Menace Under the Microscope
The two verbs *menacer* and the theory of control
or
Control: syntactic and under minimal distance
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1. Introduction

I discuss the properties of the single French verb *menacer* and its control behavior in
particular. I conclude that understanding it requires an appeal to quite abstract syntactic
representations. I also conclude that Rosenbaum's Minimal Distance Principle is needed.
Although the present proposal substantially departs from it, it is similar in spirit to Larson's
(1991) in that it takes configurational properties to be crucial to understanding control.

2. Basic Puzzle: Control Shift

Ruwet (1972) reports the following behavior of verbs such as *menacer*, *promettre* etc….
When the verb *menacer* is used with a subject, a direct object and an infinitival
complement, the construction is, it is claimed, obligatorily a subject control construction as
in (1a) and (1b) (I will amend this description below). If the main clause (can be and) is
passivized as in (1c,d) , the bottom clause needs to change too, e.g. be passivized: (1c) is out
but (1d) is well formed. I will use Ruwet's examples:[2]

   (1) a.   Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ de PRO$_j$ la$_k$ fouetter
            The marquis threatened Justine with whipping her
       b. *Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ de PRO$_k$ la fouetter
            The marquis threatened Justine with whipping her
       c. *Justine$_k$ a été menacée par le marquis$_j$ de PRO$_j$ la$_k$ fouetter
            Justine was threatened by the marquis with whipping her
       d. Justine$_k$ a été menacée par le marquis$_j$ d' PRO$_k$ être fouettée
            Justine was threatened by the marquis with being whipped

Ruwett concludes that *menacer* requires control of its complement infinitive by the surface
subject of its clause. This means that the controller is not always the bearer of a particular
theta role, which, for obligatory control, looks exceptional. This control shift behavior is the
central puzzle l attempt to derive from how syntactic structures are built and principles of
locality.

3. Raising and Control

Menacer can appear in a simple clause:

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[2] Because the English verb *threaten* does not allow the same range of structures as the French
menacer, translations are approximate, only meant to give a sense of the intended meanings.

(2) a. La pluie menace
       Rain threatens (it threatens to rain)
    b. Jean menace Marie de son fusil
       John threatens Mary with his rifle
    c. Jean menace Marie de mort
       John threatens Marie with death

As Ruwet notes, in (2b), the *de*-phrase is an instrumental (it describes how the menace is performed and the preposition could also be *avec/with*) , while in (2d), it describes the CONTENT of the menace (and both are allowed simultaneously: *Jean a menacé Marie de mort de son fusil/John threatened Mary with death with his rifle*).
Quite generally, there can be a Cause or an Agent of a menace (*Jean* above) but not necessarily (cf. (2a)). There can be an instrument as we just saw. Conceptually, there must be a potentially adversely affected party, the AFFECTEE (*Marie* above) as a menace is a menace to something/one. There may also be a constituent describing the CONTENT of the menace (*death* above). This CONTENT must denote a situation resulting from the menace being carried out (it is the fact that a particular not yet existing eventuality adversely affecting some entity can arise that constitutes a menace[3]). Finally the CONTENT must be such that it can plausibly (adversely) affect the AFFECTEE.

Menacer can also occur with an infinitive (complement) clause as CONTENT and an optional DP direct object DOC as AFFECTEE as in (3a). In (3b,c,d), DOC cannot appear.

    (3) a. Les gauchistes menacent (le parti) de manifester
           The gauchistes threaten (the party) to demonstrate
        b. Il menace (*Marie) de pleuvoir
           It threatens Mary to rain
        c. Ça menace (*la police) de barder
           Things threaten (the police) to heat up
        d. Grand cas menace (*le gouvernement) d'être fait de cet incident
           A big deal threatens to be made of this incident

Constructions (3b,c,d) behave like raising to subject constructions: weather *il* or the subject *ça* of the idiom *ça barde* or the object *grand cas* of *faire grand cas* can raise. To express the meaning corresponding to this usage of the verb *menacer*, we can paraphrase (3c) for example as follows:

    (4) Il y a une menace que ça barde
       There is a threat that things will heat up

Expectedly, (3a) allows a similar reading: it can be paraphrased as

    (5) Il y a une menace que les gauchistes manifestent
       There is a threat that the gauchistes will demonstrate

With such a reading, DOC is excluded. When DOC is present, (3a) must be paraphrased differently, namely roughly as (6a or b):

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[3] This I think explains the facts leading Zubizarreta (1982) to postulate the presence of adjunct theta role to the raised subject of *menacer*.

