

THE SEMANTICO-INFORMATIONAL FACTOR IN SOME CASES OF SYNTACTIC CONDENSATION RESULTING IN PARTICIPLE CLAUSES

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This article discusses some participle clauses in the English language, which are formed as a result of syntactic condensation. It argues that the semantico-informational factor plays a crucial role in determining their syntactic status. The examples are presented in such a way as to illustrate how we can avoid ungrammatical and illogical sentences and statements or solve potential ambiguities. These problems are discussed on the basis of Grancharov's model for functional analysis of the information structure of the sentence.

Key words: participle clauses, syntactic condensation, semantic restrictions, theme, rheme, Functional Sentence Perspective

I. Complex Condensation and Participle Clauses

In the wording of my title I have deliberately avoided the use of a comma before the participle *resulting*, thus trying to illustrate the latent ambiguity in such uses of syntactic condensation. The lack of a comma is well justified in this particular example as the intended antecedent of the participle clause is *condensation* and not *the semantic factor*. The disambiguating potential of punctuation, however, is not a major issue in this article.

Quirk (1972: 724) defines non-finite clauses as “means of syntactic compression” in which the non-finite verb functions as predicate and the subject is omitted. It is assumed that the subject should be recoverable from the context, most often from within the same complex sentence, having the same reference as a noun or pronoun in the main clause. This means that in the functional perspective of the sentence condensation takes place simultaneously within the subordinate clause and the superordinate clause. This is the first feature which Mathesius points out when speaking about the structure of the English sentence as a whole:

“We use this term [complex condensation] to describe the fact that English tends to express by non-sentence elements of the main clause such circumstances that are in Czech, as a rule, denoted by subordinate clause. This results in making the sentence structure more compact or, in other words, in sentence condensation, which may be called complex since in this way English can express entire complexes of content.” (Mathesius 1975 :146)

Other problems of grammatical structure concerning complex condensation are discussed by Vachek (1961:31-44), who throws light on the tendency for a reduced dynamism of the English verb, which results in the nominal character of the predication in the English sentence. This means that nominal elements, such as participles, infinitives and gerunds, are used in the place of subordinate clauses. The comparison between English and Czech in this respect shows that the English sentence is more compact and condensed and the relations between the sentence elements are more complex. The analytical and synthetic character of English and Czech respectively can account for some of these differences although more precise research should be carried out for other languages as well in order to ascertain this.

It is worth mentioning that Bulgarian and English are both analytical languages but this does not lead to a shared tendency for condensing sentences. The number of condensers in English is greater than that in Bulgarian although both languages are analytical. The Prague linguists have classified them on a morphological basis which is more appropriate for this purpose than a syntactic classification. On the other hand, some condensed structures can be described only on the syntactic level. The -ing and -en participles are used to form the so called participle clauses although strictly speaking, I think, these are rather participle phrases because they lack a finite verb form. For that reason, as Vachek (1961: 34) points out, the semantic center is shifted to the participle, or the respective non-finite verb, or any other nominal condenser.

However, I will adhere to the term *participle clause* because it is more widely used. In general, we do not tend to use participle clauses in speech because some of them are too formal but in writing they are quite useful as they help us achieve a more concise expression of our thoughts. For that reason they are often used in radio and TV broadcasts, as well as in newspaper headlines and reports, as they allow us to compress a lot of information into a limited amount of time and space. The occurrence of participle clauses across registers varies.

It is worth mentioning that in the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (1999: 826) we can find the results of a corpus analysis of four registers – fiction, news, academic writing and conversation – a high frequency of finite clauses in all four registers, a moderately high frequency of infinitive clauses in academic writing and a comparatively low frequency of other non-finite or verbless clauses in all four registers. These findings do not include narrative prose as is the case with my examples.

II. *Morphological Realization and Syntactic Function of Participle Clauses*

The grammar books describe the following morphological types of participle clauses:

1. The -ing participle clause – *writing*
2. The -en participle clause – *written*
3. The perfect participle clause – *having written*
4. The passive participle clause – *being written*
5. The perfect passive participle clause – *having been written*

It is controversial whether we can speak about tense in English participles since the category of tense is associated with the finite verbs. However, the participles differ in time reference, more precisely, they indicate time sequencing, simultaneity and posteriority. Their time reference is dependent on that of the verb of the main clause. We cannot use the active participle when we talk about a single, completed action in the past. On the other hand, we must consider the logical sequencing of the events:

* Falling down and breaking her leg, she ran to meet him.

