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THEMATIC ARTICLE

Absolutive case assignment as a root phenomenon in Inuktitut

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Abstract
For the Inuit language, it is often claimed that verbal agreement occurs in the CP-domain, as it is sensitive to clause type, and that absolutive case assignment is connected to verbal agreement, because one argument always bears this case in any verbal construction. These claims are strengthened by the fact that absolutive arguments are often assumed to move to the CP-domain, since they obligatorily take wide scope over sentence-level operators like negation, and are interpreted as sentential or aboutness topics. Yet, absolutive case is also assigned in certain nominalized clauses, which lack verbal agreement. In this article, we analyze gerund and participial constructions in Inuktitut to determine the contexts in which absolutive case is assigned. We argue that absolutive case is not assigned through verbal agreement but is nevertheless tied to the CP-domain. More precisely, we claim that absolutive case is assigned in any clause endowed with illocutionary force and hence projecting ForceP bundled with TopP, which we assume is responsible for absolutive case assignment. We conclude that the assignment of absolutive case is a root phenomenon in the language, as it requires the clausal left periphery.

Keywords: Inuktitut; absolutive case; left periphery; topicality; root phenomenon

Résumé
Dans la langue inuite, il est souvent tenu pour acquis que l'accord verbal se fait dans le domaine CP, puisque cet accord est sensible au type de proposition, et que l'assignation du cas absolutif est liée à l'accord verbal, puisqu'un argument reçoit nécessairement ce cas dans toute construction verbale. Ces hypothèses sont renforcées par le fait qu'il est souvent présumé que les arguments absolutifs doivent se déplacer vers le domaine CP, étant donné qu'ils prennent obligatoirement une portée large sur les opérateurs propositionnels comme la nègation, et qu'ils sont interprétés comme des topiques phrastiques ou des topiques d'à-propos. Cependant, on constate que le cas absolutif est également assigné dans certaines propositions nominalisées, qui ne présentent pas d'accord verbal. Dans cet article, nous analysons les constructions gérondives et participiales en inuktitut afin de déterminer

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les contextes dans lesquels le cas absolutif est assigné. Nous proposons que le cas absolutif n'est pas assignè par l'accord verbal, mais qu'il reste néanmoins lié au domaine CP. Plus précisément, nous avançons que le cas absolutif est assigné dans toute proposition dotèe d'une force illocutoire, projetant ainsi une projection ForceP fusionnée avec une projection TopP, que nous considérons comme responsable de l'assignation du cas absolutif. Nous concluons que l'assignation du cas absolutif relève des phénomènes typiquement associès aux propositions principales — ce que l'on appelle en anglais des root phenomena — puisqu'elle requiert une structure syntaxique associèe à la périphérie gauche des propositions principales.

Mots-clés: inuktitut; cas absolutif; périphérie gauche; topicalité; phénomènes de proposition principale

1 Introduction

The morphosyntactic alignment in all Inuit varieties is standardly described as ergative-absolutive.[1] Transitive objects and intransitive subjects are both marked with absolutive case (which is null in the singular), regardless of the unergative/unaccusative status of the verb, while transitive subjects are marked with ergative case, as shown with the Inuktitut examples in (1a–c).[2]

(1) Ergative-absolutive morphosyntactic alignment (NI)

a. Miali-**up** Jaani nalli-gi-**vanga** TRANSITIVE
Mary-ERG.SG John(ABS) love-TR-IND.3SG>3SG
'Mary loves John.'

b. Miali aannia-**vuq** UNACCUSATIVE
Mary(ABS) be.sick-IND.3SG
'Mary is sick.'

c. Miali ani-**vuq** UNERGATIVE
Mary(ABS) leave-IND.3SG
'Mary left.'

Note also that absolutive and ergative arguments are co-indexed on the verb with verbal inflection, which explains why verbal inflection displays a pattern of double agreement in (1a) but, conversely, single agreement in (1b–c). As a consequence, there seems to be

[1]Abbreviations: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, ABL = ablative case, ABS = absolutive case, ACT = active, ALL = allative case, ANTIP = antipassive, CONT = contingent mood, CTMP = contemporative mood, DEM = demonstrative, DIST = distant, DS = different subject, ERG = ergative case, GEN = genitive case, GER = gerund, IND = indicative mood, INT = interrogative mood, LOC = locative case, MOD = modalis case, NEG = negation, PART = participle, PASS = passive, PERF = perfective aspect, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PROG = progressive aspect, PST = past tense, REC = recent, REFL = reflexive, SG = singular, TR = transitivizer.

[2]Unless specified otherwise, the new data presented in this article was collected through grammatical judgements from two Nunavik Inuktitut speakers or recordings conducted in Mittimatalik, where North Baffin Inuktitut is spoken. Examples in Nunavik Inuktitut are annotated '(NI)' and those in North Baffin Inuktitut '(NB)'. This research was financially supported by the Canada Research Chair in Knowledge and Transmission of the Inuit language, held by Richard Compton. We also thank two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

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a one-to-one correlation between structural case assignment and verbal agreement.[3] And as demonstrated in (2a–c), with examples analogous to those in (1a–c), verbal inflection in transitive constructions cannot alternatively bear single agreement, nor can intransitive subjects be marked with ergative instead of absolutive.

(2) Correlation between structural case assignmentand verbal agreement (NI)

a. *Miali-up Jaani nalli-gi-**vuq** TRANSITIVE
Mary-ERG.SG John(ABS) love-TR-IND.3SG
Intended: 'Mary loves John.'

b. *Miali-**up** aannia-vuq UNACCUSATIVE
Mary-ERG.SG be.sick-IND.3SG
Intended: 'Mary is sick.' (NI)

c. *Miali-**up** ani-vuq UNERGATIVE
Mary-ERG.SG leave-IND.3SG
Intended: 'Mary left.'

An important theoretical point for the analysis below is the growing consensus in the literature that verbal agreement across all Inuit varieties occurs in the CP-domain, as it is sensitive to clause type (see Johns 2007, Spreng 2012, Compton 2018, Yuan 2018, Carrier 2021). In fact, it is also often argued that ergative and absolutive arguments must move to the CP-domain (see Compton 2018, Carrier 2021).[4] One reason for this assumption is that they are both systematically interpreted with wide scope over sentence-level operators like negation (see Bittner 1987, 1994; Wharram 2003; Branigan and Wharram 2019).[5] A second reason is that absolutive arguments are interpreted as sentential or aboutness topics (see Berge 2011, Johns and Kučerová 2017, Carrier 2021), which is a discursive feature also argued to be part of the CP-domain (see Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007; Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010; Miyagawa 2017, 2022).[6]

Yet, positing that verbal agreement in Inuktitut is responsible for absolutive case assignment is problematic, as absolutive arguments can also be found in certain nominalized constructions, which lack verbal agreement. For example, Beach (2012)

[3]But see Yuan (2018, 2022), who analyzes absolutive case as a default case and ergative case as a dependent case, and Spreng (2012), who treats the ergative case as an inherent case. Below, we give evidence against the idea that absolutive case should be considered a default case in the language.

[4]While there seems to be a strong consensus that absolutive arguments systematically move to the left periphery of the clause in Inuktitut, some authors do not assume that ergative arguments must also move there (see Spreng 2012; Yuan 2018, 2022). However, it is not clear to us how ergative arguments would always be interpreted with wide scope if they did not also move over sentence-level operators, as explained in the following sentence.

[5]Bittner (1994) reports that ergative arguments in Kalaallisut can also receive a narrow-scope interpretation, not found in Inuktitut (see Wharram 2003), which we attribute to dialectal variation. Separately, Wharram (2003) and Branigan and Wharram (2019) account for wide scope through choice functions rather than syntactic movement.

[6]Berge (2011) and Carrier (2021) claim that ergative arguments are also topicalized and correspond to 'global' or 'familiar' topics, respectively, which would suggest that ergative arguments should also move to the CP-domain to check some discursive feature associated with their interpretation as topicalized arguments.

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observes that absolutive arguments surface in some gerund constructions, nominalized with the morpheme *-niq*, as shown in (3).[7]

(3) Gerund constructions with an absolutive argument

a. [Jaani ani-nngi-**ni**[8]**-nga-ni**] niri-laur-tunga[9]
[John(ABS) leave-NEG-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-LOC] eat-PST-PART.1SG
'I ate before John left.'

b. qanilligia-rqau-jugut [Suusi taku-tsia-ruma-**ni-nga-nut**]
go.closer-REC.PST-PART.1PL [Sue(ABS) see-well-want-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-ALL]
'We went close as Sue wanted to see better.'

(Beach 2012: 280, 282)

More precisely, the subjects *Jaani* 'John' and *Suusi* 'Sue' in the two gerund constructions above are absolutive, even though the gerunds bear nominal agreement, as shown with the possessive agreement marker *-nga* in both examples, followed by different case markers (i.e., locative case and allative case, respectively).

Absolutive arguments may also surface in other nominalized constructions. For example, consider the participial construction in (4), nominalized with the passive participle *-jaq/-taq*.[10]

(4) Participial construction with an absolutive argument (NI)
Context: Someone asks Clara who she talked to on the phone. She replies:
Pauli uqauti-gi-**ja-vini-ra**
Paul(ABS) talk.to-TR-PASS.PART-former/old-POSS.1SG>3SG(ABS)
'Paul (is) who I talked to.'

In (4), the argument *Pauli* 'Paul' is absolutive even though the following passive participle form bears nominal agreement, as shown with the possessive agreement marker *-ra*. Moreover, notice the morpheme *-viniq* 'former/old' (interpreted here as the past tense) attached after the passive participle *-jaq*. This morpheme can only attach to nominal bases, as illustrated in (5).

[7]The glossing of all examples from Inuit varieties that are from external sources have been uniformized to help in their comparison. Any errors are ours.

[8]The last consonant of the gerundive nominalizer *-niq* deletes after the attachment of a possessive agreement marker.

[9]See section 4.3 for our analysis of the syntactic split between nominalized participial constructions and verbal constructions in the participial mood. This distinction is reflected throughout in the glossing of participial forms.

[10]The first consonant of the participle morphemes is /j/ when the verbal base ends in a vowel and /t/ when the verbal base ends in a consonant.

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(5) Nominal modifier *-viniq* (NI)
a. illu-**viniq**
house-old/former
'Old house'

b. *sana-**vinir**-para
build-old/former-IND.3SG>3SG
Intended: 'He/she built it.'

Above, we see that the morpheme *-viniq* can attach to a noun like *illu* 'house' in (5a) to convey that the latter is old or no longer in use but not directly to a verbal root like *sana-* 'build' in (5b) to express the past tense, as in the participial construction in (4). In fact, the verbal past tense is commonly expressed with the morpheme *-lauq,* which conversely cannot attach to nominal bases, as illustrated below in (6).

(6) Verbal past tense *-lauq* (NI)
a. *illu-**lauq**
house-PST
Intended: 'Old house'

b. sana-**laur**-para
build-PST-IND.3SG>3SG
'He/she built it.'

Therefore, the examples in (5) and (6) confirm that the participial construction in (4) is indeed a nominal one, which then brings into question how absolutive case is assigned. Moreover, considering that the passive participle form is nominalized, this suggests that it is also absolutive and that case matching occurs between the argument *Pauli* 'Paul' and the participle. That said, the analysis of participial constructions in Inuktitut is complex, as the participle morphemes are sometimes analyzed as verbal mood markers, similar to indicative ones in other languages. This is because participial constructions seem to be interpreted as verbal constructions whenever they stand alone rather than surfacing in an argument position. Building on Lowe (1978), Johns (1992), Beach (2012), and Yuan (2013), who analyze participial constructions as nominalized, we will show that this analysis holds for a specific subset of participial constructions in Inuktitut, regardless of their use and apparent interpretation.

Below, we analyze two types of nominalized constructions in Inuktitut exhibiting case variation on one of their arguments, which is marked with absolutive case only in very specific contexts. More precisely, we show that the subject in gerund constructions is marked with absolutive case only when such constructions appear in oblique positions, while participial constructions assign absolutive case only when they stand alone and act as main clauses. Crucially, while the examples in (3)–(4) show that absolutive case is not assigned directly through verbal agreement, we argue that absolutive case assignment is nonetheless tied to the CP-domain. Adopting the articulated structure of the CP-domain as first developed by Rizzi (1997) (but see also Rizzi and Cinque 2016, Rizzi and Bocci 2017), we claim that absolutive case is systematically assigned in any

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clause endowed with illocutionary force and therefore projecting syntactic structure known as the clausal left periphery. We propose that having illocutionary force makes a clause project ForceP, bundled with TopP in Inuktitut, which we argue is responsible for the assignment of the absolutive case. Importantly, this proposal still accounts for the fact that absolutive arguments are systematically interpreted with wide scope and as sentential or aboutness topics, as discussed in more detail in section 2.2. Furthermore, it falls in line with other studies that argue that the availability of aboutness topics relies on the presence of illocutionary force (and hence ForceP) (see Haegeman 2006, 2012; Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010; Frascarelli 2019). Absolutive case assignment is thus impossible in clauses with no clausal left periphery. Syntactic phenomena associated with the highest projections of utterances, such as topicalization, have traditionally been called *root phenomena* (see Emonds 2004, 2012) or *main clause phenomena* (see Haegeman 2006, 2012; Miyagawa 2022), since they occur primarily in matrix clauses, though they may also be available in a restricted set of embedded clauses. We therefore conclude that absolutive case assignment is a root (or main clause) phenomenon in Inuktitut.

