

BOOK REVIEW

Absolute Constructions in Early Indo-European. By ANTONIA RUPPEL. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xiv + 255. Hardcover, \$99.00. ISBN 978-0-521-76762-0.

Absolute participles are a prominent feature of archaic Indo-European morpho-syntax: the ablative absolute of Latin, the Greek genitive absolute, and the locative absolute of Sanskrit are notable both for their functional overlap as well as their divergences. Ruppel's study, which is based on her 2008 University of Cambridge dissertation, takes an amphichronic approach to this family of constructions. Synchronically, she offers a new definition of what constitutes an absolute participial phrase (discussed briefly below). Diachronically, she argues that the absolute constructions of the daughter languages developed from a Proto-Indo-European locative absolute (208). This is a useful volume written in an accessible style, and equipped with an ample collection of data and rich bibliography. Its success is, however, limited by some unreliable syntactic and semantic generalizations, which range from unclear to untrue.

Chapter 1 justifies the need for a study of absolute constructions by demonstrating that their basic properties have not yet been established. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 form the empirical heart of the work, and are devoted to expositions of absolute constructions in Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, respectively. One of the more notable claims of chapter 2 (33, also earlier at 21) is that the genitive absolute has grammaticalized (my term, not Ruppel's) further than its Latin or Sanskrit counterparts.

Building on this tripartite foundation, chapter 5 then looks back in time to consider the absolute construction in Proto-Indo-European. Ruppel argues (210) that "the development toward ACs started from nouns referring to time—day, night, year, months, dusk, dawn, etc.—standing in a case through which they expressed the notion 'at [that time]'. The construction was then extended to other classes of lexical items. This original temporal meaning also motivates the view that the original case of the absolute construction was locative.

This book has an anachronistic feel (as witnessed for instance by the bibliography: about 25% (94/373) of the literature antedates the First World War). Although it investigates a linguistic topic and aims to answer linguistic questions, there is little engagement with any of the methods or theories developed within modern linguistics, be it syntax, semantics, typology, grammaticalization, or corpus linguistics.¹ Ruppel's study would have benefited from the insights into absolute participles (as well as various other adverbial constructions) achieved in these fields.

On the methodological side, for instance, it would have been helpful if Ruppel had laid out a dossier of diagnostics for the question of when an absolute participle has independent clausal status and when it does not (e.g. the presence of certain discourse particles, the distribution of pronominal clitics, scopal properties, etc.). To be sure, Ruppel does this when discussing individual passages but more in this direction was necessary. As it stands, the new definition of the absolute construction that Ruppel offers (206) does not make clear predictions: "an 'absolute' construction is a nominal phrase of temporal dimensions whose head noun does not have such dimensions, or for short: a temporal expression with a non-temporal head." This pseudoparadox is more likely to confuse than aid the reader.

While the diachronic portions of the book are to my mind the more successful, here too the reader should be cautious. On page 41, I do not understand why Ruppel equates innovation (specifically, of a non-adnominal participial phrase) with ungrammaticality. On p. 207 we read: "Given the nearly one-to-one relation between formal and functional case that we can reconstruct for PIE especially on the basis of Vedic ..." but The form-function relationship of Vedic case morphology is anything but one-to-one. The remark that "The number of cases we can reconstruct for PIE survives unaltered into Sanskrit" glosses over the facts, for which see, e.g., the recent discussion of Kim (216).² The title of the book is broader than its empirical scope, since branches of archaic Indo-European other than those mentioned above are not considered.³

¹Cf. e.g. the recent dissertation of Lowe on Sanskrit participles, which one can now add to the bibliography: John J. Lowe, "The syntax and semantics of tense-aspect stem participles in early Rigvedic Sanskrit" (Diss. Oxford, 2012).

²Ronald Kim, "The Indo-European, Anatolian, and Tocharian 'secondary' cases in typological perspective," in Jeremy Rau, Adam I. Cooper, and Michael Weiss, eds., *In Multi Nominis Grammaticus: Festschrift for Alan J. Nussbaum* (Ann Arbor: Beech Stave Press, 2012) 121–42.

³For absolute constructions in Gothic, see recently Tonya Kim Dewey and Yasmin Syed, "Case variation in Gothic absolute constructions," in Jóhanna Barðdal and Shobhana L. Chelliah, eds., *The*

In sum, this book offers a number of interesting observations on absolute constructions in the languages investigated, and provides a foundation for the further exploration of absolute constructions in archaic Indo-European.

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Role of Semantic, Pragmatic, and Discourse Factors in the Development of Case (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009) 3–21; for Slavic, Daniela Hristova, “Absolute constructions in Slavic: Case diversity and originality,” *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 32 (2004) 297–317 and Daniel E. Collins, “The pragmatics of ‘Unruly’ dative absolutes in early Slavic, in Erik Welo, ed., *Indo-European Syntax and Pragmatics: Contrastive Approaches* (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2011) 103–30.).