

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 13 : 1 January 2013

ISSN 1930-2940

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## The Study of Pro-drop Parameter in Two of the Persian Dialects - Baluchi and Sistani

Mohammad Reza Pahlavannezhad, Ph.D.

Elham Akhlaghi, Ph.D. Candidate



Sistan & Balochistan of Iran

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present certain aspects of the pro-drop parameter among two of the least studied languages in the Middle East, Sistani and Balochi which are spoken in the south-eastern corner of the linguistic area of Iran, where until recently there were no such

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phenomena as language planning, education, mass media, newspaper or administrative language (Breseeng, 2001: 133- 134). According to this research, the Persian language is pro-drop and in Iran it has started to play a constantly growing role in Balochistan.

**Key terms:** pro-drop parameter, Balochi, Sistani

## **Introduction**

Absolute universal is a property that all languages have in common. These universals are scarce (Bauer, 1992: 166). For example, all languages contain vowels. There are also frequency based universals such as those found in Greenberg (1963) which state general tendencies for languages of a particular type. When Chomsky (1965) discussed the problem of poverty of stimulus, principles and parameters theory, he made use of absolute and probabilistic universals to solve this problem. He proposed that learners possess an innate grammar, which consists of universal rules and these principles are true of all natural languages (Haegeman, 1991: 12). His theory also consists of a set of parameters, or options which contain binary choices. These binary choices refer to the fact that rather than learning many individual rules, a learner merely chooses between two possible types of rules and all other characteristics associated with that rule are followed consequently. Pro-drop is one of these parameters which describe languages that do not require an overt subject. According to this parameter, there are four characteristics of a language that should pattern together.

## **Characteristics of a Pro-drop Language**

The first characteristic of a pro-drop language is that overt subjects are optional in many cases. It is observable in the contrast between the English sentence “I eat a sandwich”, and the Persian equivalent sentence ((man) yek sândwich mixoram), where the parentheses indicate that the subject pronoun is optional. In addition, this parameter implies a subject-verb inversion characteristic in pro-drop languages. For example in Persian both ([?ali be madrese raft]: Ali to school went) and ([be madrese raft ?ali]: to school went Ali), are acceptable sentences. However, it is not implied that this language has free words order (Liceras, 1988).

The existence of expletives is another characteristic of the pro-drop parameter. English, which is not a pro-drop language, requires the expletive ‘it’ and ‘there’ since the subject position in a

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sentence cannot be left empty, like “It rains” in English and ([mibârad]) in Persian. That trace effect is final characteristic involved in pro-drop parameter. In languages which do not allow pro-drop, the complementizer ‘that’ may not be left in the sentence after wh-movement has taken place. Because of this the sentence “\*whom did you say that is coming?” is not grammatical, whereas a similar sentence in Persian ([če kasi râ gofti ke miâyad?]) is grammatical.

As it is noticed, Persian Language as the official language in Iran is a pro-drop language having all these four characteristics. The aim of this research is to study the pro-drop parameter in two dialects Sistani and Baluchi spoken in Sistan- Baluchistan a province in southeast part of Iran.

### **Review of the Literature**

Until recently, many studies in pro-drop parameters have been carried out. Geldren 2011 for example, investigates pro-drop parameter in the history of English. His studies reveals that referential pro-drop is grammatical in Old English but disappears as the reanalysis is complete (Gelderen, 2011).

Jellinek collected interesting data to describe his thesis. Based on his data, nominal subjects can never be placed as subject of a verb. They are, instead, contrast targeted and emphasize on a relationship marked by a verb suffix creating subject information.

Nichols (1992) discusses the complexity trait of morphology. Morphological indicators can be demonstrated in forms such as affixations, clitics or any other morphological variability demonstrating related meanings, roles and relations. Therefore, more complexity results in a higher probability in pro-dropping (Nichols, 1992 p.48).

Rasekhmahand (2003) examines the process of omitting subject pronoun in Persian dialects Gilaki, Mazandarani, Lori, Urami and Surani. His research shows that all these dialects have the possibility of using an optional subject.

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Many other scholars have carried out similar researches into their languages being a pro-drop and have compared their languages with other languages in this aspect. Melnik (2007) Strunk (2005) Butt (2010) Han & Kocheton (2005) Geeslin (2000) Muller (2011) Simpson are to name a few. There is also few researches on each of the dialects which are to be discussed in this article.

There is very little known about the early history of Sistan and Baluchistan. The native of Baluchistan are called Baloch. Generally Baloch people speak Balochi. The Baloch tribes were forced to migrate towards Sistan Baluchistan province from 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Ghorab, 1985:15).

Balochi tribe is classified as one of the Iranian group of the Indo-European language family which is closely related to Persian. Balochi was used only as an oral language until the post-colonial period. Before that, it was generally regarded as a Persian dialect and there was no tradition of using it in writing. The Balochi literary movement got fully under way only after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Their direction was from north to south (Yaghmaee, 1981:255).

Based on the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1980), “The official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people is Persian... The use of regional and national languages in the press and mass media, however, as well as for teaching in schools the literatures written in them, is permitted according to Persian”. The reality, however, is quite different.

At present there are no publications in Sistani or Balochi language. A number of magazines emerged after the Islamic revolution in 1979, but were closed down soon, due to the pressure from the authorities. There is no provision to teach Sistani or Balochi literature in Iranian schools of Baluchistan.