The next sections are organized as follows. In section 2, we give more details about relevant grammatical aspects of the language, including case as well as both verbal and nominal agreement. In sections 3 and 4, we analyze gerund and participial constructions to determine the specific contexts in which absolutive case is assigned. We conclude with a discussion of our analysis in section 5.

2 Background

Inuktitut is one of the four dialect groups of the Inuit language, along with Iñupiaq, Inuvialuktun, and Kalaallisut, and is mainly spoken in Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut in the Canadian Arctic (see Dorais 2010). This section describes the grammatical aspects of Inuktitut that are relevant for the analysis of the different syntactic constructions discussed in the following sections. First, section 2.1 considers the basic morphosyntactic alignment of the language, which is commonly described as ergative-absolutive. Next, section 2.2 examines in more detail verbal agreement and case. Finally, section 2.3 looks at the possessive construction and the morphological parallel found between nominal and verbal constructions.

2.1 Morphosyntactic alignment

As previously shown with examples (1a–c), the morphosyntactic alignment in Inuit varieties is standardly described as ergative-absolutive, since transitive objects and intransitive subjects receive the same case marking while transitive subjects are marked with ergative case. However, the language has another type of bivalent (or dyadic) construction, namely the antipassive construction, as exemplified in (7).

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(7) Antipassive constructions

a. arnaq niri-**juq** aapu-**mit**
woman(ABS) eat-ACT.PART apple-MOD.SG
'The woman is eating an apple.'

b. qimmiq uvan**nit** kii-**si-juq**
dog(ABS) 1.MOD.SG bite-ANTIP-ACT.PART
'The dog bit me.'

(Compton 2017: 844)

From a morphosyntactic perspective, antipassive constructions pattern with intransitive ones, since antipassive subjects are marked with absolutive case and are the only arguments co-indexed on the verb by verbal inflection (compare with (1b–c)). Thus, unlike transitive objects, antipassive objects are not co-indexed by agreement and bear modalis case (sometimes labelled instrumental case).[11] Note also that some verbs require the antipassive morpheme -(*t*)*si* when they are antipassivized, like the verb *kii-* 'to bite' in (7b). The alternation between transitive and antipassive constructions in the Inuit language has been widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Kalmár 1979; Spreng 2006, 2012; Berge 2011; Carrier 2017, 2021; Johns and Kučerová 2017; Yuan 2018, 2022), including in work arguing that Inuit varieties are undergoing a shift whereby the antipassive construction is progressively becoming the default transitive construction, resulting in a nominative-accusative alignment (see Johns 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2006; Carrier 2017, 2021; Yuan 2018). This ongoing change does not impact our proposal concerning the clausal left periphery in Inuktitut. We assume that the alternation is conditioned by the discursive properties of these constructions, as explained in more detail in the next section.

2.2 Verbal agreement and case

As discussed in section 1, absolutive and ergative arguments are typically co-indexed on the verb. It is also worth noting that these arguments are often dropped in thediscourse when they are contextually retrievable. Verbal agreement is further sensitive to clause type, as shown in (8) with intransitive inflection in different verbal moods.

(8) Verbal agreement marking clause type

a. taku-**vutit**	'You (sg) see'	INDICATIVE
b. taku-**vit**	'Do you (sg) see?'	INTERROGATIVE
c. taku-**git**	'You (sg) see!'	IMPERATIVE
d. taku-**gavit**	'because you (sg) see'	CAUSATIVE

(Harper 1974: 8–17)

It is thus regularly argued that verbal agreement occurs in the CP-domain, as clause type features are expected to be located there (see, e.g., Bittner and Hale 1996, Johns 2007, Spreng 2012, Compton 2018, Yuan 2018, Carrier 2021). Previous work also often

[11]While modalis case marks objects in antipassive constructions, this case is in fact often analyzed as a structural case in the Inuit literature (see, e.g., Bok-Bennema 1991, Spreng 2012, Yuan 2018).

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argues that both absolutive and ergative arguments move high in the left periphery for agreement and case, arguably to [Spec, CP] (see, e.g., Compton 2018, Carrier 2021), as such arguments are systematically interpreted with wide scope over sentence-level operators like negation. This is exemplified in (9).

(9) Ergative and absolutive always take wide scope

a. Ergative subjects

ilinniaqti-up	Maliktaq	uqallaqatigi-lau-nngit-ta-nga
student-ERG.SG	Maliktaq(ABS)	talk.with-PST-NEG-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG

i. #'No student talked with Maliktaq.'
ii. 'There is a (certain) student who didn't talk with Maliktaq.'

b. Absolutive objects

Taqqialu-up	**tuktu**	taku-lau-nngit-ta-nga
Taqqialu-ERG.SG	caribou(ABS)	see-PST-NEG-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG

i. #'Taqqialuk didn't see a (single) caribou.'
ii. 'There is a (certain) caribou Taqqialuk didn't see.'

c. Absolutive subjects

angunasukti	**atautsiq**	ani-lau-nngit-tuq
hunter(ABS)	one(ABS)	leave-PST-NEG-ACT.PART

i. #'It is not the case that any hunter left.'
ii. 'There is one (particular) hunter that didn't leave.'

(Wharram 2003: 39–40)

As for other arguments, which are marked with oblique cases and are never co-indexed on the verb, they can receive either wide or narrow scope, as illustrated in (10).

(10) Wide or narrow scope for obliques

a. Locative obliques

Nunaling-mi	nuna-qa-lauq-sima-nngit-tuq
settlement-LOC.SG	land-have-PST-PERF-NEG-ACT.PART

i. 'There is a (certain) town that (s)he hasn't lived in.'
ii. '(S)he has never lived in any town.'

b. Ablative obliques

Tuktu-it	taku-jau-lau-nngit-tu-t	**angunasukti-mit**
caribou-ABS.PL	see-PASS-PST-NEG-ACT.PART-PL	hunter-ABL.SG

i. 'There is a (certain) hunter, and certain caribous weren't seen by him.'
ii. 'Certain caribous weren't seen by any hunter.'

(Branigan and Wharram 2019: 27)

To account for the scopal ambiguity of oblique arguments, different proposals have been advanced. For instance, building on Bittner (1994), Carrier (2021) argues that obliques can be interpreted with either wide or narrow scope depending on whether they move to [Spec, CP] at LF. Alternatively, Branigan and Wharram (2019) propose an analysis based on a choice functional D that may be removed through the deletion of the head of DP.

Lastly, in addition to moving to the CP-domain for case and agreement, it has been claimed that absolutive-marked arguments represent the topic of the sentence (see, e.g., Tersis and Carter-Thomas 2005; Berge 2011; Carrier 2012, 2017, 2021; Johns and Kučerová 2017). Despite some minor differences, there is a growing consensus that they refer to 'aboutness topics' in the sense of Reinhart (1981), who argues that both

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shifting and continuing topics should count as aboutness topics, which help build topic chains across consecutive sentences. This is illustrated in the excerpt below, in which the speaker talks about 13 children who had to move to another community to go to school. Crucially, nominal arguments referring to the children as well as null arguments, as evidenced by agreement patterns, are continually absolutive across all constructions, which alternate between intransitive, transitive and passive.

(11) Topic chaining around absolutive arguments (NB)

13-ngu-lauqsima-ngmata **[surusi-it ilinnia-riaqaq-tu-t]$_i$** INTRANSITIVE
thirteen-be-PST-CONT.3PL child-ABS.PL learn-must-ACT.PART-ABS.PL
'There were thirteen children who had to go to school.'

(pro$_i$) (pro) kama-gi-ja-kka TRANSITIVE
pro.ABS pro.ERG take.care-TR-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3PL
'I took care of them.'

(pro$_i$) nuna-tta asi-ani-nngaaq-sima-ju-t INTRANSITIVE
pro.ABS land-ERG.POSS.1PL>3SG other-LOC.POSS.3SG>3SG-be.from-PERF-ACT.PART-PL
'They were from other places than ours.'

(pro$_i$) tavvunga surusikkuving-muaq-tau-sima-ju-t PASSIVE
pro.ABS DEM.ALL.SG hostel-go-PASS-PERF-ACT.PART-PL
'They were placed in the hostel.'

[taikkua surusikkuving-muaq-tau-simalauq-tu-t ilinnia-lauq-tu-t]$_i$ TRANSITIVE
DEM.ABS.PL hostel-go-PASS-PST-ACT.PART-ABS.PL learn-PST-ACT.PART-ABS.PL
(pro) ullu-mi qaujima-liq-ta-kka
pro.ERG day-LOC.SG know-PROG-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3PL
'I still know today these children who were placed in the hostel,'

(pro$_i$) (pro) tautu-liq-ta-kka=tttauq TRANSITIVE
pro.ABS pro.ERG watch-PROG-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3PL=also
'and I am also still watching them.'

Further evidence for the aboutness topic status of absolutive arguments in Inuktitut comes from text-based quantitative measures commonly used to investigate topicality in discourse, such as referential persistence (see Givón 1983, 2017; Rude 1986; Cooreman 1987; Chiriacescu and von Heusinger 2010). More precisely, referential persistence measures the number of consecutive sentences in which a referent remains present in subsequent discourse. In other words, referential persistence assesses the local importance of a referent in a given stretch of discourse, thus assessing the local importance of that referent in a given stretch of discourse. In a quantitative analysis of recordings of personal stories in North Baffin Inuktitut collected for Carrier's doctoral research, referents encoded by absolutive arguments were found to display significantly higher referential persistence than referents encoded by other argument types. This pattern further suggests that topic continuity is built around arguments marked with absolutive case, as also argued by Berge (1997) and Carrier (2021).

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Another type of evidence for the topical status of absolutive arguments in Inuktitut comes from case assignment in existential constructions. Different types of restrictions have been reported in the literature in relation to the nominal pivot in existential constructions across various languages. For instance, the nominal pivot is commonly subject to a Definiteness Restriction (Milsark 1974), which is why pronominals as well as proper names most generally cannot surface in this position. More importantly for the current article, Reinhart (1995: 85) also notes that "[there] is one context all studies agree upon: the NP in *there*-sentences can never be topic". Thus, if absolutive case marks topicalized arguments in Inuktitut, the nominal pivot in existential constructions should not receive absolutive case. There are actually different types of existential constructions in Inuktitut, but we will only consider what Hartmann (2008) calls *there*-V sentences, in which the main verb is intransitive rather than the verb *be* (e.g., *There arrived three men*). For example, compare the standard intransitive construction in (12a) with an analogous existential construction in (12b).

(12) Existential constructions in inuktitut

a. pingasut anguti-it tikit-tu-it INTRANSITIVE
three(ABS) man-PL(ABS) arrive-ACT.PART-PL
'Three men arrived.'

b. **pingasu-nik** **anguti-nik** **tikit-tu**-qaq-tuq EXISTENTIAL
three-MOD.PL man-MOD.PL arrive-ACT.PART-have-ACT.PART
'There arrived three men.'

(Yuan 2023: 1)

In (12a), the intransitive subject *pingasut angutit* 'three men' gets the absolutive case and triggers plural agreement on the verb. On the other hand, in the analogous existential construction in (12b), the verbal predicate *tikit-* 'arrive' must be participial and incorporated into the verb *-qaq* 'have'. Crucially, the nominal pivot is now marked with the modalis case and does not trigger plural agreement on the verb. Yuan (2023, 2024) also shows that the nominal pivot cannot be interpreted as definite and is always interpreted within the scope of the incorporating verb *-qaq* 'have'. The nominal pivot must therefore receive case in situ and does not undergo movement for agreement, unlike the absolutive subject as in (12a). The morphosyntactic analysis of existential constructions in the language goes beyond the scope of this article (but see Yuan 2023, 2024). However, we consider the assignment of the modalis case to the nominal pivot (rather than the typical absolutive case for intransitive subjects), as well as the absence of movement of the latter to the clausal periphery, as a direct consequence of the restriction imposed on nominal pivots in existential constructions not to be interpreted as a topic.[12]

[12]Interestingly, Yuan (2023, 2024) reports that two speakers allow the pivot to surface as absolutive and be cross-referenced by φ-agreement on the verb. However, she notes that "[m]arking the pivot with MOD case seems to be the more preferred way to express these constructions, for all speakers consulted" (2023: 6, fn. 9).

