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Carlo Cecchetto, Donati Caterina

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# Relabeling participial constructions<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Participial relatives show a considerable degree of morphosyntactic variation cross-linguistically, with different structures and forms corresponding to different syntactic derivations (Doron & Reintges 2007). The most well-known type is that of past participial relatives in Romance, which display typical unaccusative/passive diagnostics in only allowing object relatives without an external argument (Burzio 1986). In Italian, for example, past participle reduced relatives are acceptable with passives (1) and unaccusatives (2) but unacceptable with active (3) and unergative verbs (4).

- (1) Il ragazzo rimproverato (era arrivato tardi)  
The boy reproached-PAST PART had arrived late
- (2) Il ragazzo arrivato tardi (sarà rimproverato)  
The boy arrived late will-be reproached-PAST PART
- (3) \* Il professore mangiato il panino  
The professor eaten the sandwich
- (4) \* Il professore telefonato ieri  
The professor phoned-PAST PART yesterday

We will explain these facts thanks to an extension of the (re)labeling analysis proposed in Donati and Cecchetto 2011 and Cecchetto and Donati 2015 (C&D) for other more articulated relative structures. In order to do so, will first briefly summarize C&D's relabeling analysis (section 2); we will then review other analyses that have been proposed for reduced relatives clauses, and discard them (section 3). Going back to participial relatives, we will show how the relabeling approach can account for their properties (section 4). This approach will allow us to predict the existence of a minimally different structure, namely absolute participial clauses (Section 5).

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<sup>1</sup> The two of us met Rita in different moments and different situations, but since then we have been both convinced that she is one of the smartest and most unpredictable linguist in our field. Discussing with her is always extreme fun, enormously inspirational, even if it can be very hard. Thanks Rita for your enthusiasm and for you sharp intelligence, and for the many more exhausting discussions still ahead of us.

## 2. The relabeling analysis of relativization

The starting point of C&D is the observation that a word, intended as the output of the morphology module, plays a crucial role in labeling determination. Uncontroversially, a word “projects” (provides the label) in head-complement configurations. C&D claim that the same happens when various types of relatives are formed, modulo the fact that labeling takes place after movement of the “head”.

In free relatives as in (5), for example, ‘what’, being a word, can provide the label. If it does, the structure ends up being a DP, i.e. a free relative.

(5) I like what you read

Alternatively, C, being the probe of the *wh*-movement of ‘what’, can provide the label, and the structure ends up being an interrogative clause.

(6) I wonder what you read

This potential labeling conflict explains the systematic ambiguity of the string ‘what you read’. Crucially, no ambiguity arises when a phrase is moved. In (7) only the target C is bound to project. The reason is that only words have a relabeling power, and ‘what book’ is a phrase (we refer to Cecchetto and Donati 2015: section 3.2 for an analysis of a class of *ever*-relatives, as “I will buy whichever book you will buy”, which *prima facie* seem free relatives resulting from phrasal *wh*-movement).

(7) a. I wonder what book you read  
b. \*I read what book you read.

We now illustrate relabeling analysis for the *wh*-relative in (8):

(8) The book which John read

The derivation of (8) involves two movement steps: first, ‘which book’ moves as a phrase to a dedicated position in the left periphery. This is an instance of phrasal *wh*-movement (copies are indicated by strikethrough).

(8') [CP which book John read ~~which book~~]

Second, the noun ‘book’ moves out of the phrase ‘which book’ and projects, giving the N label to the structure. The movement of ‘book’, with its relabeling property, derives the defining feature of relative constructions: that of involving a clause with a nominal distribution.

(8'') [NP book [CP which ~~book~~ John read ~~which book~~]]

Finally, the external determiner selects the NP resulting from the relabeling movement of the head noun.

(8''') The [NP book [CP which ~~book~~ John read ~~which book~~]]

An obvious problem arises in cases like (9), where the antecedent of the relative clause ‘destruction of the city’ should not be able to relabel the structure, since in C&D’s approach only words (not phrases) have a relabeling property.

