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## **PRO-DROP IN KANURI**

**ABSTRACT.** This paper examines the phenomenon in which the subject of a finite sentence is suppressed in Kanuri Language. It presents evidence that null subject sentence exists in Kanuri and admits Kanuri into the league of pro-drop languages. We observed that Kanuri has a rich system of subject-verb agreement morphology. The content of the pro is identifiable from the state of the main verb in the sentence. The verb in most finite declarative sentence contains a clitic-like subject pronoun, which agrees in number and person with the main subject in the sentence. The paper draws data from the Kanuri spoken in Maiduguri.

### INTRODUCTION

Kanuri is spoken as a major language in Borno and Yobe state in Nigeria. It is also spoken in Niger, Cameroun, Chad, Sudan and the Republic of Libya.

There are essentially two significant word orders in Kanuri. They are the basic word order (SOV) and the permissible word order (OSV), which obligatorily applies case marking to the subject or to the object Noun Phrase or to both.

There is sizable amount of work in the area of the structural description of the Kanuri Grammar in general linguistics. But there appears to be little or nothing in the area of the pro drop parameter. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the pro drop phenomenon in Kanuri. Pro drop is a situation in which the subject of a finite sentence or clause is suppressed. In

other words, it is a phenomenon in which the subject position in a finite sentence or clause contains an unexpressed (empty) category. In the Principles and Parameters (P&P) theory of pro drop, the unexpressed (empty) category or as it is sometime called, the null subject, is referred to as the “pro” (cf Heagman 1994)

### 1.1 THE PRO-DROP THEORY

Pro-drop theory determines whether the subject of a declarative finite sentence or clause can be detected. The theory has been applied to many languages of the world and it has been found that it is applicable to the following languages: Chinese (cf Huang 1989), Italian (cf Riemsdijk and Williams 1986) Radford 1997 Japanes (cf Huang 1989) and Spanish (cf Sells 1985). Languages differ in many ways. Pro-drop is one of the parameters in which language could be distinguished and described. Some languages are described as pro drop languages also call the null subject languages, while others are seen as non-pro drop languages.

In recent times, work on Nigerian languages, Igbo, Ibibio, Dagema, and Izon has described them as pro-drop languages. They exhibit apparent absence of subject in finite sentences and clauses (cf Eze 1995, Ndimele 1997,1991,2000; Ndimele and Kari 2000). The situation in which a description of language is made on the rules of suppression of subject pronoun in a finite sentence or clause is described as a pro-drop parameter theory. (cf Jaeggli, O and Safari 1989 and Harbert 1995).

### 1.2 THE PRONOMINALS IN KANURI

Kanuri language has a rich pronominal system. They have been distinguished in the features of case, number, and person. There is no gender distinction in the pronominal system of the present day Kanuri language. Cyffer and Hatchison (1979) distinguished six pronouns in Kanuri as presented below:

Wu: I

Nyi: you

Shi: he/she

Andi: we

Nandi: you (plural)

Sandi: they

Our purpose in this paper is to account for the deletion or otherwise suppression of the pronoun in the subject position of the finite declarative sentences in Kanuri. The following table shows the pronouns in Kanuri in the nominative case.

Person	Number	Gender	Pronouns
1 <sup>st</sup>	Singular	Male/female	Wu “I”
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Singular		Nyi “you”
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Singular		Shi “he/she”
1 <sup>st</sup>	Plural		Andi “we”
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Plural		Nandi “you”
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Plural		Sandi “they”

Below are the examples of Kanuri sentences showing distribution of the Kanuri in subject positions.

1. Wu   nji    Yakin            I am drinking water  
  I    water    drinking
2. nyi    nji    yamim           you are drinking water  
  You   water   drinking
3. shi    nji    saim               he is drinking water  
  He/she water   drinking
4. andi  nji    yaiyen           we are drinking water  
  We  water   drinking
5. nandi   nji    yawin            you are drinking water  
  You      water   drinking
6. sandi  nji    sasaim           they are drinking water  
  They    water   drinking

From the above examples, we observed that in each of the finite declarative sentences given above, the subject position is filled with the appropriate pronoun. What we observed here is that Kanuri language has a rich system of subject pronoun- verb agreement, such that the subject pronoun in each sentence agrees with the main verb in its respective sentence. The verb in each of the sentence above are inflected with a copy of a clitic-like form of the subject pronoun that agrees in number and person with pronoun that occupies the subject position.

