

Article

The Copy Theory of Control and the Analysis of Finite Control

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Abstract

Under the Markovian property of derivations the history of the derivation is not preserved in the current state, hence chains cannot be read off it. Instead, a Copy relation applies between identical inscriptions at the phase level, before Transfer. Consequently, Copy can take place between two identical theta-marked arguments, each separately introduced by External Merge, yielding control. In this article, we apply the Copy Theory of Control (CTC) to finite control in Greek. In finite control, the lower member of a Copy relation is interpreted as a bound variable (i.e., a ‘PRO’). At the same time its deletion is licensed in a null subject configuration, defined by Agree with rich I (like a ‘pro’). Since by hypothesis under the CTC there are no empty categories but only copies, the potential contradiction between PRO and pro properties can be avoided, under appropriate assumptions about the modular organization of the interfaces. We further predict that the same (subjunctive) structure in Greek can be ambiguous between control and pronominal null subject readings, and that non-null subject languages like English cannot have finite control.

Keywords: copy; control; agree; null subject; deletion; phase

1. The Copy and Deletion Analysis of Empty Categories

In minimalist theory, under “the copy theory of movement” (Chomsky, 1995, p. 251), movement is an operation of Internal Merge (IM) targeting a syntactic object that has already entered the derivation by External Merge (EM) and copying it in a higher position. In the resulting chain (a pair of copies), the lower member deletes at the phonological interface. For instance, in English (1) *John* undergoes EM in θ -position and then IM to matrix subject position (forced by the Extended Projection Principle, EPP). The two copies form a chain, and the lower copy undergoes deletion.

(1) John seems [_{IP} ~~John~~ to speak]

The challenge of reorganizing empty categories around the new analysis of movement was taken up by the Movement Theory of Control (MTC (Hornstein, 1999)). The idea is that the derivation in (1) could be applied to examples of Obligatory Control (henceforth referred to simply as control) like (2) by assuming θ -roles to be features. Exactly as a moved argument can check different sets of agreement features, so it can check different θ -roles *qua* features. So, *John* in (2) undergoes EM in one θ -position and IM into another. Everything else is as in (1).

(2) John tried [~~John~~ to speak]

However, the MTC means abandoning a postulate that Chomsky (2000, p. 103) formulates as follows: “pure merge [i.e., EM] in θ -position is required of (and restricted to)



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arguments”.¹ In Chomsky (2021) this postulate is captured by Duality of Semantics which restates that “EM is associated with θ -roles” (p. 18).

Chomsky (2021) introduces a new departure into this picture. Derivations are “Markovian in a strong sense beyond the normal Markovian property of derivations. The derived WorkSpace, the current state of the derivation, does not contain items that were generated earlier. [...] the history is not preserved in the current state” (p. 20).² This statement opens the way to a new proposal about control. Suppose that in accordance with Duality of Semantics we construct a structure like (2) by EM of the two separate inscriptions of *John*. We furthermore take infinitival sentences not to be phases in (2) as in (1). Under these assumptions, at Transfer, (1) and (2) are not distinguishable given the absence of a record of their derivational history. As schematized in (3), Chomsky (2021, 2024) proposes that the two identical inscriptions within the same phasal domain are identified as copies; formally, they are in a Copy relation. Following the formation of the Copy pair (Form Copy in Chomsky’s (2021) terms), the lower copy deletes. In this way, Chomsky (2021, 2024) succeeds in unifying control with movement under Copy and deletion, without giving up Duality of Semantics.

- (3) a. John seems [_{IP} John to speak] ‘trace’
 Copy: <John, John>
 b. John tried [John to speak] ‘PRO’
 Copy: <John, John>

The present article takes as its starting point Chomsky’s Copy Theory of Control (CTC) without further discussion,³ to address a classical issue in control, namely control into finite sentences, exemplified with Greek. The Greek data are reviewed in Section 2, as are previous analyses of finite control. Since the essence of the phenomenon is that a PRO-like subject from the point of view of interpretation (i.e., a bound variable) is embedded in a pro-like finite null subject context, we also briefly survey the state of the art concerning pro and null subject languages (NSLs).

As argued originally by Borer (1986), expletive pro is not necessary to satisfy the EPP, since this can be done directly by a rich I (see also Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou, 1998). This line of explanation is adopted by Chomsky (2015, p. 9). Nevertheless, referential pro is still required. Recall that θ -positions need to be satisfied by EM. In the absence of a lexical argument, pro fulfills this requirement, remaining in vP-internal position, while the EPP is satisfied by rich I. Unlike for trace and PRO, no antecedent is necessary for pro, nor is a local antecedent possible, just as for lexical pronouns. Next, given the Copy approach to traces of Chomsky (1995), Holmberg (2005) notices that a deletion approach to pro is possible as well (cf. also Roberts, 2010). Under this alternative, pro is an actual pronoun that deletes under feature identity with a rich inflection.

