

Adverbial participles (converbs) as strategies for establishing inter-sentential cohesion and coherence in Germanic and Romance languages

O. Introduction

- **Cohesion:** resources for creating texture (reference, repetition, ellipsis, conjunctions, intonation, etc.)
relations of meaning that exists within a text and that define it as a text; the use of overt lexical and grammatical markers to signal relations between sentences in a text;
 - **Coherence:** what makes a text semantically meaningful; ‘continuity of senses’; semantic relationships; interpretation of each individual sentence with respect to the interpretation of other sentences of a text; not an objective property of the text produced; may be established inferentially.
- examples
- (1) a. Looking at the election results, Angela was not very pleased.
c. Knowing me, knowing you, it’s the best we can do. [**adverbial participles**]
- (2) Using a sharp axe, he fought his way into the building. (free adjuncts, converbs)
- (3)a. The Dean turned and went out, his gown billowing darkly behind him. (**absolute construction < Lat. ablativus absolutus**)
b. With the teacher refusing to comply, Barry took the matter to the dean.
c. Even with Scottish unemployment standing at 200 000, 36 percent of the electorate think that labour is best equipped to deal with the problem.
d. You never know what will happen, with John driving the car.
- **characteristic properties:**
 - (i) non-finite verbs
 - (ii) understood subject is that of main clause (adverbial part.; otherwise dangling participles); absolutes have subject of their own; tense is determined by main clause (cohesive devices)
 - (iv) adverbial function within complex sentence (questions of coherence)
 - (v) may precede or follow the main clause (with a possible change of meaning)
 - differences in terminology (Engl. gerund vs. participles; Fr. gérondif; It. gerundio, etc.)
 - **areal distribution in Europe**
 - (i) rare in Germanic (exceptions: English, Yiddish; non-expanded participles possible in German)
 - (ii) available in Romance (It. gerundio; Sp. gerundio; Fr. gérondif)
 - (iii) available in many other languages (Slavic, Turkic, Finnish, Greek, Indic, etc.)
 - **digression: marking of non-finite forms in English;** multiple use of *-ing* forms in English : adverbial participles and others

- (4)a. The man looking out of the window is Mr. Jones. (relative clause)
 b. If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail. (progressive)
 c. The criminal avoided getting caught. I look forward to seeing you. (gerund)
 d. No reading of poetry is good enough for George.
 e. This was extremely surprising. (deverbal adjectives)
 f. Considering his age, he is extremely fit. (understood subject? → deverbal prepositions)
 g. California is a real melting pot.
 h. Knowing that sleep would elude him, he remained in his office. (adverbial participle)

1. The Semantic Versatility of Adverbial Participles: vagueness or polysemy? Problems of coherence.

- (5)a. Walking home, John saw a rabbit. (temporal)
 b. Walking home, John would have seen the new billboards. (conditional)
 c. Not seeing anyone, he went back into the building. (causal)
 d. Not introducing her to any of his colleagues, George offended Sheila in a way that she had never thought possible. (instrumental/'indem')
 e. She took off her coat and scarf, dumping them on the bed. (paratactic)
 f. He nodded merely, not trusting his voice. (causal)
 g. She listened in silence, asking no questions and making no comments...(paratactic)
 h. Having treated me at first as a notorious troublemaker, they became after a while very solicitous. (temporal, concessive)
 i. Not having seen the picture, John bought it. (causal or concessive)
 j. Even remembering the nice meal that Aunt B. had served her the night before, Meg hesitated to taste. (concessive)
 k. He smiled, making no comment. (adversative)

- the same semantic versatility is found in absolute constructions.

(6) Even with Scottish unemployment standing at 190,000, 36% of the electorate think that Labour is best equipped to deal with the problem.

- compare this versatility with that of the preposition *bei* in German:

- (7)a. Bei Regen würde ich nicht mit dem Auto fahren.
 b. Bei diesem Nebel solltest du nicht mit dem Auto fahren.
 c. Bei deiner Hochzeit bin ich natürlich auch da.
 d. Bei ständig sinkendem Einkommen, gibt Karl mehr und mehr Geld aus.
 e. Karl ist bei seiner Freundin.

2. Variability

- occurrence in genres and **text types**:

adverbial participles are primarily found in narrative texts (journalistic and fiction); not in the spoken language or in scientific texts.

