

THE ABSENTIVE IN GERMAN

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Contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	A note on dialectal variation	6
1.2	Structure of this thesis	7
2	Characteristics of the Absentive	7
2.1	Stative versus eventive	7
2.1.1	Existing arguments for stativity	7
2.1.2	Habitual readings	9
2.1.3	Sequence of tense	10
2.1.4	The perfect	11
2.1.5	Results of the diagnostics	12
2.2	Nominal versus verbal	12
2.2.1	Capitalization	12
2.2.2	Post-nominal genitives	13
2.2.3	Compounding	14
2.2.4	Results of the diagnostics	15
2.3	Control versus raising	15
2.3.1	Scope of indefinites	16
2.3.2	Selectional restrictions	17
2.3.3	Results of the diagnostics	18
3	Theories of the Absentive	18
3.1	<i>Am-</i> and <i>Beim-</i> Progressives	18
3.1.1	Intro to prepositional progressives	18
3.1.2	Control	20
3.1.3	Nominalization	20
3.2	Dutch Absentives	24
3.2.1	An index-based account of Dutch absentives	24
3.2.2	Nominalization	25
3.2.3	Problems with an index-based account	26
3.3	Silent GO	28
3.3.1	Silent GO elsewhere	29
3.3.2	Stativity of <i>ist gegangen</i>	30
3.3.3	<i>Immer noch</i>	31
3.3.4	Directional and locative PPs	31
3.3.5	Coordination	32
3.4	Silent AWAY	33
3.4.1	Parallels between absentives and locative-infinitives	34
3.4.2	Structural proposal	38
4	Conclusion	40
5	Appendix	42
5.1	Control versus raising	42
5.1.1	Passive	42
5.1.2	Fronting	43
5.1.3	Left dislocation	44
5.1.4	<i>Das</i> -replacement	44
5.1.5	Partial control	45
5.1.6	Results of the diagnostics	46

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Abstract

A novel grammatical category known as the absentive has been proposed for a variety of European languages including German, but remains understudied and relatively unexplained. Absentive constructions convey, in addition to the overt information expressed by subject and predicate, that the entity denoted by the subject is absent from a pragmatically-determined location. A key characteristic of these constructions is that they lack overt lexical material corresponding to absence. In German, this construction takes the form of the verb *sein* (*to be*) and an infinitival verb.

- (1) Hans ist lesen.
Hans is read.INF
'Hans is off reading.'

Clearly such sentences are semantically non-compositional on the basis of the phonological form alone. A key question in explaining them, then, is how the subject's absence is encoded. The question of the syntactic representation of such sentences is further complicated by German's lack of a fully grammaticalized progressive form. Through I series of diagnostics I demonstrate that the absentive construction is a stative, not eventive construction, that the infinitive is verbal and not nominal in nature, and that there is reason to suspect a control configuration exists.

On the basis of these facts I reject three potential theories of the absentive. The first of these is that the absentive is analogous to the German prepositional progressive, by which a preposition (*am* or *beim*) and an infinitive denote progressive aspect. However, this theory would be unable to explain why the infinitive of a prepositional progressive has properties suggesting it is a nominalization, whereas the infinitive of the absentive has only verbal properties. Furthermore, a theory of structural parallelism with progressives would fail to account for the absentive's entailment of the subject's absence.

An alternative theory is considered, along the lines of Haslinger (2007)'s proposal for Dutch absentives. According to this proposal, the subject's absence is explained by disjoint spatial indices on the sentential subject and an embedded PRO subject. This theory also involves the stipulation that the infinitive is a nominal, for which there is little evidence in German. Additionally, I argue that the modifications to Binding Theory that this proposal necessitates are undesirable.

I also challenge Abraham (2008)'s suggestion that the absentive involves silent GO. This theory fails to account for the stativity of the absentive construction and other empirical facts regarding compatibility with *immer noch* (*still*), directional PP adjuncts, and coordination.

I ultimately propose that the absentive construction involves a silent predicate WEG (*away*) and depictive small clause adjunct.

- (2) Hans_i ist WEG [_{SC} PRO_i ein Buch lesen]
Hans is AWAY a book read.INF
'Hans is off reading a book.'

This theory correctly accounts for the stative, verbal, and control characteristics of the construction and explains the extensive parallels between absentives and sentences with a predicative locative PP and verbal small clause adjunct.

1 Introduction

This thesis aims to provide a syntactic account for the German absentive construction, which in recent years has attracted some attention. The construction involves a subject, the verb *sein* (*to be*) and an infinitive verb, and entails that the entity denoted by the subject is absent (from some pragmatically determined location) and engaged in the activity denoted by the infinitive verb. The following example illustrates the type of sentences under consideration.

- (3) Er war Milch holen.
he was milk fetch.INF
'He (was absent because he) was fetching milk.' / (Haider 2010:276)
'He was off fetching milk.'¹

The German absentive was first noted by De Groot (2000), alongside absentives in seven other European languages. He defines absentive constructions as those that semantically encode the following four types of information without any overt lexical expression of absence.

- (4) a. the subject is absent
b. the subject is involved in an activity
c. it is predictable how long the subject will be absent
d. the subject will return after a period of time (De Groot 2000:695)

These key characteristics are more explicitly spelled out as a series of properties common to all absentives in the sample De Groot (2000) analyses. (i) The subject must be absent from what de Groot calls the 'deictic center' and (ii) the absence must be relatively remote. That is, the absentive is not licit when the subject is close enough to be seen by the speaker. (iii) The speaker and addressee must share some assumptions about the duration of absence (de Groot is not explicit about what these assumptions are, as they may vary according to the lexical verb or pragmatic factors, but minimally both should know that the absence is temporary). (iv) Absentive constructions are thought to be aspectually stative. And (v) they encode bi-directional movement (i.e. both the going-to and the coming-from the event denoted by the infinitive). Some of these generalizations have been challenged by subsequent work on absentives (cf Haslinger 2007). It may be the case that the cross-linguistic similarities are not as pervasive as was originally supposed. However, given at least the generalization that absentives convey the absence of the subject and the lack of an overt representation of absence in the phonological form of the construction, the syntactic composition is an open question in need of exploration.

De Groot (2000) identifies five distinct constructions used as absentives in the European languages he considered.

1. Since English lacks an absentive construction, it is difficult to provide adequate translation. Following De Groot (2000), Haslinger (2007), Broekhuis (2013), and others, I will use the progressive with a modifier such as 'off' or 'away'. It has also been suggested in Abraham (2008) that the English *be* + verb+*ing* construction is in fact ambiguous between a progressive and absentive reading. If that is the case, let's assume that my use of 'off' or 'away' disambiguates between the two readings. I won't address the possibility of an English absentive in this paper.

- (5) ‘be’ + infinitive
- a. Jan is boksen. *Dutch*
John is box.INF
- b. Jan ist boxen. *German*
John is box.INF
- c. János boxolni van. *Hungarian*
John box.INF is
- (6) ‘be’ + ‘to’ + infinitive
- a. Jan as tu boksin. *Fering*
John is to box.INF
- (7) ‘be’ + ‘and’ + finite verb
- a. Jan er og boksar. *Norwegian*
John is and box.PRS
- b. John är och boxas. *Swedish*
John is and box.PRS
- (8) ‘be’ + ‘at’ + infinitive
- a. Gianni è a boxare. *Italian*
John is at box.INF
- (9) ‘be’ + infinitive-inessive
- a. Jussi on nykkeile-mä-ssä. *Finnish*
John is box.3INF-INESS

(De Groot 2000:695)

From the range of forms seen here, it is apparent that “the absentive” does not constitute a cross-linguistically uniform syntactic construction. The conclusions drawn here will therefore not apply to many of the languages listed above. The extent to which they apply to Dutch and Hungarian (both of which, like German, encode the absentive with a ‘be’+infinitive construction) I leave as a question for further research.

One theory we may consider in explaining the structure of the German absentive construction is that it’s a type of progressive construction, with a similar structural configuration to the German prepositional progressive, as in (10).

- (10) a. Hans ist lesen.
Hans is read.INF
‘Hans is off reading.’
- b. Hans ist am Lesen.
Hans is at-the read.INF
‘Hans is reading.’

The surface similarities between absentives and progressives, as well as the aspectual characteristics of the two (that is, the reading event is ongoing at speech time for both 10a and 10b) make this

analysis worthy of consideration. I will demonstrate, however, that the nominal properties of the infinitive in the progressive construction and the verbal properties of the infinitive in the absentive construction suggest that structural parallelism between these sentence types is not present.

I will also evaluate a proposal for Dutch absentives made by Haslinger (2007). She suggests that the infinitival verb is a nominalization with a PRO subject and the copula is itself a control predicate in the case of the absentive. The semantics of absence is encoded by virtue of disjoint spatial indices on the sentential subject and PRO. One major flaw in this proposal is that, as with the prepositional progressive theory, we expect the infinitive to have nominal properties, which is empirically not the case. Additionally, in order for indices on PRO and the sentential subject to do the work of encoding absence, Haslinger proposes some significant modifications to Binding Theory, which I will argue are undesirable.

Abraham (2008) proposes a silent motion verb *gehen* (*go*) to account for the German absentive.

- (11) Hans ist lesen GEGANGEN.
 Hans is read.INF GO.PAST
 ‘Hans is off reading.’

This proposal has the advantage of straightforwardly accounting for the subject’s absence by virtue of the lexical semantics of the silent motion verb. *Gehen* can take a wide range verbal complements, and a silent GEHEN has been independently proposed to account for various constructions in German. However, I will show that this theory fails to account for the stative properties of the absentive, and should be rejected on empirical grounds.

The structure I will ultimately propose involves a silent predicate WEG (*away*) which is the main clause predicate of the construction. The infinitival verb, then, is a secondary predicate contained in a small clause adjunct.

- (12) Hans_i ist WEG [_{SC} PRO_i lesen]
 Hans is AWAY read.INF
 ‘Hans is off reading.’

This hypothesis, we will see, correctly accounts for the extensive parallels between the absentive construction and sentences with an overt locative expression and depictive secondary predicate. It also correctly accounts for the stative and verbal characteristics that force us to reject the other hypotheses considered.

1.1 A note on dialectal variation

It should be pointed out that both the absentive and the prepositional progressive in German are nonstandard and subject to significant dialectal variation. Some speakers do not accept them as grammatical at all and many find them acceptable only in certain contexts. Ramelli (2013) and Behrens, Flecken, and Carroll (2013) show that the grammaticalization of the *am*-progressive is an ongoing change. While more research is clearly needed to understand this process and the dialects affected by it, such work is beyond the scope of this paper.

1.2 Structure of this thesis

The first half of this thesis, Section 2, outlines some basic characteristics of the absentive construction in German with respect to stativity, the verbal status of the infinitive, and control. Section 3 addresses some potential theories as to the structure. § 3.1 discusses potential structural parallelism with prepositional progressives, § 3.2 discusses Haslinger’s theory for Dutch absentives, § 3.3 discusses the possibility of a silent motion verb corresponding to *go*, and § 3.4 proposes a silent locative expression corresponding to *away*. We will see that the last of these best accounts for the data outlined in Section 2. Finally, Section 4 gives some concluding remarks.

2 Characteristics of the Absentive

In this section I aim to establish some basic structural facts about the absentive construction, which will be necessary for evaluating the validity of several structural proposals. Specifically, I show that it is stative, not eventive, and that the infinitive is verbal, not nominal. I also briefly address the question of whether it exhibits properties of control or raising (or neither), since several proposals for absentives involve control. However, the diagnostics for control are inconclusive.

2.1 Stative versus eventive

It has been suggested that the absentive is a stative construction. De Groot (2000) argued for this classification as a universal feature of absentive constructions. It is worth demonstrating empirically that this is a true characteristic of the German absentive, since some of the hypotheses I consider will call this into question.

2.1.1 Existing arguments for stativity

De Groot (2000)’s arguments for the absentive being a stative construction are far from definitive. Here I show that they alone are not sufficient for categorizing the absentive as he does. In the following sections I present more convincing evidence.

De Groot’s first motive for calling the absentive stative is that it is licit in response to questions asking where the subject is.

- (13) a. Wo ist der Hans?
 where is the Hans
 ‘Where is Hans?’

- b. Er ist schwimmen.
 he is swim.INF
 ‘He is off swimming.’