Parking her car in a side road, she walked down the street to look for a parking meter.

* Walking down the street to look for a parking meter, she parked her car in a side road.

The uncertain reference of the covert subject of the participle clauses, the impoverished morphology of the non-finite verbs and its relative position within the whole sentence are the main reasons for the different meaning interpretations, which are connected to the respective syntactic functions. Theoretically all of them can be found in the following syntactic functions:

1. Extrapositional Attribute
2. Extrapositional Predicative
3. Detached Adverbial

There is a great variation in the terminology used to refer to these clauses, which arises from their indeterminate syntactic relations, the reference of their implied subjects, and the non-finite character of the participles. Quirk (1994:1123) refers to them as *adverbial supplementive clauses*. Many authors determine their syntactic function as predominantly that of an adverbial. However, when they are positioned initially, the participle in them is connected to the subject in the main clause, modifying it and this gives us enough grounds to consider the participle clause an extrapositional attribute of the subject. In right-branching, sentence-final position, the participle is closer to the object or the main predicate verb and thus the clause is more likely to be analyzed as an attribute of the object or as an extrapositional subjective predicative.

If the clause is introduced by a subordinating conjunction, its adverbial character is more definitely pronounced. Being introduced by a subordinator makes the semantic value of the clause more explicit since the adverbial relationships between the main clause and the subclause are clearly expressed. Without a subordinator semantic interpretation on sentence level is more difficult and without a broad context, linguistic or non-linguistic, it is impossible to elicit the intended, appropriate meaning.

Since these non-finite clauses are the result of syntactic condensation, this means that there exists in the language system an alternative with a finite verb i.e. they should be structurally recoverable. The finite subordinate clause is not always easy to determine because the language system may offer more than one grammatical choice, or it may offer none. Let us consider the following sentence, which contains a medial participle clause:

Ludens, *arriving alone* , would have to intuit what was required.

This sentence may be the result of two finite subclause alternatives:

1. Ludens, who was arriving alone, would have to intuit what was required. (reduced Attributive Relative Clause)
2. ! Ludens, while/when/if he is arriving alone, would have to intuit what was required. (reduced Adverbial Clause of time)

Or it could be an asyndetic variation of:

Ludens, on/upon arriving alone, would have to intuit what was required. (Preposition + Gerund)

The above seems to have no adequate finite alternative, or it will be rather long and explanatory:

! Ludens, at the time when he is arriving alone, would have to intuit what was required.

An additional complication arises here from the fact that the Subject *he* of the subordinate clause may have a different reference from that of the Subject of the main clause. On the whole, this finite alternative has a rather different meaning from the gerundial phrase.

However, the clause may have the following grammatically acceptable paraphrase:

Ludens, upon his arrival alone, would have to intuit what was required. (Preposition + Verbal Noun)

Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether an –ing form is a gerund or a present participle in a sentence:

He insisted on my cleaning the room.

He insisted on me cleaning the room.

In the first example above the –ing form is preceded by a possessive pronoun which would normally modify a noun. This distinguishes *cleaning* as a gerund. In the second example the –ing form is preceded by a personal pronoun in the accusative case, which means that here *cleaning* should be interpreted as a present participle in a predicate relation to the preceding pronoun. In fact, the –ing form in the latter case is considered by some grammarians as a form intermediate between the present participle and the gerund. To most native speakers of English these two structures would probably mean exactly the same. There is a difference, however, and it is to be found in the semantic structure of the sentence, or rather in its information structure. This difference is in the location of the focus. All other parameters being equal, in the first example the focus is on *cleaning* and *my* modifies it while in the second example the focus is on *me* and *cleaning* modifies it. In some cases of general statements it is difficult to determine the status of the –ing form and interpretation of the meaning of the sentence would rely on the context:

Firing arms can be dangerous.

1. To fire arms can be dangerous. (the participle reading of the sentence)
2. Arms which fire can be dangerous. (the attribute reading of the sentence)
3. The act of firing arms can be dangerous. (the gerundial reading of the sentence)

This nominal type of predication should be considered very strongly condensed if we take into account that this is what condensation is by definition – expressing with non-finite clauses or other nominal constructions complexes of thought, which we normally express with subordinate clauses. On the other hand, there is no adequate finite alternative for some of these clauses, which means that the condensed form is not structurally recoverable. The reason for this may be that in such cases, mainly with gerunds and infinitives, the tendency has become a rule, incorporated in the grammatical structure. This means that we either have no condensation at all, or the condensation is fixed in the language structure and that it is not due to the functional perspective of the sentence.

