

# On the Adverbiality of Participials

Alan Bunyan

## ABSTRACT

The present paper represents an investigation into the potential for extension of the primarily adverbial adjunct-disjunct distinction to the taxonomy of the English participle (phrase), endeavoring thereby to rationalize the treatment of the latter in terms of its syntactic function.

## KEYWORDS

*adnominal, adverbial, adjunct(ive), disjunct(ive), participle, participial*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1-1 General Introduction

One aspect of English grammar that frequently baffles the learner is how to correctly label certain participials\*<sup>1</sup> in terms of their grammatical status as adnominal or adverbial elements. A brief survey of a number of reference sources is sufficient to illustrate the widespread lack of consensus on this point.

### 1-2 Survey

Some sources, either explicitly or implicitly, admit the possibility of a participial's serving an adverbial function. Jones<sup>1)</sup> (p.453), for instance, notes that

*It is sometimes difficult to distinguish adverbial from nonrestrictive adjectival participial clauses, since both can be moved to the beginning of the sentence.*

adding, as illustrative of such an adverbial function, the example

*Disgusted by the movie, we left.* \*<sup>2</sup>

BBC Learning English<sup>2)</sup> remarks that

*Participial clauses often express condition, reason, cause, result or time in a similar way to full adverbial clauses...*

Swan<sup>3)</sup> (p.406-7) states that

*Participle clauses can also be used in similar ways to full adverbial clauses, expressing condition, reason, time relations, result etc...Adverbial participle clauses are usually rather formal.*

whilst Hasselgard<sup>4)</sup> offers up as an example of an “adverbial non-finite clause” the participial

*Reflecting on the past three years, she wondered whether she had made the right choices.*

and Hill<sup>5)</sup> classifies categorically as “adverbial” the participle of

*Crying, the child ran from the room.*

Further support for the potential adverbiality of the participial is provided by the Onestopenglish Team<sup>6)</sup>, who write

*Thus, all the following underlined words, phrases, or clauses are adverbials, but each has a different form (...in brackets):*

*She played happily. [adverb]*

*She played quite well. [adverb phrase]*

*She played in the park. [preposition phrase]*

*She played all morning. [noun phrase]*

*She played, **laughing all the time**. [non-finite -ing participle clause]*

*She played, while I watched. [finite clause]*

(my bold type), also by Martin<sup>7)</sup>, who states with regard to

*We knew going in...*

that

*"Going in" functions as an adverbial phrase. Examples using other verbs are "We knew starting out that . . ." and "I ate breakfast standing up."*

and even by Greenbaum<sup>8)</sup> (p.337), who asserts that

*Adverbial clauses may be finite, non-finite or verbless, and the verb of a non-finite clause may be an -ing participle, an -ed participle, a to-infinitive or a bare infinitive.*

Despite, however, such an abundance of support from grammarians and linguists, few dictionaries seem willing to concede that participles or the phrases that they head can function adverbially.

Collins Cobuild<sup>9)</sup> (p.1045), for instance – a favorite among learners – defines ‘participle’ simply as

*a form of a verb that can be used...as an adjective.*

Webster’s<sup>10)</sup> (p.1646) as

*a word having the characteristics of both verb and adjective;*

and even the authoritative New Shorter Oxford<sup>11)</sup> ( p.2109) merely as

*a non-finite part of a verb... which may be used adjectivally*

## **2. OBJECTIVE**

It would, then, seem fair to assert, on the basis of the above, that authorities are far from consistent in their treatment of the participial, and consequently reasonable to infer that the effective teaching of this area of English grammar would be likely to benefit substantively from the application of a conceptual framework facilitating a more systematic treatment of the topic.

In an attempt, therefore, to go at least some way toward the achievement of this aim, the present paper seeks to conduct a preliminary investigation into the possibility of invoking the classificatory distinction of ‘adjunct’ versus ‘disjunct’, normally reserved, most notably by Quirk, Greenbaum et al. <sup>12)</sup> (ch. 8, *passim*), for the classification of the English adverbial.

## **3. RATIOCINATION**

Despite the apparent unwillingness of some dictionaries – by their very nature, among the more conservative of authorities – to step outside what seems to be a comfortable,

‘traditional’ view of the participle, i.e. as being, like its Latin counterpart, a verbal derivative with adjectival (but not adverbial) potential<sup>\*3</sup>, it seems inarguable, in the context of contemporary English at least, that it can introduce phrases whose modification applies much more to the verb phrase than to any identifiable noun referent. If, for instance, we say

[1] Being rich, he was easily able to pay the fine.

there is little question that the participial specifies the reason for his ability to pay the fine. Not only is [1] semantically identical to

[1a] Because he was rich, he was easily able to pay the fine.

but the underlined portions have as complete a *functional* equivalence as we could realistically ever hope to find. The clause of [1a] is undeniably adverbial, and so therefore is the participial of [1].

