

English Absolute Clauses in Fiction: The Unaugmented Absolutes in *Harry Potter*

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Received: March 28, 2023

Revised: June 1, 2023

Accepted: June 2, 2023

Abstract

This study investigates reasons for the frequency of English absolute clauses in fiction with the focus on the interplay between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of unaugmented absolute clauses. The data were gathered from the first two books of the *Harry Potter* series. The findings of this study reveal that three aspects of linguistics play an interrelated role behind the frequency of absolute clauses. That is, syntactically and pragmatically, the absolute clauses are likely to abide by Economy and Cooperative Principles respectively to produce a concise, clear, and informative structure. Semantically, the clauses are linked to the matrix clauses via coreferences, with the majority of the subjects being part-whole coreferences. The absolutes in the data are considered *weak adverbials*, the semantic relations with little shared knowledge (Kortmann, 2013), which are easy to process. These absolutes tend to appear in the final position, which is believed to reflect the information structure of topic-comment. The interplay between the above factors results in the economical but informative structure that keeps readers' attention.

Keywords: absolute clause, Harry Potter, coreference, semantic relation, topic-comment structure, syntactic weight

The English absolute (in bold) contains an overt subject and a non-finite predicate, modifying the matrix clause (He & Yang, 2015; Kim, 2020; López, 1994; Quirk et al., 1985; Stump, 1981; Tang, 2005; Yoo, 2008), as in (1).

(1) **The coach being crowded**, Fred had to stand (Kortmann, 2013, p. 5).

In English, absolute clauses (in bold) can be syntactically classified into two types: unaugmented absolute and augmented absolute, as shown in (2) (Kortmann, 2013; Todorova, 2013).

(2) a. **Episode over**, put it out of your mind (He & Yang, 2015, p. 13).
 b. The conversation, he thought, was like a game of tennis, **with the ball lobbed from one court to the other** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 202).

The term *unaugmented absolute* describes the absolute without the introductory augmentor (Kortmann, 2013) as in (2a), whereas *augmented absolute* is for the absolute with an introductory augmentor as in (2b). In this study, the focus is exclusively on the unaugmented absolute owing to its clear identification of having an overt subject and a non-finite predicate, occurring with the matrix clause. The augmented absolute, on the other hand, was ruled out from this study because of the fine line between a preposition and an augmentor. The term “absolute” throughout this study thus refers to the unaugmented one.

With respect to frequency, English absolute clauses are traditionally believed to be infrequent (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1120), archaic, rather than stylistic (Higa, 2023), and should be avoided in writing (Sweet, 1903, p. 124). However, with the use of corpus-based quantitative approach and diachronic method, it was found that English absolute clauses are frequent in the genre of fiction and tend to be increasingly used in Present-Day English (He & Yang, 2015; Kim, 2020; van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016; van de Pol & Petré, 2015). Despite the useful findings, the reasons for their appearances in a specific context such as fiction have not yet been explored.

To investigate the appearance of the absolutes further, this study uses the data from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the first two books of the *Harry Potter* series. The series has been the source for linguistics analysis in a few studies. Růžičková (2019) studies sentential complexity in the first and the final books of *Harry Potter*; the absolutes, however, were not included. Even though Duffy (2002) mentions that the absolutes were found “everywhere” in *Harry Potter* books, no study, to our best knowledge, has yet specifically focused on the absolute clause. This study, therefore, is hoped to contribute to the study of the absolute clause in novels by presenting in-depth analyses on its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects.

Literature Review

This section presents previous studies on the structure of English absolute clauses, their coreferential properties, and semantic relations between the absolutes and their matrix clauses, together with their positions.

Syntactic Structure

The structures of the absolute clauses are reduced non-finite forms of regular finite clauses, comprising the subject and the predicate, which can be either one-place, two-place, or three-place predicates. The two-place and three-place predicate absolutes are extremely rare, as only a few were found in this study, as in (3a) and (3b).

- (3) a. Hagrid leapt to his feet, **his shaggy black head grazing the ceiling** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 194).
- b. Neville Longbottom had been sent letters from all the witches and wizards in his family, **all giving him different advice on what to choose** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 186).

In (3a) and (3b) the predicates are two-place and three-place predicates, respectively, with the verbs *graze* and *give* requiring complements. In addition to the two-place and three-place predicates, the one-place predicate with the unergative¹ is also a minority, as in (4a) – (4c).

- (4) a. At least 20 youth were arrested, [AGENT subject **some**] **resisting violently** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 97).
- b. They hurried up the street, [EXPERIENCER subject **the Grangers**] **shaking with fright** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 51).
- c. They walked more slowly, [INSTRUMENT subject **ears**] **straining for the faintest sound** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 184).

¹Intransitive constructions are divided into two types: the unergative and the unaccusative. The unergative has AGENT/EXPERIENCER/INSTRUMENT subjects, as in the *cat slept on the couch*. On the other hand, the unaccusative is with THEME subject, as in the *ice melted* and *the sun rises*. While *rise* does not have a transitive pair, *melt* is an unaccusative verb, which is also called the ergative, has a transitive pair (Simargool, 2006).

Examples (4a) – (4c) are the unergatives with AGENT, EXPERIENCER, and INSTRUMENT² subjects.

The large majority of the absolutes are the reduced form of THEME subject constructions: the unaccusative, the passive, and the copula constructions. The absolutes in the active voice appear with *V-ing* and *to-V* forms, as in (5a) and (5c) below, while the ones in the passive, with verbs in *-ed* form, as in (5b). The reduced forms of copula clauses appear with DPs, adjectives, and PPs, as exemplified in (5d) – (5f) (Kortmann, 2013; van de Pol & Cuyckens, 2013).

Table 1: The Syntactic Structure of Absolutes with Examples

Structure (Subj +)	Examples
- <i>ing</i>	(5a) She lay for a long while, tears falling (He & Yang, 2015, p. 13).
- <i>ed</i>	(5b) All things considered , she would be better married (He & Yang, 2015, p. 13).
<i>to-V</i>	(5c) We shall assemble at ten forty-five, the procession to start at precisely eleven (Yoo, 2008).
DP	(5d) De Craon blinked, his face now a mask of concern (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016, p. 323).
AdjP	(5e) The storks circled high above us, their slender bodies sleek and black against the orange sky (Nordquist, 2019).
PP	(5f) At length they stopped, and sat side by side, their backs against a boulder (Kortmann, 2013, p. 10).

The above examples reflect the vast majority of the absolute clauses in this study (81.96%) which have THEME subjects. Therefore, it could be assumed that absolute clauses are likely to comprise THEME as a subject with the strong tendency to occur with one-place predicates.

Coreferences

Coreferences of the absolute clauses indicate the relationship between absolute subjects — either pronouns (PRN) or determiner phrases (DP) — and

²THEME: entity undergoing the effect of action, as in [THEME Mary] fell over.

AGENT: Entity instigating some action, as in [AGENT Debbie] killed Harry.

EXPERIENCER, Entity experiencing some psychological state, as in [EXPERIENCER I] like syntax.

INSTRUMENT: The means used to carry out some action is INSTRUMENT, as in He hit it [INSTRUMENT with a hammer] (Radford, 2004).

any matrix DPs. The coreference between the absolute and the matrix can be roughly subdivided into four types: *no coreference* (NC), *full coreference* (FC), *part-whole coreference* (PC), and *constituent coreference* (CC), as in (6) – (9) (Kortmann, 2013).

- (6) NC: **Protocol having been satisfied, and the visit being an extremely brief one**, the large party proceeded to squeeze the small party out of all proportion to his popular vote (Kortmann, 2013, p. 92).
- (7) FC: She picked up a wine jug and strode across to the foot of the dune, ***the jug on her head*** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 92).
- (8) PC: **My head [part] bursting with stories and schemes**, I [whole] stumbled in next door (Kortmann, 2013, p. 95).
- (9) CC: Cutis O' Keefe was seldom without a feminine escort on his travels, ***the composition of the escort changing frequently*** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 94).

