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Author(s)	Yamaguchi, Masashi
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MASASHI YAMAGUCHI

ON ABSOLUTE ADJUNCTS: THEIR SYNTAX AND PREDICATION

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the syntax of absolute adjuncts in English. Given below are the relevant examples, where the italicized parts are the constructions in question.

(1) a. *The coach being crowded,* Fred had to stand.
b. *Dinner finished*, we left for the opera. (Kortmann 1991: 10)
c. Warren Trent, *his face creased in thought*, said dourly ... (ibid.: 12)
d. We went home, *the night coming on*.

As the examples of (1) show, absolute adjuncts can appear relatively freely; they appear in the sentences' initial position, medial position, and final position. One of the peculiar features of absolute adjuncts is their interpretation; despite the non-existence of overt subordinators, they are interpreted as if they have one. For example, (1)b is interpreted as '*Since* dinner was finished, we left for the opera'.

The primary goal of this paper is to examine what syntactic structure absolute adjuncts have, and how the predication relationship between participial verbs and their subjects is established. I, in particular, claim that the predication condition in (2) may account for the predication in absolute adjuncts.[1]

(2) *The Condition for Predication for Secondary Predication*
The predication relationship between a secondary predicate α and its semantic subject β can be established if:
a. α carries an uninterpretable φ-feature [uφ], and β carries an interpretable φ-feature [iφ], and
b. the [uφ] of α is valued by the [iφ] of β.

In short, this condition requires the semantic subject to c-command the predicate in

[1] For the application of (2) to augmented absolute adjuncts, see Yamaguchi (2014).

S. Okada & E. Tanaka (eds.) Osaka Univ. Papers in English Linguistics, 19, 2019, 223-236.

order for the predicate to be predicated of the subject. This construction is comprehensively analyzed from the viewpoint of Montagovian Semantics by Stamp (1988), but little attention has been paid to it in the field of syntax. In previous analyses of absolute adjuncts from a syntactic point of view, it has been argued that absolute adjuncts have a TP structure because their subjects are in the nominative Case. However, I demonstrate evidence that shows by assuming a TP structure, we cannot capture the syntactic structure of absolute adjuncts. In the framework of the minimalist program, particularly the theory of Agree (Chomsky 2000, 2001), I argue that absolute adjuncts have a TP structure, and also include an aspectual phrase between TP and *v*P in the perfective form. Following Travis (2010) and others, I assume that this phrase takes charge of the grammatical aspect.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 observes syntactic characteristics of absolute adjuncts. Section 3 briefly reviews a previous syntactic analysis of absolute adjuncts and its problem. Section 4 presents my proposal. Section 5 focuses on the licensing condition of predication in absolute adjuncts, and section 6 concludes the paper.

2 Syntactic Characteristics of Absolute Adjuncts

This section discusses the syntactic characteristics of absolute adjuncts. This paper particularly concentrates on the category of predicates in absolute adjuncts, the forms of verbs in each example, the positions of verbs and negation, and the Case of subjects.

2.1 The Category of the Predicates

First, several categories can appear as a predicate of absolute adjuncts. The examples are given in (3). They are cited from Kortmann (1991)

(3) a. Present participle
My head *bursting* with stories and schemes, I stumbled in next door. (ibid.: 95)

b. Past participle
Dinner *finished*, we left for the opera. (ibid.: 10)

c. DP
He looked towards the Presidential Suite, his expression *a mixture of anxiety and resentment*. (ibid.)

d. AP
The train moved off and she sat there, her eyes *bright* and *shining*, her little body *stiff* and *resolute*. (ibid.)

e. PP
At length they stopped, and she sat side by side, their backs *against a*

boulder. (ibid.)

According to (3), present participles, past participles, DPs, APs, and PPs are allowed as predicates in absolute adjuncts.

The interpretations of (3)b-e pose an interesting point. They are such that they include be-verbs, while that of (3)a does not have to be. Their interpretations are shown (4).