It is possible to drop the subject pronoun in each of the sentences above. If it is, then Kanuri has a finite clause with apparent absent of subject. Consider the following construction.

(Examples 1, 2, and 3 are repeated here as 7, 8 and 9.)

- |       |        |       |          |                          |
|-------|--------|-------|----------|--------------------------|
| 7 (a) | wa     | nji   | yakin    | I am drinking water      |
|       | I      | water | drinking |                          |
| (b)   | -      | nji   | yakin    | I am drinking water      |
| 8(a)  | nyi    | nji   | yamin    | you are drinking water   |
|       | You    | water | drinking |                          |
| (b)   | -      | nji   | yamin    | you are drinking water   |
| 9 (a) | shi    | nji   | sain     | he/she is drinking water |
|       | He/she | water | drinking |                          |
| (b)   | -      | nji   | sain     | he/she is drinking water |

From the fore going, it is clear that in declarative finite clauses the subject may be dropped in Kanuri. This type of dropping of subject pronoun in subject position is a characteristic feature of a pro-drop language. Apart from allowing the subject pronoun to be dropped, the content of the missed subject in such a clause is recoverable from the state of the main verb in the clause. For instance the content of the missed subject in example (7b) is recoverable as the pronoun WU ‘‘T’’ because the main verb of the sentence is in first person singular form. Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that Kanuri is a pro-drop language.

### 1.3 THE NULL-SUBJECT IN KANURI

This section examines other constructions in Kanuri in which it is possible to delete the subject pronoun. We provide data to show that subjectless sentences do exist in Kanuri. The null subjects are not a result of moving a constituent from any syntactic position to another known syntactic position. The subject position in the following constructions is found to be null (empty).

- |       |               |                 |
|-------|---------------|-----------------|
| 10. - | masar yuwuko  | I bought corn   |
|       | Corn bought   |                 |
| 11. - | fatoro lengin | I am going home |
|       | Home to going |                 |
| 12. - | kalu karzo    | she cook soup   |
|       | Soup cook     |                 |

From the above examples, we can see that the subject in each of the construction has been deleted. The position of the subject that is deleted is indicated with a null sign (-). This signifies that the construction have a null subject.

It is also possible to have an interrogative sentence, which shows apparent lack of overt subject as demonstrated in examples (13,14 and 15) below;

- |      |               |                     |
|------|---------------|---------------------|
| 13.- | abi dimin     | what are you doing  |
|      | What doing    |                     |
| 14 - | ndara lenumin | where are you going |
|      | Where going   |                     |
| 15-  | ndu rum       | who did you see     |
|      | Who see       |                     |

Other construction in which the subject could be found deleted are presented below

16-cida- nza tamoadanya- fatoro kesu  
 Work their finish home to come  
 after they finished their work, they came home

17. bintu fato- ro kadonya- kalu karwono  
 Bintu home to came soup cook  
 after Bintu came home she cook soup

In the construction in (16 and 17) above, it can be observed that the true subject in each construction has been deleted, i.e., it is null. It is the richness of the Kanuri verb morphology that renders the overt subject pronoun redundant. In current syntactic theory, the position occupied by the subject is termed the “specifier position”. Though some scholars have raised a serious question and warned that richness of subject-verb or subject-clitic agreement morphology may not be a sufficient requirement to be used as a necessary parameter for determining which language is a pro-drop or a non pro-drop in syntax, we consider it necessary to examine and describe all the observable syntactic features of the Kanuri language.

The richness of agreement morphology is one of the syntactic features of the Kanuri language as observed in its finite sentences and clauses. But the argument raised by Ndimele (2000) as to whether the richness of agreement may be used as a parameter for determining pro-drop language still remains unresolved. In fact the evidence provided in Ndimele (2000) that a subject-verb or subject-clitic agreement paradigm is not a mechanism for pro-identification in IZON is a convincing reason not to generalize richness of morphology agreement as a parameter for determining which languages can or cannot allow the subject pronoun of a finite sentence to be deleted.

What is not so convincing is the Chinese or Japanese analysis in Ndimele (2000). Ndimele (2000:13) Quoted Young (1989) and Harbet (1995) as having seen the following examples as cases of pro-drop in Chinese or Japanese language.