- (4) a. (Loro) parlano (Italian)
 ‘They speak’
 b. [_{IP} I [[_{DP} loro] [_{vP} parlano] _____] Agree

Saab (2009, p. 654) in turn construes deletion in terms of ‘No Transfer’, that is no lexical insertion for the abstract terminals of syntax, given the Late Insertion assumption of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz, 1993). Schematically, in (4b) the pronoun would be an abstract matrix of Formal Features (FFs), say [D [n]], while at Spell-Out, feature identity with rich I licenses ‘No Transfer’ (no Spell-Out). This view is consistent with the minimalist view that syntactic operations and principles work on FFs. Nevertheless, for ease of exposition, we will stay with the kind of notation that Chomsky (2021, 2024) adopts, where lexical terminals are represented in the syntax.

In Section 2, we consider previous approaches to finite control, taking Greek as our representative case study, as it is well documented in the literature. We argue that Greek subjunctives are ordinary finite, tensed clauses, simply lacking phasal status. In Section 3 we provide step-by-step derivations for both English infinitival control and for Greek finite control contexts. The existence of finite control in Greek but not in English can be imputed to the fact that finite subjects need not be externalized in Greek under the null subject parameter. This need not affect their bound variable interpretation under Copy since the Externalization (EXT) and Interpretation (INT) procedures are independent. In Section 4 we consider some consequences of the analysis. The same subjunctive contexts that display finite control can also license null subjects with (free or coreferential) pronominal interpretation. We argue that the CTC captures this difference in terms of whether Copy does or does not apply. We also draw a summary of the parameters involved in our discussion, predicting the existence of languages that are non-NSL (like English) but do display control into non-phasal finite complements. We surmise that languages recently argued to display control of overt nominative pronouns (Landau, 2024a and references quoted there) fit the bill. Section 5 explores some connected problems such as hyper-raising and concludes the discussion.

2. Finite Control and Balkan Subjunctive Sentences: Data and Previous Analyses

In all Balkan languages, including Greek, the control reading is found in finite clauses embedded under the so-called subjunctive particle (henceforth, PRT), namely *na* in Greek. Unlike infinitives in English, *na*-sentences exhibit a dual pattern. First, they allow a free pronominal reading of their null subject corresponding to *pro* in classical generative terms, alternating with nominative subjects, as for instance in (5a). At the same time, the controlled PRO reading of the embedded subject of *na*-sentences is also possible, and in fact forced with verbs of obligatory control, such as ‘could/was able’ (the ‘dynamic’ modal) in (5b).

- (5) a. O Janis theli na fiji (o Petros)
 the Janis-NOM want-3SG PRT leave-3SG (the Peter)
 ‘Janis wants (him/Petros) to leave’
 b. O Petros borese na fiji
 the Peter-NOM could-3SG PRT leave-3SG
 ‘Peter was able to leave.’

In Government and Binding (GB) and classical minimalist theory, the control reading in (5b) is tied to PRO, which is constrained to ungoverned, hence Caseless positions by Chomsky (1981) or alternatively to null Case positions by Chomsky (1995). Early generative accounts of finite control focus on the obvious problem that PRO (as required by the interpretation) would have to occur in a governed Case position, where nominative subjects can also occur, cf. (5a) above. Iatridou (1993) argues that it is Tense, and not agreement, that is responsible for nominative Case in Greek (cf. also Varlokosta, 1994 on ‘semantic Tense’). Therefore, the control sentence in (5b) has a semantically defective Tense, which blocks nominative, and for this reason, it licenses PRO. However, Philippaki-Warbuton and Catsimali (1999) show that secondary predicates cross-referencing the controlled subject of a *na*-clause are overtly in the nominative case in (6). Based on this and similar data, they argue that the controlled subject in Greek is *pro* (as originally proposed by Philippaki-Warbuton, 1987) and cannot be PRO (see also Spyropoulos, 2007).

- (6) o Petros borese na fiji monos = tu
 the Peter-NOM could-3SG PRT leave-3SG alone = his
 ‘Peter was able to leave on his own.’

- (9) a. Victor va încerca (*ca pe Mihai) să-l ajute
 Victor will.3SG try that DOM Mihai PRT-him help-3SG
 b. Victor va încerca să ajute pe Mihai.
 Victor will.3SG try PRT help-3SG DOM Mihai
 ‘Victor will try to help Mihai.’

In short, known evidence is compatible with the conclusion that control (i.e., the bound reading of the null subject) involves a sentence introduced by a bare PRT (no *that*-type complementizer), suggesting an absent or defective C phase head—as required by theories of control unifying it with movement (i.e., the MTC and the CTC under Copy).⁷ In what follows, we take this conclusion as given, without further discussion. Note on the other hand that the relation between control and the PRT is a one-way implication: control requires a bare PRT-sentence, but a bare PRT-sentence is not (at least not necessarily) restricted to control. In this respect, the structural properties of PRT-complements again do not lead to a partition of the contexts of occurrence of PRO and pro.

3. The CTC Applied to Finite Control

Before we see how the CTC applies to finite control, we show step by step how it applies to English, for instance to (2). For maximum simplicity we keep the derivation entirely parallel to that of a raising sentence—which particularly means that the matrix *v* (immediately embedding the predicate *try*) is not a phase head. We will not elaborate on this assumption (but see below under (10), cf. also (Bode, 2026) for extensive discussion). For current purposes we take this as a background assumption.

