# Shifting Control to Responsibility

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LSA Annual Meeting in Albuquerque, January 5th, 2006

## 1 Control shifts

*Promise* normally exhibits control by the promiser (SOURCE):

(1) Lee$_i$ promised Pat PRO$_i$ to leave.

Transitive *ask* normally exhibits control by the askee (GOAL):

(2) Lee asked Pat$_i$ PRO$_i$ to leave.

But sometimes control is "shifted" (Hust and Brame 1976):

(3) Pat$_i$ was promised (by Lee) PRO$_i$ to be allowed to leave.

(4) Lee$_i$ asked Pat PRO$_i$ to be allowed to leave.

Some more examples of shifted *promise* (from the internet, unless cited):

(5) a. Montana was **promised** (by the doctor) **to be healthy** by game time on Sunday. (Sag and Pollard 1991)

b. He was promised to **be first in line for admission** in June the following year.

(6) a. He was promised to **compete for a starting job**, and he actually won the starting job.

b. As I understand it, he was promised a specific seat, and he was promised to **meet Madonna**.

c. Moore has size and speed and is only in New Mexico still because he was promised to **start by his sophmore year**...

d. He was promised to **become a minister** since the beginning of 1997 when Mr. Kabariti was expected to reshuffle his government...

(7) a. Grandma **promised the children to be able to stay up** for the late show. (Sag and Pollard 1991)

b. She thought she was here for a photoshooting only. But we convinced her to make this movie. Because we **promised her to become** a famous pornstar.

**Puzzle**: What makes control-shifts possible?



## 2 Approaches to the Puzzle

- Syntactic configuration (Chomsky 1980, Williams 1980, Manzini 1983, Larson 1991, Boeckx and Hornstein 2003)
- Semantic composition (Bach 1979, Chierchia 1983, Klein and Sag 1981)
- Grammatical function (Bresnan 1982, Dalrymple 2001)
- Thematic role (Ružička 1983, Jackendoff 1987, Culicover and Jackendoff 2001)
- Lexical entailments (of responsibility) (Farkas 1988)
- Semantic coercion (or pragmatic 'reconstruction') (Sag and Pollard 1991, Pollard and Sag 1994, Ružička 1999, Jackendoff and Culicover 2003)

I will advocate a return to Farkas's responsibility-based approach.

## 3 Semantic coercion approaches

Sag and Pollard's (1991) control theory (informal):

- If the control verb has *influence*-sort semantics (e.g. *ask*), then the controller corresponds to the INFLUENCED role (the askee, the persuadee, etc.)
- If the control verb has *commitment*-sort semantics (e.g. *promise*), then the controller corresponds to the COMMITTOR role (the promiser, the threatener, etc.)
- If the control verb has *orientation*-sort semantics (e.g. *want*), then the controller corresponds to the EXPERIENCER role.

Problem: Hust and Brame examples (3) and (4) are ruled out.

Sag and Pollard's solution: When the infintive is stative, a coercion mechanism is triggered, by which (8a) becomes (8b):

(8) a. promise(SOURCE, GOAL, be-allowed(GOAL, ACTIVITY))

b. promise(SOURCE, GOAL, **cause**(SOURCE, be-allowed(GOAL, ACTIVITY))

So (9a) is interpreted just like (9b):

(9) a. John promised Mary to be allowed to leave.

b. John promised Mary to cause her to be allowed to leave.

Support: the oddness of (10)[1]

(10) #The fortune cookie promised Montana to be allowed to play in the Super Bowl.
(cf. The fortune cookie promised Montana that he would play in the Super Bowl.)

Jackendoff and Culicover (2003) and Ružička (1999) have similar approaches.

[1] raising construal is OK; only odd with control construal

### 3.1 Critique of causative coercion theories

2 problematic aspects:

1. The causative aspect: a commitment to act by the promiser is not always implied.
2. The coercion aspect: it is not the case that the goal-control reading is available only when the source-control reading is not; ambiguity exists.

**1a. The Doctor and the Cellist**

Suppose a cellist breaks his left hand in a car accident. He undergoes surgery, and the doctor gives him therapeutic exercises to do in order to regain strength and agility in his hand. The doctor has done all he can for the patient at this point, but he can still say to the patient:

(11) I promise you to be able to play the cello again within six months – as long as you keep up the exercises.

