

The Ablative Absolute in Latin and the Locative Absolute in Sanskrit

ラテン語の奪格別句とサンスクリット語の地格別句

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Abstract

According to Macdonell(1927, p.198-199), "The Locative is the usual absolute case in Sanskrit, and has much the same general application as...the Lat. ablative absolute...", but careful examination reveals that the contexts in which each of these constructions are used show considerable dissimilarities.

In this paper I would like to propose that in Latin sentences with an ablative absolute, there is less tendency to have the same subject for more than one predicates, while in Sanskrit sentences with a locative absolute, the preferred style is to unify the subject. Although this is not a quantitative study, the point will be made by displaying numerous and typical examples, which I believe are not brought out in an ad hoc manner.

Keywords: Ablative Absolute, Locative absolute, Subject, Agent,
Complex sentence, Latin, Sanskrit, Indo-European

概 要

Macdonell(1927, p.198-199)によれば、「サンスクリット語においては、別句に通常使用される格は地格であるが、その用法はラテン語の奪格別句とほぼ同様である」とされるが、それぞれの別句が使用される場所は、かなり異なっているようである。この小論では、奪格別句を含むラテン語文では同一の主語を複数の熟語に対応させないことが多いが、一方、地格別句を含むサンスクリット語文では複数の熟語に対して主語を統一する傾向があることを指摘する。数量研究ではないが、多数の典型的な例によって論点を明示してみたい。

キーワード：奪格別句、地格別句、主語、動作主、複文、ラテン語、サンスクリット語、
インドヨーロッパ語

Introduction

Every language has some devices to connect sentences to make a longer sentence. In English, two sentences can be connected by a conjunction (John stood up and looked out of the window), by a participle (Standing up, John looked out of the window), or by a relative pronoun (John, who stood up, looked out of the window). In older Indo-European languages in which functions of a noun was expressed by declension, this conjoining was often accomplished by what are called "absolute constructions". The actual case that makes up such a construction varies: it is the ablative in Latin, the locative in Sanskrit, and the genitive in Greek. It is often explained in the former study, as I mentioned above in the abstract, that these are essentially the same sentential structures except that the case employed is different from one language to another. In what follows I will examine the uses of the ablative absolute in Latin and the locative absolute in Sanskrit, and attempt to point out a difference in their inner grammatical structures. While both of these languages use a participle in their absolute constructions, the subject of the participle is often the same as that of the main clause in Latin, while it is not in Sanskrit.

The "absolute" construction of a language may be regarded as a way to embed a subordinate clause into the main clause. Latin uses the ablative case for this, and Sanskrit the locative. Besides the similarity of this syntactic function in these absolute constructions, there is also a formal correspondance observed between the constituents in these structures. As has been indicated by a number of grammarians, the verb of this construction is put in the form of a participle. Wheelock (1963, p.111) explains of the ablative absolute: "In Latin a noun (or a pronoun) and a participle agreeing with it are often put in the ablative case..." Macdonell's (1927, p.199) account for the locative absolute of Sanskrit is this: "The predicate of the absolute loc(ative) is practically always a participle..." Whitney (1924, p.102) further says, "The normal condition of the absolute construction is with a participle accompanying the noun..." .

Being a construction consisting of a participle (which is usually passive¹), the agent of the action shown by the participle (which corresponds to the verb in the subordinate clause in the complex sentence) is not usually expressed. As a result, this agent has to be either supplied by the context, inferred by the reader, or simply left unnoticed. Look at an example in Latin:

(1) His rebus auditis, coepit timere.
these things heard began (to) fear
abl.pl. < < 3.pl. inf.
"These things having been heard, he/she began to fear (be afraid)."

In (1), it can be unclear if these things were heard by a number of people including "he/she" (in translation), or by "he/she" alone. It also seems that the speaker who uttered "these things" is not considered significant. But this point can be made for the passive construction of modern English as well.

Notice, however, it is easy to express the content of sentence (1) with the same participle in the nominative case:

(2) Has res audiens, coepit timere.
these things heard began (to) fear
acc.pl. < nom.sg. 3.pl. inf.
"Having heard these things, he began to fear."

It is often suggested in the modern grammar books of English that a complex sentence is easier to understand if the subject of the subordinate clause is the same as that of the main clause, but this is definitely not the only preferred style in Latin. We will see more examples of Latin sentences in the next section.