Ravaghi (1985) claims that some written traces of Sistani can be found in a translation of ‘Koran of Ghods’. It is also claimed that some words and lexical combinations of the Sistani are found in the three well-known historical books i.e. Tarikh-e Sistan (Bahar, 1935), Etyaolmouk

(Setudeh, 1965), and Farhang-e Mohazzabol Al-asma written by Mahmood ibn Omar Zanji Sanjeri. There is no doubt that the authors of these books were Sistani.

Sistani is one of the ancient dialects of Persian. (Bahar, 1970:42) Among foreigner researchers who have done studies on Sistani are Wery ho (1983), Gryanberg (1983), and Lazard (1991). There is also another research into 'Impersonal construction in Balochi' which is written by Jahani and et al (2010). They conclude that in balochi the 3PL construction allows the speakers to distance themselves from the event somehow.

Languages in contact can affect each other in different ways. It much depends on the relative status of the languages. Nowadays it is quite obvious that the national language, Persian, is the socially and culturally dominant language.

## **Discussion**

Vosughi (1992) has distinguished 11 language population or group in Iran. Nevertheless, Persian language has the majority of the speakers in Iran (Vosughi 1992:7 cited in Jamshid 1992: 14) and other dialects spoken in Iran are in a minority and as a result, deeply affected by Persian language. The two dialects discussed in this article have been selected based on their geographical location. Data have been collected from the native speakers of the dialects as well as previous studies. Balochi has the oldest form among recent Persian languages (Asgari, 1978:123). The two examined dialects have several species. Yet, the difference between them is not too much to prevent communication.

Lexical order can statistically predict many characteristics. In Sistani, lexical order is in SOV form (Oveysipoor 1974:194). Following a SOV form in lexical order, Balochi is also the same as Sistani. The following is a sample of collected data from Sistani dialect.

1)var šo kouš stondâ

for them shoes buy. Pt. 1sg

I bought a pair of shoes for them. (Oveysipour, 1995: 103)

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2) va kadu su bra?

To which way go. pt. 3sg

Which way did he go? (the same: 111)

The above examples show sentences with no subjective pronoun, yet correct and grammatical.

3) diro injâ bâreš ka

Yesterday here rain. pt.

Yesterday it was raining in here. (the same: 145)

No expletives such as “it” or “there” have been used in this sentence and merely the verb “rain” has been used.

4) dār-în zar ham akan.in

have-prog.1sg money gather

I am gathering money (Jahani, 2010: 2273)

5) dašt-un šut-un pa ges-a ke morg-g dist-un

Have-pl.1sg go-pt.1sg with house.obl hen-indef.see-pt.1sg

I was going to house that I saw a hen

The above example clearly shows that this dialect has also the possibility to have that-trace.

6) Tabre sar-e kal

To the field go-1pl

Let's go to the field

In example number 6, there is no subjective pronoun. Besides, an inversion of subject and object of the verb is also observable and the sentence is still grammatical. The next examples are from Balochi.

7) Pa wti dōst-ān-o tārīp ko

For self.Gen friend-Pl-Pr.Cl narrate do.Pst.3Sg

I narrate (this) for my friends

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8) teh bīrjand rapt-e pa bāzār-e sarpōš  
In Birjand go.Pst.1Pl  
In Birjand, we went to the linded market.

As we can notice in the two examples mentioned above, this language likewise has the possibility of omission of subjective pronoun with no need for expletives. Omission of subjective pronoun is optional and it can be used if necessary. For example;

9) mā rapt-ō hord-e  
I go.Pst.1Sg. small-Attr sea  
I went to the small sea

A rich inflection system is a kind of language system which gives information about person, number and form of the verb. This rich inflection should be accessible to reconstruct the meaning of omitted subject. But the precondition is that it should be permissible in a specific language to lack a subject. This leads to another modification based on Jagoli and Safir's uniformity principle which means that each consistent language either in terms of having obvious markers for person and number in any form of a verb or in terms of lacking them, can allow a null subject and the process of identifying and retrieving a null subject can be explained by means of compare and contrast (Jagoli and Safir 1989, p.32) comparing and contrasting allows languages with no clear morphology to make them able to give the meaning of the verbs and nouns in null subjects.

In Sistani language if the subject is living the verb agrees with it but if it is not living the verb will not be in agreement in plural form. The wall fell. The walls fell (Oveisipour, 1995:182).

## Conclusion

This article examines pro-drop parameter in two of the Persian dialects; Sistani and Balochi. Pro-drop parameter refers to the possibility of omission of subjective pronouns in a language. It means that it is possible for some languages to omit the subjective pronoun without forming an ungrammatical sentence. These languages are called pro-drop languages. There are four

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parameters to identify this original parameter: the subjective pronoun being optional, lack of any pronoun to show null subject, the probability of existence of a relative pronoun in addition to the possibility of a shift between the verb and the subject. Word order may not be a strict criterion but it reveals the fact that many of the pro-drop languages.

Another point is related to comparing subject and object. This comparison should exist in all of the examined cases and this makes the omission of subject pronoun possible. If subject pronoun is mentioned, it can be an emphasis on the pronoun.

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Mohammad Reza Pahlavannezhad, PhD  
Linguistics Department  
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad  
PO box 91779-48974  
Park Square  
Mashhad  
Iran  
[rezapahlavan5@yahoo.com](mailto:rezapahlavan5@yahoo.com)

Elham Akhlaghi, Ph.D. Candidate  
Linguistics Department  
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad  
PO box 91779-48974  
Park Square  
Mashhad  
Iran  
[elhamakhlaghi80@ymail.com](mailto:elhamakhlaghi80@ymail.com)

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