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Assuming an articulated structure of the CP domain, as proposed in Rizzi (1997, 2004), the sensitivity of verbal agreement to clause type as well as the aboutness topic interpretation of absolutive arguments could be accounted for by positing that verbal agreement in C minimally projects Force, which expresses clause type, and Topic, where absolutive arguments must move for case assignment reasons.[13] This means that the obligatory movement of absolutive arguments to the CP-domain combines properties of both A- and A′-movement, as also claimed for Dinka by van Urk (2015). Due to this, the traditional A/A′-distinction is not entirely clear in Inuktitut either. Following van Urk, we assume that these two types of movement are better distinguished based on the type of features driving the movement. For instance, features can be *obligatory*, in the sense that they are always present and constrain movements to be more bounded. Such features drive A-movements and are typically person, number and case. Alternatively, features can be *optional,* in which case they can be absent. These other features drive A′-movements and typically include topic, focus and *wh*. As the verbal agreement features in C are not optional in Inuktitut, we assume that the movement of absolutive arguments is A-movement, regardless of their topicalization.

2.3 Possessive constructions

Gerund and participial constructions, which were discussed briefly in section 1 and will be studied in more depth in sections 3 and 4, display nominal inflection instead of verbal inflection (since they are nominalized constructions). As will be discussed later, the nominal morphology found in those constructions is similar to the one found in possessive constructions. Basic possessive constructions have the following shape, with the possessor marked with genitive case and the possessum bearing possessor/possessum agreement in person and number with the possessor combined with the number of the possessum:

(13) Possessive constructions

a. Maakusi-**up** unaa-**nga**
Mark-GEN.SG harpoon-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'Mark's harpoon'

b. inu-**it**[14] nuna-**ngat**
inuk-GEN.PL land-POSS.3PL>3SG(ABS)
'the land of the Inuit'

c. angut-**it** qukiuti-**ngit**
man-GEN.PL gun-POSS.3PL>3PL(ABS)
'the men's guns'

(Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiut 2018: 21, 30)

[13]See also Johns and Kučerová (2017), who argue that the topic interpretation of transitive objects is obtained by raising to the specifier of VP, or Carrier (2021), who proposes that verbal agreement consists of φ-features and δ-features, following Miyagawa's (2010) Strong Uniformity principle.

[14]Note that non-possessed dual and plural forms for absolutive and ergative/genitive case are homophonous.

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This pattern of genitive case on the possessor and possessive agreement on the possessum holds even when the latter bears any overt non-absolutive case, as shown in (14).[15]

(14) Overt case marking
Piita [Maakusi-**up** angirra-**nga**-**ni**] sini-lauq-tuq
Peter(ABS) [Mark-GEN.SG harpoon-POSS.3SG>3SG-LOC] sleep-PST-ACT.PART
'Peter slept at Mark's house'

(Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiut 2018: 30)

However, overt possessors do not need to be present whenever retrievable from the context, and first- or second-person possessors are typically required to be absent, as shown in (15).[16]

(15) No overt possessor
a. irni-**nga**
son-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'His/her son'

b. nulia-**ra**
wife-POSS.1SG>3SG(ABS)
'My wife'

(Inuit Uqausinginnik Taiguusiliuqtiut 2018: 29)

For simplicity, we will assume that the syntactic structure for possessive constructions involves a possessive projection, in which the Poss head takes the possessum as a complement whereas the possessor merges in the specifier position of PossP (see, e.g., Alexiadou et al. 2007). We further posit that possessums undergo head movement to Poss for agreement, and that possessors receive genitive case inherently from Poss after merging in this Spec-head configuration, as shown in Figure 1. See also Manlove (2015) for a similar proposal for Kalaallisut.

Lastly, note that genitive case has the same morphological form as ergative case (compare (12a) with (1a)). In fact, the transitive morphology found in Inuit-Yupik-Unangan languages is historically related to the morphology found in possessive constructions. However, we will argue in section 4 that this morphological parallel with possessive constructions actually now holds only with nominalized constructions, such as gerund constructions and a subset of participial constructions that we analyze as nominalized, building on previous work on participial constructions in Inuktitut by Johns (1992), Beach (2012), and Yuan (2013).

3 Gerund constructions

In this section, we will analyze the gerund construction in Inuktitut. As explained in section 1, Beach (2012) reports that absolutive case is assigned in some gerund

[15]Some combinations of possessor agreement and case markers surface as partially fused or portmanteau.

[16]In South Baffin Inuktitut, however, Yuan (2015) reports that overt first- and second-person possessors are required whenever possessive constructions are marked with an oblique case marker, such as modalis case, due to the impoverishment of the possessor's features in possessive agreement morphology in such contexts. Importantly, though, this restriction does not seem to be active in Nunavik Inuktitut, as shown in (22b) below.

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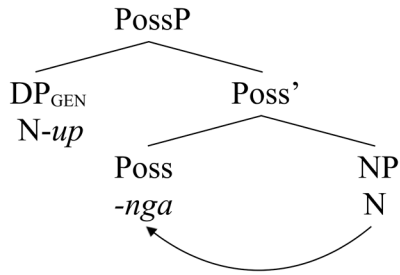


Figure 1. Possessive constructions.

constructions, which is unexpected since such constructions are nominalized and absolutive case assignment is generally thought to be associated with verbal agreement occurring in the CP-domain. Beach also does not provide a theoretical analysis of when and why absolutive case is assigned in gerund constructions. We will argue that gerund constructions vary in size and that only gerund constructions appearing in oblique positions assign absolutive case, since they act as main clauses with illocutionary force, thus having a clausal left periphery and projecting ForceP bundled with TopP, which we claim is responsible for absolutive case assignment in the language.

This section is organized as follows. Section 3.1 describes the properties of gerund constructions in Inuktitut, and section 3.2 defines the gerund constructions in which absolutive case is assigned. Next, we present our syntactic analysis of gerund constructions in section 3.3 and argue that oblique case marking on gerunds is comparable to verbal agreement in the language, as it expresses a meaning equivalent to illocutionary force/clause type (see section 2.2). We also claim that the assignment of absolutive case (instead of genitive case) to subjects in oblique gerund constructions is an instantiation of possessor raising, which occurs in other constructions in the language.

3.1 Basic properties of gerund constructions

In their simplest form, gerunds consist of a verbal root and the gerundive suffix *-niq*, as in (16).

(16) Bare gerund (NB)

[**miqsur-niq**]	alianai-gi-ja-ra
[sew-GER(ABS)]	love-TR-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3SG

'I love sewing.'

Thus, gerunds are nominalized forms that surface in argument positions. In the example above, the gerund *miqsurniq* 'sewing' is an object of a transitive construction, triggers verbal agreement (by default third-person singular agreement) and is marked with absolutive case.

Briggs et al. (2015) provide the definition in (17) for the gerundive suffix *-niq* in the Utkuhikšalingmiut dialect of the language:

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(17) Definition of the gerundive suffix
"the action or fact of X-ing; the degree of X-ness; a thing resulting from X-ing; a place or part characterized by being X (verb > noun)"

(Briggs et al. 2015: 384)

Importantly, any arguments of a nominalized verb in a gerund construction can still be expressed, in which case possessive morphology is used (see section 2.3). Standardly, the subject receives genitive case and the gerund cross-references it in person and number with possessive agreement. For example, compare the two gerund constructions in (18a–b) with the possessive one in (18c).

(18) The use of possessive morphology in geerund constructions (NI)

a. [Miali-**up** ani-ni-**nga**]
[Mary-GEN.SG leave-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)]
quvia-gi-nngi-ta-ra
be.happy-TR-NEG-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3SG
'I'm not happy with Mary leaving.' (lit. 'I'm not happy with Mary's leaving.')

b. [timmijuu-**p**[17] katan-ni-**nga**] quarsa-na-laur-tuq
[plane-GEN.SG fall-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)] scary-feel-PST-ACT.PART
'The plane falling was scary.' (lit. 'The plane's falling was scary.')

c. anguti-**up** nasa-**nga**
man-GEN.SG hat-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'the man's hat'

The examples in (18a–b) also show (i) that the subject in gerund constructions is standardly marked with genitive case regardless of the unergative or unaccusative status of the verb, and (ii) that possessive agreement markers encode the subject as a possessor and the gerund as a possessum, which again systematically triggers third-person singular agreement by default.

Gerund constructions can also be built around transitive verbs, in which case the subject receives genitive case while the object is marked with modalis case, similarly to antipassive objects (see (7a–b)).[18] Crucially, the object could not alternatively be marked with null absolutive case, which is typically given to transitive objects (see (1a)), as shown in (19).

The examples in (20) below show that only the subject in gerund constructions can be coindexed with person and number in possessives and never the object (marked with modalis case).

The fact that objects in gerund constructions are never marked with absolutive case nor coindexed in person and number with possessive agreement on the gerund is an

[17] In Inuktitut, the initial vowel of the ergative/genitive case marker *-up* is deleted when the latter combines with a base ending in two vowels.

[18] Beach (2012: 284) reports that gerunds in Nunavik Inuktitut (also called *Tarramiutut*) can only be formed from intransitive stems. Yet our consultants, who speak the same Inuktitut dialect, spontaneously produced gerund forms built on transitive stems, as we can see with examples in (19)–(21). Therefore, there might be inter-speaker variation in the acceptability of such gerund constructions.

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(19) Object marking in possessed gerund (NI)
[qimmi-up sivanirtu* **(-mik)** tusar-ni-nga]
[dog-GEN.SG bell-MOD.SG hear-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)]
tatamin-na-kainna-tuq
surprise-feel-REC.PST-ACT.PART
'The dog('s) hearing the bell was surprising.'

(20) No agreement with the modalis object (NI)
a. [qimmi-**up** sivanirtu-**nik** tusar-ni-**nga**]
[dog-GEN.SG bell-MOD.PL hear-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)]
tatamin-na-kainna-tuq
surprise-feel-REC.PST-ACT.PART
'The dog('s) hearing the bell s was surprising.'

b. [qimmi-**it** sivanirtu-**mik** tusar-ni-**ngat**]
[dog-GEN.PL bell-MOD.SG hear-GER-POSS.3PL>3SG(ABS)]
tatamin-na-kainna-tuq
surprise-feel-REC.PST-ACT.PART
'The dogs(') hearing the bell was surprising.'

important distinctive property of such nominalized constructions, because we will see later in section 4 that transitive objects in participial constructions are marked with absolutive case in some contexts and are systematically cross-referenced in person and number with possessive agreement.

The subject can be omitted in gerund constructions whenever it receives a generic interpretation or is shared with the main clause. In such cases, there is no possessive inflection on the gerund, even if an object is present, as exemplified in (21).

(21) Bare gerund (NI)
[nutarar-**nik** kaman-**niq**] alianai-gi-ja-ra
[child-MOD.PL look.after-GER(ABS)] love-TR-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3SG
'I love taking care of children.'

As a result, Beach (2012: 280) argues that the possessive agreement on gerund verbs acts as a type of verbal agreement: "My analysis will be that these are really intransitive verbal conjugations." However, considering the fact that 'bare' gerunds trigger a third-person singular default agreement in the verbal inflection of a matrix verb, as shown in (16), and that the gerund verb stands in for the possessum in gerund constructions with possessive agreement, as later exemplified in (18a–c), it seems more reasonable to conclude that gerunds trigger a third-person singular default agreement in possessive inflection (whenever present). Hence, we will assume that possessive morphology surfacing in gerund constructions is the same as that of 'regular' possessive constructions.

Importantly, note that gerund constructions may also appear in oblique positions. In such cases, the gerund verb is marked with an overt oblique case marker, like the locative case marker *-ni* or the allative case marker *-nut*. However, these oblique cases have different functions and meanings in such gerund constructions as compared to when they attach to 'regular' nouns. As one example, the locative case commonly marks

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nouns referring to a location (as in 'in/at/on X') but conveys the meaning 'after X' when attached to a non-negated gerund verb or 'before X' when attached to a negated gerund verb, as exemplified with the gerund constructions in (22).

(22) Gerund constructions in oblique positions

a. [ani-rqaa-ni-nga-**ni**] niri-laur-tunga
[leave-first-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-LOC] eat-PST-PART.1SG
'I ate after he/she left.'

b. [ani-**nngi**-ni-ra-**ni**] niri-laur-tunga
[leave-NEG-GER-POSS.1SG>3SG-LOC] eat-PST-PART.1SG
'I ate before I left.'

