

Some Remarks on Controller Assignment

Noriko Ue

I. Introduction

Control is an interesting but complex issue and it has been a focus of much debate in the literature. There are two important issues to contend with in the grammar of control. One of them concerns the distribution of the controllee: What elements / positions can be controlled? The other concerns the determination of the controller: What elements / positions can control? With respect to the first, there is basic agreement that it is a syntactic matter rather than a semantic matter. Since the controllee always occurs in the subject of a non-finite clause, it must be identified in syntactic terms. As regards to the second issue, however, it has raised lively debates within various grammatical frameworks. It was Rosenbaum (1967) who first attempted to predict controller choice by purely syntactic factors and suggested a locality principle, the Minimal Distance Principle (hereafter MDP). Jackendoff (1972) was the one who first suggested that control is essentially a semantic phenomenon and that controller assignment is determined by thematic roles. Is understanding of the unexpressed subject of the non-finite clause based on a syntactic force or a semantic force? The question has been a major research question and has been at the center of heated debates. We will take up some of Culicover and Jackendoff's (2003, 2005, hereafter C&J) arguments against the syntactic account of control.

In general typology, there are two types of control: obligatory control and non-obligatory control. Obligatory control, which C&J call unique control, is the most restricted form of control in which only one of possible targets in the matrix clause can serve as controller whereas

in non-obligatory control there is a range of possible controllers including cross-discourse controllers. In this paper, we will confine our attention to obligatory control focusing on infinitival complements in object position. Control occurs not only in infinitival complements but also in gerundive complements, adjunct clauses and nominals. We eliminate the latter three syntactic configurations in the present discussion for the following reasons: (i) The matter of controller determination is less clear with gerundive complements. (ii) The determination of controller in adjunct clauses is a syntactic property. If the adjunct clause lacks an overt subject, the surface subject of the matrix clause is always the controller. (iii) A deeper understanding of similarities and differences between verbs and nouns is needed for a fully developed theory of controller assignment within nominals.

The aim of this paper is to reexamine three control verb classes presented by C&J to support their semantic approach and to see how much the syntactic and semantic properties are interrelated in the account of controller identification.

II. Arguments against a syntactic account

To start with, following the definitions given by C&J (2005: 424), we assume that obligatory control has the following properties.

- (1) a. There is a unique controller.
- b. There can be no split antecedents.
- c. There can be no generic control.
- d. There can be no long-distance control.
- e. There can be no speaker/hearer control.

In the obligatory control structure, the understood subject of the infinitival complement of intransitive verbs is controlled by the matrix subject and that of transitive verbs is controlled either by the matrix subject or matrix (indirect) object depending on the properties of the matrix verb.

C&J reiterate the fundamental importance of semantics in the con-

trol problem and try to articulate some of the semantic factors by explaining control directly from the lexical decomposition of the matrix verb. In this section, we take up three classes of control verbs which they say a syntactic principle like the MDP fails to account for.

The first problem concerns *promise* class. The *promise* class was a well-known exception to Rosenbaum's MDP. By virtue of being transitive verbs, such verbs are expected to manifest object control given the MDP. The *promise* class, however, requires subject control; hence, it poses a serious problem for the syntactic approach. Since *persuade* and *promise* have parallel syntactic constituency, C&J argue that there is no overt syntactic basis for the difference in control. They claim that the difference between *persuade* and *promise* has to do with the meanings of these predicates, not syntax.

Another sort of argument put forward against the syntactic account of control concerns *shout* class. The verbs of this class express communication of order or advice, and control generally goes with the addressee which is expressed as the object of *to* as exemplified in (2). (The examples are from C&J 2005.)

(2) John shouted to Sally to take care of herself / *himself.

However, when the addressee is not expressed as in (3), the MDP account makes the wrong prediction: it predicts that control should shift to the subject. On the contrary, control is still assigned to the addressee.

(3) John just shouted to look out for him / *himself.

C&J give another class of communication verbs to show the failure of the syntactic account under the MDP and the superiority of their semantic account. It is *ask* class. The complements of the verbs of this class express the content of a request, and, like *shout* class, these verbs behave as object control verbs.

