

The optionality of movement and EPP in Dholuo

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Abstract This paper argues that the relatively free position of subjects in Dholuo (Nilo-Saharan; Kenya, Tanzania) provides remarkably clear evidence that the specifier positions of preverbal functional projections in the language need not be filled. In this sense, the language provides direct evidence for a strong parameterization of the classic EPP (or equivalent conditions), one that allows the existence of languages where *no* DP need occupy the specifier position of any verbal functional projection at any level of representation. Furthermore, it is shown that the optionality seen in subject raising extends to other movement types of the language, including wh-movement. This suggests a picture where the presence of an ‘EPP-feature’ Chomsky (2000) on a given functional head is systematically optional in the language. Finally, it is argued that the existence of a limited set of environments where subject raising is obligatory provides support for the theory of Agreement locality put forth by Bobaljik and Wurmbrand (2005).

Keywords EPP · Dholuo · Post-verbal subjects · Subject positions · Optional wh-movement · Agreement locality

1 Introduction: the cross-linguistic generality of the EPP

A well-known feature of English and many other languages is the requirement that every finite clause contain an overtly expressed, preverbal subject, even in clauses where the presence of such a subject is not (clearly) semantically motivated.

- (1) a. *(It) is believed that certain grammatical principles are universal.
- b. *(It) is raining.
- c. *(There) is a dog in the yard.

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