

WAYS OF INTERPRETING LATIN

ABSOLUTE PREDICATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

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Secondary predication is a linguistic phenomenon which offers special difficulty to Ukrainian and Russian speaking students and therefore requires special interpretation while teaching both the English and Latin languages.

Absolute Participial constructions of various types, forming complexes of detached semi-predication, give evidence of peculiar use of participles. In Latin the participle in agreement with a noun or pronoun can be put in the Ablative to define the time or circumstances of an action. This construction is called the Ablative Absolute (*Ablativus Absolutus*, further AA). AA is independent of any of the parts of the sentence: hence its name absolute (*absolutum* is the perfect participle passive of *absolvo, absolvere, absolvi, absolutum* 3 'to release'). A substantive in AA very seldom denotes a person or thing elsewhere mentioned in the same clause. 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.

The object of the article is to investigate the ways of rendering the Latin absolute constructions (*Ablativus Absolutus*) in English and to trace back the conjectured links between the Latin absolute constructions and the English Nominative Absolute participial construction.

Like all the verbids, the English present and past participles have no categorical time distinctions, and the attributes 'present' and 'past' are not immediately explanatory [3, p. 111]; the 'present' expressing the action simultaneous to that of the main verb and the 'past' conveys implicitly the categorical meaning of the perfect and the passive.

Similarly, the Latin *Participium Praesentis Activi* denotes the action synchronous with the predicate (e.g.: *Fure subeunte mulier nummum abscondit* – A thief

approaching, the woman hides her coin) while Participium Perfecti Passivi expresses priority to the main verb (e.g.: *Nummo deprehénso fur éffugit – Having stolen the coin the thief escapes, or The coin stolen, the thief escapes; Troia capta Aeneas in Italiam venit - Troy (having been) captured, Aeneas came to Italy*).

Consequently, the Ablative participle may be translated by a verb in the present, past or future tense depending on the tense of the predicate verb. For example, *Praesentibus omnibus orationem habeo – I make a speech when everybody is present; Praesentibus omnibus orationem habui – I made a speech when everybody was present; Praesentibus omnibus orationem habebo – I shall make a speech when everybody is (will be)* present.*

The English participles are considered to have acquired their secondary predication function under the influence of Latin translations [5]. In Old English predicative relations were conveyed by the Old English complex with the participle in the Dative case. The Latin AA was far more common than English complexes with the Dative. According to statistics given by V. Yartseva, in English translation of the Gaelic Christian priest Paulus Orosius (III-IV c. A.D.) only 5 of 318 AA were translated by means of absolute constructions. In comparing the translation with the Latin original it has been discovered that in AA is mostly translated by Old English subordinate clauses with the conjunctions indicating the connection of the Latin AA with the main verb of the sentence. Another common way of translating the AA was by means of coordination. Besides, present participle was not used in Old Germanic languages adverbially, functioning as noun modifier and had no syntactical connection with the predicate verb. The analysis of its syntactical functions shows that it was not typically used in constructions like the Latin AA. It can therefore be concluded that it was under the influence of Latin translations that English participles acquired its secondary predication function [5].

In modern English the types of absolute predicative construction with the participle are the Nominative Absolute participial construction and the Prepositional Absolute participial construction. The two parts of any construction are predicatively connected as the logical subject and the logical predicate. For example, *Caesar, acceptis*

litteris, nuntium mittit – Having received the letter, Caesar sends a messenger (the letter having been received); *Obsidibus datis, Caesar pacem faciet* – (With) Hostages having been given, Caesar will make peace.

The Latin as well as the English construction may also contain an adjective as the second (predicative) component of the construction: *Militibus fortibus, urbs servata est* – (With) The soldiers (being) brave, the city was saved.

Sometimes the Latin noun is used adverbially in AA: *Mihi optato veneris* – You will come in accordance with my wish; *Caesare duce, milites fortiter pugnauerunt* – (With) Caesar (being) leader, the soldiers fought bravely. The latter type of construction, otherwise called incomplete AA, is mainly made of substantives denoting leadership: *duce* (under the leadership of, headed by), *praesidente* (under presidency) or adjectives of state: *vivo* (in the lifetime), *mortuo* (after death), *Me invitō/ā* (in spite of my wish) etc.

The Latin AA is not always equivalent to English participial constructions, their proper interpretation conditioned by several factors, the main being the original meanings of the Latin Ablative case and the semantic relations (temporal, causal, conditional, 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 [1].

