

A PROBLEM IN PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

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A PROBLEM IN PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY¹1. On the *vote to* construction.

Suppose Dudley Dewpoint, crusading freshman Senator, is caught in the act, causing a censure motion to be introduced on the floor of the Senate against him. Dudley, hoping to salvage some of his boyish appeal, announces that he is ashamed of himself, and that he will vote in favor of the censure motion. Assuming that he does as he says, we can report this by (1):

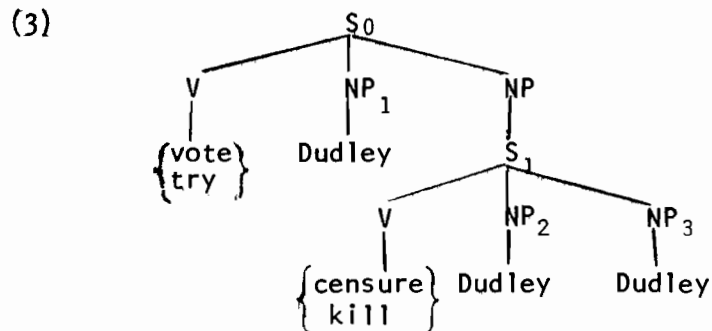
(1) *Dudley voted to censure himself.*

The question is, just what is the structure of (1); in particular, what is the subject of *censure*?

Our first impulse would be to analyze (1) as a normal occurrence of *Equi* following *Reflexive* on the lower cycle, thus essentially similar to (2):

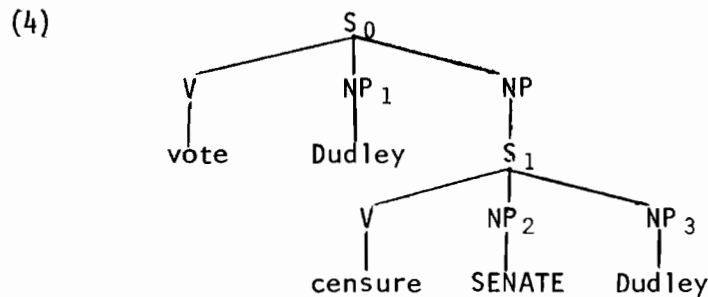
(2) *Dudley tried to kill himself.*

On this (purported) analysis, both (1) and (2) would have logical structures like (3):



Reflexive would apply on the S_1 cycle, followed by *Equi* on the S_0 cycle. Unfortunately, while this works nicely for (2), it cannot be the logical structure of (1). The problem is that (3) misrepresents the sense of (1); what is at issue is not Dudley's censuring himself, but the Senate's (possible) censuring of him. That is, we conceive of censuring in this context as something which cannot be done by one person, but rather by a duly constituted body (in this case, the Senate). The vote referred to is to decide whether the Senate will, in fact, censure Dudley, not whether he will censure himself.² Once this is clear, it is obvious that (3) is incorrect in representing NP_2 , the subject of *censure*, as *Dudley*. From a generative semantic point of view, one would have to posit some abstract³

NP referring to the organized body of which Dudley is a (voting) member⁴ as being the object of *censure*. But if we do this, the syntax does not work out. Suppose we represent the abstract NP as SENATE; then the proposed structure of (1) would be (4):



If we try to apply Reflexive and Equi to (4), we find that neither will work, since Reflexive demands that NP₂ be coreferential to NP₃, and Equi requires that NP₁ be coreferential to NP₂; neither condition is met.

Now, in producing (1), from whatever structure, it is obvious that Reflexive has to apply -- there is no other possible source for the reflexive pronoun. It is less obvious, but still fairly clear, that Equi must apply. So the choice we are faced with is either to accept a logical structure like (3) which does not represent the relationships between elements, or to find some way to make the more semantically reasonable structure, such as (4), amenable to the correct syntactical procedures.

