Failure to control is not a failure: it's *pro* [*]

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1.   Background

Whenever two related grammatical elements display distinct properties and appear in distinct environments, we have in principle two analytic possibilities: (i) **Inherent View:** posit distinctions inherent to the elements themselves, leading to them having different distributions; (ii) **Derived View:** posit a single underlying element with a broad distribution, with distinctions arising from the different contexts in which that element appears.

One place where this analytic tension is played out is in the analysis of non-overt subjects in different contexts, i.e. in obligatorily controlled (OC) "PRO" and (little) "*pro*". On the surface, the two elements — both silent, pro-forms and occuring typically in subject position — have a great deal in common. But while OC PRO must appear as the subject of a non-finite clause, and seems to be universal, *pro* may appear both as a finite subject and as an object in some languages, and is famously parametrized. OC PRO yields only sloppy readings under *v*P ellipsis, is obligatorily coreferent with an antecedent or "controller" and is interpreted obligatorily *de se* in attitude contexts (OC Signature in Landau 2013). Little *pro* can be negatively defined with respect to the same criteria: it yields strict and sloppy readings under *v*P ellipsis, can but need not be coreferent with a local antecedent and can but need not be interpreted *de se* in attitude contexts. It is probably safe to say that it is standard to take an Inherent approach to this distinction (e.g. Chomsky 1982, Martin 2001, Hornstein 1999, Landau 2004, 2013), with PRO being treated as being essentially anaphoric (with additional Case or ϕ-featural properties yielding its unique distribution) and *pro* being treated as being fundamentally pronominal. There have, however, been a number of Derived proposals (e.g. Borer 1989, Manzini 2009, Kissock 2014, Duguine 2015, Fischer 2015).

The goal of this paper is to argue for a version of the Derived view. In particular, we will empirically motivate the idea that OC PRO and *pro* correspond to distinct interpretations of a single underspecified nominal pro-form, which we will call UPro. OC PRO, NOC PRO and *pro* are different interpretations of UPro that arise based on what UPro Agrees with in the course of the derivation and to language-specific rules of realization that then apply. Crucially for us, Agree is fallible in the sense of Preminger (2014), thus failure to Agree yields a substantive result, and not a crash.

2. The Finiteness/pro-drop generalization

The empirical starting point for our account is a puzzling restriction on the appearance of *pro*, identified for a number of pro-drop languages by Sundaresan (2014). In the context of a discussion about how to decide whether a given null argument should be analyzed as PRO or *pro*, she considers alternations between null and overt subjects in certain prototypically non-finite clauses, like the Tamil example in (1):

(1) Raman$_i$ [Vasu/EC$_{\{i,*j\}}$ puuri-jæ porikk-æ] maavŭ vaaŋg-in-aan.
Raman.NOM Vasu.NOM/EC puuri-ACC fry-INF flour.ACC buy-PST-M.3SG
'Raman$_i$ bought flour [for Vasu/EC$_{\{i,*j\}}$ to fry puuris].'

Given that these are pro-drop languages, and given, furthermore, that an overt subject is possible in these environments, we might expect the null subject alternant in the non-finite clauses to be *pro*. However, independent syntactic and semantic diagnostics show that the null subject in these non-finite clauses behaves like OC PRO, and not like *pro*. In the following, we lay out the relevant issues in a bit more detail, summarize Sundaresan's evidence, and discuss why it's important for the analysis of OC PRO and *pro*.

2.1 Case, finiteness and subject distribution

A standard tenet of GB and Minimalism has been that DPs can be partitioned according to their needs with respect to abstract Case. Overt DPs and *pro* require normal abstract Case, whereas PRO either doesn't require Case or requires a special "null" Case (Martin 2001). Clauses are then partitioned according to whether their T can assign structural nominative to the subject position. In typical finite clauses, T assigns nominative, licensing overt DPs and *pro*. In typical non-finite clauses, T either assigns no Case or the special null Case, licensing PRO, or something other than T can assign (non-null) Case to the subject, as in ECM structures. This yields a simple and clear divide in the distribution of PRO and *pro*.

However, all of this has been called into question in recent decades, as a Case-based approach to the distribution of OC PRO fails empirically on several points (McFadden 2004, and many others). E.g. as Sigurðsson (1991) (among others) argues, phi-agreement on floating quantifiers and secondary predicates in Icelandic associated with the OC PRO subject clearly show that PRO is capable of bearing its own ϕ- and case-features. Conversely, in many languages like Tamil, Malayalam, Sinhala, Irish, Middle English, and Latin apparent non-finite clauses allow overt, clearly non-controlled subjects (Sundaresan & McFadden

2009, see and the references therein, a.o.). So we cannot simply rely on Case-theory or a naïve understanding of finiteness to predict whether a null subject will be PRO or *pro*.