(De Groot 2000:701)

My informants agreed that (13b) is a perfectly natural response to the question, under circumstances where both speakers know where Hans generally goes to swim. However, if speaker A did not know about Hans’s habitual swimming activities, (13b) would not be a valid answer to the

question. This seems to indicate that the absentive in (13b) does not actually provide an answer to the question ‘where is Hans’ but instead provides sufficient information for the addressee to figure out the answer. We should be wary of evidence that relies on this kind of pragmatic inference. The following example shows that just because an assertion is natural in response to ‘where is Hans?’ (or provides sufficient information to implicate the answer) does not entail that the construction is stative.

- (14) a. Where is Hans?
 b. *Possible answer:* He went to the grocery store.
 c. *Possible answer:* He left.
 d. *Possible answer:* He goes for a run on Tuesday mornings.
 (licit when uttered on a Tuesday morning)

De Groot (2000)’s second argument for the absentive’s stativity is that it can’t be embedded under deontic modality. He provides the following example from Dutch.

- (15) *Je moet vanmiddag zwemmen zijn!
 you must this afternoon swim.INF be.INF
 ‘You must be off swimming this afternoon!’ (De Groot 2000:701)

Abstracting away from the question of whether the absentive truly is impossible under deontic modality (Haslinger 2007 claims it isn’t), it’s not clear that deontic modality should be used as a diagnostic for stativity. First note that examples of stative predicates under deontic modals are not hard to find. *Love* is a prototypical stative predicate, and yet the deontic readings of (16) and (17), taken from John 13:34 and W.H. Auden’s *As I Walked Out One Evening*, respectively, are not unnatural.

- (16) A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so *you must love* one another.
 (17) *You shall love* your crooked neighbour
 With your crooked heart.²

Mufwene (1984) argues on the basis of the ungrammaticality of (18)-(20), below, that the ungrammaticality of a given predicate when used in the imperative does not entail that the predicate is stative.

- (18) *Misplace your keys.
 (19) *Collapse.
 (20) *Shatter.

Jóhannsdóttir (2011) points out that, under particular circumstances (e.g. a director tells an actor to do (18), a machine that’s programmed to self-destruct when given certain commands is told to do (19) or (20)), these imperatives may be grammatical. These facts suggest that the imperative is not restricted to eventive predicates, but to predicates with agentive subjects. I think this extends to deontics easily.

2. Italics mine in both

- (21) * You must misplace your keys.
- (22) * You must collapse.
- (23) * You must shatter.

These sentences can also be made to work in very specific circumstances where the addressee has control over whether they carry out the instruction.

Given the weaknesses of the existing arguments for analyzing the absentive as a stative construction, I think it necessary to demonstrate empirically that the absentive is in fact stative. The tests I apply are taken from Jóhannsdóttir (2011), in which she analyzes ten tests that have been proposed for identifying stative predicates and finds three of them valid for English and Icelandic. The other seven are, like the imperative, diagnostics for agentivity or ability to exert control, not stativity, and so I won't apply them here.

2.1.2 Habitual readings

Jóhannsdóttir (2011) lays out the first diagnostic as follows. In English, in the simple present tense, eventive predicates are interpreted as habitual. (24a) can be true even if there is no guitar-playing event going on at utterance time. To get the present episodic reading, the progressive is used, as in (24b). This generalization should be modified somewhat for German, which has no fully-grammaticalized progressive and uses the simple present for both habitual and episodic readings of eventive predicates. (25) is ambiguous.

- (24) a. John plays guitar.
 b. John is playing guitar. (Jóhannsdóttir 2011:54)
- (25) Max liest.
 Max reads
 ‘Max reads’ / ‘Max is reading’

Stative predicates, by contrast, do not have a possible habitual reading in the simple present. If (26) is true, then it must be true that Doug loves his wife at utterance time. The same can be said of statives in German. (27) is true only if Max hates Marie at the time of the utterance.

- (26) Doug loves his wife. (Jóhannsdóttir 2011:54)
- (27) Max hasst Marie.
 Max hates Marie
 ‘Max hates Marie’

Applying this test to the absentive, we see that the construction patterns with stative predicates. (28) is only true if Max is away reading at speech time.³ It has no habitual reading.

3. Note that one characteristic of the absentive is that it describes the entirety of the activity plus the going and coming back. So (28) can in fact be true even if the *reading* event is not going on at speech time, and Max is just on his way to it. I don't believe this has any bearing on the effectiveness of this test, since the crucial fact is that there is no habitual reading available.

- (28) Max ist lesen.
 Max is read.INF
 ‘Max is off reading’ (present episodic)
 ≠ ‘Max goes off to read’ (habitual)

2.1.3 Sequence of tense

The next test for stativity concerns the sequence of tense of an embedded clause relative to the event denoted by the matrix predicate. Jóhannsdóttir (2011) presents the test for Icelandic as follows.⁴ The simple past tense of the eventive predicate in the embedded clause in (29) is ungrammatical. The perfect is required to show the sequence of events, as in (30). In such sentences the time of the event described by the embedded clause necessarily precedes the time of the event described by the matrix clause. That is to say, María must have eaten the apple prior to Jón’s talking about it. Stative predicates, however, can be used in the simple past in the embedded clause, as in (31). In this case the events overlap - María must still be hungry at the time when Jón said it.

- (29) * Jón sagði að María át eplið.
 Jón said that María ate apple.the
 ‘Jón said that María ate the apple.’
- (30) Jón sagði að María hefði étið eplið.
 Jón said that María had eaten apple.the
 ‘Jón said that María had eaten the apple.’
- (31) Jón sagði að María væri svöng
 Jón said that María was hungry
 ‘Jón said that María was hungry.’ (Jóhannsdóttir (2011):59)

The same pattern holds in German. The simple past of an eventive predicate in (32) is ungrammatical, and the perfect in (33) entails that the events do not overlap - Maria finished reading before Hans said anything about it. Statives as in (34) can be used in the simple past, and in this case there is overlap - Maria was tired at the same time that Hans said so.

- (32) * Hans sagte, dass Marie *Der Zauberberg* las.
 Hans said that Marie *Der Zauberberg* read.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie read *Der Zauberberg*’
- (33) Hans sagte, dass Marie *Der Zauberberg* gelesen hatte.
 Hans said that Marie *Der Zauberberg* read.PAST had.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie had read *Der Zauberberg*.’
- (34) Hans sagte, dass Marie müde war.
 Hans said that Marie tired was.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie was tired.’

4. I use the test as applied to Icelandic, rather than English, as a point of comparison because German patterns like Icelandic with respect to the sequence of tense. Both disallow constructions like *John said that Mary read Middlemarch*, which is fine for English. This means that the diagnostic for English is applied somewhat differently.

When we apply this test to the absentive construction, we see that the simple past is grammatical. Furthermore the reading event is interpreted as ongoing at the time of the speech event.⁵

- (35) Hans sagte, dass Marie lesen war.
 Hans said that Marie read.INF was.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie was off reading.’

2.1.4 The perfect

Jóhannsdóttir (2011) shows that in English (and Icelandic), eventive predicates in the perfect are interpreted as having culminated prior to speech time. Thus when (36a) is said, Mary is not still sleeping and when (36b) is said, Ben is not still running 14 kilometers. He may still be running, but the 14 kilometers have been completed. The same is true for the German sentences in (37)

- (36) a. Mary has slept today.
 b. Ben has run 14 kilometers. (Jóhannsdóttir 2011:61)
- (37) a. Marie hat heute geschlafen.
 Marie has today slept
 ‘Marie has slept today.’
 b. Ben ist 14 kilometer gelaufen.
 Ben is 14 kilometer run
 ‘Ben has run 14 kilometers.’

Stative verbs, by contrast, can still hold at speech time. (38a) does not entail that Mary no longer understands *the issue*. (38b) can be interpreted as meaning Mary has been angry for some period prior to speech time or she has been angry for a period up to and including speech time. The latter reading is particularly salient with the modifier *all day*.

- (38) a. Mary has understood the issue.
 b. Mary has been angry (all day). (Jóhannsdóttir 2011:61)

The same generalization does not hold for all German stative predicates in the perfect. (39a) can mean that Marie still understands the problem at speech time, since once one has understood something one generally does not stop understanding it. However, temporary states are interpreted as no longer holding at speech time when used in the perfect. (39b) does not mean that Marie is still angry, even when used with the modifier *den ganzen Tag* (*the whole day*).

- (39) a. Marie hat das Problem verstanden.
 Marie has the problem understood
 ‘Marie has understood the problem.’
 b. Marie ist (den ganzen Tag) böse gewesen.
 Marie is (the whole day) angry been
 ‘Mary has been angry all day.’

5. Again, the semantics of the absentive is such that the subject need not actually be *reading* at speech time, as long as the going+reading+returning event is in progress.

It appears that the interpretation of the perfect is not a sound diagnostic for stativity in German, since temporary states pattern with eventive predicates. For this reason it cannot be used to demonstrate the stativity of the absentive. A key characteristic of the absentive is that the subject is expected to return, and so it is a temporary state and its interpretation in the perfect would be uninformative as to stativity.

2.1.5 Results of the diagnostics

In summary, the tests for stativity resulted in the following findings:⁶

	Eventive	Stative	Absentive
Response to ‘Wo ist Hans?’	-	-	-
Embedding under deontic modality	-	-	-
Habitual readings	✓	✗	✗
Sequence of tense	✓	✗	✗
The perfect	-	-	-

I conclude on the basis of the habitual readings and sequence of tense diagnostics that the absentive is a stative construction.

2.2 Nominal versus verbal

Scheffler (2005) describes three types of nominalizations in German: “infinitival nominals like *das Laufen* (*walking*), so-called ‘stem’-derived nominals like *Fahrt* (*trip, ride*), and ... *-ung* nominals like *Verschwendung* (*wastefulness*).” Infinitival nominalization is completely productive - every verb has a corresponding infinitival nominal. One hypothesis we might consider for the absentive is that it consists of a copula and an infinitival nominal. We will see in § 3.2 that a similar proposal has been made for Dutch absentives. Drawing on characterizations of infinitival nominals from Scheffler (2005) and Burt (1979), I show that the infinitive in the absentive construction does not show nominal-like behavior and thus should be considered a true verbal infinitive.

2.2.1 Capitalization

It is a fact of German orthography that nouns are always written with a capitalized first letter. This means that the orthography can provide some clue as to whether a given element is perceived as a noun or a verb. However, orthographic rules are obviously prescriptivist and should not be given the same weight as other types of linguistic data. Thus, the observation that a given item is written as if it were a noun or a verb should not be taken as definitive evidence. That said, some German speakers have a strong intuition that the infinitive in the absentive construction should be written in all lowercase letters. We can therefore tentatively conclude that speakers’ meta-linguistic awareness leads them to believe that absentives do not involve a nominal.

6. Dashes indicate that the test was found to be an invalid diagnostic. For the sequence of tense diagnostic, I define ‘passing’ the test as requiring temporally distinct readings. Obviously, the choice is arbitrary.

2.2.2 Post-nominal genitives

The next test for distinguishing nominal and verbal infinitives concerns the possibility of a genitive case-marked argument. Genitive DPs in German are used to represent arguments of event nominalizations or relational nouns.

- (40) die Zerstörung [der Stadt]
the destruction [the city].GEN
'the destruction of the city'
- (41) die Schwester [des Angeklagten]
the sister [the defendant].GEN
'the sister of the defendant'
- (42) der Rechner [meines Kollegen]
the computer [my colleague].GEN
'the computer of my colleague's'

(Solstad 2010:219)

Haider (2010) identifies the N head as the only structural genitive case assigner. Genitive DPs appear to the right of the case-assigning noun. Verbal heads assign structural accusative case to their complements.⁷ Additionally, if the verb is non-finite it must appear at the right edge of the clause, meaning the complement appears to the left of its case assigner. We therefore see an asymmetry between infinitival nominals and verbal infinitives with respect to both the word order and case of the object.