The problem with (4) as a logical structure of (1) hinges on the coreferentiality between *Dudley* (NP₁ and NP₃) and SENATE, our ad hoc representation of the abstract NP denoting the constituted body in question. There is little hope of getting *Dudley* and the lexical item *Senate* to count as coreferential, but there may be a way that *Dudley* and SENATE, at least in some circumstances, can be considered coreferential. If we note that SENATE, however it is structured, must contain the lexical item *Dudley* (since there is no other way the relationship between the voter and the body conducting the voting can be explicated -- the precise nature of the body appears to be moot), we may be able to delete the rest and have the rules apply. It is clearly understood in all cases of the vote to construction under discussion that the subject of the complement of *vote* is some formal body with which the subject of *vote* is somehow associated. Let us call such a body a "government", regardless of whether it meets any of the formal criteria of a government. This term is chosen because of term "X's government" to denote the relationship which I believe obtains in the more general cases

discussed here; while it is not clear that a genitive is necessarily the proper way to represent this relationship, it will do as a first approximation, and we shall see that there is some evidence that it is in fact correct. What is needed, then, is a rule of "government deletion".

As it happens, there is such a rule. In a recent paper, Ann Borkin (1972a) discusses the problems of coreference in constructions such as this one (first raised by Paul Postal (1970) in a different context), which she calls "beheaded" noun phrases.⁵ Some examples are:

- (5) *IBM is a good buy.*
- (6) *Cooper is extremely wordy.*
- (7) *Harry is too small to satisfy Zelda.*⁶
- (8) *Washington is negotiating in bad faith.*
- (9) *Nixon has finally recognized Bangla Desh.*

In each of the above, some NP has been deleted from what is hypothesized to have been a genitive NP, leaving in each case the possessor NP to stand for the original. (8) and (9) are examples of "government deletion", the former in a slightly different sense from the latter, which is similar to the *vote to* case. The problems associated with this rule (or group of rules), which is in fact what classicists call metonymy, are legion, and will be largely ignored here; we concern ourselves only with the fact that, in some environments, the lexical item standing for some governmental (or at least organizational) entity can be deleted (or not inserted, if you prefer). Given the existence of this rule, then (1) can be derived from (4) if government deletion (hereafter, GD) applies on the lower cycle, followed by Reflexive and then Equi on the higher cycle. The various coreferentiality conditions will be met at the point the rules apply. The only fly in this hypothetical ointment is that we have not yet demonstrated that a beheaded NP can count as coreferential with a normal one; it would not be surprising if it could not. Luckily, this is the topic discussed at length by Borkin, and it is in fact the case that in some instances⁷, coreference is possible. Thus (10) gives a reflexive and (11) an Equi:

- (10) *Ann Landers reads herself daily in the Times.*
- (11) *Ann Landers enjoys being read daily by millions.*

We can then accept the more intuitively justified structure of (1) as (4), noting that this use of *vote to* requires an NP as the subject of the complement which denotes some "government" (in the sense described above) with which the subject of *vote* is associated in some conventional way. This could be seen as a variation on the

equi-subject constraint studied by Perlmutter (1968). It is also marked as requiring GD and Equi.⁸ Similar treatments will yield the proper analysis for the following *vote to* sentences:

- (12) *That prosecutor was such a spellbinder that, if I'd been on the jury, I'd have voted to convict myself.*
- (13) *The chairman of the board was the only one who voted to merge with Universal Existential.*
- (14) *After the police gave us 15 minutes to decide what to do, we held a caucus and I voted to disperse.*⁹

2. On other verbs.

The *vote to* construction is not the only one which can trigger an Equi deleting a beheaded NP, although it appears to be the only one now known which requires it. Borkin notes the following sentence to be ambiguous:

- (15) *&Mary wants to bomb Hanoi.*

The ambiguity lies in the interpretation of the subject of *bomb*. On the Equi reading, Mary wants to do the bombing herself; on the Equi + GD reading, she wants her government to do it. The same constraints apply to this case of GD as to that of *vote to*: if we know that Mary is an American, we know that (on the appropriate reading) she wants the U.S. government to bomb Hanoi; if she is a Bolivian, it is the Bolivian government which she wants to do it (if she is Bolivian, it is unlikely that this is the reading which would spring to mind, a fact that argues for the inclusion of knowledge about the world in linguistic theory). Some very interesting results come to light when we raise the question of just which verbs can generate this sort of ambiguity.

