

Absolute Constructions: Telicity, Abstract Case, and Micro-variation

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1. Introduction

This paper addresses the relationship between situation aspect and Abstract Case in absolute constructions, primarily in Spanish. An absolute construction, for the present purposes, consists of a left-peripheral verb in its participial form, along with its modifiers and its internal argument. An example appears as the bracketed constituent in (1).

- (1) [Llegado el sacerdote], la boda podía comenzar.
arrived the priest, the wedding could begin

The central claim of this paper is that a connection between situation aspect and the licitness of an overt DP in absolute constructions offers evidence that Abstract Case exists in Universal Grammar, contra Marantz (1984) and McFadden (2004). I claim that absolute constructions are projections of a functional head that both Case-marks the internal argument and requires a telic interpretation of the predicate. After empirically establishing that absolute constructions are only grammatical when they are formed of a telic predicate in section 2, a formal analysis set in a Minimalist framework is presented in section 3. Finally, section 4 shows how the analysis predicts micro-variation in Case morphology when Spanish absolutes are compared with absolutes in Italian.

2. Telicity

2.1. Vendler Classes

An absolute construction is only grammatical if it is formed of a telic predicate. In order to demonstrate that this is indeed the correct characterization of the predicates that participate in absolute constructions, I first examine predicates taken from each of the four Vendler classes (Vendler, 1967). Of these, *accomplishments* and *achievements* share the common feature of being telic; they are compatible with *in a time* expressions and incompatible with *for a time* expressions, standard diagnostics for telicity. If absolute constructions must be formed of a telic predicate, then only *accomplishment* and *achievement*

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predicates should make well-formed absolutes. As the sentences in (2) through (5) demonstrate, this prediction is borne out. Each of the sentences features an absolute construction formed of transitive predicate from each of the four Vendler classes. In all cases, the internal argument appears as the overt DP in the absolute. *Accomplishments* and *achievements*, which are telic, are grammatical in absolutes, as demonstrated in (2) and (3). *States* and *activities*, which are atelic, are ungrammatical in absolutes, as demonstrated in (4) and (5). I therefore set forth the following paradigm as evidence that the predicate in an absolute construction must be telic.

(2) *Accomplishment*:

Pintada la obra maestra, el artista se mudó a la playa para descansar.
 painted the masterpiece the artist moved to the beach to rest

(3) *Achievement*:

Encontradas las llaves, podíamos salir.
 found the keys we could leave

(4) *State*:

*Creído el informe, los líderes tomaron acción.
 believed the report the leaders took action

(5) *Activity*:

*Acariciado el gato, empezó a ronronear.
 pet the cat it started to purr

2.2. Telicity Alternations and Well-Formedness Alternations

2.2.1. Bare Plural DPs

It was also suggested by Vendler (1967), and made explicit in Verkuyl (1972) and Dowty (1979) that the Vendler-class to which a predicate belongs is not merely a function of the verb itself, but rather a function of the verb and its complement and modifiers. For example, Dowty notes that accomplishment verbs behave like activities if they have a bare plural direct object, as noted in the contrasts in (6) below.

(6) a. Juan construyó la casa $\sqrt{\text{en un mes}}$ / *por un mes.
 John built the house in a month / for a month

b. Juan construyó casas *en un mes / $\sqrt{\text{por un mes}}$.
 John built houses in a month / for a month

Turning again to absolute constructions, bare plurals should be banned, since a bare plural induces an atelic reading of the predicate. Indeed this is the case, as demonstrated by (7) and (8):

(7) *Encontradas llaves, podíamos salir.
 found keys, we could leave

(8) *Pintados retratos, los artistas se fueron.
 painted portraits the artists left

2.2.2. Telic Prepositions

Just as it is possible to render a telic predicate atelic, it is also possible to render an atelic predicate telic. It was demonstrated by Verkuyl (1972, 1989) that certain prepositions can alter the telicity of a predicate. This is exemplified for English in (9) and (10) on the following page. (9) demonstrates that the verb *drive*, being an activity, is atelic. (10) features the PP *into the wall*, which results in a telic

interpretation since the PP provides an explicit endpoint to the event.

(9) John drove the car *in 20 minutes / \sqrt for 20 minutes.

