

Revisiting Visser's Generalization

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A: Visser's Generalization in (1) is exemplified in (2a vs. b) (cf. Visser 1973, Bresnan 1982).

(1) Visser's Generalization (VG): Subject control predicates cannot passivize.

(2) a. John_i promised Maggie [PRO_i to do the shopping].

b. *Maggie was promised IA_i (by John_i) [PRO_i to do the shopping].

Bresnan (1982) argues that VG is actually not a restriction on passivization, but a restriction on control: the implicit agent of passives (depicted as IA in (2b) and below) cannot act as a controller in obligatory control context (though it licenses non-obligatory control, e.g. into purpose clauses; Landau 2000, 2013). This view on VG received an important update in van Urk (2013). Based on the observation in (3a-c) that impersonal passives allow obligatory control by their IA (cf. Koster 1984), he proposes the Revised Visser's Generalization in (4).

(3) a. It was decided/ promised IA_i [PRO_i to do the shopping]. (English)

b. Ihr wurde IA_i versprochen [PRO_i einzukaufen]. (German)
her.DAT was promised to.do.the.shopping.

c. Er werd geprobeerd IA_i [om PRO_i eekhoorns te vangen]. (Dutch)
there was tried INF.C squirrels to catch

(4) Revised Visser's Generalization (RVG):

Obligatory control by an implicit subject is impossible iff an overt DP agrees with T.

Van Urk derives (4) within Landau's AGREE-model of Control (Landau 2000 2004, 2006, 2008), where the control relation is computed on the basis of an AGREE relation between the controller, a mediating functional head (matrix T for subject control, matrix v/Appl for (indirect) object control) and PRO. The IA of passives is projected as a covert DP with 3rd person, singular ϕ -features (cf. Landau 2010, Legate 2012, 2014). In impersonal passives (3a-c), IA values T and, thus, can establish an AGREE/control relation with PRO. Since in personal passives as (2b) the raised DP_{NOM} agrees with T, T cannot mediate AGREE/control between IA and PRO. (Control by DP_{NOM} is formally possible in (2b) but semantically deviant).

B: The technical implementation of RVG faces some problems. First, the idea that the IA is syntactically projected with ϕ -features is not generally accepted (e.g. Bruening 2012, Legate 2012, 2014, Pitteroff & Schäfer 2017). Further, van Urk must assume that DP_{NOM} in e.g. German passives moves out of the vP so that it intervenes between T and IA, despite arguments that DP_{NOM} can stay in situ (Haider 1993, Wurmbrand 2006). Further, van Urk must assume that 'it' in (3a) (and its relatives in other languages) does not agree with T even though it has ϕ -features. In fact, Bennis (1986), Vikner (1995) or Pitteroff & Schäfer (2017) (a.o.) argue that 'it' is not a dummy in (3a) but a pro-form cataphorically related to the complement clause; as such it can control into adjuncts and be controlled (5).

(5) It_i was decided IA_k [without PRO_i being announced] [PRO_k to raise the taxes next year]_i

Finally, Landau (2015) identifies a set of conceptual problems for his (2000, seq.) AGREE-model and replaces it with an alternative system that does not derive control via AGREE.

C: (4) is challenged by some, though not all passives where DP_{NOM} is non-human. Consider first the passive in (6). Even though a DP agrees with T, the IA perfectly controls PRO. However, (6) does not refute (4) as DP_{NOM} selects the infinitive as its complement and the overt/covert subject of DP_{NOM} can itself control PRO (7). Control by the IA in (6) might then be an illusion as the subject of DP_{NOM} is identical with IA due to complex predicate formation.

(6) A new attempt was made IA_i [PRO_i to solve the problem].

(7) I admire/recognized [the/his_i attempt [PRO_i to solve the problem]].

The German active-passive pair in (8a/b) and their English translations in (8a'/b') are different, however. Here DP_{NOM} does not select the infinitive (9) and the subject of DP_{NOM} cannot act as a controller (10). Since control by the IA is perfect, (8b/b') are serious counterexamples to (4). (11) provides a further German example.