What makes things especially tricky then is that, in the non-finite clause types that allow overt non-controlled subjects discussed by Sundaresan & McFadden (2009) and others, it is also usually possible to have a null subject (cf. (1)). English also has well-known minimal variants of this type, with alternating null and covert subjects in gerundival clauses ("Alex/EC$_j$ having no idea how to get home, Sue$_j$ asked for directions"). In English, the identity of the null subject hasn't been thought to be a big issue for the simple reason that English doesn't have clear cases of pro-drop: so the null subject would simply be assumed to be PRO without further ado. The problem is, other languages with these kinds of alternations, like Tamil, **do** allow pro-drop, hence the identity of the null subjects is an open and much more interesting question.

What we think we know leads to contradictory expectations. On the one hand, since they are in alternation with overt non-controlled subjects, we might expect them to be *pro*. On the other, since the clauses are non-finite, we might expect them to be PRO. Fortunately, this is a question that can be settled empirically. Sundaresan (2014) runs tests for the interpretive differences between OC PRO and *pro* for the following subject pro-drop languages: Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Romanian, Spanish, and Tamil. In addition to being subject pro-drop, these languages were chosen because they all allow alternating overt and covert subjects for some non-finite clauses, yielding minimal variants like that below:

(2)   [$_{CP}$ A-l   mostra-r EC$_{\{i,*j\}}$/María$_i$ los primeros síntomas de la gripe],
          At-the show-INF EC/María$_i$ the first   symptoms of the flu,

Carlos$_j$ se   vacun-ó.
Carlos$_j$ ANAPH vaccinate-PST
'[$_{CP}$ (With) Maria$_i$ showing the first symptoms of flu], Carlos$_j$ got vaccinated.'
'[Showing the first symptoms of flu], Carlos got vaccinated.'

Native speakers were presented with such alternants and asked to interpret the status of the null variant with respect to its status as a bound variable based on tests such as: *de se* reading, (obligatory) sloppy reading under *v*P ellipsis, and obligatory coreference with the antecedent (for further details on the diagnostics and the discourse scenarios used to test them, see Sundaresan 2014). The prediction, of course, is that if the null subject is OC PRO, it would behave like a bound variable, yielding: obligatory *de se* readings, obligatory coreference with the controller and obligatory sloppy readings under *v*P ellipsis; if it was *pro* on the other hand, it would yield negative results with respect to each of these parameters.

In all the languages tested, the null subject behaves like a bound variable, thus shows the hallmarks of PRO, and not *pro*. Crucially, this seems to hold true even in cases where a non-coreferent overt subject is licit in alternation (cf. (2)). This result is especially striking given that these languages do allow subject pro-drop in tensed and agreeing (i.e. prototypically "finite") clauses. Based on an array of data like these, Sundaresan proposes the following:

(3) **Finiteness/pro-drop generalization:**
     For (at least a non-trivial set of) pro-drop languages with subject-verb agreement, pro-drop is disallowed in the subject position of a prototypically non-finite clause.[1]

2.2   The import of the generalization

The generalization in (3) is puzzling under an Inherent approach to PRO and *pro*. The absence of a *pro* subject cannot be attributed to the absence of Case-licensing, since these same clauses can host (non-coreferent) overt subjects. It also cannot be attributed to the unavailability of subject pro-drop, since these languages do allow pro-drop elsewhere. On the other hand, a Derived approach has the means to make sense of it. If OC PRO and *pro* are just contextually determined, interpretive variants of a single underlying element, we expect them to show up in complementary distribution. The fact that the OC interpretation is possible in these clause types would then block the interpretation(s) associated with *pro*.

3.   Two observations

To get us started down this road, we begin with two observations about PRO and *pro* and the relationships between them.

3.1   Subset-superset relations: PRO vs. *pro*

First, the interpretations available to OC PRO are a proper subset of those available to *pro*. As noted above, OC PRO has a very specific and restricted interpretation. It must be coreferent with a "controller", gets only sloppy readings under ellipsis, and is obligatorily *de se* under attitude predicates. *pro* is far less picky, showing flexibility on all of these points: it can but need not be coreferent with another DP, can but need not get a sloppy reading under ellipsis and can but need not be interpreted *de se* under attitude predicates. It is important to understand that this really is a subset-superset relationship: i.e. the interpretations required for PRO are also generally available to *pro*. This means that it makes sense to think of PRO as restricted, or highly specified, with *pro* being an elsewhere, underspecified case.

