

# On some empty categories in Icelandic and Latvian (*PRO* and *pro*)

## *Par dažiem formāli nerealizētiem komponentiem islandiešu un latviešu valodā (PRO un pro)*

Dens Dimiņš

University of Iceland

Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies,

Sæmundargötu 2, 101 Reykjavik, Iceland

E-mail: [ddeens@gmail.com](mailto:ddeens@gmail.com)

Empty categories are abstract elements in the deep sentence structure. This paper deals with the pronominal null subjects – big *PRO* and small *pro*. The article provides definitions and refers to further theoretical discussion of these empty categories from a generative perspective. Null subjects are relevant to the principle of the economy of language resources, Universal Grammar, and are certainly present in all languages. Two Indo-European languages are selected for comparison, a Germanic language (Icelandic) and a Baltic language (Latvian). There are similar patterns in *PRO* and small *pro* constructions in Icelandic and Latvian, which suggests some surface-level structural similarity between the two languages. However, despite the overlaps, there are also significant differences, especially with regard to case government with infinitivals, the use of the dummy subject and the explicit (overt) pronoun use in the imperative. The main part of this paper discusses the types and the classification of the constructions featuring big *PRO* and small *pro* in both languages. Among the infinitive constructions with *PRO* are (1) the referential or controlled, (2) uncontrolled or arbitrary, and (3) expletive construction. There are eight little *pro* constructions with the verb in finite form: (1) the impersonal construction, (2) the impersonal-passive construction, (3) the extraposition construction, (4) the imperative/optative, (5) the elliptical construction, (6) elliptical answers/remarks, (7) stage directions and (8) exclamations. Further, there are three less marginal constructions, namely, (1) the impersonal present participle construction, (2) the impersonal modal construction and (3) the ergative construction.

**Keywords:** *PRO*, *pro*, null forms, empty categories, Icelandic, Latvian, generative grammar, deep structure, surface structure.

## 1. Introduction – framework – definitions

1. The paper examines Icelandic and Latvian with regard to the use of implicit (covert) subject pronouns, namely, *PRO* and *pro*, in both languages. The outlined directions by no means reveal a complete picture, as the topic is rather extensive. In Icelandic syntax, there is also a discussion about pronominal, co-referential “null object” (Thráinsson 2007, 479) in coordination structures of the type *I love you<sub>i</sub> and admire e<sub>i</sub>* (*e* stands for “empty”, for other abbreviations see the corresponding list at the end of the paper). This paper, however, is limited only to the null subjects.

An Icelandic example is normally given first, and followed by a Latvian one. The default unmarked verb tense is the present for both languages. If nothing is marked with a verb, it is in the infinitive. The default third person verb number in Latvian is the singular or plural (unmarked). The default number of the nominals is the singular, the default case is the nominative (unmarked). Gender is only marked sporadically, insofar as it is relevant to show agreement. Indeclinable parts of speech are mostly unmarked. All translations of the Latvian examples are done by the author.

2. The following **definitions** are given:

2.1. **PRO** (abbreviation for “pronominal”) or *big PRO* is an “unpronounced subject of infinitivals” (Poole 2011, 96) or “nonlexical infinitival subject” (Sigurðsson 1992, 179) or “can appear in the specifier of non finite TP” (Carnie 2013, 439). In the standard Government and Binding (GB) theory, e. g., by Chomsky 1982 and Rizzi 1986, *PRO* is ungoverned (has no case) and can be both anaphoric (controlled) or pronominal (free or arbitrary). However, there is also a view that only controlled *PRO* exist, see the discussion under item 6 of this Introduction.

2.1.1. Anaphoric *PRO*

- (1) *Við báðum Jón<sub>i</sub> að PRO<sub>i</sub> búa til nýjar setningar.*  
 we ask.PRET.PL.1 Jón.ACC to make new.ACC.PL sentence.ACC.PL  
 ‘We asked Jón to formulate new sentences.’
- (2) *Mēs lūdzām Jāni(m)<sub>i</sub> PRO<sub>i</sub> izveidot jaunas teikumas.*  
 we ask.PRET.PL.1 Jānis.DAT/ACC make new sentence.ACC.PL  
 ‘We asked Jānis to formulate new sentences.’

2.1.2. Pronominal *PRO*

- (3) *Ādā er erfītt að PRO búa til nýjar setningar.*  
 it is difficult to make new sentence.ACC.PL  
 ‘It is difficult to formulate new sentences.’
- (4) *Ir grūti PRO veidot jaunas teikumas.*  
 is difficult make new sentence.ACC.PL  
 ‘It is difficult to formulate new sentences.’

