Control and Obviation: A View from Polish

Existing accounts of control in Polish discuss three types of control predicates (Zabrocki 1981, Bondaruk 2004, Witkoś 2010, Witkoś et al 2011, Przepiórkowski & Rosen 2005, Dziwirek 2000, among others), which differ with respect to the types of complement clauses they allow. Verbs like zdolać ‘manage’ allow only bare infinitive complements (1a), verbs like marzyć ‘dream’, krzyczeć ‘scream’ or nalegać ‘insist’ allow only infinitival clauses introduced by the subjunctive complementizer żęby (1b), and finally, verbs like chcieć ‘want’ or woleć ‘prefer’ can occur either with or without żęby (1c).


Jan managed COMP sing<INF> Jan dreamed COMP sing<INF> Jan preferred COMP sing<INF>

‘Jan managed to sing.’ ‘Jan dreamed to sing.’ ‘Jan preferred to sing.’

The syntactic effects of the complementizer are relatively well-understood; the works cited above have shown that it can affect case assignment and block genitive of negation or result in Instrumental (as opposed to agreeing) case on predicative adjectives. This can be (and has been) accounted for by assuming that the presence of the complementizer creates an extra boundary (such as a strong phase in the sense of Chomsky 2001) that disallows Agree or Move across it; see Witkoś 2010, for example). The interpretation of PRO in żęby-clauses is somewhat more elusive. In this talk, building on Bondaruk’s seminal work (and her classification of control verb types in Polish), I examine the factors that determine when obligatory control across the complementizer is possible. Even though my focus in this talk is not on the lively and ongoing debate between Movement-based versus Agree-based theories on control, I implement the analysis in terms of Landau’s Agree-based calculus of control, thus hoping to offer new support in favor of its favor.

Bondaruk shows that the correlation between the presence of the complementizer and the lack of obligatory control (OC) holds only for verbs like want:


Jan wants COMP go<INF> to cinema Jan wants COMP go<INF> to cinema

‘Jan wants to go to the movies.’ ‘Jan wants (others) to go to the movies.’

However, she also shows there exist many predicates do allow OC PRO across the complementizer; these include subject control verbs like marzyć ‘dream’, modlić się ‘pray’ (3a), obawiać się ‘fear’, and object control verbs like radzić ‘advise’ (3b), uczyć ‘teach’ or prosić ‘ask’.


Jan dreams/prays REFL COMP fly<INF> Jan advised Piotr COMP go to home

‘Jan dreams/prays to fly.’ ‘Jan advised Piotr to go home.’

For volitional predicates, Bondaruk analogizes the lack of OC interpretation across the complementizer can be analogized to well-documented obviational effects found in finite subjunctive clauses (see Avrutin and Babyonyshev 1997, Antonenko 2008, Tomaszewicz 2008, Szucich 2009, among many others, on obviation in Slavic), whereby the matrix subject cannot be coreferential with the embedded pronominial subject in both (4a) and (4b).


Jan wants COMP came Jan wants COMP go to cinema

‘Jan wants (someone else) to come.’ ‘Jan wants us/others to go to the movies.’

However, it is also well-known that there are contexts in which obviational effects disappear; such as when the embedded subject is dative (5a), when matrix subject is not directly responsible for the embedded event (5b) (as shown by Farkas 1988, Szabolcsi 2010, Schlenker 2005, among others), or when the controller is an object (5c).


Jan wanted COMP him.DAT was happy Jan.DIM wants COMP was already adult

‘Jan wanted to feel happy/merry.’ ‘John wants to be grown up already.’

For example, John told Peter COMP gave Marię present.

‘John told Peter to give Maria a present.’
This opens up the possibility, which I explore in this talk, that for all control verbs, obligatory control across the complementizer is possible in the same contexts in which obviation effects disappear or are absent to begin with. This suggests that PRO in żeby -clauses typically receives NOC interpretation (due to obviation) but OC interpretation becomes possible under certain well-defined circumstances: (i) when PRO is controlled by a surface object, (ii) when PRO is controlled by an underlying object (or an implicit object), or (iii) when the matrix subject is not responsible for the embedded event (or the event is felt to be out of its control). To illustrate, in (4a) above, even though John dreams of flying (or prays to fly), it will depend on some other entity (not John) whether this will actually happen; John is not directly responsible for it. This presence (or absence) of responsibility can be syntactically encoded by the presence of the RESP operator of the kind proposed by Farkas 1992, located in the left periphery of the clause. For the OC interpretation to be possible, PRO cannot be coindexed with the RESP operator (6a). If the two are coindexed (as in (6b)), Principle B violation ensues.


Selected References

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