The original meaning of the Ablative is complex, incorporating the meanings and, in part, the forms of three cases, - the Ablative proper, or Ablative of separation, expressing the 'from' relation, the Locative 'in' and the Associative-Instrumental 'with' or 'by'. Due to convergence of meanings and definite phonetic processes these three cases have become largely identical in form. As a result of merging we do not always know whether a particular usage belongs to one or the other of these categories. For example, the kind of AA in *Caesare duce* may be analyzed as a temporal Ablative (that is, a metaphorical extension of the Locative case) or as an associative-instrumental Ablative (for instance, in the sense of 'with Caesar being the leader'). On the other hand, some uses of the Ablative are precise and involve category

distinctions that should not be overlooked. *Caesar militibus urbem oppugnavit* – *Caesar attacked the city by means of his soldiers*, that is, the soldiers were his tools, the means by which he carried on his assault. *Caesar cum militibus urbem oppugnavit* – *Caesar attacked the city with his soldiers*; that is, he was accompanied by his soldiers in the attack. *A militibus urbs oppugnata est* – *The city was attacked by the soldiers*; that is, by the soldiers as volitional agents [6].

Thus, the relation of the thought expressed in an AA phrase to that of the main clause may vary greatly, according to the context. Besides expressing mere situation or attendant circumstances, the Absolute phrase can express time, or cause, or concession, or even condition. Consider the examples: *Cethegus, recitatis litteris, repente conticuit.* – *When the letter had been read out (the letter having been read), Cethegus suddenly fell silent* (time); *G. Flaminius religione neglecta cecidit apud Trasimenum.* – *Gaius Flaminius fell at Trasimene, because he had neglected religious usage* (cause) [2].

The sentence *Ex urbe exibant capitibus opertis* may mean, according to the context, either *They went out of the city with covered heads*, or *With their heads covered (having covered their heads) they went out of the city*. With the former meaning *opertis* is attributive, and the phrase *capitibus opertis* is the equivalent of an adverb. In the latter sense *opertis* is predicative, and the phrase *capitibus opertis* is equivalent to a subordinate clause (*When they had covered their heads*) or a separate sentence (*They covered their heads and went out*).

A more consistent approach is proposed by Strand in his paper ‘*The interpretation of Latin predicative participles*’ [1] which is based on English translation of the famous [Julius Caesar's](#) *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*

(*Commentaries on the [Gallic War](#)*).

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

The first type, which he calls thematic participles, modify the sentence as a whole 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 *Germanico bello confecto [...] Caesar statuit sibi Rhenum esse transeundum* – *The German campaign thus finished, Caesar decided that he must cross the Rhine* [1].

The second type, which the author refers to as rhematic participles, are more on level with the matrix verb and express new and independent information. Rhematic participles seem restricted to express plain narrative progression and contrast and are typically translated with coordinated sentences, for example: *Hos item[...]cum conspexissent, subsequuti hostibus adpropinquaverunt* – *And when they saw them, they likewise followed on and drew near to the enemy.*

The third type, which are called elaborative participles, modify the matrix verb alone. 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 of accompanying circumstances, as in *Nostri ad unum omnes incolumes perpaucis vulneratis[...] se in castra receperunt* – *The Romans, with not a man lost and but few wounded, returned to camp* and are typically translated by means of English absolute predicative constructions [1].

A special type of AA is presented by those with Participium Futuri Activi: *Carthaginienses prima luce oppugnaturis hostibus castra saxis undique congestis augent vallum* – *‘Carthaginians at dawn, expecting the enemy to attack their camp, collecting the stones everywhere, build up the rampart; Victores circumsidunt urbem, haud dubie postero die aut metu dedituris se hostibus aut vi expugnaturi* – *The winners surround the city having no doubt that the next day the enemy will either surrender, or be captured* [4].

As everywhere else, the function of AA in the above sentences is to modify the circumstances of the main action. But the AA with Participium Futuri Activi

cannot express the circumstances which follow the main action or are simultaneous to it. Thus, the construction presents the event which is not real, but only predicted by the author or by the protagonist; the realization of the action is supposed to take place in the future, but the expectation affects the present. This usage is treated by M. Tariverdieva as a special kind of modality [4], and the interpretation requires modal words (*expect, suppose, doubt* etc.) to convey semantic links with the matrix verbs.

As it can be seen, the participles in different syntactic functions correlate with different sets of potential interpretations. The proper interpretation of Latin predicative participles can be viewed as a two-step process [1], 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. Their rendering in English implies a thorough analysis of the linguistic factors in both languages that influence or affect our interpretation.

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