

# Absent arguments on the Absentive: An exercise in silent syntax. Grammatical category or just pragmatic inference?

Werner Abraham (Wien)

## 1. Introduction

In German(ic) as well as other, non-IE languages, but not in English, copula-embedded non-finite forms may take the absentive meaning. According to de Groot (2000), the Absentive is a grammatical category – i.e., both meaning and morphosyntax are uniquely triggered by their selective distributional contexts. The present article is aimed at questioning this stance mainly on the basis of new distributional facts. In essence, it will be claimed that the specific absentive meaning is due to a silent predicative addition, Infinitive (+ PP-of-verb-of-movement), where ‘V-of-movement’ is best represented by German (*weg*)*gegangen* “(away-) gone” (see also Vogel 2007: 257f.; 259). Since this basic analysis and explanation of the specific meaning is questioned and refuted in the majority of the literature, new distributional data will be adduced to support the present claim.

The term “absentive” derives from its implied semantics: The subject person is strongly implied to be away from the speaker’s place. As regards the form of the Absentive, it strikes one to be anomalous: After all, the finitely construed copula does not select the bare infinitive in any of the languages observed (under Type A; see below under (3a)).

De Groot (2000) observes supportive evidence for the Absentive phenomenon in the languages of German, Dutch, Frisian, Italian, Norwegian, Swedish, Hungarian, and Finnish. The following constructions in (1)-(2) illustrate German and Dutch standing for type A of the Absentive.

- (1) *Clemens ist einkaufen/is boodschappen doen*  
Clemens is shop.INF.PRES.ACT  
“Clemens is off shopping”
- (2) *Jenny ist schwimmen/is zwemmen*  
Jenny is swim.INF.PRES.ACT  
“Jenny is off swimming”

Vogel (2007: 263) extended the discussion of the Absentive to embrace some 26 European languages (out of a total of 36 languages investigated) sharing this property. In a number of cases, it appears to be difficult to distinguish the Absentive meaning from the meaning of the PP-Progressive. See, in particular, Thiel (2007) for characteristics shared by the two grammatical forms. Peterson (1998: 100ff.) describes a similar phenomenon in the East-Asian language of Lai attached to the verbal suffix *-taak*. Krause (2002) and Vogel (2007) were the first to discuss the Absentive in German.

Cross-linguistically, the following categorial and distributional characteristics appear to be at the core of the absentive form and meaning (extending beyond de Groot 2000: 695):

- (3) a Morphosyntax (parentheses for silent, i.e., morphologically unrealized, but structurally indissmissible categories):

Type A: The finitizing head of the whole absentive predication of the construction is the copula *BE*, thus: *IS*+bare Infinitive (+PP-of-verb-of-movement). This type holds for German, Dutch, and Hungarian (among others).

Type B1: The infinitive involved carries an extra infinitival preposition *TO*: thus, *BE*, thus: *IS*+*TO*+Infinitive (+PP-of-verb-of-movement) ‘John-is-to-shop’. This type holds for Finnish, Frisian, and Italian (among others).

Type B2: The infinitive involved carries an extra infinitival preposition *G(EG)EN/GA*: thus, *BE*, thus: *IS*+*TOWARD*+Gerund (+PP-of-verb-of-movement) ‘John-is-to-shop’.

This type holds for dialectal Swiss German (summarizing Vogel 2000: 272) and Austrian Alemannic (Montafon; cf. Abraham 1964).

Type C: The embedded infinitive of Types A and B is replaced by a finite form agreeing with the subject in “pseudo-coordination” with the preceding copula: thus, something like *IS+coordinator+finite V* (verb-of-movement) ‘John-is-and-shops’. This type holds for Swedish, Norwegian, and Faroese (among others).

b Semantics:

The subject human is encoded to be absent from the speaker-deictic center.

The subject human is encoded to be acting at a distance from the speaker-deictic center.

The subject human is encoded to be returning at some point in the future to the speaker-deictic center.

The action encoded for the subject human is pursued on a regular basis.

We will say that the list above represents a necessary, but by no means sufficient set of characteristics. De Groot (2000: 695) explicitly excludes elements such as *be away* or *have gone/left* as surface elements of the construction to account for absentive meaning. Thiel (2007) even extends her position to exclude an ellipsis of the PP of German *weggegangen*.

There appear to be the following problems. First, notice that English has no way of siding with any of the three Absentive types: *IS+bare Infinitive (+PP-of-verb-of-movement)* is simply ungrammatical. The copula clearly deselects any bare infinitive. And, what is more, *IS+TO+Infinitive* is occupied for a different meaning – i.e., the modal passive or the deontic active. Yet, it is noteworthy that the PP-Progressive is not only construction-near, but shares the Absentive meaning. See (4), which is ambiguous between (i) and (ii).