Once the derivation of the embedded *vP* is complete with the merger of the external argument *John*, as in (10a), *I* merges, as in (10b). At this point, a few assumptions about the structure of the English infinitival clause become relevant. As far as we can tell, there is no evidence for a ϕ -probe on *I* and therefore for Agree with *John*, or for *John* raising under the EPP (see Manzini & Roussou, 2000; Grohmann et al., 2000). Therefore, we display the lower inscription of *John* in situ throughout the derivation—though nothing hinges on this. Next, no C phase head merges (as suggested by the absence of a complementizer).⁸ The derivation proceeds with the merger of the matrix predicate, followed by EM of another inscription of *John* as its external argument, as in (10c). At this point, the merger of finite *I* and ϕ -Agree with *John* takes place followed by IM of *John* to the edge of *IP*, satisfying the EPP (10d). The merger of the matrix C phase head closes the *vP* phase, inclusive of *v* (Chomsky, 2021), shaded in (10d). We assume that in the absence of further Merge operations the root node (itself a phase) is sent to the interfaces by default (Grohmann et al., 2017).

- (10) a. ... [_{vP} John [_{vP} speak]]
 b. ... [_{IP} to [_{vP} John [_{vP} speak]]]
 c. ... [_{vP} John tried [_{IP} to [_{vP} John [_{vP} speak]]]]
 d. C [_{IP} John I [_{vP} John tried [_{IP} to [_{vP} John [_{vP} speak]]]]]

Crucially for present purposes, at phase level, the Copy relation applies between the two inscriptions of *John* in (10d), as it satisfies the three necessary prerequisites: identity of X and Y, X c-commands Y, X and Y are in the same phase (Chomsky, 2021). At the beginning of this section, matrix *v* was assumed to be non-phasal. Returning to this point, a possible account is that *v*-phasehood depends on what Chomsky (2021) calls Transitivity, roughly accusative Case, which we can formalize in terms of a ϕ -feature probe on *v* (cf. Bode, 2026, p. 309; Manzini, 2026). Evidently, (subject) control verbs (like raising verbs) are not endowed with Transitivity, otherwise they would license ECM.⁹ Once Copy is established in (10d) (repeated below as (11a)), cf. (11b), the lower copy deletes as part of the Externalization (EXT) procedure in (11c). The Interpretive (INT) procedure treats the lower copy as a bound variable of the higher one, as (11d).

- (11) a. ... [_{VP} John tried [_{IP} to [_{VP} John speak]]]
 b. Copy < John, ~~John~~ >
 c. EXT: Copy < John, John > → < John, ~~John~~ >
 d. INT: Copy < John, John > → < John, x >

The derivation of a finite control sentence like Greek (5b), i.e., *o Petros borese na fiji* ‘Peter managed to leave’, can proceed in parallel with English infinitival control. Recall that our interest in this stems from the fact that once control is Copy and deletion of lexical terminals, the potential issue of the status of the empty category in finite control, namely PRO vs. pro, simply ceases to exist. Consider the derivation of (5b) in (12). The embedded inscription of *o Petros* ‘the Peter’ is introduced by EM. The merger of I, which unlike the English infinitival I is endowed with a φ -probe, triggers φ -Agree with *o Petros*, cf. (12a). Since Greek is a null subject language (NSL), raising of *o Petros* to the EPP position is not necessary (see the discussion in Section 1). The PRT *na* merges next, followed by the merger of the matrix predicate. The next step involves EM of the second inscription of *o Petros* as the external argument of *borese*, yielding (12b). Upon the merger of matrix I and C, as in (12c), the higher occurrence of *o Petros* φ -Agrees with I, as in (12c).

- (12) O Petros borese na fiji
 a. [_{IP} I [_{VP} fiji o Petros]]
 b. [_{VP} o Petros borese [_{PrtP} na [_{IP} I [_{VP} fiji o Petros]]]]
 c. [_{CP} C [_{IP} I [_{VP} o Petros borese [_{PrtP} na [_{IP} I [_{VP} fiji o Petros]]]]]]

Recall that *na*-complements are not (CP) phases, despite the finite form of the verb and the embedding under a sentential particle (recall that the PRT is not an exponent of C). This means that the lower and higher inscriptions of *o Petros* are within the same phasal domain and that Copy can relate the two inscriptions before the phase is sent to Transfer, as in (13a). Note that indices are merely a graphic device to unambiguously refer to the higher or lower copy and are not of course referential indices. As part of the EXT procedure, the lower copy deletes, as in (13b), while the INT mapping is as in (13c). The name *o Petros* is interpreted in the higher copy position, while the lower copy is interpreted as a bound variable of the higher one.

- (13) a. Copy < *o Petros*₁, *o Petros*₂ >
 b. EXT: < *o Petros*₁, ~~*o Petros*₂~~ >
 c. INT: *o Petros*₁ → the x: x *Petros*
 *o Petros*₂ → x

Now, deletion of the lower copy of *o Petros* in (13b) is tantamount to saying that Greek has a nominative controlled empty (i.e., deleted) category. We therefore need to explain how exactly this empty (i.e., deleted) category circumvents the problematic generalizations, discussed at length in Section 2, that controlled empty categories (‘PROs’) must be ungoverned, hence Caseless (as in GB, (Chomsky, 1981)) or must be associated with ‘Null Case’ (as in early minimalism, (Chomsky, 1995)). With these issues in mind, we turn to Greek examples involving the null subject parameter. The NSL status of Greek (and of the other Balkan languages) means that both the controller and the controllee may lack a phonological realization, as in (14). The standard account of this type of example is that both the higher and the lower argument involved in the Copy relation are pro subjects.

