

Discourse-pragmatic Functions of Participial Clauses in Preverbal Position

Considering the fact that due to processing pressure, more complex clause elements generally tend to be positioned after the verb (cf. »the principle of end weight«, Quirk et al. 1985, 1362; henceforth *CGEL*), participial clauses in preverbal position can be considered as marked. The present chapter aims to identify the discourse-pragmatic factors which require the non-final position of participial clauses and which may override the tendency towards final placement.

1. The Types of Participial Clauses

The types of participial clauses discussed involve on the one hand post-modifying clauses, restrictive (1) a. and non-restrictive (1) b., and on the other hand adverbial clauses, whether introduced by subordinators (1) c. or not (1) d.

- (1) a. **Articles considering specific aspects of intercontinental collision** include those by Burke et al. (1977) [...] (J0T, 712)
b. Sloth faeces, **estimated to contain half the leaf material**, are returned to the ground around the trees [...] (J18, 91)
c. **When interviewing Margaret**, the therapist found her to be moderately depressed, [...] (B30, 608)
d. **Having asked that she should not be disturbed** she had taken the overdose in her room. (B30, 886)

The study is stylistically limited to academic written texts. The material was obtained predominantly from the British National Corpus.

2. Participial Clauses in Initial Position

Let us consider the initial position first. Participial adverbial clauses in preverbal position are either integrated in the sentence, functioning as adjuncts, or peripheral to the sentence – performing the functions of disjuncts, subjuncts and conjuncts. Our approach to the classification of adverbials is based on that of Quirk et al. (*CGEL*, 501 ff); however, it relies more on the semantic characteristics of the non-integrated adverbials than on their formal properties. These participial clauses represent the speaker's comment on the utterance.

In disjuncts the speaker comments on the style, form or content of the utterance. In ex. (2) he presents himself as the ›authority‹ on the utterance (*CGEL*, 615). Alternatively, the speaker may present the content of the matrix clause as generally valid, including the reader in the sphere of the ›authority‹ (ex. 3). Participial disjuncts are also often used for rewording (ex. 4). The implied ›valency: subject is the authorial *I / we*, and there is typically no coreference between the implied subject of the participial clause and that of the matrix clause it is attached to. The range of participial constructions used as disjuncts appears to be quite narrow: the recurrent predicates include (*-ly*, e.g. *broadly, generally, strictly speaking, expressed (in this way, formally), put (another way), putting x (more precisely), taken (at face value, literally)*).

- (2) **Judging by our previous experience**, I do not think that the Home Secretary would have refused to renew it thereafter. (ASB, 979)
- (3) **Generally speaking**, organisms in warm, shallow seas that either build or are closely associated with reefs have been relatively vulnerable to extinction, [...]. (CMA, 556)
- (4) **Putting this more precisely**, the proper time taken by light to pass to and fro between two fixed points in spaces oscillates. (H8K, 1732)

Participial clauses may also be used to specify the speaker's point of view, their scope therefore extending over the whole sentence. These clauses may accordingly be classified as viewpoint subjuncts (ex. 5). Concerning the subject non-attachment to the subject of the superordinate clause, the same applies as in disjuncts (and conjuncts, for that matter). Again, a considerable degree of institutionalization of particular predicates in this function can be observed: *regarding, having regard, speaking, viewed (in this way)*.

- (5) **Anatomically speaking**, it is an either/or. (CGF, 890)

Although other forms of adverbials are generally preferred in the text-organising function,¹ participial clauses can assume a (near-)conjunct status. The writer's main concern here is to indicate clearly how the text is organised, and where in this structure the reader is at the moment. It is usually not only the subordinate clause that serves the text-organising function, but rather the sentence as a whole. These clauses border on temporal adjuncts but differ from them in referring primarily to textual rather than temporal localisation. As in other non-integrated adverbials, the implied agent of the conjunct is typically the authorial *I / we*. They also resemble disjuncts and subjuncts in referring to the way the content is presented. The text-organizing function is frequently expressed by the following participial constructions: *returning to*, *dealing (firstly) with*, *concluding*, *referring (back) to*, *recalling*, *switching from [...] to*, *linked with[...]*.