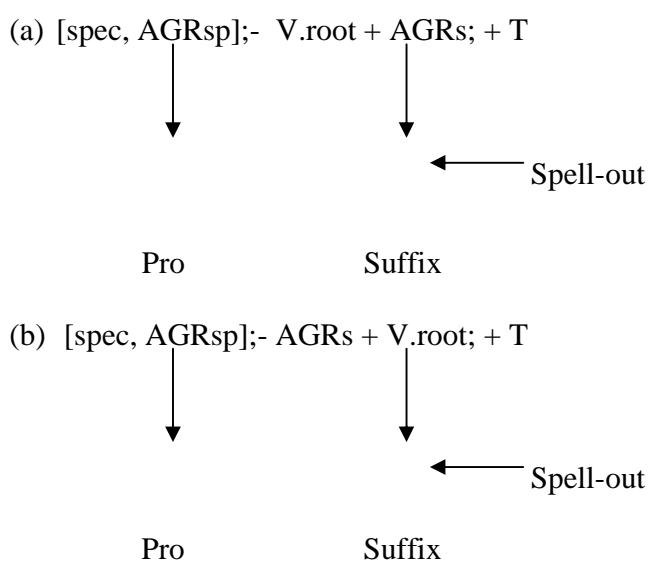
- (18) Zhangsan Shuo [AGRsp-lai le]  
 Zhangsan say NT come Asp  
 Zhangsan said that he will come.
- (19) Zhangsan qi ma qi de [AGRsp-hen lei]  
 Zhangsan ride horse ride till NT very tired  
 Zhangsan rode the horse until [he] was very tired

To him, the fact that emerges from the above example is that subject omission is possible in Chinese even though words in the language are not inflected. This analysis has generate questions such as the following:

- a. must the omission of subject in (18 and 19) be interpreted as a case of pro drop phenomenon in Chinese or Japanese?
- b. Could it not be a case of equi-Np deletion in Chinese or Japanese?
- c. If on the other hand, the omission of subject in (18&19) is a case of pro-drop in Chinese or Japanese, what will be the case of equi-Np deletion in the language.

If it were a legitimate case of pro-drop, the subject of the matrix clause (Zhangsan) would have been pronominalized, and then suppressed or dropped as in the case of Kanuri, examples give in (16) above.

Kanuri has a rich system of subject agreement. There is a morphological rule which spells out the proper morphological form of specifier of agreement (AGRsp) suffixed to the verb root in the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and plural and prefixed to the verb root in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and plural.



The syntactic format under which the conditions for the agreement morpheme to be spelled out can be presented in two ways: (a) as suffix to the verb root and (b) as prefix to the verb root as presented above.

Languages whose verb agreement system contains enough information to render the presence of over subject pronoun redundant have a “strong” AGR (Cf. Chomsky 1981, 1982). As such, Kanuri has a strong AGR, which can identify an empty category in the specifier of AGR.sf. In Kanuri the pro is licensed under the following configuration:.

(20) pro;[V.root + AGRsf + T]

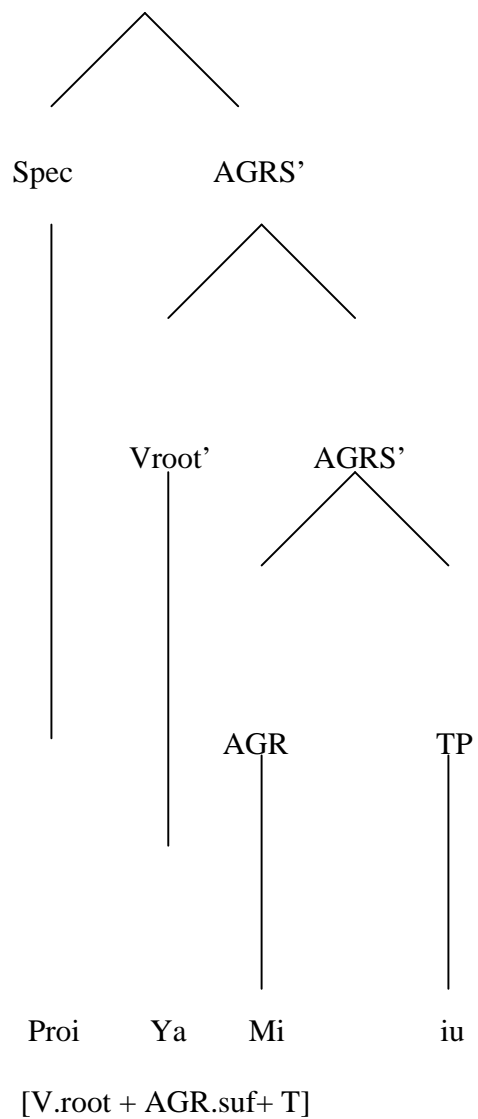
(21) pro;[ AGRsf + V.root + T]