- (14) Borese na fiji
 was.able-3SG PRT leave-3SG
 ‘He/she was able to leave.’

Recall that in terms of the discussion in Section 1, pro is simply a pronoun that undergoes deletion as part of the EXT procedure. In (14), then, a pronoun (e.g., *aftos* ‘he’) undergoes EM as the argument of *fiji*. I carries φ -features and Agree takes place between

I and *aflos* in the absence of an intervening v* phase, as in (15a). The features of I are rich enough to project without the subject moving to the edge of I (no EPP). The particle *na* merges next and the derivation proceeds with the merger of the matrix predicate and of its external argument, again a pronoun, as in (15b). The last step in the derivation is Merge of matrix I and Agree with the vP-internal argument, as in (15c). The absence of an embedded C-phase head means that the two pronouns are in the same phase, entering the Copy relation in (15d). Thus, the two inscriptions of *aflos* are interpreted as copies of the same argument, hence as members of the control relation (two θ -roles).

- (15) a. ... [IP I [vP fiji aftos]] *Agree*
 b. ... [vP aftos [vP borese [PRTp na [IP I [vP fiji aftos]]]]]
 c. [IP I [vP aftos [vP borese [PRTp na [IP I [vP fiji aftos]]]]] *Agree*
 d. Copy < aftos, aftos >

The mapping to INT of the Copy pair is relatively straightforward. The higher copy of *aftos* is interpreted deictically, while the lower copy is a bound variable as in (16c). The interesting point of the derivation is the treatment of the pronominal copies by the EXT procedure. Deletion of the controller pronoun is derived via Agree with rich matrix I. Matters are not so simple with the controllee, though. In principle, there are two possible EXT procedures, yielding the desired result. The lower copy in the Copy pair may delete under identity with the higher copy. However, there is an alternative procedure, under which the lower pronoun in (16a) deletes under Agree with rich I, cf. (16b).

- (16) a. Copy < aftos₁, aftos₂ >
 b. EXT: aftos₁ → ∅ under Agree with rich I
 aftos₂ → ∅ under Agree with rich I
 ∅ under Copy
 c. INT: aftos₁ → that x: x (masc, sg)
 aftos₂ → x

As far as we can tell, the two options in (16b) are not contradictory with one another. Nevertheless, the question arises which principles regulate their interaction. Furthermore, comparison between the EXT procedure in (16), involving *afetos*, and that in (13) with *o Petros* raises the issue of the asymmetry between the assumption that deletion under Copy is exclusively involved in (13b) and the apparent possibility of double licensing of deletion in (16b). We argue that there is a single answer to these questions, namely that the two conditions in (16b) apply jointly in all cases. Evidently, deletion of the lexical content of the DP *o Petros* necessitates the presence of a higher copy from which that lexical content is recoverable, as in (13b). However, this is not sufficient.

Recall that we have adopted the conception of the null subject parameter proposed by Chomsky (2015), which ties it to the EPP (see also Section 1). In a non-NSL like English, it is necessary for the edge of IP to be filled by a DP, so that the EPP—defined in terms of the Labeling Algorithm, LA, of Chomsky (2013) or in other terms—is satisfied. Chomsky (2013) further suggests that the EPP captures criterial freezing in the sense of Rizzi (2010), i.e., the impossibility for an EPP argument to undergo further derivational steps (for reasons connected to the LA or other). Suppose Greek was a non-NS language like English. Then in (13) the EPP would require the movement of *o Petros* to the edge of IP where deletion could not take place since it would violate the EPP. Vice versa, in NS languages the EPP does not hold (because of the richness of I, under the LA or other) with the result that subjects do not necessarily move to the edge of IP ('free inversion') and that they can freely undergo further derivational steps crucially including deletion which yields the null subject. This is the actual state of affairs in Greek.

In standard examples of null subject, e.g., (4) above, deletion of subjects under Agree with rich I is restricted to pronominal subjects which match I in phi-features, under recoverability. Specifically, deletion of a lexical DP (i.e., one including an NP restrictor), cannot take place, precisely due to lack of recoverability, since the NP restrictor cannot be recovered under Agree but only the phi-features. However, in the case of (13) this particular issue does not arise, precisely because Copy holds. In the light of the discussion that precedes, we therefore detail the EXT procedure sketched in (13b), as in (17b). The Copy relation is necessary for the lower copy to delete. However, only in an NS language can deletion actually produce a well-formed result; in a non-NS language deletion of the Spec IP leads to an EPP violation. In this sense, we notate Agree with rich I (i.e., NS status) as a necessary condition on deletion together with Copy.¹⁰

