

Partial control under (partial) control?

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It is widely recognized that control comes in two flavors: obligatory control (henceforth OC) and non-obligatory control (henceforth NOC) (cf. Williams 1980). While in the history of generative grammar the distinction between OC and NOC has been high on the agenda for a long time, recently a fresh idea has been thrust into the limelight posing a real challenge to any theory of control (cf. Landau 2000). It has been proved that the relation between PRO and its controller is not always one of identity, that is the referent of PRO seems to include the antecedent along with other individuals salient in the context which are, however, syntactically absent.

Partial control, originally deemed bizarre, has not received much attention in the literature. However, as Landau (2000: 27) demonstrates, it is not an uncommon option cross-linguistically: "PC [Partial control, A.S.] is (...) not an exotic peculiarity but an option widely available, even if not widely instantiated."

The aim of this paper is not to offer any novel theory of partial control, a notoriously intricate phenomenon. Rather, the paper seeks to situate partial control within the grammar by critically reviewing the available accounts of partial control and, in particular, by juxtaposing the three major visions of the phenomenon under scrutiny as represented by a syntactic (Landau 2000), semantocentric (Hornstein 2003) and pragmatic (Bowers 2005) approach. Any potential theory of control, if truly viable, must successfully respond to the following, by no means easy queries: (i) whose province is partial control? (ii) what determines the interpretation of PRO₁₊? (iii) what does the technical execution look like? It is shown that none of the proposed accounts is able to successfully handle all the ins and outs of partial control facing a number of conceptual and empirical problems. As regards Landau's syntactic vision, it is demonstrated, for example, that the notion of tense and semantic plurality (prima facie, concepts of critical importance) are not as significant as one may suspect when delineating partial control (as is the case with adjuncts and nominalizations of partial control verbs). Hornstein's semantocentric account, crucially pivoting on a meaning postulate, does not fare better, with the relevance of the embedded tense and failure of raising predicates being left unexplained. Finally, it is shown that Bowers's pragmatic approach, portraying partial control as synecdoche, is utterly unsuccessful conflating metonymy, a phenomenon reflecting world knowledge, and partial control, clearly a grammatical fact.

All in all, the study carried out, leads to a tentative conclusion that in order to fully account for the peculiar species of control we need a syntactocentric approach: syntax, crucially employing the Movement Theory of Control (as posited by Hornstein 1999), tainted by semantics and pragmatics. As such, partial control is ruled out of the essence of language being not characterizable by pure syntax.

It is hoped that the discussion will contribute to a better understanding of the atypical control and provide some clues for future research into this still murky area.

Selected references

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