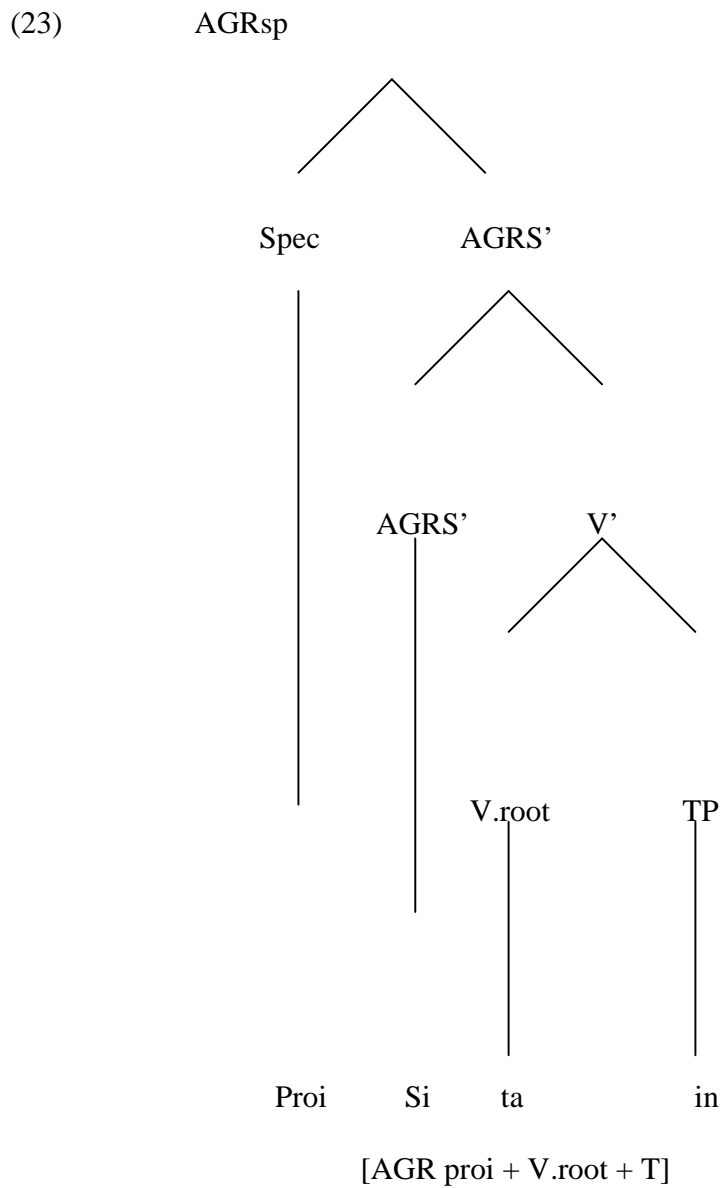
The configuration in (20 and 21) can be represented in a tree diagram as in (22) and (23):



(22)

AGRsp





Form the illustration in 20-23 below we can see that the identification of pro via agreement surf or prefix is presented by coindexation. That means the pro must be coindexed with the agreement suffix or prefix within the paradigm. This is in accordance with the principle of binding theory (cf Ndimede 2000).

#### 1.4 CONCLUSION

The conclusion that we can draw from our discussion and analysis so far is that Kanuri is a pro-drop language. We have shown that there are declarative finite sentence in Kanuri, which show apparent lack of overt subject. The null-subject found in the finite declarative sentences designated has pro. A phonetically covered constituent.

We have provided evidence that the content of the missed subject is recoverable from the state of the main verb in the sentence. We argued that the verb in Kanuri has agreement affix to identify grammatical features (number and person) and that each finite verb formed in Kanuri has a clitic-like pronoun element for pro-identification. It is because the information carried by a pronoun is marked in the verb morphology that subjects of finite sentences may be omitted. Therefore we conclude that Kanuri is a pro-drop language where subject pronoun, infinite sentence can be suppressed.

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