- (17) a. Copy < o Petros₁, o Petros₂ >
 b. EXT: o Petros₁ → /o'petros/
 o Petros₂ → Ø under (i) Agree with rich I
 AND
 (ii) Copy

At this point, two differences are seen to divide Greek and English. First, Greek, but not English, has non-phasal finite complements, i.e., the *na*-clause. Second, Greek and English are on opposite sides of the null subject parameter. On these grounds we can answer the question as to why finite control is not available in English. English is a non-NSL, which means that the subject EPP holds. We may then assume that movement to the edge of IP is enforced and that the finite subject in English is inaccessible to further operations (cf. the criterial freezing effect), hence undeletable. Note that in order to block finite control in English it is sufficient to assume that all finite embedding is phasal, which seems to be empirically correct. However, the NSL nature of Greek is crucial in explaining why there is no violation in controlling (hence deleting) a Case-marked position, as suggested above. We return to parameters more systematically in Section 4.2.

Finally, Greek allows for one further option, where the overt member of a control relation is in the controllee position, while the silent one is in the controller position, as in (18). These patterns were already observed by [Philippaki-Warbuton and Catsimali \(1999\)](#). The MTC treats the data in (20) as backward control, where the higher copy in the movement chain deletes, as opposed to the lower one ([Polinsky & Potsdam, 2002](#); [Alexiadou et al., 2010](#) on Greek).¹¹

- (18) Borese na fiji o Petros
could-3SG PRT leave-3SG the Petros-NOM
'Petros was able to leave.'

Let us assume that sentences like (18) are *bona fide* instances of backward finite control. Can the CTC account for them? The answer seems to be positive. Under the CTC, the derivation of (18) is identical to that of (5b), as schematized in (19a), cf. (12) above. The same goes for the Copy relation at the phase level and for the INT procedure, as in (19b–c), cf. (13) above. As far as the syntax and INT are concerned, which copy is overtly realized is irrelevant.

- (19) a. ... [_{VP} o Petros borese [_{PRTP} na [_{IP} I [_{VP} fiji o Petros]]]]
 b. Copy < o Petros₁, o Petros₂ >
 c. INT: o Petros₁ → the x: x Petros
 o Petros₂ → x

Let us then consider the EXT procedure. Let us assume (as is the case with the MTC) that either member of a Copy relation can delete, namely the lower copy as in (17), but also the higher one, as in (20). One licensing condition on the deletion of the controller is therefore Copy; in backward control recoverability of lexical content is achieved via lexical

insertion in the controllee position, cf. (20b). However, the NSL status of Greek is also relevant. Recall that the EPP in NSLs is satisfied by rich I, rendering deletion of the subject possible. A desirable outcome of this approach, cf. (20b), is that it predicts that so-called backward control in Greek is restricted to cases where the controller is the subject and not the object (Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou, 2019). This restriction follows directly from the operation of Agree with rich I, an option unavailable for objects. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the lower Copy, in order to be externalized, must itself have Case (under the Case Filter as in GB, or under Full Interpretation if Case is an uninterpretable feature as in minimalism, or other). Therefore, it is necessary for the lower Copy to be Case-marked.

- (20) a. Copy < o Petros₁, o Petros₂ >
 b. EXT: o Petros₁ → ∅ under (i) Agree with rich I
 AND
 (ii) Copy
 o Petros₂ → /o'petros/

Several conditions make backward control impossible in English, beginning with the fact that deletion of the controller is an option not available for non-NSLs like English, where it must satisfy the EPP rendering it undeletable. In addition, of course, the controllee is not in a Case position and for this reason its deletion is required (under the Case Filter or any of its successors).¹²

4. Extensions

4.1. Non-Control PRT-SENTENCES

We now return to (5a), repeated below as (21). In (21), the very same context that requires control in (5b), namely the *na*-sentence, does not enforce a control reading. The embedded subject can be coreferential with the matrix one ('control') or not ('pronominal'). This is what Landau (2004) calls a 'free subjunctive' (vs. a control one). In other words, there is a one-way implication between control and *na*. While finite control requires a *na*-sentence, the reverse does not hold, as the *na*-sentence is also compatible with non-control readings. *na* makes control possible but does not necessitate it (see Section 1).

- (21) O Janis theli na fiji
 the Janis-NOM want-3SG PRT leave-3SG
 'Janis wants to leave/him to leave.'

Can we account for the ambiguity in (21) without extra stipulations? Recall that, given the NSL property of Greek, a subject can delete under Agree with rich I. This possibility is always present in the *na*-sentence, irrespective of whether the Copy pair is formed or not. Given the above, in the context of a *na*-sentence, two different sets of interface procedures may be initiated at Transfer, according to whether Copy does or does not apply. If it applies, as in (22), the INT and EXT procedures yield control in the way already detailed in Section 3. If Copy does not apply, then the derivation proceeds as in (23). Deletion still applies to the lower subject under Agree with rich I (pro-drop), while interpretively it is a free pronoun.