(6) a. Les gauchistes ont fait des menaces qu'ils allaient manifester (au parti)
   The gauchistes made threats (to the party) that they were going to demonstrate
   b. Les gauchistes ont fait qu'il y une menace qu'ils manifestent envers le parti
   The gauchistes caused there to be a threat (to the parti) that they
   will demonstrate

In other words, the subject of (3a) under this reading is getting a thematic role independent of the infinitive verb. In addition, the subject of this *menacer* must, according to Ruwet(1972), binds the understood subject of the infinitive: this a subject control construction.
In classical terms then (ignoring the issue of whether control can be treated as movement), *menacer* is ambiguous between a raising verb and a control verb. And, as we will argue, it is precisely this fact that is at the root of the control shift behavior of such verbs.

How should this dual status be analyzed?
The paraphrases given are significant: the control version of *menacer* has an extra bit of meaning (as compared to the raising version of *menacer*) and this extra bit of semantics is the expression of an extra bit of syntax. This extra syntactic bit has two effects: (i) a thematic role is assigned to the superficial subject with the consequence that the subject is responsible for the existence of a menace. (ii) DOC denoting the AFFECTEE can appear.

The first effect shows the presence of a (silent) predicate Pred taking as argument the superficial subject and a constituent denoting the existence of a menace, that is containing the raising version of *menacer*. Since the result behaves as verb, Pred is of category V: in other words, Pred is what is nowadays ordinarily referred to as a "little" v. I will notate it v without attaching to it any property except that it is a verb with the thematic structure indicated, and I will now restrict *menacer* to designating only the raising version of the verb.

Minimally then, the syntactic structure should include the following elements (INF = infinitive complement):

(7) [$_{VP}$ DP v [$_{VP}$ menacer [$_{INF}$ les gauchistes manifester]]]

Such a conclusion is unsurprising. It is in keeping with conclusions regarding the treatment of causative verbs for example, in which a silent v is postulated that turns an inchoative predicate into a causative predicate as e.g. in

(8) a. -ed [$_{VP}$ the ice melt] → the ice melted
   b. -ed [$_{VP}$ John v [VP the ice melt]] → John melted the ice

In the case of *menacer* however, there is a complication not found in ordinary causative/inchoative alternations namely (ii) above: only in combination with v does *menacer* allows a direct object complement DOC not allowed otherwise.
This complication in fact provides further motivation for the kind of structure postulated in (5). To see why, let us ask what this DOC is a semantic argument of.
Firstly, if the postulated v is, as we expect, related to the v's documented in the literature (CAUSE, DO etc..), it cannot be that DOC is its argument (as such verbs take only one DP argument, their subjects). Secondly,   as was said earlier, for there to be a "menace", a threat, some entity needs to be adversely affected by the content of the threat. This suggest that the

smallest item meaning "threat", here the raising verb *menacer* (likely to be denominal, given the English morphology) takes an argument denoting the AFFECTEE, i.e. is interpreted the way DOC is: we conclude DOC is an internal argument of *menacer*.