(4) a. My head *burst* with stories and schemes, and I stumbled in next door.
b. After dinner **was** *finished*, we left for the opera.
c. He looked towards the Presidential Suite, and his expression **was** *a mixture of anxiety and resentment*.
d. The train moved off and she sat there, and her eyes **were** *bright* and *shining*, her little body *stiff* and *resolute*.
e. At length they stopped, and she sat side by side, and their backs **were** *against a boulder*.

As is evident from (4), (3)b-e are interpreted with the inclusion of be-verb. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that these examples include be-verb in their syntax. This claim is supported by the fact that be-verbs can actually appear. Observe (5).

(5) a. Dinner **being** *finished*, we left for the opera.
b. He looked towards the Presidential Suite, his expression **being** *a mixture of anxiety and resentment*.
c. The train moved off and she sat there, her eyes **being** *bright* and *shining*, her little body *stiff* and *resolute*.
d. At length they stopped, and she sat side by side, their backs **being** *against a boulder*.

All of the examples of (5) can include *being* as part of their predicates, which does not change their meaning. This suggests that absolute adjuncts of past participles, DPs, APs, and PPs actually have *being* in their syntax, and *being* is omitted in (4)b-e.

2.2 The forms of Predicates

Second, predicates in absolute adjuncts take a perfective form when they do not refer to the same time as the predicate in the main clause. Witness (6).

(6) a. Mary *having called* yesterday, I called her today.
b. The hard task *having been finished*, they are still sleeping.
c. Through New Mexico she had been listening to National Public Radio,

and had been fascinated to hear yet another installment of a story from her old hometown, from her own long-ago adolescence, where a serial killer, dormant for decades, had once again been taunting the media, a killer who'd hovered on the periphery of her formative years, his first victims *having been neighbors of hers*. (COCA)

d. Those essential values *having been outraged*, we feel we have been violated at the core of our being. (COCA)

For example, the absolute adjunct and matrix clause of (6)a clearly refer to different times; the reference time of the absolute adjunct is earlier than that of the matrix adjunct. This is evident from the temporal adverbs *yesterday* and *today*. In order to express this difference between the reference times, absolute adjuncts need to employ perfective forms.

2.3 Negation and Predicates

Third, the positions of *not* and predicates are restricted to *not* < *predicate* in absolute adjuncts regardless of the categories of predicates[2]. See (7) and (8).

(7) a. My head **not** *bursting* with stories and schemes, I stumbled in next door.
b. Dinner **not** *finished*, we left for the opera.
c. He looked towards the Presidential Suite, his expression **not** *a mixture of anxiety and resentment*.
d. The train moved off and she sat there, her eyes **not** *bright* and *shining*, her little body **not** *stiff* and *resolute*.
e. At length they stopped, and she sat side by side, their backs **not** *against a boulder*.

(8) a. *My head *bursting* **not** with stories and schemes, ...
b. *Dinner *finished* **not**, ...
c. *..., his expression *a mixture of anxiety and resentment* **not**.
d. *..., her eyes *bright* and *shining* **not**, her little body *stiff* and *resolute* **not**.
e. *... , their backs *against a boulder* **not**.

As (7) and (8) show, *not* has to precede predicates; otherwise the sentence is ungrammatical.

Moreover, even when *being* is present or when predicates are in perfective form, *not* has to precede *being* and *having*.

(9) a. Dinner **not** *being finished*, ...

[2] 'A < B' means that A precedes B.

b. *Dinner *being* **not** *finished*, ...
c. Mary **not** *having called* me yesterday, I called her today.
d. *Mart *having* **not** *called* me yesterday, ...

As shown in (9), *being* and *having* cannot antedate *not*. This result suggests that *being* and *having* are in a lower position than *not*.

2.4 The Case of Subjects

Fourth, subjects in absolute adjuncts can be either nominative or accusative. Observe (10).