- (4) *He is swimming*  
 (i) Progressive meaning  
 (ii) Absentive meaning

This implies that the surface form of what is called Progressive in English is underdetermined. And this may mean that any Absentive meaning entails the meaning of the Progressive – but not vice versa. We shall investigate this implication in more detail, in particular the assumption that the semantics and grammaticality of any form – see types A, B, and C – are dependent on lexical and constructional oppositions. This is what underlies, in essence, the divergent forms of the Absentive constructions.

Secondly, if (4) and its ambiguity is true to the facts and our intuition, then the meaning of the Absentive has no categorial standing in the first place. Much rather, it is a speaker-deictic, and thus situational, implication – far from any grammatical status, but nevertheless of an interesting and coercive pragmatic import and generality.

Third, what we are mainly interested in here, however, is the fact that given that the claim of an elliptic adverbial of speaker-distance (such as *be away* or *have gone/left*) is correct, a silent category is responsible for syntactic (subcategorical) selectivity and adequacy as well as semantic explanation. There is growing awareness in the field that silent categories play a major role in syntax and that such an assumption may help clarify constructional ambiguities along calibrated processes within distributional morphology and Minimalism (Leiss 2000: 4, Kayne 2005, Klingvall 2007, among many others).

Finally, and with regard to English (4) above, we question the accepted wisdom of the Progressive as a verbal category. Beyond doubt, anything on (*on/a*)-*ing* was (PP-)gerundial and, therefore, nominal at its diachronic outset, with the original Progressive being formed on *-inde/-unde* in Old English. Middle High German (1050-1350), likewise, had the progressive formed with the present participle, as is still accepted in Modern Dutch. For the latter see (5).

- (5) *Hij is zwemmende/boodschappen doende/afscheidnemende*  
 he-is-swim/shop/farewell say.INF=PART.PRAES

The English *-ing* suffix (like the etymologically closely related German *-ung*) makes nominal derivatives. Nominals, in opposition to verbals, are tenseless (though not necessarily aspectless) – i.e., they have no time reference (but may have eventive reference). This leads us to conclude that the form in (4), just like that in (5), is durative/imperfective. Thus, there is a common eventive function to distinct forms, *-ing* in English (taken to be progressive/continuant) and the present participle in Old English, Middle High German, and Modern Dutch (unaccepted, however, in Modern German, for stylistic reasons). Notice that the present (or past) participle, as an adjectival category, is within the subcategorical limits of the copula *BE* – as opposed to Copula+verbal infinitive (of any tense).

In sum, it appears absolutely necessary, first, to discuss the Absentive together with the Progressive as well as other verbal construction types for the very simple reason that either term has different paradigmatic and syntagmatic opponents. The second desideratum is to fathom out to what extent grammatical categories and construction types are involved and where simple pragmatic inferences fall in to serve explanatory attempts.

## 2. Some important distributional facts about the Absentive – in German, but not only.

Before we go into addressing the principled questions above let us fathom out a few distributional limits. Our main language target is German.

### 2.1. Distribution of **grammatical person**:

The real grammatical persons, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> sg/pl, disallow the absentive insertion. Only the 3<sup>rd</sup> persons are grammatical.

- |     |     |  |              |
|-----|-----|--|--------------|
| (6) | a   | <i>Er ist arbeiten/schlafen/kochen</i>                 | ... 3sg      |
|     |     | he is work/sleep/cook                                  |              |
|     |     | “He is off working/sleeping/cooking”                   |              |
|     | b   | <i>Sie/Die Kameraden sind arbeiten/schlafen/kochen</i> | ... 3pl      |
|     |     | they/the colleagues are work/sleep/cook                |              |
|     | c * | <i>Ich bin/*Wir sind arbeiten/schlafen/kochen</i>      | ... *1sg/pl  |
|     | d * | <i>Du bist/*Ihr seid arbeiten/schlafen/kochen</i>      | ... *2 sg/pl |

(6c,d) can obviously be saved to be acceptable under certain specific context conditions. See (7).

- |     |   |   |         |
|-----|---|---|---------|
| (7) | a | <i>Ich bin dann, wenn man mich braucht, (weg) arbeiten.</i> | ... 1sg |
|     |   | “I will then, when you need me, be off working”             |         |
|     | b | <i>Immer, wenn man Euch braucht, seid Ihr auf Tour.</i>     | ... 2pl |
|     |   | “Always when you are needed you are off touring”            |         |
|     | c | <i>Du, ich bin jetzt (draußen) rauchen.</i>                 | ... 1sg |
|     |   | “Listen, I’ll be out smoking”                               |         |

(7a) has both a futural and a conditional reading. Either reading leads to acceptability in contrast to (6c,d). Of course, this futural reading represented formally by the German present tense as in (7c), is a peculiarity of German and should not be taken to serve as a cross-linguistic model and explanation.

### 2.2. **Tense** distribution:

Most strikingly, only the (periphrastic) futures are out in the Absentive reading.

