement features in this language.

As for third person singular and plural and second person singular, the inflected verb was probably not even strong enough for identifying a null subject. Therefore, a subject pronoun was required. As we have seen, subject pronouns were not clitic heads in this period, but real pronouns located in subject position.

The Polesano system is the one that looks like German, because the licensing condition is just the same.²² Still, there is a fundamental difference with respect to Germanic pro-drop licensed by C° : in Germanic languages we never find referential pro. Hence, the identification requirement is not met, even in those cases in which verbal morphology has enough distinctions. In our terms: in the Germanic languages the inflected verb can never identify pro; in Polesano it can. In other words, verbal inflection apparently always plays a role in Romance null subjects, which is not the case in the Germanic domain.²³

Summing up: pro was licensed by strong C° , referential subjects were identified by inflection. When inflection was unable to identify a null subject, a pronoun was inserted. The asymmetric system of Polesano arose as a consequence of two facts: (a) the head which formally licensed the null subject had no identification features; (b) not all persons could identify the null subject. Subject pronouns (from which subject clitic originated) were required in this case.

The other system we have found in NWR in the Renaissance period is the one of French, Paduan, and Venetian. In this system, first and second person plural (and first person singular in Venetian and Paduan) were always pro-drop in all contexts, second person singular and third persons only when C° contained some feature. It is plausible to interpret the first type as being licensed by strong inflection and the second as being licensed by strong C. In other words, these languages have split the two conditions in (37), changing an 'and' to an 'or' function: pro is licensed either when the inflected verb is strong or when C° is strong:

²² In German the complementizer is strong enough to license pro; in Polesano *a* is present also in embedded domains. The clustering between *a* and the complementizer noted above could be a way of rendering the complementizer itself strong.

²³ Note that in Germanic varieties there are cases of agreeing complementizers which express subject features. In the Romance languages these cases are extremely rare, the only cases possibly being Friulian examples which change the vowel of the complementizer according to the person of the subject. French *qui* is something different, as it does not change according to the person features of the subject, but simply signals that the XP extracted from the sentence is the subject. The possibility of agreeing complementizers might be connected to the fact that there is no identification of a null subject from I° in the Germanic domain.

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- (39) a. C° is a pro-drop licenser iff it is strong.
 b. The inflected verb in $T^\circ/\text{AgrS}^\circ$ is a pro-drop licenser iff it is strong.

The definition of strength is given in (40):

- (40) a. C is strong when it contains a feature different from the unmarked one.²⁴
 b. Agr is strong when it contains a morphologically realized + person and +number feature.

(39) provides the theoretical means of explaining why an apparently costly system like the asymmetric one should exist. The verbal forms which could be reanalysed as strong by virtue of their feature composition (see below) became null subject licensers, giving rise to ‘regular’ pro-drop similar to modern Standard Italian. Those inflectional forms that could not be analysed as strong were non-pro-drop unless another head was strong, namely C° . A null subject could be licensed either by spec-head agreement or by government. The identification requirement was always performed by the inflected verb, as C° had no agreement features. As already noted for Polesano, this means that we do not have to equate the possibility of identifying a null subject with the possibility of licensing a null subject. The cases of null subject licensing by C° and identification by I° in Renaissance NWR constitute the clearest case that overt person and number agreement features do not play any role in the selection of a head as null subject licenser.

Let us now turn to the modern systems: French, Venetian, and Paduan have lost the possibility in (40a): licensing by C° is no longer attested. Typical contexts of licensing by strong C° as embedded interrogatives now require a subject clitic:

- (41) a. No so cossa che *(te) ga fato (Paduan)
 not know what that (you) have done
 ‘I do not know what you did’
 b. No so cossa che *(el) ga fato
 not know what that he has done
 ‘I do not know what he did’

As for the other possibility given in (40b), Venetian and Paduan maintained it, while French lost it. So, in Paduan and Venetian first and second person plural are pro-drop, in French they are not. First person singular is

²⁴ Following many recent proposals (e.g. Roberts and Roussou 2002), I assume that declarative is the unmarked value. Hence, the [+wh] feature in C° renders it a null subject licenser.

also pro-drop in Paduan and Venetian, but it already was in the Renaissance period (contrary to French—see above).

