Against Control by Weak Implicit Agents

0. Two Issues Landau (2010, 2013) and van Urk (2013) argue that personal (1) and impersonal (2) passive data support their view that (a) the thematic subject of a passive is syntactically projected in "normal" subject position as a weak implicit argument (WIA) and (b) antecedent resolution in control structures is resolved entirely within the computational system by either Agree or predication, not via the application of a Bare Output Condition (BOC) at LF, as suggested in Reed (2014: Ch. 7). In this paper, we argue that a closer examination of new and familiar data seems to point in the opposite direction.

(1) *Le jeu a été joué* [*en* PRO *tirant le levier sur le côté de la machine*]. Parallel to data in Roeper (1983)
"The (slot) game was played by pulling the lever on the side of the machine."

(2) *Il a été proposé/décidé* [*de* PRO *fonder une nouvelle nation*]. Parallel to data in Manzini (1983: 427)
"It was proposed/decided to establish a new nation."

Argument 1: According to Landau (2013:231), Non-Obligatory Control (NOC) arises when syntactic considerations preclude antecedent resolution via predication or Agree. He argues this to be the case for personal passives of the type in (1), suggesting that (a) the property of pulling a lever cannot be logically predicated of a game (b) the WIA (referring to the game player(s)) lacks a D-feature, upon which predication is contingent, and (c) Agree is blocked by the island status of the adjunct clause. A configuration of NOC results. In contrast, Reed's BOC below in (3) identifies (1) as a context of Obligatory Control (OC) since adjunction of the *while*-clause to TP results in both *le jeu* 'the game' and the main clause c-commanding, and, hence, serving as potential obligatory controllers of PRO. While the former reading is semantically ruled out (games cannot pull levers), the latter one is ruled in since, as originally suggested in Williams (185:308-309), the adjunct describes a typical property of events of slot-machine playing -- they occur when a lever is pulled.

(3) By default, PRO must take as its antecedent a c-commanding implicit or explicit argument within the superordinate clausal domain that immediately dominates the clause in which it appears, with lexical specifications ruling out potential antecedents and ForceP constituting a phase that "closes off" the search space. If there are no c-commanding potential antecedents or the search space is closed off by ForceP, PRO is assigned the index *arb* and its phi-feature specifications are logophorically determined. Following Williams (1985: 303), an implicit argument c-commands X if the lexeme of which it is an implicit argument c-commands X. Reed (2014: 302, 305)

We suggest that the contrasting grammaticality of (1) above and (4) below provides a first argument in favor of Reed's analysis. Specifically, Landau's approach over-generates examples of the type in (4) since there is no reason why arbitrary PRO could not take as its antecedent some pragmatically determined set of game players who happened to play the game while mad at Bill. Reed's OC approach to these examples makes the right predictions since, as Williams observed, there are no games that have the typical property of being played while angry at an individual named Bill, whereas there are ones typically played by pulling a lever.

(4) **The game was played* [PRO *mad at Bill*]. Williams (1985: 309)

Argument 2: We next note that Landau's NOC approach to (1) fails to capture the fact that the individual(s) referred to by the WIA and the one(s) referred to by PRO must be one and the same. In other words, this alleged context of NOC contrasts in this respect with a typical configuration of NOC, such as the one in (5):

(5) [*En* PRO_{arb} *mangeant des frites*]*, j'ai tout à coup réalisé que le jeu avait été joué.*
"While eating fries, I suddenly realized that the game had already been played."
→PRO_{arb} does not necessarily refer to the people who played the game.

We argue that Reed's analysis captures this fact if one assumes with Parsons (1990) and Lasersohn (1993) that the implicit subject of a passive verb contrasts with the implicit indirect object of verbs of the *signal*-type in the active voice (as in, e.g., *John signaled to leave.*) in that the WIA of passives is entirely unrepresented in the syntactic structure at LF. Instead, this argument is interpretatively recoverable from meaning postulates (MPs) of the type in (6). Under these assumptions, then, if some game is typically played by pulling a lever, as entailed by Reed's event control analysis of (1), then, given the MP in (6), it must be the case that the understood Agent of that playing event is also the one pulling the lever.

(6) $\forall e$[ATOM(**play**, *e*) → $\exists x$ AGENT(*x*, *e*)] Parallel to a MP in Lasersohn (1993: 159)

Argument 3: Landau (2013) follows van Urk (2011, 2013) in attributing the ungrammaticality of "Visser" examples like (7) to the syntax of control. Namely, agreement of matrix T (*a* 'has') with *Paul* is said to preclude T from agreeing with the WIA of *menacé* 'threatened,' making *Paul* the obligatory controller of PRO, in violation of lexical semantic requirements associated with *menacé* threatened.'

(7) **Paul a été menacé* [*d'* PRO *intenter un procés contre lui*].
"Paul has been threatened with legal proceedings."

