

‘Everyone simply thinks *pro* is a normal pronoun’ –
The “Montalbetti Effect”, *de se* attitudes, and the semantics of *pro*
Rishabh Suresh, University of Göttingen

The literature on null pronouns contains roughly three kinds of answers to the question of how null pronouns acquire their reference. One kind of answer is that if the null pronoun is derived via ellipses or a zero-spell-out rule of some kind (eg. Neeleman & Szendrői 2007), it is presumably born with a referential index like all other referential pronouns which is then mapped to an individual by the contextual assignment function at LF. A second kind of answer is that the pronoun receives a referential index from a licensing head such as D or T (eg. Holberg 2010). And the third kind of answer is that the pronoun receives an index from a Topic of some kind, merged at the left periphery, via something like an Agree operation (eg. Frascarelli 2007). All of these approaches share in common that they assume some kind of binding relationship to hold in the narrow syntax itself between the null pronoun and an antecedent or licensor, and each has its own problems. The first two for example, do not offer a satisfactory answer to why null pronouns robustly seem to refer to arguments with a specific discourse function and not just any salient local argument (Frascarelli 2007), while the third does not explain how null arguments can be bound by quantifiers (assuming that quantified DPs like *every X* cannot be topics).

The present proposal takes as its point of departure this last observation – sometimes called the Overt Pronoun Constraint or the “Montalbetti Effect” (Montalbetti 1984) – that in languages which allow null pronouns, in order for an embedded pronoun to receive a bound variable interpretation with a quantified subject in the matrix clause, it must be null. In particular, it is noteworthy that in classic examples used to illustrate this constraint, the embedding verb is an attitude predicate and the embedded pronoun is most straightforwardly interpreted *de se* with respect to the attitude holder(s). It has been argued that *de se* attitude reports require a dedicated LF (Percus & Sauerland 2003), distinct from that of *de re* reports, in which the pronoun in an embedded finite clause interpreted *de se* is semantically vacuous but nevertheless undergoes movement to the left periphery of that clause at LF, thus leaving behind a λ abstraction over the embedded pronoun that can then be bound by the matrix subject. Following this, an alternative analysis is proposed here for the semantics of *pro*, namely that it is exactly such a vacuous pronoun (called *him*/her** by Percus and Sauerland) which is bound at LF (by a topic or a quantified subject) rather than in narrow syntax, because it moves and leaves behind a λ abstraction. The advantage of this analysis is that it unifies cases of topic-binding and quantifier-binding in embedded contexts, but can also be extended to matrix clauses under the assumption that topics can be null (Frascarelli 2007). Moreover, it makes the testable prediction that the Overt Pronoun Constraint may be violated when the embedded pronoun is interpreted *de re* with respect to the attitude holder(s) since such pronouns are posited to have more internal structure (Percus & Sauerland 2003).