In this story, the doctor does not promise to cause or enable the cellist to be able to play again.

The doctor does have *responsibility* for that situation, though.

**1b. *guarantee***

(12) You're guaranteed to be satisfied with your membership. If you're not satisfied within 45 days, we'll give you a refund.

The guarantor has *responsibility* for the situation: if it does not arise, then the guarantor must pay, but the guarantor does not necessarily cause the situation.

**2. Ambiguities**

Coercion predicts that the goal-control reading should only be available when the source-control reading is ruled out. The presence of ambiguities would falsify that prediction.

Even within the same context, both control construals are available for the following sentences:

(13) Susan ordered a widget online from XYZ Incorporated. After 3 weeks the widget still hadn't come, so Susan called customer service. They were very apologetic, and **they promised her to get it in the mail by Friday.**

(14) I'm sad. **My parents promised me to get a pony for my birthday** and I didn't get one.

(15) I **promised my boss to have the report on her desk** by Friday.

(16) Jason is picking Valerie up for an important meeting she has with her boss at 9. **He promised her to be on time**.



## 4 Responsibility-based approach

Farkas's (1988) key insight:

> If $x$ persuades/convinces/forces/urges/requires $y$ to VP, $y$ is responsible for bringing about a situation $s_p$ [described by the complement clause] ... In the case of *promise*, if $x$ promises $y$ to VP, $x$ takes upon himself the obligation (towards $y$) to bring about a situation $s_p$ [described by the complement clause]. I claim that in this case, as well as in the previous one, the relation in question is the RESP-relation. (p. 41)

Certain verbs induce responsibility for one of the participants via "satisfaction conditions":

(17) *promise*: RESP($p_1$,$s_p$)

- $p_1$ is the first semantic argument (the active-voice subject)
- $s_p$ ("situation participant") is situation described by the infinitive complement

(18) *convince*, *persuade*, *ask*, *force*, *order*, *help*, *encourage*, *tell*: RESP($p_2$,$s_p$)

- $p_2$ is the second semantic argument (the active-voice object)

Along with these lexical stipulations, Farkas proposes the following principle:

(19) **Principle of Controller Choice (PCC)** (p. 44)
For RESP-inducing V′s, the controller of the infinitive is the argument linked to $i$(V′m).

- $i$(V′m) refers to the participant $i$ such that RESP($i$,$s_p$) according to the matrix predicate. (Farkas calls this the "intitiator"; I prefer to refer to it as the "responsibility-taker".)
- RESP-inducing V′s are the verbal predicates with RESP($i$,$s$) among their satisfaction conditions.

(20) **PCC (informal version)**
If individual $i$ is lexically entailed to take responsibility for the situation described by the infinitive complement of the matrix verb, then $i$ is the controller of the infinitive.

Problem: The PCC rules out Hust and Brame-type examples like (21):

(21) The pupil$_i$ asked the teacher PRO$_i$ to leave early.

Farkas's solution:

(22) **Marked Controller Choice (MCC)**
If A($i$(V′m),$x$), the controller of the infinitival complement is the argument linked to $x$.

- $i$(V′m) is the responsibility-taker associated with the matrix predicate.
- A($x$,$y$) means that $x$ determines the actions of $y$ (p. 37)

(23) **MCC (informal version)**
If the designated responsibility-taker determines the actions of $x$, then $x$ is the controller.

In (21), we have:

- A(teacher,pupil) because the teacher determines the pupil's actions
- $i$(V′m) is the teacher according to the lexical specification for *ask* in (18)

so the pupil is the controller of the infinitival complement according to the MCC.

### 4.1 Critique of Farkas's proposal

1. The MCC doesn't take care of all of the counterexamples to the PCC
2. The MCC also takes care of counterexamples it shouldn't.

**1. Counterexamples to PCC not handled by MCC**

Control "switch" is possible even with the opposite power relationship; here the responsibility-taker's actions are determined by the the controller:

(24) Curious about all the giggling, the teacher$_i$ asked the pupil PRO$_i$ to see what he had written.