(9) the destruction of the city which you witnessed

C&D assume that whatever material modifies the head noun, crucially including so-called complements of the noun (‘of the city’ in 9), can (and must) be late-merged after the head noun has moved and has “re-labeled” the structure. See C&D (but also Adger 2013) for an articulated defense of the view that nouns do not take complements the way verbs do.

The relabeling analysis can be straightforwardly expanded to an Italian *that*-relative like (10), under the assumption that, as proposed by Manzini & Savoia (2003, 2011), the counterpart of ‘that’ (*che*) is a *wh*-determiner, not a complementizer.

(10) Il libro che Gianni legge

The book that Gianni reads

Under this assumption, the analysis of *that*-relatives, illustrated in (10') is minimally different from the analysis of *wh*-relatives.

(10') Il [<sub>NP</sub> libro [<sub>CP</sub> che ~~libro~~ Gianni legge ~~che libro~~]]

An advantage of this analysis of relative clauses is that it dissociates the raising of the head from a specific feature or a specific cartographic position: what defines relative clauses is the nature of the movement operation itself, which, involving a word, can relabel, and thus nominalize the structure. We will capitalize on this feature of the relabeling analysis when it comes to participial relative clauses.

### 3. Participial relative clauses are reduced, but not from full-fledged structures

Let us now turn to briefly review the analyses that have been proposed for participial relative clauses. Historically, the term “reduced relatives” comes from the first analyses that were proposed in generative grammar, by which these structures were literally seen as reduced (elided) versions of full relative clauses (cf. Jacobs and Rosenbaum 1968: 204; Baker 1978: 12-3, a.o.). A variant of this analysis is illustrated in (11), an Italian reduced relative.

(11) Il ragazzo [ ~~che~~ è arrivato tardi ]  
the boy      ~~that is~~ arrived late

At the other extreme, we find another line of thought, inaugurated by Burzio (1986:150), where reduced relatives are identified with various kinds of small clauses (see also Pesetsky 1995:296). In Burzio’s analysis, for example, a reduced relative involves a null PRO, as in (12).

(12) il ragazzo [PRO arrivato tardi]  
the boy      arrived late

In more recent times, the idea of a full-fledged clausal structure assimilated to finite relative clauses has been revived. Participial relatives are analyzed as involving a relative operator

which is licensed in the specifier position of a functional projection headed by a complementizer-like functional head, as illustrated in (13).

- (13) il [ragazzo] <sub>[FP Op<sub>i</sub> F<sup>o</sup> t<sub>i</sub>]</sub> arrivato tardi  
the boy arrived late

Under this approach, the only peculiarity of participial clauses would be that they do not contain a tense node. In Kayne (1994), the functional head is identified with C; in Siloni (1995,1997) it is identified with D.

This recent revival of the literally reduced approach is partly related to the cartographic framework, whereby structures are defined by dedicated functional projections: the defining feature of relativization is identified with a functional projection hosting an operator (or the raising head in Kayne's terms): since participial relatives are relatives, they must contain this position.

The relabeling approach we just summarized in the previous section is very different, since it identifies the essence of relativization in the derivation itself, more specifically in the relabeling movement, no matter whether it happens in a full-fledged structure, as in full inflected relative clauses, or in a constituent as small as a VP. We shall return to this.

Going back to previous accounts, an obvious problem with Kayne's proposal is that it does not explain why complementizers are systematically banned from participial relatives. Furthermore, this incompatibility does not hold only in Romance, but is robustly attested across languages and is indeed a well-established typological observation (see Doron and Reintges 2013, and the reference quoted therein and Manzini, Savoia and Franco 2016 for a related construction in Punjabi). Another problem with a full-fledged structure for participial relatives is that it does not explain Burzio (1986)'s observation, namely why these relatives are only possible with unaccusatives and passives. This is why we think that a relabeling approach might be worth trying.