(Beach 2012: 283)

Likewise, the allative case typically marks nouns corresponding to the goal or the beneficiary of an action (as in 'to/for X') but expresses the causal meaning 'because X' in gerund constructions, as will be shown in (24b).[19] The gerund constructions in oblique positions are of a special interest in this article due to their unexpected case pattern, as will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Unexpected case pattern in gerund constructions

In the previous section, we saw that the subject in gerund constructions is standardly marked with genitive case (see also Fortescue 1984 for gerund constructions in Kalaallisut). Yet Beach (2011) reports that, in some gerund constructions, it is absolutive case that is assigned to the subject (see (3)). However, Beach does not provide any generalization for when absolutive case is assigned in gerund constructions. Our own investigation reveals that the subject in gerund constructions is in fact marked with genitive case whenever such constructions surface in subject or object positions, as in (23), but with absolutive case when they appear in oblique positions, as in (24).

(23) Gerund constructions in subject and object positions (NI)

a. [timmijuu*(**-p**) katan-ni-nga] quarsa-na-laur-tuq
[plane-GEN.SG fall-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)] scary-feel-PST-ACT.PART
'The plane falling was scary.'

b. takunna-kainna-qugut [timmijuu*(**-p**) katan-ni-nga-**nik**]
watch-REC.PST-IND.1PL [plane-GEN.SG fall-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-MOD]
'We saw the plane falling.'

[19] The different functions and meanings of the locative case and the allative case in gerund constructions have also been noted by Briggs et al. (2015: 389) for the Utkuhiksalingmiut dialect of Inuktitut: "*-niq* followed by the locative ending *-mi/-ni* (normally *in* [or] *at*) […] means 'while', [and] *-niq* followed by the allative ending *-mut/-nut* (normally *to* or *for*) means 'because of' […] or 'on account of'." Thus, the locative case is interpreted as 'while' in this dialect in lieu of 'after X' or 'before X' (in Nunavik Inuktitut). This suggests that there might be some dialectal differences with respect to the interpretation of the locative case in such contexts.

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(24) Gerund constructions in oblique positions (NI)

a. niri-laur-tunga [Jaani(***-up**) ani-nngi-ni-nga-**ni**]
eat-PST-PART.1SG [John(ABS)(*-GEN.SG) leave-NEG-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-LOC]
'I ate before John left.'

b. qanilli-gia-kainna-qugut [anaana-**ra(*-ma)**
go-start-REC.PST-IND.1PL [mother-POSS.1SG>3SG(ABS)(*- POSS.1SG>3SG.GEN)
taku-tsia-ruma-ni-nga-**nut**]
see-well-want-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-ALL]
'We went closer because my mother wanted to see better.'

Thus, the case on the subject is conditioned by the type of case marking found on the gerund verb. When the latter is marked with a structural case, like absolutive case (23a) or modalis case (23b), the subject is marked with genitive case.[20] Conversely, when it is marked with some oblique case, like locative case (24a) or allative case (24b), the subject is marked with the absolutive case. Importantly, though, recall that these oblique cases have different functions and meanings in gerund constructions as compared to when they attach to regular nouns (see section 2.2). More precisely, the locative case conveys the meaning 'before X' or 'after X' (depending on whether the gerund is negated) rather than marking a noun referring to a location (as in 'in/at/on X'), while the allative case expresses the meaning 'because X' rather than marking a noun corresponding to the goal or the beneficiary of an action (as in 'to/for X'). In the next section, we analyze this change of function and meaning of oblique cases in gerund constructions in more depth.

3.3 Analysis of gerund constructions

This section presents our analysis of the gerund constructions in Inuktitut, accounting for the basic properties of such nominalized constructions, as well as case variation on the subject discussed in the previous section. Kornfilt and Whitman (2011) argue for four possible levels of nominalization based on the highest verbal projection in the structure, namely VP, *v*P, TP and CP. As evidenced by the fact that gerund constructions can contain tense marking, such constructions must at least be as large as TP nominalizations, as exemplified in (25).

(25) Gerund constructions as tp nominalizations (NB)
utjirusu-litainnar-puq [tigu-tau-**qqau-ni**-nga-nik]
note-finally-IND.3SG [take-PASS-REC.PST-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-MOD]
'He just realized it had just been taken.'

Consequently, we propose the following syntactic structures for gerund constructions built around either transitive/unergative verbs (Figure 2) or unaccusative verbs (Figure 3). Importantly, though, note that these structures, just as they are, depict

[20] Following previous proposals for the modalis case in the Inuit language, we assume it to be a structural case, similar to the accusative case, when marking the object in antipassive constructions (see, e.g., Bok-Bennema 1991, Spreng 2012, Yuan 2018, Carrier 2021).

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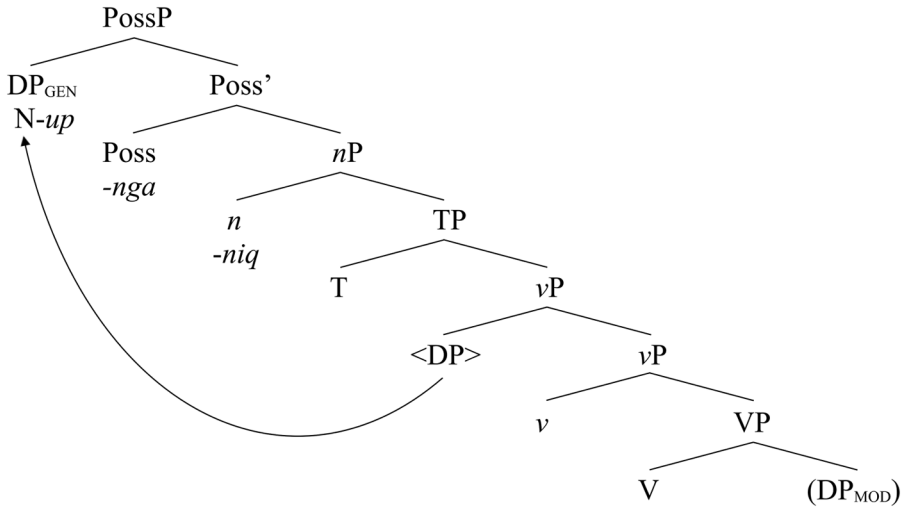


Figure 2. Transitive/unergative gerund constructions.

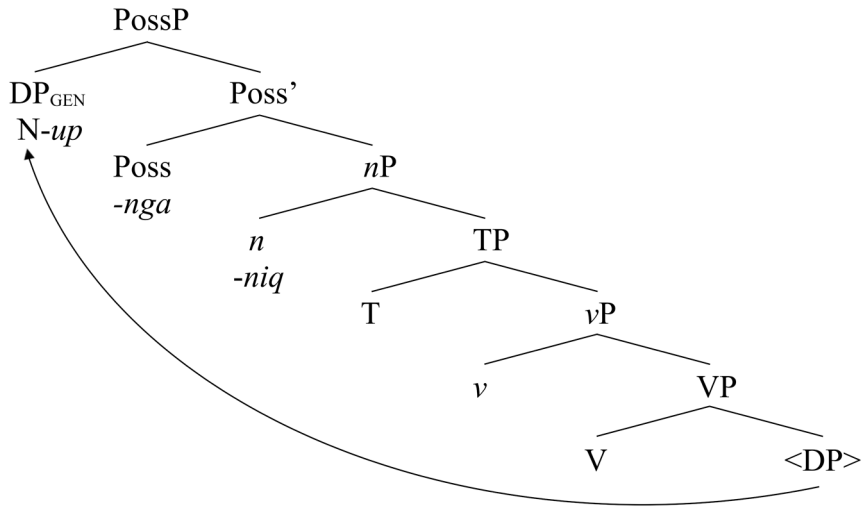


Figure 3. Unaccusative gerund constructions.

gerund constructions in subject/object positions, in which the subject receives genitive case and the gerund is marked with a structural case, but will be expanded shortly in order to account for gerund constructions in oblique positions, in which the subject gets absolutive case and the gerund is marked with an oblique case (see section 3.2).

More precisely, we propose that the nominalizer *-niq* selects TP, and a possessive phrase selects the nominalized structure whenever the subject is expressed and possessive morphology is present (see section 3.1). The polysynthetic nature of the verbal

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bases, which may contain a large number of morphemes and have been argued to consist of syntactic structures corresponding to the domain of CP when they instantiate a verbal clause (see Compton and Pittman 2010), can be accounted for by assuming head movement of the verbal bound root up to the Poss head, as very often assumed in the literature (see Johns 1987, Compton 2018, Branigan and Wharram 2019, Carrier 2021).[21]

As for case assignment, we assume that the object of transitive verbs (if present) is marked in-situ with modalis case licensed by little *v*, as commonly proposed for antipassive objects, which are also marked with this case (see section 2.1) (e.g., Bok-Bennema 1991, Spreng 2012, Yuan 2018, Carrier 2021).[22] For gerund constructions in subject/object positions, the nominalized verbal base, being the head of PossP, gets the appropriate case-marking (i.e., absolutive or modalis) depending on its syntactic position in the matrix clause. The analysis of the subject in gerund constructions is a little more complicated, as case marking of the latter varies depending on whether it appears in gerund constructions in subject/object or oblique positions (see section 3.2). First, we posit that the agent argument of transitive/unergative verbs and the theme argument of unaccusative verbs must both move to [Spec, PossP] for case and agreement with the Poss head, like the possessor in possessive constructions, except that the latter is base-generated in this position instead of moving there (see section 2.3). Importantly, we argue that the presence of PossP as well as the agreement with the Poss head is a necessary condition for the licensing of the subject in gerund constructions.

In other types of nominalized constructions in the language, the possessive agreement morphology on the verb appears to be optional. Crucially, however, the subject is marked with genitive case when possessive agreement morphology is present and with allative case when the latter is not. This is exemplified in (26a–b) with two similar constructions nominalized with *-vik* 'place', one with and one without possessive agreement morphology on the verbal base.

[21]More precisely, Johns (2007, 2009) argues that polysynthetic nature of verbal bases is driven by root movement, whereby a probe on C searches for a goal that is $+\sqrt{}$ (i.e., an element that can be a morphological root in the language). This feature-checking operation then triggers the movement of the first $\sqrt{}$ element that is found up to C. She also claims that such syntactic operation explains why noun incorporation is obligatory with certain verbs, as the latter would be non-$\sqrt{}$ROOTS, making the nominal complement of such verbs the first $\sqrt{}$ element able to satisfy the probe.

[22]One reviewer asks whether the modalis case is necessarily assigned by little *v* in gerund constructions, as this case has been argued to be a last resort case in other types of nominalized constructions in which the object similarly gets the modalis case but the verb is not able to be antipassivized (see Yuan 2018: Appendix). As explained in section 2.1, some verbs require the antipassive morpheme *-(t)si* when antipassivized. Among them, there is the verb *piuli-* 'save'. As shown below in (i), this verb is antipassivized in gerund constructions (compare with the passivized form in (ii)). We take this as evidence for antipassive little v assigning modalis case in these constructions.

Antipassivization in Gerund Constructions:

i.	piuli-**tsi**-niq	ii.	piuli-**jau**-niq
	save-ANTIP-GER		save-PASS-GER
	'action of saving someone'		'action of being saved'

(Schneider 1998: 530.2)

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(26) *-vik* constructions with or without possessive agreement

a. [Jaani-**up** ijukka-**vi**-vini-**nga**-nik] taku-gunna-qit
[John-GEN.SG fall-place-former-POSS.3SG.3SG-MOD.SG] see-be.able-INT.2SG
'Can you see the place where John fell?'

b. [Jaani-**mut** ijukka-**vi**-vinir-mik] taku-gunna-qit
[John-ALL.SG fall-place-former-MOD.SG] see-be.able-INT.2SG
'Can you see the place where John fell?'

(Beach 2012: 229)

Indeed, the subject *Jaani* 'John' is marked with genitive case in (26a) when the verbal base bears the possessive agreement marker *-nga* but then allative case in (26b) when it does not. Note that the allative case is the case employed to mark the *by*-phrase in passive constructions in Inuktitut.[23] Thus, the two examples above show that the subject in such nominalized constructions is not required to be licensed through possessive agreement and may be marked with an oblique (allative) case instead of genitive case. Going back to gerund constructions, the two examples below show that the subject could not be marked with allative case with no possessive agreement morphology on the verbal base, and, importantly, no matter whether the construction appears in a subject/object position, as in (27a), or in an oblique position, as in (27b).

