

In Latin there are two predicative participle constructions, one with an implicit subject (*participium coniunctum*) and one with an explicit subject (*ablativus absolutus*). Both constructions express events that can stand in a number of different semantic relations (temporal, causal, conditional, concessive, manner, means etc.) with the event expressed by the matrix verb. As the semantic relation between the participle and the matrix verb is only exceptionally being specified explicitly by means of adverbs or particles, it is generally left to the receiver to infer which relation makes most sense in the context.

Although the use of predicative participles to express implicit semantic relations is common in Latin, the interpretation of these constructions has as of yet received little attention in Latin linguistic literature. Central questions like how the interpretation process can be described, what the linguistic factors that influence or affects our interpretations are, how frequent the different interpretations occur, and whether there are any differences in interpretation between participles with implicit vs. explicit subject, have all yet to be thoroughly examined. In this paper, I will explore these questions on the basis of an analysis of approximately 300 predicative participles taken from the PROIEL- corpus of Caesar's historical narrative *De bello gallico* (The Gallic War).¹

The interpretation process

A central argument in this paper is that Latin predicative participles can fill three different syntactic functions in the sentence and that the different syntactic functions correlate with different sets of possible interpretations and with different functions in the information structure of the sentence ²

The first type, which I will call thematic participles, modifies the sentence as a whole (i.e appears in a left-peripheral position) and express information that is given or inferable from the context. Semantically, thematic participles seem restricted to express temporal, temporal-causal, causal, conditional, concessive, concessive-conditional and purpose relations and are often translated with an adverbial clause or a participle, like in (1) below.

- (1) **Germanico bello confecto** [...] Caesar statuit sibi Rhenum esse transeundum
 german.ABL.SG war.ABL.SG finished.PTCP.PFV.ABL.SG Caesar decided self Rhine be cross
 "The German campaign thus finished, Caesar decided that he must cross the Rhine" (Caes. Gall. 3,23,1)³

The second type, which I will refer to as rhematic participles, is more on level with the matrix verb (i.e adjoined to I') and express new and independent information. Rhematic participles seem restricted to express plain narrative progression and contrast and are typically translated with coordinated sentences, like in (2) below.

- (2) Hos item [...] cum conspexissent, **subsecuti** hostibus adpropinquaverunt
 them likewise when see. followed.PTCP.PFV.NOM.PL enemy approached
 "And when they saw them, they likewise followed on and drew near to the enemy" (Caes. Gall. 4,25,6)

The third type, which I will call elaborative participles, modifies the matrix verb alone (i.e appear inside the I' projection). The information expressed by elaborative participles, is also usually new, but – in contrast with rhematic participles – it is not independent, but elaborates on the event expressed by the matrix verb. Elaborative participles seem restricted to express the relations "accompanying circumstances", "manner", "means" and "comparison".

- (3) Nostri ad unum omnes incolumes **perpaucis vulneratis** [...] se in castra receperunt.
 our to one all unharmed few.ABL.PL wounded.PTCP.PFV.ABL.PL self to camp returned
 "The Romans, with not a man lost and but few wounded, returned to camp" (Caes. Gall. 4,15,3)

Since the participles in the different syntactic functions correlate with different sets of potential interpretations, it is argued that the interpretation of Latin predicative participles can be viewed as a two-step process, where the first step consists in identifying the syntactic function of the participle and the second step in inferring which of the potential interpretations makes most sense in the context.

¹ This paper is based on my masters thesis (Strand 2011)

² The syntactic functions identified here have also been found for Greek predicative participles (Haug 2012, Pompei forthcoming) and seem more generally to correspond to the three syntactic functions available for converbs in general (Nedjalkov 1995).

³ All translations are taken from the Loeb edition.

Concerning the first step in the interpretation process, it is demonstrated that the different syntactic functions can only be observed *directly* in contexts featuring embeddings like mode and negation, and argued that the syntactic function of the participle therefore usually can be inferred only *indirectly* on the basis of its function in the information structure of the sentence.

When it comes to the second step in the interpretation process, it is argued (following Kortmann 1991,1995) that the different semantic relations that can be expressed by participles can be ordered hierarchically based on how much contextual/world-knowledge they require in order to be successfully inferred, and that the interpretation of the semantic relations should be seen in light of the basic pragmatic principle of informativity, which states that the receiver always will seek to maximize the meaning of an utterance and go for the most informative relation sanctioned by the context. For Latin predicative participles, the following hierarchy is proposed: **Thematic participles**: temporal, temporal-causal, causal, purpose, condition, concessive, concessive-conditional; **rhematic participles**: narrative progression, contrast; **elaborative participles**: accompanying circumstance, manner, means, comparison.

Apart from pragmatic inferences based on general world-knowledge, a variety of linguistic factors on both sentence and discourse level are shown to contribute and affect the interpretation process. On the sentence level, some central factors seem to be the *aktionsart* of the participle, the tense/mood/aspect of the matrix verb and the lexical semantics of the predicates involved, and on the discourse level it is suggested that phenomena like thematic breaks and subject-shifts can play a role in the interpretation.⁴

The distribution of the different interpretations

The distribution of the different interpretations in the corpus reveal that simple relations like temporal, narrative progression, temporal-causal and causal are by far the most frequent (ca. 90%), while more complex relations like concessive, conditional, concessive-conditional rarely occur. It is suggested that this distribution must partly be seen in the light of the narrative genre of the text, but that it probably also may be taken to reflect that more cognitive complex relations are generally more likely to be expressed by semantically explicit constructions than implicit constructions like participles.

Kortmann (1995) suggest that it is a universal tendency that in languages that have both constructions, converbs with an implicit subject will express more complex relations than converbs with an explicit subject. The data in our corpus, however, suggest that in Latin it may be the other way around as the ablative absolutes to a much larger degree than conjunct participles express relations higher on the hierarchy. It is suggested that this probably must be seen in light of the fact that Latin, with the exception of a limited group of verbs with passive form, but active meaning, lacks an active perfect participle and that the absolute construction therefore is used more extensively as a substitute.

References: **Haug, D & Bary, C (2011)** Temporal anaphora across and inside sentences: The function of participles. *Semantix & Pragmatics*, Volume 4, Article 8: 1-56; **Kortmann, B. (1991)** *Free adjuncts and absolutes in English: problems of control and interpretation*. London, Routledge; **Kortmann, B. (1995)** Adverbial participle clauses in English. In: Haspelmath, M. & König, E. (ed.) *Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective: structure and meaning of adverbial verb forms, adverbial participles, gerunds*. Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, p. 189-237; **König, E. (1995)** The meaning of converb constructions. In: Haspelmath, M. & König, E. (ed.) *Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective: structure and meaning of adverbial verb forms, adverbial participles, gerunds*. Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, p. 57-95; **Nedjalkov, V. (1995)** Some typological parameters of converbs. In: Haspelmath, M. & König, E. (ed.) *Converbs in cross-linguistic perspective: structure and meaning of adverbial verb forms, adverbial participles, gerunds*. Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, p. 97-136; **Pompei, A. (Forthcoming)** Participio greco e converbi. *Archivio Glottologico Italiano*, Volume 100, number 1; **Strand, Ø (2011)** *Fortolkning av konjunkte partisipper og absolutte ablativer*. Masters thesis, Oslo, University of Oslo

⁴ Many of the factors that seem to play a role in the interpretation of Latin participles have also been found to play a role in the interpretation of converbs in other languages (see König 1995 for an overview)