(10) a. Off they went, **she** *remaining* behind. (Kortmann 1991: 12)
b. But you see, **him** *being* here, in the room - I had to be careful. (Jespersen 1954: 49)

In formal English, the nominative subject is preferred to an accusative subject. However, the difference between nominative and accusative does not leads to any difference in their interpretations and syntactic behavior.

(11) a. him not being here, ...
b. *him being not here, ...
c. him having been here, ...
d. him not having been here, ...
e. *him having not been here, ...

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the examples of (10) both have identical structure.

3 A Previous Analysis and its Problem

This section briefly reviews a previous syntactic analysis of absolute adjuncts and observes the problems it faces.

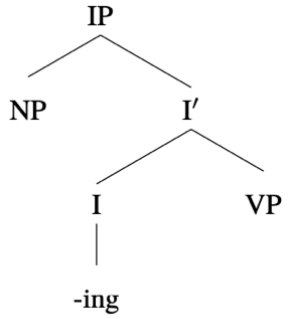
3.1 Reuland (1983)

Reuland provides a comprehensive theoretical account for *NP -ing* constructions. The NP-constructions includes absolute adjuncts ((12)a), accusative-*ing* constructions ((12)b), and gerundive constructions ((12)c).

(12) a. Elaine's winking at Roddy was fruitless, *he being a confirmed bachelor.*
b. Michael counted on *them finishing the book soon*.
c. *Them trying to sing a song* was just too horrible. (Reuland 1983: 101)

As for absolute adjuncts, he presents his proposal in the framework of Government and Binding (Chomsky 1981) and proposes the following IP structure because nominative Case appears.

(13)



(ibid.: 128)

Assuming an IP can account for the reason why subjects of absolute adjuncts are in the nominative Case, nominative Case is assigned to an element in Spec, IP. Since the head I is specified as tenseless, finite verbs are never used in absolute adjuncts.

3.2 A Problematic Point

Reuland's proposal seems promising because it may capture the syntactic properties of absolute adjuncts, but assuming an IP structure in absolute adjuncts poses a crucial problem. His analysis predicts that all subjects in absolute adjuncts are in the nominative Case because DPs in Spec, IP are assigned nominative Case. However, this prediction is not borne out. As we have observed in 2.4, subjects of absolute adjuncts can also be accusative instead of nominative Case. The relevant examples are repeated as (14).

(14) a. Off they went, **she** *remaining* behind. (Kortmann 1991: 12)

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

(14)b illustrates the case where a subject with accusative Case is also allowed in absolute adjuncts.

This unpredictable result must be solved by an alternative structure. In the following section, we focus on the issue as to what syntactic structure absolute adjuncts have.

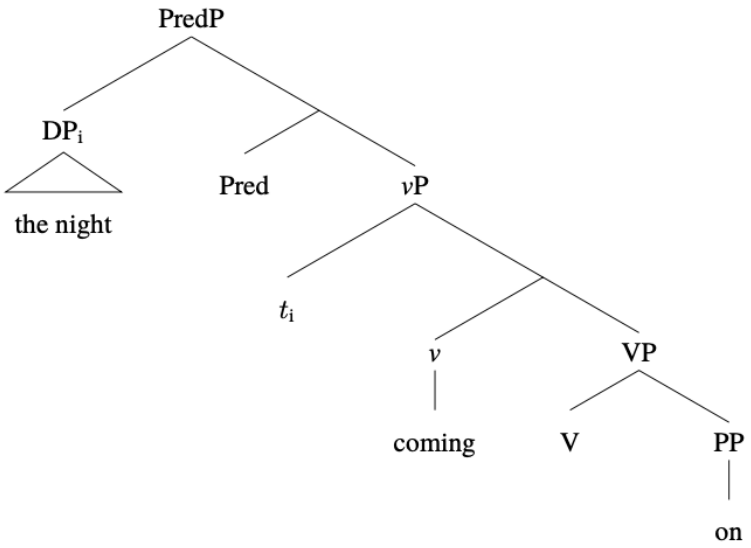
4 The Structure of Absolute Adjuncts

This section provides an analysis of the syntactic structure of absolute adjuncts that accounts for the properties observed in the previous section. First, let us recap the syntactic properties of absolute adjuncts in (15).

