

## Synchronic and Diachronic Aspects of Nominative and Accusative Absolutes in English

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to provide a principled account of Case assignment to lexical subjects in participial constructions and their historical changes within the Minimalist framework advocated by Chomsky (2004, 2007, 2008), where the C-T configuration is a requisite for nominative Case assignment. Nominative absolutes, which first appeared in the 15th century and increased during EModE, but they have been decreasing since LModE. It is argued that this historical change is closely related to the fact that participial constructions began to lose the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment by analogy with verbal gerunds. On the other hand, accusative absolutes were observed during ME and have been attested from the late 19th century onward. It is claimed that they were actually dative absolutes in ME and decreased due to the reanalysis of dative subjects as nominative subjects in participial constructions. Their reappearance in the late 19th century was triggered by the decline of the C-T configuration in participial constructions and analogy with verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects. Furthermore, it is shown that lexical subjects are licensed by default Case in accusative absolutes after the late 19th century.\*

**Key words:** nominative absolute, accusative absolute, C-T configuration, verbal gerund, default Case

### 1. Introduction

This paper deals with English participial constructions with lexical subjects, which are divided into two types: those which have nominative subjects (henceforth, nominative absolutes) and those which have accusative subjects (henceforth, accusative absolutes), as illustrated in (1) and (2), respectively.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the constructions with *V-ing* which appear in Case positions will be called gerundive constructions, while those which appear in non-Case positions will be called participial constructions.

- (1) a. Mike expected to win the game, *he being the best athlete in the school*.  
(Pires 2007: 196)
- b. Elaine's winking at Roddy was fruitless, *he being a confirmed bachelor*.  
(Reuland 1983: 101)
- (2) a. *Them doing that*, I left. (Miller 2002: 348)
- b. Mike expected to win the game, *him being the best athlete in the school*.  
(Pires 2007: 196)

The fact that both nominative and accusative Case can be assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions, which differentiates them from other nonfinite clauses in English such as infinitival and gerundive constructions, would apparently pose a serious challenge to theoretical frameworks like generative grammar, where Case assignment is structurally determined.<sup>2</sup>

In order to account for Case assignment properties of participial constructions, this paper focuses on the development of nominative and accusative absolutes in the history of English. More specifically, the purpose of this paper is to provide a corpus-based investigation of nominative and accusative absolutes, and to account for their historical changes within the Minimalist framework developed by Chomsky (2004, 2007, 2008), especially by applying to participial constructions the hypothesis that nominative Case is assigned under the C-T configuration, that is, the construction where both C and T are present.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 examines the historical changes of nominative and accusative absolutes based on four corpora, in order to clarify how their frequency has changed in the history of English.<sup>3</sup> After pointing out problems with some previous studies on nominative Case assignment in participial constructions, section 3 accounts for the historical change of nominative absolutes by arguing that lexical subjects in participial constructions are assigned nominative Case under the C-T configuration. Section 4 shows that the historical change of accusative absolutes is closely related to that of nominative absolutes, claiming that accusative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions as default Case. Section 5 briefly discusses some remaining issues regarding participial constructions to be addressed in future research. Section 6 offers the conclusion of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> This paper does not discuss participial constructions with DP subjects like (i), because they could instantiate either nominative absolutes or accusative absolutes, due to the lack of overt Case morphology on their subjects.

(i) A wounded soldier was brought in, *blood streaming down his face*.

(Declerck 1991: 462)

<sup>3</sup> The historical periods of English are divided as follows: Old English (OE: 450–1100), Middle English (ME: 1100–1500 (early ME (EME: 1100–1300)), (late ME (LME: 1300–1500))), Modern English (ModE: 1500–1900 (early ModE (EModE: 1500–1700)), (late ModE (LModE: 1700–1900))), and Present-day English (PE: 1900–).



Here are examples from each period.

- (4) Ande the Duke of Sowthefolke was a-pechydde at that Parlyment, *he* and the Duke of Southfolk wasa impeached at that Parliament *he beynge at London,* being at London  
'and the Duke of Southfolk was impeached at that Parliament, he being at London.'  
(CMGREGOR,190.1431: M4)
- (5) a. kyng Henry might sauely wyne or passé to Calays, and so *he beyng there,* the towne to be yolden vnto him. (FABYAN-E1-P2,579.138)  
b. And *they being rightly uttered,* all the rest are more plaine.  
(BRINSLEY-E2-H,15.103)  
c. But *he being in perfect health,* it was not much minded.  
(BURNETROC-E3-H,20.93)
- (6) a. I believe you are not likely to see Mr. Elliot again soon, *he being still in Cornwall with his father.* (1746-71 Letters: L1)  
b. when I heard his mother wailing that he was dead, *he having fainted away in getting the bullet extracted.* (1823 The Provost: L2)  
c. he fired a third, before we could see what as going on, *we being behind him in this narrow passage.* (1854 The Rifle and the Hound in Ceylon: L3)

Furthermore, I have investigated the distribution of nominative absolutes in PE on the basis of COBUILD. This reveals that their frequency per 500,000 words is 0.2, which is much lower than that in L3. The historical change in the frequency of nominative absolutes can be schematized as follows:

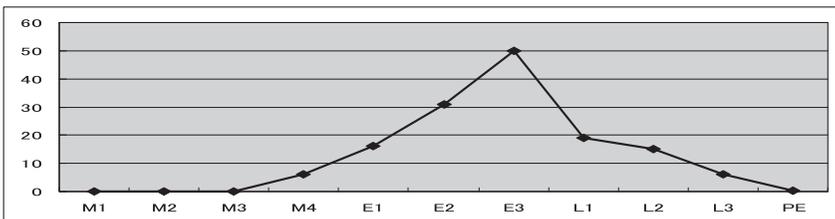


Figure 1: The historical change in the frequency of nominative absolutes  
(per 500,000 words)

## 2.2. The historical change of accusative absolutes

It has been observed in descriptive studies like Visser (1966) that accusative absolutes, which were first attested in ME, were extremely infrequent until the end of the 19th century, and then they reappeared as a colloquial equivalent to nominative absolutes. However, these studies present only a rough observation of the historical change of accusative absolutes, so that a more detailed investigation is necessary to clarify the whole path of their development in the history of English.