(4) John asked Sally to take care of herself / *himself.

When the addressee is implicit, however, they behave differently from *shout* class as is shown in (5).

(5) John asked to take care of himself / *herself.

In (5) control shifts from the object to the subject. We might argue that

this is exactly what the MDP predicts, hence support for the syntactically based account of control. C&J's argument, however, is that the contrast between *shout* class and *ask* class in the absence of the addressee discredits the syntactic approach. In order to solve the controller assignment problem with the *shout* class, we might posit a null addressee in syntax so that it could control the infinitive structurally. Then, by parallelism, the *ask* class should also have a null addressee and it should control the infinitive. But the contrast between (3) and (5) shows that this is the wrong solution. C&J claim that this is another case where syntactic structure cannot determine control.

In the next section, we reexamine the syntactic behaviors and semantic properties of these three verb classes to see if it might be possible to derive their control behaviors from them.

III. Three verb classes

Let us start with the *promise* class. The *promise* class includes *promise* and a handful of semantically related verbs such as *vow*, *undertake*, *offer*, *pledge*, *commit*, etc. In the discussions given in the literature, the “marked” control behavior of the *promise* class is mainly based on the specific verb *promise*, which can appear in the superficially identical structural configuration as the *persuade* class. As Larson (1991) fully discusses, the complement of *promise* shows behavior essentially the inverse of *persuade*. However, we should note that the verb *promise* is more marked than any other verb in the class. *Promise* is special and it diverges from other verbs in some important respects. It permits two NP objects, which can appear in either an oblique dative construction or a double object construction as in (6). Furthermore, it takes NP, not PP, along with the infinitival complement as in (7a). *Promise* is the only verb in the class that can take the V-NP-Infinitive construction. It is also to be noted that in some dialects of English (7a) is considered ungrammatical; it is only interpreted with the complement clause subject coreferential with main clause object (Dixon 2005: 153).

- (6) a. He promised a new computer to his grandson.
b. He promised his grandson a new computer.
- (7) a. He promised them to transfer Mary.
b. *He offered his mother to clean the room.
c. He offered to his mother to clean the room.

With the special status of *promise* shown, we now turn to the characterization of *promise* class.

Look at the following sentences:

- (8) a. He pledged not to cheat again.
b. She vowed never to do such a thing again.
c. He undertook to finish the job by Monday.
- (9) a. He pledged that he would not cheat again.
b. She vowed that she would never do such a thing again.
c. He undertook that he would finish the job by Monday.
- (10) a. They are not requested to pledge support for its aims. (BNC)
b. They vowed eternal friendship. (OALD7)
c. I will undertake this job.
- (11) a. ? He pledged to his teacher not to cheat again.
b. ? She vowed to her mother never to do such a thing again.
c. ?? He undertook to his boss to finish the job by Monday.
- (12) a. ? He pledged to his teacher that he would not cheat again.
b. ? She vowed to her mother that she would never do such a thing again.
c. ?? He undertook to his boss that he would finish the job by Monday.
- (13) a. *He pledged to his teacher.
b. *She vowed to her mother.
c. *He undertook to his boss.

(8), (9) and (10) show that the *promise*-class verbs are basically transitive, rather than ditransitive as Larson (1991) assumes. The difference in acceptability between (8) and (11) and between (9) and (12) and the contrast between (10) and (13) show that the dative *to*-phrase is omissible or normally not expressed.

Semantically, the *promise* class expresses commitment. Commitment must involve two semantic roles: an individual who takes responsibility to do something and the action that the individual commits to performing. The core meaning of these verbs, therefore, is to say that you will willingly / definitely / formally / sincerely do (or not do) something. What is interesting about the verbs of this class is that they can be used as performative verbs. Being performative verbs, they naturally imply the presence of the individual to whom the commitment is made. Thus, the addressee argument can be optionally expressed overtly. PP phrase, if expressed, follows the matrix verb because the object clausal complement is postposed according to the end-focus or end-weight requirement.