- (6) **Dealing firstly with the similarities between this and the student reconstructions**, it is noticeable that the preferred opening is vindicated: [...]. (J89, 144)
- (7) **Before examining the major sociological perspectives on crime**, it is useful to refer to theories from outside of sociology, from other academic disciplines. (B17, 187)
- (8) **Secondly, and linked with this point**, criminal statistics reflect the intensity of law enforcement itself. (B17, 1096)

The relatively high incidence of non-integrated clauses in initial position is due to two factors: first, they function as discourse markers – it is reasonable for the speaker/writer to indicate how the sentence is to be understood or related to the rest of the text as early as possible. Second, the main factor hindering initial position in adjuncts – the anaphoric retrievability of the valency subject – does not pose a problem here: the implied subject is typically the authorial *I / we*. The author may be considered a part of the ›given‹ information in the whole text – ›derivable or recoverable from the context, situation and the common knowledge of the speaker and listener‹ (Daneš 1974, 109).

Another factor contributing to the recognition of the participial clause as a conjunct, disjunct or subjunct seems to operate here, viz. the tendency towards lexicalization of certain constructions in the particular function.

Initial adjuncts have a Janus-like nature in the construction of the text. They are anaphoric – their subject being recoverable from the preceding context – and at the same time they are tied to the matrix clause by the prevalent identity of the implied subject and that of the matrix clause (following the attachment rule). Considering that ›from the point of view of text organization, it is the theme that

1 Cf. Biber et al. 1999, 767 – 770.

plays an important constructional role« (Daneř 1974, 113), the thematic links achieved by the anaphoric reference of the implied subject of the participial clause and its cataphoric ties to the subject of the matrix clause contribute to the cohesion of the text. It is significant that the subject preceded by a participial adjunct typically has anaphoric reference, often being expressed by a personal or demonstrative pronoun or a proper noun (approximately 80 per cent).

On the other hand, being the most dynamic element (the diatheme) of the thematic section of the sentence field, participial adjuncts may serve to introduce a new topic in the discourse.

In example (9) the pronominal subject *it* is the least dynamic element (theme proper), referring to the rhematic element of the preceding sentence, but also developing the hypertheme of the paragraph, i. e. *the peace camps*. Out of the two adverbials, the nonfinite clause carries a higher degree of communicative dynamism (CD). This is not only due to the ›weight‹ of the clause (i. e. its length and complexity as compared with the simple adverb *quickly*) but also due to the distribution of CD within the subfield of the participial clause. The participial clause is homogeneous with regard to the distribution of CD since the elements carrying the lowest amount of CD (the contextually bound subject, the transition-oriented conjunction) are not expressed in it, and the temporal and modal exponents of the verb (transition proper) are restricted (in comparison with a finite verb predicate). »Through this extreme thematization [i.e. the omission of the thematic elements], the retained elements of an abbreviated clause are brought into relief, even though they do not constitute the rheme of the entire sentence.« (Bcklund 1984, 164) The rheme proper of the participial adjunct clause (*women*) becomes (a part of) the global paragraph theme (*30,000 women, they*) in the following sentences.

- (9) Peace camps were formed around some of the RAF air bases [...]. The most famous of these was the first, at Greenham Common. **Organized exclusively by women**, it quickly became a symbol not only of peace but also of the values of the women's movement. On 12 December 1982, 30,000 women linked hands to ›Embrace the Base‹. They adorned the perimeter fence with pictures, flowers, and messages of peace. (ASB, 1485)

3. Participial Clauses in Medial Position

In medial position, following the subject head noun, the distinction between nonrestrictive postmodifying participles and adverbial clauses is described as ambiguous. It seems possible to move nonrestrictive nonfinite clauses to the initial position without a change in meaning (10). Thus, the nonfinite clause in

sentence (11) could be regarded as a reduction of a relative clause (11) a., but equally of a causal adverbial clause (11) b., or a temporal one (11) c.

- (10) a. The substance, **discovered almost by accident**, has revolutionized medicine. [>which was discovered almost by accident [...]<]
 b. >Discovered **almost by accident**, the substance has revolutionized medicine. (CGEL, 1270–71)
- (11) The man, **wearing such dark glasses**, obviously could not see clearly.
 a. >The man, who was wearing [...]
 b. >The man, because he was wearing [...]
 c. >The man, whenever he wore [...] (CGEL, 1271)

It must be observed, however, that like in the initial position there are different degrees of integration of the nonfinite clauses into the matrix structure: restrictive (defining) postmodifying clauses are, syntactically, a part of the subject NP, and non-restrictive (nondefining, parenthetical) postmodifying clauses were shown to be ambiguous in terms of whether they represent adverbial adjuncts or nonrestrictive postmodifiers. This position may also, though marginally, be occupied by disjuncts.