- (43) a. ihr (*des Stoffes) Kaufen des Stoffes
her (*[the cloth].GEN) buy.NOUN [the cloth].GEN
'her buying of the cloth'
- b. ihr (*den Stoff) Kaufen (*den Stoff)
her (*[the cloth].ACC) buy.NOUN (*[the cloth].ACC)
'her buying of the cloth'
- (44) a. Sie muss (*des Stoffes) kaufen (*des Stoffes)
she must (*[the cloth].GEN) buy.INF (*[the cloth].GEN)
'she must buy the cloth'
- b. Sie muss den Stoff kaufen (*den Stoff)
she must [the cloth].ACC buy.INF (*[the cloth].ACC)
'she must buy the cloth'

(Burt 1979:24)

The absentive construction does not allow for genitive DPs following the infinitive. It does, however permit accusative DPs preceding the infinitive. These facts support the view that the infinitive in the absentive construction is verbal in nature.

7. There are numerous examples of quirky-case-assigning verbs and prepositions in German. This means that genitive DPs can in fact be found outside of the nominal domain. However, since quirky genitive case is by definition restricted to a small set of predicates (and those predicates are not being used here), this does not weaken the validity of the post-nominal genitive diagnostic I propose.

- (45) * Sie ist kaufen des Stoffes.
 she is buy.INF [the cloth].GEN
- (46) * Sie ist des Stoffes kaufen.
 she is [the cloth].GEN buy.INF
- (47) * Sie ist kaufen den Stoff.
 she is buy.INF [the cloth].ACC
- (48) Sie ist den Stoff kaufen.
 she is [the cloth].ACC buy.INF
 ‘she is off buying the cloth’

2.2.3 Compounding

German has a notoriously productive capacity for noun compounding, as the following examples illustrate.

- (49) der Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän
 the Danube-steamship-company-captain
- (50) die Unabhaengigkeitserklärungen
 the independence-declarations
- (51) der Fussbodenschleifmaschinenverleih
 the flooring-sanding-machine-rental

collected via Google search

Noun compounding is available for infinitival nominals as well:

- (52) das Briefeschreiben
 the letters-writing
- (53) das Kamelereiten
 the camels-riding
- (54) das Wassertrinken
 the water-drinking

German is an OV language, so the object of an infinitive verb will precede the verb, as we saw in the discussion of post-nominal genitives. Since both the objects of verbal infinitives and compounded objects of infinitival nominals precede the infinitive, relative order can't be used to distinguish nominal from verbal infinitives. However, nouns that are compounded with infinitival nominals must be bare nouns - they cannot be full DPs. This means that overt determiners are impossible. This restriction does not hold for the objects of verbal infinitives. The contrast is demonstrated in (55)-(56).

- (55) a. das Äpfelessen
 the apples-eating

- b. * das Einenapfelessen
the an-apple-eating
 - c. das Zeitunglesen
the newspaper-reading
 - d. * das Diezeitunglesen
the the-newspaper-reading
- (56)
- a. Hans muss Äpfel essen.
Hans must apples eat
'Hans must eat apples.'
 - b. Hans muss einen Apfel essen.
Hans must an apple eat
'Hans must eat an apple.'
 - c. *Hans muss Zeitung lesen.
Hans must newspaper read
'Hans must read newspaper.'
 - d. Hans muss die Zeitung lesen.
Hans must the newspaper read
'Hans must read the newspaper.'

When this test is applied to the absentive, we see that DP objects are possible, so I conclude that the infinitive functions as a verbal element in this context.

- (57) Jan ist einen Apfel essen.
Jan is an apple eat.INF
'Jan is off eating an apple.'
- (58) Sara ist die Zeitung lesen.
Sara is the newspaper read.INF
'Jan is off reading the newspaper.'

2.2.4 Results of the diagnostics

To conclude, the data indicate that the absentive contains a verbal infinitive and not an infinitival nominal:

	Nominal	Verbal	Absentive
Capitalization	✓	✗	✗
Post-nominal genitives	✓	✗	✗
Compounding (i.e. only allows bare nominal objects)	✓	✗	✗

2.3 Control versus raising

In the above sections it was shown that the absentive has stative and verbal properties. These characteristics will be crucial for evaluating the success of theoretical accounts of the absentive.

One additional property we may wish to explore is the absentive’s behavior with respect to control and raising. Three of the four hypotheses I will analyze in Section 3 involve PRO in some sense, so proving that there is or isn’t evidence for control in the absentive would have significant bearing on those theories. Haslinger (2007)’s index-based explanation of absence involves a PRO subject of an infinitival nominal, Abraham (2008)’s silent *go* approach is biclausal, with PRO in the lower clause. And the theory I will advocate, which involves silent *away*, posits a small clause with a PRO subject. Unfortunately, however, we won’t see definitive evidence one way or the other, since most of the tests for raising versus control fail to apply to the absentive. Where data is available, it tentatively suggests that a control-based approach is viable. In this section I outline the two diagnostics that yield some results. The Appendix presents five other tests for distinguishing raising and control and shows that they don’t apply to the German absentive straightforwardly.

2.3.1 Scope of indefinites

The scope of a predicate relative to an indefinite subject can be used as a diagnostic for distinguishing between raising and control structures.

Raising predicates allow for either low or high scope with respect to indefinite subjects.

- (59) Jemand_i scheint [_{t_i} zu Hause zu sein]. (raising)
 someone seems at home to be.INF
 ‘Someone seems to be home.’
 $\exists >$ seems, seems $> \exists$

(59) can mean that there exists someone, x , such that it seems that x is home ($\exists x$.seems(home(x))). In this reading there is a particular person about whom the speaker is making a claim. The sentence also allows for the inverse reading, in which it seems that there exists someone, x , such that x is home. (seems($\exists x$.home(x))). This reading is made more salient by context: the lights are on, so someone seems to be home.

Control predicates obligatorily scope below the sentential subject.

- (60) Jemand_i plant [PRO_i zu Hause zu sein]. (control)
 someone plans at home to be.INF
 ‘Someone plans to be home.’
 $\exists >$ plans, * plans $> \exists$

(60) can mean there exists someone, x , such that x plans for x to be home ($\exists x$.plans(home(x), x)). That is, the speaker has someone in mind and that someone plans to be home. The sentence cannot have the inverse scope, in which there is a planning event and it is planned that there exist someone, x , such that x is home (plans($\exists x$.home(x))). It’s difficult to even make sense of what that would mean, since *plans* needs a second argument – the planner.

Now I turn to the behavior of the absentive with respect to the scope of indefinite subjects.

- (61) Jemand ist lesen. (absentive)
 someone is read.INF
 ‘Someone is off reading.’

It's impossible to make sense of whether the indefinite can have low scope in (61) without some hypothesis as to the (potentially silent) matrix predicate. Given the semantics of the construction, the predicate may be thought to denote the property of being absent. This is the approach taken by both the silent GO theory and the silent AWAY theory, as we will see in greater detail in Section 3. The two potential readings, then, would be $\exists > absent$ and $absent > \exists$. The latter is not a possible reading of the sentence, and in fact it's difficult to make sense of the question, as with (60). It cannot be the case that there is an absence and the absence is such that there exists someone x such that x is reading ($absent(\exists x.read(x))$). Under a theory in which the matrix predicate corresponds to absence, there must be an entity who is absent, so an additional argument is needed. The uninterpretability of an $absent > \exists$ reading is similar to the problems with a *plans* $> \exists$ reading in (60).

Haslinger (2007)'s index-based explanation of the absentive does not involve a silent predicate expressing absence, but instead argues that the copula assigns a theta role, analogous to Partee (1977)'s active *be*. The two possible readings, then, would be $\exists > be$ and $be > \exists$. It's not clear that we can empirically determine whether both scopes are available. In order to formulate the question of whether $be > \exists$ is a reading, one would need to stipulate that this is an active kind of *be*. But that's exactly what we want the test to tell us – whether *be* here assigns a theta-role. I'll leave this question aside for now and return to it in the context of Haslinger's proposal.

In summary, under a theory of the absentive in which the matrix predicate corresponds to absence, the data are consistent with a control analysis. If the matrix predicate does not contribute the semantics of absence (or if there is in fact only one predicate at all) the test is inconclusive.

2.3.2 Selectional restrictions

Another difference between control and raising constructions, discussed in Davies and Dubinsky (2008) is the types of sentential subjects they allow. Since raising predicates assign no theta-role to the sentential subject, the selectional restrictions on the subject come exclusively from the lower predicate. Control constructions, however, do assign a theta-role, and so they may only allow for certain types of subjects (e.g. animate). The paradigm is shown in (62)-(64). Subjects that are permissible arguments of the lower predicate (as in 62) are also acceptable when embedded in a raising context (as in 63). In a control context, however, the sentence may be ill-formed because the subject is incompatible with the theta role assigned by the matrix predicate (64).

(62) Das Gebäude stürzt ein.
 the building collapses
 'The building is collapsing.'

(63) Das Gebäude scheint einzustürzen. (raising)
 the building seems collapse.INF
 'The building seems to be collapsing.'

- (64) # Das Gebäude plant einzustürzen. (control)
 the building plans collapse.INF
 ‘The building is planning to collapse.’

Applying this test to the absentive, we see that the construction does impose selectional restrictions of its own. (65) is unnatural given that the building cannot go somewhere else to collapse – it can only be at one location.

- (65) # Das Gebäude ist einstürzen. (absentive)
 the building is collapse.INF
 ‘The building is off collapsing.’

This finding supports a control theory of the absentive, since the construction imposes restrictions on the kinds of subjects that are allowable, beyond the restrictions of the overt (embedded) predicate.

2.3.3 Results of the diagnostics

The tests shown here tentatively indicate that the absentive is a control construction.

	Raising	Control	Absentive
Ambiguous scope of indefinites	✓	✗	✗/ ?
Selectional restrictions	✗	✓	✓

In conclusion, we have seen evidence that the absentive shows some behavior consistent with control and not raising, that it has stative and not eventive properties, and that the infinitive is verbal and not nominal. In the next section I will evaluate several hypotheses of the absentive, making reference to these characteristics.

3 Theories of the Absentive

3.1 *Am-* and *Beim-* Progressives

Colloquial German allows for a construction that conveys progressive aspect using a preposition, *am* or *beim*, and an infinitival nominal. We will see that although there appear to be similarities between the prepositional progressive constructions and the absentive, there are empirical reasons to reject a theory of structural parallelism between them.

3.1.1 Intro to prepositional progressives

Unlike English, German is conventionally thought to have no morphologically unique progressive form - rather, the simple present and simple past can be used to convey both perfective and imperfective aspect (see Dodd et al. 1996, Buck 1999, Fagan 2009, and others).

- (66) Er findet es schwer.
 He finds it hard.
 ‘He finds it hard.’
 ‘He is finding it hard.’ (Dodd et al. 1996:71)
- (67) Er fand es schwer.
 He found it hard.
 ‘He found it hard.’
 ‘He was finding it hard.’ (Dodd et al. 1996:71)
- (68) Sie isst Pfannkuchen.
 she eats pancakes
 ‘She eats pancakes.’
 ‘She is eating pancakes.’ (Buck 1999:76)
- (69) Ich lass das Buch.
 I read.past the book.
 ‘I read the book.’
 ‘I was reading the book.’ (Fagan 2009:162)

When the speaker wishes to make explicit that the event is ongoing at the reference time, several options are available. The adverbs *gerade* and *eben* (both, approximately ‘just’) force a progressive reading. Krause (2001), Fagan (2009), Gargyan (2010), and Behrens, Flecken, and Carroll (2013) discuss two other types of progressives in German: the *dabei + sein + zu-infinitive* construction and (of particular interest here) the prepositional progressive, which uses the preposition *am* (70) or *beim* (71).

- (70) Eine Frau ist am Klavierspielen.
 a lady is at-the piano-play
 ‘A lady is playing the piano.’ (Behrens, Flecken, and Carroll 2013:100)
- (71) Ein Surfer ist beim Wellenreiten.
 a surfer is by-the wave-ride
 ‘A surfer is riding the waves.’ (Behrens, Flecken, and Carroll 2013:100)

Am- and *beim-* progressives consist of a subject, the verb *sein*, and a prepositional phrase containing one of the prepositions *am* or *beim* and a non-finite verb. The similarity of this construction and the absentive should be immediately apparent. The key difference lies in the presence of the prepositions *am* and *beim*. One might think, based on the surface similarity, that the absentive and the prepositional progressive are structurally similar. Such a hypothesis might suppose that the absentive is a subtype of the prepositional progressive – that is, a progressive with the added entailment of absence. An advantage of this line of thinking is that the stativity of the absentive is straightforwardly accounted for, since progressives are stative constructions. However, we would have to account for (i) the lack of an overt preposition in the absentive and (ii) the subject’s absence (specifically, how it is encoded). It might be possible to develop a theory that gets around these obstacles. I will argue, however, that such a theory is not on the right track. First, the selectional

restrictions of the absentive construction, which we saw as tentative evidence in support of a control account, are not characteristic of progressive constructions. Second, prepositional progressives contain an infinitival nominal. § 2.2 showed that that absentives do not. I lay out the empirical motivation for these arguments below.