To begin with, a purely semantic explanation seems ruled out by the fact that (16)a-d are not ambiguous, although it is difficult to see just where the verbs in these sentences differ semantically from *want*:¹⁰

- (16)a *Mary desires to bomb Hanoi.*
 b *Mary yearns to bomb Hanoi.*
 c *Mary longs to bomb Hanoi.*
 d *Mary craves to bomb Hanoi.*

Even when we admit the possibility of adequately specifying the distinctions between *want* and the verbs in (16), there does not seem to be much hope of ascribing the differences in behavior between these verbs to these semantic distinctions. I shring this phenomenon at all.¹¹

Secondly, there are a number of verbs which involve the equi-subject constraint of Perlmutter; in the main, these verbs require an active verb in a *for-to* complement, and presuppose that the subject of the higher verb is capable of bringing about the action described in the complement. Some such verbs are *try*, *decide*, *refuse*, *intend*,¹² *hesitate*, and *hope*. All of these can generate ambiguities like that of (15), but not with every NP. They must start with a noun phrase of a somewhat different type to show the ambiguity. Note, for example, that (17)a is unambiguous, but (17)b is ambiguous:

- (17)a *Mary tried to bomb Hanoi.*
 b *Nixon tried to bomb Hanoi.*

The difference is that a deletion reading of (17)a would use "Mary's government", while (17)b uses "Nixon's government". Not only do these phrases refer to different individuals, but they also manifest a completely different relationship between the individual named and the government. We consider the government to be in some sense under Nixon's control, while it is not under Mary's. This fact allows the use of the government-phrase in (17)b, since the subject of *try* is in some sort of position to control things, but not in (17)a, where the subject of *try* cannot, in fact, do anything about the actions of her government (this is one of the most potent arguments I have found for considering the genitive to be the underlying form of the beheaded NP - it expresses exactly the right relationship, and allows us to make a prediction which is correct). When one of these equi-subject verbs is used with a complement which contains a verb describing an action which can only be taken by an official body (e.g., *recognize* in the diplomatic sense), the subject must be a person in some kind of authority over the government which is seen as performing the act. Otherwise nonsense results:

- (18)a **Mary decided to recognize Red China.*
 b *Nixon decided to recognize Red China.*

The operative principle in these verbs is that while *want* may signify a mere passive desire, *try*, etc. indicate either that the subject does something to bring about the state of affairs mentioned in the complement, or that he has some good reason (usually derived from his knowledge of his own actions) to believe that it will come about. For this to be true, he must be in a position to act (or at least be privy to certain knowledge) vis-à-vis the government.

It is interesting to note in this regard the confirming evidence of *personally*. This disambiguates sentences like (17)b, disallowing the GD reading. When used in sentences like (18)b, which are not ambiguous, it produces aberrant sentences; in sentences like (17)a, however, which are unambiguous in the other direction, it produces no change in meaning:

- (19)a *Nixon tried to bomb Hanoi personally.*
 b **Nixon tried to recognize Red China personally.*
 c *Mary tried to bomb Hanoi personally.*

So far we have considered only infinitive complementizers; but some strange things happen with gerunds. I find, for example, that both (20)a and b are ambiguous:

- (20)a *&I'm scared to bomb Hanoi.*
 b *&I'm scared of bombing Hanoi.*¹³

while only (21)a is ambiguous; (21)b does not allow the GD reading:

- (21)a *&I'm ashamed of bombing Hanoi.*
 b *I'm ashamed to bomb Hanoi.*

The disparity of complementizers is, of course, linked to semantics -- the gerund represents an activity, and the infinitive an achievement (in Vendler's (1967) sense). This fact, however, interesting as it may be, does not allow us to account for the different behavior of the complementizer with GD; if the gerund works with both *scared* and *ashamed* (which are members of the same verb-class), then the infinitive ought to work with either both or none. There is nothing in the semantics of the complementizers which explains this odd paradigm.

