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978-1-107-01697-2 - Control in Generative Grammar: A Research Companion

Idan Landau

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## Control in Generative Grammar

*A Research Companion*

The subject of nonfinite clauses is often missing, and yet is understood to refer to some linguistic or contextual referent (e.g. *Bill preferred \_\_ to remain silent* is understood as “Bill preferred that he himself would remain silent”). This dependency is the subject matter of *control theory*. Extensive linguistic research into control constructions over the past five decades has unearthed a wealth of empirical findings in dozens of languages. Their proper classification and analysis, however, have been a matter of continuing debate within and across different theoretical schools. This comprehensive book pulls together, for the first time, all the important advances on the topic. Among the issues discussed are: the distinction between raising and control, obligatory and nonobligatory control, syntactic interactions with case, finiteness and nominalization, lexical determination of the controller, and phenomena like partial and implicit control. The critical discussions in this work will stimulate students and scholars to further explorations in this fascinating field.

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## Preface

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Control is one of the earliest concerns of generative grammar. Key puzzles are already noted in Chomsky 1965, and one of the first dissertations in the field, Rosenbaum 1967 (originally 1965), is largely dedicated to the topic. Theories of control figure prominently in every major school of thought in generative grammar (GB-minimalism, Categorical Grammar, LFG, HPSG), and the topic has been addressed from every possible angle – conceptual structure, lexical semantics, syntax, formal semantics and pragmatics. Over the past four decades, a vast amount of data has been collected and described regarding the manifestation of control in many different languages. Lively debates on the nature of control keep invigorating the field.

And yet, during all this time, not a single survey work solely dedicated to control has appeared that attempts to organize and synthesize all this knowledge, and present it in a systematic fashion.<sup>1</sup> This lacuna troubled me when I first became engaged with control, sometime in the late 1990s, and it has continued to do so ever since. The present book aims to fill this lacuna.

A number of goals – scientific, methodological and educational – have guided my thinking when putting this book together.

Perhaps the most urgent of all was simply empirical: to put the facts of control – *all* of them – on the table, for the service of future research. The last decade has seen a dramatic surge in interest in control, with dozens of studies uncovering novel data in many languages, and newcomers often find it difficult to keep track of all these developments. On the other hand, again and again studies of control neglect to take into account important findings and generalizations that have already been established. Old facts are “rediscovered,” or worse, simply ignored. This situation, to my mind, seriously hampers the progress of the field, for there cannot be any progress without recognition and assimilation of past achievements.

<sup>1</sup> Stiebels 2007 is the most comprehensive descriptive survey to date. It is, however, confined to complement control, leaving out adjunct and nonobligatory control. It is also very laconic on the semantic aspects and the theoretical implications of control.

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Indeed, close attention to the past, or the history of the field, has been a related goal of the present work. A common bias of young researchers is to focus on “cutting edge” publications, to the occasional neglect of classical works. This bias is understandable to a certain extent. Theoretical tools and vocabularies in linguistics change ever so rapidly and it becomes increasingly difficult to recover the theoretical mindset of works from three or even two decades ago. At the same time, there can be little doubt that classical works – in linguistics as in any other field – hold much interest for the current scholar. Often one finds curious and challenging data in them, that have been filtered out in later works. Such data, typically, spur new discoveries and innovations. Furthermore, classical works often direct our attention to real scientific problems (as opposed to technical quibbles) precisely *because* they frame analytic problems in ways that are less theory-laden than current works do. And finally, let us not forget that the founding fathers of generative grammar were (and are) pretty smart folks; it always pays to read what they had to say about linguistic problems, control included.

In the same vein, I have tried to do some historical justice to studies of control that for one reason or another were not assimilated into the mainstream literature. In hindsight, quite a few of these works are certainly worth present attention, if only for raising problems that students of control ought to address. Turning the spotlights to such works has been one of my goals (illustrative examples include Postal 1970, Clements 1975, Roeper 1987, Clark 1990, Kayne 1991, Kawasaki 1993, Kroeger 1993).