The absolute subject is marked as NC when it is completely distinct in reference from any constituents in the matrix clause as exemplified in (6), in which the absolute subjects *protocol* and *the visit* have no matrix constituent to co-refer to (Kortmann, 2013, p. 92). FC, on the contrary, is marked when the overt absolute subject fully refers to the matrix referent underlined, as in (7) *a jug (absolute)* and *a wine jug (matrix)*, accordingly (Kortmann, 2013, p. 99). The relatedness between the absolute subject and its matrix referent, on the other hand, could be found in the form of PC which is understood in the sense that the absolute subject is a part of the whole matrix constituent it refers to. Usually signaled by a possessive marker such as *my*, *their*, *his*, *her*, etc., this coreference may refer to a body part, some piece of clothing, feeling, actions, some part of belonging, and so on (Kortmann, 2013, p. 95), as illustrated in (8) in which the matrix referent *I* is whole, while the absolute subject *my head*, part of it. As for the CC, a certain part of the absolute subject refers to the matrix referent or vice versa (Kortmann, 2013, p. 93), as in (9) in which a part of the absolute *the escort* (not the whole absolute subject) refers to the matrix constituent *the feminine escort*. Furthermore, the coreference sometimes can be implied from context, which is called “implied coreference,” a subtype of constituent coreference, which is shown in parenthesis (Berent, 1975, as cited in Kortmann, 2013, p. 94), as in (10) below.

- (10) The Silesian was still droning on, ***the audience (of the Silesian) still standing aimlessly round him*** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 94).

In (10) the implied adjunct (*of the Silesian*) is not mentioned. The definiteness of *the audience* implies that it is known information.

Semantic Relations

Aside from coreferences, English absolutes also express a wide range of semantic relations to the matrix clause, in accordance with a scale of informativeness, proposed by Kortmann (2013), as shown in Figure 1.

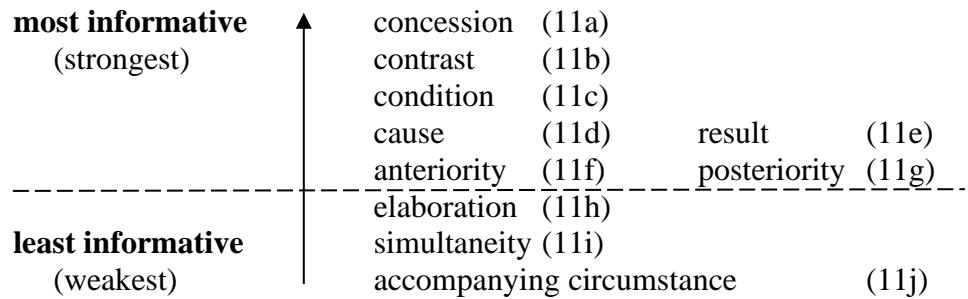


Figure 1: A Scale of Informativeness of Semantic Relations (adapted from Kortmann, 2013)³

The semantic relations in the scale are based on the types of adverbial phrases; each is given with its example and explanation, as shown in Table 2 below.

³ With minor adjustment, the scale of informativeness in this study reflects the frequent ones that are commonly examined in other studies. Some in the original were excluded due to their zero occurrences in both the original work itself and other studies (Kortmann, 2013); others were combined due to their overlapping characteristics (Fuhre, 2010; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016; van de Pol & Petré, 2015).

Table 2: Semantic Relations of Absolute Clauses with Examples and Explanations

Semantic Relations	Examples	Descriptions for Analysis
Concession	(11a) The unexpected weather aside , it had been a good day (He & Yang, 2015, p. 19).	The concessive reading is marked when <i>although</i> , <i>even though</i> , or <i>even if</i> is appropriate for the context.
Contrast	(11b) Significantly, when the 'temporal' conjunction <i>quand</i> is used to indicate a potential or unreal concessional conditional, the conditional forms of the verb are most common, the indicative being used to indicate a real condition (Kortmann, 2013, p. 193).	The absolute clause denotes the use of <i>whereas</i> and <i>while/whilst</i> , showing contrast. The absolute that denotes the use of <i>however</i> and <i>but</i> is also included in this type (Kortmann, 2013, p. 127).
Condition	(11c) Weather permitting , the big helicopters will place them between the flows and the town (He & Yang, 2015, p. 13).	The clause that denotes <i>if, on condition that, supposing, unless</i> , etc., expresses the semantic relation of condition.
Cause	(11d) There being no bridge , the master had to stop at the shore (He & Yang, 2015, p. 19).	A causal relationship is marked when the use of <i>because</i> or <i>since</i> fits the context.
Result	(11e) High waves whipped up by hurricane-force winds swamped pleasure boats, several sinking and others being carried out into the Bay of Biscay (Adapted from Kortmann, 2013, p. 125).	Like cause, the use of <i>because</i> or <i>since</i> also fits the resultative context with the matrix clause conveying the cause, while the absolute, the result. Such conjunctions as <i>therefore, as a result, as a consequence</i> , etc., are also possible to mark this semantic type.
Anteriority	(11f) That settled , I booked myself in (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016, p. 323).	The conjunction <i>after</i> can precede the absolute, showing that the absolute clause occurs prior to the matrix clause event.

Semantic Relations	Examples	Descriptions for Analysis
Posteriority	(11g) The row, meanwhile, about an advertisement calling for the ANC's unbanning has flared anew, the Benoni city council threatening to withdraw its account from First National Bank (Adapted from Kortmann, 2013, p. 125).	The conjunction <i>after</i> can precede the matrix clause, showing that the matrix clause occurs prior to the absolute event, thereby marking a posterior absolute clause event.
Elaboration	(11h) I too am tired with two lodgers of different nationalities, one highly carnivorous and one very vegetarian! (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016, p. 323).	The absolute is marked elaboration when it further specifies, describes, restates, or clarifies the previous discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 394) by means of comments, specifications, explanations, subtypes, and examples (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016).
Simultaneity	(11i) The rain pouring down outside the window , he surveyed his surroundings (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016, p. 323).	Usually denoting <i>while/when</i> , the absolute clause signifies the event that co-occurs with its matrix clause.
Accompanying circumstance	(11j) He turned, his face lined and despairing in the bright morning light (Kortmann, 2013, p. 170).	Providing additional information, typically concerning postures, facial expressions, thoughts, feelings, detail of dressing, perception, holding in one's hand, sound production, or any kind of movement (Kortmann, 2013).

According to the given examples, there are two points of concern. Firstly, there are fine lines between *cause and anteriority* and *result and posteriority*. That is, cause also denotes the time-before event since cause is the reason for something to happen. Meanwhile, result also signifies the time-after event as it is the result of something. These close relations result in their locations close to each other in the scale.

Secondly, there is a distinction between *elaboration* and *accompanying circumstance*. Elaboration elaborates another clause by further specifying or describing it. It does not introduce a new element into the picture but rather provides a further characterization of the one already there (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 394). On the other hand, accompanying circumstance, or *extension* for Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), extends the meaning of another clause by adding something new to it. What is added may be just an addition, or a replacement, or an alternative (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 405).

The semantic relations shown in Figure 1 are roughly categorized, using a dotted line, into two groups, namely *weak adverbials* and *strong adverbials*, following van de Pol and Petré (2015), as shown in the following examples.

(12) a. [cause **There being no bridge**,] [result the master had to stop at the shore] (He & Yang, 2015, p. 19).
 b. Dexter turned to Emma, [accompanying circumstance **eyes blazing an apology**] (He & Yang, 2015, p. 19).

Strong adverbials are marked when more prior knowledge, information, or co-contextual evidence is required to interpret the semantic relation between absolute and matrix clauses. In (12a), shared/prior knowledge/information is essential to determine the causal relationship between the absolute and the matrix clause.

Weak adverbials, on the other hand, require less knowledge/information for inferential processing. In fact, they simply provide additional, conjoining, or side-by-side information to the matrix clause (Fuhre, 2010; Kortmann, 2013, pp. 119-120), as in (12b) in which the absolute *eyes blazing an apology* is placed side-by-side to provide additional details on the matrix clause.

Aside from expressing a wide range of semantic connections with the matrix clause, Kortmann's semantic relations also show connections with the coreferential properties of the overt absolute subjects, as exemplified in (13a) and (13b).

(13) a. PC: He [whole] was leaning forward from the pillows, **his eyes** [part] **alert**, **hands** [part] **lifted from beneath the covers** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 95) (*accompanying circumstance*).
 b. FC: She showed in two men, **both carrying briefcases** (Kortmann, 2013, p. 100) (*elaboration*).

In (13a), the absolute subjects *his eyes* and *hands* express PC as they are part of the whole, *he*. PC usually refers to a body part, some piece of clothing, feeling, actions, some part of belonging, and so on (Kortmann, 2013, p. 95). Similarly, accompanying circumstance is employed to describe postures, facial

expressions, thoughts, feelings, detail of dressing, etc., as in (13a) in which the absolute clauses *his eyes alert* and *hands lifted from beneath the covers* describe facial expression and gestures of the pronoun subject *he*, respectively. As they are both about the subject, it can be assumed that PC and accompanying circumstance are correlated with each other.

