A stronger argument for backward control

1. Background: Polinsky & Potsdam (P&P) (2002) discuss a pattern of backward subject control in the Nahk-Dagestanian language Tsez. As shown in (1), two subject arguments are co-indexed but it is the higher one that is unpronounced. P&P argue that the existence of backward control (BC) in natural language is the strongest argument brought by the movement analysis to control (Hornstein 1999) against the PRO-based approach, see e.g. Landau (1999). Landau (2007) raises two objections to this: i) the chain of the subject DP in Tsez bears two distinct cases, ergative and absolutive. Hence it is not clear why the merging of a second DP in the matrix clause is impossible. ii) BC is very rare. In Tsez only two verbs display BC, i.e. a subset of verbs that allow Obligatory Control (OC). And most commonly, the BC verbs are aspectuals (begin, stop) which also have a standard raising analysis.

2. On the basis of Greek and Romanian, we make a stronger case for BC. For these languages neither of Landau’s objections hold. We argue that these languages allow BC, as they make extensive use of clitic/agreement-associate pairs, see Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (A&A 1998, 2001), P&P (2002).

3. As Greek and Romanian lack infinitives, Control is instantiated in a sub-set of subjunctive complements. Greek subjunctives are introduced by the marker na (2). The Romanian subjunctive marker is să (3). Romanian has a second type of subjunctive, introduced by the complementizer ca plus să. ca is absent in OC (Grosu & Horvath 1987, 4). Greek subjunctives and Romanian să (but not ca să) subjunctives lack obviation effects and thus behave like infinitives (Terzi 1992). Two main types of subjunctives have been recognized: OC ones and non-OC ones (NOC). OC-subjunctives are found with verbs such as ksero ‘know how’, herome ‘be happy’, ksehno ‘forget’; NOC-subjunctives are found with e.g. volitional predicates. In OC-subjunctives, the embedded and the matrix verb agree in number and person with the matrix subject; the embedded verb doesn’t have independent tense (morphological or semantic (5-6); Iatridou 1993, Varlokosta 1994, Alboiu 2007).

4. All OC verbs in Greek/Romanian allow BC. The subject can appear in several positions (7-8). When the subject is in the complement clause, it agrees with both the embedded and the matrix verb in number and person. This is a pattern of BC, as evidenced by the following: i) The subject is truly embedded (i.e. not situated in the higher clause) as it precedes objects (note the VSO order in 9) and VP-modifiers of the lower verb. In Greek (9a) the event adverbial modifies either the matrix or the embedded verb. This difference in interpretation depends on the adjunction site of the adverb. When it modifies the matrix verb, it (right-) adjoins to the matrix vP/TP. When it modifies the embedded verb, it adjoins to the embedded vP/TP. In the low reading, the subject must be in the embedded clause. If it was part of the higher clause, the adverbial would also be adjoined to the higher clause, resulting in the high reading obligatorily. In (9b), where it clearly modifies the matrix verb, the adverb only has matrix scope. Romanian is similar. ii) An unpronounced subject is present in the matrix clause. In Greek/Romanian, nominal secondary predicates and modifiers like “alone” agree in gender and number with the c-commanding DP they modify (10 for Romanian; Greek patterns alike). In BC, such modifiers can be licensed in the matrix clause, while the modified DP is in the embedded clause (11), suggesting that a silent copy is present in the matrix. This contrasts with NOC verbs/non-subjunctives (12). In conclusion, Greek/Romanian provide uncontroversial evidence for BC and in turn for Control as movement. Landau’s objections don’t hold. Both clauses have the same Case, namely nominative (the expected pattern under the Copy and Delete analysis) and BC is found with all OC verbs.

5. As BC patterns lack Tense, they constitute domains transparent for A-movement, see Alboiu (2007), Rivero & Geber (2008). A straightforward account can be given in Chomsky’s (2007) system where Case is a property of C inherited by T. If the presence of C turns a clause into a phase, then lack of C (and hence of T features and Case) entails lack of a phase (13). Romanian provides evidence for the absence of C, as the complementizer ca is always absent in OC (4). What are the properties Greek and Romanian share that could potentially explain the common BC pattern? Both have subjunctives in OC, are pro-drop, have VSO orders with VP-internal subjects, clitic doubling and check EPP via V-movement (A&A 1998). The lack of infinitives cannot be the source of BC, as e.g. Bulgarian lacks infinitives but also lacks BC, while Spanish has infinitives, but exhibits BC (14). Spanish but not Bulgarian shares with Greek and Romanian the other properties. A&A (1998, 2001) have proposed that these properties are a reflex of a single one: the extensive availability of agreement-associate relationships of the clitic doubling type in a language. Unlike long distance Agree, doubling involves movement of the clitic/agreement without phrasal pied piping (Anagnostopoulou 2003, Preminger 2008) which leads to Case and EPP checking allowing the DP to remain in situ.
The girl began to feed the cow.

Petre knows how to swim./ I know how to swim.

Ion forgot to rinse the shirt.

Ion wants/forgot that today subj play at cello.

John learned alone to solve the problems.

John learned to play the guitar.