### **On Implicit Adjunct Control**

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#### 1. Introduction

- Implicit adjunct control:  $\rightarrow$  control by an implicit argument into an adjunct; in (1): controller = implicit agent of the passive
- (1) The boat was sunk [adjunct PRO to collect the insurance]. (cf. Roeper 1987: 268 a.o.)

#### Goals:

- extend previous findings on implicit complement control to implicit adjunct control
- investigate the nature of implicit adjunct control and integrate it into a more general theory of control (following Fischer 2018; Fischer & Høyem 2021, 2022; Brodahl et al., to appear)
- data: we examine in particular German sentences containing an adjunct clause with an implicitly controlled PRO subject

## Our claims on implicit adjunct control:

- it is obligatory control (OC) (see also Fischer et al. 2024)
- it violates the Revised Visser's Generalization (RVG)
- as a result, the (un)grammaticality of examples involving implicit control cannot follow from the RVG but must receive a different treatment
- suggested technical implementation: licensing under upward Agree with a syntactically encoded implicit controller (in analogy to other OC relations)

## 2. The Revised Visser's Generalization: previous results

Based on examples like (3a) vs. (3b) involving implicit complement control:

- $\rightarrow$  formulation of the RVG
- Revised Visser's Generalization (RVG): Obligatory control by an implicit subject is impossible if an overt DP agrees with T. (van Urk 2013: 172)
- (3) German:
  - a. \*Der Lehrer<sub>1</sub> wurde gebeten, [PRO ihn<sub>1</sub> kitzeln zu dürfen].
    the<sub>nom</sub> teacher<sub>nom</sub> was begged him tickle to may
    '(Lit.) The teacher was begged to be allowed to tickle him.'

 b. Mir wurde versprochen, [PRO mir noch heute den Link für das me<sub>dat</sub> was promised me<sub>dat</sub> still today the link for the Update zu schicken]. update to send 'It was promised to me to send me the link for the update today.' (cf. van Urk 2013: 171 a.o.)

#### Observation:

- (3a): overt DP bears nominative Case  $\rightarrow$  DP agrees with T  $\rightarrow$  (3a) is ungrammatical (as predicted by the RVG)
- (3b): overt DP bears dative Case  $\rightarrow$  DP does not agree with T  $\rightarrow$  (3b) is grammatical (as predicted by the RVG)

Underlying assumption in van Urk (2013):

- Agree between T and the nominative subject DP prevents T from establishing any other Agree relations
- <u>BUT:</u> licensing of control involves an Agree relation mediated by the T head (but see, for instance, Wurmbrand 2021, who rejects the latter assumption)

Counterexamples in Pitteroff & Schäfer (2019):

- (4) *implicit complement control:* 
  - a. It was decided [PRO to attend the workshop].
  - b. VielZeit/Energie wurde (von Hans) darauf verwandt, [PRO das much time/energy<sub>nom</sub> was (by John) it.on spent the Problem zu lösen].
    problem to solve
    'Much time/energy was spent (by John) on solving the problem.' (cf. Pitteroff & Schäfer 2019: 177, 178)

#### Note:

Pitteroff & Schäfer (2019) explicitly show that their counterexamples involve OC and that the occurrence of *it* in examples like (4a) (and its German counterpart *es* in respective German examples) agrees with T

 $\rightarrow$  examples like (4) contradict the RVG

Interim conclusion:

doubts on the validity of the RVG (or its implications) have already been raised by Pitteroff & Schäfer (2019) and Wurmbrand (2021)

### 3. Observations concerning implicit adjunct control

Line of reasoning:

- implicit adjunct control is OC
- > as a result, the RVG should apply here, too
- > <u>BUT:</u> we also find counterexamples in the case of implicit adjunct control

#### 3.1 The implicit argument

#### Claim:

Implicit adjunct control involves OC; controller = implicit agent.