- (22) a. ... [_{VP} o Janis₁ theli [na fiji o Janis₂]
 b. Copy < o Janis₁, o Janis₂ >
 c. INT, EXT: as in (13), (17)
- (23) a. ... [_{VP} o Janis theli [na fiji aftos]
 b. no Copy
 c. EXT: o Janis → /o'janis/
 aftos → ∅ (Agree with rich I)
 d. INT: o Janis → the x: x Janis
 aftos → (Def, masc, sg)

An important point here is that there is no structural difference between the two sentences in (22) and (23). In other words, the control vs. non-control pattern discussed above is not disambiguated by the syntax. Rather, the two readings correspond to the possibility, but not the necessity, to apply Copy. Therefore, the two subjects can be identical but need not be.

In English, the subject of infinitives needs to be deleted for independent reasons (lack of Case, i.e., the Case Filter) and can only do so under Copy, so that the empty subject of (24a) must be controlled. Pronominal reference of the embedded structure requires a different structure in which an overt pronominal subject is licensed by Case (or by what (Chomsky, 2021) calls the TR property for Transitivity), as in ‘Exceptional Case Marking’ (ECM) configurations.¹³

- (24) a. John wants to leave
b. John wants him to leave

Of course, in Greek the dynamic modal (*borese*) used in the examples in section tendentially excludes the ‘free subjunctive’ reading. We must assume that the ambiguity of (21), and the corresponding optionality of Copy in (22) and (23), is conditioned by lexical properties of the verb *thelo* ‘I want’. The same assumption is embedded in other theories of control. The MTC, which accounts for control via a movement derivation, can deal with free subjunctives in terms of a pro subject. The TTC assumes that there is either a predication structure (control) or a full sentential structure (free subjunctive). The structural choice does not follow from the inherent properties of the relevant predicates but is simply encoded as a selection property. In present terms, the relevant stipulation can be embedded in the lexicon in the form of a meaning-postulate, i.e., for certain predicates (e.g., the dynamic modal) only Copy returns a possible interpretation. In other words, finiteness in the PRT-clause always allows a pronominal (free) reading due to deletion under Agree with rich I, while the lexical semantics of the selecting predicate may enforce a Copy relation.¹⁴

4.2. Parameters

Let us summarize so far. In intuitive terms, finite control in languages like Greek occurs in structures that are formally indistinguishable from pro-drop ones. In particular, they present a verb fully inflected for phi-features and agreeing with the understood subject; secondary adjectival predicates also display overt nominative Case. At the same time the semantics of control is characterized by *de se* readings, sloppy identity under ellipsis and in general the same properties as in English (see Landau (2013) for the ‘Obligatory Control signature’). Under the CTC (and the deletion theory of pro-drop), this state of affairs obtains because there are in fact no base generated empty categories, unlike in GB and in classical minimalism. Therefore, there are no PRO and pro with predefined PHON and SEM properties. Rather, narrow syntax builds identical inscriptions at the local (phase) level into Copy pairs. Because of the fully modular treatment of narrow syntax and the EXT and INT procedures, variation at EXT is uninfluential on interpretation at INT and vice versa. Variation at EXT and interpretation at INT are restricted only by narrow syntax and here notably by the Copy relation at Transfer. In a language like English deletion at EXT is licensed by the Copy relation, while in Greek, it is licensed by Copy and Agree with rich I (pro-drop). The INT procedure crucially need not know how the EXT procedure works, returning a bound variable interpretation for the lower copy in both languages.

Two parameters applying in Greek have been invoked above to explain the various properties of finite control. On the one hand, the presence of finite complements lacking a C phase head determines the possibility of Copy pairs involving two finite subjects. On the other hand, the NSL status determines the possibility of licensing deletion (in part) under Agree with rich I. Languages like English which lack these properties cannot have finite

control. NSL languages like Italian cannot have finite control either because they present a different structure of complementation, with *that*-type phasal complementizers introducing subjunctives.¹⁵ This variation picture is summarized in Table 1, where control in English or Italian is restricted to non-finite complementation.

Table 1. Distribution of empty subjects with PRO interpretation.

	Finite I (φ -Probe)	Non-Finite I
NSL	Greek	Italian
Non-NSL	?	English

The cell with the question mark in Table 1 would correspond to a language which is non-NSL and exhibits control in a finite context, identified with contexts that admit overt subjects (nominative Case, φ -probe on I). Whether this option exists or not is open to empirical investigation. Ostrove (2026) argues that control contexts in San Martín Peras Mixtec (SMPM, Oto-Manguean) are akin to Balkan subjunctives. What is of interest to the present discussion is that unlike English and Greek, SMPM requires an overt pronoun in the controllee position. This relates to parametric variation regarding control, discussed by Landau (2024a, 2024b) under the label of ‘overt PRO’. For instance, Allotey and Paul (2023) analyze the Gã (Kwa, Niger-Congo) language. They show that there are control sentences with the same interpretation as English PRO, except the controllee is overtly realized, Gã being a non-NSL. Another similar language would appear to be Bùlì (Gur, Niger-Congo) (Sulemana, 2021, 2022).

The languages just briefly reviewed may fill the missing slot in Table 1, where a language with the non-NSL properties of English does not yield the same output at PHON, given that the lower copy cannot delete but is overtly realized as a pronoun. The overt pronoun in non-NSLs can then be treated as the equivalent of the phi-features associated with rich I in NSLs. While we only mention these alternatives, the discussion so far and the options in Table 1 allow us to view control phenomena from a different perspective, eliminating PRO and pro in favor of copies and most crucially by adopting a modular approach of grammar.