### 2.2.1. The results of the investigation of accusative absolutes

First, I employed PPCME2 and PPCEME to investigate the distribution of accusative absolutes in ME and EModE. The results of this investigation are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: The frequency of accusative absolutes in ME and EModE (per 500,000 words)

M1	M2	M3	M4	E1	E2	E3
0	15	0	2	0	0	0

Here are examples found in M2 and M4.

- (7) a. *þe openand þyn honde*, alle þynges shul be fulfild of godenes.  
 you opening your hand all things shall be fulfilled of goodness  
 ‘You opening your hand, all things should be fulfilled with goodness.’  
 (CMEARLPS, 126.5520: M2)
- b. Mortimer, *him being vndir 3ong age - all þis considered* he  
 Mortimer him being under young age all this considered he  
 gadered a grete power for to go onto Scotlond.  
 gathered a great power for to go to Scotland  
 ‘Mortimer, him being under age – all of this considered, he gathered  
 powers to go to Scotland.’ (CMCAPCHR, 157. 3681: M4)

According to Table 2, accusative absolutes were attested with rather high frequency in M2, but they became less and less frequent during ME and EModE; in fact, no examples of accusative absolutes are found in PPCEME.<sup>5</sup>

Second, I investigated the frequency of accusative absolutes in LModE on the basis of CLMET. The result of this investigation is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: The number of accusative absolutes in LModE (per 500,000 words)

L1	L2	L3
0	0	0.1

The following is the only example found in L3.

- (8) “*me continually backing out of no thoroughfares*, where she would drive up.”  
 (1848 Dombey and Son: L3)

Table 3 shows that accusative absolutes were extremely infrequent in LModE as well.

On the other hand, I found 23 examples of accusative absolutes in *The Corpus*

<sup>5</sup> Although only three texts belong to M2, the examples of accusative absolutes are observed in each text, which would suggest that their frequency reflects the grammar in that period and is not due to a certain author’s special preference for accusative absolutes.

of *English Novels* (CEN), which consists of 25 novels written from 1881 to 1922, indicating that accusative absolutes were sporadically observed from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, i.e., in L3 in the periodization of CLMET. This investigation reveals that their frequency per 500,000 words is 1 in L3. Here is an example from CEN.

- (9) “Well, I knew there couldn’t be no harm, *him being my own uncle*,”  
(1898 *The Town Traveler*: L3)

As for PE, I found 6 examples of accusative absolutes in COBUILD, and their frequency per 500,000 words is 0.1. The historical change in the frequency of accusative absolutes is schematized in Figure 2.

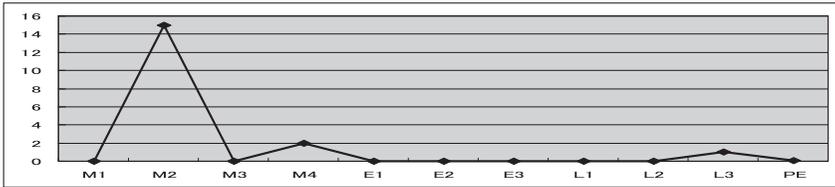


Figure 2: The historical change in the frequency of accusative absolutes  
(per 500,000 words)

### 3. A Syntactic Analysis of the Historical Change of Nominative Absolutes

This section attempts to provide a syntactic analysis of the historical change of nominative absolutes. Adopting the Minimalist framework advocated by Chomsky (2004, 2007, 2008), it is claimed that nominative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions under the C-T configuration.

#### 3.1. Previous studies

Let us begin by reviewing two previous studies on nominative absolutes. First, Reuland (1983) attempts to explain nominative Case assignment to lexical subjects in participial constructions within the GB framework. He argues that the *-ing* affix, which is assumed to be a realization of AGR, can assign nominative Case if it is not governed, as stated in (10).

- (10) *-ing* has nominative Case if ungoverned. (Reuland 1983: 127)

That the *-ing* affix is ungoverned implies the absence of Case assigners to lexical subjects in participial constructions, suggesting that they instantiate a configuration in which default Case is assigned (Schütze 2001). As we will see in section 4.3, however, default Case is accusative Case, not nominative Case in English, so (10) is an unmotivated stipulation and hence Reuland’s analysis based on it cannot be maintained. Furthermore, if (10) is correct, participial constructions could only have nominative subjects, which runs counter to the possibility of accusative absolutes after the late 19th century.

Second, Alboiu (2007) proposes to account for nominative Case assignment in participial constructions within the Minimalist framework by assuming that only languages with the expletive *pro* allow nominative subjects in nonfinite clauses. Adopting Rizzi's (1986) analysis, where subject clitics are assumed to be a morphological realization of  $\emptyset$ -features on T, she argues that T does not bear  $\emptyset$ -features in Friulian nominative absolutes, because they cannot have subject clitics. She proposes that instead of T, the expletive *pro* in [Spec, TP] can bear  $\emptyset$ - and D features, and nominative Case is assigned under the following condition.

- (11) Nominative, iff the probing domain is specified as [uD, u $\phi$ ].  
 (Alboiu 2007: 6)

Given (11), the expletive *pro* with  $\emptyset$ - and D features, which can function as a probe, agrees with the subject DP in [Spec, vP] as a goal, as shown in (12).

- (12) [CP [TP *pro* [D, u $\emptyset$ ] [T' T<sub>[u $\emptyset$ ]] [vP DP<sub>[\emptyset, case [NOM]]] [v' ...]]]]]  
</sub></sub>

Therefore, nominative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions via an Agree relation with the expletive *pro*.