## Remarks:

- (i) status of implicit arguments has been controversially discussed:
  - <u>camp 1:</u> implicit arguments are not syntactically encoded but only semantically entailed (see, e.g., Bruening 2013, 2024)
  - camp 2: implicit arguments are syntactically projected (see, e.g., Collins 2005, Wurmbrand 2021)
  - → we adopt the latter assumption (see also Alexiadou et al. 2015: 126 ff. for further discussion concerning the two views)
- (ii) potential vagueness of the meaning of implicit arguments: sometimes its interpretation is not completely unambiguous
  - → we argue that a potential vagueness concerning the interpretation of PRO does not originate in the control construction as such but hinges on the interpretation of the implicit argument
  - → whatever the interpretation of the implicit argument is, PRO inherits this interpretation due to the underlying OC relation (see also Landau 2010: 367: "the reference of PRO is strictly linked to that of the implicit controller")

### Notation:

Following Wurmbrand (2021), we use the notation  $\phi(P)$  for the implicit argument.

On the interpretation of  $\varphi$  (P): how to disambiguate its meaning

## be

'The doctor prescribed new pills to Peter. Peter thinks they are impractical since the medicine has to be consumed in the morning.'

(7) Das Medikament muss von Peter<sub>1</sub> morgens  $\phi(P)_{1/*gen}$  eingenommen werden. the medicine must by Peter in the morning consumed be

## The meaning of $\varphi(P)$ :

(5): generic reading (see also Landau 2000: 175; Høyem 2018: 370 concerning this reading)

- (6): depending on the discourse, a non-generic reading can become available
- (7): adding a von/by-phrase helps to disambiguate the meaning; the implicit argument gets a specific reading  $\rightarrow \phi(P) = Peter$

# 3.2 Implicit adjunct control = obligatory control

- (8) OC properties (see Landau 2013: 226, a.o.)
  - (i) The controller must be an argument of the adjunct's matrix clause. Thus, long-distance (LD) and arbitrary control are ruled out.
     (ii) OC PRO only allows a sloppy reading under ellipsis.
- (9) Implicit adjunct control in German

## Recall:

We can use the *von/by*-phrase to enforce a specific reading of the implicit argument  $\phi(P)$ .

### Observation 1:

## OC property (i) holds; see (10), (11), (12).

## (11) control by "Hans"/ $\varphi(P)_2$ or "Peter" ruled out: LD control is impossible

Peter<sub>3</sub> wurde von Hans,  $\phi(P)_2$  erzählt, dass das Medikament von Maria<sub>1</sub> Peter was by John told that the medicine by Mary φ(P)<sub>1</sub> [PRO<sub>1/\*2/\*3</sub> liegend1 eingenommen werden muss. lving consumed be must 'Peter was told by John that the medicine must be consumed by Mary while lying down.'

### Additional observation regarding LD control:

If the *von/by*-phrase in the embedded clause is deleted (but retained in the matrix clause, see (12)), the interpretation of PRO in the embedded clause becomes unspecific, just like the implicit argument in the embedded clause.

➔ the interpretation of PRO depends on the implicit argument in the adjunct's matrix clause and not on any higher argument

'Peter was told by John that the medicine must be consumed while lying down.'

### Observation 2:

OC property (ii) holds; see (13).

### (13) only sloppy reading under ellipsis

'The pills were consumed by Mary while lying down, and the cough syrup was, too, by John.'

### Interim conclusion:

- implicit adjunct control is obligatory control
- the controller is the implicit argument of the adjunct's matrix clause
- the implicit argument often leaves room for different interpretations, but disambiguation can be enforced using a von/by-phrase

### 3.3 Implicit adjunct control and the RVG

### Observation:

If implicit adjunct control is OC, the RVG should hold; however, this is not the case; see, for instance, (14) (repeated from (9)) and (15) (repeated from (1)):

- → an overt DP agrees with T (= nominative-marked overt subject), which should render OC by an implicit subject impossible – but the sentences are grammatical
- (15) The boat was  $\phi(P)_1$  sunk [PRO<sub>1</sub> to collect the insurance].

### Interim conclusion:

- the RVG does not hold: whether an overt DP agrees with T or not does not affect the implicit control relation
- the RVG is based on a specific technical implementation of OC (using T as a mediating functional head): there might be preferable alternatives
- $\rightarrow$  the RVG should be dispensed with

## 4. Analysis

## Claim:

- All instances of OC should receive the same technical implementation (differently to e.g. Landau 2021).
- We argue for a unified analysis in terms of upward Agree, with PRO as probe and the controller as goal (see also Fischer 2018 on control into islands; Fischer & Høyem 2021, 2022 on event and adjunct control; Brodahl et al., to appear, on adjunct control).