One additional change that has occurred in all NIDs is that the subject pronouns, which were not clitic heads in the Renaissance, have become clitics in the modern varieties. This is true not only of Venetian, Paduan, and Polesano, the dialects considered here, but also of the vast majority of the NIDs (excluding Franco-Provençal varieties and V2 Romantch and Rhaetoromance of the Dolomites).

A possible explanation for this change has to do with a ‘regularization’ of the asymmetric system: in the Renaissance period French, Venetian, and Paduan could have null subjects across the whole paradigm, even though the licensing conditions of a null subject was different according to the person. The loss of null subject licensing through government by strong C° should have given rise to a real asymmetric system, where only some persons (i.e. those that admitted licensing by a strong I°) could have a null subject. Probably the fact that subject pronouns became clitic heads has to do with this asymmetry: becoming heads, subject clitics created a new type of null subject licensing (and identifying) performed by a head which is not $T^\circ/AgrS^\circ$, but a higher one. In other words, the null subject licensing (and identifying) process by the clitic head is similar to the one performed by C° , because the head is higher than $T^\circ/AgrS^\circ$, but, by contrast with licensing by C° , the subject clitic can also identify referential null subjects, and this is probably done in a spec-head agreement configuration.

As for modern Polesano, this dialect has changed its system in a very limited way. Expletive and referential pro of first person singular and plural and second person plural is licensed by *a* in C° . Referential pro is still identified by verbal inflection. Third person singular and plural are now regular cases of pro-drop, as discussed above: the licenser and identifier is a clitic head located higher than the inflected verb, but still in the IP domain (as the tests discussed in section 6.4 show). Second person singular is a special case. In the Renaissance period it was similar to third persons; now it requires both a clitic IP head and the C° clitic *a*. We can say that in this case the C° clitic licenses the null subject and the IP clitic identifies it. Verbal inflection probably plays no role here (see below for a discussion on the special requirements of second person singular).

One interesting consequence of the analysis of Polesano is that we have to divorce null subject licensing from nominative case assignment. Roberts (1993) explicitly proposes that the change in the null subject parameter, on a par with the loss of V2, depends on a change in the nominative assignment possibilities: in the medieval period case could be assigned by the inflected

verb in C° through government, while in the Renaissance period nominative could only be assigned through spec-head agreement. Null subjects were also licensed through government in the medieval period; subsequently this possibility was lost, and replaced by licensing through spec-head agreement (where possible). Modern Polesano has lost V2, and this tells us that nominative case assignment through government is no longer possible. However, *pro* is still licensed in a government configuration by the *a* clitic in the CP domain: hence, null subject licensing is not directly connected to case assignment, and a head can still remain a pro-drop licensor even when it has lost its case-assigning ability.

We can sum up the three evolutionary stages examined for second person singular and third person singular and plural across all NWR as follows:

- Medieval stage: the inflected verb in C° licenses a null subject through government and identifies referential null subjects.
- Renaissance stage: a strong C° head licenses a null subject through government. Identification of referential null subjects is performed by verbal inflection.
- Modern stage: a clitic head licenses (and identifies) the null subject

This analysis also captures Haiman's intuition that subject clitics and the loss of verb second were somehow connected, although the connection is only indirect. Subject clitic heads originate from a reanalysis of full pronouns, which in turn were obligatory because the V2 context of pro-drop licensing had been lost. The reanalysis of pronominal XPs as heads permitted a generally uniform system in the NIDs, where a null subject is always licensed, although the licensing conditions change, and still reflect the original split between strong and weak forms internal to the verbal paradigm.