5. Further Issues and Conclusions

In Section 3, we avoided the difficulties raised by the PRO Theorem of GB theory or the Null Case PRO of early minimalism by attributing the possibility of what amounts to a Case-marked empty subject with control interpretation directly to the interaction of Copy with the null subject parameter. But the main fact that the PRO Theorem or Null Case are meant to subsume is the impossibility of controlling an accusative object, e.g., in (25). Note that an interpretation should be possible, along the lines of ‘John likes himself’.¹⁶

(25) *John likes John (=PRO)

One line of explanation is hinted at by Chomsky (2024). This is to impute the ungrammaticality of sentences like (25) to the fact that there is an embedded vP phase. When matrix C is merged, the vP phase is transferred to the interface. This contains the lower inscription of *John*, but not the higher inscription, which is merged as the external argument at the edge of vP. Therefore, no Copy can be formed, yielding the desired interpretation. This solution is consistent with the discussion in the text but implies various consequences which cannot be addressed here (see Kitahara & Seely, 2025; Bode, 2026). The matter is therefore left open for further research.

Finally, as pointed out by Boeckx et al. (2010), theories unifying (at least partially) control and raising predict a parallelism in their distribution—which is in fact verified in

Greek (and in Balkan languages generally). Raising from finite sentences, i.e., hyper-raising is possible in Greek ((Iatridou, 1993) and much of the subsequent literature), in the same syntactic environments (i.e., subjunctive *na*-complements) where finite control is possible, for instance in (26).

(26)	Ta	pedhja	fenonde	na	ine	arosta
	the	children-NOM	seem-3PL	PRT	be	sick
	'The children seem to be sick.'					

This is in principle an empirical advantage of unification theories since the control/raising parallelism is not predicted in classical theories which distinguish between control and raising constructions. Nevertheless, the issue remains as to what the present approach to finite control predicts on hyper-raising. One of the primary concerns of the theoretical literature on hyper-raising (see (Zyman, 2023) for a comprehensive review) is circumventing the Activity condition (Chomsky, 2001), which prevents a DP whose Case has been deactivated via Agree with a phase head from entering Agree any further, and hence from undergoing IM. In the conception that we have outlined above for the purposes of finite control, what is crucial in licensing finite control, apart from locality, is the fact that deletion of the lower copy as part of the EXT procedure is made possible by the NSL status of Greek. Otherwise, the EPP renders a phrase not only immovable but undeletable as well (another possible mechanism involves what comes under the general term of 'resumption' via an overt pronoun). The prediction would be that the same mechanism can be enforced for hyper-raising—though again the matter requires further research.

In conclusion, in the present paper we have taken the Markovian property of derivations as our starting point and considered finite control in the light of the CTC. We have argued that there are two basic configurations capable of licensing deletion of a subject, namely, Copy and Agree with I, corresponding roughly to the PRO vs. *pro* distinction at PHON. Under modularity, on the other hand, the two procedures INT and EXT take care of the readings that arise and the phonological realization of inscriptions independently of one another. This allows the PRO reading at SEM (under Copy) to characterize null subjects that are (also) licensed by Agree with rich I. The key to the present approach then is that the variation regarding null subjects is captured provided empty categories such as *pro* and PRO are avoided. In this way, we overcome the difficulties connected to the fact that they combine PHON and SEM properties in rigid (non-modular) fashion.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

EM	External Merge
EXT	Externalization
CTC	Copy Theory of Control
DOM	Differential Object Marking
FF	Formal Features
GB	Government and Binding

IM	Internal Merge
INT	Interpretation
LA	Labeling Algorithm
NOM	Nominative
NS(L)	Null Subject (Language)
MTC	Movement Theory of Control
PHON	Phonology
PL	Plural
PREP	Preposition
PRT	Particle
SEM	Semantics
TTC	Two-tiered Theory of Control