Although restrictive postmodifiers are not of central interest here because their degree of integration into the subject NP does not allow any other position, they are worth mentioning because they share some features with non-restrictive postmodifiers and they also fulfil a clear discourse function. They provide anaphoric links between sentences, as can be observed in the following examples, (12) and (13), in which the participial clauses in bold are in anaphoric relation to the underlined preceding elements.

- (12) The presence of an antithetic fault on the hanging wall margin can give the impression of a symmetric rift valley if it is exposed and forms an escarpment, **even though** the overall structure is asymmetric. Further evidence **contradicting the traditional symmetric rift valley model** comes from observations of their morphology and surface structure. (JOT, 855)
- (13) Such regular joint patterns appear to develop when the centres of contraction are evenly spaced. The lines **joining these centres** represent the directions of greatest tensile stress in the lava flow as it cools, and [...]. (JOT, 1198)

Two observations are relevant at this point. First, the determiners of subject NPs with postmodifying clauses express mainly (96 per cent) non-anaphoric reference, i. e. the subjects are indefinite, as in (12), generic, or cataphoric, as in (13). It is the postmodifier part which links the new sentence and the new nominal entity with the previous context, as is clear from our examples. In contrast to the initial adverbial clauses, where it is the subject of the superordinate clause which is anaphoric, in restrictive postmodifying clauses it is the participial clause (the verb and its complementation) that provides the anaphoric link between the new subject and the previous context. In other than subject functions this tendency is not so strong, i. e. other than subject postmodifiers are not anaphoric to such an extent (the object modifiers are used to introduce new entities / information in the clause, i. e. they do not contain so many anaphoric elements). As far as other clause elements with participial postmodifiers are concerned, the anaphoric function does not seem to be so prominent.

The second point worth mentioning is that, in academic writing, subjects containing a participial modifier are much more frequent (40 per cent) than in other registers (10 – 15 per cent, cf. Biber 1999, 623). This specific feature is also reflected in the fact that, as in the initial adverbial position, we can encounter frequently recurring verbs, the prototypical one being *associated with*, representing 10 per cent of all examples and occurring prevalingly as the modifier of a subject. The reason why this verb is frequent may be sought in its meaning of 'connect in the mind', which serves well the defining function of the postmodifiers. It makes it possible to connect noun phrases in a semantically rather unspecified way, i. e. signalling some kind of relationship. The preposition *with* adds to this flexible combinability.

As has been mentioned earlier, nonrestrictive modifiers are said to be indistinguishable from medially placed adjuncts, which can be tested by the possibility of moving them to the initial position, cf. example (10).

The following two examples, however, attest that the status of participial clauses following the subject and separated by a comma is not always equivocal, and the adverbial interpretation may not be plausible at all. To be more precise, the mobility test is hard to apply, mainly due to the changes in the interpretation of the initially placed non-finite clause (examples illustrating this point are not drawn from academic prose). Thus, in example (14) the adverbial reading b. brings about a change in meaning, namely, temporal relations; in (15) the postmodifying interpretation with a relative clause is not possible at all.

- (14) A kindly lorry driver on his way to North Wales, **chatting of his own daughter and his home**, had dropped her at the roundabout at the top of the Banbury Road at about lunch-time. (A6J, 32)
 a. >A kindly lorry driver on his way to North Wales, **who chatted / was**

- chatting of his own daughter and his home**, had dropped her at [...]
 b. >**Chatting of his own daughter and his home**, a kindly lorry driver on his way to North Wales had dropped her at [...]

- (15) Hazlitt, **facing death**, was still able to say, proudly, that his last hopes or ideals were also his first ones. (ADA, 663)
 a. >**Hazlitt, when facing death**, was still able to say, [...]
 b. >**Facing death**, Hazlitt, was still able to say, [...]

Although the positional mobility test may serve well to indicate the degree of integration of the clause into the noun phrase, or to highlight the similarity (both structural and functional) of what are traditionally regarded as two different types of clauses, it represents an oversimplification in the sense that it suggests ›free positional variation‹ of the participial clauses, even in cases when these clauses are regarded from the point of view of the sentence structure, without taking into account the textual or discourse factors that may influence or determine the position of the clause in such sentences.

Comparing the NPs of restrictive and nonrestrictive postmodifiers, the most striking feature they share is the prevalent non-anaphoric character of the subject NPs. On the contrary, analyzing the properties of the initially placed participles, it was observed that the main clause subjects were anaphoric, which implies that the covert subject of the participle was present in, or retrievable from, the previous context as well, and the participle was primarily interpreted with respect to that entity, i. e. not with respect to the subject of the matrix sentence, but across its boundaries: the unexpressed subject can be seen as a member of a cohesive chain, with the finite clause subject being anaphoric to all the previous items in that chain.