In contrast, Reed attributes the ungrammaticality of (7) to the fact that PRO must take a c-commanding nominal as its antecedent whenever one is present in the relevant domain, cf. her BOC in (3). If the complement clause of *menacé* 'threatened' takes the form of FinP, as Reed would assume, then *Paul* c-commands PRO within that domain and he must be selected as controller, in violation of lexical semantic requirements of *menacé*. We argue that the ungrammaticality of (8) supports Reed's approach over that of Landau and van Urk since a comparison of (7) with (8) reveals that neither PRO nor overt pronouns can take the WIA of a passive matrix verb as an antecedent. This parallel is lost under the Landau/van Urk analysis since their account of (7) makes crucial reference to the syntax of control, which is unattested in (8). However, the parallel is captured by our refined variant of Reed (2014) since we assume that the implicit argument associated with passives is unrepresented at LF. It is, therefore, equally unavailable to the theories of binding and control.

(8) **Paul a été assuré**$_k$* [*qu'**on**$_k$ le dédommagerait*].
*"Paul was promis**ed**$_k$ [that **they**$_k$ would compensate him]."

Argument 4: Landau (2013: 183) notes that indirect questions like (9) are problematic for his and van Urk's Agreement approach to examples of the type in (7). Namely, in (9), as in (7), agreement of matrix T with the NP in subject position should preclude T from agreeing with the WIA of the passive verb, making the former the controller of PRO. In (9), however, native speakers report just the opposite, as indicated by the indices.

(9) *Mary$_i$ was* [$_{vP}$ IMP$_k$ *asked* [$_{ForceP}$ *where* PRO$_{*i/k}$ *to throw the trash*]].

We argue that Reed's analysis accommodates these facts since her BOC identifies indirect questions as contexts of NOC. That is, if, as is standardly assumed, *wh*-elements undergo movement to Spec of ForceP, then (9) contrasts with (7) in involving ForceP, not FinP, complementation. As a result, the BOC in (3) bars *Mary* from serving as controller in (9) and PRO's reference is logophorically determined. In this particular example, PRO is likely to be understood to refer to the implicit asker of the question since one usually asks where trash is thrown out because one wishes to do so. Additional support for Reed's NOC approach to indirect questions is provided by examples like (10), which Landau's OC analysis incorrectly predicts will violate Principle B, but her NOC approach predicts will not.

(10) *Ton bébé$_x$ ne risque pas de savoir* [*quand PRO$_{arb}$ le$_x$ nourrir*]. *C'est toi que le sait.*
"Your baby$_x$ doesn't know [$_{ForceP}$ when to PRO$_{arb}$ feed him$_x$]. You do!"

Argument 5: Landau (2013: 180-183) also follows van Urk (2013: 174-175) in analyzing impersonal passives like (2) in terms of OC of PRO by a WIA. Specifically, expletive *il* 'it' is argued to merge only to check the EPP feature of T; *il* 'it' and T do not undergo Agree. This means that T is free to Agree with the WIA, making it the obligatory controller of PRO. We note that this OC approach to impersonal passives immediately over-generates a significant number of ungrammatical sentences in both French and English since the construction is actually limited, in these languages, to verbs of speech and thought, compare (2) with examples like (11a,b).

(11) a. **Il a été adoré danser toute la nuit.* *"It was loved to dance all night long."
b. **Il a été oublié d'amener le vin.* *"It was forgotten to bring the wine."

We argue that this restriction can be made to follow from Reed's analysis if one assumes that (2) and (11) both involve embedded ForceP, not FinP, complementation. If so, then the BOC in (3) will identify them as contexts of NOC, which, in turn, means that PRO's reference will be logophorically determined. Given that the literature on overt logophoric pronouns has established that, in many languages, such pronouns are limited to the complement clauses of verbs of speech and thought, it is not at all unexpected that this should be true of logophoric PRO in French and English. The lack of Principle B effects in examples like (12) and the existence of Long Distance Control in examples like (13) offers further support for our proposal:

(12) *Il n'a évidemment pas été décidé par les colons$_x$* [*de* PRO$_{arb}$ *les$_x$ taxer à ce point*].
C'est bien sûr la royauté qui en a décidé ainsi.
"It was obviously not decided by the colonists$_x$ to tax them$_x$ at such a rate. It was the Crown."

(13) *Les colons$_x$ disaient qu'il avait été proposé par la royauté* [*de* PRO$_{arb=x}$ *verser une redevance réduite*].
"The colonists claimed that it had been proposed by the Crown to pay at a lower taxation rate."

Argument 6: The Landau/van Urk approach to impersonal passives also faces an over-generation problem with respect to verbs of speech and thought, producing ungrammatical examples like (14):

(14) **Il a été refusé* [*de* PRO *discuter du problème*]. *"It was refused/declined to comment on the issue."

We argue that the BOC in (3) accounts for such examples if one assumes that these verbs select for FinP, not ForceP, as argued in Rizzi (2001). If so, then the BOC will select expletive *il* 'it' as the controller, which clashes with the inherently non-expletive nature of PRO. Three additional pieces of evidence for this proposal will be provided that show that impersonal passivization correlates with selection for full inflected ForceP complements in languages like English and Dutch.