(15) a. Present participles, past participles, DPs, APs, and PPs are available as predicates of absolute adjuncts.
b. Predicates are used in perfective forms in referring to the different time from the matrix clause.
c. The word order in absolute adjuncts has to be subject < *not* (< *having* < *been*) < predicate.
d. The Case of subjects in absolute adjuncts is either nominative or accusative.

In order to explain the syntactic properties above, I propose the following structure for absolute adjuncts.

(16) a. We went home, *the night coming on*.
b.

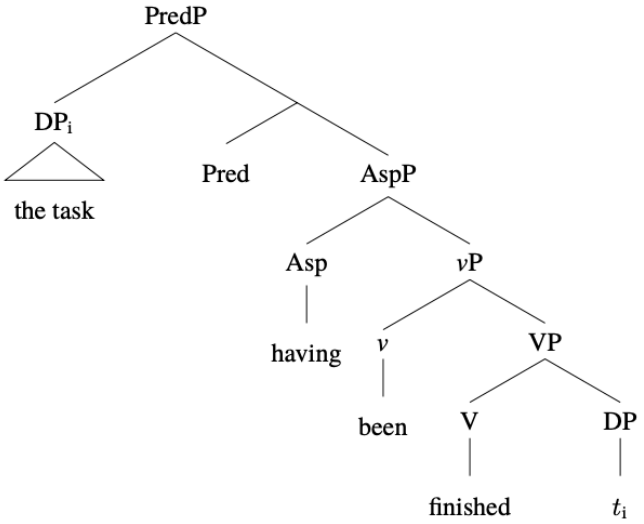


I propose that absolute adjuncts carry a projection for a small clause PredP (cf. Bowers 1993), whose specifier is filled by the subject DP. This structure includes a verb phrase as its complement. This makes it possible for various categories to be available as the predicates of absolute adjuncts since DPs, APs, and PPs are selected by the be-verb *being* in *v*.

Perfective forms, I assume, are the realization of an outer aspectual phrase AspP (cf. Travis 2010). This AspP is between PredP and *v*P, and the head Asp is realized as *having*.

(17) a. The hard task *having been finished*, they are still sleeping.

b.



The structure in (17)b illustrates that Asp is realized as *having* and takes *v*P as its complement. The Be-verb *been* stays in *v* because the form is not the inflection in accordance with the subject, unlike other forms such as *am* and *are* (cf. Pollock 1989).

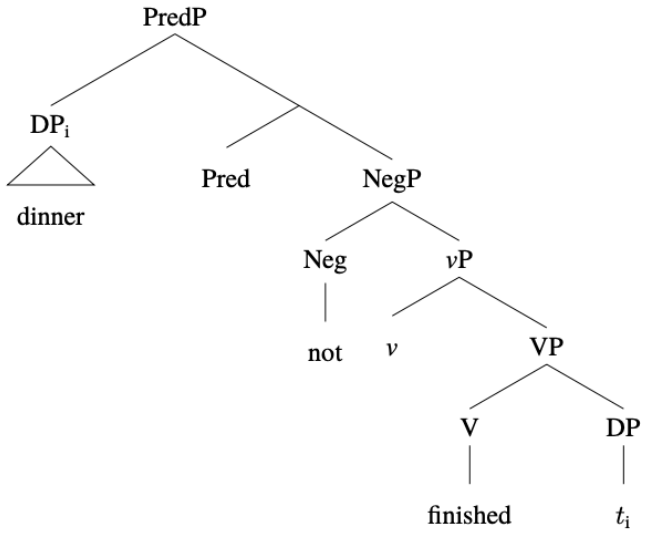
With this structure, we can account for the word order in absolute adjuncts. The negation word *not* appears between TP and *v*P in finite clauses in order to negate a verb phrase. The same type of interpretations is also found in absolute adjuncts.