However, Alboiu's analysis is problematic in that it cannot account for the historical change of nominative absolutes in English. According to Fischer et al. (2000), the expletive *pro* was lost during the 15th century, so her analysis predicts that nominative absolutes had become obsolete by the beginning of EModE. However, as we saw above, they were frequently attested in EModE, contrary to the prediction. In addition, it is unclear how Alboiu's analysis applies to account for the possibility of accusative absolutes after the late 19th century.

In what follows, adopting the Minimalist framework developed by Chomsky (2004, 2007, 2008), it is argued that nominative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions under the C-T configuration.

### 3.2. Nominative case assignment under the C-T configuration

Within the recent Minimalist framework advocated by Chomsky (2004, 2007, 2008), it is assumed that phase heads like C and v play important roles in syntactic derivation, and C bears tense and uninterpretable  $\emptyset$ -features which are inherited to T. Therefore, T can participate in an Agree relation only if it is selected by C, which means that the C-T complex functions as a probe agreeing with a subject DP. Given the assumption since Chomsky (2000) that the Case feature of DP is valued via an Agree relation with the relevant probe, it follows that nominative Case is assigned to a subject DP via an Agree relation with the C-T complex. In other words, the C-T configuration is necessary for nominative Case assignment.

Applying this mechanism of nominative Case assignment to participial constructions, I claim that nominative Case is assigned to their lexical subjects under the C-T configuration, i.e., the C-T complex functions as a probe, valuing their Case features as nominative. Support for this claim comes from the following

cross-linguistic data involving nominative absolutes where present participles precede nominative subjects.

- (13) *Italian*  
 Essendo egli improvvisamente tornato a casa, ...  
 having he NOM suddenly come to home  
 'He having suddenly come back home, ...' (Rizzi 1997: 303)
- (14) *Portuguese*  
 Chegada ela a casa, Pedro saiu.  
 arriving she-Nom at home Pedro left  
 'She arriving at home, Pedro left.' (Costa 2000: 21)
- (15) *Early Modern Dutch*  
 zullende wij die met ons gansche hof komen bijwonen,  
 will-ing we NOM that with our whole court come attend  
 'we going to attend that with our entire court, ...' (Hoeksema 2003: 2)

Given that nominative subjects occupy [Spec, TP], it follows that present participles move to a functional head higher than T, i.e. C, suggesting that nominative absolutes are CP in (13)–(15).<sup>6</sup> This would lead us to assume that the presence of the C-T configuration allows nominative Case assignment to lexical subjects in participial constructions.

If the above arguments are correct, however, a question arises as to why nominative Case can be assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions, because nominative subjects generally cannot appear in nonfinite clauses. Taking into consideration the Minimalist assumption that the value of a Case feature is determined by properties of the relevant probe (see Chomsky 2000), properties of the C-T complex, especially the phase head C, are crucial for the valuation of a Case feature. Since finite clauses typically have nominative subjects, it is plausible to assume that the C-T complex with finite C is responsible for nominative Case assignment.

Although finiteness is normally associated with the presence of both tense and agreement, a number of studies have reported cases where agreement is manifested in the absence of tense, arguing that the two properties may be dissociated. For example, Raposo (1987) argues that Infl is specified as [+Agr, -Tense] in Portuguese inflected infinitives, where [+Agr] assigns nominative Case to their subjects. Moreover, based on the observation of tenseless clauses in various languages, Cowper (2002) points out the correlation between the presence of agreement marking and nominative subjects, and claims that tenseless clauses with agreement should be analyzed as a kind of finite clause.

Recasting the above arguments in terms of the recent Minimalist framework adopted here, finite C comes in (at least) two varieties: one bears both tense and  $\emptyset$ -features, and the other bears only  $\emptyset$ -features. Both types of finite C inherit

<sup>6</sup> See Rizzi (1982, 1997), Hoeksema (2003), and Alboiu (2007) for evidence that present participles in front of nominative subjects occupy C in examples like (13)–(15).

$\emptyset$ -features to T, and the C-T complex acts as a probe assigning nominative Case to a subject DP. What I would like to argue is that alongside of those cases reported in the literature above, participial constructions involve finite C with only  $\emptyset$ -features in a number of languages, including English, since their lexical subjects are typically assigned nominative Case, yielding nominative absolutes.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence for the presence of finite C with  $\emptyset$ -features in participial constructions comes from the following example from a Portuguese dialect, where the present participle agrees with the nominative subject in number and person.<sup>8</sup>

- (16) *Eles tende-m as coisas em casa, fazem a toda a hora,*  
 They having-3PL things at home, do the all the time  
*quando querem,*  
 when want  
 'They having things at home, they do it whenever they want, ...'  
 (Lobo 2001: 112)

The same conclusion will be supported by examples of participial constructions like (13)–(15), where present participles move to C, preceding nominative subjects. Especially relevant is the example in (15) from Early Modern Dutch, which is a verb second language. Based on the observation of verb second languages, Holmberg and Platzack (1995) argue that the finiteness [+F] on C attracts verbs to C in finite clauses, suggesting a link between finite C and V movement to C. Applying their analysis to examples like (15), it will follow that they involve finite C that triggers V movement. Since participial constructions are tenseless, what makes C in examples like (15) finite must be  $\emptyset$ -features, on the assumption adopted above that finiteness is defined in terms of the presence of one or both of its components, namely tense and  $\emptyset$ -features.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> An anonymous reviewer raises a question regarding the status of C in English present subjunctives such as (i), where nominative subjects can appear in the absence of tense and agreement morphology.