3.1.2 Control

We saw in § 5.1 that the absentive is difficult to categorize as either a raising or control structure. However, one diagnostic did support a control theory, namely the selectional restrictions of the absentive. The *am*-progressive does not have this restriction.

- (72) a. # Das Gebäude ist einstürzen. (absentive)
 the building is collapse.INF
 ‘The building is off collapsing.’
- b. Das Gebäude ist am einstürzen. (progressive)
 the building ist at-the collapse.INF
 ‘The building is collapsing.’

Even if we do not take this fact to be conclusive evidence for a control account of the absentive, it does suggest that the absentive and the progressive are not structurally alike.

3.1.3 Nominalization

Since the infinitive of the prepositional progressive is the complement to a preposition, a plausible analysis is that the infinitive is an infinitival nominal. Barrie and Spreng (2009) argue that the infinitive in the *am*-progressive is acutally verbal and in cases where a direct object is present, this is an instance of noun incorporation. Here I outline their argumentation along with my own rebuttals.

The contracted preposition.

Barrie and Spreng’s primary argument that *am*-progressives like (73) below must not contain a preposition *an* and an infinitival nominal *dem Wassertrinken* relies on the fact that the ‘non-fused’ form of the preposition in (b) is unacceptable. This they contrast with examples like (74) and (75).

- (73) a. Ich bin am Wasser trinken.
 I am at-the water drink.INF
 ‘I am drinking water.’
- b. *Ich bin an dem Wasser trinken.
 I am at the water drink.INF
 ‘I am drinking water.’

- (74) a. am See
 at-the lake
 ‘at the lake’

- b. *an dem* See
 at the lake
 ‘at the lake’
- (75) a. Ich bin *am* Singen interessiert.
 I am at-the sing.INF interested
 ‘I am interested in singing.’
- b. Ich bin *an dem* Singen interessiert.
 I am at the sing.INF interested
 ‘I am interested in singing.’ (Barrie and Spreng 2009:379)

The argument here is, approximately, that since canonical prepositional phrases can be expressed with either *am* or *an dem*, but the *am*-progressive does not allow for this alternation, *am*-progressives must not be prepositional phrases, and so the object of *am* must not be a DP. However, if this line of reasoning is valid, it obligatorily predicts that any other context in which we see *am*, but *an dem* is disallowed, the complement is also not a DP. This argument neglects the empirical fact that *am* and *an dem* are not always interchangeable, even in situations where the complement is clearly nominal, as we will see.

Schwarz (2009) argues extensively that, cross-linguistically, definite descriptions fall into two categories: those licensed by the situational uniqueness of the referent as in (76) and those licensed anaphorically as in (77).

- (76) **The projector** is not being used today.
 (licit in a lecture hall containing exactly one projector) (Schwarz 2009:22)
- (77) John bought a book and a magazine.
The book was expensive. (Schwarz 2009:23)

The two kinds of definites are expressed with the same article in English, namely *the*. However, Schwarz (2013) shows that in several languages, including German, Fering, Akan, Mauritian Creole, Lakhota, Hausa, and Haitian Creole, there are distinct definite articles corresponding to the two types. In German, the distinction is encoded in the choice between the contracted and expanded forms of prepositions, such as *am* vs *an dem*, *vom* vs *von dem*, and *beim* vs *bei dem*. He calls the contracted forms ‘weak articles’ and the expanded forms ‘strong articles’. Examples (78)-(80) show that the weak article is preferred in contexts where the definite is licensed by the referent’s uniqueness.

- (78) Das Buch, das du suchst, steht **im** / **# in dem** Glasschrank.
 the book that you look-for stands in-the / in the glass-cabinet
 ‘The book that you are looking for is in the glass cabinet.’
- (79) Der Einbrecher ist zum Glück **vom** / **# von dem** Hund verjagt worden.
 the burglar is luckily by-the / by the dog chase-away been
 ‘Luckily, the burglar was chased away by the dog.’

- (80) Der Empfang wurde **vom** / **# von dem** Bürgermeister eröffnet.
 the reception was by-the / by the mayor opened
 ‘The reception was opened by the mayor.’ (Schwarz 2009:39-40)

If Barrie and Spreng (2009) were on the right track in arguing that the ungrammaticality of (73b) entails that *Wassertrinken* is not a noun, we would have to also conclude that the ungrammaticality of strong articles in (78)-(80) suggest that *Glasschrank*, *Hund*, and *Bürgermeister* are not nouns (or at least not being used as nouns in these contexts). I think that this is not a welcome result and we should seek a different theory to account for the impossibility of the strong article in the *am*-progressive.

Schwarz (2009) suggests that one possible account of why the expanded form is unavailable with eventive nominalizations as in (81) is that the event denoted thereof constitutes an example of ‘kind reference’, which patterns with situationally unique definites. That is, the weak article is required because the event refers to a kind of activity - specifically, in (81), the kind that involves swimming. A prototypical example of ‘kind reference’ is given in (82).

- (81) Hans hat sich **beim** / **# bei dem** Schwimmen verletzt.
 Hans has REFL by-the / by the swimming hurt
 ‘Hans hurt himself during his swimming.’
- (82) **Am** / **# an dem** Zebra kann man sehen, dass die Natur symmetrisch ist.
 on-the / on the zebra can one see that the nature symmetrical is
 ‘The zebra shows us that nature is symmetrical.’ (Schwarz 2009:65-67)

Puig Waldmüller (2008) offers a different account for why the expanded forms are ungrammatical with event nominalizations in most contexts. She suggests that the contracted form is a dative-inflected preposition that takes an NP complement. The expanded form, by contrast, takes a full DP complement. The determiner *dem* includes the deictic element *d-* “which introduces an index to a discourse-old entity and which has a strong inflectional ending” (Puig Waldmüller 2008:161).

Both Schwarz (2009)’s and Puig Waldmüller (2008)’s analyses suggest that the impossibility of the strong article in *am*- and *beim*-progressives is not unique to these constructions, but a general characteristic of event nominalizations. This is contrary to Barrie and Spreng (2009)’s data, reprinted here from (75) above.

- (83) Ich bin **am** / **an dem** Singen interessiert.
 I am at-the / at the sing.INF interested
 ‘I am interested in singing.’ (Barrie and Spreng 2009:379)

My informants judged *an dem Singen* to be noticeably degraded compared to *am Singen*, especially when uttered out of the blue. I suspect that Barrie and Spreng (2009)’s judgment that the strong article is possible here reflects the fact that, if given sufficient context, a strong definite can be made to work with an event nominalization. For example, the contrastive reading in (84), taken from Puig Waldmüller (2008), requires the strong definite with a nominalization.

- (84) Beim Autofahren wird mir normalerweise nicht schlecht, aber **#beim / bei dem**
 at-the car-driving get me normally not sick, but at-the / at the
 Autofahren schon.
 car-driving yes.
 ‘Usually, I don’t get sick when driving by car, but I do during this car travel.’ (Puig
 Waldmüller 2008:59)

Examples such as these, given the specific context required for them, support rather than refute the generalization that the distinction between contracted and expanded preposition forms is driven by the type of definiteness of the complement and not whether the complement is in fact nominal.

I have suggested here that the semantic and/or pragmatic factors associated with the distinction between strong and weak articles in German can be used to account for the ungrammaticality of the expanded forms *an dem* and *bei dem* in *am-* and *beim-*progressives. How these factors are encoded in the syntax I leave as a question for further research.

Characteristics of the direct object.

Barrie and Spreng (2009) then proceed to identify properties of the direct object in the *am-*progressive which they argue indicates that noun incorporation has occurred. They show that the noun must be a bare nominal.

- (85) a. Ich bin am Wasser trinken.
 I am at-the water drink.INF
 ‘I am drinking water.’
 b. *Ich bin am das Wasser trinken.
 I am at-the the water drink.INF
 ‘I am drinking the water.’
- (86) a. Ich bin am Cola kaufen.
 I am at-the cola buy.INF
 ‘I am buying cola.’
 b. *Ich bin am Dosen Cola kaufen.
 I am at-the cans cola buy.INF
 ‘I am buying cans of cola.’ (Barrie and Spreng 2009:380-381)

What they do not address, however, is the fact that a nominalization view would account for these data just as well. We saw in § 2.2 that compounding is also restricted to bare nominals. Thus the above evidence fails to rule out the possibility that the infinitive of the prepositional progressive has nominal properties.

Based on the above discussion I conclude that Barrie and Spreng (2009)’s challenge to the notion that *am-* and *beim-*progressives consist of a preposition and an infinitival nominal to be unfounded.

It is perhaps worth noting at this point that if Barrie and Spreng’s analysis is correct, an analysis of the absentive that forces structural parallelism with the prepositional progressive is no more desirable. They argue for a noun-incorporation account on the basis of the direct object facts I

show above. Absentives, as we saw in § 2.2, are compatible with full-DP objects, contrary to a noun incorporation theory. In fact, the the analysis we adopt for the progressive does not necessarily have much bearing on my claim that absentives and progressives are distinct constructions. The empirical facts alone are sufficient to motivate this. Note that Abraham (2008) arrives at a similar conclusion.

3.2 Dutch Absentives

Since Dutch has an absentive construction very similar to that in German, the literature on Dutch absentives may be informative here. Recall that Dutch, German, and Hungarian all have absentives consisting of a ‘be’ + infinitive construction. Haslinger (2007) discusses the Dutch absentive, arguing in favor of a control account, in which the copula assigns an agent theta-role to the sentential subject and the infinitive verb assigns its theta-role to PRO. Her theory makes use of a triple of indices (person, spacial, and temporal) on the subject and PRO. A disjoint spatial reference between these indices is thought to drive the absence reading. First, we’ll see how Haslinger’s theory achieves this. I will then address the problems with this account and why it should not be extended to German.

3.2.1 An index-based account of Dutch absentives

Haslinger (2007) proposes a structure for the Dutch absentive that relies on a control structure in which the infinitive verb is a nominalization and the absentee reading is generated by virtue of the indices on PRO and the sentential subject. Before arguing that this analysis is not appropriate for German absentives (and perhaps not for Dutch either), I will lay out the Dutch data and claims made about them.

Dutch has an absentee construction very similar to that of German, in which the verb *zijn*, ‘to be’, is followed by an infinitive, as shown in (87)-(88).

- (87) Jan is vissen.
 John is fish.INF
 ‘John is off fishing.’

- (88) Marie is een brief posten.
 Marie is a letter post.INF
 ‘Mary is off posting a letter.’ (Haslinger 2007:11)

Haslinger is primarily concerned with the notion of absence. She attempts to explain where De Groot (2000)’s ‘deictic center’ is and how the addressee knows. A potential hypothesis that she considers (but ultimately rejects) is that the deictic center is the location of the speaker, which may or may not be expressed lexically. Such a theory fails to account for data as in (89), where the subject is not dislocated with respect to the speaker, but from another location. Note that this is true of the German absentive as well.

- (89) Toen Harry de kamer binnenkwam was Snape lunchen. *Dutch*
 when Harry the room entered was Snape lunch.INF
 ‘When Harry entered the room, Snape was off having lunch.’ (Haslinger 2007:16)
- (90) Als Harry den Raum betrat war Snape essen. *German*
 when Harry the room entered was Snape eat.INF
 ‘When Harry entered the room, Snape was off eating.’

To account for these facts, Haslinger claims the absence of the absentive construction constitutes dislocation from the subject’s ‘origo’. She borrows this term from Bühler (1934) where it is used to describe the origin of a coordinate system. The deictic words, *I*, *here*, and *now* point to the origo. Haslinger uses this coordinate system to propose that absentive readings arise when the sentential subject and PRO differ in location. In order to encode this syntactically, she uses indices. Every argument has three variables (x,t,l) , which refer to person (x), time (t) and location (l), respectively.