Finally, the verb *like* produces a pattern which I can only describe as chaotic. First, the normal usage in the affirmative, with both infinitive and gerund complementizers, is similar to that of *try*:

- (22)a *I like to bomb Hanoi.*
 b *&Nixon likes to bomb Hanoi.*
- (23)a *I like bombing Hanoi.*
 b *&Nixon likes bombing Hanoi.*

I.e., the GD reading is only possible when the subject of *like* is in some position to cause the government to act. In the negative (*dislike* or *don't like* -- in my dialect, *dislike to* is possible, but I get the same results with a simple negative), the gerund complement produces an ambiguity even when the subject is not in any governmental position of power, while the infinitive works the same as it does in the affirmative.

- (24)a *I dislike/don't like to bomb Hanoi.*
 b *&Nixon dislikes/doesn't like to bomb Hanoi.*
- (25)a *&I dislike/don't like bombing Hanoi.*
 b *&Nixon dislikes/doesn't like bombing Hanoi.*

To cap the confusion, the *would like* construction produces apposite results; (26)a is not ambiguous, but (26)b is:

- (26)a *I would like bombing Hanoi.*
 b *&I would like to bomb Hanoi.*

and in the negative, the pattern remains the same:

- (27)a *I wouldn't like bombing Hanoi.*
 b *&I wouldn't like to bomb Hanoi.*

I hypothesize that this pattern, at least, can be explained by noting that *would like* with infinitive is virtually synonymous with *want*, and therefore acts the same way. With the gerund, however, it cannot be the same as *want*, which requires an infinitive, and seems to mean what it ought to -- subjunctive + *enjoy*, which should require a personal reading. For the rest of the facts, however, I have no explanation.

As can be seen from the discussion above, there remains much to be discovered about this phenomenon, and practically everything about it needs an explanation. It is clear, I think, that such an explanation must include a great deal of semantic material; just what else however, and in what theoretical framework it must be couched, remain open questions.

NOTES

1. I am greatly indebted to Ann Borkein, George and Robin Lakoff, Paul Postal, and Andy Rogers for many helpful criticisms, examples, and observations. As usual, others, particularly Ann Borkein, have supplied more in the way of crucial data than have I. The least I can do is absolve them all of any responsibility for my hare-brained schemata.

I have employed the ampersand ('&') to mark sentences which I find ambiguous; it should be noted that the kind of judgements which are made here are (again as usual) notoriously subject to dialectal variation. I wish to make the standard cop-out about describing my own dialect, and that of a few other people I asked about it.

At least two other versions of this paper have been written and circulated under the same name. This is the version of May 1972, and I swear never to rewrite this paper again under any name. I have tried not to change those parts which I know have been (God help me) quoted, even when they embody fantastic claims that I would like to disown; one has, after all, some responsibility to one's readers.

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2. The sentences we have been discussing so far must be distinguished carefully from another (closely related) *vote to* construction, exemplified by (a):

(a) *The Senate voted to censure Dudley.*

As far as I can determine, (a) is a true example of *Equi*, with some peculiarities; note that while (a) entails (b), (l) does not:

(l) *Dudley voted to censure himself.*

(b) *The Senate censured Dudley.*

Apparently, the *vote to* construction in use in (a), with the full body participating in the decision, entails its complement, providing the verb in the complement is of an afficial nature which can be accomplished in a performative fashion. Thus, *authorize*, *adjourn*, *censure*, *convict*, etc., when present in the complement of this *vote to* construction, will produce an entailment; but other verbs of a non-performative nature will not.

