

Aspects of the history of Absolute Constructions in English

In this presentation, I will sketch the development of the Absolute Construction in the history of English. The Absolute Construction (AC) is typically a non-finite construction consisting of a nominal and a verbal head (participle). Two types can be distinguished: augmented ACs (1-2) and unaugmented ACs (3).

- (1) *Ðæt Mercna mægð, ofslegenum [DAT.SG] Pendan [DAT.SG] hyra cyninge [DAT.SG],
Cristes geleafan onfengon.* (OEBede, Index, 850-900)
'The Mercians received Christ's faith, when their king Pendan was slain.'
- (2) The dean turned and went out, his gown billowing in the wind. (Kortmann 1995: 193)
- (3) Well, B. Deane preached not that day; whereupon John stands in a corner, with boyes flocking about him, and begins to preach himselfe, holding up his muckender for his booke, and reads his text. (Nest of Ninnies, 1608).

After briefly looking at the question whether ACs in Old English are loans from Latin or of Germanic origin, I will pay particular attention to (i) the structural extension/expansion of augmented as well as unaugmented ACs (in terms of the increasing choice of possible heads), and (ii) their increasing semantic versatility and concomitant generalization of the augmentor *with*. It will be argued that the augmentor *with* has grammaticalized showing host-class expansion and semantic-pragmatic expansion (Himmelman 2004). It will also be examined to what extent the development of ACs can be regarded as a case of grammatical constructionalization (cf. Trousdale 2012).