#### **4. Participial reduced relative clauses are relabeled**

All that is needed under the relabeling approach in order to build a relative structure is a relabeling movement, i.e. the movement of a nominal head.

Consider as an illustration the structure in (14), containing a participial relative with a passive verb (unless indicated differently, examples are in Italian).

(14) Conosco [<sub>DP</sub> il [<sub>NP</sub> ragazzo [<sub>VP</sub> rimproverato ragazzo]]]

(I) know the boy reproached

Here the head of the reduced relative ('ragazzo') is external since it precedes the verb, much like the head noun in full relatives. As in full relatives, we claim that it is the movement of N which "relabels" the structure, and provides the external determiner with the NP it needs to select. This amounts to saying that the derivation in (14) is parallel to the derivation of a full relative but for two aspects:

- the landing site of N movement is a position in the VP periphery in reduced relatives, while it is in the CP area in full relatives<sup>2</sup>;
- in (14) there is no manifestation of a D inside the relative. Participial relatives never contain wh-determiners such as 'which' or the complementizer 'che', which we analyzed as a wh-determiner following Manzini and Savoia's work.

We take the absence of a D inside the reduced relative at face value, and we assume that in (14) the participle 'rimproverato' ("scolded") is merged directly with the bare noun 'ragazzo'. This assumption plays a crucial role in explaining Burzio's facts.

If the verb does not need to check/assign accusative as in passive and unaccusative constructions, nothing goes wrong: the noun 'ragazzo' gets a thematic role from the past participle and gets a case from the main verb 'conosco' together with the external D after the noun has moved and has relabeled the structure. Under this analysis, theta role assignment is *not* restricted to DPs, as the past participle assigns a theta-role to the bare noun 'ragazzo'. This is not problematic, since there is independent evidence that nouns can receive theta roles: this happens with adjectives.

In languages like Italian bare singular nouns do not get case (DPs do). Therefore, an object past participle reduced relative as (15) is predicted to be impossible: (15) is a case violation because the verb 'eat' needs to (but cannot) assign accusative<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> We will not try to detail further what exact position in the vP/VP area this should be. According to Alcázar and Saltarelli (2008) what they call adnominal participial clauses are as small as VP, not vP.

<sup>3</sup> The derivation (15) also involves a locality violation, since the movement of the object noun 'panino' skips a c-commanding N, the subject 'Gianni', in a typical Relativized Minimality

(15) \*Il [NP panino [vP Gianni mangiato ~~panino~~]]

The sandwich Gianni eaten

Let us now turn to subject relatives. Consider (16), an ungrammatical participial relative with a transitive active verb.

(16) \*Incontrerò [DP il [NP professore [v [vP visto il ragazzo]]]

(I) will-meet the professor seen the boy

A first derivation is illustrated in (17'): the bare noun 'professore' becomes the label when it is merged with the structure headed by *v*.

(17') [NP professore [v [vP visto il ragazzo]]]

The problem with (17') is that, if *v* does not provide the label, the configuration for the Agent theta role assignment is not created (informally, the noun is not in Spec,*v*P). Therefore, a theta violation occurs and the structure is out. In other words, the relabeling configuration is incompatible with that for theta assignment: as a result subject relatives with a transitive verb as (17'), where the two configurations coincide, are ungrammatical. In principle, a different derivation might be the source of the reduced relative in (16), namely (17'').