(10) John drove the car into the wall \sqrt in 20 seconds (flat) / *for 20 seconds.

The same kind of alternation can be found in Spanish with the preposition *hasta*, which is usually translated as *until* although it can express the same idea as English directional *to*. (11) indicates that *manejar* ‘to drive’ is also atelic in Spanish, and (12) indicates that the telic PP *hasta la casa* renders the VP telic by providing an endpoint.

(11) Juan manejó el taxi *en 20 minutos / \sqrt por 20 minutos.
John drove the taxi in 20 minutes / for 20 minutes

(12) Juan manejó el taxi hasta la casa \sqrt en 20 minutos / *por 20 minutos.
John drove the taxi until the house in 20 minutes / for 20 minutes

Turning again to absolutes, it should be possible to render an ungrammatical absolute grammatical with the addition of an *hasta* phrase. This is indeed the case, as demonstrated below. (13) is an absolute formed of the atelic predicate *manejar*, and the sentence is ungrammatical. (14) is an absolute formed of the very same predicate, but with the addition of an *hasta* phrase. As predicted, the result is grammatical. I therefore submit the contrast between (13) and (14) as further evidence that the well-formedness of absolute constructions should be characterized by telicity.

(13) *Manejado el taxi, todos supimos que el motor era muy ruidoso.
driven the taxi, we all found out that the motor was very loud

(14) Manejado el taxi hasta la casa, los niños chillaron de felicidad.
driven the taxi until the house, the children squealed in happiness

2.3. Previous Characterizations

Thus far, it has been argued that a condition on the well-formedness of absolute constructions is that it be formed of a telic predicate. The diagnostic for telicity has been the well-formedness of *in- α -time* phrases such as *in an hour*. When telicity-affecting elements are added to the VP of which an absolute construction is formed, the grammaticality of the absolute construction changes according to the telicity of the resulting VP. The addition of bare plurals, which induce atelic readings, cause otherwise well-formed absolutes to become ungrammatical; and the addition of *hasta*-phrases, which induce telic readings, render ill-formed absolutes grammatical.

Some previous analyses of these constructions have characterized their well-formedness in terms of either perfectivity (de Miguel, 1992), eventivity (Bosque, 1990), or both (Hernanz, 1991). Ungrammatical examples such as (13) above, however, suggest that this characterization is not complete, since (13) is both perfective and eventive. In spite of its perfectivity, (13) is atelic, as indicated by the illicitness of an *in- α -time* phrase. Therefore, the range of licit predicates in absolute constructions must be more restricted. The unacceptability of (13), in addition to the alternations presented above, indicate that telicity is relevant notion.

Both Hernanz (1991) and de Miguel (1992) posited some sort of functional head that was associated with the class of predicates they argued to make for licit absolutes. This functional head was also involved in Case-marking the DP. In section 3 below, I propose that the functional head of which absolute constructions are a projection is Inner-Aspect (Travis, to appear) as I discuss the syntactic structure of absolute constructions. I also propose an account of Case-Marking in absolute constructions, similar in spirit to the accounts of Hernanz and de Miguel although quite different in implementation. The advantage of the present approach has to do with differences in Case morphology in absolute constructions that arise when Spanish is compared with Italian. It will be shown that these differences

follow from a connection between C° and the functional head that assigns Case, coupled with independently motivated differences in the valency-changing operations involved in the formation of absolutes in the two languages.

3. Inner-Aspect: The Locus of Telicity and Abstract Case

Travis (to appear) argues that situation aspect, the classification under which telicity falls, is encoded in a functional projection that immediately dominates the lexical verb. This functional projection is dominated by little νP , which is responsible for the syntactic realization of the external argument (Kratzer, 1996). Based on the position of the functional head that encodes situation aspect within the verbal shell, Travis terms it *Inner-Aspect*. I adopt this architecture and claim that absolute constructions in Spanish are projections of this Inner-Aspect head¹, which is dominated by a CP-layer. I further claim that the Inner-Aspect head Case-marks the internal argument of the verb that participates in the absolute. Thus, the DP is licensed by the very same functional head that ensures that absolute constructions are formed of a telic predicate. This is the central claim of this paper.