## 4.1 Underlying assumptions concerning OC

## The role of PRO:

- PRO = referentially defective argument
- ightarrow must be referentially identified in the course of the syntactic derivation
- technical implementation:
  - $\rightarrow$  PRO bears unvalued semantic *i* $\varphi$ -features (cf. Wurmbrand 2017)
  - $\rightarrow \frac{\text{relevant idea}:}{\text{these features comprise more than standard } \phi \text{-features; they must}}$ be able to referentially identify the controllee (like binding indices)
- feature valuation: takes place under Agree, based on the definitions in (16); probe = PRO; goal = controller

## (16) Agree and feature valuation (see also Brodahl et al., to appear)

- a. Probe  $\alpha$  with an unvalued feature [F:\_ ] agrees with goal  $\beta$  iff
  - (i)  $\beta$  c-commands  $\alpha$
  - (ii)  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are in the accessible domain, and
  - (iii)  $\beta$  bears a matching feature F.
- b. If  $\alpha$  agrees with  $\beta$ , feature [F:\_] on  $\alpha$  is *valued* by feature [F: *val*] on  $\beta$ .

### Locality considerations:

We adopt a local-derivational view of the syntactic component:

➔ the accessible domain is constrained by the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) as defined in (17)

## (17) Phases and the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC)

- a. The domain X of a phase XP is *not accessible* to operations outside XP; only X and its edge are accessible to such operations. (cf. Chomsky 2000: 108)
- b. CPs and vPs are phases.

## Licensing of OC:

> Until PRO finds a suitable goal to have its unvalued semantic  $i\phi$ -features valued, it keeps moving to the current phase edge to remain in the accessible domain and retain the possibility of being licensed.

- > When PRO ultimately finds a suitable goal  $\beta$  which can value PRO's unvalued *i* $\phi$ -features under Agree, this means: PRO is interpreted in the same way as  $\beta$ :
- $\rightarrow$  an OC relation between  $\beta$  (= controller) and PRO is established

Standard subject OC as an illustration:

- (18) Point in the derivation when the matrix subject is merged into the structure:  $\begin{bmatrix} VP \text{ John}_{[i@: val]} \text{ tries } \begin{bmatrix} CP \text{ PRO}_{[i@:-]} & \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} +$ 
  - $\rightarrow$  crossed out material = no longer in the accessible domain (see (17))
  - $\rightarrow$  John values PRO's unvalued semantic *i* $\varphi$ -features
  - $\rightarrow$  OC relation is established

## 4.2 The analysis of implicit adjunct control

Underlying assumptions concerning the implicit argument:

- φ(P) = syntactically encoded as a φ-feature bundle in the specifier position of some functional verbal projection (see also Wurmbrand 2021)
  - $\rightarrow$  assumed position: Specv
- > the reference of  $\phi(P)$  is typically not inherently valued; as a result,  $\phi(P)$  also enters the derivation with unvalued semantic *i* $\phi$ -features
  - → reference is determined by the context or other syntactic constituents (like a *von/by*-phrase)
  - → "determining the reference of  $\varphi(P)$ " = valuation of its semantic *i* $\varphi$ -features in the course of the derivation (not our focus right now)

Licensing of implicit adjunct control:

- implicit adjunct control generally involves event-modifying adjuncts
  - → involved adjuncts are vP adjuncts (see Fischer & Høyem 2022; Brodahl et al., to appear, regarding the correlation between adjunct class and adjunction height)
- > as in (18), PRO enters the derivation with unvalued semantic  $i\phi$ -features, does not find a goal inside the adjunct and thus moves to the edge of it to remain in the accessible domain
- → following the standard definition in (19), PRO is now c-commanded by constituents occurring in Specv (with  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  being two segments of vP):
- (19) Node A c-commands node B iff the first branching node  $\alpha_1$  dominating A
  - (i) either dominates B
  - (ii) or is immediately dominated by a node  $\alpha_2$  which dominates B, and  $\alpha_2$  is of the same category type as  $\alpha_1$ . (cf. Reinhart 1976: 148)

## Case A: non-implicit adjunct control

A DP in Specv can now serve as a goal for PRO inside the adjunct; this happens, for instance, in examples like (20), for which our analysis correctly predicts subject control (see Brodahl et al., to appear):

(20) a. A snake1 swallows its prey [vP-adjunct PRO1 using its teeth and muscles].

b. [vP [vP a snake[iq: val] swallows its prey ] [vP-adjunct PRO[iq: val] ... ]]



### Case B: implicit adjunct control

If Specv hosts an implicit argument  $\varphi(P)$  instead:

• φ(P) = goal

c.

