



Remote Control and Implicit Agents

Michael McCourt^{1,3}, Aleksandra Fazlipour^{2,3}, Jeffrey Green^{2,3}, Ellen Lau^{2,3}, and Alexander Williams^{1,2,3}

¹Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland; ²Department of Linguistics, University of Maryland; ³Maryland Language Science Center

Topic

Representation and retrieval of 'implicit arguments'

(1a) Two outfielders were traded away ...

→ no audible trader = implicit deep subject role

(1b) ... to acquire a better pitcher.

→ intended acquirer can be trader = implicit control

Questions

How is the implicit deep subject role represented?

How is the role retrieved in implicit control?

Background

Are (2) and (3) underlyingly the same?

(2) Some team traded away two outfielders.

(3) Two outfielders were traded away.

A familiar claim:

Yes, because control is possible from (1a) to (1b). [2]

Control of a rationale clause is mediated by a syntactic dependency.†

Implicit control is therefore explained:

IF the silent deep subject is present syntactically.

IF control is mediated by a syntactic dependency.

† Control usually requires an **explicit subject** antecedent.

(i) * A hired thief stole the ship to collect the insurance.
...so that the victim might collect the insurance.

(ii) * My ipad was stolen while distracting me.
...while the thief was distracting me.

(iii) * Parasites cover these sharks to have their gills kept clean.
...so that these sharks can have their gills kept clean.

Remote Control

Control possible when reason and target clause are syntactically independent [3]:

(4) Two outfielders were traded away.
Negotiations carried on for days.
The goal was to acquire a better pitcher.

Observation:

Remote control can't be a grammatical relation.

Question:

Different mechanisms for remote versus local control?

Design

A self-paced reading study (n=38; 24 sets of four items; 96 fillers)

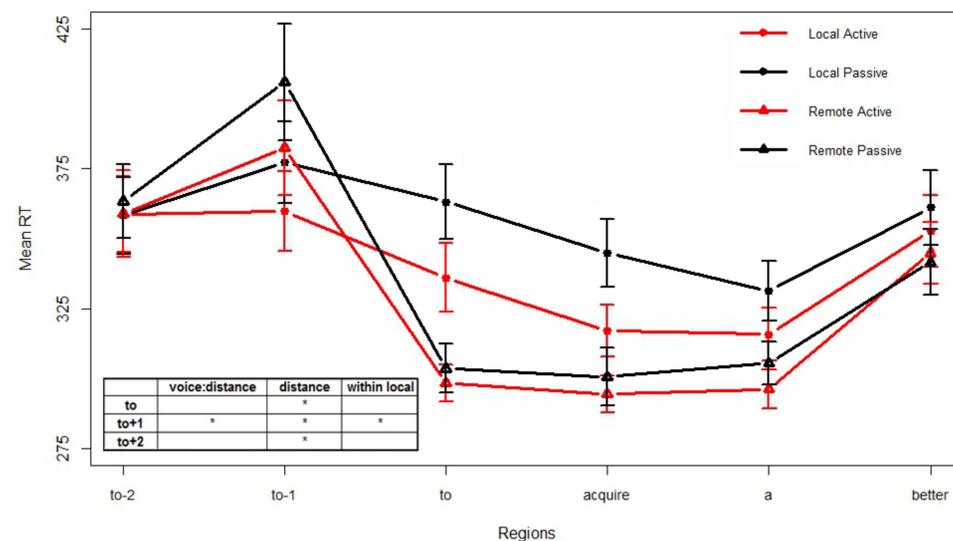
Local+Active Some team traded away two outfielders to acquire a better pitcher.

Local+Passive Two outfielders were traded away to acquire a better pitcher.

Remote+Active Some team traded away two outfielders. The reason was to acquire a better pitcher.

Remote+Passive Two outfielders were traded away. The reason was to acquire a better pitcher.

Results



Local+passive slowdown

RT slower at 'to' and subsequent region in local+passive compared to local+active.

Remote speed-up

RT slower at 'to' and the two subsequent regions in local versus remote conditions.

Discussion

Local+passive slowdown

Challenge to Mauener and colleagues [1]?

Challenge for the traditional claim that (2) ≈ (3)?

Remote speed-up

Remote control is not harder (and may be easier) to resolve than local control.

Possible explanations for this difference:

- more time in the remote condition
- predictability of rationale clause following 'the reason was' in remote condition
- two mechanisms for remote and local control, with syntax being slower

Future Directions

Buffer in local:

Two outfielders were traded away **last week** to acquire a better pitcher,

Control for prediction: Two outfielders were traded away **in order** to acquire a better pitcher.

By-phrase:

Two outfielders were traded away **by the management** to acquire ...

Interference:

* The team traded away an outfielder to make himself more money.

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References

- [1] Mauener, G. et al. 1995. Implicit arguments in sentence processing. *Journal of Memory and Language* 34, 357-382.
- [2] Roeper, T. 1987. Implicit arguments and the head-complement relation. *Linguistic Inquiry* 18, 267-310.
- [3] Williams, A. 2013. *Argument structure* [Manuscript]. Cambridge University Press.