She then reworks Binding Theory to incorporate these three variables. Principle B, under the new theory, is satisfied when any one of the three variables differs between pronoun and antecedent. In biclausal control constructions, the two distinct TPs necessitate disjoint temporal reference, and (the new version of) Principle B is satisfied. Principle B will also be responsible for the absentive construction, since PRO has these indices as well. However, this theory can only get off the ground if it can be established that the absentive does in fact involve control.

Haslinger outlines eight diagnostics for control versus raising. She finds that four of these fail to disambiguate between control and raising in the case of Dutch absentives. The four that she found effective are discussed in the Appendix. They are (i) fronting, (ii) left dislocation, (iii) *dat*-replacement, and (iv) partial control. Based on these diagnostics, she adopts a control account of the absentive. However, the control account is crucially not a proposal that the absentive is biclausal. Instead, Haslinger argues for a theta-role assigning copula (which she justifies by analogy to the English active *be*, proposed by Partee 1977) whose complement is an infinitival nominal. The analysis of the infinitive as a nominal element is motivated by word order facts we’ll see in the next section.

The absentive reading is thought to arise because PRO and its controller share x and t variables (x because PRO is controlled by the subject, t because the structure is monoclausal), and so the only way for Principle B to be satisfied is disjoint reference in the spacial variable.

3.2.2 Nominalization

Haslinger shows that a characteristic distinguishing whether a participial form of a Dutch verb is adjectival or verbal is its position in dependent clauses. Verbal participles can appear to the left or right of the finite verb whereas adjectival participles can occur only to the left.

- (91) omdat het hek gisteren geverfd is / is geverfd. (verbal)
 because the fence yesterday painted is / is painted
 ‘because the fence was painted yesterday’

(92) omdat het hek al jaren geveerd is / * is geveerd. (adjectival)
 because the fence for years painted is / is painted
 ‘because the fence has been painted for years’

(93) omdat Jan al jaren verliefd is / * is verliefd (adjectival)
 because Jan for years in love is / is in love
 ‘because Jan has been in love for years’

(Haslinger 2007:67)

She suggests that since the infinitive in an absentive construction can occur only to the left (see 94), it must not be verbal in nature. She therefore concludes, despite the verbal properties that the infinitive maintains (e.g. ability to take a full-DP object), it should be thought of as a nominalization.

(94) a. omdat Jan vissen is
 because Jan fish.INF is
 ‘because Jan is off fishing’
 b. *omdat Jan is vissen
 because Jan is fish.INF
 ‘because Jan is off fishing’

(Haslinger 2007:67)

These data have been called into question. Broekhuis (2013) argues that many speakers do not share Haslinger’s judgments on the above pair. Furthermore, he shows that the word order when a direct object is present, the word order in the perfect, and the realization of the IPP effect⁸ in these sentence types all suggest that the infinitive in the Dutch absentive construction is verbal, not nominal in nature.

We saw in § 2.2 that the generalization Broekhuis argues for is true the German absentive – the infinitive is not a nominalization. Based on these data, it’s clear that Haslinger’s theory does not apply straightforwardly to German.

3.2.3 Problems with an index-based account

In the above sections I argued that a nominalization account of absentives is not appropriate for German and likely, based on Broekhuis (2013)’s data, inadequate for Dutch as well. A remaining question is whether Haslinger (2007)’s Binding Theory account of absentives could be made to work without the stipulation that the infinitive is a nominal. The key elements of the theory, after all, are not in the nominalization account of the infinitive, but in (i) the triple of indices, (ii) the modifications to Binding Theory, and (iii) the claim that the absentive is a control construction with one TP. A workable theory of binding-based absence could still be possible if the absentive might contain a (silent) control predicate whose complement is smaller than a TP. Wurmbrand (2003) argues extensively that many predicates do take vP- or VP-sized complements. However,

8. The IPP effect, or *Infinitivus Pro Participio* is a term used to describe a phenomenon in Dutch where a past participle in a clause-final verb cluster surfaces in its infinitival, and not participial form. It is a characteristic of verb clusters and would be unexpected with a nominalized infinitive. See Wyngaerd (1994) or Zwart (2007) for more information on the IPP effect.

the nominalization facts are not the only reason we may wish to reject an index-based approach to the absentive. I will argue here that there are further theoretical problems with the proposal.

Principle B.

Recall that Haslinger proposes a triple of indices, (x, l, t) corresponding to person, location, and time, for every argument in the syntax. The addition of the locative and temporal indices might be justified if the new theory can account for binding effects more elegantly than the old. In particular, Principle B is somewhat streamlined: now it must only state that a pronoun cannot be bound (where ‘bound’ now means having all 3 indices in common) - no stipulations about clause boundaries as binding domains are necessary. What was previously accounted for by the binding domain now follows automatically from the indices. Pronouns in separate clauses from their antecedents are grammatical because of disjoint temporal reference. That is, the coindexing with respect to person of *Harry* and *he* in (95) is possible because the two arguments differ in their temporal index.

(95) $Harry_x$ told him_{*x/y} that he_{x/y} had found an old map.⁹

There is a significant flaw in this reasoning though: (95) would still allow for *Harry* and *he* to refer to the same entity, even if the two clauses didn’t differ temporally. See, for example, (96), in which the reading where Harry is tired at the time of his telling Ron about it (and not at some other time) is in fact the most salient reading.

(96) $Harry_x$ told Ron_y that he_{x/y} was tired.

In this case *Harry* and *he* have all the same indices - person, spacial, and temporal. Under Haslinger’s theory this should be a Principle B violation, and yet it’s perfectly grammatical. The only way out of this predicament that I can imagine would be to say that, given the existence of two distinct clauses (and two distinct tense phrases), the temporal indices can be thought of as disjoint, although they (coincidentally) refer to the same point in time. This stipulation won’t always rescue the derivation, though, as we will see.

PRO.

Haslinger’s theory attempts to explain how absence is encoded in the absentive construction using a few modifications to Binding Theory. First she must stipulate that PRO is subject to Principle B of Binding Theory. Then she argues that since the absentive construction is monoclausal, the PRO subject of the infinitive can’t possibly have a disjoint temporal reference. Since the person and temporal indices are shared between PRO and its controller, the spatial index must differ to avoid a Principle B violation. This would predict that other instances where PRO is not separated from its controller by a TP, absentee readings are generated to satisfy Principle B. This prediction can be tested empirically. Depictive small clauses are traditionally thought to contain a PRO subject (cf Bowers 2003). But, being small clauses, they have no TP projection. Thus the theory predicts that in (97), since PRO shares a person index with *the model* and has no independent

9. For clarity I have written only person indices

TP to guarantee a disjoint temporal index, the spatial index has to be disjoint in order to avoid a Principle B violation, and the sentence has an absentive reading. This is not the case.

(97) John_i painted the model_j [PRO_j nude].

Traces.

Haslinger’s theory also stipulates that traces of movement share all 3 indices with the overt arguments they refer to. This predicts that it should be impossible to have a raising structure in which the matrix clause and the embedded clause differ in temporal reference. This is also a bad prediction – in fact, the possibility of multiple independent temporal modifiers in raising structures is a key argument suggesting they’re biclausal.

(98) Yesterday, John needed to rent your apartment until June, but today he needs it until August.

If we follow the suggestion from the Principle B discussion above that separate TPs necessitate separate temporal indices (even if they accidentally corefer), and we accept Haslinger’s supposition that traces and their referents must share all indices, the theory predicts that raising structures are altogether impossible. This is clearly not valid.

I believe the above examples show that an attempt to shuttle temporal and spatial reference into argument-level indices is misguided and makes no improvements to Binding Theory. Based on these concerns, I conclude that an index-based approach to the absentive along the lines of Haslinger (2007) is not feasible.

3.3 Silent GO

One analysis of the absentive that we might consider is that it corresponds to (100) but with a silent verb corresponding to GO.

(99) Hans ist lesen.
Hans is read.INF
‘Hans is off reading.’

(100) Hans ist lesen gegangen.
Hans is read.INF go.PAST
‘Hans has gone to read.’

This theory has some advantages and was advocated by Abraham (2008). He suggests that, given the semantics of the absentive construction, the possibility of a silent verb of motion is worth pursuing. This theory is corroborated by the fact that *gehen* takes auxiliary *sein* (as opposed to *haben*) in its perfect forms, is semantically “light”, and is one of the few motion verbs in German that can take an infinitival complement.

(101) Er geht / fährt / *tanzt / *schwimmt (nach Konstanz) einkaufen.
He goes / drives / dances / swims (to Konstanz) shop.INF
‘He goes / drives / dances / swims (to Konstanz) to shop.’ (Abraham 2008:371)

Furthermore, silent verbs corresponding to *go* have been proposed for Germanic and Slavic, lending support to this theory. We will see, however, that the semantics of the absentive and that of the *gehen*+infinitive construction are not, in fact, parallel with respect to stativity, and this theory makes incorrect predictions regarding coordination and compatibility with *immer noch* and directional PPs.

3.3.1 Silent GO elsewhere

A silent verb corresponding to *go* has been proposed to account for various structures in Germanic and Slavic. Van Riemsdijk (2002) proposed a silent GO for modal + directional PP constructions in Germanic OV-languages as in (102)-(104).

(102) Die doos kan naar de zolder. *Dutch*
 that box can to the attic
 ‘That box can be put in the attic.’ (Van Riemsdijk 2002:144)

(103) wil mer hetted söle häi *Swiss German*
 because we would’ve had-to home
 ‘because we should’ve gone home’ (Van Riemsdijk 2002:146)

(104) Ich muss nach Berlin. *German*
 I must to Berlin.
 ‘I must go to Berlin.’

Van Riemsdijk evaluates the validity of two competing hypotheses: (i) that the modals are being reanalyzed as lexical verbs, and (ii) that the modals behave as true auxiliaries, and so take a verbal complement with a phonetically unrealized verb. He shows, on the basis of Swiss German word order phenomena, that the second hypothesis better accounts for the data. Based on the meanings of these constructions, the best candidate for the silent verb is GO (or, to be precise, the equivalent of English *go* in each of the relevant languages). Van Riemsdijk also claims that the modal is necessary to structurally license the silent element. The absentive has no modal, and so the silent GO proposed by Van Riemsdijk does not straightforwardly extend to the absentive if we accept the structural licensing condition. However, Marušič and Žaucer (2005) argue for silent GO in a variety of constructions in Slovenian and show that silent elements need not be licensed by particular structural configurations. This finding opens the possibility of a silent GO licensed both by modals, as in Van Riemsdijk (2002) and by *sein* in the context of the absentive.

A challenge for this theory would be to account for (i) why modals can license GO with an overt directional PP but *sein* cannot (see 105) and (ii) why *sein* can license silent GO with an overt infinitive but modals cannot (see 106).¹⁰

10. Note that these predictions assume that the silent lexical item GEHEN has all the forms an overt lexical item has, including both the infinitival form and the *ge-* participial form. We could alternatively suppose that silent items are static in this respect and do not allow for a full range of grammatical forms. This would mean that each form may have entirely different licensing conditions. It also means that Van Riemsdijk’s silent GEHEN has no bearing at all on Abraham’s silent GEGANGEN.

- (105) *Ich bin nach Berlin GEGANGEN
 I am to Berlin GO.PAST
Expected, if silent GO were present: ‘I went to Berlin.’
- (106) Hans muss lesen GEHEN
 Hans must read.INF GO.INF
Expected, if silent GO were present: ‘Hans must go off to read’
Actual: ‘Hans must read.’

3.3.2 Stativity of *ist gegangen*

§ 2.1 showed evidence that the absentive is a stative construction. The *sein*+infinitive+*gegangen* construction is not. It is a present perfect construction containing an eventive verb *gehen*. The proposed parallel that was introduced at the beginning of this chapter is repeated here.

- (107) Hans ist lesen.
 Hans is read.INF
 ‘Hans is off reading.’
- (108) Hans ist lesen gegangen.
 Hans is read.INF go.PAST
 ‘Hans has gone to read.’

