

A syntactic structure of free adjuncts and absolute adjuncts

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1. Introduction

This paper explores a syntactic structure of free adjuncts (FAs) and absolute adjuncts (AAs) in English. Examples of FAs are given in (1) and those of AAs are in (2).

(1) a. *Playing soccer*, he hurt his leg. b. *Written in plain English*, this book is easy to read.

(2) a. *My head bursting with stories and schemes*, I stumbled in the next door.

b. *Dinner finished*, we left for the opera. (Kortman 1991: 10)

Few studies have examined the linguistic behavior of these constructions. Stump (1985) provides a comprehensive semantic analysis to explain their semantic properties. To the best of my knowledge, however, no syntactic studies have been conducted to capture the similarities. In this paper, I argue that FAs and AAs have the same syntactic structure and should therefore be analyzed in the same manner.

2. Data: Similarities between FAs and AAs

FAs and AAs share syntactic properties. One of the similarities is that when their predicates are negated, *not* must precede the predicates.

(3) a. **Not** playing / *Playing **not** soccer, ... b. My head **not** bursting / *bursting **not** ...

(4) a. **Not** written / *Written **not** ... b. Dinner **not** finished / *finished **not** ...

(5) a. **Not** a mere child / *A mere child **not**

b. ..., his expression **not** a mixture of anxiety and resentment / *a mixture of anxiety and resentment **not**.

(6) a. **Not** unable / *Unable **not** to ... b. her eyes **not** bright and shining / bright and shining **not**.

Another is the use of the perfective auxiliary *have*; the auxiliary must be in front of the predicates.

(7) a. Frankly, **having** spent time in The Middle East... . (COCA)

b. Manny knows only the plantation camp, **having** been born in the Hawaiian islands. (COCA)

c. ... , **having** been part of the team ... (COCA)

d. **Having** been unable to consult the associated case file, ... (COCA)

(8) a. Mary **having** called yesterday, I called her today.

b. The hard task **having** been finished, they still sleeping.

c. ..., his first victims **having** been neighbors of hers. (COCA)

d. Those essential values **having** been outraged, ... (COCA)

These similarities demonstrate that FAs and AAs share identical structures.

3. Previous studies

This section reviews two types of previous studies that deal with FAs and AAs. The first is PRO analysis by Williams (1975). He focuses on structures with the *-ing* form, including FAs, and analyzes FAs as having small clause structures with PRO in the subject position (ibid.: 253).

(9) a. Driving down the street, ... b. [_{sc} PRO driving down the street]

If we apply this analysis to AAs, we have the following structure.

(10)a. We went home, the night coming on. b. We went home, [_{sc} the night coming on].

Appealing as this seems, the PRO analysis cannot be applied to AAs due to the characteristics of PRO. As is discussed in traditional studies, PRO is available only in the position where Case is not checked. Under the theory of generative grammar, it is therefore impossible to assume PRO to be in the same position as nouns with their Case checked. This leads us to conclude that PRO analysis cannot explain the behavior of FAs and AAs in the same way.

The second is IP analysis by Reuland (1983). He analyzed *NP -ing* constructions and argues that this type of construction has the following IP structure whose head I is responsible for the suffix *-ing*.

(11)a. Elaine's winking at Roddy was fruitless, he being a confirmed bachelor. (Reuland 1983: 101)

b. [_{IP} NP [_I VP]] (ibid.: 128)

This analysis is motivated by the fact that subjects of AAs have a nominative case, as provided in (13a) because in the traditional theory of generative grammar, the head I checks a nominative case. However, subjects of AAs can also have an accusative case, as shown in (14).

(12) But you see, him being here, in the room, –I had to be careful. (Jespersen 1954: 49)

Therefore, the IP analysis is problematic since IP structure obligatorily assigns a nominative case to NPs in Spec, IP.

In summary, the PRO and IP analyses cannot capture the properties of FAs and AAs in the same manner although these constructions are syntactically identical. To explain their similarities, it is necessary to derive a new analysis.

4. Proposal and analysis

I propose that FAs and AAs have a PredP structure (cf. Bowers 1993) in which subjects of the constructions are in Spec, PredP and a vP is in the complement of the head Pred, and that present participles are in v. I also argue that *being* is elided in when predicates are past participles, nouns, and adjectives. Further, I claim that FAs have covert subjects that undergo ellipsis, as shown in (15b), because in some cases, their subjects are overtly realized, as (16) illustrates. It is therefore reasonable to assume that FAs have elided subject DPs instead of PRO.

- (13)a. [PredP DP_i Pred [_{vP} t_i [_v -ing] [_{VP} ...]]] b. [PredP ~~he~~_i Pred [_{vP} t_i [_v playing] [_{VP} V soccer]]]
c. [PredP my head_i Pred [_{vP} t_i [_v bursting] [_{VP} V with stories and schemes]]]
d. [PredP dinner_i Pred [_{vP} t_i [_v being] [_{VP} finished]]]

(14) **Their patron, St Anthony**, was the Egyptian hermit, **he** having held to foster the growth of herbs in the desert. (Scheurweghs 1969: 164, emphasis added)

I argue that the case of DPs in Spec, PredP is checked by the head Pred. It has also been claimed that copular constructions have PredP structures, and DPs in this construction may have a nominative or accusative case. This checking relation is not obligatory because the subject DP can move to Spec, TP, where nominative case is assigned.

- (15)a. It is I/me (, John). b. [TP it [... [PredP I / me_[uCase] [Pred_[Case] (John)]]]]
b. I am John. b. [TP I_[uCase] T_[Case] [... [PredP [Pred John]]]]

I claim that FAs and AAs are a kind of absolutive constructions, and their subjects are assigned an absolutive case. In ergative languages such as Adyghe, subjects of copular constructions are assigned such case.

(16) mə bzəlfəxə-r qə-sjə-thamat-Ø.

that woman-ABS DIR-1SG.POSS-director-COP

‘That woman is my boss.’

(Caponigro and Polinsky 2011: 74, emphasis added)

The subjects of FAs and AAs in English are also assigned absolutive case. However, English does not have a form for this case realization, so that the case on DP is instead realized nominative or accusative case, instead.

The proposal in (15a) can account for the similarities of FAs and AAs by assuming that *not* is in NegP and that *having* is in the head of AspP. Both of NegPs and AspPs are above vP, as in the case of finite clauses.

- (17)a. [PredP DP_i Pred [_{NegP} not [_{vP} t_i [_v playing] [_{VP} V soccer]]]]
b. [PredP DP_i Pred [_{AspP} having [_{vP} t_i [_v spent] [_{VP} V time]]]]

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, FAs and AAs have identical syntactic structures. There are some remaining issues such as the reason the absolutive case, which Pred checks, is realized as nominatives or accusatives in English. These issues will be investigated in the future research.

References

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