3.2   Specific and Elsewhere: OC vs. NOC

The second observation is that there is a parallel between these phenomena and "non-obligatory control/NOC" (Williams 1980) which presents a challenge for Inherent approaches:

(4) a.   [PRO to run out of beer] would be a crying shame.
     b.   Stevie$_i$ talked with Jackie$_j$ about [PRO$_{i/j/k}$ driving to Texas].

The silent nominal in these structures bears none of the characteristics of Landau (2013)'s OC Signature. It is not obligatorily coreferent with a syntactic controller, allows strict readings under ellipsis, and both *de se* or *de re* readings under attitude predicates (see Landau

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[1]We will have reason to update this generalization in the analysis that follows.

2013, p. 234 for data and discussion).The details of how NOC works are not particularly well resolved, but there is more or less general agreement that the OC relationship is subject to strict structural conditions, and NOC interpretations of PRO can arise only when those structural conditions for OC are not met. That is, NOC arises as an Elsewhere.

Under an Inherent view, where the strict interpretive requirements on OC PRO must stem from its underlying lexical properties, we would expect them to hold no matter where it appears. Since NOC PRO does not have these strict requirements, it must then actually be a distinct underlying element from OC PRO, with this interpretive distinction then somehow also deriving the distributional ones.[2] But an inherent difference between OC and NOC PRO is even worse than one between PRO and *pro*, because we can't point to parametric differences in availability: i.e. while there are non-pro-drop languages, we are not aware of any without NOC PRO. The Derived camp, on the other hand, can deal with NOC straightforwardly. Under this view, OC would involve a strict syntactic relationship that derives a specific and restricted interpretation of the controlled element. NOC would occur when this relationship cannot be established, yielding a less restricted interpretation, which is plausibly closer to the interpretation associated with "*pro*". This less restricted interpretation would, in fact, subsume the one associated with OC and thus can be understood as an Elsewhere that obtains when OC fails.

4. The Proposal: Combining PRO/*pro* and OC/NOC

We assume that control is based on a syntactic relation that is implemented in terms of Agree (Landau 2004, etc.).[3] : it will thus be subject to the structural restrictions on Agree, including at least c-command, (phase)-locality and minimality. The feature(s) Agreed for are involved in the syntactic side of determining the referential status of the controlled element: the semantic reflex of OC is that the controlled element is interpreted as a variable bound by the controller. The specific identity of the feature(s) is contentious, candidates from prior work on control, anaphora and pro-drop including ϕ, D, ID and DEP (see Sundaresan 2012, Landau 2015, with references). Here, we will have little to contribute to this debate, and refer to this feature simply as F.

Our central proposal is as follows. There is a single element UPro, underlying what are traditionally labelled OC PRO, NOC PRO and *pro*. UPro starts out with an unvalued F feature. The different interpretations of UPro arise from what happens to this F, purely as a function of differences in the local syntactic environments where it appears. Specifically, when UPro appears in a position where control can structurally apply, it does so obligatorily, valuing F via Agree with an antecedent and deriving the bound variable interpretation of the OC Signature. When such control fails, the less specific interpretations traditionally labelled as *pro* and NOC may be derived, or the one labelled PRO$_{arb}$ arises as the Elsewhere.

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[2]So inherent approaches end up with a three-way distinction between OC PRO, NOC PROand *pro*, or they can assimilate NOC PRO to *pro*, both distinct from OC PRO (Bouchard 1984, Hornstein 1999, and others).

[3]Something more will need to be said about OC into adjunct clauses. See e.g. Landau (2013, 2015) for the idea that predication is involved.

4.1   Where OC obtains

Again, setting aside points of detail, this proposal makes the right predictions for the distribution of the interpretation conventionally labelled OC PRO. It results when UPro appears as the subject of a non-finite clause that is c-commanded by an argument of the matrix clause. Such clauses are structurally or featurally reduced compared to typical finite clauses (see e.g. Wurmbrand 2001, Sundaresan & McFadden 2009, McFadden 2014). As such, they don't constitute (strong) phases — see also Landau (2013) for motivation of this point. Thus the controller can either Agree directly with the embedded UPro for F (yielding exhaustive control) or via the embedded C head (yielding partial control). As per the Derived basis of this proposal, the properties described in the OC Signature will follow *directly and solely* from these structural configurations and from how agreement for F is interpreted.