2.2. There is also a null (zero) pronominal element, which is usually referred to as “**little pro**” (Poole 2011, 234) or “**baby pro**” (Carnie 2013, 450). This element can be found in a subject position of a finite clause and has case. An example with *pro*, where it has the nominative case (optative constructions):

- (5) *pro Förum.*  
 go.PL.1  
 ‘Let’s go.’

- (6) *pro Braucam.*  
 go.PL.1  
 ‘Let’s go.’

- 2.3. The theory of **control** is concerned with the choice of antecedents of *PRO* (Chomsky 1982, 7). If no antecedent is available, the control is considered arbitrary (Růžicka 1999, 13).
- 2.4. **Binding** is a syntactic relation, where A binds B if and only if A c-commands B, and A and B are coindexed. A is the binder, B is the bindee (Carnie 2013, 157).
- 2.5. **Government** is a syntactic relation, where Node A governs node B, if A c-commands B, and there is no node G such that G is c-commanded by A, and G asymmetrically commands B (Carnie 2013, 130).
- 2.6. The **Empty Category Principle** is an extension of the notion of government. Government, or the absence of government, is involved in the distribution of null pronouns (Cowper 1992, 15, 102). This involves, on the one hand, a relation between the lexical head and its complements, and, on the other, the inflection element and its subject, also involving features such as person, gender and number (agreement) and tense (plus or minus).
3. In a broader perspective, *PRO* and *pro* are instances of implicit subject anaphors or pronouns in the deep structure (D-structure). These are said to have left *traces* in the surface structure (S-structure) (Poole 2011, 152). The D-structure of a sentence is therefore fully recoverable from the S-structure. This allows a semantic interpretation or logical form recovery, as Chomsky calls it (Chomsky 1988, 17), to be done purely on the basis of S-structure. The empty categories are not a part of morphemic inventory in syntax, because their meaning is inferred at a later stage (it is implicit), but are well part of the syntactic one.
4. In Icelandic syntactic literature, it has been argued that *PRO* is essentially the same phenomenon as *pro* (Sigurðsson 1992, 179). According to Sigurðsson (1990, 37), the *PRO/pro* distinction does not work in Icelandic, because there is evidence that *PRO* is both case-marked and governed. This argument is taken up by Carnie (2013, 452–453). He admits that with regard to verbs assigning quirky cases one can hypothesize that floated quantifiers must agree with the noun they modify in terms of case:
- (7) *Strákarnir vonast til að PRO leiðast ekki öllum í skóla.*  
 boy.PL.DEF hope.PL.3 for to bore.INF.REFL not all.DAT.PL. in school.DAT  
 ‘The boys hoped not to be bored all of them at school.’

It is apparent that the same problem arises in Latvian:

- (8) *Zēniem bija svarīgi PRO būt saprastiem.*  
 boy.DAT.PL was important be understood.PTCP.PASS.DAT.PL  
 ‘For the boys, it was important to be understood.’

This poses a problem to the Chomskian claim that *PRO* never gets the case but is of little relevance for the purposes of this article, so the distinction and use of *PRO* for subjects in non-finite clauses and *pro* in finite clauses will be maintained.

5. Later (in the early 1990s and thereafter), the GB theory was further developed in the Minimalist Program by Chomsky himself (Chomsky 1995) and others, as well as in the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993). Some proposals envisaged to eliminate *pro* as an independent theoretical construct in the null subject parameter and to revise and parametrize the extended projection principle (Camacho 2013, 6, and the sources quoted there). This paper cannot provide a detailed elaboration on this topic.
6. In Latvian syntactic literature, there is a discussion about *nullforma* (null form) as *formālas izpausmes trūkums pretstatā formāli izteiktiem paradigmas elementiem* ('absence of formal expression as opposed to formally expressed paradigmatic elements') (Skujiņa 2007, 265). In the Latvian translation (2012) of the Lithuanian syntax manual *Bendrosios sintaksės pagrindai* ('Foundations of General Syntax') by Holvoet (2009), the following terms are used: (1) for *PRO*, *virsteikuma argumenta kontrolētais nulles subjekts* 'the controlled null subject of the main clause'; (2) for little *pro*, *nulles subjekts, atbilst anaforiskam personai vietniekvārdam* 'a null subject corresponding to an anaphoric personal pronoun' (Holvūts 2012, 141). This terminology is consistent with the general idea of the generativist thought that "all *PRO* are controlled if apparently uncontrolled *PRO* actually has a hidden controller [...]" (Chomsky/Lasnik 1993, 20), or, "so-called *PRO*<sub>arb</sub> is really a subcase of controlled *PRO*" (Kayne 1991). There have also been earlier publications on infinitive constructions in Latvian, for instance, by Kārklīšs (1976) and Freimane (1985).