(17'') [NP professore [v ~~professore~~-[v [vP visto il ragazzo]]]]

In (17'') the noun 'professore' moves and relabels the structure after it has received a theta role in Spec,*v*P. However, this derivation would be a case of vacuous movement and, crucially, it would also violate anti-locality. The anti-locality principle is a corollary of Last Resort that establishes that movement is allowed only if it creates a configuration in which some condition can be satisfied that could not be satisfied before movement took place (cf. Abels 2003 and Grohmann 2000 for discussion about different versions of the anti-locality principle). For example, anti-locality rules out movement of the complement of some head to the specifier of that very same head. The reason for this is that the head-complement

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violation configuration. See Cecchetto and Donati (2015: Chapter 4) for a detailed discussion of intervention effects in object relative clauses in a relabeling framework.

configuration is the closest relation that can be established between two categories in syntax, so all feature checking that involves these two categories should be satisfied in the head-complement configuration. As a consequence, movement to the specifier position of the same head is excluded because “useless”, since it does not allow any further feature checking. We propose that the same rationale applies to a case like (17’): the noun “professore” might have labeled the structure before movement (although ultimately this would have caused a theta-violation, as in 17’). So, it cannot move to create a relabeling configuration that was already possible without movement.<sup>4</sup>The same reasons that blocks the derivations (17’) and (17’’) blocks (18), with an unergative verb: in a nutshell, (18) either involves a theta violation or an anti-locality violation. All in all the structure is out.

- (18) \*Incontrerò [DP il [NP ragazzo [V [VP telefonato]]  
(I) will-meet the boy phoned

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Notice that auxiliary selection does not play any role in this account of past participle reduced relatives. This explains why reduced relatives are possible with passives but also with unaccusatives in English (cf. 19) and Spanish (cf. 20), even if unaccusatives do not select for the auxiliary *be* in these languages<sup>5</sup>.

- (19) The people recently arrived from the South

- (20) Las chicas recién llegadas a la estación son mis hermanas.  
the girls recently arrived at the station are my sisters.

## 5. Absolute participial constructions

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<sup>4</sup> An alternative account, which might not be incompatible with the one proposed here, is to assume that participial relatives are as reduced as VPs, therefore they do include the external argument position: see Alcázar and Saltarelli (2008) for a detailed argumentation.

<sup>5</sup> We acknowledge however that past participle reduced relatives with unaccusatives are not fully productive at least in English, unlike what happens in languages like Italian. We do not have an explanation for this.

An interesting feature of the relabeling approach is that it predicts a number of structural ambiguities due to labeling, such as the ones we briefly discussed in Section 1 in relation to free relatives. Let us start considering the minimally different structures in (21) and (22). (21) contains a reduced relative with a past participle while (22) contains an absolute participial construction.

(21) Il ragazzo arrivato tardi (non si scusò neppure)  
The boy arrived late (not himself apologized even)  
'The boy who arrived late did not even apologize'

(22) Arrivato il ragazzo (Gianni se ne andò)  
Arrived the boy Gianni left  
'Since the boy arrived, Gianni left'

In (21) we have a *preverbal* noun and a relative clause distribution of a participial structure. In (22) we observe a *postverbal* DP and a clausal (absolute) distribution of a participial structure. This alternation between reduced relatives (nominal structures) and absolute participial constructions (clausal structures) is expected under the relabeling hypothesis, as well as their word order difference: what turns a verbal category (or a clause) into a nominal structure is the relabeling movement of the noun and word order shows that noun movement takes place in (21), not in (22).

Interestingly, as observed by Belletti (1990;1991) absolute participle constructions, just like reduced relatives, are possible with unaccusatives (21-22) and impossible with unergatives (23-24).

(23) \*Il ragazzo telefonato tardi (non si scusò neppure)  
The boy called late (did not even apologize)

(24) \*Telefonato il ragazzo (Gianni se ne andò)  
Called the boy (Gianni left)

As for unergative subjects, we already offered an account for why they are impossible in reduced relatives (cf. 18 above). As for the ungrammaticality of the absolute participle construction (24), we claim now that the structure does not include the Focus position in the

vP periphery dedicated to postverbal subjects, which has been identified by Belletti (2004)<sup>6</sup>. That this position is not available is suggested by the fact that ‘il ragazzo’ in (25) cannot be interpreted as the postverbal subject of a passive verb<sup>7</sup>, namely (25) cannot mean “Having the boy been scolded...”.