Likewise, FC and elaboration seem to show a similar connection. That is, the absolute subject *both* in (13b) fully refers to the matrix referent *two men*. This full coreference elaborates on the previous discourse, as in (13b) in which the absolute clause *both carrying briefcases* elaborates on the matrix referent *two men*.

Despite the connections, coreferences and semantic relations are never observed together in such previous studies as Kortmann (2013)'s and van de Pol and Hoffmann (2016)'s. To reflect the relationship, this study discusses the two aspects both separately and together to provide the overall picture and to show their correlations.

Positions

Regarding positions in the sentence, Kortmann (2013) classifies them into three: *initial*, *medial*, and *final*. Bosch (2009) and van de Pol and Hoffmann (2016) propose *fragment* or *separate* as the fourth position. “Separate” is the absolute clause individually detached from the matrix clause by a period (.) rather than a comma (,). The examples of all four positions are given below.

- (14) a. Initial: **His voice trembling and his eyes roving**, he started to cry (Kim, 2020, p. 145).
- b. Medial: Warren Trent, **his face creased in thought**, said dourly (Kortmann, 2013, p. 12).
- c. Final: He shrugged, **his eyes never leaving her face** (van de Pol & Hoffman, 2016. P. 334).
- d. Separate: But here were hacked limbs and truncated bodies. **Strange, greenish gold fluid staining their skin which was not quite skin and not quite leaf** (van de Pol & Hoffman, 2016, p. 334).

The positions of absolute clauses have been roughly examined in a few studies. In Kortmann (2013)'s, for instance, it was said that the final position is likely to be the domain of weak adverbials, while in He and Yang (2015)'s, absolute clauses are said to be governed by information structure without further elaboration. However, the detailed investigation of absolute positions regarding the pragmatic and syntactic aspects, the two that predominate the ordering of constituents, have not yet been explored in absolute clauses. The following discussion presents the pragmatic aspect, which plays an important role in determining positions of sentential constituents.

Pragmatically, the *information structure* of *topic* and *comment* (Lambrecht, 2012) is believed to govern the positions of sentential constituents, as illustrated in (15) below.

(15) [Scene-setting topic (clause topic) After the children went to school], [Subject topic he]
 [Comment had to clean the house and go shopping for the party] (Lambrecht, 2012, p. 121).

The entire adverbial clause *after the children went to school* functions as a scene-setting topic (or clause topic) by providing background information for the matrix clause underlined in (15) (Lambrecht, 2012, p. 125). Meanwhile, the subject *he* in the matrix clause functions as a primary topic (subject topic) of the sentence (Lambrecht, 2012, p. 125, 147). Topic is the “center of attention,” which introduces “theme of the discourse” (Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 464), whereas the predicate *had to ... party* that follows serves as a focus/comment, conveying new information about the topic (Lambrecht, 2012, p. 226).

Positions could also be syntactically determined, as in the following examples.

(16) a. The waiter brought [the wine we had ordered] [to the table] (Arnold et al., 2000).
 b. The waiter brought [to the table] [the wine we had ordered] (Arnold et al., 2000).

The long, heavy constituent *the wine we had ordered* in (16a) is shifted to the end of the sentence as in (16b), following the *Principle of End-Weight* (Quirk et al., 1972). This notion concerns the syntactic weight of constituents and its ordering. That is, longer, heavier, and complex phrases or structures usually come last in a clause or sentence or near the ends (Swan, 2016, p. 267; Behaghel, 1909/10, as cited in Arnold et al., 2000, p. 29). In other words, “save the hardest for last” (Bever, 1970, p. 330). Meanwhile, the shorter (light) constituent seems to appear initially due to the fact that humans are prone to recognize the simple and easy constituents instead of the complex ones, following *Early Immediate Constituent* (Hawkins, 1994, as cited in Wu & Chitrakara, 2020, p. 74). It is believed that syntactic complexity (heaviness) and information status (topic-comment/newness) play a significant role in determining the ordering of constituents (Arnold et al., 2000).

Despite previous analyses on the positions, the coreferences, syntactic structure, and semantic relations, the correlations of coreferences and semantic relations, along with syntactic weight and information structure and their frequencies, to my best knowledge, have not yet been explored. This study, therefore, is conducted to investigate the interplay between the syntax,

semantics, and pragmatics of unaugmented absolute clauses with an attempt to find out the reasons for their productivity in fiction.

The Data

As mentioned earlier, English absolute clauses are claimed to be frequent in fiction and tend to be increasingly used in Present-Day English (He & Yang, 2015; Kim, 2020; van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016; van de Pol & Petré, 2015). Meanwhile, English absolute clauses are also said to be found “everywhere” in *Harry Potter* books without further elaboration (Duffy, 2002). This study, therefore, aims at investigating the appearance of absolute clauses in two books from *Harry Potter* series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the first and the second books of the series. The selection criteria are based on the fact that they are a middle grade fiction for readers aged between eight to twelve, while the other books in the series (Books 3 – 7) are considered young adult fiction (Cunningham, 2019). Moreover, being sold worldwide, the language used in the books is considered widely accepted by the majority (Wu & Chitrakara, 2020). The selected 2013 edition was published by Bloomsbury, UK, the first to start the publication and is considered to be the original version. The time of publication is not a primary concern in this study because there is no distinction between editions in terms of grammatical constructions that could affect the analysis (Peter Harrington Journal, 2018).

The instances are from the total of 474 pages of the two books. The criteria used to mark an absolute clause are a clause with the subject and predicate and being separated from its matrix clause by a comma (,) as in (17a), or by a period (.), as in (17b).

- (17) a. ‘Do I look stupid?’ snarled Uncle Vernon, **a bit of fried egg dangling from his bushy moustache** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 7).
- b. Ron dropped his wand. **Hermione Granger, telling a downright lie to a teacher?** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 131).

Separated from its preceding matrix clause by a comma, the boldfaced absolute clause in (17a) comprises its subject DP, *a bit of fried egg*, and the predicate VP, *dangling from his bushy moustache*. With its subject DP, *Hermione Granger*, and the predicate VP, *telling a downright lie to a teacher*, the absolute clause in (17b) is, on the other hand, detached from its matrix by a period.

With regards to instance counting, in some sentences, two absolute clauses may be placed next to each other, as in (18a), or occur in different positions but sharing the same matrix clause, as in (18b).

(18) a. Mrs. Weasley now came galloping into view, [her handbag swinging wildly in one hand]^{1st}, [Ginny just clinging onto the other]^{2nd} (Rowling, 2013a, p. 46).

b. **Eyes still tightly shut**, Harry began to run blindly sideways, **his hands outstretched**, feeling his way (Rowling, 2013a, p. 234).

Since positions are taken into consideration, in this study, one occurrence of an absolute clause is, therefore, counted as a single instance.

Syntactic Weight

In many languages constituents are prone to occur in the order of increasing size (length) or complexity, which is called *grammatical weight* (Wasow, 1997) or *syntactic weight* (Hawkins, 1994). In this study, two methods were selected to determine the syntactic weight of absolutes and matrix clauses: the number of phrasal nodes and the number of words.

The weight of constituents can be syntactically measured by counting numbers of phrasal nodes (maximal projections), following Ferreira (1991), Hawkins (1994), Johnson (1966, as cited in Szmrecsányi, 2004, p. 1033), and Rickford and Wasow (1995). Counting phrasal nodes seems to be an appropriate way to assess syntactic complexity since one must conform to syntactic rules before producing or constructing sentences (Szmrecsányi, 2004). This method is also in line with Chomsky (1975 as cited in Wasow, 1997), stating that the order of constituents seems to be determined by its complexity, rather than the length of words (p. 117). Here is an example.

(19) Matrix clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ Both Croydons [VP⁴ started]]]], absolute clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ the Duke [VP⁴ moistening [DP⁵ his lips [ADVP⁶ nervously]]]]]]]]] (Kortmann, 2013, p. 97).

Each maximal projection, i.e., CP, TP, VP, DP, is counted as one phrasal node. The syntactic complexity scores of the matrix and the absolute clause in (19), are, therefore, 4 and 6, respectively reflecting the number of the phrasal nodes. Hawkins (1994, as cited in Szmrecsányi, 2004, p. 1033), who suggests the idea, states that phrasal node counting reflects the syntactic complexity (Chomsky, 1975, as cited in Wasow, 1997, p. 117), which, in turn, reflects the weight of the absolute and its matrix clause. If the absolute contains a lower score than its matrix, it is considered light, as in (20a). In contrast, if the absolute clause carries a higher score than its matrix, it is marked as heavy, as in (20b), in which the complexity scores of the absolute its matrix clauses are 12 and 5, respectively.