## 2. Infinitive constructions with pronominal null forms

In Icelandic, there are three types of infinitive constructions with pronominal null forms – referential or controlled, uncontrolled or arbitrary and expletive (Sigurðsson 1990, 35–82).

1. First, the **referential constructions** (also called anaphoric). These are sentences of the type " $X_i$  expects  $PRO_i$  to win":
- (9) *Við sögðum honum að PRO vera ekki svona ergilegur/ergilegum*  
 we tell.PRET.PL.1 he.DAT to be not so annoyed.ADJ.NOM/DAT  
 'We told him not to be so annoyed.'

Sigurðsson points out that acceptability of non-nominative agreement can sometimes depend on lexical items (Sigurðsson 1990, 46, footnote 14). While in the previous example both cases (both the nominative and dative) are considered acceptable, only the nominative is viewed as grammatical in (10):

- (10) *Við sögðum honum að PRO vera ekki svona latur.*  
 we tell.PRET.PL.1 he.DAT to be not so lazy.NOM.M  
 'We told him not to be so lazy.'

The case marking on the adjective, when it is used in an infinitive construction, depends on the structure of the phrase and the government (*Rektion*) of the verb (preceding or, in some instances, following *PRO*), as we can see from the following examples:

- (11) *Strákarnir vonast til að PRO verða aðstoðaðir.*  
 boy.PL.M.DEF hope.PL.3 for to become assisted.PRET.PTCP.PL.M  
 ‘The boys hoped that somebody would help them.’

Here *PRO* is quite clearly co-referential with the subject and would be assigned the nominative plural, as is the case with the agreeing participle. Compare a passive variant of the same phrase:

- (12) *Strákarnir vonast til að PRO verða hjálpað.*  
 boy.PL.M.DEF hope.PL.3 for to become helped.SUP  
 ‘The boys hoped that somebody would help them.’

The form *hjálpað* after the auxiliary verb is indeclinable and is viewed as supine (*sagnbót*), i.e. a nominal form, which is identical with the neuter past participle nominative and accusative form (Thráinsson 2007, 11). In Icelandic, supine is used in the passive, when a transitive verb in the corresponding active construction takes a non-accusative object (often dative, in rare cases, genitive). In (12), the verb *hjálpa* takes the dative. Therefore, in the passive, dative is conserved and a non-agreeing participle form is used (*hjálpað*). This leads to hypothesize that *PRO* in (12) receives the dative case. Another example with the dative in the passive:

- (13) active: *Hann stélur hestinum.*  
 he steal.SG.3 horse.DAT.M.DEF  
 ‘He steals the horse.’  
 passive: *Hestinum var stolið.*  
 horse DAT.M.DEF was stolen.SUP  
 ‘Somebody stole the horse.’

This dative in the passive voice can be explained by a certain functional applicative formation which moves the head of a subject or adjunct to another head position and incorporates the dative (or genitive), according to Baker’s 1988 Theory of Incorporation (Baltin & Collins 2001, 115–118). However, if there is an accusative object, it is transformed into a nominative object and an agreeing participle is used, just like in many other languages, cf. Latin, *Puer librum* <sub>ACC</sub> *legit* ‘a boy reads a book’ vs. *Liber* <sub>NOM</sub> *lectus est* ‘a book is read’:

- (14) active: *Peir seldu bókina.*  
 they.M sell.PRET.PL.3 book.ACC.F.DEF  
 ‘They sold the book.’  
 passive: *Bókin var seld.*  
 book.NOM.F.DEF was sold.PAST.PTCP.NOM.F  
 ‘The book was sold.’

As to (11)–(12), in standard present day Latvian such infinitivals would normally not be possible and a subordinate clause would be inserted. This is

because *vonast til* ‘expect, hope’ in Icelandic allows for an infinitival complement (IP), while the Latvian verb *cerēt* ‘to hope’ takes a CP and the pronoun is explicit:

- (15) *Zēni cer, ka viņiem kāds palīdzēs.*  
 boy.PL hope.3 that they.DAT.PL someone help.FUT.3  
 ‘The boys hope that somebody will help them.’

However, on a second thought, in special cases, for instance, in a religious context imbued with archaic Biblical syntax, an infinitival complement to the verb *cerēt* in Latvian is conceivable:

- (16) *Zēni cer PRO tapt atpestīti.*  
 boy.PL.M hope.3 become saved.PTCP.PASS.PL.M  
 ‘The boys hope to be saved.’