**2. Non-counterexamples to PCC handled by MCC**

Pupils can ask teachers to do things, contra MCC:

(25) The pupil asked the teacher$_i$ PRO$_i$ to explain the homework.

The responsibility-taker for *ask* is $p_2$, which corresponds to the teacher. The teacher determines the pupil's actions, so the pupil is predicted by the MCC to be the controller of the infinitive.

## 5 Current Proposal

I propose to weaken Farkas's PCC as follows:

(26) **Revised Principle of Controller Choice (RPCC)**
Participant $x$ may control the infinitive complement of a verb if and only if the infinitive, construed with participant $x$ as the subject, describes a situation $s$ such that RESP($i$,$s$) for some matrix participant $i$, possibly identical to $x$ (as long as the syntactic requirements on obligatory control are met).

IOW: *Someone must take responsibility for the situation described by the infinitive complement.*

In addition:

- Farkas's MCC can be eliminated.
- The reflexive analysis of the unexpressed subject can be maintained.

With only the RPCC and common sense, we can correctly predict the controller in the basic cases.



#### *promise*

How do we derive the controller in (27)?

(27) John promised Mary to be allowed to leave early.

*Promise* has the following meaning components:

- A promiser $p_1$
- A promisee $p_2$
- A promised situation $s$ which benefits $p_2$, such that RESP($p_1$,$s$)

The RPCC only says that [PRO *to be allowed to leave early*] must be interpreted as $s$. Either:

- PRO=John; $s$ = John being allowed to leave early.
- PRO=Mary; $s$ = Mary being allowed to leave early.

John is an implausible controller for two commonsense reasons:

- The promised event benefits the promisee, and it is implausible than someone would benefit from someone else being allowed to leave early.
- The promised event is a (perhaps small) sacrifice for the promiser – otherwise there is no need to make a promise – and it is hard to imagine that being allowed to leave early would constitute a sacrifice.

#### *ask*

Recall (21): *The pupil asked the teacher to leave early*.

*Ask* has these meaning components:

- A asker $p_1$
- A askee $p_2$
- A asked-for situation $s$ which benefits $p_1$, such that RESP($p_2$,$s$)

The RPCC only requires that the the infinitive complement, including the unexpressed subject, corresponds to $s$.

Two construals are possible:

- The pupil requested of the teacher that the teacher leave early. [implausible]
- The pupil requested of the teacher that the pupil leave early. [plausible]

Why is the first interpretation implausible? Common sense: It's inappropriate for a student to make certain requests of a teacher, due to the power asymmetry. Since it's inappropriate, it's implausible.[2]

[2]But imagine: "There is such an unbelievably rude boy in Mrs. Thompson's class. The pupil asked the teacher to leave early!".

### Prediction: Multiple RESP-relations

*Threaten* has the following meaning components:

- a communication event $e$, which is a type of command, saying "You better $X$ or else $Y$"
- a speaker $p_1$
- an addressee $p_2$
- a situation $X$ constituting the content of a command from $p_1$ to $p_2$, such that RESP($p_2$,$X$)
- another situation $Y$ which negatively affects $p_2$, which will arise in case situation $X$ does not come to pass, such that RESP($p_1$,$Y$)

According to the RPCC, the infinitive complement can correspond to either $X$ or $Y$.

- If the infinitive is to be construed as $X$, as in (28), then the situation that it describes, including the unexpressed subject, must satisfy the constraints on the interpretation of $X$
- Otherwise, if the infinitive complement is to be construed as $Y$, as in (29) and (30), then the infinitive with the unexpressed subject must satisfy the constraints on the interpretation of $Y$

Complement $= X$; RESP-taker $=$ GOAL:

(28) a. The terrorist has threatened <u>him</u>$_i$ PRO$_i$ to leave the country or else face brutality.

b. The whole way there, Marlone had implored, demanded, and threatened <u>him</u>$_i$ PRO$_i$ to act "normal" around the pastor.

Complement $= Y$; RESP-taker $=$ SOURCE:

(29) <u>They</u>$_i$ threatened PRO$_i$ to take his house away.

(30) a. I$_i$ was threatened PRO$_i$ to have my house taken away from me.

b. I$_i$ was threatened PRO$_i$ to be killed at work today by an irate customer who left before the cops got there.