(20) a. Absolute clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ Heart [VP⁴ hammering]]]], Matrix clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ Harry [VP⁴ pushed [DP⁵ his trolley [PP⁶ after [PRN⁷ them]]]]]]]] (Rowling, 2013b, p. 69).

b. Matrix clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ They [VP⁴ stood [ADVP⁵ still]]]]], absolute clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ their heads [VP⁴ inclined [PP⁵ toward [DP⁶ Flich's voice, [CP⁷ [TP⁸ [PRN⁹ which [VP¹⁰ sounded [ADVP¹¹ quite [ADJP¹² hysterical]]]]]]]]]]]]] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 171).⁴

In the case that counting phrasal nodes yields equal syntactic complexity scores, word counting will be applied, as in (21) below.

(21) Harry saw Hermione slide back into the dungeon, **the front of her robes bulging** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 140).

As for this method, the score depends on the number of words in a sentence. Thus, the syntactic complexity score of the matrix and absolute clauses in (21) will be 8 and 6, respectively.

These two selected methods are said to work well on weight measurement (Wasow, 1997). In this study, node counting will be primarily used. Word counting, however, will be employed in case the first method yields equal syntactic complexity scores.

Findings

This section discusses the frequency of English unaugmented absolute clauses in connection with their coreferences, semantic relations and positions. In this study, the total number of unaugmented absolutes is 316 instances. Compared with Kortmann (2013), who discovered the total 269 absolutes from a text corpus, comprising approximately 450,000 words, the figure of this study is believed to yield sufficient data for analysis.

⁴ This study follows the absolute syntactic tree diagram of Kim (2020) and Tang (2005) and maximal projections of Radford (2016) and van Gelderen (2017).

The Structure of Absolutes

Table 3: The Structure of Absolutes

Thematic Roles	Constructions					two-place	three-place		
	one-place								
	(V-ing)		(AdjP, DP, PP)	(V-ed)	(V-ing)				
	unergative	unaccusative	copula	passive	(di)transitive				
THEME (259)		113	96	50	-	-			
AGENT (40)	30	-	-	-	9	1			
INSTRUMENT (14)	8	-	-	-	6	-			
EXPERIENCER (3)	3	-	-	-	-	-			
Total (316=100%)	41	113	96	50	15	1			
	300/94.94%				16/5.06%				

The data show that two-place and three-place predicates rarely appear in the study with only 15 instances (4.75%) of the two-place predicate and 1 instance (0.31%) of the three-place predicate. On the contrary, one-place predicates are of the highest frequency with 300 instances (94.94%). Reflecting the argument structure, one-place predicate AGENT, INSTRUMENT, and EXPERIENCER subjects are the minorities with 30 instances (10%), 8 instances (2.67%), and 3 instances (1%), respectively. THEME subjects, meanwhile, contribute to the majority with 259 instances (86.33%).

With respect to the one-place predicates, all AGENT, INSTRUMENT, and EXPERIENCER subjects are the unergatives in the form of V-ing. THEME subjects, in contrast, appear in three main constructions: the unaccusative (V-ing, 113 instances), the copula construction with AdjP, DP, and PP (96 instances), and the passives (V-ed, 50 instances).

Coreferences

Table 4 below presents the number of instances of unaugmented absolutes with the focus on their coreferences.

Table 4: Coreferences of Absolute Clauses

Coreferences	N	Percent	Examples
Part-Whole Coreference (PC)	262	82.92	(22) 'Oh, yes,' said Mr. Dursley, his heart sinking horribly (Rowling, 2013b, p. 11).
No Coreference (NC)	24	7.59	(23) Harry wheeled around to look up at the statue, Fawkes swaying on his shoulder (Rowling, 2013a, p. 234).
Full Coreference (FC)	24	7.59	(24) They were in a corridor. The forbidden corridor on the third floor (Rowling, 2013b, p. 119).
Constituent Coreference (CC)	6	1.90	(25) They could hear footsteps, Filch running as fast as he could towards Peeves's shouts (Rowling, 2013b, p. 118).
Total	316	100	

According to Table 4, PC forms the highest frequency with 262 (82.92%) out of the total of 316 instances, while the others are 54 instances altogether from 24 instances (7.59%) of NC, 24 instances (7.59%) of FC, and six instances (1.90%) of CC.

Semantic Relations

Table 5 shows the overall semantic relations of unaugmented absolutes.

Table 5: Semantic Relations

Semantic Relations	N	Percent
Strong Adverbials	3	0.95
Weak Adverbials	313	99.05
Total	316	100

Weak adverbials are the largest part of unaugmented absolutes with 313 instances (99.05%) out of 316, whereas there are only three instances (0.95%) of strong adverbials found in the data. Their details are described in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Weak and Strong Adverbials of Unaugmented Absolute Clauses

Semantic Relations		N	Percent	Examples
Strong	Anteriority	1	0.32	(26) Harry swerved out of the way, one idea firmly lodged in his numb brain: get to Malfoy (Rowling, 2013a, p. 129).
	Cause	2	0.63	(27) Ron dropped his wand. Hermione Granger, telling a downright lie to a teacher? (Rowling, 2013b, p. 131).
Weak	Accompanying Circumstance	248	78.48	(28) Heart hammering , Harry pushed his trolley after them (Rowling, 2013b, p. 69).
	Elaboration	35	11.08	(29) Fred and George were wearing blue sweaters, one with a large yellow F on it, the other a G (Rowling, 2013b, p. 149).
	Simultaneity	30	9.49	(30) Ron steered him out of the hall, Hermione hurrying alongside them (Rowling, 2013a, p. 146).
Total		316	100	

313 instances (99.05%) of weak adverbials describe accompanying circumstance, elaboration, and simultaneity. They are represented through 248 instances (78.48%), 35 instances (11.08%), and 30 instances (9.49%), respectively. Only three instances of strong adverbials were used for anteriority and cause. They are represented through one (0.32%) and two instances (0.63%), respectively.

Positions and Syntactic Weight

Table 7 below presents the positions of the absolute clauses.

Table 7: Positions

Positions ⁵	N	Percent
Final	271	85.76
Medial	24	7.59
Initial	21	6.65
Total	316	100

⁵In this study, it was found that there were only three instances of separate, all of which occur after the matrix clause, as exemplified in “They were in a corridor. **The forbidden corridor on the third floor**” (Rowling, 2013b, p. 119). They, therefore, will be counted as final instead.

The final position is of the highest frequency with 271 instances, 85.76 percent in total. The medial position, in the meantime, forms the second highest with 24 instances (7.59%), while the initial position is the least used with 21 instances (6.65%).

The next table reports the syntactic weight of absolutes clauses based on their syntactic complexity score. That is, if the absolute contains fewer phrasal nodes than its matrix, it is less complex and light. However, if the absolute has more phrasal nodes than its matrix, the clause is more complex and heavy. Here are examples.

(31) a. Matrix clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ Harry [VP⁴ hesitated]]]], Absolute clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ **his quill** [PassP⁴ [VP⁵ **suspended** [PP⁶ **over** [DP⁷ **the diary**]]]]]]]] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 180).

b. Absolute clause [CP¹ [TP² [DP³ **His hands** [VP⁴ **trembling** [AdvP⁵ **slightly**]]]]], Matrix clause [CP¹ [TP² [PRN³ he [VP⁴ raised [DP⁵ the book [CP⁶ [TP⁷ to [VP⁸ press [DP⁹ his eye [PP¹⁰ against the [AdjP¹¹ little [DP¹² window]]]]]]]]]]]] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 180).

In (31a), the syntactic complexity score of the absolute and its matrix clause is 4 and 7, respectively. Since the absolute clause *his quill suspended over the diary* contains a higher syntactic score, it is then marked as a heavy absolute. The absolute clause *his hands trembling slightly* in (31b), in contrast, contains a lower syntactic score than its matrix clause, which is 5 and 12, respectively. It is, therefore, considered as a light absolute. Table 8 below reports the syntactic weight of the absolutes.

Table 8: Syntactic Weight

Syntactic Weight	N	Percent	Examples
Light Absolutes	258	81.65	(32) They went to bed exhausted, their throats sore (Rowling, 2013b, p. 190).
Heavy Absolutes	58	18.35	(33) At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching toward the dungeon ceiling (Rowling, 2013b, p. 103).
Total	316	100	

The data reveal that the absolute clause tends to be light, while its matrix clause tends to be heavy. The light absolute constituent forms the majority of the data with 258 instances or 81.65 percent out of the total 316. The heavy absolute constituent, in contrast, occurs less frequently with only 58 instances or 18.35 percent from the data.

