Chapter 14

Rethinking implicit control

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This paper discusses Visser's generalization effects in light of the question whether control involves a direct relation between the embedded PRO subject and a matrix controller, or an indirect relation mediated by a functional head in the matrix clause. Based on certain case restrictions and effects of additional *by*-phrases, it is suggested that both types of licensing may be necessary.

Approaches to control which assume an embedded PRO subject differ regarding the relation PRO has with the argument supplying the interpretation. The traditional view is that PRO is licensed *directly* by a matrix DP via some form of binding. More recent approaches postulate a mediated form of binding: PRO is only *indirectly* connected to the actual controller in that it is identified/bound by a functional head of the matrix clause (e.g., T or v) which itself is licensed by the controller. In this squib, I suggest based on data involving implicit control that both forms of identification of PRO exist.

In van Urk (2013), evidence for a mediated approach to control is provided via a novel observation regarding *Visser's generalization* effects in languages that have been assumed to not show such effects. As shown in (1), Dutch and German allow implicit matrix agents of verbs like *promise* to control PRO. The interpretation of these sentences is such that the person promising is also the person initiating the embedded event.

(1)   IMPLICIT.AGENT DP.DAT V [$_{INF}$ PRO $_{...}$]

    a. Dutch (van Urk 2013: 171, (8))
        Er   werd mij beloofd / aangeboden om   me op de hoogte te
        there was I.DAT promised offered   COMP me on the height to
        houden.
        keep.INF
        'It was promised/offered to me to keep me informed.'

    b. German (van Urk 2013: 171, (9a))
        Mir   wurde versprochen, mir   noch heute den Link für das Update
        I.DAT was   promised   I.DAT still today the link for the update
        zu schicken.
        to send
        'It was promised to me to send me the link for the update today.'

Such implicit control in ditransitive matrix contexts is restricted, however, to predicates like *promise* in (1) that combine with a dative argument (in addition to the infinitive). Implicit control is impossible when the matrix predicate combines with a structurally case marked object realized as accusative in the active and nominative in the passive. This is shown in (2) for Dutch and (3) for German. The (a) examples illustrate that in active statements, subject control is possible in appropriate contexts with these predicates. The same interpretations are lost, i.e., implicit control is impossible, when the matrix predicate is passivized as in the (b) examples.

(2)   *IMPLICIT.AGENT DP.ACC → NOM V [$_{INF}$ PRO $_{...}$]

    a. Dutch (P. Fenger, p.c.)
        De kinderen hebben de leraren   overtuigd om   ze   te mogen
        the children have   the teachers$_L$ convinced COMP them$_L$ to may
        kietelen.
        tickle
        'The children convinced the teachers to be allowed to tickle them.'
        (PRO=children ✓)
        'The children convinced the teachers that they (the children) would be allowed to tickle them (the teachers).'

    b. Dutch (van Urk 2013: 171, (10b))
        *De leraren   werden overtuigd om   ze   te mogen kietelen.
        the teachers$_L$ were   convinced COMP them$_L$ to may   tickle
        Lit. 'The teachers were convinced to be allowed to tickle them.'
        'The teachers were convinced that they/someone would be allowed to tickle them (the teachers).'

(3)   *IMPLICIT.AGENT DP.ACC → NOM V [$_{INF}$ PRO ...]

    a. German (personal knowledge)
        Die Kinder   haben den   Lehrer   gebeten, ihn   kitzeln zu dürfen.
        the children have   the.ACC teacher$_L$ begged   him$_L$ tickle   to may
        'The children begged the teacher to be allowed to tickle him.'
        (PRO=children ✓)
        'The children begged the teacher that they (the children) would be
        allowed to tickle him.'

    b. German (van Urk 2013: 171, (7b))
        *Der   Lehrer   wurde gebeten, ihn   kitzeln zu dürfen.
        the.NOM teacher$_L$ was   begged   him$_L$ tickle   to may
        Lit. 'The teacher was begged to be allowed to tickle him.'

Given that implicit control is, in principle, possible in these languages, a direct
control approach faces the question of how to distinguish between (1) and (2)/(3)
if implicit control is established as a direct dependency between an implicit ar-
gument (e.g., *pro*) and PRO. On the other hand, if control is mediated by matrix
T, the difference can be implemented since, as suggested in van Urk's *revised
Visser's generalization* in (4), a difference arises in whether T agrees, (2)/(3), or
does not agree, (1), with a matrix argument not connected to the control depen-
dency.