The definition of strength in (40) still leaves a problem: why is it the case that just first and second person plural can be considered strong while other persons cannot? The case of second person singular, whose inflected verb is morphologically distinct in the NIDs, shows that being strong does not simply depend on morphological distinctions. A number of morphological phenomena isolate first and second person plural in the Romance languages. For instance, they use a different root from all other persons with irregular verbs like *andare*; very often first and second person singular pronouns are compound forms of the bare pronoun plus the form *altri* 'other' in the NIDs, yielding forms like *noialtri*, *voialtri* 'we + other', 'you + other'), and this induces us to consider them as a natural subclass inside the domain of deictic persons. Moreover, Chinellato (2001) has shown that agrammatical patients have more problems in producing these two persons than with all the others,

including third person plural. This has probably to do with the fact that they have the most complex feature composition: all other persons result from the combination of the plus and minus of at most two features. Among the deictic persons first and second singular are respectively [+speaker], [–hearer] and [–speaker], [+hearer]. In the non-deictic persons, i.e. the third, there is only a distinction of number among singular and plural. First and second person plural require the most complex feature composition, including hearer and speaker, but also something more, as first person plural can express [+speaker], [+hearer] but can also include a third person, and second person plural can also result from the combination of a deictic and a non-deictic person. One might think of translating this ‘heaviness’ in their feature composition in terms of verb movement and assume that these two verbal forms raise higher than the others, and that this is the reason why they license null subjects in a higher functional head, on a par with subject clitics. However, if we adopt the relative position of adverbs as a test, as has traditionally been done since Pollock (1989), we find no difference between first and second person plural and the other persons. This does not mean that this hypothesis has to be discarded, because there might be no adverbs intervening in this area. However, given that we lack empirical evidence in favour of this hypothesis, we propose it as a possibility, leaving it for future research in which our tests concerning verb movement will be more refined.

One further research path that could shed light on the feature composition of the various persons is the one indicated by Renaissance Venetian and Paduan, where first person singular goes with first and second person plural: the extension to first person singular must not be considered pure chance. There are several cases of morphological spreading of forms which go from the first person singular to the first person plural (for instance, reflexive and object clitics in Lombard and Veneto dialects use a first person singular form also for the first person plural, and some French dialects use the form *je* ‘I’ for the first person plural clitic pronoun). Hence, it seems that also the class of persons including first person singular and first and second person plural is a natural one, and it is very likely that it is first person plural that constitutes the ‘bridge’ between first person singular and second person plural.

Second person singular deserves special treatment within the NIDs: as Renzi and Vanelli (1983) originally noted, if a dialect has only a subject clitic, this is second person singular, and is not connected to the presence of distinct morphology on the verb. Moreover, we saw that in modern Polesano, the inflected verb is not sufficient to identify a null subject licensed by *a*. A morphologically distinct subject clitic (*te*) is obligatory. It seems that second person singular requires additional morphological material in order to be

identified. Even standard Italian subjunctives require a second-person pronoun when the forms are ambiguous among first, second, and third person singular, but do not require it for third or first person (see Cardinaletti and Starke 1999). The fundamental reason why second singular should display such a requirement or ‘morphological redundancy’ is still obscure, but must somehow be connected to the feature composition of this person, being more marked than first person:

We can therefore single out a number of natural subclasses according to their feature composition within the verbal paradigm:

- The first split is the one that becomes evident in partial pro drop: first and second person versus third persons.
- Another natural subclass includes first person singular and plural which combine + and – deictic features.
- The third natural class includes first person singular and plural marked as +speaker.
- The last class might be first and second person singular, with second singular being more marked in the opposition between speaker and hearer.

Many morphological spreading phenomena found in Romance probably follow these natural classes.