The Ablative Absolute in Latin

We find in Latin numerous instances such as (1) in the contexts where we would in English use the active voice for the verb in the subordinate clause (so as to make the subject predicated by the verb of the main clause as well). Observe the following sentences in which the agent of the verb of the ablative absolute (designated by brackets[]) is the same as the agent of the verb of the main clause.

(3) Eisdem temporibus Persarum rex Dareus,
that-same time Persians' king Darius
abl.pl. < gen.pl. nom.sg. <
"About the same time, Darius, king of Persia,

[ex Asia in Europam exercitu traiecto],
from Asia into Europe army transported
prep. abl.sg. prep. acc.sg. abl.sg. <
when he transported his army from Asia into Europe,

Scythis bellum inferre decrevit.
 Scythians war bring in decided
 dat.pl. acc.sg. inf. pft.3.sg.
 decided to make war upon the Scythians.
 (Nepos, *Miltiades* 3)³

- (4) [Hac re audita], barbarus,
 this thing heard barbarian
 abl.sg. < < nom.sg.
 "Having heard this, the barbarian,

nihil doli subesse credens,
 nothing trick be under(concealed in) believing
 indecl. gen.sg. inf. nom.sg.
 not suspecting any trick to be hidden under it,

postridie alienissimo sibi loco,
 the day after most unfavourable for himself place
 abl.sg. abl.sg. dat.sg. abl.sg.
 in a place most unfavourable for himself,

contra opportunissimo hostibus
 on the contrary most advantageous for the enemy
 adv. abl.sg. dat.pl.
 and (on the contrary) most advantageous for the enemy,

adeo angusto mari conflixit...
 so(to such a degree) narrow sea battled(fought)
 adv. abl.sg. < pft.3.sg.
 engaged in battle in such a narrow piece of sea (strait)...
 (Nepos, *Themistocles* 4)

- (5) [His rebus cognitis]
 these things known
 abl.pl. < <
 "When he (Caesar) knew these things

Caesar Gallorum animos verbis confirmavit
 Caesar Gauls mind words comforted
 nom.sg. gen.pl. acc.pl. abl.pl. pft.3.sg.
 Caesar comforted the Gauls' feelings with his words

pollicitusque est⁴ sibi eam rem
promised-and to himself this thing
pft.3.sg. indecl. dat.sg. acc.sg. <
and promised that this matter

curae futuram:
concern to be
dat.sg. fut.act.ppl.
is to be of his concern:

magnam se habere spem
great himself have hope
acc.sg. acc.sg. inf. acc.sg.
(he said) he had great hope

et beneficio suo et auctoritate
and kindness his own and authority
indecl. abl.sg. < indecl. abl.sg.
by his kindness and his authority

adductum Arioivistum finem iniuriis facturum.
led Arioivistus end outrage to make
past ppl. acc.sg. acc.sg. dat.pl. fut.act.ppl.
induced Arioivistus would stop his outrages."
(Caesar, *Bellum Gallicum* 1.33.)

- (6) [Hac oratione habita] concilium dimisit.
this speech had convention dismissed
abl.sg. < < acc.sg. pft.3.sg.
"Having made this speech, he(Caesar) dismissed the convention."
(Caesar, *ibid.*)

In (3), an ablative absolute is inserted in the clause *Dareus...decrevit*. The literal translation of [ex Asia in Europam exercitu traiecto] is "the army having been transported from Asia into Europe". Thus, the original Latin sentence has two different subjects for the two actions whose agents are the same (*Dareus*). We would have the same subject (*Dareus*) for this inserted clause if we simply convert the words *exercitu traiecto* into *exercitum*(acc.sg.) *traicens*(pres.ppl.nom.sg.). Likewise in (4), the phrase [Hac re audita] meaning "This thing having been heard" could be *Hanc*(acc.sg.) *rem*(acc.sg.) *audiens*(pres.ppl.nom.sg.) to make the subject the same (*barbarus*). Perhaps, however, the present active participle was avoided because there follows another one (*credens*), although such accumulation of the participles is, as

we will see shortly, common in Sanskrit.