(27) Allative case cannot mark subjects in gerund constructions

a. [*Jaani-**mut** ani-nir-mik] takunna-qau-vugut
[John-ALL.SG leave-GER-MOD.SG] watch-REC.PST-IND.1PL
Intended: 'We witnessed John leaving.'

b. [*Jaani-**mut** ani-nngi-nir-mi] niri-laur-tunga
[John-ALL.SG leave-NEG-GER-LOC.SG] eat-PST-PART.1SG
Intended: 'I ate before John left.'

(Beach 2012: 283)

Furthermore, possessive agreement morphology on the gerund is obligatory whenever the subject is expressed, and again no matter if the gerund construction surfaces in a subject/object position, as in (28a), or an oblique position, as in (28b).

Therefore, we take (27a–b) and (28a–b) as evidence that the movement of the subject to [Spec, PossP] is a necessary condition for the licensing of the latter in any gerund constructions.

[23] For example, consider the Inuktitut passive construction below.

Passive constructions in inuktitut

i. anguti kii-jau-lauq-tuq qimmir-**mut**
man(ABS) bite-PASS-PST-ACT.PART dog-ALL.SG
'The man was bitten by the dog.'

(Yuan 2013: 2)

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(28) Gerund constructions without possessive agreement (NI)

a. [timmijuu-p katan-ni*(**-nga**)] quarsa-na-laur-tuq
[plane-GEN.SG fall-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)] scary-feel-PST-ACT.PART
'The plane falling was scary.'

b. niri-laur-tunga [Jaani ani-nngi-ni*(**-nga**)-ni]
eat-PST-PART.1SG [John(ABS) leave-NEG-GER-POSS.3SG>3SG-LOC]
'I ate before John left.'

The final piece of the puzzle is to explain why the subject in oblique gerund constructions is marked with absolutive case rather than the expected genitive case. Recall from section 3.2 that oblique cases on gerunds do not instantiate their typical function and meaning. Interestingly, though, their 'new' function and meaning are the same as the ones expressed by verbal clause-type markers found in subordinate clauses (see section 2.2). Indeed, the combination of the gerundive nominalizer *-niq* and the locative case *-ni* or the allative case *-nut* can be replaced with subordinate verbal endings in the contemporative or the contingent clause type, respectively, without any difference in meaning. For instance, compare the following subordinate verbal clauses in (29) with their corresponding oblique gerund constructions in (24).

(29) Corresponding subordinate verbal clauses to oblique gerund clauses (NI)

a. niri-laur-tunga [Jaani ani-nngi-**tillugu**[24]]
eat-PST-PART.1SG [John(ABS) leave-NEG-DS.CTMP.3SG]
'I ate before John left.'

b. qanilli-gia-kainna-qugut [anaana-ra taku-tsia-ruma-**mmat**]
go-start-REC.PST-IND.1PL [mother-POSS.1SG>3SG(ABS) see-well-want-CONT.3SG]
'We went closer because my mother wanted to see better.'

Hence, the oblique cases on gerunds serve the exact same function as verbal clause-type markers in the language, namely introducing adverbial subordinate clauses. The only difference between the two types of constructions is that gerund constructions are nominalized clauses, but the subject is nevertheless marked with absolutive case, as in their corresponding verbal subordinate clauses. As verbal clause-type markers (which also encode verbal agreement) are commonly assumed to be exponents of C and the absolutive case is argued to mark aboutness topic in the Inuit language, a discursive feature that is also associated with the CP-domain (see section 2.2), we assume that the oblique cases on gerunds similarly project a clausal left periphery. In the articulated structure of the CP-domain developed by Rizzi (1997) (see also Rizzi and Cinque 2016, Rizzi and Bocci 2017), the head labelled Force is the one expressing illocutionary force and clause type. We propose that the oblique cases on gerunds are in fact

[24]Note that while the more literal or compositional meaning of this form involving negation would be "while X had not (yet) V-ed", it is also spontaneously translated as "before X" when following negation (see Lowe 1985: 188).

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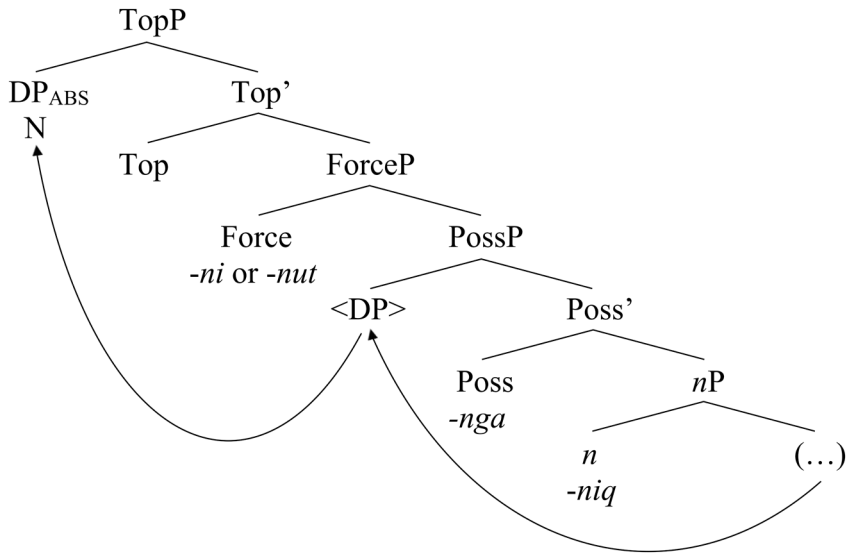


Figure 4. Oblique gerund constructions.

an instantiation of Force markers projecting ForceP bundled with TopP, which assigns absolutive case. One issue, though, is that in Rizzi's original decomposition of CP, Force is positioned on top of all the other functional heads (i.e., **Force** > Topic > Focus > Topic > Fin). The situation is necessarily different here as nothing could justify the presence of Topic prior to Force in oblique gerund syntactic structures.

Yet this organization of functional heads in the CP-domain is debated. Haegeman (2006, 2012), for instance, argues that topicalization depends on the presence of Force and, as such, Topic should dominate Force (i.e., Topic > Focus > Topic > **Force** > Fin). This proposal is in tune with others claiming that aboutness topicality is a root (or main clause) phenomenon and thus only available in clauses endowed with illocutionary force (see Krifka 2001, 2007; Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010; Frascarelli 2017, 2019). The unavailability of aboutness topicality would then be a direct consequence of the absence of Force (and by extension of a clausal left periphery). This is also the position we adopt here. We argue that absolutive case assignment in oblique gerund constructions stems from the presence of ForceP, projected by these oblique case markers, which do not instantiate their typical oblique case function, but rather a function similar to that of verbal mood markers expressing illocutionary force and clause type. We propose the structure in Figure 4 for oblique gerund constructions.

Essentially, oblique gerund constructions project more structure than other gerund constructions, due to these oblique case markers being endowed with illocutionary force and thus projecting ForceP bundled with TopP, which is responsible for absolutive case assignment. Consequently, we account for the fact that absolutive case is available in this type of nominalized construction despite the lack of verbal agreement, as

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previously assumed to be directly responsible for absolutive case assignment in the Inuit language (see section 1).[25]

That said, one might wonder what happens to the genitive case usually assigned by the Poss head to the subject that had previously moved into its specifier position. We argue that this is an instance of possessor raising, as sometimes observed in constructions involving noun incorporation. First, note that verbs that permit noun incorporation in the language obligatorily incorporate their object (see, e.g., Tersis and Mahieu 2006; Johns 2007, 2009). Possessor stranding is allowed but only with a subclass of incorporating verbs describing location and direction of movement, as shown in (30).

(30) Permitted possessor stranding

a. **Piita-up** **illu-nga**-niit-tugut
Peter-GEN.SG house-POSS.3SG>3SG-be.in-PART.1PL
'We are in Peter's house.'

b. **Piita-up** **illu-nga**-nuu-si-jugut
Peter-GEN.SG house-POSS.3SG>3SG-go.to-PROG-PART.1PL
'We are on our way to Peter's house.'

(Johns 2009: 188–189)

With all other incorporating verbs, possessor stranding is strictly prohibited, regardless of whether the incorporated noun is marked with a possessive marker or not, as shown in (31).

(31) Prohibited possessor stranding

a. **savi**-siuq-si-tunga
knife-look.for-PART.1SG
'I am looking for a knife.'

b. *__Piita-up__ **savi**-siuq-tunga
Peter-GEN.SG knife-look.for-PART.1SG
Intended: 'I am looking for Peter's knife.'

c. *__Piita-up__ **savi-nga**-siuq-tunga
Peter-GEN.SG knife-POSS.3SG>3SG-look.for-PART.1SG
Intended: 'I am looking for Peter's knife.'

(Johns 2009: 187)

[25] Although not essential, there is another interesting result of our analysis of gerund constructions. Haegeman (2006 and previous work) argues for a correlation between the amount of structure available in embedded clauses and their degree of integration in main clauses. In short, left periphery material would be available only to embedded clauses merging 'high' in main clauses, arguably above TP (see also Endo and Haegeman 2019, Badan and Haegeman 2022). While such a correlation still needs to be explained formally, this is in line with our analysis. As oblique gerund constructions are equivalent to verbal subordinate constructions, it is reasonable to assume that they also adjoin the main clause CP. Evidence for subordinate verbal constructions being adjoined to the root CP is based on the presence of switch reference marking in subordinate verbal moods (Pittman 2005, Mauro 2018) and the need for the subjects of main and subordinate clauses to be in proximity to the syntactic head in the left periphery on which switch reference is realized (see Compton 2018, Arregi and Hanink 2022). As for subject or object gerund constructions, the unavailability of left periphery material could have to do with their low attachment within the main clause TP.

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Interestingly, though, several incorporating verbs that do not allow possessor stranding may have an ambiguous interpretation when used in transitive constructions, whereby the absolutive object can be interpreted as the possessor of the incorporated nouns, as exemplified in (32).

(32) Ambiguous transitive constructions with noun incorporation (NB)

a. Joni-p Pauli kaja-ir-paa
John-ERG.SG Paul(ABS) kayak-remove-IND.3SG>3SG
i. 'John took the kayak from Paul.'
ii. 'John took Paul's kayak away.'

b. Joni-p Miali ujami-siur-paa
John-ERG.SG Mary(ABS) necklace-look.for-IND.3SG>3SG
i. 'John is looking for the necklace for Mary.'
ii. 'John is lookin g for Mary's necklace.'

In order to account for the possible possessive interpretation, we follow Deal's (2013) analysis of possessor raising in Nez Perce, according to which possessors remain in the possessive DP and receive genitive case in situ only when they are ineligible to receive another case via movement to a higher athematic A-position. Thus, we assume that the possessum incorporates into the verb via head movement, while the possessor raises to the higher A-position that licenses absolutive case – TopP, in our analysis – as shown in Figure 5. This is also the type of analysis proposed by Baker (1988) and Bittner (1994) for such examples in the language.[26]

The same reasoning extends to oblique gerund constructions. We argue that the subject first moves to [Spec, PossP], as in other gerund constructions, but then undergoes possessor raising to TopP, where it can receive structural case without being assigned a new θ-role, as in Deal's (2013) analysis of Nez Perce. Importantly, recall that, building on van Urk (2015), we assume that the movement of absolutive arguments to the CP-domain, which minimally consists of Force and Topic in Inuktitut, is an instance of A-movement, as the features driving movement are obligatory (see section 2.2), possibly triggered by an EPP-like feature. As a consequence, absolutive case must be discharged whenever the ForceP/TopP layer is projected, which explains why the subject in oblique gerund constructions cannot be marked with genitive case. Thus, the only difference between oblique gerund constructions and verbal constructions is that the features of the former contain case but not person and number.

In fact, we believe that the case variation on the subject in gerund constructions provides arguments against previous proposals arguing that absolutive case is a default case in the language, as claimed in Yuan (2018, 2022) and Mikkelsen and Thrane (2024). More precisely, such proposals consider default morphological absolutive case as syntactic caselessness, where "nominals that are outside of the purview of the Case Filter are realized as ABS (…)" (Yuan 2018: 241). In other words, nominals that cannot be

[26] See also van Geenhoven (2002) for a non-derivational approach to such examples in Kalaallisut.