(c) *The Senate voted to adjourn.* (\rightarrow (c'))

(c') *The Senate adjourned.*

(d) *The Senate voted to authorize the project.* (\rightarrow (d'))

(d') *The Senate authorized the project.*

(e) *The Senate voted to build a dam over the River Kwai.* (\nrightarrow (e'))

(e') *The Senate built a dam over the River Kwai.*

(c) and (d) entail (c') and (d'), respectively, since the verbs are performative, but *build* is not a performative, so (e) does not entail (e'). This raises the interesting question of what the subject of *build* in (e) is -- it is clearly not *Senate*; possibly another deletion is involved. I leave this as an exercise to the reader.

3. Abstract because, although it is true that Dudley is a member of the Senate, that does not qualify *Senate* (the lexical item) as coreferential with *Dudley*. Note the ungrammaticality of:

(f) **Dudley wanted the Senate to censure himself.*

(g) **Dudley and the other senators censured himself.*

(h) **The Senate of which Dudley is a member censured himself.*

The only hope for coreference would come from an abstract NP, SENATE.

4. This description is left vague on purpose. There are some puzzling facts about just what the nature of the connection of the voter to the organization in question must be in order for the *vote to* construction to be used felicitously. Suppose we consider just what situations a sentence like (i) can be used to report. (We will ignore the purpose clause interpretation of (i)):

(i) *I voted to end the war.*

If there is a national plebiscite on the war, for example, or if I am a member of the Supreme Court or the Cabinet or the Senate, or some other official body, and a vote is taken on the war, then (i) can clearly be used to describe my action. But it can also be used appropriately to describe less exalted situations; if there is a referendum on the war in a state or local election, for instance, I can report my vote appropriately with (i), even though there may not be the slightest hope that it could have any influence on events the way a national plebiscite, or a vote of some deliberative body could. However, if the same referendum is on the ballot in a foreign town, even if the election is national (or even global, as long as the warring parties are excluded, or do not have to abide by the results of the voting), I cannot use (i) to describe my vote in that election, unless I intend the reading that the government conducting the election should step in as a third party and stop the war. Clearly, if the question is phrased as something like "The U.S. should stop the war.", (i) is inappropriate to describe my vote in a foreign election, even if I am a U.S. citizen. On the other hand, if a foreigner votes in a U.S. election, he can describe his action by (i); suppose the Linguistics Society of America and the Linguistic Society of Lower Slobbovia both conduct elections, on each of which is the identical question about the U.S.'s stopping the war. If I am a member of both the LSA and LSLS, and vote in both elections the same way, I can refer to my LSA, but not my LSLS, vote by (i); the same is true of a Lower Slobbovian who votes in both elections.

The relationship of membership in a government (using this term very broadly to include any group that conducts votes) is seemingly a transitive one. In order to use the *vote to* construction felicitously, there must be an uninterrupted chain of membership from the subject of *vote* to the subject of the verb in the complement sentence. In this analysis we treat all subsidiary political divisions, as well as non-political ones like the LSA, as members in some sense of the national government. It is interesting to note that the matter is somewhat unclear with respect to supra-national organizations like the UN, although the U.S. is a member of that body and the transitivity relationship would predict that (j) would be used to report my vote in a local election on a referendum that the U.N. admit North Vietnam. However, I find the use of (j) in this context decidedly odd, although others inform me that it is fine for them.

(j) *I voted to admit North Vietnam.*

I hasten to note that if the voting occurs during a binding national plebiscite to decide the U.S. vote in the U.N., then it works, but not in the usual what-does-Sauk-Center-think-about-it strictly local type of referendum that has become more common these days. I think this difference of opinion may reflect some diversity of viewpoints on the nature and possible non-governmental character of the U.N.