Independent evidence can be adduced in favor of this conclusion. The McCawley(1971) / von Stechow(1996) argument for complex v/V VP structures based on the scope properties of *again* extends to French as discussed in Sportiche (2008). In the following sentence, DOC must be in the scope of *re-*:

(9) Jean a remenacé Pierre de le renvoyer
    John again threatened Bill with firing him

While there is an ambiguity as to who issued the first threat that is being reiterated, there is no ambiguity as to who was threatened in the first instance: it must be Pierre. In other words, the discourse in a is fine, while that in b is deviant:

(10)a. Marie a menacé Pierre de le renvoyer et Jean a remenacé Pierre de le renvoyer.
       Marie threatened Pierre with firing him, and John threatened Peter again with firing him.
   b. Marie a menacé André de le renvoyer et elle a remenacé Pierre de le renvoyer.
      Marie threatened André with firing him and she threatened Peter again with firing him

Taking *re-* to be verb phrase peripheral (see Sportiche, 2008), this shows DOC is (and must be) thematically part of the VP (otherwise it would be able to fall outside the scope of *re-*). All these considerations lead to the conclusions that DOC is an argument of *menacer* and not of any other higher predicate.

Why can't DOC overtly show up with (raising) *menacer* but can surface with v+*menacer*. This can be tied to Case theory and the presence of v: just as in causative/inchoative alternations such as in (8a,b) Accusative is unavailable unless v is present. In other words, the distribution of DOC supports postulating v and tying its presence to that of DOC.

Thus *menacer* is a verb (part of a structure) taking two arguments, one, CONTENT, specifying the content of the threat, the other the AFFECTEE. The latter remains implicit unless Case becomes available.

4. The Control Shift Puzzle: Logic and Outline of a Solution.

Let us now turn back to the control properties of v+menacer and how they can be derived. As noted, CONTENT must always be a property affecting DOC (never the Cause/Agent) and must denote a potential change with respect to the state of the world. This is clearly visible if CONTENT is a nominal:

(11)a. Le marquis a menacé Justine de sanctions
       The marquis threatened Justine with sanctions
   b. Justine a été menacé par le marquis de sanctions
      Justine was threatened by the marquis with sanctions

Thus in both (11a) and (11b), it is Justine that is potentially subjected to sanctions, not the marquis. Passive in (11b) has no effect.

Consider now the case of CONTENT being an infinitival. Here I will depart from previous descriptions (in particular Ruwett, 1972). In the cases with agentive subjects we started with, it has been reported that subject control is obligatory in the active voice but this is false: object control is also possible, although perhaps somewhat less accessible (and as in all cases, the CONTENT must be interpretable as something that adversely affect DOC):

(12)a. Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ de PRO$_{j/*k}$ la fouetter
   The marquis threatened Justine with whipping her
   b. Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ d' PRO$_{j/k}$ avoir à la fouetter
   The marquis threatened Justine with having to whip her
   c. Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ d' PRO$_{j/k}$ être fouetté(e)
   The marquis threatened Justine with being whipped
   d. Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ de PRO$_{j/k}$ subir le fouet
   The marquis threatened Justine with undergoing whipping

In sentence (12a), *k can be attributed to the incoherence of what would be asserted, namely that the marquis is responsible for there being a menace to Justine, the content of which is an event of which Justine is an Agent, that is under Justine's control. Sentence (12b) is fine because the content is interpreted as an obligation on Justine resulting from the menace being carried out. Sentences (12c and d) are both fine, where the PRO$_j$ interpretation requires understanding that the marquis being whipped somehow adversely affects Justine.

In the passive voice, control must be by the deep object. Control by the *by* phrase is totally excluded:

(13)a. Justine$_k$ a été menacée par le marquis$_j$ de PRO$_{*j/k}$ la fouetter
   Justine was threatened by the marquis with whipping her
   b. Justine$_k$ a été menacée par le marquis$_j$ d' PRO$_{*j/k}$ être fouettée
   Justine was threatened by the marquis with being whipped

A purely thematically based approach to these facts is insufficient because the differences between the active and its passive counterpart, which we now understand as (i) the impossibility for the *by* phrase to act as controller of the infinitive, (ii) the perfect naturalness of deep object control in the passive case, perhaps as opposed to the active case.
There clearly are semantic constraints (although it remains unclear whether or not they are not ALL syntactically coded) but just as clearly *the form* of sentences plays a role in determining control options. Minimally then, I agree with Hust and Brame (1976) and disagree with Jackendoff and Culicover (2003): (obligatory) control options cannot generally be stated on thematic structures alone. They are sensitive syntactic realizations.