A connection between Case-marking and telicity is not without precedent in syntactic theory. For example, Kiparsky (1998) notes that, in Finnish, telic verbs assign accusative case to their objects while atelic verbs assign partitive. Kratzer (2002) also examines this phenomenon and posits a functional head that both plays a role in marking the direct object with accusative Case and requires a telic interpretation of the event. She further assigns a particular semantics to the functional head that has the effect of requiring that the “culmination requirements” of the predicate be fully met (p. 4).

The analysis of absolutes presented here is similar. A functional head, Inner-Aspect, Case-marks the overt DP while at the same time ensuring a telic interpretation of the predicate in the absolute via Kratzer’s semantics, which I here assume. In effect, telicity is intimately linked to the licensing of the DP by Abstract Case, thus providing evidence that Abstract Case has a place in Universal Grammar, contra Marantz (1984) and McFadden (2004).

3.1. Formal Analysis

The framework I assume is that of Chomsky (2000), in which Agree is triggered by Matching features among syntactic objects that are visible by virtue of their having an uninterpretable feature. Nominals come into the derivation bearing an uninterpretable Case feature, which is morphologically indistinct. The Case feature is erased as a result of Agree, and the Case morphology that is realized (if any) is determined by the functional head with which the nominal has undergone Agree.

In the case of absolutes, both Spanish and Italian, the proposal here is that nominative Case is assigned by the Inner-Aspect head (henceforth Asp°), the very same head that requires a telic reading of the absolute. We begin with a derivation of the absolute in (1), repeated here as (15).

- (15) [Llegado el sacerdote], la boda podía comenzar.
arrived the priest, the wedding could begin

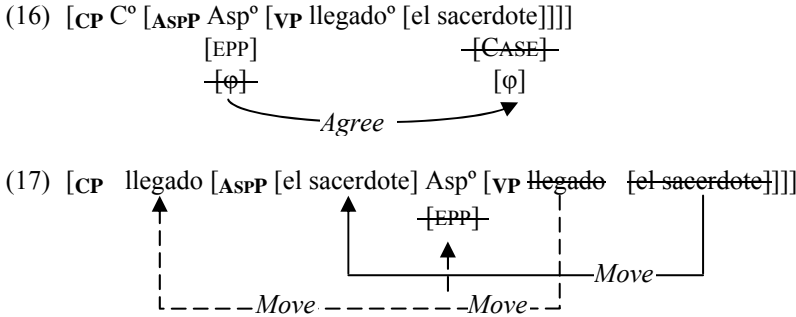
The hierarchical structure of (15) is illustrated in (16) on the following page, along with the relevant steps of the derivation. *Llegar* is an unaccusative predicate. Its single argument is first-merged as its complement, and since all absolute constructions in Spanish only involve an internal argument, (15) can be taken as an exemplar of all absolute constructions in Spanish². Immediately dominating the VP is $AspP$, which is immediately dominated by CP.

The DP, *el sacerdote*, has interpretable ϕ -features and uninterpretable Case. Its Case feature therefore makes it active for the syntax. Asp° has matching ϕ -features, although in this case they are uninterpretable, and it is by virtue of these uninterpretable ϕ -features that Asp° is active. The

¹That Absolute Constructions could be projections of inner aspect was first suggested to me by Jim McCloskey.

²See section 4 for an analysis of Italian absolute constructions, in which the external argument is realized as PRO.

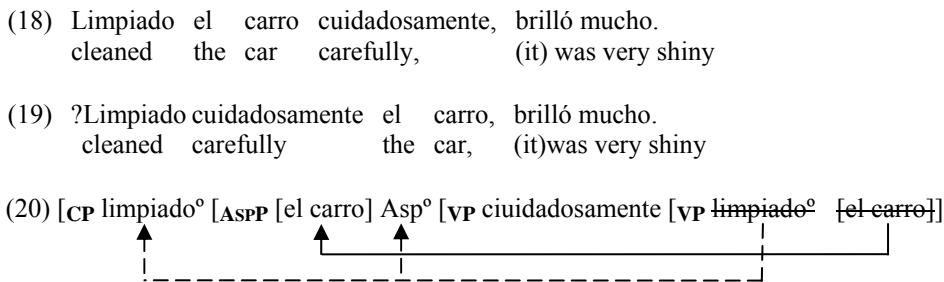
uninterpretable ϕ -features on Asp° are a probe that scans its C-Command domain for an active matching goal, which it finds in the ϕ -features of the DP *el sacerdote*. Agree takes place between the probe and goal, and as a result, the uninterpretable Case feature on the DP is deleted along with the uninterpretable ϕ -features on Asp° . Since the DP agrees with Asp° , the Case it receives is nominative³. Finally, the internal argument moves to spec, $AspP$ to check an EPP feature, and the verb raises past it to Asp° , and then ultimately to C° , as shown in (17). Such is the derivation of every absolute in Spanish. Evidence for both the derivational steps and the relationship between telicity and Case-Marking will be presented in the two sections that follow.