- |     |   |                         |                            |
|-----|---|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| (8) | a | <i>Er ist schwimmen</i> | ... Present; Absentive     |
|     |   | he is swim              |                            |
|     | b | <i>Er war schwimmen</i> | ... Simple Past; Absentive |
|     |   | he was swim             |                            |

c	<i>Er war schwimmen gewesen</i> he was swim been	... Past in the Past; Absentive
d	<i>Er ist schwimmen gewesen</i> he is swim been	... Analytic Past; Absentive
e *	<i>Er wird schwimmen</i>	... <b>Analytic Future</b> ; *Absentive
f	<i>Er wird schwimmen sein</i>	... Future Progressive; Absentive
g	<i>Er wird geschwommen sein</i>	... Past in the Future; *Absentive
h	<i>Er wird schwimmen (gewesen) sein</i>	... Double Past in the Future; Absentive

Fig. 1: Absentive-Tense distribution: Overview

Tense	Present	Past	Past Past	Perfect	Future	Past Future	Double Past Future	Future PP-Progressive
±Absentive	+	+	+	+	–	–	+	+

(8e) is of course the normal future reading. (8e-h) appear to be the forms determining the temporal distributional limits since they obviously have distinct selective properties: *sein* embedded under *wird* makes the dependent verb an adjectival, which is among the normal selection characteristics of *werden* as an inchoative and, thus, a full verb. In other words, if (8f) is the closest parallel to (8a), though making it a stylistically unacceptable present participle, but nevertheless understandable ... *ist schwimmen( seien)d* ‘is-swim-being’, it turns out to be the grammatically correct adjectival selected by the copula. Notice that this accounts for the selection restriction only, not for the Absentive meaning. Another such selection-friendly construal is the PP-gerundial ...*wird am Schwimmen sein/ist am Schwimmen*, which counts as the general suppletive for what may be called the German PP-Progressive (Kraus 1997, 2002; Emmel 2005, Thiel 2007, among many others).

The gist of (8a-h) is that (a) only embedding *BE* triggers the Absentive reading – not, however, *werden*; and (b) this is so because both the copula and inchoative *werden* “become” is selection constrained for adjectivals and nominals – thus, [–V, +N]. This, for one, corroborates our initial claim that it is not a pure *BE+V* that is at the heart of the Absentive construction. And, second, it makes more probable our assumption that the Absentive meaning is situationally motivated and has no direct grammatical correlate. The latter, in turn, requires the reconstruction of a silent lexical and grammatically specific component – something to which we shall return later.

#### 2.4. Aspect/Aktionsart distribution:

Telics and Perfectives (Vendler’s Accomplishments and Achievements) are obviously out; only Imperfectives/Duratives (Vendler’s Statives and Actives) qualify for an Absentive reading. [*SMALL CAPS* for word accent].

- (9) a \* *Sie ist EINSchlafen* ... durative-telic/perfective  
she is fall-asleep  
b \* *Er ist ABSpringen* ... punctual-telic  
he is off-jump  
c *Sie sind schlafen/springen* ... imperfective  
they are sleep/jump

This appears to be in line with other, true aspect languages (confirmed aspectual Hungarian by de Groot (2000: 704): “[...] only the imperfective form can be used in the absentive”. The same holds for Czech: No Absentive meaning is triggered for perfective verbs (counter to Vogel (2007: 283); see Thiel (2007: 82).

- (10) a *Anna byla se koupat.*  
SUBJ was REFLEX bathe.INF.IMPERF  
“Anna was swimming.”

- b \* Anna byla se vykoupat.  
 SUBJ was REFLEX PERF.bathe.INF  
 “Anna was swimming.”

Clearly, given that only imperfective verbs trigger the Absentive, this construal is close to the Progressive. Question is whether the Progressive is synonymous with the Absentive syntax.

Notice that the conclusion about the aspectual constraint is in line with the present derivation of the Absentive meaning from the Progressive form in 2.2. above. The prediction was that Telics/Perfectives should not lend themselves to an Absentive derivation on the given their fundamental progressive (since adjectival) semantics – and, in fact, they don’t.

### 2.3. The **syntactic prerequisites** for the Absentive semantics:

There is no other Aux but the copula to trigger the Absentive reading. This is in itself a telling fact since  $[_{AP/NP} V]_{+SEIN}$  limits decidedly the class of co-construing categories in order to yield the structural prerequisites for the Absentive meaning. This is most clearly revealed by the following opposition.

- (11) a \* *Er wird arbeiten* ... Future tense reading due to *wird* (+V);  
 “He will be working” no Absentive reading  
 b *Er wird arbeiten sein* ... Absentive reading due to *wird* (+V) *sein*;  
 “He will be off working” *wird* has also non-futural, i.e., modal reading

The Absentive reading is not restricted to the finite copula. It holds also for the non-finite copula.