Examples (16) – (18) illustrate subject NPs with indefinite reference, which also represent the subjects of the participial clauses, with (18) indicating most clearly that linearity is an important factor in the interpretation of the subject of the participle.

- (16) Dickinson and Seely (1979) give a more specific treatment of forearc regions with excellent diagrams of their morphology, structure and evolution. A good coverage of the major processes of orogenesis, **containing a number of detailed case studies**, can be found in Hsu (1983) and [...] (JOT, 702)

- (17) Rather similar definitions, referring to shared norms and abstract patterns of variation rather than to shared speech behaviour, have been given by Dell Hymes (1972) and Michael Halliday (1972). (Hudson 1996, 25)
- (18) Though ›poireau‹, the French word closest in sound to the name Christie chose, with its double meanings of ›leek‹ and ›wart‹, appears to have no obvious connection with the detective, the word ›poirier‹, meaning a ›pear-tree‹, offers a much more fruitful area for investigation. (A0D, 2123)

Let us now consider the consequences of the initial placement of such clauses. In (19), the subject of the main clause is a proper noun, which, by nature, is definite. If the participial clause is moved to the initial position, as illustrated in example (19) a., the fact that in the previous context there is no element which can be interpreted as its agent gives rise to pragmatic inferencing in the sense that if the initial position is not required by the cohesive link through the covert subject, there must be some other, this time semantic, relation, usually exemplification, setting a contrast etc. In our example *working in Britain* is interpreted with respect to the previous context – most likely in the sense that there is a relationship between *stationary continents* and *Britain*. This reading is, however, disqualified at the end of the sentence where it is stated that it was rocks *from around the world*, not just Britain, that provided the data. Although the subject is definite (proper noun), it is mentioned for the first time, i. e. it is not anaphoric.

- (19) 2.3.2 Palaeomagnetic evidence. During the mid-1950 s, at a time when continental drift was not seriously considered by most earth scientists, new evidence in the form of palaeomagnetic data from rocks again began to bring into question the notion of stationary continents. S.K. Runcorn and his associates, **working in Britain**, conducted an intensive programme of data collection involving the measurement of remanent magnetism in rocks of various ages from around the world. (JOT, 151)
- a. > [...] new evidence in the form of palaeomagnetic data from rocks again began to bring into question the notion of stationary continents. **Working in Britain**, S.K. Runcorn and his associates conducted an intensive programme of data collection [...]

In example (20), the form of the subject, which is explicitly indefinite and ›non-anaphoric‹, rules out the possibility of the initial placement entirely (the beginning of a book). The position can be changed as far as the sentence is con-

cerned, but the lack of an element in the previous context to which the participle could be linked has pragmatic and semantic consequences.

- (20) Two European physicists, **working in Britain**, were able, in 1940, to establish that isotope 235 of uranium could be separated industrially, and during the following year, the Maud Committee reported that an atomic bomb was possible. (ALY, 858)

Adjuncts in medial position resemble non-restrictive postmodifying clauses in several respects. First, the subject of the superordinate clause is typically non-anaphoric. In clear contrast to the superordinate clause subjects preceded by initial adjuncts, the subjects followed by an adjunct were never realized by pronouns. Second, moving the participial clause to initial position proved to be problematic. If possible at all, it involved a pragmatic re-interpretation of the semantic relation between the participial clause and the superordinate one. Even if there is an anaphoric link between the subject of the matrix clause and the preceding sentence, it may not be sufficient to guarantee mobility of the participial clause into the initial position where the initial placement could complicate processing, cf. ex. (21) with ›the exposition of a split rheme‹ (Daneš 1974, 120).

- (21) It has recently been proposed that variations in albedo with respect to latitude [...] are a result of both the changing distribution of continents and sea-level oscillations. The latter, **causing a change in land-sea proportions**, is apparently the more important. (CMA, 525)

We have already mentioned the compactness of the participial clause and the way this affected the sub-field of the participial clause. However, compactness, i. e. homogeneity in terms of communicative dynamism,² influences the distribution of the degrees of CD in two ways: one concerns the ›compact‹ element itself, the other the neighbouring elements. As shown by Bäcklund (1984, 165), the »compacting effect [...] contributes to bringing about distinct rises or falls in CD over the sentence elements«. Participial clauses in medial position, although thematic themselves, frequently assign a certain degree of prominence to the preceding thematic subject. In this way, the subject *human beings* in (22) is highlighted owing to the following participial clause. The subject would not be emphasised if the adverbial clause were placed in initial position. Bäcklund