(4)   *Revised Visser's generalization* (van Urk 2013: 172, (12))
    Obligatory control by an implicit subject is impossible if an overt DP
    agrees with T.

A possible account of (4) (this is a modified version of van Urk's suggestion)
is illustrated in Figure 14.1. I assume that implicit passive arguments are syntacti-
cally represented as weak deficient pronouns, and, more specifically, as φ-feature
bundles without a D-layer (see among many others Cardinaletti & Starke 1999;
Déchaine & Wiltschko 2002; Landau 2010; Roberts 2010b,a). I leave open here
whether these φ-bundles are projected as independent arguments or as part of *v*
(see Legate 2012; 2014 for the latter). Due to the lack of D-layer, which is required
to receive a referential interpretation, implicit passive arguments are not able to
control (or bind) on their own. Instead, following the works in Biberauer et al.
(2010), I assume that weak pronouns can acquire referential properties or ground-
ing through an Agree dependency with T, for instance, via a D-feature in T as in-
dicated in Figure 14.1, or via referential anchoring to the speech context through
the dependency with T.[1] In other words, although the implicit subject lacks a D-

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[1] The latter option may be preferred, since the languages under consideration here (German and
Dutch) are not null-subject languages for which the D-feature in T has been proposed in the
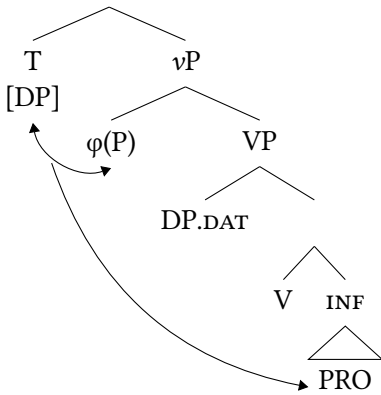works cited in the text.

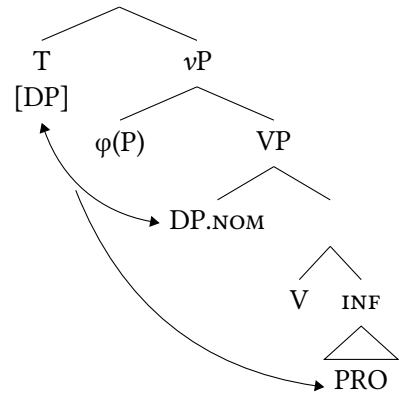Figure 14.1: Implicit control across a dative   Figure 14.2: Failure of implicit control

layer and can thus not refer on its own, referential properties can be transmitted from T or C through the Agree relation with T. After the features of the implicit subject are strengthened by T (i.e., they acquire a D-property through T), either of these elements can control PRO, depending on one's ultimate control mechanism. Thus, similar to agreement-based approaches to control as suggested in Borer (1989) and developed in Landau (2000 et seq.), Agree with T is essential for an implicit argument to control PRO.

The failure of implicit control in (2) and (3) is illustrated in Figure 14.2. Since the matrix argument in these constructions is not a lexical dative DP but a structurally Case marked DP, it has to Agree with T in passive contexts. This relation with T, I suggest, then precludes any further dependency between T and another argument. In other words, in Figure 14.2 T cannot enter an additional Agree relation with the implicit subject since this would lead to referential identity between the nominative argument and the implicit subject (i.e., a non-existing reflexive interpretation – 'the teachers begged/convinced themselves' in (2)/(3)). Similarly, T cannot Agree with the implicit subject first since this would either leave the object without Case or create two conflicting referential dependencies. As a result, implicit control is impossible and the only control relation that can be established in these contexts is control by the nominative argument (which is in general possible in passive contexts such as (2)/(3); in the specific examples above, it would be excluded due to the resulting binding violation between PRO and the embedded pronouns).

In both Dutch and German, the difference in the availability of implicit control between (1) and (2)/(3) disappears when an overt *by*-phrase corresponding to

the implicit agent is present. As shown in (5) and (6), the interpretation that is impossible in (2) and (3) becomes available when PRO can be understood to be controlled by the *by*-phrase.