- **backgrounding and focusing**

- (8)a. Peut-on fumer en priant? 'Is it allowed to smoke while praying?'
 b. Peut-on prier en fumant? 'Is it allowed to pray while smoking?'

- combinations with **conjunctions** (*while, when, before, after, as if, rather than, since*)

(9)a. Before coming to the pub, John had taken an evening stroll.

- b. Mary looked into her glass, as if replaying the scene there.
- c. He refused to stay in his office, going to the library instead.

- prepositions vs. participles

- (10)a. Following a sharp decline last year, the price of petrol has risen again this year.
(understood subject ≠ subject of main clause) → preposition
- b. Sitting on a tree, I saw a bird. (= speaker sat on a tree)

- digression: participial relative clauses and adverbial participles as translations of German prepositions:

- (11)a. ...für Reisende mit einer Bahn-Card
'...for travellers holding Rail Cards...'
 - b. Ein Film mit Bruce Lee 'a movie featuring/starring Bruce Lee...'
 - c. Mit ihm sind es sechs.
'That makes (it) six, counting him.'
 - d. ...die Antwort auf die Frage an den Menschen von heute.../
'the answer to the question facing modern man...'
 - e. Wenn er so tief liegt, wird es ein Schwede mit Erz sein, schätzte Oskar. (G. Grass)
'Must be a Swede carrying iron ore to draw so much water, Oskar reflected.'
 - f. Das Geheimnis um die Marie-Celeste ist nie völlig geklärt worden.
'The secret surrounding the ship Marie-Celeste has never been satisfactorily explained.'
 - g. Die Texte zu den abgebildeten Pflanzen umfassen den deutschen und den wissenschaftlichen Namen.
'The descriptions accompanying the photographs include the English and scientific names.'
- (12)a. A map or plan showing the harbour limits... ('eine Karte mit den Hafengrenzen')
 - b. ...books dealing with sexual topics... ('Bücher über sexuelle Themen')
 - c. ...huge jars displaying flowers and foliage... ('Krüge mit Blumen und Grün..')
 - d. ...sessions lasting daily from early morning until late at night..('...tägliche Sitzungen vom frühen Morgen bis spät in die Nacht')
 - e. Hier ist ein Buch über Mineralien von Paul für Karl.

- deverbal prepositions: *barring, concerning, following, owing to, regarding, saving, considering, including, notwithstanding, facing, etc.*

3. Converbs (adverbial participles) in Romance languages

- different traditions in the use of terminology

3.1. Examples

FRENCH

- (13)a. Elle traversa le fleuve en nageant.
- b. Il a éteint le feu en sifflant.

ITALIAN

- (14)a. C'è una donna che guadagna danaro accompagnando nuovi membri.
- b. Vagava, nella casa, come cercando il sentiero misterioso.

SPANISH

- (15)a. Tratando de atender a todos, don Roque servía a varias mesas al mismo tiempo.

b. Entrando, dio los buenas dias a todos.

- restrictions in German

(16)a. Karl trat singend in s Zimmer.

- b. ?Karl trat ein Lied singend ins Zimmer.
- c. ??Karl trat ins Zimmer, einen neuen Schlager mit aller Kraft singend.
- d. ??Ihm helfend, hast du auch mir geholfen.
- e. *Wie wunderschön ist dieser Abend, aufgehört zu regnen habend...(Ludwig II)

- **Vagueness of Meaning in Romance languages**

the meaning of adverbial participles is vague/non-specific just as in English; a variety of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic factors contribute to their interpretation;

- FR. tense and mood

(17)a. Vous réussiriez mieux en procédant avec plus de méthode. (conditional)

b. Vous avez réussi mieux en procédant avec plus de méthode. (causal, instrumental)

- **syndesis in French and Italian**

- Fr. **tout** en V-and ; Italian pur, anche, solo, come

(18)a. FRENCH Elle traversa le fleuve en nageant.

b. ...dit-il, en se levant.

c. En tuant sa femme il a aussi assassiné le rêve.

ITALIAN d. Grazie, disse balbettando. 'Thanks he said, stammering'.

(19)a. Il la regarda encore, tout en lui caressant les cheveux. (accompanying circumstance)

b. Mais tout en accusant ma nature, je me sentais incapable de le dompter. (concessive)

ITALIAN

(20)a. Essendo raffreddato, ha preferito restare a casa. (causal)

b. Pur essendo raffreddato, Franco non è restato a casa. (concessive)

5. Relevant Literature

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