6.6 Minimalist views on null subject licensing

In this section I will briefly consider two possible alternative solutions in minimalist terms, neither of which makes use of the notion of government. Both solutions share the assumption originally proposed by Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998) that pro-drop is due to a mechanism of feature checking: the head of TP is endowed with an EPP feature which needs to be checked by an appropriate element; in pro-drop languages the inflected verb can check the EPP feature moving to the head of T⁰. Null subject licensing therefore amounts to feature checking, and we do not need to postulate the existence of a null pronoun in the Spec of TP that has the same characteristics as overt pronouns.²⁵ Even the definition of ‘null subject’ would thus be misleading, as there are no null subjects in SpecTP at all, but simply a different way of checking a syntactic feature.

The first solution that comes to mind to account for the diachronic path described above exploits verb movement. One could update the original

²⁵ This proposal has also been made by various other authors (e.g. Manzini and Savoia 1997).

observation made by Benincà (1983) and assume that the EPP feature of a given F° , in our case TP, is checked in Romance by the inflectional features which overtly raise up to F° , pied-piping the verb that hosts them. The difference between NWR and the other Romance languages would lie in the F° that is endowed with the EPP feature: in NWR it would be a projection higher than T° but lower than C° . In the other Romance languages like Spanish or Portuguese it would be T° .²⁶ Therefore, in NWR the EPP feature could be checked by the inflected verb moving through F° only when the verb is moving to the V2 position; otherwise, the inflected verb would remain in T° , a subject pronoun would be inserted in SpecF, and EPP checking would be performed in this way. In the other Romance languages, T° is always reached by the inflected verb, and hence the EPP feature would always be checked by the verb and never by a pronoun.²⁷

However, there is at least one good reason not to choose this reformulation in terms of movement of the relation between C° and the lower FP. Our system has to derive medieval pro-drop but also its further evolution. In the Renaissance period it seems that it is not V to C that licenses pro-drop, but C° itself: we saw that the original observation made by Vanelli (1987), that embedded contexts in this period allow more null subjects than main contexts, depends on the fact that a null subject was licensed by a strong C° , endowed with wh- (or modal in the case of subjunctive) features. Hence the fact that C° can license a null subject when it contains a wh- element constitutes a direct counterargument to the minimalist analysis based on movement: it is not possible to account for the Renaissance pro-drop system by assuming that it is due to an EPP feature checked by means of verb movement on its path to C° .²⁸ The Polesano system, which has systematically null subject licensing by a CP clitic, would also be problematic: once again one could assume that the clitic *a* is merged in F° where it checks the EPP feature

²⁶ This solution is reminiscent the proposal of Roberts (1993) of an additional AgrS projection in early Old French.

²⁷ Note that this hypothesis needs an additional assumption: that the EPP feature does not trigger overt movement but can only be checked parasitically when the inflected verb moves for independent reasons (i.e. because of other features checking) to the relevant head.

²⁸ A way to solve the problem and account also for the Renaissance system in terms of movement would be to assume that all the contexts of null subject licensing have V to C movement. Hence, in wh-embedded contexts, the typical context of null subject licensing in this period, the verb should raise higher than in embedded declaratives. Given that there is no empirical evidence in favour of this hypothesis—indeed there seems to be evidence to the contrary—we are left without an account for the Renaissance asymmetric systems in which a strong C° is directly involved in null subject licensing. Here C° licenses a null subject even when it does not contain the inflected verb but an XP, which has no reason to move through F° , being a wh-element and directly targeting its operator position; in the case of yes/no questions the problem is even clearer, as the interrogative complementizer (on a par with the null operator in its Spec) is directly merged in CP and does not move from the inside of the clause.

and than raises up to C° , but there is no empirical evidence for that either. It seems that the status of C° as null subject licenser is crucial in NWR.²⁹ We come back to the problem that a movement analysis straightforwardly explains V2 and medieval null subject, but not the further evolution of the phenomenon.