(i) I demand that he be there. (Haegeman and Gueron 1999: 328)

Although English present subjunctives lack tense and agreement morphology, there are some languages like Spanish where subjunctive verbs are inflected for tense and agreement (see Hwang 1997). Furthermore, Hwang (1997) argues that the absence of tense and agreement morphology in English present subjunctives is due to the fact that they involve a null modal that selects a bare infinitival complement. Along these lines, I assume that English present subjunctives have finite C with both tense and  $\emptyset$ -features, which will in turn account for the appearance of nominative subjects.

<sup>8</sup> Lobo (2001) argues that participial constructions such as (16) are CP, on the basis of the fact that they can involve *wh*-elements and be coordinated with finite clauses.

<sup>9</sup> It has sometimes been argued that control infinitives are specified as [+Tense], even though they lack overt tense morphology, based on the observation that they have an independent time reference from their matrix clauses (see Stowell 1982). Even under this broader definition of tense, participial constructions should be regarded as tenseless because

Along these lines, since English participial constructions may have nominative subjects (and feature V movement to C in ME and EModE; see the next section), it would be reasonable to assume that they also have the same structure involving finite C with  $\emptyset$ -features, where their lexical subjects are assigned nominative Case under the C-T configuration.<sup>10</sup>

The following sections attempt to explain the historical change of nominative absolutes in terms of the present claim that nominative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions under the C-T configuration.

### 3.3. Nominative absolutes in ME

As shown in Table 1, nominative absolutes first appeared in M4, i.e., in the 15th century. Given the present claim that nominative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions under the C-T configuration, it is predicted that they should have the C-T configuration in ME. In order to confirm this prediction, I have employed PPCME2 to collect examples of participial constructions with V movement to C where present participles precede lexical subjects. The result of this investigation is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: The frequency of participial constructions with V movement to C in ME  
(per 500,000 words)

M1	M2	M3	M4
3	0	9	10

Here are some examples.

- (17) a. ...als is ordainde by-fore, *sitande alle wid ordir*,  
as is ordained before, sitting all with order  
'...as is ordained before, all sitting with order'

(CMBENRUL, 16.568: M3)

- b. Ande at that tyme *being many sowdyers at Portysmowthe*, the  
And at that time being many solders at Portsmouth the  
whyche haddyn take the kingys wagys for to pass ovyr the see.  
well had take the boatmen wages for to pass over the sea  
'And at that time, many solders being at Portsmouth, the well person gave  
the boatmen wages to pass over the sea.'

(CMGREGOR, 189.1424: M4)

they have a temporal interpretation dependent on their matrix clauses (see Tomozawa 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Agreement morphology does not appear in participial constructions in many languages, including English. There could be parametric variation involving the morphological realization of  $\emptyset$ -features on C, in that these languages allow  $\emptyset$ -features to be overtly realized only in the presence of tense, unlike the Portuguese dialect seen in (16). Along these lines, Raposo (1987) postulates what he calls the *Infl* parameter to account for language variation on the realization of agreement morphology.

Given the standard assumption that subjects occupy [Spec, TP], examples like (17) indicate that present participles can move to C, preceding lexical subjects in participial constructions.<sup>11</sup> The same conclusion is supported by the following example from Visser (1966).

- (18) and the kinges peas halden at Norwiche, the xxviii day of August  
and the king's peace held at Norwich, the 28 day of August  
in the secunde year, *being there thane a grete congregation of people.*  
in the second year, being there then a great congregation of people  
'and the king's peace lasted at Norwich on the 28th day of August in the  
second year, then there being a great congregation of people.'  
(1424 Paston Lett. (Gairdner) I. P.13 / Visser 1966: 1161)

Since the expletive *there* is assumed to occupy [Spec, TP] in order to satisfy the EPP requirement of T (Chomsky 2000), it follows that the present participle appears in C in (18).

Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that participial constructions had the C-T configuration in ME, which served to assign nominative Case to their lexical subjects. However, a question arises as to why nominative absolutes became available only in the 15th century, in spite of the fact that participial constructions already had the C-T configuration before the 15th century. I argue that the appearance of nominative absolutes in the 15th century is due to the reanalysis of dative subjects as nominative subjects, which was triggered by the loss of dative Case during ME. Given that nominative absolutes historically derived from dative absolutes (see section 2.1), it is plausible that dative subjects were reanalyzed as nominative subjects during ME.

It has been argued that the loss of dative Case triggered a number of syntactic changes in ME (see Allen 1995 and Fischer et al. 2000 among others). One such change is the reanalysis of dative subjects as nominative subjects in impersonal constructions, as illustrated in (19) and (20).

- (19) and him gelicade hire þeawas and þancode Gode  
and him DAT like her virtues and thanked God

<sup>11</sup> One might argue that in examples like (17) lexical subjects remain in vP and therefore present participles do not move as far as C. However, given Sportiche's (1988) analysis where a floating quantifier is stranded as a result of the movement of its associated DP to [Spec, TP], the following example with quantifier floating suggests that lexical subjects move to [Spec, TP] in participial constructions.

- (i) And thenne alle the byschoppys seseden with a swerde, *they alle syttyng*  
and then all the bishops rested with a sword they all sitting  
*there hondys thereon,*  
their hand thereon  
'And then all the bishops took a rest with a sword, they all sitting there with their  
hand on that.'  
(CMGREGOR, 166. 910: M4)

- 'and he liked her virtues, and thanked God.'  
 ((COE) Chron D (Classen-Harm) 1067. I. 35 / Allen 1995: 76)
- (20) somewhat she likede hym the bet.  
 somewhat she NOM liked him the better  
 'She liked him the better.' (Chaucer.LGW.1076 / ibid: 251)

According to Allen (1995), dative subjects began to be replaced by nominative subjects in impersonal constructions in the late 14th century, and the reanalysis was completed during the 15th century.

It should be noted that this roughly coincides with the period when nominative absolutes began to appear. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that the loss of dative Case also affected dative absolutes, so that dative subjects were reanalyzed as nominative subjects, thus accounting for the appearance of nominative absolutes in the 15th century.