Taking these facts into consideration, we would like to suggest that *promise*-class verbs subcategorize for infinitival complement and PP complement and the Projection Principle requires that the message argument be structurally represented but not necessarily the addressee argument. Thus if we assume that the syntactic argument ordering of the *promise*-class verbs is V-infinitival clause-(pp), its subject control behavior can be explained.

Next, we turn to C&J's argument about the *shout* class that the absence of the addressee argument does not affect the controller choice contrary to the MDP's prediction and that the solution by postulating an implicit PP object creates a serious problem for the control shift in the *ask*-class verbs. The verb class in question includes such verbs as *shout, yell, whisper, whine, shriek, hoot*, etc., and these verbs express communication of an order or advice by speech. I argue that there is motivation for positing a phonetically null PP in syntax for this verb class even when no overt addressee is expressed.

Strictly speaking, these verbs should be called manner-of-speaking verbs as suggested by Zwicky (1971). The meaning of these verbs appears to have two parts. The first component of their meaning describes physical characteristics of the speech act, namely, it refers to manner of vocal production. The second component refers to intended acts of communication. Notice that when they occur intransitively without any mention

of object and *to*-phrase as in (14), they only mean that the man made a noise of some kind, not that the man made an attempt to convey information.

(14) The man shouted / yelled / shrieked / whined / hooted.

The manner-of-speaking verbs are interpreted communicatively if there is a *to*-phrase along with a clausal complement. This is confirmed by the examples given in Zwicky (1971: 226).

(15) The neighbors howled / moaned / wailed "Futz."

(16) ?She howled ("Futz") to me, but she wasn't saying anything to me.

He says that the manner-of-speaking verb may be interpreted non-communicatively in (15) but the verb is interpreted communicatively if there is an indirect object, no matter what the nature of the direct object. Thus (16) seems contradictory.

On the basis of these facts, we can assume that the sentences in (17b) contain a null PP.

(17) a. Ann shouted / yelled / shrieked / whined / hooted to Bob to be quiet.

b. Ann shouted / yelled / shrieked / whined / hooted [(PP)] to be quiet.

(18) Ann shouted / yelled / shrieked / whined / hooted at Bob.

When the *shout*-class verbs are used with the communicative readings, they are assumed to subcategorize obligatorily for the infinitival complement and PP, which is either explicitly or implicitly expressed. The existence of such sentences as in (18), which is in sharp contrast with the ungrammaticality of (13), suggests that the syntactic argument ordering of the *shout*-class verbs is V-PP-infinitival clause. With a null PP posited, non-shift of control is accounted for.

The third problem to be reexamined concerns control in the *ask* class. The *ask* class includes such verbs as *ask*, *beg*, *request*, *plead*, *pray*, etc., and their complements express comment of a request. The behavior of this verb class contrasts with the behavior of the *shout* class in that control shifts from the object to the subject.

- (19) a. I asked / begged / requested / pleaded with / prayed to him to see the manager tomorrow.
 b. I asked / begged / requested / pleaded / prayed to see the manager tomorrow.

When we consider the control shift in (19b) independently of the *shout* class, the *ask* class appears to comply with the MDP straightforwardly. In order to understand better the difference in control behavior between the two classes, we reexamine the syntactic and semantic properties of the *ask* class and then suggest that these verbs have cross-classifications.

Semantically, the act of requesting means the act of telling somebody that you would like him to do something. Thus the *ask* verbs take the requestee and the content of the request expressed by the infinitival clause, as exemplified in (19a). In this case, control goes with the object in accordance with the MDP. The control shift in (19b), we argue, has to do with a ‘wanting’ sense included in the basic meaning of requesting. When you ask somebody for something, you do so because you want or need it very much. When *ask*-class verbs are used in the sense ‘want,’ the syntactic consequence of this meaning shift is that these verbs can occur in the construction (19b), which is normally available to *want* class. C&J propose to explain an unusual shift of control in *ask* class by introducing the coercion mechanism with ‘... allow / enable X ...’ in the semantic structure of this verb class (C&J 2005: 455). We suggest, instead, that the *ask*-class verbs function in two ways: *ask* in the sense ‘request’ and *ask* in the sense ‘want.’ This semantic property makes it possible for these verbs to occur with two constructions.