4.2   Where OC cannot obtain

Under this model, the structural contexts where OC does not obtain also follow naturally. First, OC does not obtain in prototypical finite clauses. These are (strong) phases, thus the controller may not directly Agree with the embedded subject, and they do not have control-relevant escape hatches in their edges, i.e. control via an intervening C head is also ruled out.[4] Note, crucially, that examples of "finite" control (Landau 2004, a.o.) involve subjunctive-like clauses, which are plausibly more like control infinitives in being structurally reduced or in having the relevant kind of escape hatch. Second, OC cannot obtain in a root clause or in a clause which itself functions as the subject of the matrix clause, because there is no c-commanding matrix argument. Some version of this distinction between OC environments and non-OC is commonly assumed under both Agree (Landau 2013) and MTC (Hornstein 1999, et seq) models of control, so this is just the background.

4.3   Fallible control: deriving NOC and *pro*

The real innovation of our proposal lies in reconciling the Agree-based model of OC with the idea that NOC and *pro* are what happen when the restriction of the underspecified semantics of UPro via OC fails. We are treating the OC relation as **conditionally obligatory, but fallible**, much like what Preminger (2014) argues for ϕ-agreement. OC is obligatory if its structural conditions are met for a particular UPro. As is usual, the unvalued F feature must Agree with a valued F on a local antecedent if one is available in the right configuration. But if there is no antecedent in the right structural configuration, OC fails to obtain, and UPro defaults to the less restricted interpretations of NOC and *pro*. Now, more needs to be said about the different interpretive possibilities in the absence of OC and how they relate to the valuation (or non-valuation) of the F feature. There are several distinguishable readings, each with its own contextual conditions, many of which remain seriously under-

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[4]They may also contain functional material in their left peripheries representing discourse information which is capable of valuing the F feature on UPro, which, due to minimality, takes precedence over any potential antecedent in a higher clause. See the discussion of definite *pro* below.

studied, especially outside of English. But we can make a few fundamental points here suggesting that our proposal will ultimately allow an insightful approach.

First, it has been argued that, at least in consistent null-subject languages like Italian, when *pro* gets a definite interpretation, it must be anteceded by a type of topic. Frascarelli (2007) proposes that the topic is represented (silently) in a dedicated position in the left periphery which antecedes *pro*. This translates quite nicely into our account. UPro always starts out with an unvalued F and will be looking for a local DP to Agree which can serve as its antecedent. A fully finite clause will contain the representation of such a topic in its left periphery allowing the UPro to get a definite *pro* interpretation. In a structurally reduced embedded clause, this will be missing, and UPro will instead Agree with the most local c-commanding DP in the matrix, yielding OC. Second, it has long been observed that non-arbitrary NOC PRO shows sensitivity to topicality and logophoricity in its choice of referent (Kuno 1975, Landau 2013). We can accommodate this in an entirely parallel fashion, by following the precedent for analyzing such effects in terms of the syntactic representation of a perspective-holder in the left periphery (Speas 2004, Giorgi 2010, Sundaresan 2012, Under review, with references). Again, this can value F on UPro, thus serving as its antecedent, in just those cases where no closer overt antecedent is in the right position to trigger OC.[5] Third, in cases where not even such logophoric antecedents are available, the result is the so-called 'arbitrary' interpretation. We can plausibly understand this as the result when nothing is around to value the F feature on UPro. Again, Agree is fallible for us, so this does not lead to ungrammaticality, but it does mean that there is nothing to help determine the reference of UPro. We propose that the non-referential 'arbitrary' interpretation is just what is defaulted to in such a case.

Under the analysis developed here, the generalization from Sundaresan (2014) in (3) above follows automatically, but it is too restrictive as it stands. I.e. it is indeed correct that pro-drop is ruled out for prototypically non-finite subjects, where a potential antecedent for OC is present in the right configuration. But when the configuration for OC doesn't obtain, NOC is possible, which for us is equivalent to pro-drop (at least with non-arbitrary readings). OC PRO and *pro* are interpretive variants of a single underlying element UPro, derived by means of Agree with different elements. Since Agree is obligatory when its conditions are met, the two interpretations will thus be in complementary distribution: whenever one can apply, it will block the other. The non-finite clause types that were the focus of Sundaresan (2014) are transparent to OC and in positions where a c-commanding antecedent is available, thus OC applies and *pro*-like or NOC interpretations are ruled out. Far from being problematic, (3) (or the less restrictive, updated version thereof, described here) is thus precisely what we predict.