### 3.4. Nominative absolutes in EModE

As we saw in section 2.1.1, the frequency of nominative absolutes increased in EModE, so it is predicted that there is evidence that participial constructions had the C-T configuration in EModE. As in the case of ME, I have employed PPCEME to collect examples of participial constructions with V movement to C where present participles precede lexical subjects. The result of this investigation is summarized in Table 5:

Table 5: The frequency of participial constructions with V movement to C in EModE  
 (per 500,000 words)

E1	E2	E3
2.7	0	0.8

Here are examples from E1.

- (21) a. Than the duke of Orleauce entending to promote his cause, *vnknowinge the other lordes*, allyed hym with the duke of Geldre,  
 (FABYAN-E1-P1,559.57)
- b. neither may swere that law lawfully was made, *standing his owne conscience to the contrarie*,  
 (MROPER-E1-P2,525.14)

It can be safely concluded that participial constructions in E1 had the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment, so that nominative absolutes were available in E1.

On the other hand, there are few examples of participial constructions with V movement to C in E2 and E3, as shown in Table 5. This is related to the fact that V movement to C was gradually lost in finite clauses during EModE (see Fischer et al. 2000). Therefore, some other kind of evidence must be looked for in order to determine whether participial constructions had the C-T configuration in E2 and E3.

Indeed, independent support for the presence of the C-T configuration comes from participial constructions where *wh*-elements appear. The result of the investigation of participial constructions with *wh*-elements based on PPCEME is summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: The frequency of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in EModE<sup>12</sup>  
(per 500,000 words)

E1	E2	E3
7	50	30

Here are examples from each period.

- (22) a. Aristotle is nothyng els, but feare to do ill: *which feare beyng once lustely fraid away from youth* (ASCH-E1-P2,14V.103)
- b. And then were seven Felons that received Sentence of Death; *who being taken aside*, Mr. Udall was called the second time. (JUDALL-E2-P2,1,177.376)
- c. *who being a Soldier from his Infancy*, it's possible minded not such concerns. (FRYER-E3-P1,1,202.72)

Since it is generally assumed that *wh*-elements occur in [Spec, CP], examples like (22) show that participial constructions were CP in EModE. This suggests that they retained the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment, which in turn explains the fact that nominative absolutes were frequently observed in EModE.

### 3.5. Nominative absolutes from LModE onward

Recall from section 2.1.1 that the investigation based on CLMET shows that nominative absolutes were observed with some frequency in LModE. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether participial constructions still retained the C-T configuration in LModE. For this purpose, I again employed CLMET to collect examples of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in LModE. The result of this investigation is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: The frequency of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in LModE  
(per 500,000 words)

L1	L2	L3
18	6	1

<sup>12</sup> I assume that the relatively low frequency of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in E1 is closely connected with the development of relative pronouns like *which* and *who*. See Ukaji (2000), who observes that relative pronouns like *which* and *who* came to be observed frequently during the 16th century.

Here are examples from each period.

- (23) a. she confirmed the truth of what he had told the innkeeper, *who thinking he had no other business there*, (1744 the Fortunate Findlings: L1)  
 b. *Which being done*, he went on. (1811 Sense and Sensibility: L2)  
 c. Then came summonses to open, *which being unanswered*, the assault commenced. (1857 Tom Bronw's School Days: L3)

As shown in Table 7, participial constructions with *wh*-elements were still available in LModE, which suggests that participial constructions had the C-T configuration in LModE.

However, it should be noted in Figure 1 that the frequency of nominative absolutes has been on the decline since L1. Given that the availability of nominative absolutes depends on the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment, I argue that the decline of their frequency can be attributed to the fact that participial constructions began to lose the C-T configuration. Consider again the distribution of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in ModE, as schematized in Figure 3, which puts together the results reported in Tables 6 and 7:

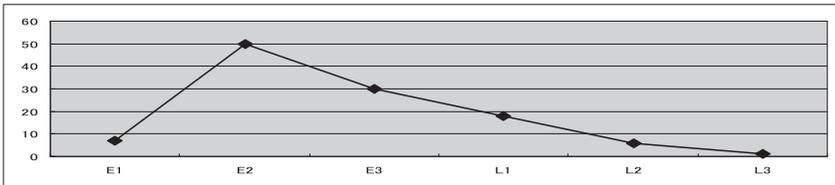


Figure 3: The frequency of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in ModE (per 500,000 words)

As shown in Figure 3, the frequency of participial constructions with *wh*-elements increased until E2 and began to decrease in E3. However, a closer look reveals that their high frequency in E2 is due to a certain author's special preference, suggesting that their frequency actually peaked in E3 and began to decrease in L1.<sup>13</sup> This roughly coincides with the distribution of nominative absolutes, as we can see from Figure 1.

Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the decrease of nominative absolutes is due to the fact that participial constructions began to lose the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment in L1.

### 3.6. The cause of the decline of nominative absolutes

This section examines what caused participial constructions to begin to lose the C-T configuration, paying special attention to the development of verbal gerunds

<sup>13</sup> In fact, there are 29 examples of participial constructions with *wh*-elements in one text of *BLUNDEV*, accounting for about half of all the relevant examples found in E2.

in English. It has been observed that verbal gerunds first appeared in LME, a development triggered by phonological assimilation with present participles (see Ukaji 2000).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, verbal gerunds acquired clausal properties in EModE, as is evident from the fact that their passive and perfective forms began to be attested in that period, as shown in (24).