Asp° has the ability to delete the offending Case feature from the DP and assign nominative. It is therefore not defective. In the theory developed here, defectiveness only refers to a probe’s ability to delete an uninterpretable Case feature. In Chomsky (2000), a probe must possess a full set of ϕ -features in order to perform such an operation. Chomsky further notes that when T° is selected by C° it is not defective, whereas it is defective if it is selected by any other category (p. 102). In order to later account for morphological differences between Spanish and Italian absolute constructions, I assume that a probe is defective if it is not selected by C, regardless of its featureal makeup.

3.2. Evidence for the Derivational Steps

Evidence that both the verb and the overt DP vacate the VP comes from the placement of manner adverbs such as *cuidadosamente* ‘carefully.’ The preferred order under neutral intonation in absolutes is V-DP-Adv, as shown in the contrast between (18) and (19). If the manner adverb is left-adjoined to the verb, then the preferred constituent order in (18) is derived if the subject raises to the spec of $AspP$ and the verb raises past it to C° , as in (20). That the verb stops first in Asp° on its way to C° follows from the Head-Movement Constraint (Travis, 1984).



The word order in (19) receives a question mark instead of a full star because it is possible under a focus intonation, with the demonstrative *éste* ‘this’ necessarily resuming the car in the main clause, as in (21) on the following page. To the extent that (19) is possible, it is only possible if *cuidadosamente* is focused. Clearly, this is a different structure and the preference for the V-DP-Adv order is evidence that

³Evidence that the Case is nominative is presented in section 4 below.

both the internal argument and the verb vacate the VP⁴.

- (21) Limpiado CUIDADOSAMENTE el carro, ¿(éste) brilló mucho.
cleaned CAREFULLY the car, this was very shiny

Turning now to the existence of the CP layer, the word order facts just discussed motivate the presence of some functional head to which the verb moves. That it is identified as C^o is motivated by the possibility of wh-extraction. If indeed absolute constructions are dominated by a CP layer, then Spec, CP should be available as a landing site for a wh-phrase that has been extracted from within the absolute. This prediction is borne out, given a carefully constructed context, as in (22)⁵.

- (22) Hay otra familia; [de la cual] una vez separados los miembros fundamentales
there is another family; [from/of which] once separated the fundamental members

fueron estos a instalarse en Francia.
these settled down in France.

‘There is another family; once its fundamental members had been separated from it, they settled down in France.’

3.3. Evidence for the Connection between Telicity and Abstract Case

Under the analysis presented here, absolute constructions formed of atelic predicates are illicit because they fail to get their Case feature deleted. Evidence for this approach comes from minimal pairs first cited by Marín (2000, 2002). (23) represents what Marín calls a *predicative absolute*: A (generally) left-peripheral construction formed of a participle but featuring no overt DP. As the well-formedness of (23) shows, there is no requirement that the VP in the predicative absolute denote a telic event, since *manejar* is atelic. On the other hand, when a DP is present, as it is in (24), we see the familiar requirement that the VP must be telic.

- (23) Manejado descuidadamente, el carro se convirtió en un arma peligrosa.
driven carelessly, the car became a dangerous weapon

(24) *Manejado el carro descuidadamente, se convirtió en un arma peligrosa.
driven the car carelessly, (it) became a dangerous weapon

The ill-formedness of (24) is a Case-Filter violation. The predicate *manejar* is atelic, and therefore incompatible with the presence of a telic Asp^o. If there is no telic Asp^o, there is no means by which the uninterpretable Case feature on *el carro* can be deleted, and the derivation crashes.