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[5]In order to make this account of *pro* and NOC PRO convincing, we need to ensure that topic and/or perspective-holder are not represented in the left periphery of clauses where OC is found, which is plausible due to their reduced structure, but will require working out. Furthermore, we need to explain why Agreeing for F with such left-peripheral material does not yield bound-variable readings the way that Agreeing for F with matrix arguments does. See the 4.4 for some suggestions.

4.4 Summarizing and comparing the different treatments of UPro

Here are diagrams illustrating the syntactic structures relevant for the five different inter-pretations of UPro we have distinguished:

(5)   a. **Exhaustive control**
        DP V [UPro . . .]

         b. **Partial control**
           DP V [C UPro . . .]

(6)   a. **Definite *pro***
        $[_{TopP}$ AboutnessTop Top^0 [UPro . . .]]

         b. **Logophoric NOC**
           $[_{PerspP}$ PerspHolder Persp^0 [Y [UPro . . .]]]

         c. **Arbitrary PRO**
           $[_{XP}$ Y UPro . . .]

           where XP is a sentence or phase boundary, and Y is an arbitrary (pos-sibly null) amount of structure not containing a locality boundary or the representation of any DP that could Agree for F with UPro

5. Theoretical advantages of our proposal

The current proposal bears perhaps the closest resemblance to that in Hornstein (1999, et seq.) with respect to its views on the relationship between OC and NOC. But we believe our analysis has a number of theoretical advantages and discuss these briefly below.

For both the current analysis and Hornstein, OC is obligatory when the structural con-ditions are met, NOC and pro-drop ultimately reduce to the same thing, and NOC/pro-drop is only possible as the Elsewhere when OC is blocked. But while our analysis involves a single element UPro underlying OC, NOC, and *pro*, and a relatedly simpler story about how *pro* and NOC emerge as the Elsewhere when OC fails, that in Hornstein (1999) has to appeal to a last resort mechanism inserting *pro* when OC fails. I.e. the Hornstein-ian pro-posal involves not just an additional type of null subject, but also an additional operation. For us, UPro is there from the beginning and receives different interpretations depending on how it is affected by the operation Agree, yielding a more principled account of the distinction between the OC PRO, NOC PRO and *pro* interpretations, and in particular of the subset-superset relationship. But for Hornstein, since *pro* is a distinct element, there isn't necessarily any expectation that its interpretation will be related in any way to that of OC PRO — an elsewhere distribution need not imply an elsewhere interpretation. Finally, for Hornstein, since NOC *pro* is just a pronoun, he can't readily derive cases where the inter-pretation of NOC PRO is more restricted than an overt pronoun in the same context, e.g. the dependence on logophoricity (again, see Landau 2013, ch. 7). Of course, Hornstein could always stipulate these properties about the *pro* that shows up in these contexts, but he has no way to derive them from his basic assumptions. For us, the restrictions plausibly fall out

naturally from the idea that NOC PRO is just another guise of UPro, which is referentially defective due it its unvalued F feature. It is thus like long-distance anaphors, which are famously logophoric or perspective-sensitive (again, see Sundaresan 2012, with extensive references).

6.   Conditions on overtness

What conditions the silence of UPro in both its PRO and *pro* guises? For us, given strict modularity, the question of the morphophonological silence of these elements is distinct from its syntactico-semantic characteristics. Rather, their silence must be derived somehow from how the contexts in which they appear are treated on the branch heading to PF. Some suggestive ideas for how to proceed come from Duguine (2015). Her starting point is her analysis (Duguine 2014) that different types of pro-drop fall out of parametrized conditions on types of ellipsis. She then extends this to PRO, partly on the strength of its (roughly) complementary distribution with *pro*: "PRO and *pro* are fundamentally the same linguistic object; the difference in their interpretation derives from independent properties" [p. 8].

An important idea in Duguine's work, which we adopt, is that the overtness of the pro-forms is orthogonal to both their underlying featural status and their interpretation. For us, UPro is an inherently underspecified nominal pro-form, in principle consistent with a number of interpretive and phonological realizations. The regulation of whether and under what circumstances a language allows pro-drop is a matter of intense debate and ongoing research (see e.g. Biberauer et al. 2010, Duguine 2014, Sheehan To appear, among many others). What we can say for now is that OC PRO, NOC PRO and *pro* are underlyingly the same element, UPro, which we assume to be available in all languages. So the difference between pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages is just the possibility of leaving this element silent in prototypical finite clauses. This may just boil down to a version of the EPP applying at PF in certain clause types in certain languages (see McFadden & Sundaresan Under review).

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