- note that definition (16a) does not prevent Agree if the features on the goal are not valued either at this point in the derivation
- → we adopt a **feature-sharing version of Agree** (following Pesetsky & Torrego 2007):
  - if a first application of Agree does not yield valuation, the connection between probe and goal is still maintained (= Agree chain; like P&T we use identical numbers to signal this connection below (= [2] in (21b))
  - another instance of Agree can take place later in the derivation:
    in our scenario, the former goal φ(P) turns into a probe and is looking for a goal to value its semantic *i*φ-features
  - once it succeeds, all members of the Agree chain are aligned = get the same value
- relevant take home message for the implicit adjunct cases:
  φ(P) can license PRO: resulting meaning of PRO = meaning of φ(P)
- (21) a. The boat was  $\phi(P)_1$  sunk [vP-adjunct PRO<sub>1</sub> to collect the insurance].
  - b. [<sub>νP</sub> [<sub>νP</sub> φ(**P**)[<sub>*i*φ: [2]]</sub> sunk] [<sub>νP-adjunct</sub> **PRO**[<sub>*i*φ: [2]]</sub> ...]]
    - $\rightarrow~$  when  $\varphi$  (P)'s features are valued, PRO automatically inherits the same value

## 4.3 Potential goals

## Question:

What happens if there are several potential goals in Specv (=  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  in (22))?

(22) Assumption:  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  occupy two specifiers of vP

 $[_{vP} [_{vP} \alpha \beta [_{v'} v]] [_{vP-adjunct} PRO ...]],$ 

e.g.,  $\alpha$  = subject,  $\beta$  = implicit agent of the passive clause (see also (23)-(25) below)

# Factor A: order of merge

- > note: following (19), both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  c-command the adjunct (and thus PRO)
- $\blacktriangleright$  if both α and β are merged into the derivation before the adjunct, they are immediately accessible to PRO when the adjunct is concatenated with the main clause; hence, both α and β should be suitable goals
- > in case the adjunct is merged into the derivation *before*  $\alpha$  and/or  $\beta$ , the potential goal that enters the derivation first provides PRO's first opportunity to establish an Agree relation and will be chosen immediately; the alternative option would then only be considered if the first goal is ruled out for independent reasons (see factor B/C)

## Factor B: semantic compatibility (i.e. thematic identity requirements)

- the predicate of the adjunct also imposes certain restrictions on PRO: for instance, *collect the insurance* in (21a) requires that PRO be [+human] (see also Müller 2025: 118, who calls requirements of this type thematic identity requirements, a notion we will also adopt)
- > a goal that contradicts such requirements cannot be chosen
  - → result for (22): if  $\alpha$  contradicts thematic identity requirements, PRO must choose  $\beta$  as a goal for Agree

# Factor C: independent syntactic principles

- one of the two potential goals might be ruled out since otherwise another syntactic principle is violated (like binding principles)
  - $\rightarrow \frac{\text{result for (22): if } \alpha \text{ violates a syntactic principle if PRO chooses it as goal, only}}{\beta \text{ is a suitable goal for the Agree relation}}$

# Examples:

- (23) a. The boat was  $\phi(P)_1$  sunk [PRO<sub>1</sub> to collect the insurance].
  - b.  $\alpha = the \ boat; \ \beta = \phi(P):$  $\left[ \int_{vP} \left[ \int_{vP} the \ boat \ \phi(P) \left[ \int_{v'} sunk \right] \right] \left[ \int_{vP-adjunct} PRO \dots \right] \right]$

# Note:

On the assumption that *the boat* moves successive-cyclically to SpecT via Specv, there is a point in the derivation at which *the boat* also occupies a specifier of vP:

- the boat does not satisfy thematic identity requirements imposed on PRO by the predicate inside the adjunct, here something like the criterion [+ human] (= factor B)
- $\succ$  if it is assumed that intermediate landing sites at phase edges are outer specifiers that are arguably projected after base-generated specifiers and adjuncts,  $\phi(P)$  is the *first* matching goal for PRO in a local-derivational model (= factor A)