Petrlikova (2007: 17-29) assumed that "in order to delimit gerundial constructions functioning as sentence condensers it was necessary to find sentences in which the actual gerund could theoretically be realized by a finite clause. It was assumed that if the gerund in a particular syntactic function could be replaced by an alternative finite clause without the whole sentence becoming ungrammatical, it could be considered a sentence condenser."

I think that the clarification of this problem is crucial to our understanding of complex condensation. If we posit that only the cases of structural recoverability with a finite alternative can be regarded as complex condensation, we will have to exclude most gerundial objects, prepositional gerundial objects, some complex objects of the type "accusative with the infinitive", and perhaps many other cases. In addition, how should we treat the verbal nouns in the function of sentence condensers? It seems that we need more definitive criteria as to what should be understood by *complex condensation*.

III. *Correlations between Position, Syntactic Function and Information Structure of Participle Clauses.*

Although some practical grammars maintain that the initial position is more common for these clauses, research done on the basis of an electronic corpus points out that rather lengthy participle clauses tend to be

placed in final position. This is in agreement with the "heavier element principle" of word order. However, it seems that the length of the clause is not the only factor, which we have to consider, when using or analyzing participle clauses. Quirk (1994: 1126) mentions that as non-finite clauses can take initial or final position, sometimes this may cause ambiguities or awkward sounding.

The final position of the participle clause may result in different possibilities for interpreting meaning. In the following example the implied Subject of *going home* is *I* on one interpretation, whereas on another, it is *Pam*. Sometimes a comma can disambiguate the meaning of the participle clause, defining it as a supplementive clause in the syntactic function of an extrapositional predicative. The comma would rule out the possibility of interpreting the clause as non-finite complementation of the verb, i.e. the complex object reading of the clause:

I saw Pam going home. (in the act of her going home, Complex Object)

I saw Pam, going home. (while I was going home, Extrapositional Predicative)

Quirk (ibid.) discusses other examples, in which the position of the non-finite clause does not offer ambiguous interpretations:

The manager approached us smiling.
Smiling, the manager approached us.

Often more interpretations are available for one and the same sentence:

I caught the boy waiting for my daughter.

1. I caught the boy while I was waiting for my daughter. (Adverbial Supplementive clause)

2. I caught the boy in the act of waiting for my daughter. (Complex Object)

3. I caught the boy who was waiting for my daughter. (Relative Clause)

These examples differ not only in terms of syntactic functions but also in the manner of condensation. In (1) and (3) we have the alternatives

with full finite subclauses whereas, in (2) the Complex Object reading of the participle clause does not have a finite alternative. The question arises again whether we should regard such cases as complex condensation. A possible solution to this theoretical issue would be to postulate two different types of condensation:

1) *Functional condensation* for the cases with finite alternatives, in which the structural recoverability of the form is possible and the choice of the condensed or the full form is determined by its function in the sentence, as well as, by the development of communication.

2) *Structural condensation* for the cases without finite alternatives, in which the structural recoverability is not possible and the choice of the form of expressing the intended meaning is fixed and delimited by the language structure. A detailed research of the historical perspective of this phenomenon will show whether these structurally condensed forms used to have finite alternatives at an earlier stage of the development of the language, and only became fixed in the linguistic structure as a result of condensation, or whether they are forms which came into existence independently, of their own right.

These structures seem to exhibit a higher degree of condensation, especially the instances of secondary predication with complex object, where we have not only a non-finite predicative centre but also overlapping of syntactic functions over one and the same NP, that of object of the main predicate verb and subject of the non-finite verb. Further analysis is necessary to ascertain which examples of complex objects (infinitival and participial) and gerundial prepositional objects are structurally condensed and which, functionally. It will be interesting to establish the relation between the semantics of the main predicate verb and the type of condensation it triggers.

According to a study carried out on the basis of examples from the British National Corpus (Wiechmann, Kerz, 2012) the ordering choice for the adverbial clauses depends on the importance of six variables. The authors maintain that semantic and discourse-pragmatic factors are much stronger predictors of clause position than processing-based, weight-related factors. The research concerns finite adverbial clauses. Participial adverbial clauses should be studied independently because of the syntactic condensation which has produced them and hence their indeterminate syntactic status and semantics. The interdependence between the respective semantic categories of adverbial clauses and their preferred positions in the sentence structure has been studied statistically by Diessel (2008) on the basis of a corpus across languages. He reports that temporal clauses are

often found both before and after the main clause, whereas causal clauses typically appear in final position and conditional clauses often occupy the initial slot, before the main clause.