(18) a. Mary didn't eat a hamburger.
→ It is not the case that Mary ate a hamburger.
b. Mary not having called me yesterday, ...
→ It is not the case that Mary called me yesterday.

Since the predicative phrase is also negated by *not* in absolute adjuncts, it is reasonable to assume that NegP also exists between PredP and *v*P.

(19) a. Dinner **not** *finished*, we left for the opera.

b.

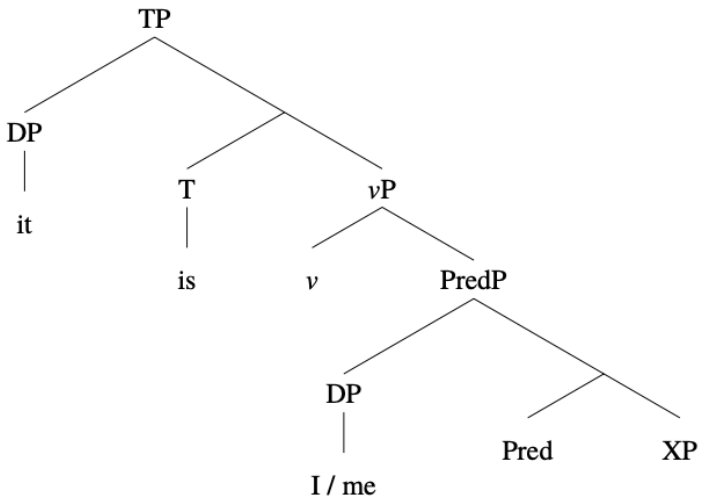


I also claim that this head Pred is responsible for assigning Case to the subject DP. This is partly evidenced by the fact that a DP is assigned either the nominative or accusative Case in a certain example of copular constructions. See (20).

(20) a. It is *I*.
b. It is *me*.

In (20), the first-person singular pronoun can be either the nominative *I* or the accusative *me*. Assuming that copular constructions have PredP because they are considered to have a small clause structure (cf. Stowell 1981, and Matushansky 2008), we can assume that Pred checks the feature for Case on the pronoun.

(21)



In this structure, the DPs *I* and *me* are in Spec, PredP, and Spec, TP is filled by an

expletive *it*.[3] The XP is usually omitted because it is contextually salient in usual cases. If we assume that T or *v* is responsible for checking the Case feature of the pronoun, it is impossible to explain why the pronoun is in either the nominative Case or accusative Case. If we instead assume that Pred exists and checks the Case feature of the pronoun, the problem of Case is not predicted.

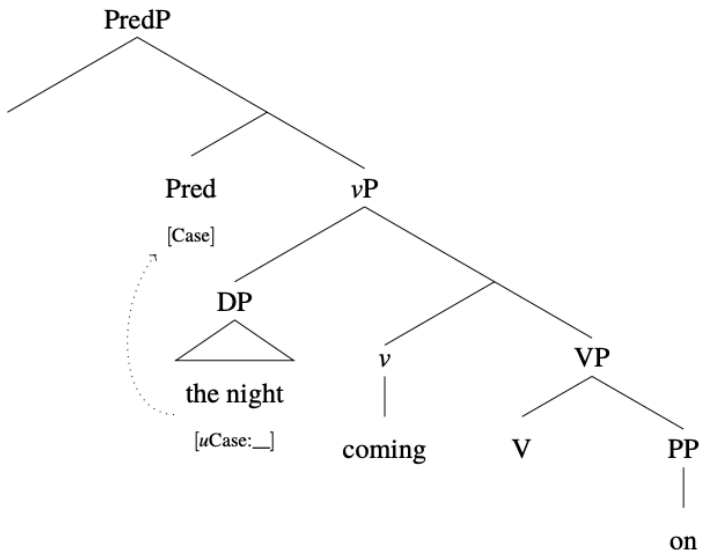
As we have seen, a previous analysis of absolute adjuncts faces the same problem as to the Case of the subject DPs of absolute adjuncts. If *v* or T checks the Case feature, we cannot explain why both nominative and accusative Cases are allowed. On the assumption that Pred is responsible for the Case feature checking, we may avoid this problem because this account does not mention that *v* and T do not check Case feature on the first-person singular pronoun.