Here I wish to make it clear that *ist gegangen* constitutes a present perfect construction of the verb *gehen* (*to go*), equivalent to *has gone*. The use of auxiliary *sein* (*to be*) as opposed to *haben* (*to have*) can be attributed to the fact that *gehen* is an unaccusative predicate. We should resist the temptation to equate *ist gegangen* with English *is gone*, which is presumably composed of the predicative adjective *gone* and the copula, and describes the state that results from having gone. In what follows I attempt to show that *ist gegangen* is not a stative construction.

It’s difficult to use Jóhannsdóttir (2011)’s stativity diagnostics for *ist gegangen* because the construction is already in the perfect. Her tests are designed to distinguish stative predicates from eventive predicates. Here we need to distinguish between a present perfect construction and a stative construction.

The habitual readings diagnostic does not apply here. We saw in 2.1.2 that stative predicates do not have habitual readings in the simple present but eventive ones do. This test cannot be applied to *ist gegangen* because it is a perfect construction. To put it into the simple present would simply test whether *gehen* is stative or eventive. To leave it in the perfect shows us nothing because perfect constructions, like statives, do not have habitual readings.

The sequence of tense diagnostic is difficult to apply. We saw, first, that eventive predicates are impossible in the simple past of an embedded clause (see 32). Again, we can’t test this for *ist gegangen* because it’s in the perfect and to change it to the simple past would test the predicate *gehen* and not the construction. The second component of the diagnostic is that stative predicates in the simple past in an embedded clause are obligatorily interpreted as holding for the event time of the matrix predicate. This we can test. If *ist gegangen* had a stative interpretation corresponding

to *be gone*, we would expect that for (109) to be true, Marie has to be gone at the time of Hans's saying so. This is not the case. The sentence is ambiguous between that reading and one in which Marie has gone and returned before Hans said so. This evidence supports the claim that *ist gegangen* is not stative.

- (109) Hans sagte, dass Marie lesen gegangen war.
 Hans said that Marie read.INF go.PAST was.PAST
 'Hans said that Marie had gone to read.'

The stativity diagnostics are inconclusive. There is some indication that *ist gegangen* is not a stative construction.

3.3.3 *Immer noch*

Jóhannsdóttir (2011)'s diagnostics for stativity are mostly uninformative regarding whether *ist gegangen* has a stative reading corresponding to *is gone* available. Where they are informative, they indicate that the construction is not stative. Here I present additional support for the hypothesis that *gegangen* cannot be used as a result-state adjective like English *gone*. For one thing, if *gegangen* were stative, we might expect modification with *immer noch* (*still*) to be possible. This is not a true diagnostic for stativity since many stative predicates are not compatible with *immer noch*. Kratzer (2000) uses compatibility with *immer noch* to distinguish different types of stative passive predicates. Target state passives, which result from the predicate's action but may or may not last for a long time, are compatible with *immer noch* whereas resultant state passives, which hold perpetually once the predicate's action is completed, are not. If *gegangen* had a stative reading, it would certainly be a target state, so *immer noch* should be possible. We see in (110)-(111) that it is not. This is all the more problematic because the absentive (112) *can* be modified by *immer noch*.

- (110) *Hans ist immer noch gegangen.
 Hans is still go.PAST
 'Hans is still gone.'
- (111) *Hans ist immer noch lesen gegangen.
 Hans is still read.INF go.PAST
 'Hans is still gone to read.'
- (112) Hans ist immer noch lesen.
 Hans is still read.INF
 'Hans is still off reading.'

3.3.4 Directional and locative PPs

Additionally, we see evidence for different analyses of the absentive and *ist gegangen* in the case of locative and directional PPs. *Gehen* is a verb of motion and can therefore be modified by PPs specifying the direction of motion. The perfect form *ist gegangen* can also be modified by directional

PPs. If there were a stative interpretation available, we might expect it to be compatible with locative PPs in addition. This is not the case, as examples (113)-(114) show.¹¹ The absentive has the exact opposite characteristics: directional PPs are impossible whereas locative PPs are possible.¹² It would be very difficult to formulate a silent GO theory that can account for these facts.

- (113) Hans ist in [die Bibliothek] / *[der Bibliothek] gegangen.
 Hans is in [the library].ACC / *[the library].DAT go.PAST
 ‘Hans has gone into the library’
- (114) Hans ist in [die Bibliothek] / *[der Bibliothek] lesen gegangen.
 Hans is in [the library].ACC / *[the library].DAT read.INF go.PAST
 ‘Hans has gone into the library to read.’
- (115) Hans ist in *[die Bibliothek] / [der Bibliothek] lesen.
 Hans is in [the library].ACC / *[the library].DAT read.INF
 ‘Hans is in the library reading.’

3.3.5 Coordination

Finally, I argue that a silent GO analysis is not possible on the basis of coordination facts. The *ist+infinitive+gegangen* construction can be coordinated with other VPs in the perfect. The absentive cannot. If we supposed a silent *gegangen* to be present in the absentive construction, it would be difficult to explain why coordination is impossible.

- (116) Hans war [schwimmen gegangen] und [zurückgekommen] in weniger als einer Stunde.
 Hans was swim.INF go.PAST and back-come.PAST in less than one hour
 ‘Hans went to swim and came back in less than an hour.’
- (117) *Hans war [schwimmen GEGANGEN] und [zurückgekommen] in weniger als einer Stunde.
 Hans was swim.INF GO.PAST and back-come.PAST in less than one hour
 ‘Hans was off swimming and came back in less than an hour.’

The above data show that a silent GO theory of the absentive makes incorrect predictions regarding stativity, compatibility with *immer noch*, locative and directional PPs, and coordination. For these reasons, I conclude that there is no silent GO in the absentive construction.

11. Note that the preposition *in* is a ‘two-way’ preposition. It assigns accusative case to its complement when used to specify direction of motion (as English *into*) and dative case when used to specify location (as English *in*).

12. We will see in the next section that it is not exactly correct to say that the sentence in (115) is an absentive with a locative PP modifier. For the present purposes the key point is that the locative and not the directional PP is licit here.

3.4 Silent AWAY

We saw in the last section that the absentive is compatible with locative PPs. Essentially any locative expression is permissible in the sequence subject+*sein*+locative+infinitive. Most locative expressions are PPs, but *weg* (*away*) is also possible.

- (118) Hans ist in der Bibliothek lesen.
Hans is in the library read.INF
'Hans is in the library, reading.'
- (119) Hans ist am Fluss laufen.
Hans is at-the river run/walk.INF
'Hans is by the river, running / walking'
- (120) Hans ist weg fischen.
Hans is away fish.INF
'Hans is away fishing.'

For lack of a better term, I'll call constructions like in (118)-(120) 'locative-infinitives.' When we first saw these forms, we treated them as absentives with a locative adjunct. However, this is not, strictly speaking, an accurate characterization. To say that the locative-infinitive construction is an absentive with an adjunct commits us to saying locative-infinitives are a subset of absentives. I claim the relation actually goes in the other direction: absentives are a subset of locative-infinitives. Specifically they are locative-infinitives where the locative expression is a silent WEG (*away*). The motivation for flipping the subset relation as I suggest is as follows.

First, speakers who do not accept the absentive construction (as the construction is subject to substantial dialectal variation) do accept the locative-infinitive construction. If the locative-infinitive construction were in fact an absentive with a locative adjunct, this would mean that addition of the adjunct makes the absentive grammatical for those speakers. On the other hand, if the absentive were a locative-infinitive construction with a silent locative expression, those speakers would find the absentive ungrammatical because they do not allow for silent WEG.¹³

Second, it is possible to formulate a locative-infinitive construction with a locative expression that does not require the subject's absence, as in (121). The absentee reading of the absentive construction is an entailment, and can't be cancelled. (122) constitutes a contradiction.

- (121) Hans ist hier lesen.
Hans is here read.INF
'Hans is here reading.'
- (122) # Hans ist lesen. Er ist hier.
Hans is read.INF he is here
'Hans is off reading. He is here.'

13. An interesting question raised by this proposal is whether silent WEG exists elsewhere in German. The theory as I have formulated it predicts that those speakers who do not accept the absentive will also disallow those constructions. Unfortunately I know of no other silent WEG with which to test this prediction.

If the locative-infinitive construction were in fact an absentive with a locative adjunct, it would be very difficult to account for these data. We would essentially need to say that the absentive means that the subject is absent and engaged in the activity denoted by the overt predicate, unless a locative adjunct is present, in which case the absentive means that the subject is at the location denoted by the locative adjunct and engaged in the activity denoted by the overt predicate. This is clearly an inelegant and implausible theory. The silent WEG solution is much better suited to account for these facts.

Based on these facts I conclude that absentives are a subtype of locative-infinitives and not vice versa. One might suggest that the two facts I use to motivate this relationship are also compatible with a view in which neither is a subtype of the other. That is, if absentives and locative-infinitives were different constructions entirely, we could easily account for the facts that (i) some speakers allow locative-infinitives but not absentives and (ii) locative-infinitives can use a non-distant locative. There is overwhelming evidence that they are not simply different constructions, as the next section will demonstrate.

3.4.1 Parallels between absentives and locative-infinitives

I have argued in previous sections that other hypotheses as to the structure of the absentive make incorrect predictions about various characterizations such as control versus raising, stative versus eventive, and nominal versus verbal. The silent WEG hypothesis does not have these weaknesses. As the following data will demonstrate, locative-infinitive constructions and absentive constructions show the same behavior with respect to all of the diagnostics we saw in part 2.¹⁴

Passives.

The interpretation of passives is used as a diagnostic for control versus raising. However, this test cannot be applied to the absentive, since it resists passivization. The ungrammaticality of (123) is therefore uninformative as to whether the absentive involves control or raising.¹⁵ What is clear, though, from (124)-(125) is that locative-infinitive constructions also resist passivization. So although the passivization facts fail to indicate control or raising, they at least show that locative-infinitives and absentives exhibit the same pattern.

- (123) * Ein Insekt ist (von Hans) gegessen werden.
 an insect is (by Hans) eat.PASS become.INF
(intended:) ‘An insect is off being eaten by Hans.’
- (124) * Ein Insekt ist weg (von Hans) gegessen werden.
 an insect is away (by Hans) eat.PASS become.INF
(intended:) ‘An insect is away being eaten by Hans.’

14. Note that I omit tests that were found to be uninformative or to not apply to German.

15. The explanation and application of this diagnostic can be found in the Appendix.

- (125) * Ein Insekt ist im Wohnzimmer (von Hans) gegessen werden.
 an insect is in-the living-room (by Hans) eat.PASS become.INF
 (*intended:*) ‘An insect is in the living room, being eaten by Hans.’

Scope of indefinites.

We saw that the scope of indefinite subjects also yielded inconclusive results with respect to control, but there was reason to believe a low scope reading was impossible for absentives. The same is true of the locative-infinitive construction. None of (126)-(128) allow for a reading corresponding to something like “there is an absence such that there exist some person x such that x reads” (*weg > \exists); they can only mean “some person x is such that x is absent and x reads” (\exists > weg).

- (126) Jemand ist lesen.
 someone is read.INF
 ‘Someone is off reading.’
- (127) Jemand ist weg lesen.
 someone is away read.INF
 ‘Someone is away reading.’
- (128) Jemand ist in der Bibliothek lesen.
 someone is in the library read.INF
 ‘Someone is in the library, reading.’

Selectional restrictions.

The main support for a control account of the absentive came from its selectional restrictions. We can see below that the locative-infinitive construction shares these restrictions.

- (129) a. # Das Gebäude ist einstürzen.
 the building is collapse.INF
 ‘The building is off collapsing.’
- b. # Das Gebäude ist weg einstürzen.
 the building ist away collapse.INF
 ‘The building is away collapsing.’
- c. # Das Gebäude ist in Berlin einstürzen.
 the building ist in Berlin collapse.INF
 ‘The building is in Berlin, collapsing.’

Partial control.

The absentive construction does not allow for collective predicates in conjunction with singular subjects. This suggests that if there is control, it is exhaustive control. The same facts hold for the locative-infinitive construction.

- (130) # Hans ist die Stadt umzingeln
 Hans is the city surround.INF
 ‘Hans is off surrounding the city.’

- (131) # Hans ist weg die Stadt umzingeln
 Hans is away the city surround.INF
 ‘Hans is away surrounding the city.’
- (132) # Hans ist in Berlin die Stadt umzingeln
 Hans is in Berlin the city surround.INF
 ‘Hans is in Berlin, surrounding the city.’