Sentence (6) immediately follows (5). In this short passage from *Bellum Gallicum*, we find two instances in question. In (5), the ablative absolute [*His rebus cognitis*] means "These things having been known", and the agent of the action of knowing is the same as the subject of the main clause (Caesar). (6) has an ablative absolute which contains an action which is hardly passive in sense. Its literal translation would thus become very odd in English: "This speech having been made (by himself), Caesar dismissed the convention." This sentence almost sounds like there is another person besides Caesar who had made a speech.⁵

The Indeclinable Participle and the Locative Absolute in Sanskrit

We have just observed that in Latin the actions performed by the same agent in a sentence are often predicated by the passive and the active verbs, generating a sentence having different subjects for them. In the same grammatical context, however, it is definitely preferred to have the same and single subject in Sanskrit. Some typical examples follow, in which the participles in question are put in the brackets:

- (7) vish'vaasam taavat utpaadayaami
trust first win
acc.sg. indecl. pres.1.sg.
"First I (will) win his trust

iti [aalocya] [upasr'tya] abraviit.⁶
so having thought having approached said
indecl. indecl.ppl. indecl.ppl.⁷ impft.3.sg.
having so thought and approached, he (jackal) said."
(Hitopadesh'a, *The Deer, Jackal and Crow*)

- (8) tam ca duure [dr's't'vaa] gardabhah
that and (from) distance having seen ass
acc.sg. indecl. adv. indecl.ppl. nom.sg.
"Having seen that from the distance, the ass,

gardabhii iyam iti [matvaa]
she-ass this so having thought
nom.sg. < indecl. indecl.ppl.
having thought that this (was) an she-ass,

sh'abdam [kr'vaanas]
noise(cry) making
acc.sg. pres.ppl.nom.sg.
raising his voice,

tadabhimukham dhaabitah.⁸
that-direction ran
adv. past act.ppl.nom.sg.
ran toward that direction.
(Hitopadesh'a, *The Washer's Ass*)

In (7), the three actions involved in it have the same subject, which is the jackal (*sr'gaala* in the preceding sentence in the original text). The indeclinable participles *aalocya* and *upasr'tya* are active in meaning and simply put before the finite verb *abraviit*. The three participles in (8), *dr's't'vaa*, *matvaa*, and *kr'vaanas*, each making up a clause to describe in the active voice an action of the ass, again have the same subject.

The locative absolute of Sanskrit, which corresponds to the ablative absolute of Latin, is mainly used when the agent of the main clause is different from that of the subordinate clause. In the next example, the agent of the subordinate clause is *savitri* "the sun", while that of the main clause is *mr'gajambukau* "the deer and the jackal"

(9) tatah astam gate savitari
then home gone the sun
indecl. acc.sg. past act.ppl.loc.sg. loc.sg.
"Then, when the lordly sun set

bhagavati mariicimaalini
lordly garland of rays
loc.sg. <
who has the garland of rays,

mr'gasya vaasabhuumim prati
deer's home toward
gen.sg. acc.sg. prep.
(translation in the following line)

mr'gajambkau gatau
the deer and the jackal went
nom.dual. past act.ppl.nom.dual
the deer and jackal went toward the deer's home."
(Hitopadesh'a, *The Deer, Jackal and Crow*)

The Ablative Absolute for Periphrastic Expressions

It seems to make sense to put a subordinate clause into an absolute construction when its agent is not the same as that of the main clause. In this case, this clause works as an explanatory phrase providing some additional information such as a situation, condition, or description of a preceding action. It is not clear why an ablative absolute is so frequently used in Latin when there is a single agent in a sentence. A possible explanation is that it may be used to make a periphrastic expression. In the following example, it is possible to take the expressions in the ablative absolute to be periphrastic ways to describe Xerxes' destroying and killing.

