

Absentive constructions in German and Italian

Place or person deixis?

1. Introduction

- Absentivity (de Groot 2000) has been described as a grammatical category of the verb expressing the absence and/or non-availability for interaction of an agentive subject who distances themselves physically from a place to perform an activity for a limited period of time. Absentivity is semi-aspectual (Krause 2002, Stollhans 2015).
- In languages with an absentive, this construct is realized by means of the combination of a finite copula (*be*) and a lexical verb form (subject to cross-linguistic variation).
- Typology of the absentive (de Groot 2000: 695, Abraham 2007: 3):

Type	Syntax	Languages (e.g.)
Type A	<i>be</i> + V _(non-finite)	German, Dutch, Hungarian
Type B	<i>be</i> + local preposition + V _(non-finite)	Italian, Finnish, Frisian, Swiss German
Type C	<i>be</i> + coord. conjunction + V _(finite)	Swedish, Norwegian, Faroese

- (1) Tom ist einkaufen. (Type A) (2) Tom è a fare la spesa. (Type B)
Tom is shop.INF Tom is at do.INF the shopping
'Tom is off doing the shopping.'

- The relevant semantic interpretation must be available without the insertion of any additional lexical element disambiguating the non-presence of the subject:

- (3) Lena ist (in-Tirol) fischen. (4) Lena è a raccogliere funghi (in-Tirolo).
Lena is in Tyrol fish.INF Lena is at collect.INF mushrooms in Tyrol
'Lena is off fishing / collecting mushrooms in Tyrol.'

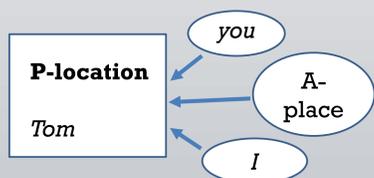
- The absentive is only compatible with durative, active predicates:

- (5) *Max is ankommen. (→ perf.) (6) *Max è ad amare Anna. (→ psych.)
Max is arrive.INF Max is at love.INF Anna

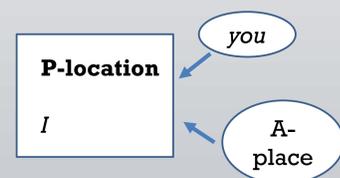
3. Absentivity and spatial deixis

An absentive event inherently implies (but does not necessarily realize overtly) the following origins (in Bühler's (1934) sense):

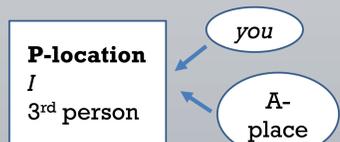
- the *I*-deixis, which is realized through the speaker's utterance;
- the *you*-deixis, which corresponds to the hearer's deictic domain;
- the third-person deixis;
- the local coordinates of the place at which the absent human agent is present (*P-location*);
- the local coordinates of the place from which the human agent is absent (*A-location*).



Tom ist einkaufen / è a fare la spesa



Ich bin einkaufen / Sono a fare la spesa



Wir sind einkaufen / Siamo a fare la spesa
(1PS + 3PS)



Du und ich waren einkaufen / Eravamo a fare la spesa
(1PS + 2PS)

- (9) Weißt du noch, als wir letztes Jahr skifahren waren?
know you still when we last year ski.INF were
'Do you remember when we were on that skiing trip last year?'

- (10) Ricordati che io e te la prossima settimana siamo a sciare!
remind that I and you the next week are at ski.INF
'Please don't forget that we're going skiing next week!'

2. Research questions

Abraham (2007: 5): "The real grammatical persons, 1st and 2nd sg./pl., disallow the absentive insertion. Only the 3rd persons are grammatical."

But (!):

- (7) a. Ich war baden und hab dich leider verpasst.
I was bathe.INF and have you.ACC unfortunately missed
'I was bathing and unfortunately missed you.'
(Isabella Lovegood (2018), *Ich, du und sie*, p. 32)

- b. Wir waren rauchen, ich ging ein Stück die Treppe runter...
we were smoke.INF I went a bit the stairs down
'We were smoking, I walked down the stairs a bit...'
(<https://forum.mein-schooner-garten.de/posts/list/555/desc/4815941.page>)

- (8) a. Ho incontrato Tim mentre ero a fare la spesa.
have met Tim while was at do.INF the shopping
'I met Tim while I was doing the shopping.'
(Eli Easton (2015), *Come ululare alla luna*, p. 95)

- b. Siamo stati a fumare marijuana.
are been at smoke.INF marijuana
'We have smoked weeds.'
(Roberto Bolaño (2014), *I detective selvaggi*, p. 28)

- What deictic origins are present in an absentive event?
- With respect to which spatial reference and/or whose deixis is absentivity interpreted in German (Type A) and Italian (Type B)?
- What is the nature of this deictic center?

4. The nature of the A-location

- The person-related perspectivation in the intended reading is not a priori predictable.
- Neither the speaker's nor the hearer's or a third person's deictic center seems to be the reference point with respect to which the absentive is interpreted.
- The only relevant trigger for an absentive reading appears to be the movement of an agentive subject from the A- to the P-location.

- (11) Ich war einkaufen, hab geputzt, gekocht, gegessen und war in der Uni.
I was shop.INF have cleaned cooked eaten and was in the uni
'I went grocery shopping, cleaned my apartment, ate something and went to the university.'
(<https://nicomuh.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/experiment-woche-1-tag-1/>)

- (12) Ich war einkaufen, putzen, kochen und essen. (≠ (11)!)
(13) Ich war einkaufen und in der Uni. (coordination of local expressions?)

- (14) a. Ganz Breslau scheint (hier) einkaufen zu sein.
all Wrocław seems here shop.INF to be.INF
b. Tutta Breslavia sembra essere (qui) a far spese.
all Wrocław seems be.INF here at shop.INF
'It seems like everybody in Wrocław is shopping (here).'

→ Absentive as a subclass of a locative construction in German and Italian?

- (15) Copular-locative construction
+ obligatory local adverbial: localization of the subject
- obligatory local adverbial: absentive

The absentive is interpreted with respect to the movement of a human/agentive subject from an A-location (which is to be contextually reconstructed each time and corresponds to a spatial location in which the subject is expected to be at the reference time) to a P-location in which he/she performs a durative activity for a limited period of time.

Conclusions

- Person deixis is not relevant for the interpretability of the absentive in German and Italian.
- The only relevant variables are the coordinates of the P- and of the A-location, the latter being the place in which the subject would be expected to be at the reference time in a non-absentive situation.
- The absentive can be assumed to be a subclass of a copular-locative construction.

References

- ABRAHAM, W. 2007. Absent arguments on the absentive: An exercise in Silent Syntax. *Groninger Arbeiten zur Germanistischen Linguistik* 45, 3-16. // BÜHLER, K. 1934. *Sprachtheorie: die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache*. Jena: Fischer. // GROOT, C. de. 2000. The absentive. In Ö. Dahl (ed.): *Tense and Aspect in the Languages of Europe*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 693-719. // KRAUSE, O. 2002. *Progressiv im Deutschen. Eine empirische Untersuchung im Kontrast mit Niederländisch und Englisch*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. // STOLLHANS, S. 2015. *Ich bin dann mal Deutsch lernen!* Der Absentiv im DaF-Unterricht". *GFL-Journal* 1, 43-71.