SUBJECT CONTROL AND NONSUBJECT CONTROL

Marietta Bradinova

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) John2 asked Bill3 if he3 would leave
   (b) John2 asked Bill3 if he2 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.