- (24) a. Cloths for being look'd on. (1606 B.Jonson/ Araki and Ukaji 1984: 451)  
 b. I condemne my selfe of want of consideration in not *having demanded thus much*. (1590 Sideny, Arcadia I. 66 / *ibid.*: 452)

Crucial evidence for the same conclusion comes from the following example with the expletive *there*:

- (25) Epicurus and his scholars of old ... make this an argument of *there being no God*. (1657-83 John Evelyn, Hist, Religion, I, 79 / Visser 1966: 1185)

Since it is generally assumed that the expletive *there* occupies [Spec, TP] to satisfy the EPP requirement of T (Chomsky 2000), examples like (25) show that verbal gerunds acquired clausal properties in EModE.

Once verbal gerunds acquired clausal properties, the Case form of their lexical subjects gradually changed. In LME, lexical subjects of verbal gerunds were assigned genitive Case, as shown in (26).

- (26) It semeth    nou3t    þat    3e    shulle    Haue    heuene    in    3owre    here  
 it seems    not    that    you    shall    have    heaven    in    your    here  
*beying her after.*  
 being    her    after  
 'It does not seem that you shall have the heaven in your being here after her.'  
 (1377 Langland, P. P1. BXI, 141 / Visser 1966: 1168)

In addition to genitive subjects, accusative subjects began to appear in verbal gerunds in EModE, as shown in (27).

- (27) They had no such ignorance that could excuse *them admittinge that he was a superior*. (1603 The Archpriest Controversy, I. 185/ *ibid.*: 1184)

The appearance of accusative subjects in EModE seems to be closely related to the fact that verbal gerunds acquired clausal properties. As they acquired clausal properties, they lost nominal properties, so that their lexical subjects came to appear in the accusative form.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ukaji (2000) describes the process of phonological assimilation as follows. In OE, present participles were formed by adding the affix *-ende* to a verbal stem. However, the affix *-ende* came to be pronounced as *-inde* and then as *-ind* in EME. The affix *-ind* was phonologically assimilated to the affix *-ing*, which had been used to form abstract nominals since OE. Consequently, the two affixes were phonologically collapsed as *-ing*. In the process of this phonological assimilation, abstract nominals acquired verbal properties from present participles, leading to the appearance of verbal gerunds.

<sup>15</sup> Once verbal gerunds lost nominal properties, they were structurally reanalyzed as not

I claim that the development of verbal gerunds in EModE is responsible for the fact that participial constructions began to lose the C-T configuration. It has been standardly assumed that the syntactic structure of verbal gerunds is TP (see Miller 2002 and Pires 2007).

- (28) a. I remember John certainly having agreed. (Nakajima 1991: 42)  
 b. \*I don't remember what him doing. (Matsuoka 1994: 120)  
 c. \*Mark prefers for Mary traveling with him. (Pires 2007: 173)

The example in (28a) shows that sentential adverbs like *certainly*, which appear in the TP domain, can occur with verbal gerunds. The examples in (28b, c) show that *wh*-elements and the complementizer *for*, which appear in the CP domain, cannot occur with verbal gerunds. Given that examples like (28b, c) have never been attested in the history of English, it is natural to assume that the syntactic structure of verbal gerunds has been TP since EModE.

If this is correct, participial constructions differ structurally from verbal gerunds only in that they have C on top of TP, as illustrated in (29).

- (29) a. [<sub>CP</sub> C [<sub>TP</sub> Subj [<sub>T</sub> -*ing* [<sub>VP</sub> V...]]]] (Participial Construction)  
 b. [<sub>TP</sub> Subj [<sub>T</sub> -*ing* [<sub>VP</sub> V...]]] (Verbal Gerund)

Therefore, I claim that once verbal gerunds acquired clausal properties in EModE, participial constructions began to have the same syntactic structure as verbal gerunds, which was made possible by the fact that both constructions had clausal properties with the same *V-ing* form.<sup>16</sup> In other words, participial constructions began to have the structure lacking C, that is, TP, by analogy with verbal gerunds, leading to the decline of the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment. As a result, nominative absolutes became less and less frequent as the language approached PE.

Under the present analysis, the rarity of nominative absolutes in PE can be straightforwardly explained. In PE, participial constructions with *wh*-elements are still attested, as shown in (30).

- (30) Robert Southey, who said that Isaac D'Israeli looked like a Portugee, *who being apprehended for an assassin*, is convicted of being circumcised.  
 (brbooks BB-YM042731)

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having D, which served to assign a genitive Case to their subjects. Therefore, the latter came to depend on external Case assigners, especially verbs and prepositions, leading to the appearance of verbal gerunds with accusative subjects.

<sup>16</sup> Unlike participial constructions, verbal gerunds have to appear in Case positions. I assume that this is due to the fact that the *-ing* affix in verbal gerunds derived from the *-ung* affix in OE. The latter was attached to verbal stems to create abstract nominals in OE, so it is natural that it had some nominal properties, including a Case feature, which has survived into PE after phonological assimilation to the participial affix (see note 14). Assuming that verbal gerunds are TP headed by the *-ing* affix (see Reuland 1983 and Pires 2007), I argue that they have to appear in Case positions due to its Case feature.

However, participial constructions with *wh*-elements are extremely infrequent in PE: according to the investigation based on COBUILD, their frequency per 500,000 words is 0.05, which is much lower than that in L3 (see Table 7). This indicates that though participial constructions have not completely lost the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment, they are hardly ever analyzed as having it, so nominative absolutes are extremely infrequent in PE.

#### 4. A Syntactic Analysis of the Historical Change of Accusative Absolutes

This section discusses the historical change of accusative absolutes, arguing that their decrease during ME and their infrequency after EModE have to do with the establishment of nominative absolutes in the 15th century. It is also claimed that the reappearance of accusative absolutes in the late 19th century is closely related to the fact that participial constructions were losing the C-T configuration, together with the increase of verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects.

##### 4.1. Accusative absolutes in ME

As we saw in section 2.2.1, accusative absolutes decreased during ME. I argue that accusative absolutes in ME were virtually identical with the dative absolutes attested in OE, and that their decline during ME is due to the reanalysis of dative subjects as nominative subjects in participial constructions, as we saw in section 3.3. This means that the decline of accusative/dative absolutes was caused by the establishment of nominative absolutes in the 15th century.

