

## Null pronouns in English: evidence from particle verb constructions

Daniel Milway  
University of Toronto

English is widely considered to lack the null pronoun, *pro*, null arguments being restricted to traces, *PRO* and bound variables. Evidence presented in this paper, however, demonstrates that *pro* is present in certain English particle verb (PV) constructions. Furthermore, English null pronouns differ from other null pronouns discussed in the literature by having both discourse and syntactic requirements.

The PVs in question, demonstrated below in (1), are members of the class that show an argument structure alternation known as ground promotion (McIntyre, 2007), and have a complementary alternation which I refer to as figure retention.

- (1) a. **V + Full PP**  
Alex *rinsed* [<sub>Figure</sub>the dust] *out* of [<sub>Ground</sub>the coffee pot].
- b. **Ground Promotion**  
Alex *rinsed out* [<sub>Ground</sub>the coffee pot]. ~ Alex *rinsed* [<sub>Ground</sub>the coffee pot] *out*.
- c. **Figure Retention**  
Alex *rinsed out* [<sub>Figure</sub>the dust]. ~ Alex *rinsed* [<sub>Figure</sub>the dust] *out*.

While both ground promotion and figure retention constructions are able to undergo particle shift, the characteristic syntactic property of PVs, Levin and Sells (2007) note an asymmetry between the two constructions with respect to their interpretation, namely, that figure retention PVs require contextual support for proper interpretation, while ground promotion does not. This paper shows that this asymmetry is due to the presence of a null argument in figure retention which is interpreted as the contextually salient ground argument.

- (2) a. **Figure Retention**  
Whenever Jim wears his blazer, [he *wipes* the fingerprints *off*.]  
**Interpretation:** He wipes the fingerprints off **his blazer**.
- b. **Ground Promotion**  
Whenever Sheila sees fingerprints, [she *brushes* her blazer *off*.]  
**Interpretation:** She brushes something off her blazer.  
**Not:**She brushes **fingerprints** off her blazer.

These null arguments do not show the syntactic dependencies that are characteristic of *PRO*, traces, or bound variables, and are interpreted as definite and specific like pronouns. As such, they are properly treated as null pronouns.

Beyond showing the presence of these null pronouns, this paper provides a structural analysis for them, and places them in a typology null pronouns. The structural analysis comes from the fact that these null pronouns are predicted by a small clause type analysis of PVs (Svenonius, 2003). Null pronouns in figure retention are discourse-linked in the same way as null objects are in Colloquial Brazilian Portuguese (Farrell, 1990) and French (Cummins and Roberge, 2004). Unlike other discourse-linked null objects, English null grounds are also linked to a syntactic context, namely figure retention PVs. This adds strength to the claim, made by Iten et al. (2005), that semantic-pragmatic recoverability is not sufficient to explain null complements, but that they must be syntactically licensed as well.

## References

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