(25) Rimproverato il ragazzo (Gianni si mise a piangere)

Scolded the boy, Gianni started to cry

‘Having scolded the boy, Gianni burst into tears’

The only interpretation for (25) is with ‘il ragazzo’ interpreted as the object, and a null subject, arguably PRO, controlled by ‘Gianni’.

(25’) PRO rimproverato il ragazzo, Gianni si mise a piangere

The difference is here that PRO can sit in the preverbal position of the absolute clause (arguably Spec, vP), where a lexical subject is disallowed.

More generally, interesting questions arise concerning Case assignment in absolute participial constructions. The well-formedness of (22) repeated here as (26), indicates that Case is correctly assigned/checked in this type of structure.

(26) Arrivato il ragazzo (Gianni se ne andò)

We know however that ‘arrivare’ is an unaccusative verb. In fact, we relied on *lack* of case assignment by unaccusatives in the relabeling analysis of the related reduced relative construction. So, what is the case of ‘il ragazzo’ and where does it come from in (26)?

As extensively discussed by Belletti (1990; 1992) there is evidence that the subject of an unaccusative verb receives *nominative* case in the absolute participle construction: the

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<sup>6</sup> As for why this low focus position is not available in this construction, we speculate that it is related to because the fact that absolute small clauses as a whole express given information, as indicated by translation (“having scolded the boy.....”).

<sup>7</sup> This assumes that the postverbal subject of a passive verb does not surface in its argumental position (the sister position of the verb) but must move to a dedicated position in the vP periphery.

contrast in (27) shows that the Case assigned to the postverbal lexical NP is nominative, which is visible in the personal pronouns of first and second person singular, where the distinction nominative/non-nominative is morphologically realized (Belletti 1990).

- (27) a. Arrivato io/tu, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo.  
arrived I/you, Gianni was relieved  
'Since I/you arrived, Gianni was relieved'
- b. \*Arrivato me, Gianni tirò un sospiro di sollievo.  
arrived meACC Gianni was relieved

Belletti claims that nominative assignment is evidence that V raises to C, by sticking to the idea that a clausal structure needs a C to be a proper clause. It has indeed been argued by Rizzi (1982) for Italian, and by Raposo (1987) for Portuguese, that a nominative Case assigner can be present in the left periphery of some nonfinite clauses in these languages, on the basis of facts like those illustrated in (28).

- (28) a. Avendo Gianni/io chiuso il dibattito, la riunione è finita prima  
Having Gianni/I closed the debate, the meeting ended early  
'Since Gianni/I closed the debate, the meeting ended early.'
- b. O Manel pensa terem os omigos levado o livro  
Manel thinks have(3PL) the friends taken the book  
'Manel thinks the friends have taken the book.'

We will not commit to this V to C analysis, since we believe there is no evidence for the presence of a complementizer in these reduced structures. In addition, if we assumed a full CP structure, it would become more difficult to explain why absolute participial constructions are not possible with unergatives. However, we do assume that the participle moves to a functional head in the middle-field from where it can assign nominative into a position to its right. Crucially, we assume this position to be lower than the one that hosts preverbal subjects.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The portion of the vP layer in the participle construction is big enough to include enclitics.

- (i) Accusatolo, Gianni scoppiò a piangere  
Accused-him, Gianni started to cry  
'Having accused him, Gianni started to cry'

Let us take stock: in our account both Italian reduced relatives and absolute participial constructions are reduced in a structural sense (or are truncated structures, following a terminology used in slightly different contexts). A reduced relative is a vP in which a noun (crucially, not a full DP) is generated. The noun moves to the vP periphery, relabels the structure (which becomes an NP) and is selected by the external determiner. An absolute participial construction is also truncated. The internal argument is a full DP, unlike what happens in reduced relatives. It receives nominative from the participle that moves out of the vP, no relabeling movement occurs and the structure maintains a clausal (not a nominal) distribution.