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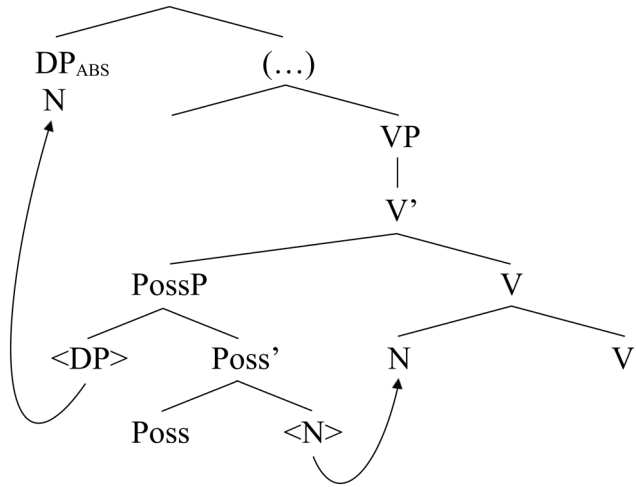


Figure 5. Possessor raising involving noun incorporation.

assigned any other case are then marked with absolutive case by default.[27] This cannot be the case here. Examples (28a–b) showed that possessive agreement morphology on gerunds is obligatory whenever the subject is present in any type of gerund construction, which crucially indicates that the movement of the subject to [Spec, PossP] is a necessary condition for the licensing of the latter. This also explains why the subject in gerund constructions appearing in subject/object positions is marked with genitive case (assigned by the Poss head), but also indicates that the subject in oblique gerund constructions moves to a position where it can be assigned case. As a result, it would be difficult to explain why the subject in oblique gerund constructions is marked with absolutive case (rather than genitive case) without assuming an obligatory A-movement towards a higher functional head, as in the present proposal. In section 4.3, we give more evidence against the absolutive-case-as-a-default-case approach in the language.

4 Participial constructions

This section analyzes the participial construction in the language. First, in section 4.1, we describe the basic properties of participial constructions whenever the latter appear in an argument position. In section 4.2, we then consider participial constructions when they stand alone and are interpreted as main clauses, in which situation absolutive case is assigned to one of their arguments, despite being nominalized clauses. In section 4.3, we present our syntactic analysis for participial constructions that can surface in argument positions as well as main clauses. We argue that both types derive null predicative constructions but that absolutive case is assigned only

[27]Note that Yuan (2022) further specifies that nominals that cannot be assigned any other case receive absolutive case when they are *v*P-external but modalis case when they are *v*P-internal.

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when such constructions are interpreted as main clauses since they are endowed with illocutionary force and thus project ForceP and TopP in their left periphery, following our analysis of oblique gerund constructions.[28] We also argue for a syntactic split across participial constructions, whereby those that only contain nominal inflectional morphology are indeed always nominalized, regardless of their verbal or nominal interpretation, whereas the others are systematically derived as verbal constructions.

4.1 Basic properties of participial constructions

The active participle morpheme *-juq/-tuq* and the passive participle morpheme *-jaq/-taq* derive nouns referring to, respectively, the agent/experiencer or the patient/theme denoted by a verb, respectively, as exemplified in (33).

(33) Bare active and passive participles (NB)

a. [pisuk-**tuq**] taku-viuk
[walk-ACT.PART(ABS)] see-INT.2SG>3SG
'Can you see the one walking?'

b. [katat-**taq**] nukappia-kulu-up tigu-laur-llugu
[fall-PASS.PART(ABS)] boy-small-ERG.SG take-PST-CTMP.3SG>3SG
'The little boy picked up the one that was dropped.'

As nominalized verbal forms, participles can take nominal inflectional morphology. For example, they can be marked with a case marker, as the active participle marked with allative case in (34a) (compare with the nominal argument, also marked with allative case, in (34b)). Notice also the nominal modifier *-kuluk* 'small' attached immediately after the active participle morpheme.

(34) Casemorphology on participles (NB)

a. taanna nukappiaq tuni-si-lir-puq nasar-mik
DEM.ABS.SG young.boy(ABS) give-ANTIP-PROG-IND.3SG hat-MOD.SG
[tukkarialik-tu-kulung-**mut**]
[bicycle-ACT.PART-small-ALL.SG)]
'This young boy is giving the hat to the little one biking.'

b. Simioni Mittimatalir-**mut** tiki-laur-puq
Simon(ABS) Pond.Inlet-ALL.SG arrive-PST-IND.3SG
'Simon arrived to Pond Inlet.'

[28] One reviewer points out that there are other types of nominalized constructions in the language (i.e., constructions nominalized with other nominalizers like *-lik* 'one that has', *-vik* 'place', etc.) that also seem to form null predicative constructions. We agree with them, and we believe that the syntactic analysis presented in this section for participial constructions should for the most part also apply to these other types of nominalized constructions. That said, more research is needed to ensure that all these nominalized constructions do indeed have the same properties.

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Possessive inflectional morphology can also surface in passive participial constructions, whereby the passive participle bears possessive agreement morphology, which encodes both the person and the number of the subject as well as the object, and the subject is marked with genitive case, as shown in (35a) (compare with the possessive construction in (35b)).

(35) Possessive morphology in passive participial constructions (NB)

a. [anguti-**up** katat-ta-**nga**] taku-vaa
[man-GEN.SG fall-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)] see-IND.3SG>3SG
'He saw what the man dropped.'

b. [anguti-**up** nasa-**nga**] maniqqa-mii-puq
[man-GEN.SG hat-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)] ground-be.on-IND.3SG
'The man's hat is on the ground.'

The subject of an active participle and the object of a passive participle can also be expressed syntactically, in which case these arguments are marked with the same case as the one marking the participle. Crucially, this case is assigned within the matrix clause to the argument position in which the participial construction surfaces, as exemplified with the active participial construction in (36a) and the passive participial construction in (36b).

(36) Case matching between arguments and participles (NB)

a. [anguti-**mut** avvur-tur-**mut**] upak-si-vut
[man-ALL.SG pick-ACT.PART-ALL.SG] reach-PROG-IND.3PL
'They are going to the man who is picking (fruits).'

b. Piita pisuk-tuq
Peter(ABS) walk-ACT.PART
[nanur-**mut** anguti-up kapi-ja-nga-**nut**]
[bear-ALL.SG man-GEN.SG stab-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG-ALL]
'Peter is walking towards the bear that the man stabbed.'

Note that the case matching between the subject and the active participle, as in (36a), and the object and the passive participle, as in (36b), will be an important element of our syntactic analysis of participial constructions, proposed in section 4.3. Recall also that their corresponding arguments in verbal constructions, namely intransitive subjects and transitive objects, are conversely always marked with absolutive case (see examples (1a–c)). In participial constructions appearing in argument positions, such arguments are marked with absolutive case only when the construction surfaces in an argument position to which absolutive case is assigned within the matrix clause (and the participle is also marked with absolutive case), as illustrated in (37).

Accordingly, this shows that absolutive case is never assigned *within* participial constructions when the latter serve as arguments, which makes sense if we assume that absolutive case is connected to verbal agreement (see section 1) and such constructions are nominalized. However, there is one context in which absolutive case is assigned within participial constructions, namely when the latter do not serve as arguments but as main clauses, as discussed in the next section.

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(37) Participial constructions as absolutive arguments (NB)

a. [nukappiaq taanna nasar-minik kata-i-rqau-juq]
[boy(ABS) DEM.ABS.SG hat-MOD.SG.REFL fall-ANTIP-REC.PST-ACT.PART(ABS)]
pingasu-nik tuni-si-vuq
three-MOD.PL give-ANTIP-IND.3SG
'The boy who just dropped his hat gave three (pears).'

b. [taanna naarraaji-kuluk tigua-ri-rqau-ja-nga]
[DEM.ABS.SG frog-small(ABS) adopt-TR-REC.PST-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)]
tigu-tuinnar-lluniuk
take-just-CTMP.3SG>3SG
'He takes the frog that he adopted earlier.'

4.2 Unexpected case pattern in participial constructions

In the last section, we saw that absolutive case is never assigned within participial constructions serving as arguments. Consequently, in such nominalized constructions, intransitive subjects and transitive objects, which are always marked with absolutive case in 'regular' verbal constructions (see examples (1a–c)), are marked instead with whichever case is assigned within the matrix clause to the argument position in which the participial construction surfaces (see examples (36)–(37)). However, when participial constructions can stand alone and serve as main clauses, for example as a response to a question, these arguments are marked with absolutive case, as shown in (38)–(39).

(38) Active participial constructions with absolutive case (NI)
Context: Someone asks John who used to work at the store. He replies:
Siasi niuvirvir-mut iqqanaijaq-**tu-viniq**
Siasi(ABS) store-ALL.SG work-ACT.PART-old/former(ABS)
'Siasi (is) who used to work at the store.'

(39) Passive participial constructions with absolutive case (NI)
Context: Someone asks Clara who she talked to on the phone. She replies:
Pauli uqauti-gi-**ja-vini-ra**
Paul(ABS) talk.to-TR-PASS.PART-old/former-POSS.1SG>3SG(ABS)
'Paul (is) who I was talked to.'

Crucially, note that these two participial constructions must be nominal, since the nominal modifier *-viniq* 'old/former' can only attach to nominal bases, as shown earlier with the examples in (5a–b), and it follows the participle morpheme in both examples. This case pattern is therefore unexpected if we assume that absolutive case can only be licensed through verbal agreement (see section 1). Importantly, note that the participle forms in both examples are also marked with absolutive case, which suggests the same type of case matching observed with participial constructions appearing in argument positions (see examples (36)–(37)).

As mentioned in the introduction, though, the two participle morphemes in Inuktitut seem to have a dual function. On the one hand, they seem to be nominalizers and build participial constructions appearing in argument positions, as in

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Table 1. Agreement in possessive and passive participial constructions in Inuinnaqtun (Lowe 1985)

POSSESSIVE AGREEMENT		PASSIVE PARTICIPIAL AGREEMENT	
qaja-**ra**	'my canoe'	taku-ja-**ra**	'I saw him/her'
qaja-**kka**	'my canoes (2)'	taku-ja-**kka**	'I saw them (2)'
qaja-**tka**	'my canoes (3+)'	taku-ja-**tka**	'I saw them (3+)'
qaja-**n**	'your canoe'	taku-ja-**n**	'you (sg) saw him/her'
qaja-**kkin**	'your canoes (2)'	taku-ja-**kkin**	'you (sg) saw them (2)'
qaja-**tin**	'your canoes (3+)'	taku-ja-**tin**	'you (sg) saw them (3+)'
qaja-**a**	'his/her canoe'	taku-ja-**a**	'he/she saw him/her'
qaja-**ik**	'his/her canoes (2)'	taku-ja-**ik**	'he/she saw them (2)'
qaja-**it**	'his/her canoes (3+)'	taku-ja-**it**	'he/she saw them (3+)'

all examples presented in section 4.1. On the other hand, they also seem to function like verbal mood markers and form what look like verbal constructions in a verbal mood semantically similar to the indicative mood (see (8a)). Consequently, participial constructions in isolation are in fact semantically ambiguous, as shown in (40).

(40) Semantically ambiguous participial constructions
  a. miki-juq
     small-ACT.PART
     'He is small .' *or* 'The small one'

  b. taku-ja-ra
     see-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3SG
     'I see it.' *or* 'The one I see'

(Johns 1992: 60, 75)

Recall also that the transitive morphology in Inuit-Yupik-Unangan languages is historically related to the possessive morphology, as mentioned in section 2.3. The morphological parallel still holds between the forms of the ergative case and of the genitive case (compare (1a) with (13a)) and also between the forms of the agreement markers found in possessive constructions and passive participle constructions, as shown in Table 1.

Importantly, the parallel holds only if the object in passive participial constructions is third person, as the language does not have possessive agreement markers for first/second-person possessums. When the object is first or second person, verbal agreement markers cross-referencing first- or second-person intransitive subjects are then attached after the possessive agreement marker that cross-references a third-person singular possessum (by default), as shown in (41).[29]

[29]See Bergsland (1955), Fortescue (1995), and Mahieu (2009) for the historical evolution of these forms.

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(41) First/second-person objects in passive participials
a. taku-ja-a-**nga**
see-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG-1SG
'He sees me.'

b. pisuk-pu-**nga**
walk-IND-1SG
'I walk.' (Johns 1992: 74)

Moreover, note that passive participial constructions with a first-/second-person object as well as active participial constructions with a first-/second-person subject are never semantically ambiguous and can only be interpreted as verbal, as also shown with the examples in (41a–b).

In the next section, we will demonstrate that participial constructions like the ones in (38) and (39) should be analyzed as null predicative clauses, following Yuan (2013). Furthermore, building on our analysis of oblique gerund constructions in section 3.3, we will argue that such constructions are also endowed with illocutionary force, which makes them project TopP/ForceP, allowing them to license absolutive case (contrary to participial constructions surfacing in argument positions). Finally, we will show that even participial constructions interpreted verbally but containing only inflectional nominal morphology, like the examples in (40), should in fact also be analyzed as null predicative clauses.