Table 9: Syntactic Weight and Positions

Syntactic Weight	Positions			Total (316)
	Initial	Medial	Final	
Light Absolutes	17 (6.59%)	24 (9.30%)	217 (84.11%)	258
Heavy Absolutes	4 (6.90%)	0 (0%)	54 (93.10%)	58

The results in Table 9 report that light absolutes mostly occur in the final position with 217/258 instances (84.11%), while the instances of light absolutes in medial and initial positions are 24 (9.30%), and 17 (6.59%), respectively. Similarly, the highest frequency of heavy absolutes is the final position with 54/58 instances (93.10%) in total. The other positions, on the other hand, were rarely found, with only 4 initial instances (6.90%) and no medial instance.

Coreferences and Semantic Relations

Previous sections illustrate data concerning coreferences and semantic relations separately. In this section, four kinds of coreferences and the semantic relations of unaugmented absolutes are presented together to display their correlations.

Table 10 below presents the correlations between coreferences and semantic relations.

Table 10: Coreferences and Semantic Relations

Semantic Relations		PC	NC	FC	CC	Total
weak	Accompanying Circumstance	244	4	-	-	248
	Elaboration	8	-	23	4	35
	Simultaneity	8	19	1	2	30
strong	Cause	1	1	-	-	2
	Anteriority	1	-	-	-	1
		262 (82.91%)	24 (7.60%)	24 (7.60%)	6 (1.89%)	316 (100%)

Table 10 shows the tendency of correlations between coreferences and semantic relations. Three likely correlations could be observed: 1) PC-Accompanying Circumstance, 2) NC-Simultaneity, and 3) FC-Elaboration. The first column suggests that PC, the highest majority among the coreferences, significantly appears in the absolutes that serve as an accompanying circumstance with 244/262 instances or 93.14 percent, as exemplified in (34a)

and (34b). The second column, with the NC data, indicates that NC absolutes tend to refer to simultaneity with 19/24 instances or 79.16 percent, as in (35a) and (35b). The figure of FC absolutes in the third column, in the meantime, shows that FC correlates with elaboration with 23/24 instances or 95.83 percent, as in (36a) and (36b).

PC and Accompanying Circumstance

(34) a. Ron stared after her, **his mouth open** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 120).
 b. Mr. Dursley arrived in the Grunnings car park, **his mind back on drills** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 8).

NC and Simultaneity

(35) a. Ron steered him out of the hall, **Hermione hurrying alongside them** (Rowling, 2013a, p.146).
 b. He rolled down the burrow window, **the night air whipping his hair**, and looked back at the shrinking rooftops of Privet Drive (Rowling, 2013a, p. 26).

FC and Elaboration

(36) a. Next second, the sink began to move; the sink, in fact, sank, right out of sight, leaving a large pipe exposed, **a pipe wide enough for a man to slide into** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 222)
 b. Ginny went scarlet as Ron and Hermione fought their way over, **both clutching stacks of Lockhart's books** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 50).

Aside from the three correlations above, in the last column of Table 10, there are only six instances of CC, the smallest minority. Even if this figure may not be sufficient to yield any significant correlation, one observation could be made. That is, among all the six instances, five instances of CC are implied coreference (see *coreferences*), as illustrated in (37a); meanwhile, the other instance is the one that is not implied, as given in (37b) below.

(37) a. They could hear footsteps (of Filch), **Filch running as fast as he could towards Peeves's shouts** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 118).
 b. Marcus Flint had blocked Harry on purpose and **Harry's broom span off course, Harry holding on for dear life** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 138).

The constituents in the parentheses, covertly referring to some matrix constituents underlined or vice versa, are implied from the context. For instance, in (37a) the absolute subject *Filch* seems to be unrelated to any matrix constituents on the surface; however, the context implies that the footsteps they could hear are the footsteps of Filch, suggesting implied coreference.

The finding in this section reveals that four patterns (three correlations and one distinctive feature) could be observed between coreferences and semantic relations, namely 1) PC and accompanying circumstances, 2) NC and simultaneity, 3) FC and elaboration, and 4) CC mainly as implied coreference. The result suggests that these patterns are quite expected in unaugmented absolute clauses.

Discussion

According to the findings, most of the unaugmented absolute clauses appear sentence finally even though they are light. Nearly all of them are also weak adverbials referring to accompanying circumstances. As for the correlations between coreferences and semantic relations, four patterns were observed: PC and accompanying circumstance, NC and simultaneity, FC and elaboration, and CC mostly as implied coreference. In addition to the semantic property, the discussion below also covers the syntactic aspect, the semantic property, and the information structure of absolute clauses.

Syntactic Aspect: The Economy Principle

Syntactic operations are believed to be governed by the *Economy Principle*, a universal principle stating that structures and operations should be as economical as possible (Radford, 2016, p. 23). For instance, (38b) below shows that the use of pronoun *it* makes the sentence more economical than the DP repetition in (38a).

- (38) a. My new book on syntax has been so unsuccessful that nobody has bought **my new book on syntax** (Radford, 2016, p.24).
- b. My new book on syntax has been so unsuccessful that nobody has bought **it** (Radford, 2016, p.24).

In addition, some functional categories accommodate the Economy Principle as they can be omitted, as shown in (39a) and (39b) below.

- (39) a. **(Are)** you coming? (Thrasher, 1974).
- b. I'll see you **(on)** Sunday (Radford, 2016).

Since the Economy Principle is believed to universally govern the syntactic structures and operations, it is assumed that this principle also applies to the syntactic structure of absolute clauses as their structure is in a syntactically reduced form, comprising an overt subject and a non-finite predicate, with the omission of some functional categories, as exemplified in (40).

(40) Hagrid looked sideways at Harry, **his beard twitching** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 90).

In the absolute clause in (40), *his beard twitching* follows the Economy Principle, which states that syntactic representations should involve as few constituents, syntactic derivations, and grammatical operations as possible (Radford, 2004, p. 449). In *his beard twitching* in (40), the clause contains mainly lexical categories, which provide meaning, with the progressive *be* omitted. Being economical, the clause still follows one of *Grice's cooperative principles, the Maxim of Quantity* with its sufficient information (Grice, 1975, p. 47). According to Merchant (2001, p. 1), omission of some linguistic structures is allowed as long as there is no ambiguity. If ambiguity or misunderstanding occurs due to omission, the economical process cannot take place (Chen, 2016, p. 393). This is because ambiguity and misunderstanding, due to the economical process, could result in a clash of communication violating another cooperative principle, *the Maxim of Manner*, which states that ambiguity and obscurity should be avoided, while the information given should be brief and orderly (Grice, 1975, p. 46).

(40) shows that despite being syntactically economical, the absolute clause *his beard twitching* is still able to provide sufficient information for the readers. The statement given is informative with no ambiguity or obscurity. Thus, it is assumed that the structure of the absolute follows both economy and cooperative principles in order to produce a concise and clear statement to the readers. The statement is considered to be in line with Kortmann (2013) who states that the absolute clause might be the production of the least effort, following Grice (1975).

Arguments of Absolute Clauses

Absolute clauses comprise the subject and the predicate, which can be one-place, two-place, or three-place predicates. The two-place and three-place predicates are extremely rare in the data. The large majority of the absolute clauses are one-place predicates (See Table 3). According to Table 3, the one-place predicate as the unergative is also a minority, as shown in (41a) – (41c) below.

- (41) a. 'Follow me, you two,' said Professor McGonagall, and they marched on up the corridor, [AGENT subject **Wood**] **looking curiously at Harry** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 112).
- b. They walked more slowly, [INSTRUMENT subject **ears**] **straining for the faintest sound** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 184).
- c. They hurried up the street, [EXPERIENCER subject **the Grangers**] **shaking with fright** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 51).

AGENT, EXPERIENCER, or INSTRUMENT are the minority due to the fact that they are specifically restricted to a particular person or thing, as in (42a) and (42b) below.

(42) a. *God* made heaven and earth (Leech & Short, 2007).

b. *The dog* ate the bone (Leech & Short, 2007).

God and *the dog* in (42a) and (42b) are causers that instigate the action *made* and *ate*, respectively. Similarly, the AGENT subject *Wood*, the INSTRUMENT subject *ears*, and the EXPERIENCER subject *the Grangers* are specifically preserved in those contexts because they carry “story weight” as they are marked within a particular story (Leech & Short, 2007). That is, in (41a), it is *Wood* that was looking curiously at *Harry*, not anyone else. *Ears* in (41b) seem to be the only instrument (organ) to strain for the faintest sound. In (41c), the people who were shaking with fright in that scenario is the Grangers, not anybody else. Since the AGENT EXPERIENCER, or INSTRUMENT subjects are specifically selected, the context to appear is then narrowed down, leading to their rarity in fiction.