We want to answer the following question: why are both (deep) subject and (deep) object control possible in the active but only deep object control in the passive.

Structurally, we have concluded that we are dealing with the following rough structural pieces: a VP1 headed by v and a XP2 embedded (somewhere) under it with raising (where INF stands for the infinitive CONTENT).[4]

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[4] Note that the reference of DP2 must be understood as a low argument, it may well be that DP2 is in fact a high applied argument of menacer controlling the affectee. This question classically and generally arises in French causative constructions.

(14)   [$_{VP1}$ DP1 v … [$_{xP2}$ DP3 [$_v$ menace] DP2 [$_{INF}$ t$_{DP3}$ Verb…]]]

Determining the control behavior of such active constructions is now interpreted as the question of what can control DP3=PRO. We see that it is c-commanded both by DP1 and by DP2 within a single clause. If c-command is a sufficient requirement, either DP1 or DP2 can in principle act as controller. But notice that the fact that *menacer* is a raising verb makes it possible to maintain the validity of the Minimal Distance Principle (MDP). Indeed, there are derivational points at which the MDP is satisfied with DP2 as closest c-commander (prior to DP3 raising), or DP1 as closest c-commander (post DP3 raising).[5]

In addition, the a priori case for the MDP is good: there is an asymmetry between Object control verbs and Subject control verbs, if *menacer* is a good representative for the latter class. There are object control verbs which resist subject control (e.g. *dire/tell*), but all subject control verbs also allow object control. This a priori supports the idea that the MDP holds (and begs the question, not discussed here, of exactly why).

A passive structure is superficially more complex. First, the participial morphology must be introduced between v and V. Secondly, following Collins (2005), the introduction of *par/by* smuggles the participial phrase past the subject DP1 to allow the object DP2 to raise to the T domain. Thirdly, participles (in French) obligatorily agree with the direct object when it is a derived subject of their clause, here with DP2. Importantly participles never agree with post participles objects (dooming treatment in terms of AGREE). Following Kayne (2000) and Sportiche (1998), I take this to mean that passivized objects (always) obligatorily transit through the (A-position) subject of the participial phrase.[6]

Putting all this together this means that the pre smuggling structure must be (Part the head of the participial phrase) as in (15a) – with the direct object subject of the Participial Phrase, and the post smuggling structure as in (15b):

(15)a. [$_{VP1}$ DP1 v … [$_{PartP}$ DP2 Part [$_{VP2}$ DP3 [$_v$ menace] [$_{INF}$ t$_{DP3}$ V…]]]]
     b. [$_{PartP}$ DP2 Part [$_{VP2}$ DP3 [$_v$ menace] [$_{INF}$ t$_{DP3}$ V…]]] [by [$_{VP1}$ DP1 v…t$_{PartP}$]]

In other words, the relation between DP1 and DP3 never satisfies the MDP. Assuming the MDP, the control facts follow.

Needless to say, much is left open in this account. The most challenging problem is to reconcile the motivation for smuggling in passives with say, movement of DP3 over DP2 with raising menacer, or of DP2 across DP3 in (15a) above.

The internal structure of VPs (and other phrases for that matter) is likely to be syntactically far more complex both in its cartography and its movement structure than anything ever proposed so far. Working out a detailed solution requires getting much more technical[7] than the scope of the present article allows, and making somewhat arbitrary decisions regarding

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[5] Note in passing that the lesser accessibility of object control in these structures can perhaps be attributed to a bias in favor of surface structure configurations of the MDP as opposed to ones holding under reconstruction (clearly an option however, see Sportiche, 2005).

[6] Agreement with cliticized or wh-moved objects has different properties, than with passivized objects, at least in French (and Italian). The former are thus not expected to interfere with control as the latter do.