- (10) At Xerxes, [Thermopylis expugnatis],
and then Xerxes Thermopylae destroyed
indecl. nom.sg. abl.pl. <
"And then Xerxes, having assaulted Thermopylae

protinus accessit astu, idque,
right on came up to city it-and
adv. pft.3.sg. indecl. acc.sg.- indecl.
came up to the city (Athens) and (it)
(id "it" is the object of delevit "destroyed" below)

[nullis defendentibus],
no one defending
abl.pl. <
as no one defended himself/herself,

[interfectis sacerdotibus] quos
killed priests whom
abl.pl. < acc.pl.
having killed the priests

in arce invenerat,
in citadell had found
indecl. abl.sg. plupft.3.sg.
whom he had found in the citadell,

incendio delevit.
fire destroyed
abl.sg. pft.3.sg.
destroyed it (the city of Athens) by fire."
(Nepos, *Themistocles* 3)

The first instance of the ablative absolute, [*Thermopylis expugnatis*], is here preceded by the subject of the main clause before it is predicated by any verbal expression. This once again shows strong inclination to make use of this construction in this language. But this and the following [*interfectis sacerdotibus*] both involve a violent action, and this could be why such roundabout ways of description are employed. The second instance in this sentence, [*nullis defendentibus*], on the other hand, has its own subject.

Conclusion

We have seen that in Latin the action(s) of the agent may be put in the ablative absolute construction(s) if there are more than one action involved in a statement. This syntactic device is so frequently and freely used that it is no exaggeration to regard it as an optional way to connect clauses. But in some sentences, it is perhaps used to make a periphrastic expression. Sanskrit, on the other hand, quite straightforwardly lines up the actions in a sentence with indeclinable participles. The locative absolute construction is ordinarily used when the agent of the action in it is different from the agent of the main clause.

The existence of the intransitive passive construction (see Isoe(2001)) and its frequent use in Sanskrit indicates that this language does have a tendency to use periphrastic expressions as the needs arise. The locative absolute construction, however, does not seem to serve for this purpose. Consecutive actions of the same agent are usually expressed by the finite forms and/or indeclinable participles.

Another point I would like to make, in concluding this paper, is that the intrinsic function of the case is more clearly observed in the Sanskrit locative absolute than in the Latin ablative absolute. If the essential meaning of the locative case is "at" or "in", it adequately gives the meaning of "in such and such a situation or condition" to the phrase which is put in the locative absolute. On the other hand, the phrases in the ablative absolute in Latin quite frequently fails to convey such ideas as "by this incident", "for this reason", or "from this", as we might expect from the fundamental senses of "by" or "from" of the ablative case. It seems that the ablative absolute is used with less restrictions in Latin.

Notes

- 1 If the participle modifies the subject of the main clause, it must be in the nominative case, and so the ablative absolute construction cannot be used. For example, in the following sentence, the present participle *videntes* agrees with the subject of the main clause, *milites*, and it does not make an ablative absolute.
Hostes videntes, milites gaudebant.
enemies seeing soldiers rejoiced
acc.pl. nom.pl. nom.pl. imp.3.pl.
"Seeing the enemies, the soldiers rejoiced."
- 2 The pronominal subjects are, just as in modern Italian and Spanish, often omitted in Latin. It has been often explained that this is possible by virtue of the fact that the persons and numbers are expressed by the verb endings, but that the omission of the subject is quite possible without such information given by the verb of the sentence is easily seen in the Japanese language in which the verbs are not conjugated according to person, number or gender.
- 3 It is customary to mention the author and the "chapter" number of the book in a citation from a Latin classical text.
- 4 This is a deponent verb; its form is passive, but the meaning is active. The phrase *pollicitus est* is literally "is promised", but it means "promised" (in the active sense).
- 5 It should be noted that, as is the case in (3), (4), and (5), the subject of the main clause is placed immediately after the ablative absolute in numerous other instances in Latin.
- 6 In this paper, the Indian alphabet is written by the English letters which are found on any ordinary (English) typing keyboard.
(1) The long vowels are written in double letters, e.g.: long *a* = *aa*.
(2) Retroflex sounds have an apostrophe with them, e.g.: *t'*, *d'*, and so on (but *r'* is the vowel *r*).
(3) Palatal *s* (*sh*) is written *sh'*. This is to distinguish it from the two separate letters *s* and *h*.
- 7 "Indeclinable participle" according to Macdonell(1927, p.201). This is sometimes called "gerund" as Macdonell also indicates.
- 8 The original sentences of the examples in this work are written in the forms in which all possible phonological rules (called "Sandhi") have been applied. They have been broken into separate words in my example sentences. (e.g. the original of (7): *vish'vaasantaavadutpaadayaamiityaalocyopasr'tyaabraviit.*)

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