(5) a. Dutch (P. Fenger, p.c.)

De leraren   werden door de kinderen overtuigd ze   te mogen
the teachers$_L$ were   by   the children convinced them$_L$ to may

kietelen.
tickle

'The teachers were convinced by the children that they (the children) would be allowed to tickle them (the teachers).'

b. German

Der   Lehrer   wurde von den Kindern gebeten, ihn   kitzeln zu
the.NOM teacher$_L$ was   by   the children begged   him$_L$ tickle   to

dürfen.
may

Lit. 'The teacher was begged to be allowed to tickle him.'

(6) a. Dutch (P. Fenger, p.c.)

De leraar   werd door de kinderen gesmeekt niet weer hun best te
the teacher was   by   the children begged   not again their best to

hoeven doen.
have   do

'The teacher was begged by the children that they wouldn't have to do their best again.'

b. German

Der   Lehrer wurde von den Kindern angefleht, nicht wieder
the.NOM teacher was   by   the children beseeched not   again

ihr   Bestes geben zu müssen.
their best   give   to must

'The teacher was beseeched by the kids that they wouldn't have to give their best again.'

There are two ways control by *by*-phrase agents could be achieved—directly via the DP within the *by*-phrase or mediated by an implicit Agent (which I assume is present in passive independently of whether there is a *by*-phrase agent or not). The first option, direct licensing by the *by*-phrase DP, is given in Figure 14.3a. The c-command relation could be established by covert movement of the DP outside the *by*-PP, by assuming that the *by*-PP is transparent for c-command (e.g., by treating the *by*-PP as a DP in syntax and the preposition as a pure PF

element which is inserted as a last resort to license the DP), or by a strict left-to-right branching structure for PPs as in Pesetsky (1995). The second option in Figure 14.3b is for the *by*-phrase DP to anchor the deficient implicit argument referentially (e.g., via binding), which would then make the implicit subject strong enough to license PRO.
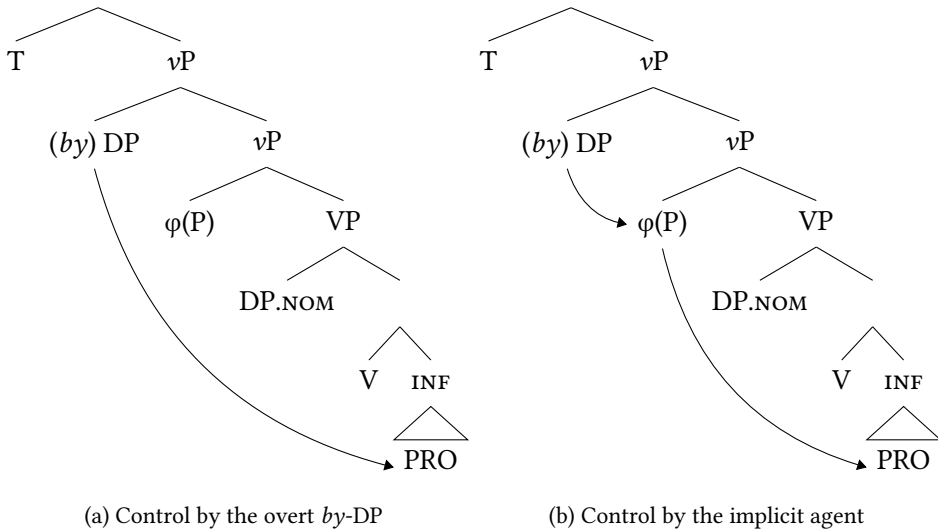

(a) Control by the overt *by*-DP   (b) Control by the implicit agent

Figure 14.3: *by* AGENT DP.ACC → NOM V [$_{INF}$ PRO ...]

Importantly, both options in Figure 14.3 involve *direct control* which cannot be mediated by T. In the examples in (5) and (6), T is still engaged in a Case and agreement dependency with the overt DP argument of the matrix clause, which is referentially independent from the implicit/*by*-phrase Agent and PRO. Thus, T cannot be involved in the control relation in these cases, and control is established directly by the antecedent.