2. Second, there is **the uncontrolled** or **arbitrary PRO**. In Icelandic, the null elements mostly occur in a non-initial position but in Latvian they also occur in an initial position:

- (17) *Paļ er hollt PRO aļ synda.*  
 it is healthy to swim  
 ‘It is healthy to swim.’

- (18) *PRO Peldēt ir veselīgi.*  
 swim is healthy  
 ‘It is healthy to swim.’

An example with *PRO* in a non-initial position:

- (19) *Smagajiem tur PRO ne-izbraukt.*  
 trucks.DAT/INSTR.PL there not-get\_through.NEG-INF  
 ‘The trucks would not get through.’

This example is particularly interesting because of case ambiguity (syncretism dative/instrumental) and polarity issues. The absence of the negation particle renders the sentence ungrammatical (*\*Smagajiem tur izbraukt*) and the same happens if the adverb is negated (*\*Smagajiem ne tur izbraukt*). Baylin analyses a similar Russian example (*Gruzoviku ne proehat* ‘a truck would not pass’, Baylin 2012, 112) and concedes that examples like this one “are in fact bi-clausal, with an unexpressed *PRO* subject of the verb ‘to go through,’ while *truck* is an argument of an unexpressed higher modal.” In my view, for Latvian this reading of the agentive scope appears particularly convincing if we assign the instrumental case to the noun *smagajiem*. The meaning is then likely to be *Ar smagajiem tur [šoferiem] neizbraukt*, ‘with trucks [drivers] are unlikely to pass through’. The Theta role relations in this example are complex. The bi-clausality is another term for *secondary predication*, see below examples (31)–(32).

If we substitute *PRO* in (18) with an explicit subject in Latvian, it would receive the dative case:

- (20) *Cilvēkam/Ikvienam peldēt ir veselīgi.*  
 man/anyone.DAT swim is healthy  
 ‘It is healthy for everyone to swim.’

In infinitival impersonal phrases the adjectives linked by means of the copula receive the nominative case in Icelandic but the dative in Latvian. The masculine form is used by default in both languages. The feminine form is used only with an explicit feminine referent and, as far as Latvian is concerned, it is not even always done so.

- (21) *Það er gott/mikilvægt að PRO vera duglegur/dugleg.*  
 it is good/important to be diligent.M/F  
 ‘It is good/important to be diligent.’

In Icelandic *PRO* can be rendered explicit by inserting *maður* (as in German *man*, French *on*):

- (22) *Það er gott/mikilvægt að maður sé duglegur.*  
 it is good/important that man.M be.SBJV.SG.3 diligent.M  
 ‘It is good/important that one should be diligent.’

Here, the adjective in the neuter in Icelandic is used adverbially.

- (23) *Ir labi/svarīgi PRO būt enerģiskam/enerģiskai.*  
 is good/important be energetic.M/F.SG  
 ‘It is good/important to be energetic.’

From an interview with psychotherapist Aina Poiša (a woman):

- (24) Q: *Jūsu recepte, kā PRO kļūt laimīgam?*  
 your recipe how become happy.M  
 ‘Your recipe of how to become happy?’

A: *Man liekas, ka svarīgāk ir pieņemt un saprast to,*  
 I.DAT seem that important.COMP is accept and understand it.ACC

*ka PRO kļūt laimīgam – tas ir process, jo visu mūžu*  
 that become happy.DAT.M it is process because all life.ACC

*pro ir jāmācās gan mīlēt, gan būt laimīgam.*  
 is learn.DEB.3 both love and be happy.DAT.M

‘It seems to me that it is more important to accept and grasp the fact that becoming happy is a process because all life long one has to learn both to love and to be happy.’

### 3. Third, the **expletive pronominal construction**:

- (25) *Mēr virōist PRO vera leiðinlegt hérna.*  
 I.DAT seem.REFL.SG.3 be boring.ADJ.N here  
 ‘It seems to me that it is boring here.’

Such a construction with the infinitive is not possible in Latvian. Instead, it is frequent in Latin and a number of Romance languages (*accusativus cum infinitivo*). In Latvian, a similar or analogous construction is possible with the indeclinable present participle *-am/-ām-*. The 1948 Bible edition (a modified Ernst Glück

translation from 1689) (1. Mozus 1:4, Bihbele 1948, 5) contains the following statement:

- (26) *Un Dievs redzēja gaismu PRO labu esam.*  
 and god see.PRET.3 light.ACC good.ACC.F being.PTCP.INDECL  
 ‘And God saw light that it was good.’ (Genesis 1:4, The Holy Bible 1834, 5)

Compare the 1966 Bible edition (a more recent translation):

- (27) *Un Dievs redzēja gaismu, ka tā ir laba.*  
 and god see.PRET.3 light.ACC.F that it.F is good.F

A gerund construction similar to the one in (26) is also widely used in Slavic languages, for instance, Russian (Bailyn 2012, 114):

- (28) *Ivan nashel Sashu PRO chitaya gazetu.*  
 Ivan find.PAST.PTCP.SG.M Saša.ACC.M/F reading.GER newspaper.ACC.F  
 ‘Ivan found Sasha reading a newspaper.’