Habitual readings.

Absentives in the present tense do not have a habitual reading available, suggesting they are stative. Locative-infinitives also do not have a habitual reading.

- (133) Hans ist lesen.
 Hans is read.INF
 ‘Hans is off reading’ (present episodic)
 ≠ ‘Hans goes off to read’ (habitual)
- (134) Hans ist weg lesen.
 Hans is away read.INF
 ‘Hans is away reading’ (present episodic)
 ≠ ‘Hans goes away to read’ (habitual)
- (135) Hans ist in der Bibliothek lesen.
 Hans is in the library read.INF
 ‘Hans is in the library, reading’ (present episodic)
 ≠ ‘Hans goes the the library to read’ (habitual)

Sequence of tense.

Absentives in embedded clauses can be interpreted as overlapping in time with the event denoted by the matrix predicate. Again, this suggests stativity. Locative-infinitives allow for this interpretation as well.

- (136) Hans sagte, dass Marie lesen war.
 Hans said that Marie read.INF was.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie was off reading.’
- (137) Hans sagte, dass Marie weg lesen war.
 Hans said that Marie away read.INF was.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie was away reading.’
- (138) Hans sagte, dass Marie in der Bibliothek lesen war.
 Hans said that Marie in the library read.INF was.PAST
 ‘Hans said that Marie was in the library, reading.’

Capitalization.

The infinitive of the absentive construction is preferred in all-lowercase, as opposed to capitalized like a nominal. This is also true of the infinitive of the locative-infinitive.

Post-nominal genitives.

Absentives allow for accusative objects preceding the infinitive, and not genitive objects following it. This suggests that the infinitive is verbal and not nominal. The same is true for the locative-infinitive.

- (139) a. *Sie ist kaufen des Stoffes.
she is buy.INF [the cloth].GEN
b. Sie ist den Stoff kaufen.
she is [the cloth].ACC buy.INF
'She is off buying the cloth.'
- (140) a. *Sie ist weg kaufen des Stoffes.
she is away buy.INF [the cloth].GEN
b. Sie ist weg den Stoff kaufen.
she is away [the cloth].ACC buy.INF
'She is away buying the cloth.'
- (141) a. *Sie ist im Laden kaufen des Stoffes.
she is in-the store buy.INF [the cloth].GEN
b. Sie ist im Laden den Stoff kaufen.
she is in-the store [the cloth].ACC buy.INF
'She is at the store, buying the cloth.'

Compounding.

Absentives can take a full-DP (overt determiner) object, indicating that the object is not being compounded into an infinitival nominal. Locative-infinitives can also take full-DP objects - see (140b) and (141b).

Immer noch.

In § 3.3 we saw that absentives, unlike *gehen*+infinitive constructions, can be modified by *immer noch* (*still*). Locative infinitives can also be modified by *immer noch*.

- (142) Hans ist immer noch lesen.
Hans is still read.INF
'Hans is still off reading.'
- (143) Hans ist immer noch weg lesen.
Hans is still away read.INF
'Hans is still away reading.'
- (144) Hans ist immer noch in der Bibliothek lesen.
Hans is still in the library read.INF
'Hans is still in the library, reading.'

Coordination.

Absentives cannot be coordinated with VPs in the perfect, suggesting there is no silent *gegangen* present. The locative-infinitive also disallows such coordination.

- (145) * Hans war schwimmen und zurückgekommen in weniger als einer Stunde.
Hans was swim.INF and back-come.PAST in less than one hour
'Hans was off swimming and came back in less than an hour.'
- (146) * Hans war weg schwimmen und zurückgekommen in weniger als einer Stunde.
Hans was away swim.INF and back-come.PAST in less than one hour
'Hans was away swimming and came back in less than an hour.'
- (147) * Hans war am See schwimmen und zurückgekommen in weniger als einer Stunde.
Hans was at-the lake swim.INF and back-come.PAST in less than one hour
'Hans was at the lake, swimming and came back in less than an hour.'

Since it is apparent that the locative-infinitive construction behaves the same as the absentive construction, it's reasonable to propose that they are in fact the same construction, and the absentive has a silent locative expression.

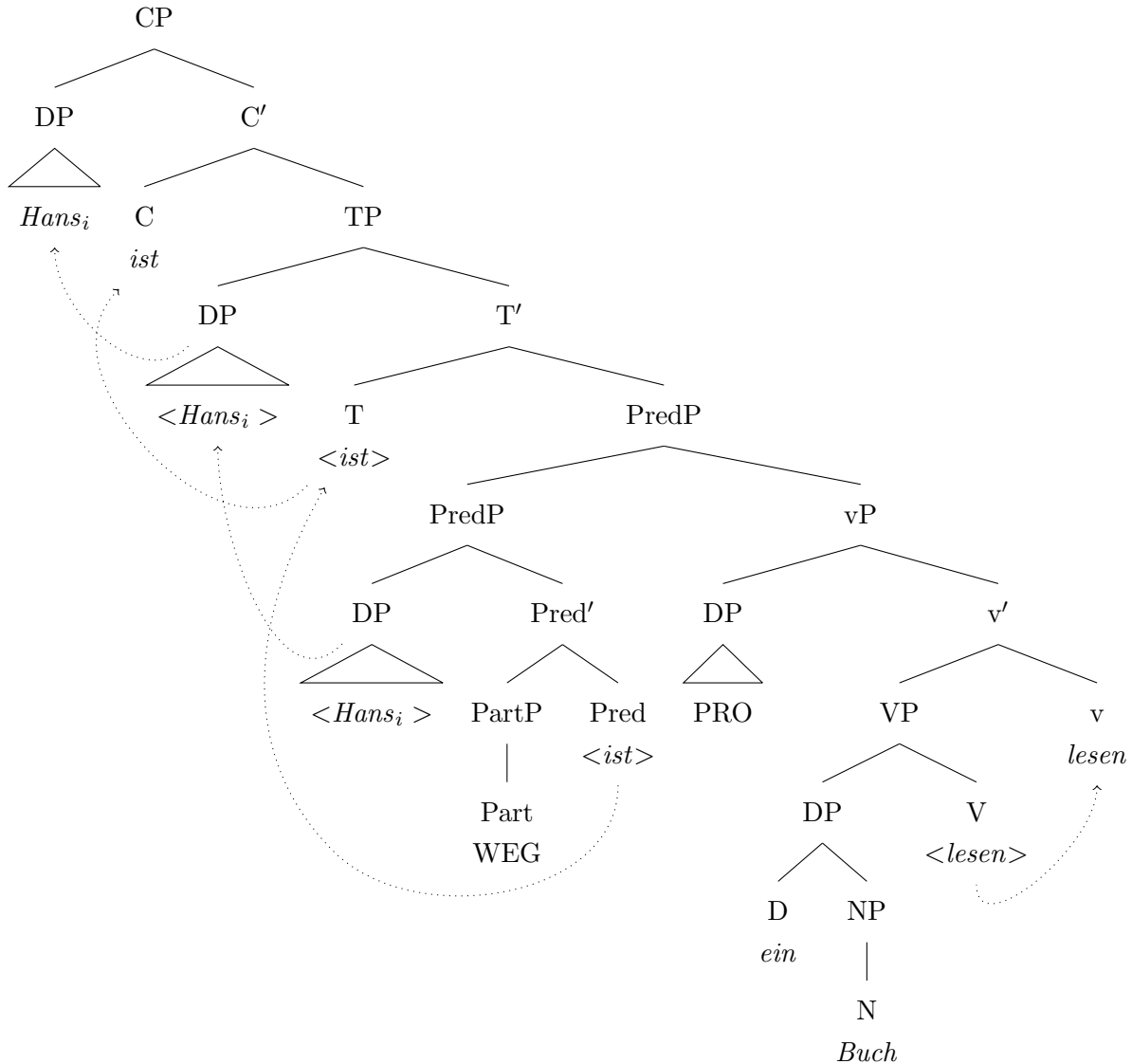
Phonologically null elements have been proposed in the syntactic literature to account for various constructions which, like the absentive, lack an overt representation of a key part of the semantic representation. A few examples of such items include FAILED in the English have/be-yet-to construction (Harves and Myler 2014), MEANT or SUPPOSED in the English be-to construction (Kayne 2012), HAVE as a component of *need* (Ross 1978, Maccawley 1979, Den Dikken, Larson, and Ludlow 1996, and others), FEEL-LIKE in Slavic (Marušič and Žaucer 2004), and many others. I follow Marušič and Žaucer (2005) in supposing that silent elements are part of the lexicon and as such do not require any particular structural configuration beyond their selectional restrictions and those of other elements in the sentence. The key difference is that the listener must figure out that the null element is present based on additional factors in the sentence and context. The licensing of silence is obviously a challenge for syntactic theory beyond the absentive construction.

I have used WEG (*away*) to represent the null element, since it captures the essence of a non-specific non-origo location, but in principle it could be some other locative expression with these characteristics. The choice of a lexical item does not have significant bearing on the theory.

3.4.2 Structural proposal

Having established that the absentive is a particular type of locative-infinitive construction, the obvious follow-up question is what is the structure of the locative-infinitive construction. I propose that it involves a predicative locative PP (or other locative expression) and a depictive small clause. Thus my proposal for *Hans ist lesen* is essentially the following.

- (148) Hans_i ist WEG [_{SC} PRO_i ein Buch lesen]
Hans is AWAY a book read.INF
'Hans is off reading a book.'



This proposal correctly accounts for the fact that the infinitive is verbal and the construction is stative, since the main clause, *Hans ist WEG*, expresses a state relating to Hans - namely, his location. Furthermore, the infinitive is treated as a verbal infinitive and not an event nominalization. The theory also explains why we find *sein* with an infinitival form in the absentive construction (which is unusual, given that auxiliary *sein* is only compatible with *ge-* participial forms). In the absentive, *sein* is not an auxiliary, but a copula, and the infinitive is part of a small clause. The control facts, we saw in § 5.1, are not straightforward. Depictive secondary predicates are classically thought to involve PRO, but this claim is far from uncontroversial (cf Marušič, Marvin, and Žaucer 2003). I leave this question aside.

One important consequence of the structure I propose is that the infinitive (and, in effect, the entire verbal complement) is an adjunct. This makes some predictions about the absentive that we can test. Namely, it predicts that the verbal complement is an island for extraction. This prediction

is in fact borne out, as the following examples demonstrate.

- (149) a. Hans ist weg ein Buch lesen.
Hans is away a book read.INF
'Hans is away reading a book.'
- b. *Was ist Hans weg lesen?
what is Hans away read.INF
'What is Hans away reading?'
- (150) a. Hans ist in der Bibliothek ein Buch lesen.
Hans is in the library a book read.INF
'Hans is in the library, reading a book.'
- b. *Was ist Hans in der Bibliothek lesen?
what is Hans in the library read.INF
'What is Hans in the library reading?'
- (151) a. Hans ist ein Buch lesen.
Hans is a book read.INF
'Hans is off reading a book.'
- b. *Was ist Hans lesen?
what is Hans read.INF
'What is Hans off reading?'

We might wonder why, if the verbal complement is an adjunct, it cannot be dropped. That is, why can't *Hans ist* mean *Hans ist WEG*. This is a valid concern, but I think it can only come down to the fact that the phonological form *Hans ist* does not convey enough information for the listener to infer the silent element, and as Fiengo and Lasnik (1972) demonstrate, non-recoverable silent material cannot be semantically interpreted.

4 Conclusion

This thesis explicated a few key properties of the absentive in German, and evaluated 4 theories as to the structure thereof. This construction involves no overt expression of absence, making its meaning non-compositional, at least from perspective of the surface form. The absentive's use of *sein* (*to be*) along with an infinitive is also surprising, since auxiliary *sein* is only compatible with *ge-* participial forms. Through a number of diagnostics it was demonstrated that the absentive is a stative construction, does not involve a nominalized infinitive, and has some properties associated with control constructions. These facts indicate that the absentive should not be analyzed as structurally parallel to prepositional progressives. We also saw that Haslinger (2007)'s proposal for Dutch absentives should not be extended to German for both empirical and theoretical reasons. Abraham (2008)'s proposal that the absentive contains a silent motion verb corresponding to *go* was also deemed inadequate based on inconsistencies between the absentive and sentences with

overt *go*. Finally, I argued that there is reason to believe a silent locative predicate such as WEG exists in absentive constructions, and the infinitive verb is part of a small clause adjunct. This theory better accounts for the properties of absentive constructions that were discussed throughout than the three alternative theories I addressed.