- (8) a. Er_i verwendete viel Zeit/Geld/Grips da-rauf [PRO_i das Problem zu lösen].
 a' He_i spent lots of time/money/intelligence on [PRO_i solving the problem].
 b. Viel Zeit/Geld/Grips wurde da-rauf verwendet IA_i [PRO_i das Problem zu lösen].
 b' Lots of time/money/intelligence was spent IA_i on [PRO_i solving the problem].
 (9) *I admire/observe [his time/money/intelligence] (on) [PRO solving the problem].
 (10) My_i money was spent IA_k on [PRO_{*i/k} solving the problem].
 (11) Alles Geld wurde da-rauf verwettet/gewettet [PRO das Rennen zu gewinnen].
 all money was it-on bet the race to win

D: The infinitive in (8a'/b') is embedded in a PP. Similarly, (8a/b/11) involve a pro-form (*da*) + P (*'rauf'*; on) combination and a post-field infinitive co-indexed with the pro-form (e.g. Müller 1995, Haider 2010). Still, such examples show the contour of obligatory control (cf. Landau 2000, 2013) as i) arbitrary PRO (12) and ii) long distance control (13) are impossible and iii) PRO only allows a sloppy interpretation (14). (German (8a/b/11) behave the same.)

- (12) Lots of money was spent IA_i on [PRO_{i/*k} solving the problem].
 (13) John_i hopes that lots of money will be spent IA_k on [PRO_{k/*i} solving the problem].
 (14) John spent lots of money on [solving the problem] and Peter did too. (*only sloppy*)

E: Controller choice (whether a verb is a subject or an object control verb) is determined on semantic grounds (cf. Landau 2013). RVG in (4) suggests that the actual control relation is established on purely syntactic grounds: a DP_{NOM} overrides control by the IA even if DP_{NOM} is not selected by controller choice (thus leading to semantic deviance (cf. (2b)). However, the contrast between (2b) vs. and (8b/b'/11) suggests that only a *human* DP_{NOM} overrides control by the IA, i.e. (morpho-)syntax plays a partial role only. We argue that DP_{NOM} is generally preferred as the actual controller, but that exceptions to VG follow from (15) (instead of (4)):

(15) DP_{NOM} overrides control by an IA iff it fulfills all restrictions on control and of selection. Landau (2015) distinguishes between logophoric (with attitude verbs) and predicative control (with non-attitude verbs). Pitteroff & Schäfer (2017) show that the IA of impersonal passives can control in both contexts. Under (15), a non-human DP_{NOM} will not override logophoric control by an IA if logophoric control is subject to a *human restriction* as argued by Landau (2015). (11) shows that this prediction is correct. (8b/b'), however, would involve predicative control (no *de re/de dicto* ambiguity; the truth of the whole clause depends on the truth of the infinitive; mismatching time adverbials are not allowed), which is not inherently restricted to human controllers. A non-human DP_{NOM} in such examples is also ruled out by (15) because a competing controller must fulfill the *selectional restrictions* on the controlled argument position. For example, 'Maggie' in (2b) qualifies as a shopper but 'it' in (3a) does not. (This covers all examples of (R)VG in the literature.) Crucially, DP_{NOM} in (8b/b') does not satisfy the selectional restrictions on PRO, as 'solve the problem' selects an agent. While 'Lots of money/his intelligence solved the problem' are not fully unacceptable, such instrument subjects are coerced into agentive events (cf. 16) (Alexiadou & Schäfer 2006); to see this, note that an agentive event is presupposed under negation with instrument subjects but not with agents like *John* (17). However, coercion is neither necessary in (8b/b'), as control by the IA saves the sentence, nor possible, as a coerced DP_{NOM} is not *selected* by the matrix verb (18).

- (16) (Spending/using) lots of money/ his intelligence solved the problem.
 (17) Lots of money/his intelligence/John did not solve the problem. (--> Money was used)
 (18) (*Using) lots of money/(*Using) all the money was spent on solving the problem.

F: (15) predicts a VG-effect in predicative control if the non-human DP_{NOM} fulfills the selectional restrictions on PRO. Examples are hard to construct, but (20) is a case in point (also in German). The active in (19) conveys that an agent tries to be burnt and even pays for this, but the passive in (19) can hardly convey this; thus (20) equals (2b).

- (19) He_i spent the money on [PRO_i being burnt] (20) ??The money was spent on [being burnt]

G: Based on counterexamples to (R)VG, we argued that an interplay of morpho-syntactic prominence and semantic restrictions (formulated in (15)) determines the actual controller.

Selected Refs.: van Urk, C. 2013. Visser's generalization: The syntax of control and the passive. *LI* 44: 168-178
• Landau, I. 2013. *Control in Generative Grammar: A Research Companion*. CUP • Landau, I. 2015. *A Two-Tiered Theory of Control*. MIT Press • Pitteroff, M. & F. Schäfer 2017. *Implicit control crosslinguistically*. Ms.