Possibilities having to do with the co-occurrence of events are also limited by the presence of an overt DP. This can be seen with a predicate like *leer* ‘to read’, which is flexible enough to allow for both telic and atelic interpretations, as attested by the well-formedness of both sentences represented in (25) on the following page. Similarly, the predicative absolute in (26) allows for both a telic and an atelic

⁴However, as an anonymous reviewer points out, floating quantifiers are less-than-perfect, which is somewhat surprising if the subject vacates the VP:

- (i) ?Limpiados los carros cuidadosamente todos...
cleaned the cars carefully all...

This is likely the result of how focus interacts with the syntax of absolutes. If it turns out that subjects remain within the VP in absolutes, then the consequence for the present theory would be that Asp^o does not bear an EPP feature.

⁵Both the argument and the datum come from Gunnarson, (1994, p. 141).

interpretation: the speech and the laughter could have been in progress simultaneously, or the laughter could have started once the speech was over. However, the only possible interpretation for (27) is one in which the speech was read first, and once it was completed, the public started laughing⁶.

(25) Juan leyó el libro $\sqrt{\text{por una hora}}$ / $\sqrt{\text{en una hora}}$.
John read the book for an hour / in an hour

(26) Leído por el señor Rosa, el discurso hizo reír al público.
Read by Mister Rosa, the speech made the public laugh.

(27) Leído el discurso por el señor Rosa, el público se rió.
Read the speech by Mister Rosa, the public laughed

These facts are explained by the same analysis from which the difference between (23) and (24) was derived. When the overt DP *el discurso* forms part of the absolute, as it does in (27), it must be licensed by the Case assigned by Asp^o. Asp^o entails a telic interpretation of the predicate, and as a consequence the event in the absolute must be interpreted as having been completed. In contrast, there is no overt DP in the left-peripheral constituent in (26), and there is therefore no requirement for licensing, which under this theory means no requirement for Asp^o. Since there is no requirement for Asp^o, there is no requirement for a telic interpretation, and the events may be interpreted as simultaneous.

3.4. Consequences for Universal Grammar

That telicity and DP licensing are connected in this way provides evidence for the existence of Abstract Case in Universal Grammar. In theories of grammar that abandon the notion of Abstract Case, DPs are licensed simply by predication or by theta-assignment (Marantz, 1984; McFadden, 2004). In these theories, the DP is licit provided that it is interpretable. Such a theory would have to explain why a DP should rely on telicity in order to be interpretable in an absolute, which is not obvious. I therefore submit the correlation between telicity and the licitness of overt DPs as evidence for the existence of Abstract Case in Universal Grammar.

4. Absolute Constructions in Italian

In Spanish, the overt argument in an absolute receives nominative Case regardless of the adicity of the verb, as shown in (28) and (29) below⁷. In Italian however, the Case assigned to the overt argument varies according to the verb's argument structure: if an absolute is formed of an unaccusative verb, its overt argument displays nominative case; if an absolute is formed of a transitive verb, its overt argument displays accusative case. The generalization is demonstrated by the alternations in (30) and (31)⁸ on the following page. The internal argument of *arrivare*, an unaccusative verb, must appear in nominative Case, and the internal argument of *conoscere*, a transitive verb, must appear in accusative.

(28) Llegado $\sqrt{\text{tú}}$ /*ti, la fiesta podía comenzar. (Spanish)
arrived she/ her, the party could begin

(29) Conocido $\sqrt{\text{yo}}$ /*mí, empezaste a apreciar el mar.
met I/ me, you began to appreciate the sea

⁶Data and facts about interpretation from Marín (2000, 2002). The same was reported for Italian in Dini (1994).

⁷These forms are only licit in Peninsular varieties. Absolutes with pronouns and proper names are rejected by Latin-American speakers.

⁸All Italian data is from Belletti (1990) unless otherwise noted.

- (30) Arrivata $\sqrt{\text{io}/\text{*me}}$, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo. (Italian)
 arrived I/ me, Gianni was relieved
- (31) Conosciuta $\sqrt{\text{me}/\text{*io}}$, hai cominciato ad apprezzare il mare.
 known me/ I, you began to appreciate the sea.