For Agreement operation, this paper assumes Upward Agree (Bjorkman and Zeijlstra 2014), under which an uninterpretable feature Agrees with its matching interpretable feature if the former is c-commanded by the latter.

(22) α Agrees with β iff:
  a. α carries at least one uninterpretable feature and β carries a matching interpretable feature.
  b. β c-commands α, and
  c. β is the closest goal to α. (Bjorkman and Zeijlstra 2014: 1)

To see how (22) works, observe (23).

(23)



Under Upward Agree, the DP *the night* must be c-commanded by the head Pred because the head checks the uninterpretable Case feature of *the night*. This relationship is

[3] The first-person singular pronoun can move to Spec, TP instead of the external merge of an expletive *it*. In this case, the following example is generated.
(i) I am.

correctly captured in 0.

This section has presented a syntactic structure of absolute adjuncts that properly accounts for their syntactic behavior. In the following section, we focus on the main issue as to how the predication is established in absolute adjuncts.

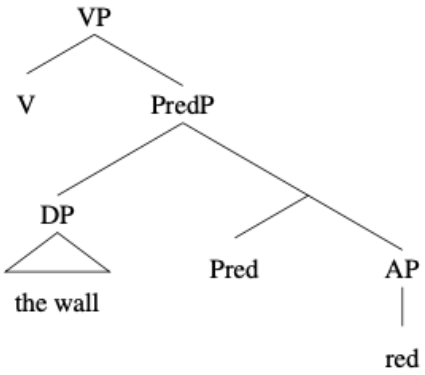
5 On the Licensing Condition of Predication

In this section, we delve into the predication in absolute adjuncts. I argue that the predication condition in (2), repeated here as (24), is applicable to absolute adjuncts.

(24) *The Condition for Predication for Secondary Predication*
The predication relationship between a secondary predicate α and its semantic subject β can be established if:
a. α carries an uninterpretable φ-feature [uφ], and β carries an interpretable φ-feature [iφ], and
b. the [uφ] of α is valued by the [iφ] of β.

Under this condition, a subject has to c-command its predicate in order to establish predication. Let us take (25) for example.

(25) a. John painted the wall red.
b.



Assuming with Hoekstra (1988) that resultative constructions in English form a small clause with a resultative predicate and its semantic subject, they have the structure in shown (25)b.[4] In this structure, a carrier of an uninterpretable φ-feature is the predicate *red*, and if its uninterpretable φ-feature is valued by the DP *the wall*, the predication relationship between *red* and *the wall* is established. The present analysis assumes Upward Agree in (22). With this Agreement operation, *red* can be predicated of *the wall* because an element with an uninterpretable feature has to be c-commanded by an element with a matching interpretable feature, and in this case, *the wall*, which carries an

[4] Some previous studies exerts Res(ult)P instead of PredP. See Yamaguchi (2018, 2019), for example.