- (12) a *arbeiten gewesensein* ... Absentive, composite Past  
 work been be  
 b *arbeitensein werden* ... Absentive, composite Future  
 work be become  
 c \* *arbeiten werden* ... no Absentive reading; Future  
 work become

Notice that the necessary construal condition for the Absentive reading is that of the PP-Progressive just as well:  $[_{AP/NP} V]_{+SEIN/WERDEN}$ . This covers also the Present participle form for V. The mereological characterization is that of Imperfectives:

- (13)  $[_{AP/NP} V]_{+SEIN/WERDEN} \equiv [+DIVISIBLE, +ADDITIVE, -HETEROGENEOUS]$

which is in line with Krifka’s [+CUMULATIVITY].<sup>1</sup>

In fact, this requirement recapitulates the diachronic emergence of the periphrastic future in German: i.e., from “ingressive *werden* as a full verb + V-in-Present participle form” to “no-longer-ingressive”, i.e., *werden* as Auxiliary + V-in-Infinitival form”, to all appearances on the strength of morphological erosion (though the handbooks remain strikingly silent about any grammaticalizing account). Likewise,  $[_{AP/NP} V]_{+SEIN}$  appeared first (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century) as adjectival or nominal  $[_{PresPart} V]_{+SEIN}$  before switching to  $[_{VP} V]_{+SEIN}$ . See further 2.6. below.

<sup>1</sup> See Krifka 1989. The mereological (Leiss’) terminology appears to be more felicitous, not in the least because it links to the early language-philosophical introduction by the mediaeval Modists. See, as a strikingly convincing example for the mereological part-whole related conception and terminology, Filip (1989) on the logical-semantic properties of the Progressive, mainly the PP-Progressive in German. On the whole, the terminological confusion in the modern linguistic literature on aspect and Aktionsart is considerable, and knowledge of prior, ground laying literature is poorly represented among modern linguists. The reason is, first and above all, that sentence-rooted aspect and single verb-based Aktionsart are not kept apart sufficiently. Furthermore, the differences between languages (such as article vs. articleless ones) are not considered carefully enough. For example, Verkuyl’s S(pecific)Q(uantified)A(rgument)-criterion (telicity expressed on definite object lexicals; see Section 2) applies to article languages such as Dutch and English, but does not to articleless Russian as well as most other Slavic languages.



- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| d | <i>Er wird am Arbeiten sein</i><br>he becomes at work.INF be | ... Absentive2; ambiguous between Present/Future tense and modal-epistemic reading (“it is probable that he is working”) |
| e | <i>Er ist am Arbeiten</i><br>he is at work.INF               | ... Absentive2; Present Progressive  |

Compare the Progressives in (15d-e) with a clear Absentive1 implication and the non-Progressives in (15b-c) without one or a different, Absentive2 one. (15a) is a specific case and has no Absentivity implication at all. Absentive1 and 2 imply different distances of Absentivity: distal and proximate.<sup>3</sup> See (21)-(22) below.

Behold that both the Bare Infinitive with Absentive meaning and the PP-Progressive can be triggered only by activity predicates. The argument (Ebert 1996: 47) that the (meaning of the) Progressive may be seen as a subset of the (meaning of the) Absentive has to be suspended for the reason that the Absentive reading is opened only under specific situative contexts and nowhere else. See (16) for Ebert’s line of demarcation.

- (16) a *am V sein*: PP-Progressive: being engaged in activity denoted by V  
 b *V sein*: Infinitival Absentive: being engaged in activity V + in typical place of, + on the way to, activity of V

It is interesting to pursue a common locational component in the diachronic development of both the PP-Progressive and the Infinitival Absentive. This holds for German as well as English, whose *V-ing* goes back to *a-V-ing*, which in turn derived from a clear prepositional *on-V-ynge* – i.e., [<sub>PP</sub> P+[<sub>N</sub> V+nominal suffix]]. Its original meaning is locative (Bybee et al. 1994: 135;<sup>4</sup> see also Comrie 1976: 98). This is strongly reminiscent of the local features of the Infinitival Absentive. Thus, whatever the causality behind mediaeval German *sein* + [<sub>AdjP</sub> Present Participle] > *sein* + [<sub>V</sub> INF], one could conclude from this (as indeed Vogel (2007: 273, FN 36) does), on the basis of the semantic local affinity, that there is a derivational link between mediaeval *sein* + [<sub>V</sub> INF] and the Modern German PP-Progressive.

I think that such a conclusion is misled for empirical reasons. In Section 2.5 I will argue that, since the Absentive semantics is strictly contingent upon the specific situational context, there is nothing grammatically regular on this semantics and that, in particular, the mediaevally frequent *sein* + [<sub>V</sub> INF] cannot be the starting point for a diachronic path to the modern PP-Progressive – and be that for the single reason that the latter, as claimed by Vogel herself, has no Absentive implication. Why, then, would PP-Progressive have lost this meaning? Vogel does not pose this obvious question, much less that she has an answer to it.