# → Factor A + B predict: only $\varphi(P)$ is a suitable goal for PRO in (23)

- (24) **Das Haus**<sub>1</sub> wurde  $\phi(P)_2$  geleert, ...
  - the house was emptied

| (a) | $[PRO_{*1/2}]$       | um       | es1   | abzur  | eißen]. |         |
|-----|----------------------|----------|-------|--------|---------|---------|
|     |                      | in order | it    | to.der | nolish  |         |
| (b) | [PRO <sub>1/*2</sub> | um       | abger | issen  | zu      | werden] |
|     |                      | in order | demo  | lished | to      | be      |

'The house was emptied (a) in order to demolish it / (b) in order to be demolished.' (cf. Müller 2025: 118)

(25) building of the vP:

 $\alpha = das Haus; \beta = \phi(P):$ [<sub>vP</sub> [<sub>vP</sub> das Haus  $\phi(P)$  ... ] [<sub>vP-adjunct</sub> PRO ...]]

- ad (24a): Binding Principle B excludes das Haus as a controller
  - $\rightarrow\,$  although two goals are accessible to PRO in the vP phase, only  $\phi(P)$  is a valid option (= factor C)
  - in addition, *das Haus* does not meet the thematic identity requirements imposed on PRO by the predicate inside the adjunct (= factor B)

# → <u>Factor B + C predict</u>: only $\varphi(P)$ is a suitable goal for PRO in (24a)

- <u>ad (24b):</u> the predicate inside the adjunct requires an argument which is [– human] (which "can be demolished")
  - $\rightarrow$  an implicit agent argument would thus impose conflicting requirements on PRO (violation of thematic identity requirements)
  - $\rightarrow$  only das Haus is a valid option (although structurally speaking,  $\phi(P)$  would also be available) (= factor B)
- → Factor B predicts: only das Haus is a suitable goal for PRO in (24b)
- 5. Conclusion
- implicit adjunct control is obligatory control
- the RVG should thus hold, but it does not
  - $\rightarrow~$  hence, the RVG should be dispensed with
  - $\rightarrow~$  all the more since it assumes a specific technical implementation which can be replaced

### > alternative implementation:

analyze implicit adjunct control in terms of upward Agree in analogy to other OC relations

#### Supplementary remarks:

What about the ungrammatical sentence (3a) (= (26))?

#### Some tentative ideas:

It is not implicit control as such which renders (26) ungrammatical:

- (27), (28a), (28c) are structurally similar but seem to be much better.
- It might be the case that the (non-)occurrence of *darum* (pronominal adverb meaning 'for it') also plays a role (in comparison to structures like (29)); see (28).

## Observation 1 (see Wurmbrand 2021: 14):

(27) Der Lehrer<sub>1</sub> wurde von den Kindern<sub>2</sub>  $\phi$ (P) gebeten, [PRO<sub>2</sub> ihn<sub>1</sub> kitzeln zu dürfen]. the teacher was by the children begged him tickle to may '(Lit.) The teacher was begged by the children to be allowed to tickle him.'

#### Observation 2:

- - b. without 'darum':

- c. Der Lehrer<sub>1</sub> wurde darum  $\phi(P)_2$  gebeten,  $[PRO_2 \ ihn_1 \ kitzeln \ zu \ dürfen]$ . the teacher was PRON.ADV asked  $him_{acc}$  tickle to may 'The teacher was asked to be allowed to tickle him.'
- (29) Der Lehrer wurde (darum) gebeten, die Aufgabe zu erledigen. the teacher was PRON.ADV asked the task to accomplish 'The teacher was asked to do the task.'

## Note:

- (i) jdn. (darum) bitten, etw. zu tun ('ask sb. to do sth.) (object control reading):  $\rightarrow$  the pronominal adverb is optional
- (ii) jdn. darum bitten, etw. tun zu dürfen ('ask sb. to be allowed to do sth.') (subject control reading):
  - ightarrow it seems to us that omitting the pronominal adverb makes the sentence worse

- → Whatever the ultimate reason is for the difference in grammaticality regarding (26)-(28), it seems to be independent of a nominative DP agreeing with T (as suggested by the RVG).
- → This confirms our assumption that the RVG is not needed and should be dispensed with in view of the wrong predictions it makes in the examples discussed in the previous sections.

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