In terms of Information Structure it is generally believed (Popa, 2008) that within the whole sentence the participle clause carries *given/old* information and functions as a Theme. Within the participle clause the Theme (the subject) and the Transition (the auxiliary verb) are missing, and only the Rheme (the participle) is left. It is presumed that the Theme is recoverable from the main clause or from the immediately preceding context. The cognitive opposition *old – new information* can be established on the basis of the situational and verbal context and the general and shared experience of the participants in the communication. When working with written texts the preceding context provides an objective ground for determining the quality of the information. This means that the quality of the information encoded in the participle clauses, then will depend largely on the semantic factor, the antecedent which they modify, and the contextual factor. As was mentioned above, we can outline two communicative structures, or two types of functional word order, with the participle clauses encoding either *old* or *new* information:

1. Theme → Transition → Rheme (unmarked, progressive)
2. Rheme → Transition → Theme (marked, regressive)

Drawing on Grancharov's model (2010) for functional analysis of the information-communicative structures of the English sentence, we can apply the two criteria – the positional and the informational, to determine the two communicatively relevant polar points in the distributional field. Using the four variables: old information – new information and initial position – final position, we can postulate the four theoretically possible configurations. We must take into consideration Firbas' (in Grancharov, 1981: 84) principle for the basic distribution of communicative dynamism (CD) according to which languages tend very strongly to arrange the words in sequences with a gradual increase of communicative dynamism. This is the unmarked communicative word order with the simple, affirmative, declarative, unemphatic sentence, having a S-V-O type of grammatical word order in contextual independence with the initial position being thematic and characterized by a low degree of CD, and vice versa, the end-sentence position of the same sentence type being rhematic and characterised by a high degree of CD. On the other hand, the sentence elements conveying old information are strongly thematic, and the

sentence elements conveying new information are rhematic. The interplay of these four variables theoretically yields the following combinations:

1. Old (given) information encoded in initial position
2. New information encoded in initial position
3. Old (given) information encoded in final position
4. New information encoded in final position

According to Chernyahovskaya (in Grancharov, 1976: 49) and Alexieva (ibid. 1980: 5, 1988:9) the linear arrangement of the components of FSP yields two structures: a) *progressive* in which the theme occupies initial position in the message (sentence, information unit, distributional field) with the rheme following it (Th=>Rh), and b) a *regressive information structure* in which the linear ordering is the opposite – the rheme comes first, followed by the theme (Rh=>Th). On the grammatical (syntactic) level these two types of communicative word order can be realized by two types of word order – direct, uninverted S-V-O (etc.), and inverted O-S-V, O-V-S (etc.). Therefore, the communicative word order Rh=>Th and the grammatical word order O-S-V, O-V-S will be considered marked, differing from the normal, unmarked word order not only in the linear arrangement of the components but also in their semantic and communicative load. Grancharov treats these four types of word order as four parameters – 1) unmarked communicative word order, 2) marked communicative word order, 3) unmarked grammatical word order, 4) marked grammatical word order. On the basis of considerable corpus material, the author proves that progressive, unmarked communicative structures (Th=>Rh) can be realized syntactically both by unmarked, uninverted grammatical word order, as well as by marked, inverted grammatical word order. The research is focused on progressive and regressive communicative structures realized by marked, inverted grammatical word order and dislocations. Grancharov discusses cases which have been rather controversially analyzed so far and proposes a formal, objective model for determining the communicative status in example like:

Money is money.
 The law is the law.
 Theme (old) → Rheme (old)

In these cases the rheme carries old (given, contextually retrievable information), as can be ascertained from the preceding context. The old

information is actualized and updated in the rhematic field. Regardless of the fact that the rheme carries old information, its rhematic status is manifested in its relation to the theme, since by definition the rheme is not only the carrier of new information but also “what is said about the theme”. Later in this article I will discuss similar examples from my corpus. Another interesting example of communicative structure is: theme, encoding new information followed by rheme encoding new information (Theme-new → Rheme-new). This is found in isolated sentences out of any context, or in the initial opening sentences of narrative prose. There the theme carries new information and it functions as the starting point for the message as illustrated by the opening sentence of “For the Sake of Elena” by E. George:

Elena Weaver awakened when the second light went on in her bed-sitting room.