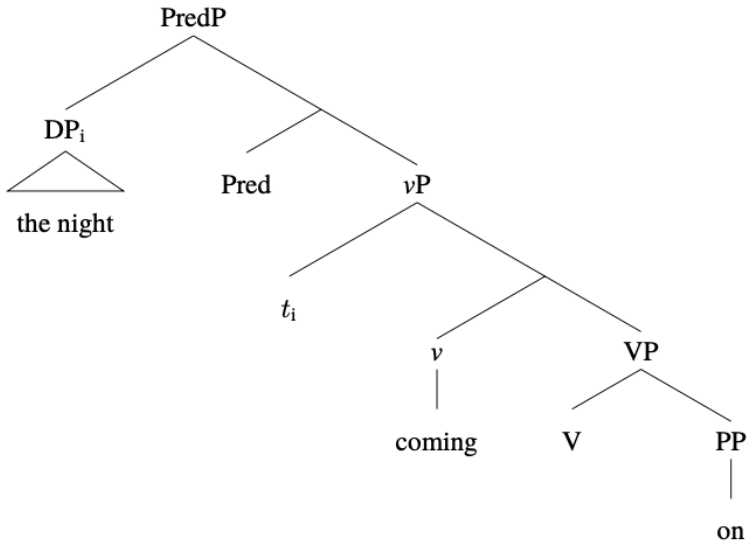
interpretable feature, c-commands *red*.

This story is applied to the cases of absolute adjuncts. The subjects in absolute adjuncts actually c-commands its predicate.

(26) a. Mary being angry at herself, John didn't know what to do.
b. *Mary being angry at her, John didn't know what to do.

Mary in (26) can be coreferential with *herself*, but not with *her*. It has been argued that anaphors must be bound, or c-commanded, by its antecedent, while pronouns must not, which is known as Condition A and B of Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981). This fact indicates that the subject *Mary* actually c-commands the predicate *angry at herself* / *her*. We can account for this from the structure in (16)b, repeated here as (27).

(27)



The DP *the night* c-commands its predicate *coming*. This structural relationship establishes the predication between *the night* and *coming*. Therefore, we can conclude that the predication condition can be applied to absolute adjuncts.

6 Conclusion

This paper has argued that absolute adjuncts carry a PredP structure whose specifier and complement are filled by a subject and a predicate, respectively. Perfective forms are explained as the realization of aspectual phrase outside *v*P. The predication is theoretically accounted for under the condition for secondary predication in (24).

Some problems remains. One is why subjects of absolute adjuncts are sometimes assigned nominative and sometimes accusative Case, and how to distinguish each case. I do not have a clear explanation to this problem, but assuming TP or *v*P as the main

category of absolute adjuncts instead of PredP, the result must be that the subjects always have nominative Case or accusative Case, contrary to the fact. Therefore, I claim that TP or *v*P is a better option, but I leave this issue for future research.

Before closing, I remark the possibility that the analysis proposed here may be applicable to free adjuncts in (28). Free adjuncts have properties similar to absolute adjuncts such as categories available as predicates, the status as adjuncts, and their interpretations.

(28) a. *Playing soccer*, John hurt his leg.
b. *Written in plain English*, this book is easy to read.
c. *A mere child*, he couldn't understand the situation.
d. *Unable to resist*, he was under captivity.

(29) a. An old woman, *carrying some presents*, left the station.
b. This train leaves Osaka at 6:00, *arriving at Tokyo at 9:00*.

(30) a. *When* he was play soccer, he hurt his leg.
b. *Because* it is written in plain English, this book is easy to read.

As is obvious from (28), several categories are allowed to be the predicates in free adjuncts, including present participle, past participle, DPs, and APs. The examples in (29) illustrate that free adjuncts are available in the sentence's initial position, medial position, and final position, and subordinators are supplemented in interpreting (28)a, b, as shown in (30). All of these properties are found in absolute adjuncts. This implies that the proposal in this paper can be applied to free adjuncts. The crucial difference between absolute adjuncts and free adjuncts is that the former has an overt subject, and the latter does not. Future research should examine how we ought to interpret a subject in free adjuncts.

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Masashi Yamaguchi
m.yamaguchi0113@gmail.com