

ON (NON-)OBLIGATORY CONTROL*

1. THE ISSUE

For the purposes of the present paper, we will assume that a movement approach to obligatory control (OC) is essentially correct. Although this view is not shared by all linguists working within the generative tradition, we think that the movement theory of control (MTC) has many desirable conceptual and empirical virtues, and has done well in the face of what some viewed as lethal problems (see Boeckx and Hornstein 2003, 2004, in press; and Boeckx et al., forthcoming, for extensive discussion). Within the MTC, it is fair to say that non-obligatory control (NOC) has been pushed to the side, with the focus of inquiry resting on OC. There are good reasons for this. As OC is mediated by movement (OC PRO being an A-trace), its properties reflect core features of UG. NOC in contrast is the elsewhere case and is mediated by an empty pronominal category, *pro*, in the subject position of nonfinite clauses (see Hornstein 2001, 2003; Boeckx and Hornstein 2003, 2004.) Nonetheless, the MTC is incomplete without an account of *pro*'s distribution, the cynosure of what follows.

The present paper focuses on the following question: even assuming that PRO reduces to a copy/trace left by movement and that movement is preferred to pronominalization (as Hornstein 2001, 2003 has argued), what prevents a DP that cannot licitly antecede PRO (i.e. a copy/trace of A-movement) from binding a *pro* (i.e. a null pronoun) in the same position?¹

Some concrete examples will make the problem clear.

- (1) John persuaded Mary to leave
- (2) John₁ persuaded Mary₂ [PRO_{*1/2} to leave]
- (3) John₁ persuaded Mary₂ [pro_{1/*2} to leave]

Sentence (1) has the structure (2). Given (2) and the assumption that PRO=copy/trace of A-movement we can explain why *Mary* is the antecedent and *John* cannot be: For *John* to be the antecedent requires that it move over *Mary* on its way to Spec, vP. As this violates minimality, it cannot be the antecedent. In contrast, movement of *Mary* from the embedded clause to the object of *persuade* is licit and does not violate minimality (if we assume, as the MTC does, that movement into theta positions is legitimate). So, given (2), we explain why

Mary is and *John* is not an antecedent of PRO in (1). However, why can't (1) be analyzed as (3)? Here we have *pro* in place of PRO and the relation of *John* to *pro* should be fine. Moreover, in this structure, *Mary* should not be a possible antecedent on the assumption that movement trumps pronominalization (cf. note 1). Thus, we can explain why (3) with *pro* indexed 2 is out (because, (2) with index 2 is good). But why (3) with *pro* bound by *John* is illicit remains unexplained.

To phrase the problem differently, we assume that a coupling between an antecedent and a pronoun is licit *just in case movement cannot establish the same relation*. Thus, if one can move from one position to another, a DP in the 'target' cannot bind a pronoun in the 'launch' site, i.e. position of the trace. This is how we understand the assumption that movement is cheaper than pronominalization. However, this also implies that if movement is *not* possible between positions A and B, then bindings should be. What we see in (3) is a concrete example of this option. However, we also see that it is impossible; (1) cannot be interpreted with *John* as the leaver. The problem for the MTC is why (1) cannot be interpreted as (3) given the basics of the MTC?

2. MORE EVIDENCE FOR PRO

Before attempting an answer, let us consider another piece of evidence that favors relating the availability of *pro* (and hence NOC) to the impossibility of movement: NOC is always licensed inside islands. Thus, for example, in (4) the subject of the gerund can be bound by *John* and this binding has all the hallmarks of NOC (see Hornstein 1999, 2001 for discussion).

- (4) John said that [pro washing himself delighted Mary]

Interestingly, we can also get OC here.

- (5) John said that [PRO washing herself delighted Mary]

The relation between *John* and *pro* in (4) cannot be formed by movement as extraction from a subject gerund (to the matrix subject position) is illicit. Thus, *pro* is allowed to mediate this relation. However, in (5) movement from the subject of the gerund to where *Mary* sits is licit, so PRO is required here and *pro* relating to *Mary* is not.² If this is correct, then the position occupied by PRO can also be occupied by *pro*.³ What cannot occur is the following: both a structure in which DP binds *pro* is licit and in which movement from the position of *pro* to that of the binder is also licit (i.e. the structure in which DP binds PRO in place of *pro*). If this is correct, then it follows that structures are never classified as OC or NOC (e.g. there is never selection for an OC complement). Rather, it is *relations* that are OC or NOC. Furthermore, as NOC is only licit where OC is not and given that OC is formed by movement, it follows that NOC will occur where movement is prohibited, i.e. inside islands. However, as should be clear, this does not help us with (3) above as here the movement is illicit yet the structure is not available.