From the discussion to follow, it will emerge that the difference between Italian and Spanish absolutes is that, while the external argument is suppressed from the syntax in Spanish, in Italian it is syntactically realized as PRO. The differences in Case-marking between the two languages will follow how from this fact interacts with the analysis of Case-assignment presented in section 3.1.

4.1. *The External Argument in Italian Absolutes*

Belletti (1990) points out that the facts about Case morphology would be consistent with Burzio's Generalization if the external argument were in fact syntactically realized in Italian absolute constructions. Belletti's proposal, which I adopt here, is that the external argument of an Italian absolute formed of a transitive verb is realized as PRO. As further evidence for the realization of the external argument, Belletti notes the impossibility of a by-phrase, shown in (32).

- (32) *Salutata Maria da Gianni, tutti uscirono dalla sala.
 greeted Maria by Gianni, everyone went out of the room

(32) is ruled out by the theta-criterion, since the external theta-role is being assigned both to PRO and to the DP in the by-phrase. Spanish absolutes display the opposite behavior: by-phrases pose no problem, as shown in (33). The difference between Spanish and Italian absolutes is then that the external argument has been suppressed from the syntax in Spanish, whereas in Italian it is realized as PRO.

- (33) Criticada la cantante por sus fanáticos, la compañía de grabaciones decidió despedirla.
 criticized the singer by her fans, the recording company decided to fire her

This analysis receives additional support from binding evidence. Anaphors in absolutes are grammatical in Italian and ungrammatical in Spanish, as shown in the contrast between (34) and (35). This is expected if, in (34), the anaphor *se stessa* is bound by PRO, as Belletti claims; whereas *sí misma* is unbound in (35), in violation of Principle A.⁹

- (34) Criticata perfino se stessa, Maria decise di abbandonare l'impresa.
 criticized even herself, Maria decided to abandon the enterprise
- (35) *Criticada incluso sí misma, la cantante anunció su retiro.
 criticized even herself, the singer announced her retirement.

⁹An anonymous reviewer notes that an anaphoric reading is indeed available in the *predicative* absolutes discussed in section 3.3:

- (ii) Confiado en sí mismo, el presidente siguió con su propuesta de cambio.
 Confident in himself, the president moved forward with his proposal for change.

These constructions lack of an overt DP, allow for a non-telic interpretation of the predicate, and require co-reference between an argument of the predicate in the absolute and an item in the main clause. Predicative absolutes have properties very different than the absolutes under study here; and thus, they have a different syntactic analysis, in which the anaphor in (ii) is indeed bound. For further discussion of the differences between these constructions and the absolutes under study here, see Marín (2000, 2002).

4.2. Analysis of Case in Italian Absolutes

The analysis of Case in Italian absolutes follows from what was already said regarding Case in Spanish. There remains only to add that the external argument is assigned by small v , which is also the locus of accusative Case (Chomsky, 1995; Kratzer, 1996). With regard to the position of Asp° , I follow Travis (to appear) and MacDonald (2008) who argue that Inner-Aspect is sandwiched between $v\text{P}$ and VP. The derivation for a transitive absolute in Italian is then as in (37) below, which takes (31) as an exemplar, repeated here as (36).

- (36) Conosciuta $\sqrt{\text{me/*io}}$, hai cominciato ad apprezzare il mare.
 met me/ I, you began to appreciate the sea

Both v and Asp° come into the derivation bearing uninterpretable ϕ -features. The direct object, *me* in this case, bears interpretable ϕ -features and an uninterpretable Case feature. Hence, both are active for the syntax and able to participate in Agree. The first Agree operation is between the ϕ -features on Asp° and the internal argument. This Agree operation deletes the ϕ -features from Asp° . As for Case however, this Asp° is not selected by C° ; it is therefore defective and unable to delete the Case feature on the internal argument. As a result, the Case feature survives the first Agree operation. The ϕ -features on the internal argument survive by virtue of their interpretability.

Because the Case feature survives the first Agree operation, the direct object remains active for a second Agree operation with the ϕ -features of small v , shown in (38). Small v is selected by C° , and therefore not defective. Furthermore, it is the locus of accusative Case. It is during the second Agree operation that the Case feature on the direct object is deleted, and since the deletion is via Agree with small v , the internal argument appears as morphologically accusative.