4.3 Analysis of participial constructions

In this section, we present our analysis of participial constructions with the goal of accounting for absolutive case assignment when such constructions are employed as main clauses, as explained in section 4.2. First, again following Kornfilt and Whitman's (2011) typology of nominalizations, we argue that participial constructions are TP nominalizations, as they can contain tense, as shown with the active participial construction in (42a) and the passive participial construction in (42b).

(42) Participial constructions as tp nominalizations (NB)
a. [tainna igluling-miuta-u-**lauqsima-juq**]
[DEM.ABS.SG Igloolik-inhabitant.of-be-DIST.PST-ACT.PART(ABS)]
qauli-lauqsima-ja-ra
know-DIST.PST-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3SG
'I knew <u>that person from Iglulik</u>.'

b. [sirnaa-qatta-**lau**-nngi-**ta**-kka]
[protect-regularly-PST-NEG-PASS.PART-POSS.1SG>3PL(ABS)]
aaqqik-sima-niqsauq-quuji-ju-t
adjust-PERF-more-seem-ACT.PART-PL
'<u>The ones I would not defend</u> seem to be more adjusted today.'

While both types of participles form DPs, passive participles may also take possessive morphology whenever the subject is expressed, overtly or not (see (35a–b)). In such circumstances, we assume that passive participles merge in the complement position of a Poss head and then move to the Poss head for agreement, while their

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subject subsequently moves to the specifier position of PossP to receive genitive case. The syntactic derivation for passive participle constructions is thus similar to that of transitive/unergative gerund constructions up to that point (see Figure 2).

A bit more challenging are the structures in which the subject of an active participle or the object of a passive participle is expressed syntactically. As we saw in (36), repeated below as (43) for convenience, these arguments are marked with the same case as the active/passive participle when participial constructions appear in an argument position.

(43) Case matching between arguments and participles (NB)

a. [anguti-**mut** avvur-tur-**mut**] upak-si-vut
[man-ALL.SG pick-ACT.PART-ALL.SG] reach-PROG-IND.3PL
'They are going to the man who is picking (fruits).'

b. Piita pisuk-tuq
Peter(ABS) walk-ACT.PART
[nanur-**mut** anguti-up kapi-ja-nga-**nut**]
[bear-ALL.SG man-GEN.SG stab-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG-ALL]
'Peter is walking towards the bear that the man stabbed.'

For that reason, such complex participial constructions have been argued to consist of two DPs in apposition, where the participial DP is right-adjoined to the other nominal (see Compton 2012, Yuan 2013), as illustrated in Figure 6.

Crucially, even if the second DP seems to function like a relative clause, participial constructions used in such contexts cannot be considered genuine relative clauses, as it would be impossible to argue that an operator undergoes A′-movement to the specifier position of CP within the DP. This is because participial constructions are TP-nominalizations and hence lack a CP layer. Nevertheless, the participial constructions appearing in argument positions present restrictions that are sometimes observed in relative clauses, since the first DP is restricted to refer to the subject of the active participle or the object of the passive participle (see Johns 1992; Yuan 2013, 2018), which could suggest some type of A′-extraction restriction. The problem with the proposal that participial constructions appearing in argument positions consist of a participial DP right-adjoined to another DP, as illustrated in Figure 6 above, is that these restrictions are not accounted for.

Such participial constructions could well be pseudo-relative clauses, which are often analyzed as some kind of small clauses (e.g., Guasti 1988, 1992; Cinque 1995;

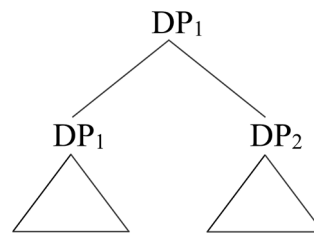


Figure 6. Participial constructions as two DPs in apposition.

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Rafel 1999; Casalicchio 2016). This is the approach we will adopt. We argue that all participial constructions containing only inflectional nominal morphology, whether serving as arguments or main clauses, are small clauses. This proposal builds on Yuan (2013), who analyzes main clause participial constructions as null predicative clauses. Similar analyses, albeit using different formalisms, have been proposed by Lowe (1978), Johns (1992), and Beach (2012) for main clause participial constructions. Indeed, null predicative clauses exist independently in the language, as exemplified in (44).

(44) Null predicative clauses in inuktitut (NI)

a. Jaani ilisaiji
John(ABS) teacher(ABS)
'John (is) a teacher.'

b. Jaani Miali-up ilisaiji-nga
John(ABS) Mary-GEN.SG teacher-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'John (is) Mary's teacher.'

In both examples, two absolutive DPs are placed in apposition to form a null predicative clause. Interestingly, if any verbal categories are expressed, like negation or tense, the second DP must be followed by one or the other of the affixal verbs *-u* and *-gi,* which seem to function as verbalizers to allow the affixation of verbal categories and are commonly translated as 'be' and 'have as', respectively, due to their interpretation in such constructions.[30] Crucially, the verbal base is thereafter re-nominalized with the active participle or the passive participle, and the given participial form remains marked with absolutive case, as shown in (45).

(45) Participial constructions as null predicative clauses (NI)

a. Jaani ilisaiji-**u-nngi-tuq**
John(ABS) teacher-be-NEG-ACT.PART(ABS)
'John is not a teacher.'

b. Jaani Miali-up ilisaiji-**gi-laur-ta-nga**
John(ABS) Mary-GEN.SG teacher-have.as-PST-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'John was Mary's teacher.' (lit. 'Mary has John as a teacher.')

The participial constructions in (45) are in fact very similar to those presented in (38) and (39), repeated in (46) and (47) for convenience, with the sole exception that the root of the participles is nominal (i.e., *ilisaiji* 'teacher') instead of verbal (i.e., *iqqanaijaq-* 'work' and *uqauti-* 'talk to'). Yuan (2013) proposes that the null predicative head is Infl, which takes the participial construction as its complement, and the first DP in its specifier. As for how absolutive case is assigned, Yuan posits that absolutive case is

[30] In such contexts, the choice of the affixal verb between *-u* 'be' and *-gi* 'have as' only displays an agreement reflex in relation to the choice of the following participle morpheme. More precisely, the affixal verb *-u* 'be' surfaces with the active participle *-juq*/*-tuq* while the affixal verb *-gi* 'have as' surfaces with the passive participle *-jaq*/*-taq.*

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(46) Active participial constructions with absolutive arguments (NI)
Context: Someone asks John who used to work at the store. He replies:
Siasi niuvirvir-mut **iqqanaijaq**-tu-viniq
Siasi(ABS) store-ALL.SG work-ACT.PART-former(ABS)
'Siasi (is) who used to work at the store.'

(47) Passive participial constructions with absolutive arguments (NI)
Context: Someone asks Clara who she talked to on the phone. She replies:
Pauli **uqauti**-gi-ja-vini-ra
Paul(ABS) talk.to-TR-PASS.PART-old/former-POSS.1SG>3SG(ABS)
'Paul (is) who I talked to.'

inherited from C by Infl (following Pesetsky and Torrego 2001) and then assigned to the first DP in [Spec, Infl], as illustrated below in Figure 7.

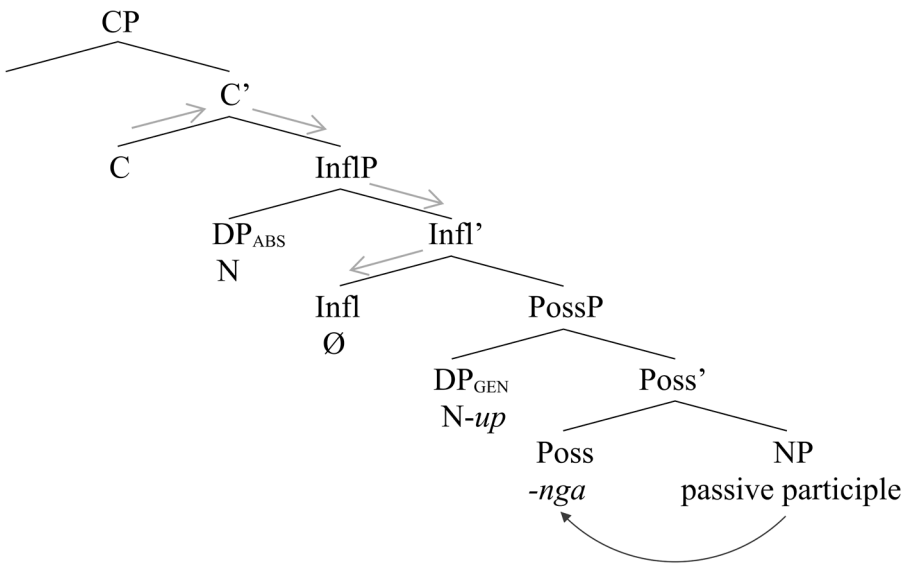


Figure 7. Main clause participial constructions as null predicative clauses, based on Yuan (2013).

The assignment of absolutive case by Infl to the argument in its specifier is, however, not in line with the growing consensus in the literature that absolutive case-marked arguments must move into the CP-domain in order to explain their systematic wide scope over sentence-level operators and be interpreted as sentential or aboutness topics (see section 2.2). This proposal also does not account for why the participle form also receives absolutive case whenever such constructions act as main clauses, as shown with examples (45)–(47), suggesting the same case matching operation seen in participial constructions surfacing in argument positions, as shown with (43a–b). In fact, when null predicative clauses like those in (44)–(45) appear in argument positions (rather than standing alone and acting as main clauses), the second DP is also marked

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with the same case as the first DP, no matter whether the second DP is a noun (48a) or a participle form (48b).

(48) Null predicative clausesin argument positions

a. [uvatti-**nik** uqausiliriji-**nik**] nalli-gusut-tuq
[1PL-MOD.SG linguist-be-MOD.PL] love-ANTIP-ACT.PART
'He/she loves us linguists.'

b. [uvatti-**nik** uqausiliriji-u-**ju**-**nik**] nalli-gusut-tuq
[1PL-MOD.SG linguist-be-ACT.PART-MOD.PL] love-ANTIP-ACT.PART
'He/she loves us, we being linguists.'

(Beach 2012: 41)

Consequently, this further suggests that null predicative clauses and participial constructions are indeed similar syntactic constructions, regardless of whether they serve as arguments or main clauses. Building on Yuan's (2013) proposal, we argue that the two DPs in apposition are linked by a null predicative head (i.e., Pred) rather than by Infl. The null predicative head expresses identity between the two DPs, namely that they are semantically related constituents. This explains why the two DPs are always marked with the same case by assuming *case matching*, as also argued by Schütze (2001) for languages in which the subject and the postcopular DP in copulative clauses must have identical case. Thus, the second DP is never in a syntactic relation with any case assigner and its case-marking simply matches the one of the first DP. Interestingly, this gives more evidence against proposals arguing that absolutive case is a default case in the language, as briefly discussed at the end of section 3.3. In fact, Yuan (2018) and Mikkelsen and Thrane (2024) claim that absolutive case is a default case as the postcopular DP in copulative constructions, as in (45), is outside of the purview of the Case filter and is realized as absolutive. However, as we can see in (48), when such constructions appear in argument positions, the second DP is not necessarily absolutive and its case-marking simply matches the one of the first DP. If absolutive case was a default case in such circumstances, we would then expect the second DP to always be absolutive. However, this is not the case.

Assuming that such constructions are null predicative clauses, we propose the structures in Figures 8 and 9 for active and passive participial constructions surfacing in argument positions.

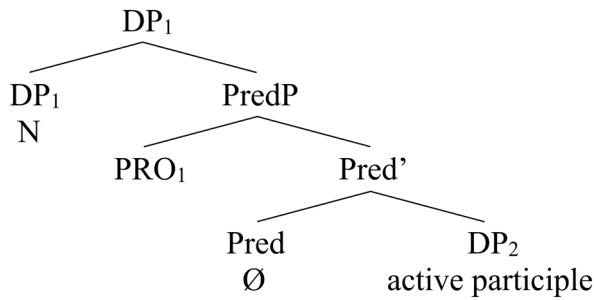


Figure 8. Active participial constructions in argument positions.