At this point, one may wonder whether it is possible to have a unified mechanism for control based on direct licensing. Taking the option in Figure 14.3b, one could imagine that it is always the implicit passive subject that licenses PRO directly, however, it can only do so when supplied with a D-property through Agree with T or association with a *by*-DP. While this is attractive for its uniformity, the data below may suggest that there is still a difference between licensing of PRO mediated by T vs. the *by*-phrase Agent. As shown in (7), in both Dutch and German implicitly controlled PRO in a *promise* context (i.e., a context where the implicit argument can be associated with T) cannot bind lower possessive

pronouns, as would be required in the *to do one's best* construction.[2] In (8a) it is shown that even when the implicit Agent is contextually very salient, the interpretation in which the possessive pronoun (and PRO) refer to the implicit matrix subject is impossible. In contrast, if the matrix clause includes a *by*-phrase Agent, the implicit control and binding relation becomes possible again.

(7) a. Dutch (P. Fenger, p.c.)
    *Mij werd beloofd (om) zijn / haar / hun best to doen.
    I.DAT was promised COMP his her   their best to do
    lit. 'I was promised to do his/her/their best.'
    'I was promised that they would do their best.'

   b. German
    *Mir wurde versprochen / angeboten, sein / ihr   Bestes zu
    I.DAT was promised   offered   his her=their best to
    geben.
    give
    intended: 'I was promised/offered that they would do their best.'

(8) John just returned from a meeting with his boss. What happened?

   a. German
    Dem   Hans wurde angeboten / versprochen, seine Beleidigung
    the.DAT John was offered   promised   his insult
    zurückzunehmen / nächstes Mal sein Bestes zu geben.
    away.to.take   next   time his best   to give
    possible: 'John was offered/promised to retract his (=John's) insult/do
    his (John's) best next time.'
    *intended: 'John was offered/promised that he (the boss) would
    retract his (the boss') insult/do his (the boss') best next time.'

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[2]The same restriction is also found in simple passive statements like (i). As in the case of control discussed below in the text, bound possessors become possible when an overt *by*-phrase Agent is added as in (ii). For a comparison of binding in the *to do one's best* construction with other binding relations (apparently) established by an implicit passive argument, see Wurmbrand (2016).

(i) German
    Wie haben sich die Kinder heute verhalten?

   a. * Es wurde sein / ihr   Bestes gegeben.
      it was his   their best   given.
      intended: 'They did their best.'

   b. Es wurde von jedem   sein Bestes gegeben.
      it was by everyone his best   given
      'Everyone did their best.', literally 'The best was given by everyone.'

b.   German

Dem   Hans wurde von seinem Chef angeboten / versprochen, seine
the.DAT John was   by   his   boss offered   promised   his
Beleidigung zurückzunehmen / nächstes Mal sein Bestes zu geben.
insult   away.to.take   next   time his best   to give
'John was offered/promised that he (the boss) would retract his (the
boss') insult/do his (the boss') best next time.'

One way to derive this difference is to differentiate between direct control by
a referential DP vs. control by a non-referential argument which is (merely) an-
chored to the context via T. This then allows us to formulate the following gen-
eralizations:

(9)   a.   Implicit passive arguments cannot control on their own.

b.   Implicit passive arguments can control when anchored to the context
via an Agree dependency with T, but such control does not transmit
referential properties.

c.   Overt DPs can control and transmit referential properties.

The above thus points to a hybrid approach – control is established either as
a direct (syntactic and semantic) binding relation between a referential DP and
PRO, or a non-referential φ-feature dependency between a weak implicit subject
pronoun (or subject features on v) and PRO, which is only possible when the
subject is anchored to the context via T.[3]

In conclusion, the data presented in this squib support the view of deficient
pronouns as φ-bundles, the relevance of T in referentially licensing weak subject
pronouns, and the involvement of T in certain cases of control. More specifically
regarding control, the least it seems we can conclude from the data presented
here is that control does not always require a dependency between PRO and
matrix T but can also be established as a direct relation between the reference
supplying DP and PRO. Whether control can always be established as a direct
antecedent–PRO dependency is left for another occasion.

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[3]As pointed out by a reviewer, this approach may be extended to implicit control (as in *It is/was
difficult to catch an early train*) which shows differences in the interpretation of the embedded
subject (generic or specific) depending on the value of matrix tense (present vs. past).

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	INF	infinitive
COMP	complementizer	NOM	nominative
DAT	dative		

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