The situation is slightly different in French. Belletti (1990) observes that the structure equivalent to (22) is impossible, as illustrated in (29).

- (29) \*Arrivée Marie, la fête commença  
Arrived Marie, the party started

Belletti explains the ungrammaticality of (29) as a Case filter violation, ultimately due to the Head Movement Constraint: the French V does not move into the Agreement position involved in participial agreement, so it cannot further move to C. This prevents the Verb from accessing the position where the exceptional mechanism of nominative assignment takes place. We will stick to the part of the explanation which does not commit ourselves to assuming a complementizer in this structure: simply, we will say that in French the verb cannot move in the position where it can assign nominative Case to its right.

What Belletti does not discuss in much detail, though, is another possibility, which indeed seems available in French. This alternative is illustrated in (30).

- (30) Le train parti, on se dépêcha de sortir  
The train left, we hurried up and exited  
'After the train left, we quickly went out'

The difference here is that the DP is preverbal, not postverbal. This entails that French displays the genuine ambiguity that we expect given the relabeling approach. The very same string, repeated in (31) can either be interpreted as a (reduced) relative or as a (reduced) clause, depending on labelling.

- (31) Le train parti
- a. (On a pris) [<sub>DP</sub> le [<sub>NP</sub> train [<sub>VP</sub> parti ~~train~~ ]]
- (We have taken) the train left
- b. P [le train [<sub>VP</sub> parti ~~le train~~ ]], (on se dépêcha de sortir)
- the train left (we hurried up and exited)

In one case (31a), the Noun alone moves in order to get Case and relabels the structure. It shares Case with the external Determiner, and the result is a complex NP, a relative.

In the other structure (31b), the entire DP moves in order to get case without relabeling the structure. It gets case at the edge of the structure, probably from some kind of a silent preposition, as in *avec le train parti* ('with the train left') in (32).

- (32) Avec le train parti, on peut aller prendre une bière<sup>9</sup>
- With the train left, we can go get a beer

The difference between the two structures in (31) does not stem from cartography or configuration, but from their derivation: in (a) N moves, and labels the structure, relativizing it; in (b) a phrase moves and does not label the structure, with remains a (small) clause. Case is also assigned consequently: in (a) the structure receives case as every NP does, through agreement with a determiner; (b) is a configuration of exceptional case marking, probably from a null preposition.<sup>10</sup> All in all the difference between Italian and French participial constructions reduces to the case assigner: in Italian the Nominative case assigner is the past participle itself, which moves to a dedicated functional position in the middle field. In French, a possibly null preposition assigns Accusative.

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<sup>9</sup> As expected, the subject of an absolute participial clause in French displays the case (accusative) normally assigned by a preposition, as shown in (i), which contrasts with (ii) in Italian.

- (i) (avec) moi parti, mes enfants s'amuse<sup>t</sup> beaucoup.  
(with) me left my kids have a lot of fun
- (ii) Partita io, i miei figli si divertono molto  
Left I, my kids have a lot of fun

<sup>10</sup> In fact, the absolute participial construction of the French type is marginally available in Italian as well:

- (i) Con il treno partito, possiamo prenderci una birra  
With the train left, we can go get a beer

## 6. Conclusion

The account of Romance reduced relatives proposed here has three welcome features:

- it is minimally different from the analysis of full relatives but it does not stipulate a fully-fledged silent clausal structure.
- It derives straightforwardly the impossibility of past participle reduced relatives with active transitive verbs and ergative verbs.
- It predicts the existence of a minimally different structure, the absolute participial construction, that obeys the same constraints but has a clausal distribution.

To the best of our knowledge, no alternative account exists that combines all these three features.

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SFL/Paris 8

[Carlo.cecchetto123@gmail.com](mailto:Carlo.cecchetto123@gmail.com)

Caterina Donati

LLF/Labex EFL/Paris 7

[cdonati@linguist.univ-paris-diderot.fr](mailto:cdonati@linguist.univ-paris-diderot.fr)