- (37) [CP C° [$v\text{P}$ PRO v [AspP Asp° [VP conosciuta° [me]]]]]
 [ϕ] [EPP] [CASE]
~~[ϕ]~~ [ϕ]
 $\xrightarrow{1^{st} \text{ Agree}}$

- (38) [CP C° [$v\text{P}$ PRO v [AspP Asp° [VP conosciuta° [me]]]]]
~~[ϕ]~~ [EPP] ~~[CASE]~~
~~[ϕ]~~ [ϕ]
 $\xrightarrow{2^{nd} \text{ Agree}}$

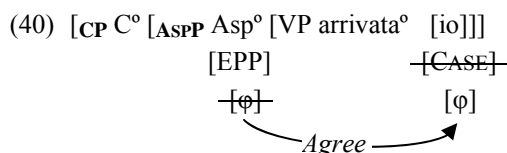
Note that if there were a full lexical DP in the place of PRO, the derivation would crash. The lexical DP would bear an uninterpretable Case feature when it merges into spec, $v\text{P}$, which is not a position in which the Case feature can be deleted. There is no active probe above it and no matching goal below it. Even though small v is a potential source for accusative Case, the spec-head relationship it has with the external argument is not sufficient to allow for deletion. The ϕ -features on the DP are interpretable, and hence inactive. Therefore, Agree between the overt argument and the DP cannot be established, and deletion cannot take place. In the case of PRO, all uninterpretable features are deleted as in (37) and (38) above, since, by assumption, PRO does not need Case. Thus, the presence of an overt external argument in absolute constructions is ruled out on the basis of Abstract Case, and the external argument must be realized as PRO, a Caseless entity¹⁰.

¹⁰A question arises here as to why absolutes cannot be formed of telic unergative predicates with a PRO subject in Italian, as in **PRO telefonato, Gianni raccontò la storia*. ‘Having telephoned, Gianni told the story.’ (Judgment from Roberto Zamparelli.) The ungrammaticality follows from the Caselessness of PRO. Since PRO only bears interpretable features, it is inactive for the syntax and thus unable to participate in Agree relations. Small v bears

Turning now to unaccusative verbs in Italian absolutes, the overt argument of these verbs appear in nominative case, as shown above in (30) and repeated here as (39).

- (39) Arrivata $\sqrt{\text{io}}/*\text{me}$, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo.
Arrived I/me, Gianni was relieved

Since unaccusative verbs do not have an external argument, and hence no small v , the analysis of Italian unaccusative absolutes is exactly the same as all absolutes in Spanish: Case assignment is from Asp° , as shown in (40) below. Asp° , being selected by C° , is not defective, and it therefore has the ability to delete the Case feature of the internal argument. Since the Case feature is deleted under Agree with Asp° , and not small v , the morphological Case is nominative. Later, in both the transitive and unaccusative absolutes, the subject raises to the spec of AspP and the verb raises to $\text{C}^{\circ 11}$.



5. Conclusion

The claim of this paper is that absolute constructions are projections of an Inner-Aspect head that both ensures a telic interpretation of the predicate and Case-marks the internal argument. Such an analysis accounts for the telicity requirement that holds of absolute constructions in which an overt DP appears. Furthermore, the analysis explains why it is that only the internal argument of the predicate may appear as on overt DP: the external argument has no source for Case. Finally, differences in the Case morphology found in absolute constructions in Spanish and Italian follow from the notion of defectivity put forth here, as it interacts with an independent difference in the realization of the external argument in each language. Thus, absolute constructions provide evidence that Abstract Case has a place in Universal Grammar.

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uninterpretable ϕ -features. Since there is no other element in the structure with which v 's uninterpretable ϕ -features can Agree, they cause the derivation to Crash.

¹¹An anonymous reviewer points out yet another difference between Spanish and Italian that is in line with the present approach: Italian allows accusative clitics in Absolutes whereas Spanish does not, as shown below. The illicitness of accusative clitics in Spanish may be due to the lack of small v , and therefore due to the unavailability of Case for the clitic.

- (iii) Conosciutame, hai cominciato ad apprezzare il mare (Italian)
Known.me, you began to appreciate the sea.
- (iv) *Conocidome, empezaste a apreciar el mar (Spanish)
Known.me, you began to appreciate the sea.

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