5. The reader should not be misled by this statement into believing that the problem of beheaded NP's has been solved. Borkin's excellent

paper is the first gun in a long battle to dredge some sense out of what promises to be an excessively difficult problem. It raises (as excellent papers do) many more problems than it solves; for one thing, Borkin shows in the paper that consideration of beheaded NP's knocks everything we (think we) know about coreference into a cocked hat.

6. Robin Lakoff has pointed out (personal communication) that the obscene nature of many deletions (there is usually at least one sexual and/or scatological interpretation possible) can be explained by taking into account social contexts, which must be done in any case. Since we regard any deletion as having been made for some purpose, and since one of the most crucial social taboos in English is that forbidding the mention of the genitals (cf. (7)), the secondary sex characteristics, excreta, and other socially taboo items in "polite" speech, the possibility is always present that the missing NP was obscene, and deleted for that reason. The auditor is then at liberty to supply it in interpreting the sentence.

A number of interesting speculations are raised by this hypothesis, which is perfectly in line with our intuitions about such matters. We would predict that it would be impossible to interpret *Harry* in (7) as *Harry's car*, which is indeed the case, although there is no apriori reason why such a construction is impossible: indeed, there are occasions where *car* must be read as the missing NP:

- (k) *Harry is parked in the visitor's lot.*
- (m) *I'm afraid Harry needs a valve job.*

I hypothesize that the possibility of *car*-deletion in (k) and (m) comes from the semantics of the rest of the sentence, while its impossibility in (7) comes from the "marked" nature of *car*, while obscene NP's, like that naturally supplied for (7), are in fact the unmarked choice, and occur wherever possible, producing frequent ambiguities.

7. In other instances, for no apparent reason, coreference is not possible. Compare the ungrammatical (n) and (o) with the grammatical (10) and (11):

- (n) **Ann Landers writes herself in only half an hour daily.*
- (o) **Rod McKuen hates being read over the radio by anyone else.*

8. Considering the number of possible types of deletions, and the number and idiosyncracies of English verbs, it would be extremely surprising if *vote* in this construction were the only verb which was marked as an exception by requiring a particular type of deletion. No other examples spring to mind, however. This is a question which may repay some careful investigation.

9. (13) and (14), in particular, argue strongly for the correctness of the GD analysis of (1). Any analysis which had *Equi* apply without

GD, therefore requiring the same subject instead of an abstract NP, would wind up with some such clause as *...*the chairman of the board merge with...* or *...*I disperse*. It is well-known that these verbs cannot occur with such subjects; their occurrence in *vote to* constructions is clinching evidence for the analysis adopted here.

10. But see also Borkin (1972b), for a further discussion of this question. If she is correct in her analyses of the semantic structures of the verbs of (16) (and I think she is), there is some evidence that they are indeed different in important ways from *want*. The nature of this difference, in turn, namely that the verbs in (16) contain intensifiers, might be stretchable to produce an explanation of the behavior of the verbs. If they contain intensifiers, they would seem to refer to individual action more strongly than governmental, since the intensive desire presupposes in most cases the proposition that it be satisfied personally, not by governmental proxy. This putative explanation has some holes in it, but may be on the right track.

11. Cf. Horn (1971), fn. 6, for the genesis of this useful linguistic term. I quote here his definition: "*shring*:...bearing the sense 'have absolutely no explanation for.'"

12. *intend*, of course, is an exception to the generalization stated above, in that it can have also a gerund complement; even this, however, requires Equi.

13. The infinitives which arise with the *too* and *enough* constructions, however, which presumably also are produced by Equi, do not give ambiguities with random NP's; compare the unambiguous personal (p) and (q) with the ambiguous (20)a:

- (p) *I'm too scared to bomb Hanoi.*
 (q) *I'm scared enough to bomb Hanoi.*

It would be comforting to be able to ascribe this difference to some feature of *too* and *enough* constructions; however, we have so little firm knowledge of the structure of these, and so many other puzzling facts about them, that we must forgo this pleasant possibility.

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