The Russian gerund and the Latvian indeclinable participle function in the same way.

Another pair of examples of the expletive pronominal construction:

- (29) *Hann virðist PRO vera hræddur.*  
 he seem.SG.3 be scared.ADJ.M  
 ‘He seems to be scared.’
- (30) *Viņš šķiet PRO (esam) izbījies.*  
 he seem.3 (be.PTCP.INDECL) scared.PAST.PTCP.REFL.SG.M  
 ‘He seems to be scared.’

In this last type of structure, the participle is frequently omitted in both languages, and the phrase thus turned into some kind of secondary predication, where one element of a given phrase is connected with two other elements of the same phrase and expresses a feature of a living being, object or phenomenon over the time (Ceplītis et al. 1989, 50):

- (31) *Viņš izslējās PRO taisns.*  
 he rise.PRET.3 straight.M  
 ‘He straightened up.’

This phrase means that someone gets up and at the same time also straightens up his posture. The secondary predication can also be seen as a small clause adjunct (Bailyn 2012, 184 et seq., for instance, *My nashli ego p'yanym/p'yanogo* ‘we found him drunk’). A similar Latvian example:

- (32) *Es atceros viņu PRO jaunu.*  
 I remember.REFL.SG.1 he/she.ACC.M/F young.ACC.M/F  
 ‘I remember him/her as a young person.’

This sentence denotes remembrance of the subject in the first person of somebody else (*viņu* ‘him/her’, ambiguous) and concomitantly qualifies the person



remembered as young. This Latvian construction (with or without the participle *esam* in it, see (30)) is very close to the Latin *accusativus cum infinitivo*:

- (33) *Vīdeo eum/eam juvenem PRO esse*  
 see.PRES.SG.1 he/she.ACC.M/F young.ADJ.ACC.M/F be  
 ‘I see him/her to be young.’

### 3. Pronominal Constructions with the Verb in Finite Form

Sigurðsson (1992, 161–162) singles out three main types of pronominal constructions with the verb in finite form that feature little *pro*. These are the impersonal (often weather) constructions, impersonal passive constructions and the extraposition construction. Thráinsson (2007, 476–482) adds five more: imperative/optative constructions, elliptical constructions, including ones pertaining to postcard, diary and SMS style, elliptical answers or remarks, stage directions and exclamations.

1. First, empty pronominal in Icelandic typically occur with the **impersonal – often weather – constructions**:

- (34) *Í gær rigndi pro mikið.*  
 yesterday rain.PRET.SG.3 much.ADJ.N  
 ‘It rained a lot yesterday.’

These constructions are, however, not restricted to weather verbs only:

- (35) *Oftr er leiðinlegt á kvöldin.*  
 often is boring in evening.ACC.PL.DEF  
 ‘Often the evenings get boring.’

Same constructions occur in Latvian:

- (36) *Vakar daudz pro lija.*  
 yesterday much rain.PRET.3  
 ‘It rained a lot yesterday.’
- (37) *Vakaros bieži pro ir garlaicīgi.*  
 evening.LOC.PL often is boring  
 ‘Often the evenings get boring.’

2. Little *pro* can be found in the **impersonal passive constructions**:

- (38) *Stundum var pro hlegið að ráðherranum.*  
 sometimes was laugh.SUP at minister.DAT.DEF.M  
 ‘Sometimes the minister was laughed at.’
- (39) *Um þetta mál er pro aldrei talað.*  
 about this matter.ACC is never spoken.SUP  
 ‘This matter is never discussed.’

Same constructions in Latvian in the passive voice:

- (40) *Bieži vien pro tika smiets par ministru.*  
 often become.PRET.3 laugh.PTCP.PASS about minister.ACC.M  
 ‘The minister was often poked fun at.’

- (41) *Par šo lietu nekad pro netiek runāts.*  
 about this.ACC matter.ACC.F never become.3 spoken.PAST.PTCP  
 ‘This matter is never discussed.’

Sigurðsson (1992, 162) notes that such constructions are extremely common in Icelandic and compares their frequency to the German construction with an active pronominal element *man*. In Latvian they are also common but relatively recent (Ķīka 1961, 173) and therefore still somehow not entirely natural.