Further research on the topic is obviously needed, as only a few properties of the construction could be evaluated in depth here. Although a silent WEG theory of the absentive clearly accounts for the data better than the alternatives explored here, some questions about the construction remain. For one, both absentives and the locative-infinitive constructions which I argued they are parallel to disallow passivization. Although the theory articulated here correctly predicts that these two sentence types should exhibit the same behavior with respect to passivization, the syntactic or semantic factors that make passivization impossible have not been explored. In addition, we saw that absentives disallow inanimate or immobile subjects like *the building*. This is somewhat surprising since both the main clause predicate (a locative expression) and small clause predicate do allow such subjects outside of the absentive construction. Additional work on the German absentive is clearly needed in order to determine the underlying characteristics that yield these empirical facts. Another highly relevant question is the extent to which the proposed theory can be applied to Dutch and Hungarian absentives, which are realized similarly. If these languages also allow for something like what I've called a locative-infinitive construction, and if these constructions also show similar behavior to absentives, it may be reasonable to conclude that Dutch and Hungarian also have a silent predicate corresponding to *away*. Beyond this set of languages, the absentive as a cross-linguistic phenomenon remains understudied and not well understood. Typological studies identifying other linguistic features with which the presence/absence of an absentive construction is correlated might help to explain these sentence types. Additionally, the distribution and characteristics of WEG (*away*) should be explored further as part of the ongoing effort to uncover the silent elements that natural language makes use of.

5 Appendix

5.1 Control versus raising

In Section 2 I presented two diagnostics for distinguishing between control and raising and showed that the results of these tests are compatible with a theory of the absentive that involves PRO. Other standard tests for control and raising are addressed here. The following tests are all inconclusive.

5.1.1 Passive

A classic diagnostic for distinguishing control from raising is the truth conditional equivalence of embedded passives. *Plannen* (*to plan*) is a subject control predicate, so it assigns a theta-role to its subject. The two sentences in (152) are therefore not equivalent - in (152a) Hans is the one who plans an eat(insect, Hans) event whereas in (152b) the insect is the one who plans such an event.

- (152) a. Hans_i plant [PRO_i ein Insekt zu essen]. (control)
Hans plans an insect to eat.INF
'Hans plans to eat an insect.'
- b. Ein Insekt_i plant [PRO_i (von Hans) gegessen zu werden].
an insect plans (by Hans) eat.PASS to become.INF
'An insect plans to be eaten by Hans.'

Scheinen (*seem*) is a raising predicate. Its subject originates in the embedded clause and receives no theta-role from the matrix predicate. The two sentences in (153) are therefore truth-conditionally equivalent - both express that it seems that there is an eat(insect, Hans) event.

- (153) a. Hans_i scheint [_{t_i} ein Insekt zu essen]. (raising)
Hans seems an insect to eat.INF
'Hans seems to be eating an insect.'
- b. Ein Insekt_i scheint [_{t_i} (von Hans) gegessen zu werden].
an insect seems (by Hans) eat.PASS to become.INF
'An insect seems to be being eaten by Hans.'

When we apply this test to the absentive, we find that the active and passive constructions are not equivalent. Moreover the passive is ungrammatical and essentially uninterpretable. Absentive constructions are incompatible with the passive.

- (154) a. Hans ist ein Insekt essen. (absentive)
Hans is an insect eat.INF
'Hans is off eating an insect.'
- b. * Ein Insekt ist (von Hans) gegessen werden.
an insect is (by Hans) eat.PASS become.INF
(*intended*.) 'An insect is off being eaten by Hans.'

Since the passive version is uninterpretable, we cannot make claims about its truth conditions. This test is therefore inconclusive.

5.1.2 Fronting

The remaining tests for control versus raising are taken from Haslinger (2007), which found that the canonical diagnostics failed to provide conclusive evidence for the status of Dutch absentives. Haslinger suggests these diagnostics as a means to provide additional evidence for the control account she proposes for Dutch. Here I give the German equivalent for each of these diagnostics.

Haslinger argues that the Dutch absentive patterns with control predicates with respect to the possibility of fronting the verbal complement.

- (155) [PRO_i Het boek te lezen] probeert Jan_i al jaren. (control)
the book to read tries Jan already years
'John has been trying to read this book for years.'
- (156) * [*t_i* Het boek te kennen] schijnt Jan_i. (raising)
the book to know seems Jan
'John seems to know the book'
- (157) [PRO_i Sigaretten halen] was Jan_i zogenaamd. (absentive)
cigarettes get.INF was Jan supposedly
'Supposedly, John was off getting some cigarettes.' (Haslinger 2007:44)

Fronting of the verbal complement seems to not be as productive in German as Haslinger claims it is in Dutch. My informants judged both the control and raising variants to be ungrammatical with a fronted VP (the (b) examples below), and so the test cannot be used to diagnose whether the absentive is a control or raising construction. Interestingly, the absentive example was judged as somewhat better than both the control and raising variants.

- (158) a. Hans_i plant [PRO_i dieses Buch lesen]. (control)
Hans plans this book read.INF
'Hans plans to read this book.'
- b. * [PRO_i Dieses Buch lesen] plant Hans_i.
this book read.INF plans Hans
intended: 'Hans plans to read this book.'
- (159) a. Hans_i scheint [*t_i* dieses Buch zu kennen]. (raising)
Hans seems this book to know.INF
'Hans seems to know this book.'
- b. * [*t_i* Dieses Buch zu kennen] scheint Hans_i.
this book to know.INF seems Hans
intended: 'Hans seems to know this book.'
- (160) a. Hans ist [dieses Buch lesen]. (absentive)
Hans is this book read.INF
'Hans is off reading this book.'

- b. ?? [Dieses Buch lesen] ist Hans.
 this book read.INF is Hans
 ‘Hans is off reading this book.’

5.1.3 Left dislocation

Haslinger claims that left dislocation (LDL) distinguishes between control and raising constructions and can be used as a diagnostic. Van Riemsdijk and Zwarts (1997) describes LDL as a rule by which a DP (for van Riemsdijk, NP) raises into the left periphery and replaced by a pronoun from the class of “d-words” (that is, pronouns that are also used as demonstratives). The embedded clause of a control construction can also be left-dislocated, as in (161). Raising constructions as in (162) do not allow this. The equivalent constituent of the absentive (that is, the infinitive verb along with its object) can be left-dislocated, which Haslinger takes as evidence for control.

- (161) [PRO_i Het boek te lezen], dat probeert Jan_i al jaren. (control)
 the book to read.INF that tries Jan already years
 ‘John has been trying to read this book for years.’
- (162) * [*t_i* Het boek te kennen], dat schijnt Jan_i. (raising)
 the book to know.INF that seems Jan
 ‘John seems to know the book’
- (163) [PRO_i Sigaretten halen], dat was Jan_i zogenaamd. (absentive)
 cigarettes get.INF that was Jan supposedly
 ‘Supposedly, John was off getting some cigarettes.’ (Haslinger 2007:45)

In German, this is not the case. Both control and raising predicates allow for left dislocation of the complement (though one of my informants noted that all sound somewhat unnatural - “like what you might find in a poem.”)

- (164) Dieses Buch lesen, das will Hans. (control)
 this book read.INF that wants Hans
 ‘Hans wants to read this book.’
- (165) Dieses Buch zu lesen, das scheint Hans. (raising)
 this book to know.INF that seems Hans
 ‘John seems to know this book.’
- (166) Dieses Buch lesen, das ist Hans. (absentive)
 this book read.INF that is Jan
 ‘Hans is off reading this book.’

Again, the test is inconclusive.

5.1.4 *Das*-replacement

According to Haslinger, the infinitival complement of a control verb can be pronominalized by *dat* but the complement of a raising verb cannot be.

- (167) Harry probeert een taart te bakken en Ron probeert dat ook. (control)
 Harry tries a cake to bake.INF and Ron tries that too
 ‘Harry is trying to bake a cake and so is Ron’
- (168) *Jan lijkt te scoren en Piet lijkt dat ook. (raising)
 Jan seems to score.INF and Pete seems that also
 ‘It seems that Jan is scoring and Pete seems to do so too.’
- (169) Jan is vissen en Piet is dat ook. (absentive)
 Jan is fish.INF and Pete is that also
 ‘Jan is off fishing and so is Pete.’ (Haslinger 2007:45)

However, in German, there does not appear to be a difference between control and raising verbs in the possibility of the complement being replaced by *das* (the equivalent to Dutch *dat*). The test is therefore uninformative as to the status of the German absentive.

- (170) Harry versucht, einen Kuchen zu backen und Ron versucht das auch. (ctrl)
 Harry tries a cake to bake.INF and Ron tries that too
 ‘Harry is trying to bake a cake and so is Ron’
- (171) Hans scheint zu studieren und Peter scheint das auch. (raising)
 Hans seems to study.INF and Peter seems that also
 ‘It seems that Hans studies and Peter seems to do so too.’
- (172) Hans ist studieren und Peter ist das auch. (absentive)
 Hans is study.INF and Peter is that also
 ‘Hans is off studying and Peter is too.’

5.1.5 Partial control

Haslinger argues that, if the absentive is a control construction, we might expect it to allow for partial control - that is, the matrix subject controls a lower PRO subject that refers to additional entities as well. If partial control is possible, we can conclude that the construction is a control construction. If not, it could be a raising construction or an exhaustive control construction. The use of collective predicates (which are ungrammatical with singular subjects) allows us to distinguish these three types.

- (173) ? Jan omsingelde de stad om 6 uur. (singular subj.)
 Jan surrounded the city at 6 o'clock
 ‘Jan surrounded the city at 6 o'clock.’
- (174) ? Jan_i probeerde om 6 uur [PRO_i de stad te omsingelen]. (exhaustive control)
 Jan tried at 6 o'clock the city to surround
 ‘Jan tried to surround the city at 6 o'clock.’
- (175) Jan_i wilde om 6 uur [PRO_{i+} de stad te omsingelen]. (partial control)
 Jan wanted at 6 o'clock the city to surround
 ‘Jan wanted to surround the city at 6 o'clock.’

(Haslinger 2007:50)

She shows that the Dutch absentive is compatible with collective predicates, as in for example (176), and takes this as evidence that the construction involves control.

- (176) De koning_i is PRO_{i+} de stad omsingelen.
 the kind is the city surround.INF
 ‘The king is off to surround the city.’

Applying the test to German, we see that, like in Dutch, singular subjects are incompatible with collective predicates, raising does not allow for partial control, and some control predicates allow for partial control while others do not.

- (177) ?Hans umzingelte die Stadt. (singular subj.)
 Hans surrounded the city
 ‘Hans surrounded the city.’
- (178) ?Hans_i scheint [_{t_i} die Stadt zu umzingeln]. (raising)
 Hans seemed the city to surround
 ‘Hans seemed to surround the city.’
- (179) ?Hans_i plant [PRO_i die Stadt zu umzingeln]. (exhaustive control)
 Hans planned the city to surround
 ‘Jan planned to surround the city.’
- (180) Hans_i befürwortet [PRO_{i+} die Stadt umzingeln]. (partial control)
 Jan approved the city surround
 ‘Jan approved of surrounding the city.’

German absentives, however, are incompatible with singular subjects and collective predicates.

- (181) ?Hans ist die Stadt umzingeln
 Hans is the city surround.INF
 ‘Hans is off surrounding the city.’

This finding indicates that the absentive does not allow for partial control. This is not evidence that there isn’t control at all, since many control predicates do not allow for partial control (Stiebels 2007 suggests that partial control is in fact very rare in German). The test is inconclusive.

5.1.6 Results of the diagnostics

I summarize the results of the diagnostics as follows. It’s clear from these data that classifying the absentive as a control or raising construction is not a straightforward task.

	Raising	Control	Absentive
Passive	✓	✗	-
Idioms	-	-	-
Fronting	✗	✗	✗
Left dislocation	✓	✓	✓
<i>Das</i> -replacement	✓	✓	✓
Partial control	✗	✓/✗	✗

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