Theme (new) → Rheme (new)

As pointed out by Grancharov (2010), another unmarked communicative structure, theoretically possible, is when the initial theme encodes new information and the following rheme, encodes old information. This means that we simply change the places of the theme and the rheme and the structure becomes marked, with the rheme taking the lead encoding new information and the theme following it, carrying old (given) information. Thus, such an unmarked, and only theoretically possible, progressive information structure turns out to be a marked, regressive information structure. In initial position the rheme should carry new information because if it carried old information, the difference between theme and rheme would be neutralized.

The examples in my corpus come from a contemporary novel in English, “For the Sake of Elena” by Elizabeth George, and they comply with Vachek’s observations about the predominance of the participial condensers, more precisely of the -ing participle clauses. For lack of space, in this article I discuss only the first 10 sentences containing participle clauses in the order in which they appear at the very beginning of the book. However, the uneven representation of the different patterns, which is present in Grancharov’s analysis, has been so far confirmed. When analyzing these examples, the first thing worth mentioning is that in the different communicative patterns concerning the position of participle clauses, the grammatical word order seems to be dominated by the communicative word order. They are found both in sentence initial and sentence final position, to the left or to the right of the main clause.

Theme(old) Rheme(old) → **Second**
 unnerved her.](E.G)

In the above sentence, the PC *considering the location* is in initial position and functions as a theme, carrying old information because it has a connective role, the *location* is mentioned in the preceding paragraphs (and is fully described), and this type of participle clause is fossilised in its use to a certain extent as it serves to make a comment on the part of the speaker/author, and can be described structurally as a disjunct. The rheme in the main clause also encodes old information because the preceding sentences describe “what she should have been *prepared* for”. This sentence is an example of the second type of communicative structure in the list above: Theme (old) → Rheme (old)

3) *Perhaps hearing Elena’s approach*, the crouched figure turned towards her. (E.G)

Theme (old) Rheme(old) → **Second type**

The above sentence (3) presents the second type again.

4) The material was old, *worn down to a feathery softness*. (E.G.)

Theme (old) Rheme (new) → **Fifth type**

In (4) we have the fifth communicative type, with the participle clause in final position. Similar analysis can be applied to the rest of the examples. Here are some more:

5) The ground was loamy, *matted by leaves*. (E.G.)

Theme(old) Rheme (new) → **Fifth type**

6) The second blow crashed against her nose and cheek, *cutting completely through the flesh*.

Theme (old) Rheme (new) → **Fifth type**

7) She ran in place for a moment, *fumbling with the wrist of her tracksuit jacket*. (E.G.)

Theme (old) Rheme (new) → **Fifth type**

8) She made an assessment of every detail, *trying to see each as a line or an angle*, a simple

Theme (old) Rheme (new) → **Fifth type**
 problem in composition which needed to be solved. (E.G.)

9) Lynley stirred, *reaching for the report*.
 Theme (old) Rheme (old) → **Fifth type**

10) *Depending upon how one looked at it*, the place was either a dream-come-true or a crime-
 Theme (old) Rheme (new) → **First type**
 scene nightmare.

A more detailed functional analysis of participle clauses could be the subject of a future research on the basis of a larger corpus material to ascertain the basic communicative configurations of the sentences which contain participle clauses and to outline the tendencies for their use in English. We cannot draw absolute and final conclusions about the prevailing configurations and the factors which determine them within the scope of this article.

Downing (2006: 276) considers circumstantial adverbials to be more integrated into the main clause when they appear finally, than when they are initial where they fulfil a framing function. She defines the -en and -ing supplementary clauses as peripheral, set off from the main clause by a comma, their function being to provide background information when they are placed initially, and supplementary details when final. The above analysis based on Grancharov's model for functional communicative analysis proves that Downing's views, concerning the position of the participle clause in relation to its function are not fully acceptable without taking into consideration the quality of the information in the opposition old-new, established on the basis of the context.

Conclusion: *Complex condensation* is a strong tendency in the structure of the English sentence. Regardless of its historical motivation and development, it is closely connected to the communicative organization of the sentence (utterance), giving rise to semantic issues and problems with interpretation of meaning. A clear definition of complex condensation is needed when studying its manifestations, because it encompasses different linguistic forms and structures. For this purpose, it is helpful to differentiate between *functional* and *structural* condensation and try to establish in what sense the term *complex* participates in the definition. Does it refer to complexity of form and structure, or should we

use it in Mathesius' sense of *complexes of thought*. Participle clauses are one of the manifestations of complex condensation. Adequate analysis of their information structure would solve semantic and structural ambiguities and would contribute to an elegant style in writing and translation practice.

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