In Latvian, it is possible to express generalized (*vispārināts*) action by using the third person verb form with the subject null form, where the lexical meaning of the predicate and the context unequivocally show that the agent can only be a human being. Functionally and semantically this usage is parallel to that of the passive voice (Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2015, 526, 1161):

- (42) *Es piezvanīšu, lai jums pro izsniedz*  
 I call.FUT.SG.1 so you.DAT.PL give.3  
*Marijas Sjuartes kāzu tērpu.*  
 Mary.GEN.F Stewart.GEN.F wedding.GEN.PL dress.ACC.M  
 ‘I will call so that you are given Mary Stewart wedding dress.’

### 3. Third, there is the **extraposition construction**:

- (43) *Ekki er pro alltaf gaman*  
 not is always pleasant.ADJ.INDECL.  
*(að læra mál).*  
 (to learn language/languages.ACC.SG/PL.N)  
 ‘It is not always pleasant (to learn a language/languages).’

Extraposition consists in omission or elimination of heavy constituents or constituents that can be inferred from the context (here – the bracketed part).

*Idem* in Latvian:

- (44) *Ne vienmēr pro ir patīkami (mācīties svešvalodas).*  
 not always is pleasant (learn.REFL foreign.language.ACC.PL)  
 ‘It is not always pleasant (to learn foreign languages).’

### 4. There is little *pro* in **imperative/optative constructions**.

#### 4.1. **Imperative** constructions.

- (45) *Farið pro þangað!*  
 go.IMPER.PL.2 there  
 ‘Go there!’

An expletive form *Farið þið þangað* is also possible and used more often (especially in the contracted form *Fariði þangað*). The non-expletive forms are limited to a formal or solemn style.

- (46) *pro Brauciet uz turieni!*  
 go.IMPER.PL.2 to there  
 ‘Go there!’

In Latvian, non-expletive construction is used much more often than the expletive one, which denotes emphatic use. An Internet search rendered only non-standard offensive language use with that construction (<http://forestmangonewild.blogspot.com>):

- (47) *Ejiet tak visi jūs uz \*\*\**  
 go.IMPER.PL.2 PART all.PL you.PL.2 to  
 ‘Why don’t you all go to...’

4.2. **Optative** constructions: see examples (5) and (6) above.

## 5. **Elliptical** constructions.

- (48) *Við vorum svangir og*  
 we were hungry.PL.M and  
 pro *keyptum okkur hamborgara.*  
 buy.PRET.PL.1 us.DAT.PL hamburger.ACC.PL.M  
 ‘We were hungry and bought hamburgers.’
- (49) *Mēs bijām noguruši un pro aizgājām uz mājām.*  
 we were tired.PL.M and go.PRET.PL.1 to home.DAT.PL.F  
 ‘We were tired and went home.’

In Icelandic, usually the first person pronoun is omitted. However, in postcard, diary and SMS style, the third person pronoun can also occasionally be omitted, resulting in grammatically ambiguous forms (the first or third person syncretism in the past tense singular):

- (50) pro *Vaknaði snemma.*  
 wake.PRET.SG.1/3 early  
 ‘I/he/she/it woke early.’

In Latvian, the form would be ambiguous only in relation to the number and gender, not the person:

- (51) *Jau ieradās.*  
 already.ADV come.PRET.SG/PL.3  
 ‘He/she/they came already.’

6. There is null subject in **elliptical answers or remarks** in both Icelandic and Latvian. Thráinsson (2007, 478) points out that those are heavily discourse conditioned, i.e. require a conversational context. They mainly occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular or, more seldom, in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural:

- (52) pro *Þekki hann ekki.*  
 know.SG.1 he.ACC.M not  
 ‘I don’t know him.’
- (53) pro *Ne-pazīstu viņu.*  
 no.NEG-know.SG.1 he/she.ACC.M/F  
 ‘I don’t know him/her.’

7. *pro* is used in **stage directions**:

(54) *pro Fer út til hægri.*  
 go.SG.3 out.ADV to right.ADV  
 ‘He/she exits stage right.’

(55) *pro Aiziet.*  
 away\_go.3  
 ‘He/she/they exit.’

8. Finally, *pro* can be found in **exclamations** that can be ambiguous morphologically, but pragmatically are always unambiguous:

(56) *pro Situr bara og drekkur bjór!*  
 sit.SG.2/3 just.ADV and drink.SG.2/3 beer.ACC.M  
 ‘You are/He/She is just sitting here and drinking beer!’

(57) *pro Sēž te un dzer alu!*  
 sit.3 here.ADV and drink.3 beer.ACC.M  
 ‘She/He is/They are sitting here and drinking beer!’