In this study, the vast majority of the one-place predicates are the reduced forms of THEME subject constructions. These are represented by three constructions: the unaccusative, the copula and the passive constructions, as in (43a) – (43c) below.

(43) a. ‘Harry!’ said Ron, [Unaccusative THEME **his eyes**] **gleaming** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 55).

b. Fawkes was soaring around its head, and the basilisk was snapping furiously at him **with** [Copula THEME **fangs**] **long and thin as sabers** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 235).

c. He watched an owl flutter toward the school across the bright blue sky, [Passive THEME **a note**] **clamped in its mouth** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 192).

The extensive use of one-place predicates corresponds with the economical syntactic structure, earlier discussed, in that the syntactically reduced structure of absolute clauses needs to be involved with as few syntactic derivations and grammatical operations as possible in order to be economical. With the single argument required, one-place predicates seem to be a potential option to make absolute clauses concise but understandable. To further satisfy the Economy Principle, the auxiliary *be* — a functional category which is light in semantics — is omitted, as in the examples (43) above. For instance, example (43a) reflects a progressive unaccusative construction, with the theme subject *his eyes* and the VP *gleaming*, and the progressive *be* omitted; example (43b) reflects a copula construction, with the THEME subject *fangs* and the AdjP *long and thin as sabers* and the copula *be* omitted; and example (43c) reflects a passive construction with the theme subject *a note*, a VP *clamped*, and the passive *be* omitted. Since theme subjects are part of the majority of one-place predicates, they, therefore, predominate the data.

Another reason for THEME subjects to be productive is that THEME subjects are likely to signify part-whole coreference (PC) and accompanying circumstance. Since PC-Accompanying Circumstance are usually affected inanimate entities, they are thus more likely to be THEMES, as shown in (44a) and (44b) below.

(44) a. Dobby [whole] leaned toward Harry, *his eyes* [THEME/part] **wide as headlamps** (accompanying circumstance) (Rowling, 2013a, p. 17).
 b. Harry looked at Ron [whole], who was still standing **with his wand** [THEME/part] **in the air** (accompanying circumstance) (Rowling, 2013b, 131).

THEME and PC-Accompanying Circumstance usually refer to a body part, some piece of clothing, some belonging, facial expression, inanimate or abstract entities, etc., which do not denote cause or mental state (Reinhart, 2016). These entities extensively appear as PC-Accompanying circumstance to provide background information, depict situations and actions, or describe facial expression of some elements in the matrix clause in fiction, as in (44a) and (44b). In (44a) and (44b), the absolute clauses, with the THEME subjects signifying PC-Accompanying Circumstance, describe Dobby's facial expression and how Ron's wand is held, respectively. This suggests that THEME and PC-Accompanying Circumstance are correlated with each other to establish the scene and sentence's context, accentuate an event, or suspense, excitement, and adventure in the story, resulting in the dominance of THEME and PC-Accompanying Circumstance in the fiction.

In contrast to AGENT, EXPERIENCER, and INSTRUMENT, which are preserved in a specific context, as mentioned earlier, THEME subjects seem to be simple to produce in a context (Leech & Short, 2007), as illustrated in (45a) and (45b) below.

(45) a. She approached Lockhart's desk, [THEME **a piece of paper**] **clutched tightly in her hand**. (Rowling, 2013a, 123).
 b. We must be miles under the school," said Harry, **his voice echoing in the black tunnel** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 223).

In (45a), the THEME subject, *a piece of paper*, is simple to produce because it is the accompanying circumstance of the matrix clause. The absolute clause in (45a) also conforms to the Economy Principle as the given AGENT is not repeated. Moreover, with the THEME subject, the focus of the story can be shifted from the known, unimportant AGENT to what is in her hand (*a piece of paper*). This suggests that the THEME subject smooths the story transition (Leech & Short, 2007). Similarly, the THEME subject *his voice* in (45b) smoothly shifts the focus from the AGENT who made the voice to how his

voice was echoing in the black tunnel. As *his voice* is part of the matrix subject, it is part of old information, which is also simple to produce. The above, therefore is part of the reason for the productivity of THEME subjects in the absolute.

Coreferences and Semantic Relations: Four patterns observed

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this study is to investigate absolute coreferences and semantic relations together to see if there is any correlation between them. Four patterns emerged, namely, 1) PC and accompanying circumstance, 2) NC and simultaneity, 3) FC and elaboration, and 4) CC as implied coreference.

Part-Whole Coreference and Accompanying Circumstance.

Part-whole coreference (PC), with its 262 instances, has the highest frequency among the coreferences. 244 instances occur with accompanying circumstance, as in the following examples.

(46) a. Two seconds later Harry, **heart thudding madly**, heard Uncle Vernon coming into the hall (Rowling, 2013a, p. 19).
 b. 'No, I haven't," said Percy, **his smile fading** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 137).

The main reason that PC correlates strongly with accompanying circumstance is that both are usually used to describe postures, facial expressions, thoughts, feelings, details of dressing, perception, and so on in the matrix clause (Kortmann, 2013). As in items (46a) and (46b), for example, the absolute subjects *heart* and *his smile*, respectively, are part of the whole bodies of *Harry* and *Percy*, signaling part-whole relationship. In the meantime, the whole absolute clauses, *heart thudding madly* and *his smile fading*, respectively, express the semantic relation of accompanying circumstance, detailing Harry's feeling and Percy's facial expressions, respectively. Since part-whole coreference and accompanying circumstance tend to describe such similar things as postures, facial expressions, feelings, and so on, they are, therefore, commonly used together.

No Coreference and Simultaneity.

No coreference (NC) extensively appears with simultaneity, the event that co-occurs with the matrix clause, with 19 out of 24 instances (79.16%) found in the study, as shown in (47a) and (47b) below.

(47) a. Harry wheeled around to look up at the statue, **Fawkes swaying on his shoulder** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 234).
 b. [matrix event He came around, [simultaneous backdrop event **rain falling on his face**,] still lying on the field, with someone leaning over him] (Rowling, 2013a,

p. 129).

Items (47a) and (47b) indicate that the absolute subjects *Fawkes* and *rain* have no coreferential connection with any constituents in the matrix clauses. They are in the absolute clauses that sketch a simultaneous time frame during which the action of the matrix event takes place (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016). In (47b), for instance, it is likely that *rain falling on his face* serves as a simultaneous backdrop event to the matrix clause, rather than providing additional information like accompanying circumstance and elaboration (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016). NC is, therefore, assumed to strongly correlate with simultaneity in absolutes to depict two separate events that co-occur in a sentence.

Full Coreference and Elaboration.

According to Kortmann (2013), full coreference (FC) in (48a) is expected to be rarely used in fiction since it can be further reduced into control clauses as shown in (48b) below.

(48) a. Slytherin captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – **Flint flying like an eagle up there** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 137).
 b. Slytherin captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – **flying like an eagle up there**.

In (48b), with *Flint* omitted, the sentence is still grammatical and understandable with no absolute clause. Although *Flint* can be omitted leaving the phrase a control clause, the DP *Flint*, in contrast, still appears, as in (48a) because it is to specifically emphasize the underlined matrix referent *Slytherin captain Marcus Flint*. Based on the finding in Table 10, FC is largely used with the semantic relation of elaboration, exclusively for elaborating on the matrix referent it fully refers to (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016). Hence, it could be said that the appearance of FC is to introduce elaboration to the context.

Constituent Coreference as Implied Coreference.

Unlike the other coreferences, six instances of constituent coreference (CC), the least frequent one, have no significant correlation with the semantic relations. However, it could be observed that this type of coreference tends to be used in the form of implied coreference. Five were found out of six, as shown in (49a) and (49b) below.

(49) a. Colin was sitting in one of the highest seats, his camera raised, taking picture after picture, **the sound (of him/ Colin's) strangely magnified in the deserted stadium** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 85).

b. The bedclothes had been pulled off his four-poster and the drawer had been pulled out of his bedside cabinet, **the contents (in the drawer) strewn over the mattress** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 187).

The constituents in the parentheses in (49a) and (49b) show that they are covertly implied. With the support of the surrounding context, readers can simply interpret and comprehend this hidden coreferential relationship. For instance, *the contents* in (49b), on the surface, seems to have no coreference with any matrix DPs. Nevertheless, a closer inspection reveals that the absolute *the contents* implies *the contents in the drawer*, and this covert adjunct *in the drawer* implicitly refers to the drawer in the matrix clause. Similarly, *the contents (in the drawer)* in (49b) cannot be interpreted as PC because anything that is implied belongs to implied coreference. Also, PC is usually signaled by a possessive marker. Thus, it should be *its contents* in order to show part-whole relationship.

