

## No index, no *pro*-blem

It has long been proposed that languages with null pronominal arguments may be partitioned roughly in terms of how freely they allow pronouns to be covert, with ‘consistent’ languages allowing any and only null subjects, ‘partial’ languages allowing a restricted subset of null subjects, usually conditioned by person in matrix clauses, and ‘radical’ languages allowing both subject and object null pronouns. These distributions are argued to be correlated with some morphological properties of the languages in question, which are also responsible for directly or indirectly licensing the null arguments (Holmberg 2010; Koenenman & Zeijlstra 2022; Neeleman & Szendrői 2007; Tomioka 2003; cf. Perlmutter 1971; Taraldsen 1978; Rizzi 1982). Importantly, null pronouns are assumed under these approaches to be semantically equivalent to their overt counterparts, at least at LF, with the burden of explaining the language-internal distribution of overt and null pronouns falling on some additional principle such as *Avoid Pronoun* (Chomsky 1981) or *Minimise Structure* (Cardinaletti & Starke 1994). The aim of this talk is threefold: I argue i) that null pronouns are not semantically equivalent to overt pronouns, ii) that null pronouns behave far more uniformly across consistent, partial, and radical varieties than traditionally assumed, and iii) that the language-internal distribution of null and overt pronouns is best accounted for by ascribing them unique semantics. I will propose that null pronouns are by nature non-referential vacuous pronouns – in the spirit of Percus & Sauerland’s (2003) *he\*/she\** pronouns – that can acquire referential indices under specific discourse conditions (Frascarelli 2007), but crucially are not required to do so. Overt pronouns are by contrast always inherently indexed. The non-referentiality of null pronouns will be shown to be widely exploited in embedded clauses, but also in matrix clauses in contexts where pronouns must not be referential to derive the right interpretation (*e-type* pronouns in the sense of Nouwen 2020). This specific division of labour also offers a principled explanation for a number of well-known facts about the interpretations of embedded null subjects including the Overt Pronoun Constraint (Montalbetti 1984), obligatory subject-oriented-ness and locality (primarily in partial varieties as reported by Ferreira 2009 and Holmberg 2005), and obligatory sloppiness under VP-ellipsis.