#### 4. Marginal Null-Subject Constructions

Sigurðsson (1992, 162–163; 199–201) also singles out three more types of less well known null-subject constructions. This is a miscellaneous category where less studied constructions are jumbled together. He mentions the impersonal present participle construction, the impersonal modal construction and the ergative construction.

1. There is **the impersonal present participle construction**:

(58) *Ekki er PRO hlæjandi að þessu.*  
 not is laugh.PTCP.PRES at this.DAT.N  
 ‘One should not laugh at this.’

Such necessitive construction does not exist in Latvian. However, a construction that does exist and is semantically close to the above Icelandic structure features the verbal substantive with the suffix *-šan-* that roughly corresponds to the Latin *gerundivum*:

(59) *Par šo pro nav ne-kādas smiešanās!*  
 about this not-be.3 no-some.GEN.SG.F. laughing.GEN.F  
 ‘There is no laughing about this.’

(60) *pro Carthago nobis delenda est*  
 Carthage.SG.F us.DAT.PL destroyable GER.SG.F is  
 ‘Carthage must be destroyed by us.’

2. There is **the impersonal modal construction**:

(61) *Parf pro að kaupa mjólk?*  
 need.PRET.SG.3 to buy milk.ACC.F  
 ‘Should I (we, etc.) buy some milk?’

The past tense is here used in present meaning in the Icelandic (the so called preterite-present verbs). A parallel construction in Latvian:

- (62) pro *Vajag nopirkt pienu?*  
 need.3 buy milk.ACC.M  
 ‘Should I (we, etc.) buy some milk?’

In Icelandic affirmative sentences, such constructions can have a dummy subject or non-referential expletive (pleonastic, semantically empty) *það*. In Icelandic, this overt expletive is restricted to clause-initial position – compare examples in (34) and (61):

- (63) *Það rigndi mikið í gær.*  
 it rain.PRET.SG.3 much yesterday  
 ‘It rained a lot yesterday.’
- (64) *Það þarf að kaupa mjólk.*  
 it need.PRET.SG.3 to buy milk.ACC.F  
 ‘I (we, etc.) should buy some milk.’

In standard Latvian, such sentences are impossible, because the Extended Projection Principle, as formulated by Chomsky, “all clauses must have a subject” (quoted from Poole 2011, 93–94), does not require an explicit subject in impersonal constructions. Insertion of such an expletive subject automatically renders the sentences ungrammatical:

- (65) \**Vakar tas daudz lija.*
- (66) \**Tas vajag nopirkt pienu.*

### 3. Finally, the **ergative construction**.

- (67) *Mér pro liður vel.*  
 I.DAT feel.PRES.SG.3 well.ADV  
 ‘I feel well.’
- (68) *Man pro nāk vēmiens.*  
 I.DAT come.3 vomiting.M  
 ‘I feel like throwing up.’
- (69) *Hana pro langar í köku.*  
 she.ACC long.PRES.SG.3 in cake.ACC.F  
 ‘She longs for a cake.’
- (70) *Tēvi pro velk uz kašķi.*  
 thou.ACC.SG pull.3 to squabble.ACC.M  
 ‘You feel like squabbling.’

Ergative constructions with the genitive are rare in both languages:

- (71) *Gunnars pro getur oft í förnunm sögum*  
 Gunnar.GEN mention.SG.3 often in old saga.DAT.PL.  
 ‘Gunnar is often mentioned in old sagas.’

- (72) *Viņas*                      *šeit*      *pro*   *pietrūkst.*  
       she.GEN.SG.F      here              lack.3  
       ‘She is missed here.’

The ergative case marking and Theta role distribution could be concisely explained, as follows: “The logical, underlying subject in an active transitive clause (most typically, Agent) has a Case marker morphologically different from the logical, underlying subject in an (active) intransitive clause, which has the same Case marker as the logical, underlying object (typically, Patient or Theme) in an active transitive clause.” (Baltin & Collins 2001, 347–348). So, in all these examples the default agent marking (the nominative) is replaced by other cases.