Notes

- ¹ Chomsky (2000, p. 35) motivates this θ -theoretic principle on the basis of the configurational definition of theta-roles of Hale and Keyser (1993).
- ² This bears on another debate in early minimalism. Brody (1995, p. 10) notes that it is a “standard assumption that the grammar contains a designated interface interpretive level” and argues that “the assumption that such an interface level exists is incompatible with a derivational approach to the chain-Move α cluster of properties”. Analogously, Chomsky (2021, 2024) moves towards a position where chains are interpretive and not reflections of the history of movement. Note also that unlike Hornstein (1999), Manzini and Roussou (2000) do not advocate a reduction of control to raising. Rather, they propose dissociating Merge (which for them is EM in surface position) from FormChain, taking place at the interface to connect DPs to their theta-role(s). This is again in abeyance to the idea that chains are not derivational, but interface constructs.
- ³ Landau (2024a) criticizes the CTC and defends his Two-tiered Theory of Control (TTC) (see Landau, 2015). The TTC takes the classical view (already defended by Landau against the MTC) that raising and control are syntactically disambiguated, since control involves a minimal pronoun subject (a free variable) and a predication operation, while only raising involves a full NP copy, produced by movement. Debating Landau (2024a) is beyond the scope of the present article. For a reply to Landau (2024a) from the point of view of the CTC, or more generally of theories unifying raising and control, see Manzini (2026).
- ⁴ Terzi (1992) maintains PRO while also arguing against defective tense. Her idea is that PRO is possible to the extent that C is null. Vice versa, raising of *na* + V to C renders the latter a proper governor, excluding PRO and forcing pro. Based on the obviation effect in Romance subjunctives, Terzi argues that *thelo* ‘want’ also exhibits obviation. When control is observed the subject is PRO, while disjoint reference is obviation with a pro subject. This approach assimilates Greek *na*-subjunctives to Romance subjunctives and infinitives at once.
- ⁵ Other relevant examples are found in Italo-Romance varieties of the extreme South (Calabria, Sicily) with Balkan-style subjunctives (Manzini & Savoia, 2005).
- ⁶ In early approaches, the subjunctive particle was assigned to a Mood position (Rivero, 1994). Following Rizzi’s (1997) C-field, it has been assigned a lower C position such as Fin (for example, Hill, 2013), or a M(odality) position part of the C-field (Roussou, 2000).
- ⁷ The assumption is shared by the TTC for predication control, so that it is effectively theory-neutral at least for this class of control.
- ⁸ Saito (2024) modifies the notion of phase in order to account for FormCopy in the presence of a C head. On the other hand, Manzini (2026), in response to observations by Landau (2024a), points out that the complementizers that in a given language occur in obligatory control structures are quite generally found in raising structures as well. This provides an independent reason to conclude that the complementizer *per se* does not imply a phase.
- ⁹ Lack of Transitivity is discussed by Manzini (2026) in connection with the distribution of the issue of overt infinitival subjects in English, raised once again by Landau (2024a).
- ¹⁰ A reviewer wonders whether there is an (intrinsic or extrinsic) order of licensing conditions for deletion—whereby for instance the Copy condition is verified first and the NS condition enters into play only if Copy does not hold. As argued in the text, in finite control languages like Greek, Copy holds, but Agree with rich I must also be present—i.e., the Copy condition does not void the NS condition, contrary to what was suggested by the reviewer. In non-NS languages like English Copy does not apply to finite subjects because under standard assumptions, finite complements are phasal CPs—so no conclusions about ordering can be drawn. Another logically possible combination is that of a language with transparent finite subjects (allowing Copy) but no NS. In that case, the hypothesis put forth by the reviewer would predict the possibility of an empty controlled subject (Copy suffices). On the contrary, we predict that in the absence of NS, the controllee must be overt. See the text surrounding Table 1 for possible confirming evidence of our prediction.

- 11 Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2019), based on Tsakali et al. (2017), abandon the movement approach to backward control. They argue that backward control, as in (18), is an epiphenomenon that arises due to Long Distance Agree (LDA) between the matrix and embedded finite I (heads) and with the DP in its canonical thematic position. They still assume a defective embedded I (T). Regarding the embedded nominative case of the DP, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2021) assume that it is an unmarked Case, and the only Case with which the φ -features of T can agree (in other words, Case determines agreement, as in the dependent Case framework). We have already criticized the defective T approach. With respect to Case, we assume the standard minimalist Agree model of Case of Chomsky (2001) (Agree determining Case).
- 12 A reviewer suggests that we predict that all NS languages that have finite control also have backward control. This is correct. If there are counterexamples (and we are not aware of any) they require further research (or possibly Greek does).
- 13 See Landau (2024a) for criticisms, and Manzini (2026) for a defense of the Case-based account.
- 14 Philippaki-Warbuton (1987) argues that control in Greek is semantic and not syntactic. Roussou (2009) also assumes that the free pronominal reading in *na*-clauses is the basic option, unless the selecting predicate requires a bound reading (control). The reverse holds in English: a bound reading (here Copy) is the basic option, unless some other mechanism blocks it. This would be the case of *for*-insertion, e.g., *I tried for Peter to leave*, or embedding under an ECM predicate, e.g., *I believe Peter to have left*.
- 15 Therefore, Romance NS languages like Italian and Spanish are separated from Balkan-type behavior by a single parameter. In fact, there are Romance NSL varieties which have Balkan style complementation and hence finite control, notably Eastern Romance (see the references quoted in the text for Romanian, Manzini and Savoia (2018) for Aromanian) and varieties of South Italy (cf. n. 5).
- 16 Under the MTC the ungrammaticality of (25) can be subsumed under the Activity condition, according to which a non-Case active DP cannot enter Agree with a higher phase head, hence no IM to its Spec, as in Chomsky (2001). The fact remains that the Activity Condition is violated by finite control, if construed as movement—and in any event by hyper-raising, see (26) below in the text. Under the TTC, the generalization that there is no control into objects follows by construction, since control presupposes a predicate with an open subject. This is not necessarily a conceptually good result, though, to the extent that it upholds the traditional idea that there are units of meaning that rigidly map to a given syntax and vice versa, (cf. what Culicover and Jackendoff (2005) call ‘Uniformity’), i.e., ultimately constructions (on the latter see Hornstein, 2024).

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