Previous studies such as Kortmann (2013)'s and van de Pol and Hoffmann (2016)'s analyze the coreferences of absolute clauses separately from semantic relations. Nonetheless, with the focus on the semantic relations, it was found that each coreference tends to co-occur with a particular semantic relation or appear in a particular form, for example, constituent coreference as the implied one. These correlations demonstrate how coreferences and semantic relations work together in producing absolute clauses in the context of fiction. Moreover, they also suggest that the structure of the absolutes can be clearly explained via the application of the concepts of coreference and semantic relations.

Semantic Relations

There are two groups of semantic relations in this study, namely strong adverbials —requiring more prior knowledge from readers — and weak adverbials — requiring little prior knowledge from readers. Weak adverbials form the highest frequency in the findings appearing 99.05 percent (313/316 instances), as given in (50a) and (50b).

Weak adverbials.

(50) a. Madam Hooch was bending over Neville, **her face as white as his** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 110) (*Accompanying circumstance*).
 b. Slytherin captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes – **Flint flying like an eagle up there** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 137) (*Elaboration*).

The reason for the highest frequency of weak adverbials is due to the fact that weak adverbials are easier to process than their counterpart. That is, little

prior knowledge/information is required for interpretation (Fuhre, 2010; Kortmann, 2013), and surrounding context usually suffices to provide a clear understanding (van de Pol & Hoffmann, 2016). For example, the absolute clause *her face as white as his* provides additional information about Madam Hooch's face. With context provided, the readers do not have to think long and hard to understand the relationship between the absolute and its matrix clause. Since less shared knowledge is needed, the semantic processing is not difficult. This therefore leads to the extensive use of weak adverbials in the data.

In contradiction to weak adverbials, strong adverbials, with merely three instances (0.95 percent) from the whole data, are difficult to process. The reason for the difficulty is that readers have to retrieve their shared/relevant knowledge for the semantic relation interpretation (van de Pol & Petré, 2015).

Strong adverbials.

- (51) a. Even Neville scraped through, **his good Herbology mark making up for his abysmal Potions one** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 222) (*Cause*).
- b. Ron dropped his wand. **Hermione Granger, telling a downright lie to a teacher?** (Rowling, 2013b, p. 131) (*Cause*).
- c. Harry swerved out of the way, **one idea firmly lodged in his numb brain: get to Malfoy** (Rowling, 2013a, p. 129) (*Anteriority*).

In (51a), for instance, the boldfaced absolute is the reason (cause) why Neville scraped through his final exam. Readers need to retrieve the past knowledge from the previous chapters that Neville is good at Herbology and bad at Potions. His good mark in Herbology makes up for his low mark in Potions which helped him eventually pass the exam. Another example is item (51c). The boldfaced absolute occurs prior to the matrix clause. In order to understand that the absolute denotes anteriority, readers need to bring back the old information that Harry was in the Quidditch match against Slytherin. He saw the Golden Snitch, the smallest ball that has to be caught to finish the game, hovering inches near Malfoy. He then swerved out of the way after the idea to get to Malfoy to grab that Golden Snitch was lodged in his mind.

In comparison with cause in (51a and b), anteriority in (51c) is quite easier to process due to the meaning of the verb "swerve." That is, the verb itself means to change direction suddenly; this means that something has to happen prior to the change of direction. As for cause, there is nothing appearing to facilitate the interpretation, which is why it is placed higher than anteriority in the scale of informativeness (see Figure 1). Due to the difficulty in processing, strong adverbials are, therefore, not as frequent as weak adverbials.

High Productivity of Weak Adverbials in Fiction.

As stated earlier, 99.05 percent of the entire instances are weak adverbials. This high productivity illustrates that absolute clauses largely occur as weak adverbials which are easy for the readers to process. The occurrence of the absolute in a simplistic form seems to correspond with the concept of accommodation (Reid et al., 2022) referring to the fact that authors need to know their audience to communicate with them. When they know their audience, they anticipate their needs so that they can meet those needs (Reid et al., 2022). The readers of the main source of data of this study, the first two books of *Harry Potter* series, are middle-graders whose ages are between eight and twelve (Cunningham, 2019). Since the target audience of these two books is children to pre-teens, the language use should be easy to understand to keep their attention. Moreover, the language should be clear and concise to help readers read the books effortlessly. If the language is too difficult, the readers could lose their interest and stop reading (*Write Clearly and Concisely*, n.d.). Thus, in order to keep their attention and interest, weak adverbials, which require little knowledge to process, are more preferred, leading to the highest use in the data. Strong adverbials, which are difficult to process, however, are less preferred, and therefore rarely appear.

The process of producing written language to satisfy the audience's needs seems to be in line with Leech and Short (2007), who view the operation of language in fiction as a coding system. That is, the writer encodes messages/the idea to convey into language by constructing sentences, which become a text for the readers to decode/read (pp. 96, 100). Therefore, in order to keep readers' attention, especially children to preteens, the target audience, weak adverbial absolute clauses seem to meet this demand with concise, clear, and informative messages they provide.

Topic-Comment vs Syntactic Weight

As stated, the structure of absolute clauses is likely to abide by the Economy and Cooperative Principles in producing brief and informative clauses. These short and concise (light) clauses are believed to be determined by the two types of constituent ordering: syntactic weight and information structure. In this study, light absolutes form the vast majority. Being light in weight, these absolutes are hypothesized to follow End-Weight Principle by frequently appearing sentence initially. However, the data show that the syntactic weight does not apply to the majority because of the high frequency of light absolutes in the final position. In contrast, it was found that the short and concise absolutes at the end of the sentences present new information. Such information conforms to the topic-comment information structure, in which topic is given information and comment, new information. The data suggest that these short and concise light absolutes, which are due to the Economy and Cooperative Principles, can

easily move around. However, instead of being positioned initially due to their light weight, these light absolutes, in contrast, tend to appear finally to present new information. This, therefore, suggests that information structure, rather than the syntactic weight, governs the positions of absolute clauses, as demonstrated in (52a) and (52b).

- (52) a. [Topic *Several people in green robes* were walking onto the pitch], [Comment **broomsticks in their hands**] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 85).
- b. [Topic *Several people in green robes*] [Comment were walking onto the pitch, **broomsticks in their hands**] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 85).

The matrix clause and the absolute clause are parsed as topic and comment based on their positions, as in (52a) in which the matrix clause *Several people in green robes were walking onto the pitch* is a topic whereas the absolute *broomsticks in their hands* is a comment (He & Yang, 2015). This matrix clause is then further divided into topic and comment from its subject and predicate, as in (52b) in which the subject *several people in green robes* is a topic, while the predicate *were walking onto the pitch* is a comment (Li & Thompson, 1976). Unlike the matrix clause, the absolute clause, in contrast, cannot be further parsed into topic and comment as information structure is sentential; there is, thus, no information structure partition in a subordinate clause (Komagata, 2003, p. 303). Since the absolute clause is considered a subordinate clause, part of the sentence, being unable to occur independently and functioning as an adverbial clause (Tang, 2005, p. 8), it hence cannot be further subdivided as topic-comment.

According to the degree of Communicative Dynamism (CD, henceforth, following Firbas, 1971), the linguistic elements that are more contextually dependent (given information) will appear towards the beginning, carrying the lower degree of CD. In contrast, the elements that are inclined to be contextually independent (new information) would come last, carrying the higher degree of CD. Based on CD, it could be assumed that the matrix clause predicate *were walking onto the pitch* in (52b) carries the lower degree of CD; it, therefore, comes first. The absolute clause *broomsticks in their hands*, on the other hand, carries the higher degree of CD, thereby being placed finally.

- (53) [Topic ‘Don’t be so ridiculous, Fred,’] [Comment said Mrs. Weasley, **her cheeks rather pink**] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 32).

In the case of example (53), the sentence starts with the complement clause ‘*Don’t be so ridiculous, Fred,*’ followed by the inverted verb and the subject *said Mrs. Weasley* (Biber et al., 2021, p. 198). Being positioned sentence initially, the complement clause ‘*Don’t be so ridiculous, Fred,*’ is the topic, while the following verb and the subject, *said Mrs. Weasley* is part of the

comment, with the newest information at the rightmost constituent of the sentence, *her cheeks rather pink*.

As for the other 58 instances of heavy absolutes, they also follow the topic-comment order with 54/58 instances (93.10%) of the absolutes in the final positions, as in (54a) and (54b).

