

# SUBJECT CONTROL AND NONSUBJECT CONTROL

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Many linguists, including Williams, propose a distinction between two types of verbs: those that take *subject control* (*want, promise*, etc.-i.e. verbs whose subject controls the PRO subject of a following infinitive); and those that take *nonsubject control* (*persuade*, etc.- i.e. verbs where the PRO subject of a following infinitive is governed by some complement of the higher verb which is not its subject, e.g. its object).

It seems likely that the question of whether a control predicate takes subject control or nonsubject control will ultimately turn out to follow directly from the meaning of the predicate concerned: indeed, it seems likely that classifying predicate strictly into a single control-class is a misguided enterprise. Consider the examples:

- (1)(a) John pleaded with Bill PRO to leave
- (b) John pleaded with Bill PRO to be allowed to leave
  
- (2)(a) John appealed to Bill PRO to leave
- (b) John appealed to Bill PRO to be allowed to leave

In (1) (a) and (2) (a), PRO has nonsubject control, and is interpreted as referring to *Bill*; but in (1) (b) and (2) (b), PRO has subject control and is interpreted as referring to *John* instead. Shall we then say that verbs like *plead* and *appeal* allow *either* subject or nonsubject control? I think that's no good as a solution, because it wrongly predicts that PRO can refer to either *John* or *Bill* in all four of the sentences in (1) and (2). And to complicate matters still further, in sentences like:

- (3) John asked Bill to leave

there are dialect disagreements over the preferred interpretation of PRO: for British speakers, PRO here must have nonsubject control and hence refer back to *Bill*; but for many American speakers, the preferred interpretation would be for PRO to have subject control, and hence refer back to *John*: to be more concrete, the difference of interpretation is over the question of whether (3) should be paraphrased as in (4) (a) or (b) below:

- (4)(a) John<sub>2</sub> asked Bill<sub>3</sub> if he<sub>3</sub> would leave
- (b) John<sub>2</sub> asked Bill<sub>3</sub> if he<sub>2</sub> could leave

This control difference might reflect a difference in the meaning of the verb *ask* in the two dialects.

## REFERENCE

Williams, E. 1980. Predication. *Linguistic Inquiry* 1: 203-238.