### 2.5. The syntactic justification of Absentive semantics – sufficient semantic criterion beyond the necessary syntax?

The claim is that [<sub>VP</sub> V]+*SEIN* does not mirror the underlying construal, but that an unrealized Past participle of (*weg*)*gehen*, i.e., (*weg*)*gegangen* “off-gone” is dominated by the copula and that V is in itself embedded under the Past participle (*weg*)*gegangen* – thus: [[[V] (*weg*)*gegangen*] *SEIN*]. This lexical insertion brings about the specific Absentive meaning.

The path toward a methodologically sound attestation leads over comparison of PP-Progressive and Absentive. See (17).

- (17) *Wo ist Ruth?* “Where is Ruth?”  
 a *Ruth ist am/beim Arbeiten* ... predicative Progressive  
 R. is on work. INF.

<sup>3</sup> According to Ebert (1996: 47), Krause (2002: 235), Langl (2003: 31) and Bertinetto et al. (2000: 541), the Progressive is not of the same category as the Absentive infinitive. We might conclude from this that these authors see no Absentivity implication in the Progressive. However, see Section 2.5 below where we reach different conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> “[...] if the original function of the progressive periphrasis is to give a location, then the activities expressed by the main verb must be overt and have a characteristic location” (Bybee et al. 1994: 135).

- b *die arbeitende/am Arbeiten seiende Ruth* ... attributive Progressive  
 the work.PRES.PART./on work.INF. being R.
- (18) *Ruth ist arbeiten* ... Absentive  
 R. is work.INF.

There is no attributive Absentive form. Thus, the Absentive is only predicative as opposed to the Present Participle – which has adjectival status irrespective whether it is attributively or predicatively used. Notice the distinct semantics, [ $\pm$ Absentive], triggered by the different construals in (17a,b). The crucial question now is: Is (17a) an ‘Adsentive’ as opposed to the Absentive in (18)? Notice that a categorial form can only be postulated if there is an evenly formal category with an opposing semantics. Are (17a) and (18) really “Absentive” vs. “Adsentive”? Is there not a different distinction: not that between being absent – which both (17a) and (18) have in common with respect to the question in (16), but with respect to whether Ruth is farther away and not so far away. It appears beyond doubt that (17a) is an appropriate answer to the question in (17) just as much as (18). Now take (19).

- (19) “Is Ruth in/at home?” (at Ruth’s door)
- a *Ruth ist am/beim Arbeiten* ... Progressive  
 b *Ruth ist arbeiten* ... pure Infinitive

What both (19a) and (19b) have in common is that, more or less, Ruth is said not to be available. Now, while far being away from postulating a grammatical category of “Availability” (which might be what de Groot, Vogel, Thiel and others meant in the first place), such Absentivity appears to come into play only in the answering-the-door or telephone situation – hardly anywhere else. Stylistic appropriateness notwithstanding, either (19a) and (19b), two clearly different constructions, may serve to evenly ward the visitor off.

Let us investigate briefly what role the answering-the-door or telephone situation plays and to what extent (19) might change the Absentive meaning, or might not let it come into play, would undergo outside this specific context. Consider the following narrative sequence.

- (20) Barrack Obama before the first pre-elections for US-president candidacy in Iowa and New Hampshire.
- a *Barrack Obama steht für Interviews, die nicht mit seinem Wahlkampf zu tun haben, nicht zur Verfügung.*
- b *Er ist wahlkampfvorbereiten.* ... pure Infinitive  
 c *Er ist am Wahlkampfvorbereiten.* ... Progressive

Quite clearly, an Absentive does not come into play in the first place. The semantic “Absentive/Adsentive” opposition is not triggered. Notice furthermore that one can construe a proximative distance context with which, as one may, assume the Absentive will not comply. Vice versa, notice that the Absentive Infinitive and the PP-Progressive are in complementary contextual distribution.

- (21) *Was macht denn Peter **da neben dir**?* ... close Proximity  
 what makes PRT Peter **there next to you**
- (21) a \* *Der ist arbeiten.* ... \*pure Infinitive; Absentive1  
 the (one) is work.INF
- b *Der ist am Arbeiten.* ... Progressive; Absentive2  
 the (one) is at.DAT work.INF
- (22) *Wo ist denn Peter, **wenn er nicht da ist**?* ... far Distance  
 where is PART Peter **if he not here** is
- (22) a *Der ist arbeiten.* ... pure Infinitive; Absentive1  
 the (one) is work.INF
- b \* *Der ist am Arbeiten.* ... \*Progressive; Absentive2  
 the (one) is at.DAT work.INF



In other words, Absentival Infinitive and PP-Progressive are not interchangeable in terms of distance despite a possible Absentive (albeit close-proximal Absentivity) reading for the latter. Notice, furthermore, that in the specific telephone or at-the-door situation, the Absentive reading is triggered for any syntactic form, bare Infinitive or PP-Progressive. This bars any purely grammatical – syntactic or semantic – solution.