Another possible solution which does not exploit movement is the following: licensing by C° is a sort of an ‘optical illusion’ due to the fact that C° overtly shows what the features of the whole phase and of the inflected verb are. In other words, the morphological evidence that the inflected verb is strong enough to license a null subject can be provided by the inflectional endings or ‘at a distance’ by C° , whose strong features are transferred to the inflected verb by virtue of a feature-sharing mechanism which ensures that all the extended projections of the verb share the same feature composition. One could exploit the Agree operation, which is part of the movement complex operation as proposed by Chomsky (2001a), and assume that it has to apply to all functional heads within a phase. Agree requires matching: two elements match when they have identical (or better non distinct) features. Hence, ‘match’ is not strictly speaking identity, but non-distinctness: the two matching categories have to have the same feature, (independently of its interpretable or uninterpretable value).³⁰ Agree is subject to locality conditions: an intervening potential element *c* prevents matching of two more distant *a* and *b*.

Given that between I and C there is no potential intervener, the operation of Agree can apply, with I° having an uninterpretable feature matched by the interpretable feature in C° ; by means of this relation, too, the EPP feature in I (or T°) could be checked, yielding null subjects.³¹ In other words, Agree in the new framework is a substitute for the notion of government, which has been used in section 6.5 following traditional accounts. The analysis proposed in section 6.5 can thus be transferred to a minimalist framework by means of the substitution of government by Agree.

This is a welcome result, because (at least in this case) we have an analysis with the same empirical coverage with a less complex theoretical burden: the

²⁹ Note that it would not be possible to assume that it is CP itself that is endowed with an EPP feature in these contexts, because this analysis has already been proposed by Haegeman (2000) and Roberts (2004) and accounts for V2 contexts, not for null subjects.

³⁰ According to Chomsky (2001a), Agree applies in narrow syntax to uninterpretable features that enter into agreement relations with interpretable features. Agree is activated by an uninterpretable feature, which must be deleted under an agreement relation; the agreement relation removes the uninterpretable feature from the narrow syntax, allowing derivations to converge at LF.

³¹ Note that this is a restatement in new terms of the old idea that null subjects are licensed by C° : it is C° that has the interpretable feature and transfers it to I° by virtue of the Agree operation.

notion of government has been eliminated, and Agree is anyhow necessary because it is involved in the complex operation of movement.

This analysis makes use of a mechanism that must be in any case incorporated into every theory: feature sharing between I° and C° .

6.7 Conclusion

Having been a major topic in the 1980s, pro-drop has been recently neglected in the syntactic studies (a notable exception is Ackema and Neeleman (2000), in addition to the articles quoted above). This is partly due to the fact that within the minimalist approach Agreement projections do not exist. The reason for such a move is that they do not encode any real semantic feature, but simply a syntactic relation, which can also be expressed in terms of spec-head agreement within a given functional projection, i.e. without the need of an independent head. However, we have seen that in NWR null subjects do not depend only on the inflected verb, but are clearly connected to the type and number of subject clitics and to the internal feature composition of a given person of the paradigm. We have seen that the NIDs we examined here seem to be asymmetric pro-drop systems. Moreover, the asymmetry does not cut between first and second person on one side and third person on the other, as one might plausibly think on the basis of Kayne's recent proposal that pro can only be third person and that first and second person are different. The distinction running through the verbal paradigm in the NIDs forces us to draw a more detailed analysis of the feature composition of each person: first and second person plural have been proposed as strong because their feature composition is more complex than that of all other persons, as it combines features of the deictic persons (first and second) with features of the non-deictic persons (third singular and plural). Furthermore, we have seen that first person singular seems to be connected to first person plural, and modern Polesano *a* also shows that there is a split between first and second persons and third persons of the type already noted in other languages. Second person singular has a special status and needs redundant morphology: the reason why this is so still remains a mystery.

Moreover, I have first presented an analysis of the development of NWR null subjects in terms of a traditional proposal that exploits the notions of government and spec-head agreement. Two possible ways of eliminating government have been present in section 6.6, the one based on the operation Agree being more promising.