[7] In all likelyhood, this involves treating *menacer* and consorts as syntactically denominal, and v+menacer on a par with *faire*-causative constructions.

poorly understood matters. What precedes, therefore, is only an outline of a solution, based on assumptions that I think will remain fundamentally correct even once the full complexity of these structures is worked out.

5. Beyond *Menacer*

This treatment of *menacer* is now readily extendable to verbs such as *promettre/promise*, *demander/ ask*, *prier/supplier/beg* etc.. which show subject control in the active but only deep object control in the passive (if they are passivizable).[8] Such an extension would basically derive what is sometimes referred to as Visser's generalization in all cases of control (but not in cases of raising such as *strike*) in a way reminiscent of Koster's (1984) proposal.

This treatment however must not however be extendable to verbs like *convaincre/convince*, *persuader/persuade*, etc…   which strongly resist subject control, despite very strong superficial similarities with *menacer*.

(16)a. Le marquis a menacé Justine de sanctions
             The marquis threatened Justine with sanctions
     b. Le marquis a persuadé Justine de ces vérités
             The marquis persuaded Justine of these truths

(17)a. Le marquis$_j$ a menacé Justine$_k$ de PRO$_{j/k}$ V
     b. Le marquis$_j$ a persuadé Justine$_k$ de PRO$_{*j/k}$ V

What allows subject control with *menacer* is the fact that v embeds a raising verb. There probably is no uniform answer as to why other transitive verbs do not allow subject control apart from the fact that they do not involve a raising substructure. Thus *persuader* and similar verbs are plausibly analyzed as containing a control substructure (*A persuaded B [PRO to C] = A caused B to intend [PRO to C]*) because the intermediate verb (*intend*) is a control verb: PRO subject of the infinitive never gets a chance to smuggle past B.

6. Still Further Inward: Beyond Agents

Here are additional puzzles arising if the subject of *v+menacer* is a non agentive cause, which space limitations prevent from discussing beyond the barest hints of solutions. First, to the extent that (18) is possible (the % signs indicating that speaker's judgments vary, some speakers requiring a human object to v+*menacer*) it is, as expected, the elections that are threatened with cancellation not the regulations:

(18) % Les règlements menacent les élections d'annulation
             The regulations threatened the elections with cancellation

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[8] *Promettre* stands out in not being passivizable, and having its AFFECTEE as Dative. It also stands out as allowing a CONTENT direct object: these properties are clearly related, and echo what happens in *Faire*-causative with certain verbs allowing or requiring a Dative causee subject of intransitive verbs in ways that I cannot discuss here.

For speakers accepting (18), two observations are surprising. First, the construction must be an OBJECT control construction (% still, because not all speakers accepting (18) allow an infinitive CONTENT with non agentive subjects):

(19)a. % Les règlements$_j$ menacent les élections$_k$ de [devenir inutiles]$_{k/*j}$
The regulations threaten the elections with becoming useless

b. % Les élections sont menacées par les règlements $_j$ de [devenir inutiles]$_{k/*j}$
The elections are threatened by the regulations with becoming useless

c. * Les règlements$_j$ menacent les élections$_k$ de [les$_k$ rendre inutiles]$_j$
The regulations threaten the elections with making them useless

d.* Les élections$_k$ sont menacées par les règlements$_j$ de [les$_k$ rendre inutiles]$_j$
The elections are threatened by the regulations with making them useless

Second, only non human(ized) objects are allowed: speakers require an agentive subject if the object is human:

(20) * Les règlements$_j$ menacent [le commissaire aux élections]$_i$ de [devenir inutile]$_{i/j}$
The regulations threaten the election czar to become useless

What the second fact suggests is that human (affected?) objects are licensed higher than other objects, so high in fact that non agentive subjects are not merged high enough to escape from under them. In turn, this suggests that with non agentive subjects, the raised subject of *menacer* remains too low to get controlled by the subject under the MDP. I refer the reader to Koopman (2009) for fuller discussion of these cryptic remarks.

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