What all of this boils down to is this. First, an absentive meaning cannot be tied to any unique form. Both the progressive and the pure infinitive feed this meaning with negligible (i.e., presently non-relevant) distinctions. Second, since the Absentive meaning is not triggered outside the answering-the-door or telephone situations – which was the typical and specific context that has been presupposed in the respective literature from scratch – it is the result only of a highly situation-pragmatic process. Third and most prominently, it is a methodologically ill-fated endeavor in the first place to make dependent a specific meaning on any such specific situative meaning. No doubt, it is interesting and relevant to investigate why such distinct differences as between the far distance and the small distance reading come about under one and the same answering-the-door or telephone situation attached to either the PP-Progressive and the bare Infinitive. But beyond that the Absentive is an linguistic epiphenomenon to the extent that it is hatched on a very specific situational context. In this sense, its treatment as a grammatical category is doomed to outright failure. *Ex nihilo quodlibet*.

### 2.6. Enigmatic lexical constraints:

Recall that perfectives/telics disqualify for both the Absentive and the PP-Progressive – for the latter for obvious reasons. But there is more to the range of constraints. See (23).

- (23) a \* *Er ist (nachhause/weiter)kommen/(fort)gehen* ... bare Infinitive  
       he is (home/further)come.INF./ (away)go.INF.  
       b *Er ist bahn/wettkampfgehen*  
       he is competition-go
- (24) a *Er ist am (Nachhause/\*Weiter)kommen/(<sup>OK</sup>Fort)<sup>OK</sup>Gehen* ... PP-Progressive  
       b *Er ist am Bahn-/Wettkampfgehen*

Any lexical extension of *kommen* seems out the main reason being that *kommen* is perfective/telic. The same holds for *fort/weg/hinausgehen*. However, *gehen* is expandable to yield acceptable Absentives as shown in (23b). There is no clear understanding of why it is as it is.

### 3. Underlying Absentivity: A speaker-subject origo question

If our observation is correct that there is no Absentive implication outside the answering-the-door and telephone situation, we might postulate that there is an underlying Absentivity, or at least a non-Absentivity implication, at work in regular declaratives. This appears to be trivial. However, together with the distributions of grammatical person as in (6) above, the origo question need to be readdressed. This is what our observations in (6)-(7) yielded:

- (24) The real grammatical persons, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> sg/pl, disallow the absentive reading (*gegangen* insertion). Only the 3<sup>rd</sup> persons are grammatical.
- (25) 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> sg/pl can obviously be saved to be acceptable under futural or conditional readings. The present time reference forbids the Absentive reading.

The conclusion must be that the origo solution is contingent upon the distribution between speaker location and subject location.

- (26) a unmarked reference:  
       The Absentive reading is triggered only if Speaker or Addressee location and subject location are separated. This excludes 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person subjects for the Absentive reading.

## b marked alternative reference:

The Absentive reading is triggered only if Speaker location and subject location are separated in time reference. This includes 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person subjects for the Absentive reading.

Consequently, there appear to two types of Absentivity: a locational one and a time referential one. Illustrations for (26b) are in (7a-c) – which is repeated here for ease of reference. Notice the time reference indices,  $t < t+n$ , for  $t$ =speech act time.

- (7) a Ich bin dann, wenn man mich braucht, (weg) arbeiten. ... 1sg  
 “I will then, when you need me, be off working”  
 b Immer, wenn man Euch braucht, seid Ihr auf Tour. ... 2pl  
 “Always when you are needed you are off touring”  
 c Du, ich bin jetzt (draußen) rauchen. ... 1sg  
 “Listen, I’ll be out smoking”

$t$ , the speech act time, is not always overtly represented, as in (7b). In fact, it is questionable whether or not the speech act time is overt in any of the illustrations in (7a-c). But this is a minor point.

Needless to highlight the point that (23a,b) are not grammatical components of pinpointing the reference.

One may assume that (26), and (26b) in particular, would be mirrored by minimal text sequences in terms of antecedent and postcedent clauses accounting for the Absentive readings. Cf. (27). Notice that (27c), with the *zu*-Telic Progressive, requires the ellipsis of the movement verb to be inserted.