The proposed cross-membership of *ask*-class verbs is supported by the following facts:

- (20) a. She asked / begged / requested / pleaded with John to tell the truth.
 b. *She asked / begged / requested / pleaded with John that he should tell the truth.
 c. She asked / begged / requested / pleaded that John should tell the truth.

- d. She asked / begged / requested / pleaded for John to tell the truth.
- e. She asked / begged / requested / pleaded to do it.
- f. She asked / begged / requested / pleaded that she be told the truth.
- g. She asked [to be here] and [for Bill to be there].

(Koster & May 1982)

- h. She asked for the fish to be deep-frozen. (Palmer 1987)

She asked for her article not to be published.

*She asked the fish to be deep-frozen.

*She asked her article not to be published.

(20a) and (20d) show that the *ask*-class verbs can occur with either *to*-infinitive or *for-to*-infinitive. However, when they have a finite *that*-clause, they cannot have their indirect objects expressed as the ungrammaticality of (20b) shows. This means that the construction (20c) is related to the construction (20d), which is the construction available to *want* class. The interpretation of (20c) is also (20d), not (20a). The construction (20a) has a deontic reading where a request is made to someone to do something while the construction (20d) has an epistemic reading where someone wants the situation denoted by the clause to occur. These two meanings accord with the two possible constructions. Paraphrasability with *that*-complement, meaning difference, slight though it may be, and the existence of two constructions (20a) and (20d) lend support to the treatment of the *ask*-class verbs as being simultaneously members of both the *request* class and *want* class. Coordination in (20g) and the availability and unavailability of inanimate NPs in (20h) confirm the ambiguous status of the *ask*-class verbs. *Ask* in the sense 'request' subcategorizes for NP / PP and the infinitival clause, which is structurally represented as V-NP / PP-*to* infinitival clause; *ask* in the sense 'want' subcategorizes for the infinitival clause, which is structurally represented as V-(*for*) *to* infinitival clause with or without the complementizer *for*. Given this assumption, the object control and subject control properties of the *ask* class follow directly from its status as a double-

membership verb.

IV. Conclusion

In this paper, we have concentrated on the arguments offered by C&J concerning three verb classes: *promise* class, *shout* class and *ask* class, and we have examined their arguments against the syntactic treatment of controller determination. We agree with C&J that the unique control is correlated with the semantic type of the verbs; verbs of a certain semantic type take subject control while those of a different semantic type take object control. We have suggested, however, that this correlation can be explained to some extent in terms of syntactic argument orders that verb classes have. This paper dealt with only a small part of controller assignment, and for an adequate account of controller assignment there is no doubt that syntactic, semantic and pragmatic considerations are called for.

References

- Culicover, Peter W. and Jay Jackendoff (2005) *Simpler Syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, William D. and Stanley Dubinsky (2004) *The Grammar of Raising and Control*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Delderck, Renaat (1991) *A Comprehensive Descriptive Grammar of English*. Tokyo: Kaitakusha.
- Dixon, R.M.W. (2005) *A Semantic Approach to English Grammar*, Second Edition. London: Longman.
- Jackendoff, Ray S. (1972) *Semantic Interpretation in Generative Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jackendoff, Ray S. and Peter Culicover (2003) "The Semantic Basis of Control," *Language* 79, 517-56.
- Koster, Robert and Jan May (1982) "On the Constituency of Infinitives," *Language* 58, 116-43.
- Landau, Idan (2000) *Elements of Control*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Larson, Richard K. (1991) "Promise and the Theory of Control," *Linguistic Inquiry* 22, 103-39.
- Parlmer, F. R. (1987) *The English Verb*, Second Edition. London: Longman.

Rosenbaum, Peter S. (1967) *The Grammar of English Predicate Complement Constructions*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sag, Ivan A. and Carl Pollard (1991) "An Integrated Theory of Complement Control," *Language* 67, 63-113.

Zwicky, Arnold M. (1971) "In a Manner of Speaking," *Linguistic Inquiry* 2, 223-32.

BNC: The British National Corpus

OALD⁷: Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th Edition

キーワード obligatory control controller assignment verb classes