Heidi (2005) observes that one of the major changes which happened to the case paradigm during ME is the loss of the morphological distinction between dative case and accusative case. According to her, for first person and second person pronouns, the distinction between dative case and accusative case had already been lost during OE.

Table 8: accusative and dative case paradigms of 1ps and 2ps in OE

	1sg	2sg	1pl	2pl
ACC	Me	Ʒe	Us	Eow
DAT	Me	Ʒe	Us	Eow

(Heidi 2005: 12)

As for third person pronouns, Heidi states that the morphological distinction between dative case and accusative case was lost during ME, though there was a dialectal difference. In the southern dialect, the distinction was being lost in the 13th century, as shown in Table 9, where the morphology of dative case is extended to accusative case in third person singular masculine and plural pronouns.

Table 9: accusative and dative case paradigms of 3ps in *Vices & Virtues*  
(13C: Southern England)

	3ps singular			3ps plural
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	
ACC	Hine ( <b>Him</b> )	Hie, Hes, His	Hit	Hes, His ( <b>Hem</b> )
DAT	<b>Him</b>	Hire	Him	<b>Hem</b> , Heom

(ibid.: 15)

Then, the distinction was completely lost during the 14th century in the southern dialect. On the other hand, Heidi observes that the morphological forms of dative and accusative Case were collapsed in all the genders and numbers of third person pronouns during the 12th century in the northeastern dialect, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: accusative and dative case paradigms of 3ps in *Peterborough Chronicle*  
(1154: Eastern England)

	3ps singular			3ps plural
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	
ACC	Him	Hire	Hit	Heom
DAT	Him	Hire	Hit	Heom

(ibid.: 16)

Given the above observation by Heidi (2005) that the morphological distinction between dative case and accusative case was gradually lost during ME, there is a possibility that accusative subjects were actually dative subjects in the participial constructions attested in M2 (see Table 2). Therefore, I argue that accusative absolutes were not present in ME, and what appear to be accusative absolutes were actually dative absolutes. Thus, the decrease of accusative/dative absolutes during ME was triggered by the reanalysis of dative subjects as nominative subjects, so that they were replaced by nominative absolutes.

#### 4.2. Accusative absolutes after EModE

The absence of accusative absolutes in EModE is explained in terms of the presence of the C-T configuration in participial constructions. As we saw in section 3.4, participial constructions had the C-T configuration in EModE, so that their lexical subjects were assigned nominative Case, but not accusative Case, yielding nominative absolutes.

However, accusative absolutes began to be sporadically observed in L3. I argue that there are two factors responsible for the reappearance of accusative absolutes in L3. One factor is that participial constructions were losing the C-T configuration, and hence their lexical subjects gradually ceased to be licensed by nominative Case (see sections 3.5 and 3.6).

The other factor is that verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects began to increase in the middle of the 19th century, that is, in L3 (see Visser 1966). This is confirmed by the investigation of verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects based on CLMET, as shown in Table 11:

Table 11: The frequency of verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects in LModE (per 500,000 words)

L1	L2	L3
0.7	1.1	2.0

It should be noted that the reappearance of accusative absolutes roughly coincides with the increase of verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects, which would suggest a link between the two events. Therefore, I claim that accusative absolutes began to be observed in L3 by analogy with verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects, which was made possible by the formal resemblance between the two constructions.

If the above arguments are correct, there is a straightforward explanation for the fact that accusative absolutes are regarded as a colloquial equivalent to nominative absolutes in PE. Visser (1966) states that verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects were frequently attested in spoken English in the middle of the 19th century. Furthermore, Lyne (2006), who investigates the frequency of verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects in various texts of the British National Corpus, reports that they are attested most frequently in the texts of colloquial English in PE. Therefore, if the reappearance of accusative absolutes is partly due to analogy with verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects, it will immediately follow that they are regarded as a colloquial equivalent to nominative absolutes in PE.<sup>17</sup>

In summary, accusative absolutes can be observed in the history of English when nominative Case assignment under the C-T configuration is not firmly established in participial constructions, suggesting that the historical change of accusative absolutes has a close connection with that of nominative absolutes.

### 4.3. The licensing of accusative subjects in participial constructions

It was claimed in section 4.1 that accusative absolutes in ME were actually dative absolutes, meaning that their lexical subjects were licensed not by accusative Case, but by dative Case.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, it is necessary to consider how lexical

<sup>17</sup> As shown in Figure 2, accusative absolutes have been decreasing in modern English since L3. This could be related to the decline of nominative absolutes: since accusative absolutes are regarded as a colloquial equivalent to nominative absolutes, the former have been decreasing in parallel with the latter.

<sup>18</sup> In OE, adverbial dative Case is assigned to DP functioning as a modifier. Given that participial constructions are modifiers of their matrix clauses, there is a possibility that their lexical subjects are assigned adverbial dative Case in dative absolutes. However, I will leave

subjects are assigned accusative Case in participial constructions after L3, because dative Case was lost during ME. It was argued in section 3.6 that participial constructions began to lose the C-T configuration by analogy with verbal gerunds. As a result, they are now hardly ever analyzed as having the C-T configuration, so that their lexical subjects need to be licensed by other means than nominative Case assignment.

A system of default Case assignment has been proposed to account for the existence of DP in environments where there are no Case assigners. Schütze (2001) argues that default Case morphology is inserted in response to the Case feature of DP when it is not valued in syntactic derivation. Here are some examples where he argues that default Case is assigned.

- (31) Coordination  
*Us and them* are gonna rumble tonight. (Schütze 2001: 215)
- (32) Modified Pronoun  
*Us* three have to be leaving now. (ibid.)