- (27) a [Sie ist arbeiten], *wird erst in 1 Stunde/aber bald wieder da sein* ... Postcedent  
 [she is work.INF], will only in 1 hour/but soon again here be  
 b ... *und kommt auch nicht wieder.* ... Postcedent  
 and comes also not back  
 c [Sie ist zum Arbeiten \*((weg)gegangen)] *und kommt auch nicht wieder.*<sup>5</sup>  
 [she is to.DAT work.INF ((away)gone)] and comes also not back  
 ... Postcedent;Telic Progressive/Gerund  
 d [Sie ist am Arbeiten ((\*weg)\*gegangen)] *und kommt auch nicht wieder*  
 ... Postcedent; non-Telic Progressive

(27a) suspends Absentivity holding at  $t$  for  $t+n$  ( $n = \textit{in 1 Stunde/bald}$ ), while (27b) extends Absentivity to capture/until  $t+n$ .

- (28) a *Er war vor 1 Stunde arbeiten* [und ist noch nicht zurück] ... Antecedent  
 he was ago 1 hour work.INF [and is still not back]  
 b *Er war vor 1 Stunde arbeiten*, [kommt aber bald zurück] ... Antecedent  
 he was ago 1 hour work.INF [but comes soon back]  
 (29) a *Er war eben noch da, ist jetzt aber arbeiten/am/zum Arbeiten.* ... Antecedent  
 he was just still here, but is now work.INF/at.DAT/to.DAT work  
 b *Er ist nicht mehr da, er ist arbeiten/am/zum Arbeiten.* ... Antecedent  
 he is no longer here, he is work.INF/at.DAT/to.DAT work

What the respective antecedent and postcedent clauses, (27a-d)-(29a,b), clearly show is that Absentivity holds for  $t$ , the speech act time, while no-longer-speech act time accounts for the Absentivity reading. Recall the generalizations for local and time co- and non-coreference in

<sup>5</sup> In South German oral speech, the movement verb is suspended regularly: *Sie ist zum Arbeiten/Eislaufen/Einkaufen* ‘she-is-to.DAT work.INF/skate.INF /shop.INF’. *weggegangen* need not be overt; directional *zum* is sufficient.

(26a, b), whose local and time referential Absentivity is reflected in the local and time adverbs in (28a,b) and (29a,b).

#### 4. Movement-V ellipsis – and its irrefutable motivation

Whatever the division of intellectual inspiration and arguments in the literature as to whether or not an elliptical movement-V in past participle form is behind *IS+(Prep+)V* – i.e., *IS+(Prep +)V(+[<sub>v</sub> P(ast)P(articipale)])* (in favor Wilmanns 1922: §92; Holmberg 1916: 33; Bertinetto 1995: 57; Krause 2002: 61; Langl 2003: 11; counter Vogel 2007: 256; Berthele 2007, Thiel 2007: 62 et passim) –, there are lines of argument in favor of an invisible component yielding the desired account has not yet been pursued in the literature.

The linguistic motivation for assuming a silent syntactic Movement-V in Past Participial form such as German (*weg*)*gegangen* “(off-)gone” for any Absentive trigger, although not really necessary given the old diachronic distribution with sufficient frequency (see Section 2.3 above as well as immediately below in connection with (30)), is as follows.

(30) *necessary (for German and Dutch, apparently also for Italian), but certainly not sufficient:*

- a the restriction to *SEIN/BE* – which holds for verbs of movement.
- b strictly taken, the non-selection of infinitival V by *SEIN/BE*.
- c restriction to, and near-identity with, syntactic progressive status.
- d *SEIN/BE* has the status of a copula (not an Aux); it is thus categorially in line with the copula subcategorized for Adjectives, Nominals, and Present Participles of verbs.  
*(near-)sufficient:*
- e (27d) excludes the verbal Infinitive as a syntactic complement of the copula.
- f absentive meaning holding for location and time reference (see (23) above).
- g distal absentive meaning, as opposed to proximate absentive for the Progressive; cf. (21) above.

Bare verbal infinitives as complements are rare in German; they are in principle restricted to modal verbs (at least in Standard German – though not in its dialects and sociolectal variants) and a few movement verbs, among which *gehen* “go” – quite clearly of light semantic import. Viz. (31a,b).

- (31) a *Er geht/fährt/\*tanzt/\*schwimmt (nach Konstanz) einkaufen.*  
he goes/drives/\*dances/\*swims (to K.) shop.INF
- b *Er tanzt/schwimmt nach Konstanz.*  
he dances/swims to Konstanz

There might be an alternative to the blind syntactic insertion of Movement-V in participial form, one that has been suggested by Berthele (2007: 240ff.). In German at least, any such V-of-movement insertion can be replaced (at least in less controlled oral speech) by a directional PP. See (32) (illustrations from Berthele (2007: 240 f.)).

