

The Absentive: Time, Person, and Place Deixis

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The so-called Absentive (De Groot, 2000) has been identified for various related and unrelated languages in Europe. It has been described as spatial deictic construction denoting remoteness or distance from the deictic centre. While it has differing forms crosslinguistically, it almost always involves a non-finite form of the verb. In Standard German (SG), it can be formed with *go+non-finite verb* (1a), or *finite BE+non-finite verb* (1b). The latter thus resembles strongly the English progressive form, which has led it to be described as some form of progressive (Krause, 2002). Others however disagree with that assessment (de Groot, 2000). Swabian, an Alemannic dialect of German expresses this notion with *finite BE+ZUM+go+non-finite verb* (2a) or *finite BE+BEIM+non-finite verb* (2b). It contrasts with the similar AM-progressive *finite BE+AM+non-finite* (3), which does not denote the absentive reading. I suggest in this paper that the BEIM-construction involves more than just a spatial absence as described in deGroot (2000), but is also triggered by time and person distance. If the subject is first person and the tense is present and thus both person and time deixis are not distal, the construction does not denote absence and is synonymous with the AM-progressive in that respect. If the subject is third person and the tense is past, only the BEIM-construction is acceptable. Any other person-tense combinations prefer the BEIM-construction and indicate absence by default. They do allow the contrasting AM but indicate that the subject and the event must be visible to the speaker in that case.

1st person – present:	AM/BEIM ok	1st person – past:	BEIM preferred
2 nd person – present:	BEIM preferred	2 nd person – past:	BEIM preferred
3rd person – present:	BEIM preferred	3rd person – past:	BEIM acceptable

These initial patterns suggest that the absentive indicates more than just spatial distance but is triggered by temporal and person distance as well. Without any further context, the preference for BEIM thus supports its semantics as absentive (Krause, 2002). I thus suggest that the grammaticalisation of absence in Swabian does not only include place but also temporal and person deixis. Some cross-linguistic evidence from other languages that have been described as grammaticalizing multiple deictic distances seem to support this view (Tamm, 2011).

Phone call: May I speak to John?	Absentive: Sorry he is gone eating.	
(1) a. tut mir leid er ist ess-en gegangen sorry, he is eat-INF gone	b. tut mir leid, er ist ess-en sorry, he is eat-INF.	[SG]
(2a) r'isch zom essa ganga he'is to-the eat-INF gone	b. r'isch BEIM ess-a he'is at-the eat-INF	[SW]
(3) I be grad AM koch-a I am currently AM cook-INF		[SW]

De Groot, Caspar. 2000. The Absentive. In *Tense and Aspect in the Languages of Europe*, ed. Östen Dahl. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 641–667

Krause, Olaf. 2002. *Progressiv im Deutschen: Eine empirische Untersuchung im Kontrast mit Niederländisch und Englisch*. vol. 462: Linguistische Arbeiten. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Tamm, Anne. 2011. Cross-categorial spatial case in the Finnic nonfinite system: Focus on the absentive TAM semantics and pragmatics of the Estonian inessive m-formative nonfinites. *Linguistics* 49:835–944.