Since there are no Case assigners for the italicized pronouns in (31) and (32), Schütze assumes that they are licensed by default Case. It should be noted that all the italicized pronouns appear in the accusative form in (31) and (32), which shows that default Case is accusative in English.

According to Jespersen (1949) and Visser (1966), a number of examples corresponding to (31) and (32) were observed in ModE as well, as shown in (33) and (34).

- (33) Coordination  
 There was *him and her* a sitting by the fire.  
 (1840-1 Humphery's Clock 324 / Visser 1966: 246)
- (34) Modified Pronoun  
*Us* old fellows may wish ourselves young tonight.  
 (1861 GE S, 157 / Jepsersen 1949: 276)

This indicates that default Case has been accusative since ModE. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that lexical subjects are licensed by default Case in accusative absolutes after L3, because their Case features cannot be valued by any syntactic operations in the absence of internal or external Case assigners.

## 5. Remaining Issues

Besides nominative and accusative absolutes, there also exist participial constructions with PRO subjects (henceforth, free adjuncts) in English.

- (35) PRO being the best athlete in the school, Mike expected to win the game.  
 (Pires 2007: 196)

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the question of how dative Case is assigned to lexical subjects in participial constructions in OE and ME for future research.

A detailed analysis of free adjuncts is beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to touch upon two issues regarding free adjuncts to be addressed in future research.

The first issue concerns the syntactic structure of free adjuncts. Consider the following example from COBUILD.

- (36) *Probably acting on a tip*, the soldiers removed a rug and some rags from the ground in front of the hut to reveal a panel of foam insulation.  
(cannews NC1-031215)

Since it is generally assumed that sentential adverbs like *probably* appear in the TP domain, examples like (36) indicate that the syntactic structure of free adjuncts involves at least TP. If so, a problem arises as to whether free adjuncts are analyzed as CP. In this connection, it should be noted that they may be introduced by subordinate conjunctions such as *while*, like finite clauses.

- (37) John kept walking slowly, while PRO drenching the road with insecticides.  
(Pires 2007: 199)

Given that finite clauses are CP, it might be argued that free adjuncts are also CP, because both types of clauses can be selected by subordinate conjunctions.

However, examples like (37) do not provide strong evidence for the CP status of free adjuncts, because lexical items may have more than one selectional property, as shown in the following examples, where *believe* selects an ECM infinitive and a finite clause, which are normally analyzed as TP and CP, respectively.

- (38) a. I believe him to be intelligent.  
b. I believe that he is intelligent.

Therefore, it cannot be concluded that free adjuncts are CP just because they are selected by subordinate conjunctions.

The next issue is how PRO is licensed in free adjuncts. Within the Minimalist framework, it has been the standard assumption since Chomsky and Lasnik (1993) that PRO is licensed by null Case. However, a number of serious problems with this assumption have been pointed out in the literature (see Hornstein 1999 and Harley 2000). Among them, Harley (2000) abandons the notion of null Case, and argues that PRO is licensed by the same mechanism of Case assignment that is operative in the licensing of normal DPs, which is motivated by the evidence from such languages as Irish and Icelandic that PRO may be assigned nominative, accusative, and dative Case (see Sigurðsson 1991). Along these lines, it might be suggested under the CP analysis of free adjuncts that PRO is assigned nominative Case under the C-T configuration.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, if it is the case that free adjuncts are TP, PRO should be

<sup>19</sup> This analysis should be supplemented by a condition on the phonetic realization of nominative pronouns to distinguish between nominative absolutes and free adjuncts; see Kobayashi (2003) for related discussion.

licensed by some other mechanism(s) than Case assignment in the absence of the C-T configuration. A possible analysis would be that PRO is a Caseless element that appears only in environments where there are no Case assigners; its covert nature would follow if Case assignment is a necessary condition for the phonetic realization of DP (see Nawata 2006). To choose between the two possibilities of licensing PRO in free adjuncts, other kinds of nonfinite clauses than participial constructions must be examined with the goal of establishing the general theory of PRO, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explain Case assignment to lexical subjects in participial constructions and their historical changes, especially in terms of the hypothesis that nominative Case is assigned under the C-T configuration. Nominative absolutes, which first appeared in the 15th century, increased during EModE, but they have been decreasing since L1. It was argued that this historical change is closely related to the fact that participial constructions began to lose the C-T configuration necessary for nominative Case assignment by analogy with verbal gerunds.

Furthermore, it was claimed that accusative absolutes were actually dative absolutes in ME and that they decreased due to the reanalysis of dative subjects as nominative subjects in participial constructions. Their reappearance in the late 19th century was triggered by the decline of the C-T configuration in participial constructions and analogy with verbal gerunds with accusative pronominal subjects. Finally, it was shown that lexical subjects are licensed by default Case in accusative absolutes after L3.

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## 【要 旨】

## 英語における主格・対格独立分詞構文の共時的・通時的諸相

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本稿の目的は分詞構文の語彙的主語に対する格付与と歴史的発達を、Chomsky (2004, 2007, 2008) で提案されている C-T 構造形による主格付与の枠組みに基づいて理論的に説明することである。主格独立分詞構文は 15 世紀に初めて現れ、初期近代英語には増加傾向にあったが、後期近代英語以降は減少している。この歴史的発達は分詞構文が動詞的動名詞との類推の結果 C-T 構造形を失い始めたことに関係していると論じる。一方、対格独立分詞構文は中英語や 19 世紀後半以降に観察される。対格独立分詞構文は中英語では事実上与格分詞構文であり、分詞構文において与格主語が主格主語へ再分析されたことにより減少するが、19 世紀後半以降、分詞構文が C-T 構造形を持たなくなってきたこと、対格代名詞主語を伴う動詞的動名詞との類推により再度観察されるようになってきていると論じる。また、19 世紀後半以降、対格独立分詞構文の主語は default Case によって認可されるということも示す。