- (54) a. [Topic They][Comment stood still, **their heads inclined toward Flich's voice, which sounded quite hysterical**] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 171).
- b. [Topic He][Comment walked off, **his mind still full of what Ernie had said about him**] (Rowling, 2013a, p.150).

The reason for the absolute to be predominantly placed sentence finally is that they represent new information/comment, according to information structure (Li & Thompson, 1976), while the matrix, given information/topic. The topic in the matrix clause facilitates the readers' comprehension of the story by leading them to the new information. Example (54a), for instance, shows that the absolute clause *their heads inclined toward Flich's voice, which sounded quite hysterical* describes the topic *they* in the preceding clause. Similarly, *his mind still full of what Ernie had said about him* in (54b) also depicts the topic *he* in the matrix clause.

As for the 17 sentence-initial instances of light absolutes, they occur initially not because they are light but because they serve as scene-setting topics for the matrix clause (Lambrecht, 2012). Scene-setting topics are prepositional phrases, adverbs, and adverbial clauses, which establish background information for the matrix clause whose subject is the primary topic (subject topic, henceforth) (Lambrecht, 2012; Wu & Chitrakara, 2020). Since the absolute clause is viewed as a subordinate clause, functioning as adverbials (He & Yang, 2015, p. 7; Tang, 2005, p. 8), it is, therefore, assumed that the absolute clause in the initial position could serve as scene-setting topics, as exemplified in (55a) and (55b).

- (55) a. [Scene-setting topic **Mouth hanging open**], [Subject topic Harry] [comment saw that the little square for June thirteenth seemed to have turned into a minuscule television screen] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 180).
- b. [Scene-setting topic **His heart beating very fast**], [Subject topic Harry] [comment stood listening to the chill silence] (Rowling, 2013a, p. 226).

Being a scene-setting topic, the boldfaced absolute clause *his heart beating very fast* in (55b), for instance, marks coherence in the text by giving necessary background information for the subject topic *Harry* (Hasselgård, 2010), which is assumed to be known by the reader from the previous context (Kroeger, 2004, p. 142; Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 464).

Aside from light absolutes, four instances of heavy absolutes in this study also appear initially. This suggests that although being heavy, these instances appear initially following information structure. Below are examples of heavy absolutes with the preceding context, showing that they do not abide by the principle of End-Weight but the notion of topic-comment.

(56) a. He fell, face forward, onto cold stone and felt the bridge of his glasses snap ... [Scene-setting topic **Nose still stinging where it had hit the hearth,**] [Subject topic **Harry**] [comment made his way swiftly and silently toward the door] (Excerpted from Rowling, 2013a, p. 42).

b. The tunnel was so dark that they could only see a little distance ahead. Their shadows on the wet walls looked monstrous in the wand light... [Scene-setting topic¹ **Very slowly**], [Scene-setting topic² **his eyes as narrow as he could make them and still see,**] [Subject topic **Harry**] [comment edged forward] (Excerpted from Rowling, 2013a, p. 224).

Being a scene-setting topic of the discourse, the boldfaced absolute *nose still stinging where it had hit the hearth* in (56a) is assumed to be already known from the context which suggests that his nose was still stinging because he previously fell, face forward, onto cold stone, causing a sharp pain in his nose. Being known, *nose ... the hearth* is then set as a scene-setting topic to link with the preceding discourse and establish background for the matrix clause. When the subject topic *Harry* in the matrix clause, together with the preceding scene-setting topic, is retrieved, the comment in the matrix clause then provides the new information about Harry's making his way quickly and silently to the door.

In (56b) the heavy absolute *his eyes ... still see* is set as a scene-setting topic referring to the previous discourse. That is, Harry had to narrow his eyes to be able to see because the tunnel was so dark. When the matrix clause subject topic *Harry*, with its preceding scene-setting topic, is perceived, the old information will be recovered, and the readers would understand why he edged forward (very slowly).

Based on the earlier discussion, the whole absolute clause in the initial position serves as a scene-setting topic, establishing background information to the subject topic. This function is like an adverbial clause which sets a background framework to the main clause proposition (Lambrecht, 2012). Since the absolute clause is believed to be derived from the adverbial clauses (He & Yang, 2015), it could be assumed that when occurring initially, the absolute clause serves as a scene-setting topic just like the adverbial clause.

With respect to medial positions — though infrequently used with only 24 instances (9.30%) of light absolutes (no medial heavy absolutes) — their occurrences are believed to be determined by the notion of topic-comment, as in (57).

(57) Neville, **his face tear-streaked**, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him (Rowling, 2013b, p. 110).

According to the degree of CD (Firbas, 1971), the linguistic elements that are more contextually dependent (given information) will appear towards the beginning, therefore carrying the lower degree of CD. The elements that are prone to be contextually independent (new information) would come later, carrying a higher degree of CD, as in (58).

(58) b. John has gone up to the window (Firbas, 1971, p. 136).

John in (58) is considered having the lowest degree of CD appearing at the leftmost of the sentence. In the direction to the end, the degree of CD increases until it reaches the last word, which is *the window*, signifying that it is contextually independent, carrying the highest CD degree.

(59) [Topic Neville], [comment **his face tear-streaked**, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him] (Rowling, 2013b, p. 110).

Thanks to the concept of CD, the ordering of absolute clauses, especially in the medial position, as in (59), can be explained. In (59), *Neville* is topic, while the rest is comment. *Neville* has the lowest CD, while the absolute *his face tear-streaked* has the next lowest CD. The CD increases as the sentence progresses until the highest CD is reached, which is at the PP *with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him*. The above discussion shows that the positions of absolute clauses are primarily pragmatically determined by information structure: the topic is in the initial position and comment, the rest of the sentence. The medial position is thus the comment with new information, but not as new as the element in the final position.

Conclusion

Based on the earlier discussion, it could be concluded that the correlation between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics plays a central role in determining the way absolute clauses occur in fiction.

Syntactically, the structure of absolute clauses comprises the subject and non-finite predicate with *V-ing*, *V-ed*, *To-V*, DP, AdjP, and PP, the reduced versions of regular finite clauses. The majority that can be frequently found is the ones with THEME subjects. They follow Economy and Cooperative Principles by forming a syntactically economical construction with clear, brief, and informative message for readers. Traditionally, the absolute structure is said not to be linked in any other specific way to the rest of the sentence (Matthews,

2014, p. 2). However, it was found that the absolute clause is largely semantically connected to its matrix clause via coreferential properties. In the case of no coreference (NC), even if it does not directly co-refer to its matrix clause, it is still linked to the rest of the sentence through the semantic relation by serving as a backdrop event, sketching a simultaneous time frame to the matrix clause.

The coreferential property of absolutes also correlates with semantic relations; these correlations are in four patterns: PC and accompanying circumstance; NC and simultaneity; FC and elaboration; and CC as implied coreference. These correlations provide an in-depth understanding of how coreferences and semantic relations are related in absolute clauses.

With respect to semantic relations of absolute clauses, weak adverbials form the vast majority of the entire data. The key factor that is believed to play a role behind the high productivity of weak adverbials is in the fact that the author of the books knows her audience (Reid et al., 2022) and encodes the language that is comprehensible to children aged between eight to twelve to keep their attention and interest (*Write Clearly and Concisely*, n.d.). Since the encoded language by the writer is simplified, it is then easy for the readers to decode. Moreover, since weak adverbials are easier to process than strong adverbials, their extremely frequent use is thereby expected.

Regarding the positions, it is apparent that absolute clauses are pragmatically determined by the topic-comment structure, rather than the syntactic weight. Regardless of the weight, the absolute is positioned by virtue of being new or old information (Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 464).

The findings of this study report the appearance of the English absolute clauses in *Harry Potter* books. The analyses uncover the meaning and function of this intriguing structure. The absolute clauses help provide background information, establish literary genre, depict relationships, set the scene, establish the sentence's context, accentuate an event, or link two themes. With this construction, J.K. Rowling is able to accentuate the fantasy, suspense, adventure, excitement, and thrill, which could keep readers' attention to the book. This study is believed to shed some light on the appearance of the English absolutes, especially in the specific genre of fiction. However, since this study exclusively focuses on *Harry Potter* books, the findings might not be able to generalize the concept of the absolute clauses in other genres of writing. To support the findings, studies of a similar nature with other sources are highly encouraged.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Assistant Professor Nirada Chitrakara, Ph.D., for her constructive comments and kind support. Without her help, this study could not have been completed. In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to the Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University, for their financial support, the scholarship in commemoration of *The Celebrations on the Auspicious Occasion of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's 5th Cycle (60th) Birthday*.

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