- (32) a SUBJ + *SEIN/BE* + <([<sub>DIRECT</sub> PP<sub>Loc</sub>])><sub>1</sub> + V<sub>INF</sub> + <([<sub>PASTPART</sub> Movement-V])><sub>2</sub>
- b *Er ist ins Büro <gegangen> arbeiten <gegangen>*  
he is to the office <gone> work.INF <gone>
- c *Er rennt/fährt/bewegt sich/ist ins Büro/Krankenhaus/in die Firma.*  
he runs/goes/moves himself/**is** to the office/hospital/to the business
- d *Er ist ins Büro/Krankenhaus/in die Firma arbeiten.*  
he **is to the** office/hospital/**to** the business work.INF

(32b) and (d) are semantically synonymous alternatives separated only by style distinctions. However, (29d) does not suspend the insertion of <><sub>2</sub> in constructions such as (32a) for the simple reason that SUBJ + *SEIN/BE* + <([PP<sub>Loc</sub>])><sub>1</sub> exists also for stative locative PPs which

defy the directional reading and which are totally bare of the Absentive reading. In other words, (33a) is a complete syntactic structure, whereas (33b) is not.

- (33) a SUBJ + *sein* + (LOC) + INF  
 b SUBJ + *sein* + (DIR) + INF

An even stronger line of argument is the following one. Since the strict subcategorization and semantic selection of *SEIN/BE* includes Adjectives and Nominals, if SUBJ + *SEIN/BE* + <([<sub>DIRECT</sub> PP<sub>LOC</sub>])><sub>1</sub> + V<sub>INF</sub> as in (31a) were a normal grammatical construal, one would expect *SEIN/BE* + Adj/N to trigger the Absentive meaning as well. But it does not – meaning that something co-vert needs to be assumed that the Absentive is contingent upon. Notice that the Movement-V component in (31a), <([<sub>PASTPART</sub> Movement-V])><sub>2</sub>, is the one that selects the first adverbial PP-component, <([<sub>DIRECT</sub> PP<sub>LOC</sub>])><sub>1</sub>, not vice versa (as Berthele 2007: 247) appears to assume.

Another important empirical argument clearly corroborating the present ellipsis account is provided by Dutch. See (34), where the Movement-V can always be inserted to yield exactly the Absentive construal and meaning.

- (34) a *Ik ben (gaan) werken* ≠ *Ik ben aan het werken*  
 I am (go.INF) work.INF I am at the work.INF  
 b *Ik ben iets begonnen* = *Ik ben iets gaan beginnen*  
 I am something begun I am smth. go.INF work.INF

*Gaan* “go.INF” is a suppletive Infinitive (consider the German ‘Ersatzinfinitiv’ after certain Psych-verbs) for the Past Participle of “go”, which is typical of Dutch. In certain respects, Dutch is more conservative than its close genetic relative, German. We may assume that this possibility in Dutch relates directly and irrefutably to the question whether or not an ellipsis of the German Past Participle of *gehen* “go” yields the account for the Absentive bare Infinitive – even given the fact that Modern German no longer allows this construal.

## 5. Conclusion: Is there a common account for the typologically different Absentive-triggering forms?

Recall that even Indo-European languages have different realizations of the Absentive.

- (35) Italian: SUBJ *IS* only with the infinitival preposition *a* + Infinitival V  
 Norwegian: SUBJ *IS AND* Finite-V  
 German/Dutch: SUBJ *IS* + Infinitive-V  
 English: no Absentive at all? See *He is (off) working*

Given that the ellipsis hypothesis of a Movement-[<sub>V</sub> PP] cannot explain the Scandinavian type (*IS+AND+finite-V*), Vogel (2007: 274) suggests either the simple infinitival substitute solution or the Present Participle-V solution. Recall that either form was invoked for the historical formation of the periphrastic Future (late Middle High German, with inchoative *werden*). Vogel’s solution is thus in line with the traditional assumption of diachronic philology. Notice, however, that Langl’s (2003) diachronic investigation (listed in Vogel’s bibliographical references) does not fully endorse this view for the pre-modern German material. There is no obstruction to the claim that in each of the Absentive-producing languages in (35), the ellipsis account would not work.

- (36) Italian: SUBJ *IS* (+ [<sub>V</sub> Movement-V PP]) + *a* + Infinitival V  
 Norwegian: SUBJ *IS* (+ [<sub>V</sub> Movement-V PP]) *AND* Finite-V  
 German/Dutch: SUBJ *IS* (+ [<sub>V</sub> Movement-V PP]) + Infinitive-V  
 English: *He is* (+ [<sub>V</sub> Movement-V PP]) *working*

This closes the cycle of our line of argumentation. We have claimed that the ellipsis account is a viable, and, in fact, the most plausible, path toward an account of the Absentive. The main gist of this discussion, however, was that, given the highly situationally restricted context triggering the Absentive meaning under any of the construals in (35) and (36), the occurrence of the Absentive is not a grammatical category. Nor is there a viable diachronic relation with the PP-Progressive in German and other languages such as English. Admittedly, this leaves the unaccounted for fine gradual distance-semantic difference between the Bare Infinitive and the PP-Progressive in German. There is reason to assume that reaching this last step in the discussion has brought us further than in the previous discussions.

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