On the other hand, this book by no means intends to relate the history of control, and indeed, its structure is patently theoretical, not chronological. First and foremost, it is intended to be used as a research companion, and as such, to stimulate further explorations into various aspects of control. This methodological goal underlies much of the discussion throughout the book: alongside descriptive passages, the reader will often encounter critical assessments of various proposals and analyses, pointing out their merits and faults. When theories make conflicting claims, the text does not leave the choice between them to the taste of the reader but tries to (dis)confirm one or the other; when empirical generalizations are reported that are known to be inaccurate or false, the text makes that clear. No less important, questions that cannot be answered due to limitations of current knowledge or understanding are highlighted as open research problems. At every point along the way, the reader is encouraged to take a critical stand on the issues under discussion.

Over four decades of research on control have produced not only heated disputes and disagreements, but also some solid results that seem unlikely to go away. This fact is, regrettably, not sufficiently recognized, owing to the frequent debates and to the lack of comprehensive accounts of control. For example, despite persistent skepticism, PRO exists, and there are compelling



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arguments (alongside bad ones) to show it. These arguments were scattered in the literature so their joint force was not always appreciated; here they are assembled together, to settle the issue once and for all (see Chapter 3). Another example, there is a systematic correlation between finiteness ingredients and obligatory control, but it is clearly *not* the simplistic “textbook” view, whereby “only nonfinite clauses display obligatory control” (see Section 4.1). And a final example, nonobligatory control is *not* structurally constrained, despite common claims to the contrary (see Chapter 7). All these results should become a standard part of the lore of every practicing generative linguist, just like the knowledge that syntactic islands exist, that operator scope is computed by c-command, etc.

True to its intended *survey* function, the book’s expository approach is ecumenical in principle. That is, there is no attempt to vindicate one theoretical framework over others on the basis of their treatments of control. Rather, I have sought to extract common insights and lay them out in fairly theory-neutral ways, so that scholars of different persuasions can all benefit from the discussion. Once technical jargon is weeded out, analyses that are officially “affiliated” to opposing frameworks often turn out to have more in common than analyses that share affiliation. Having said that, I should state the obvious: no presentation is absolutely impartial, certainly not in a highly divided field like generative grammar. My own training and “grammatical mindset” are situated in the GB-minimalism tradition, and I *cannot help* believing in the tenets of that tradition more strongly than I do in alternatives. I can only hope that this undeniable bias does not taint the discussion more than it should.

My own continuing work on control has convinced me, throughout the years, that it is a multidimensional phenomenon. By that I mean that a complete understanding of control – the facts and the principles behind them – cannot be confined to any single module of grammar. Correspondingly, there is no “theory of control,” but rather, there are “subtheories of control,” which, when assembled together and set to interact via interface principles, yield a comprehensive account of the facts. This view also inspires the organization of this book. Thus, the discussions of obligatory and nonobligatory control are sharply separated because the phenomena are qualitatively different, falling under very different explanations. Complement and adjunct control are similarly distinguished; questions of controller choice, falling within the purview of lexical semantics, are distinguished from questions of case marking and finiteness, which are plainly syntactic, and so on.

The reader will accordingly realize that many of the chapters and sections in this book can be read in isolation, as modular pieces in a big jigsaw puzzle. Many specific topics in control have already produced their own “sub-literature.” When a certain section in the book covers one of these topics, I have listed

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all the relevant references at the end of the section. Cross-references to related sections and subsections are included to help the reader navigate the book in any itinerary that fits his/her own individual research interests.

Working on this book has been both hard and rewarding. I hope it will stimulate its readers – students and scholars alike – into novel explorations and discoveries in control that have not been contemplated before. This will be my ultimate reward.

Several colleagues have read drafts of this work and contributed many valuable comments to improve it. I would like to acknowledge their kind assistance: Peter Herbeck, Marcello Modesto, Johan Rooryck, Ivy Sichel, Anna Szabolcsi, Arhonto Terzi and Coppe van Urk. Parts of this work were written during my sabbatical stay at UC Santa Cruz in 2010; I thank the staff at the linguistics department for their warm hospitality and for providing me with a perfect environment for research. I also owe thanks to Jan Engh and Kristian Emil Kristoffersen, both of whom I do not know personally. Their online bibliography of control (see <http://folk.uio.no/janengh/KONTROLL>), constantly and meticulously updated for over 15 years now, has been a tremendous resource for me. Finally, bless my wife Shira and my kids Elya and Nimrode, who bring so much joy into my life.