2 As explained by Firbas, »the phenomenon of compactness can be displayed by any elements that differ comparatively little from each other in CD, but form a section which in its entirety noticeably differs in CD from the elements which precede and follow it« (Firbas 1961, 88).

points out that participial clauses resemble parentheses in this respect. Both may be used to »throw emphasis on a word immediately preceding it«, and in both »the emphasis is signalled by intonation in speech but is also in most cases signalled by commas in writing« (Bäcklund 1984, 184). »There is rarely any need to set off an item that contributes so little to the development of communication« as pronouns do (ibid., 185). This may be another factor explaining why no instance of an adverbial clause inserted in the medial position following a personal pronoun subject occurred in our material, and why the subjects followed by an adverbial clause in medial position are often contextually non-bound.

- (22) The evolutionary costs in this case are those due to inbreeding, and the cultural outcome is the incest taboo. Two quite distinct arguments are mounted. [...] The first argument is the classical one and runs as follows. Human beings, **being observant and intelligent**, spot the consequences of matings between close relatives and make safety laws about them. (CMA, 983)

4. Summing up – the Anaphoric Subject of the Superordinate Clause

Initially placed adjuncts contribute to establishing and maintaining cohesive links in the text in two ways. First, their unexpressed subject is recoverable from the previous context (*a rattlesnake* in (23)); we can therefore speak about the »attachment rule« operating backwards in the text across sentence boundaries. The unexpressed subject is also typically co-referential with the subject of the matrix clause, viz. the intrasentential application of the »attachment rule« (*it* in (23)). Second, since the initial participial clause constitutes the diatheme of the field of the sentence, it often serves to introduce a new (or »derived«, cf. Daneš 1974, 119) topic in discourse (*the two rattlesnakes fight*).

Medial participial clauses are easier to move to the initial position if the preceding subject of the matrix clause has anaphoric reference. However, this is rarely the case and, moreover, the initial placement of the participial clause may necessitate extra processing effort. In the last sentence of (23) the semantic relation of the participial adjunct to the matrix clause is not influenced by position, since it is explicitly indicated by the subordinator (*after*).

- (23) Animals avoid using their most powerful weaponry when fighting other members of their species. Rattlesnakes are a clear example. A rattlesnake possesses a powerful poison which it uses against prey and dangerous

enemies. However, when fighting against another rattlesnake it does not use its poison fangs. Instead the two rattlesnakes fight in a gentlemanly, if energetic, joust in which each tries to push the other to the ground. The loser, after being floored, retreats. (GU8, 1580)

5. Summing up – the Non-anaphoric Subject of the Superordinate Clause: an Adverbial or Postmodifying Participial Clause?

We hope to have shown that when the subject of the matrix clause is non-anaphoric, mobility of the medial participial clause is problematic, as in the example of *working in Britain* [...] above ((19) and (20)). Mobility therefore does not seem to be applicable as a criterion of distinguishing between adverbial and postmodifying nonrestrictive clauses. There rather appears to be just one type of medially placed participial clause without a subordinator, which follows a non-anaphoric subject, is intonationally separated from it (as reflected in commas in writing), and which is capable of expressing a range of semantic relations starting from the weakest ones – ›postmodifying‹ (cf. [...] *today's speakers, who do not know the origins of generic he* [...] in (24)) – up to the stronger ›adverbial‹ relations (e.g. reason: [...] *since they don't know the origins of generic he*).

- (24) [...] it surely becomes impossible to maintain that the workings of gender in English are untouched by sexism. It is true that today's speakers, not knowing the origins of generic he, may regard it as just a feature of grammar. (CGF, 1050)

6. Conclusion

While governed by structure-specific rules every (micro-)structure is also influenced by the requirements of the higher macro-structure which it is a part of. When considering the placement and the positional mobility of participial clauses as a criterion of their syntactic status we have seen that what is a plausible explanation if we limit ourselves to the syntactic structure of the sentence is overridden by the requirements of the hyper-syntactic structure. Likewise, the initial and the medial positions of participial adverbial clauses seem unlikely and hard to justify when considered merely from the point of view of sentence structure – they violate the principle of end-weight and cause processing problems. However, when considered from the point of view of the macro-

structure of the text, they contribute to the construction and processing of a text: they contribute to establishing and maintaining cohesive ties, they facilitate the introduction of a new topic in the text and may also serve as explicit means of textual organization. The interaction between the micro- and macro-structure is pragmatically conditioned. This involves not only cohesive links but also coherence semantic relations.

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