## 5. Conclusion

Both languages – Latvian and Icelandic – predictably share similarities in relation to empty categories (null subject forms), insofar as many languages show similar abstract patterns (in the so-called D-structure) but there is bound to be more variation on the surface level. *PRO* and *pro* are relevant to universal grammar. The main surface level differences appear in the phrase structure (Icelandic is V2 language but Latvian is not, thus the word order in the latter is freer) and the case governance, for instance, in infinitival impersonal phrases with adjectives linked by means of the copula typically take the nominative case in Icelandic but the dative in Latvian. Both Icelandic and Latvian *PRO* pose a problem to the Chomskian claim that *PRO* is always ungoverned (i. e., caseless). There is a striking similarity in the ergative constructions involving little *pro*. There is no expletive pronoun (dummy subject) in Latvian. There is less variation as to the placement of empty pronominals in Icelandic than there is in Latvian. There is no construction *accusativus cum infinitivo* in Latvian but there is an equivalent participial construction or, in some cases, a secondary predication construction with a omitted participle of the type *es atceros viņu jaunu*, ‘I remember him/her as young person’, or a complementizer phrase (CP) is used instead of the infinitival complement (IP). In some instances, *PRO* raises issues involving ambiguity of the agentive scope. In some examples, verb and pronoun form syncretism in *PRO/pro* constructions gives rise to ambiguity in terms of person, number and gender. Formal approaches do not help explain the differences with regard to the possibilities of having overt and non-overt expletive elements in sentence-initial and non-initial position, also, some instances of adjectival case agreement remain perplexing and are likely to be based on semantic rather than formal criteria.

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## Abbreviations

ACC	accusative case	N	neuter
ADJ	adjective	NEG	negation, negative
ADV	adverb	NOM	nominative
<sup>arb</sup>	arbitrary	PART	particle
CP	complementizer phrase	PASS	passive
COMP	comparative	PRET	past tense
D-structure	deep structure	PTCP	participle
DAT	dative	PL	plural
DEB	debitive	PRS	present tense
DEF	definite	<i>pro</i>	null subject of finite phrase (small <i>pro</i> )
<i>e</i>	empty	<i>PRO</i>	null subject of non-finite phrase (big <i>PRO</i> )
F	feminine	PRON	pronoun
FUT	future tense	REFL	reflexive
DM	distributed morphology	S-structure	surface structure
DP	determiner phrase	SG	singular
GEN	genitive	SBJV	subjunctive
GER	gerund	SUP	supine
GB	government and binding	TP	tense phrase
IMPER	imperative	/	or
INDECL	indeclinable	1	first person agreement
INF	infinitive	2	second person agreement
INSTR	instrumental	3	third person agreement
IP	infinitival complement		
M	masculine		

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## Kopsavilkums

Formāli nerealizēti komponenti ir abstrakti dziļās teikuma struktūras elementi. Rakstā iztirzātas pronominālās subjekta nullformas (lielais *PRO* un mazais *pro*) ģeneratīvās gramatikas tvērumā. *PRO* jeb virsteikuma argumenta kontrolētais nulles subjekts ir elements, kas iedomājams pie nefinītām verba formām. Mazais *pro* ir implicīts elements,



kurš atbilst anaforiskam personas vietniekvārdam, kas lietots ar finītām verba formām un atrodas pārvaldītā locījuma pozīcijā. Minētās formas saistītas ar valodas līdzekļu ekonomijas principu un universālo gramatiku un ir atrodamas visās valodās. Salīdzinājumam izraudzītas divas indoeiropiešu valodas – ģermāņu (islandiešu) un baltu (latviešu). Rakstā aplūkota iepriekš minēto elementu, cik iespējams, līdzīgā klātbūtne abās valodās, kas ļauj pieņemt, ka starp tām ir zināma līdzība virsējās struktūras ziņā. Tomēr par spīti kopīgajām iezīmēm ir arī būtiskas atšķirības, it īpaši saistībā ar īpašības vārdu pārvaldījumu infinitīva konstrukcijās, semantiski tukšā teikuma priekšmeta lietojumu un eksplicītu vietniekvārda lietojumu pavēles izteiksmē. Rakstā galvenā uzmanība pievērsta konstrukcijām, kurās ir liels *PRO* un mazais *pro*, to veidiem un klasifikācijai. Pie infinitīva/divdabja konstrukcijām ar *PRO* pieskaitāma 1) referenciālā jeb kontrolētā, 2) nekontrolētā jeb patvaļīgā un 3) ekspletīvā konstrukcija. Ar finītām formām ir astoņas mazā *pro* konstrukcijas: 1) bezpersonas konstrukcija, 2) bezpersonas un ciešāmās kārtas konstrukcija, 3) ekstrapozīcijas konstrukcija, 4) pavēles izteiksme/optatīvs, 5) izlaidumkonstrukcija, 6) kontekstuāli reducētas atbildes, parcelāti, 7) skatuves remarkas un 8) eksklamatīvi (izsauksmes) teikumi. Turklāt ir arī marginālākas konstrukcijas, piemēram, 1) bezpersoniska tagadnes divdabja konstrukcija islandiešu valodā, kurai nav tiešas atbildes latviešu valodā, 2) bezpersoniska modāla konstrukcija un 3) ergatīvā konstrukcija.