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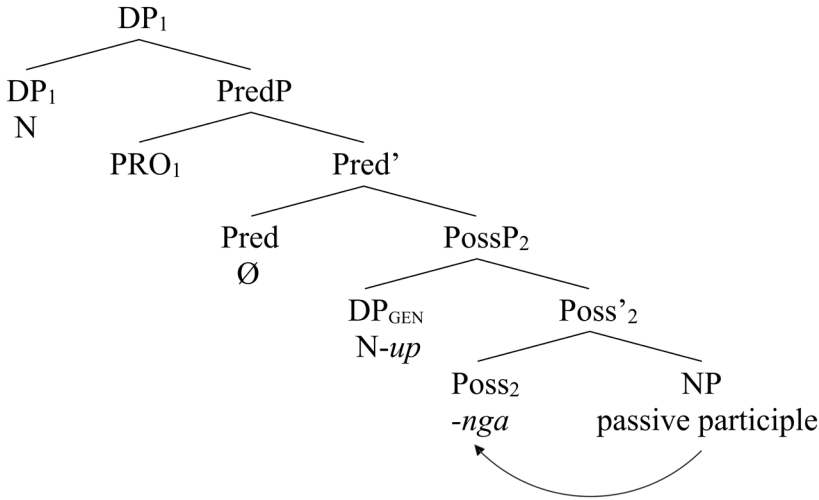


Figure 9. Passive participial constructions in argument positions.

Both types of participial constructions form complex DPs, in which the null predicative clause modifies the first DP as an adjunct and is crucially analyzed as a control structure with a PRO in its subject position that is coindexed with the first DP.[31] Most importantly, such structures allow us to account for the fact that the modified DP (i.e., the first DP) can only refer to what we have called the subject of the active participle or the object of the passive participle, but which in both cases actually correspond to the subject of the null predicative clause (or, semantically, the constituent being in an identity relation with the following participle form). Note that this is also in line with previous studies on pseudo-relatives, which also argue for control structures in order to account for the so-called subject-object asymmetry, according to which the antecedent is always coindexed with the subject of such clauses (see Graffi 1980, 2017; Kayne 1983; Cinque 1995; Côté 1999; Casalicchio 2016). Lastly, as for case marking, the first DP is marked with whichever case is assigned within the matrix clause to the argument position in which the participial construction surfaces. We further assume that the subsequent participle form receives the same case as the first DP following *case matching*, as explained earlier.

[31]This approach shares common ground with Yuan's (2023, 2024) analysis of participle-incorporating existentials in Inuktitut, which she characterizes as pseudo-relative clauses involving a control structure. However, our approach applies to a different syntactic domain – specifically, participial constructions functioning as arguments rather than existential constructions – and is implemented differently. In our analysis, all participles are treated as nominal rather than verbal; PRO is not contained within the participle; and the nominal pivot is interpreted as referring to the subject of the null predicative clause, which corresponds to what would be the subject of an active participle or the object of a passive participle in a verbal analysis. It is worth noting that the nominal pivot in participle-incorporating existentials is subject to different restrictions: it cannot be a definite description or a strong quantifier and can only be interpreted as the subject of an active participle (see Yuan 2023, 2024).

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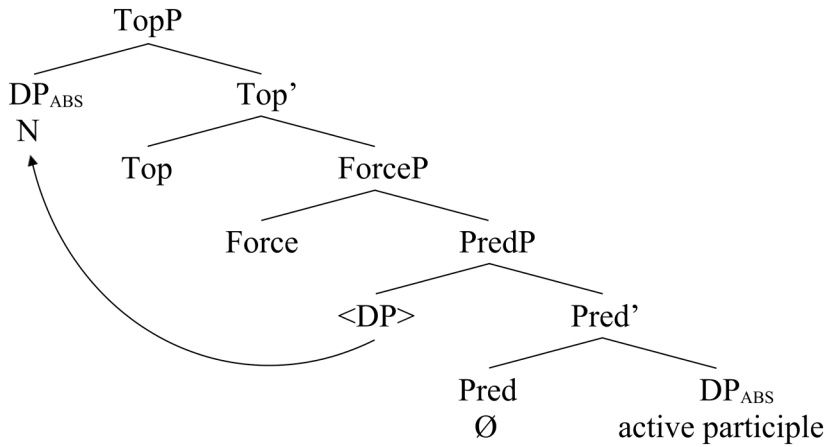


Figure 10. Active participial constructions as main clauses.

As for participial constructions as main clauses, we propose the following structures formed with the active or the passive participle, building also on our analysis of oblique gerund constructions proposed in section 3.3.

Like participial constructions appearing in argument positions, those acting as main clauses also form null predicative clauses. However, the first DP merges directly into the subject position of the null predicative clause (instead of having a PRO), as the latter is no longer modifying this DP but is now implementing an independent conversational move that affects the common ground of the conversation (e.g., Krifka 2007, Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010, Frascarelli 2017), since asserting an identity relation between the first DP and the following participle form DP represents a speech act. Main clause participial constructions therefore possess illocutionary force (i.e., the illocutionary force of assertion), and, as was argued for oblique gerund constructions in section 3.3, must project ForceP bundled with TopP. Thus, we argue that the first DP then moves to [Spec, TopP], where it is assigned absolutive case. Recall that we assume that the movement of absolutive arguments to the CP-domain, which minimally consists of Force and Topic in the language, is an instance of A-movement, since the features driving movement are obligatory (see section 2.2). The fact that the participle form is also systematically marked with absolutive in such participial constructions is once again explained by assuming *case matching* between the first DP and the participle form, as just discussed.

Finally, recall that active participial constructions with a third-person subject and passive ones with a third-person object are ambiguous in isolation between nominal or verbal interpretations (see examples in (40)). In fact, there is a long-lasting debate in the Inuit literature as to whether such participial constructions should still be analyzed as nominalized constructions even when interpreted verbally (see, e.g., Lowe 1978, Johns 1992, Sadock 1999, Beach 2011, Yuan 2013). Interestingly, the examples below clearly indicate that such constructions must be nominalized, as they allow nominal modification after the participle, as we saw earlier with examples (38)–(39).

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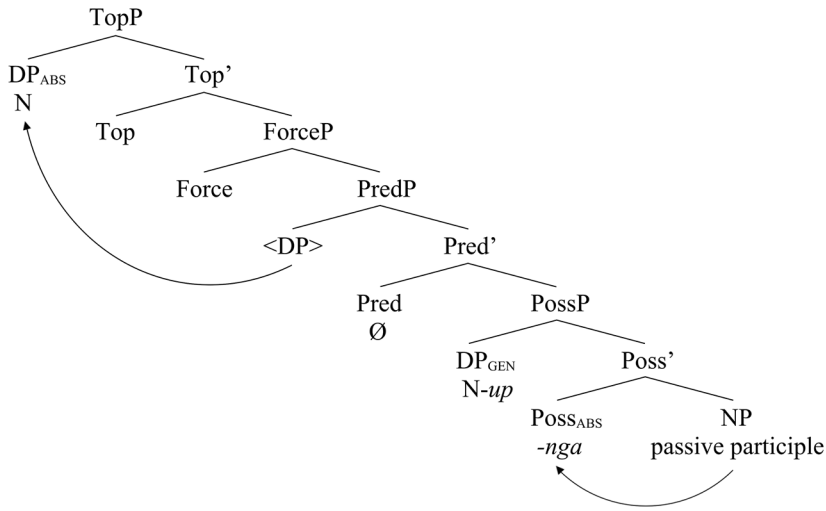


Figure 11. Passive participial constructions as main clauses.

(49) Nominal modification in active participial constructions (NI)

a. Jaani-**kuluk** pisuk-tuq
John-small(ABS) walk-ACT.PART(ABS)
'Little John is walking.'

b. Jaani pisuk-tu-**kuluk**
John(ABS) walk-ACT.PART-small(ABS)
'Little John is walking.'

(50) Nominal modification in passive participial constructions (NI)

a. Piita-up Piani-**kuluk** malit-ta-nga
Peter-GEN.SG Penny-small(ABS) follow-PASS.PART-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'Peter is following little Penny.'

b. Piita-up Piani malit-ta-**kulu**-nga
Peter-GEN.SG Penny(ABS) follow-PASS.PART-small-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'Peter is following little Penny.'

More precisely, the nominal modifier *-kuluk* 'small' can attach to either the absolutive argument or the participle both in the active participial constructions (49) or in the passive ones (50). Importantly, the interpretation is the same in both pairs, and *-kuluk* 'small' systematically modifies the absolutive argument. This can be explained if and only if (i) the active participle morpheme and the passive one function as nominalizers rather than verbal mood markers (and consequently such participial constructions are nominalized ones), and (ii) the absolutive argument is placed in a syntactic relation in which this argument and the participial construction are interpreted as being in a semantic relation of equivalence or identity (which explains why the modifier *-kuluk* 'small' still modifies the absolutive argument even if attached to the participle). We take this as evidence that such participial constructions also form null predicative

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clauses, as illustrated in Figure 10 and Figure 11 above, despite their apparent verbal interpretation.

As for active participial constructions with a first-/second-person subject, as well as passive ones with a first-/second-person object, which conversely require verbal agreement markers to encode the latter arguments (see (41)), such participial constructions are not only never interpreted as nominal constructions, they also disallow nominal modification, as shown in (51).

(51) Prohibited nominal modificationin local participial constructions (NI)

a. *pisuk-tu-**kulu**-nga
walk-ACT.PART-small-1SG
Intended: 'I, the little one, am walking.'

b. *Piita-up malit-ta-**kulu**-a-nga
Peter-GEN.SG follow-PASS.PART-small-POSS.3SG>3SG-1SG
Intended: 'Peter is following me, the little one.'

Therefore, we argue for a syntactic split in participial constructions, whereby those bearing only inflectional nominal morphology are nominalized constructions and derive null predicative clauses, while the participial constructions taking verbal agreement markers have no nominal properties and are derived like any other verbal constructions in the language. Yet Johns (1992) argues that the nominal base in such participial constructions are in fact re-verbalized with the attachment of verbal agreement markers, rather than having the same derivation as other verbal constructions, due to the presence of the participle morpheme as well as possessive agreement morphology in passive participial constructions. However, if this were the case, the examples in (51) would be grammatical, as the nominal modifier *-kuluk* 'small' attaches to the participle morpheme (before the said re-verbalization). We therefore assume that the participle and the agreement morphemes in 'verbal' participial constructions now form portmanteau morphemes, which are equivalent to verbal mood markers (see section 2.2). Further evidence for the present morphological analysis is the fact that such verbal agreement markers can no longer freely attach to nominal bases, as shown in (52).

(52) Verbal agreement markers in null predicative clauses

a. Miari jaani-up anaana-a
Mary(ABS) John-GEN.SG mother-POSS.3SG>3SG(ABS)
'Mary is John's mother.'

b. *Jaani-up anaana-a-**nga**
John-GEN.SG mother-POSS.3SG>3SG-1SG(ABS)
Intended: 'I am John's mother.'

(Johns 1987: 67, 72)

The null predicative clause in (52a) is similar to the one presented in (44b). But the possessum in the null predicative clause in (52b) bears both possessive and verbal agreement morphology, now similarly to so-called verbal participial constructions like the ones presented in (41a) or (51a), with the intended meaning 'I am John's mother'. However, the example in (52b) is ungrammatical, indicating that verbal agreement markers can indeed no longer attach to nominal bases.

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5 Conclusion

In this article, we analyzed gerund and participial constructions in Inuktitut to account for the unexpected assignment of absolutive case to one of their arguments in two specific contexts. Absolutive case assignment in such nominalized clauses is surprising, as it is commonly assumed to be tied to verbal agreement occurring in the CP-domain (see Johns 2006; Spreng 2006, 2012; Compton 2018; Carrier 2021). However, gerund and participial constructions not only lack verbal agreement, as they are nominalized constructions, but they also correspond to TP nominalizations, lacking a CP layer. Absolutive case assignment in them thus poses a theoretical problem.

A deeper analysis of these nominalized constructions helped us determine that they can assign absolutive case when they have illocutionary force and thus project ForceP bundled with TopP, which we argue is responsible for absolutive case assignment, as this case is used to mark sentential or aboutness topics in the language (see Tersis and Carter-Thomas 2005; Berge 2011; Carrier 2012, 2017, 2021; Johns and Kučerová 2017). More precisely, gerund constructions assign absolutive case to their subject whenever they are marked with certain oblique cases and become equivalent to subordinate verbal constructions. As for active and passive participial constructions, they assign absolutive case only when they stand alone and are interpreted as main clauses. The analysis of these nominalized constructions deepens our understanding of the left periphery in Inuktitut by establishing that absolutive case is not only assigned in verbal clauses, but in any clause endowed with illocutionary force. By extension, this further indicates that absolutive case assignment represents a root phenomenon in the language, as it requires the clausal left periphery. Aboutness topics have been claimed as being among the clearest representatives of root clause phenomena cross-linguistically in several studies (e.g., Hooper and Thompson 1973, Haegeman 2006, Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010, Frascarelli 2019). However, to our knowledge, this is the first study in which root phenomena have been argued to be also available with nominalized clauses.

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