

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GENITIVE ABSOLUTE IN SANSKRIT  
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While there are first signs of a Locative Absolute construction already in Vedic (see Example 1), the Genitive Absolute (henceforth GA, see Example 2) does not appear until Epic Sanskrit. And while for almost 130 years now, Ferdinand de Saussure's doctoral thesis (*De l'emploi du génitif absolu en sanscrit* (1881 [1922])) has served as an excellent and detailed synchronic description of the use of the GA, a study concerning the construction's origins is yet missing.

1) yád adyá surya udyatí príyak\_atra \_tá\_ dadhá

'when you, dear rulers, appoint the rite at sunrise today' (RV 8.27.19)

2) etavad uktva vacana\_ Maitravaru\$ir acyuta%  
samudram apibat kruddha% sarvalokasya pasyata%

'having said this, the son of Mitra and Varuna, unmoved and angry, drained/drank up the ocean with the whole world looking on' (MBh III 8807)

This talk offers a theory of how the GA may have come about, taking into account both the observations Saussure made about the nature of the attested construction, and also relevant comparative material, mainly taken from ancient Greek.

In brief, I propose that the GA developed after the model of the already existent locative absolute when genitive took over most functions of the dative (on this partial syncretism, see e.g. Oberlies, *A Grammar of*

*Epic Sanskrit*, 303-4). Originally, the genitive absolute was no more than an ethic dative/dative of referent,

which now appeared in the genitive: eva\_ cintayato mahaka\_+ena divaso vyatikranta% 'of him thinking so

(<\*to/for him thinking so), the day passed very slowly' (Pañcatantra 154; example given by Speijer, *Sanskrit*

*Syntax* (1886:8)). Compare this with Greek expressions such as &'( CD ) \* +,)-./0 CEFGGHIE

JDKCLEM NOMHL /

PQMHL RS' TIKNUCVM 'and to him as he pondered in this way, it seemed to him better to go find the son of

Atreus' (Il. 14.23-4)

This theory is supported not only by de Saussure's findings that the subject of the GA is in almost all cases

animate (op. cit. 274) - which is what one would expect of an ethic dative -, that the action of the GA is always coinciding with that of the main verb (op. cit. 275-6), and that the large majority of GAs employ verbs

of perception (first and foremost Xd\_s) (op. cit. 275). It also finds support in what Pañini (2.3.38) writes about

this construction: \_a\_+hi ca anadare 'the sixth case (i.e. the genitive) [can] also [be used] in case of anadara'

states that the GA can be used instead of a Locative Absolute in case of anadara, a term meaning 'disregard;

lack of consideration, disinterest, indifference' (*Nichtachtung, Mangel an Rücksicht, Nichtbeachtung, Gleichgültigkeit*, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch Kürzerer Fassung*). The point here is that the main action is viewed by

someone, given in the GA (i.e. once an ethic dative), who reacts to it in some way, whether disapprovingly or

with indifference. The theory presented here does admittedly not explain why the GA does not also include

positive reactions to the given main action.

Over time, the GA then came to include expressions that did not reflect the construction's origins from the

ethic dative (which de Saussure lists as cases of 'anadara mitigé' (op. cit. 282) or of 'extrême dégradation de

l'anadara' (op. cit. 283)).