*Assure* also has two situations for which a participant can take responsibility.

- a state of affairs $Y$ described in $e$ that is beneficial to the addressee $p_2$ such that RESP($p_1$,$Y$)
- (when the assurance is issued as a command:) an event $X$ that causes $Y$ such that RESP($p_2$,$X$)

Complement $= X$; RESP-taker $=$ GOAL:

(31) a. The threats were earlier discounted by the governor's office, which assured <u>us</u>$_i$ PRO$_i$ to continue with our program.

b. On the way out of town we asked a local for directions, who confidently assured <u>us</u>$_i$ PRO$_i$ to just keep going straight ahead and stick to the road we were on.



Complement $= Y$; RESP-taker $=$ SOURCE:

(32) a. <u>The police</u>$_i$ duly registered a case and assured us PRO$_i$ to do all the investigation needed and report to us before morning.

b. <u>Avis</u>$_i$ has assured us PRO$_i$ to beat or meet any of their competitors' rates.

(33) a. [Upon arrival at the Paris airport of Roissy Charles de Gaulle... I was confronted with the unpleasant surprise that my luggage had not arrived yet...] I$_i$ was assured PRO$_i$ to receive my luggage on the very next day.

b. I arrived back in the city, my home. I had very little cash on me, only to discover that my replacement debit card had not arrived in the mail. so, after many conversations with my credit union, I$_i$ was assured PRO$_i$ to receive it within four days.

*Promise* has $Y$, but not $X$; even if a promise is used to persuade someone to do something, the promisee does not incur responsibility to carry it out. Thus the RPCC correctly predicts that the infinitive complement of *promise* cannot describe the situation desired in exchange for a promise:

(34) *My mother promised me$_i$ PRO$_i$ to do my homework (and I would get five dollars).

### Refinement: commands

Since there are two possible responsibility-takers in the case of *threaten* and *assure* and two syntactically available controllers in their active, transitive uses, we predict a 2-by-2 typology:

| | source-control | goal-control |
|---|---|---|
| goal-responsibility | | *threaten* (28)<br>*assure* (31) |
| source-responsibility | *threaten* (29)<br>*assure* (32) | *threaten* (30)<br>*assure* (33) |

But the goal-responsibility, source-control slot is missing:

(35) *The boss$_i$ threatened <u>Joey</u> PRO$_i$ to be given back his two grand.

Related: no control-switches with *tell*:

(36) The prisoner$_i$ asked/*told <u>the guard</u> PRO$_i$ to be released (by saying, "Release me!").

Mysterious fact: The recipient of a command must control the infinitive complement.

## Conclusion

- Farkas's notion of responsibility was on the right track.
- However, responsibility only *indirectly* determines the controller, by limiting the set of possible interpretations of infinitive clauses, including the unexpressed subject.
- Controller construal is also based on a host of extra-grammatical principles that determine the relative plausibility of interpretations.

# A Nietzsche, Responsibility, and Punishment

To make the notion of responsibility more vivid, it may be useful to recall Nietzsche's remarks *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in which he asks, "To breed an animal *with the right to make promises*– is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man? is it not the real problem regarding man?" His answer is that man becomes "*calculable, regular, necessary*", and "able to stand security for his own future", not through gentle means, but through pain and threat of punishment.

> It was here [in contractual relationships of buying, selling, barter, trade, and traffic] that promises were made; it was here that a memory had to be made for those who promised; it is here, one suspects, that we shall find a great deal of severity, cruelty, and pain. To inspire trust in his promise to repay, to provide a guarantee of the seriousness and sanctity of his promise, to impress repayment as a duty, an obligation upon his own conscience, the debtor made a contract with the creditor and pledged that if he should fail to repay he would substitute something else that he "possessed," something he had control over; for example, his body, his wife, his freedom, or even his life... Above all, however, the creditor could inflict every kind of indignity and torture upon the body of the debtor; for example, cut from it as much as seemed commensurate with the size of the debt–and everywhere and from early times one had to enact evaluations, legal evaluations, of the individual limbs and parts of the body from this point of view, some of them going into horrible and minute detail...

Nietzsche articulates the essence of responsibility: threat of punishment.

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