There is certainly nothing remotely ‘adjectival’ about the participial: it does not, in any meaningful sense, serve to distinguish one noun referent from another. If we pause to compare the above with a truly adnominal participial, e.g.

[2] The man driving the red sports car is Alex.

we immediately see that ‘driving the red sports car’ is fully subsumed as an adjunct to the preceding NP, distinguishing the man in question from other possible referents in terms of his action, and doing precisely what could otherwise, if less economically, be achieved by means of a relative clause, as in

[2a] The man who is driving the red sports car is Alex.

the underlined portions having, here too, clear functional equivalence.<sup>\*4</sup>

The problem appears to consist essentially in a simple terminological vacuum: because there is no universally accepted term serving specifically to designate participials functioning adverbially as opposed to those functioning adnominally, it is all too easy to ignore what might be an uncomfortable fact in light of the traditional, Latin-influenced (if not directly Latin-based) view of the participle.

Some authorities<sup>\*5</sup> apply the labels ‘restrictive’ and ‘nonrestrictive’ (the former to designate the adnominal and the latter, the adverbial type), but because these terms themselves originate as subcategories of the relative clause, this simply serves to reinforce the concept of all participials as adnominals.

Turning, then, to our tentative analogy, we would, by its lights, reckon the underlined portion of [2] an **adjunctive participial**, since it stands, as already noted, as a simple adjunct to

the NP.

Regarding (adverbial) disjuncts, on the other hand, concerning which Quirk, Greenbaum et al. <sup>12)</sup> (p.612) note that they

*...have a superior role as compared with the sentence elements; they are syntactically more detached and in some respects 'superordinate'...*

we cannot help but recognize a parallel with participials such as that of [1], which is similarly detached from what, for want of a better term, we might call its 'official' referent\*<sup>6</sup>, the subject NP, indeed behaving as if superordinate to it, and relates, in terms of its syntactic function, rather to the main verb phrase. A participial such as that of [1] would then be termed a **disjunctive participial**.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The analogy here posited between natural categories of the adverbial and of the participial would appear then to represent one viable solution to the pedagogical problem adumbrated earlier: in very much the same way as the (pure) adverbial adjunct constitutes an integral part of the verb phrase, the adjunctive participial constitutes an integral component of the noun phrase, and, just as the adverbial disjunct is to some extent syntactically "disjoined" (Lat. *disjunctus*) from the verb phrase, whilst still retaining a tenuous connection to it, the disjunctive participial, whilst still retaining a tenuous connection to the noun phrase (in terms of the latter's still serving to specify the agent of the action or condition that it denotes), nevertheless possesses a manifestly greater syntactic 'allegiance', so to speak, to the finite verb phrase.

It is to be hoped that, on the basis of this preliminary exploration, a more detailed examination of the analogical relationship between the adverbial and the participial will be undertaken in the near future.

#### FOOTNOTES

\*<sup>1</sup> For present purposes, the term 'participial' is used to denote specifically a *modifier* consisting in an -ing (a.k.a. 'present' or 'active') participle *or* in a phrase headed by such, thus including e.g. 'playing tennis' in

*The boy playing tennis is Peter.*

but excluding the use of the same phrase as a purely verbal *complement* in e.g.

*Peter is playing tennis today.*

In short, 'participial' here subsumes both 'participle' and 'participle phrase'.

\*2 Ibid.

\*3 Irrespective of the English meaning that we might most naturally ascribe to them in any given context, Latin participles take *adjectival* endings, such as accusative singular 'capientem' agreeing with direct object 'Caesarem' in

*Caesarem piratas capientem laudat.*

(cited by Cramer<sup>13</sup>) and thus fall into a fundamentally different category from the morphologically distinctive Latin adverbial, a form inherently incapable of taking noun-related inflections. (The ubiquitous influence wielded for centuries by the grammatical taxonomy of Latin over that of English is a point that scarcely needs underscoring!)

\*4 The temptingly simplistic argument is often put forward that such participials as that of [2] are merely ellipses of relative clauses such as that of [2a]. The fallacy of this line of reasoning is, however, easily refuted when one considers other examples, such as

[3] *Anyone belonging to this organization will be invited to join the march.*

whose expansion into its supposed canonical form would simply yield a non-sentence:

[3a] *\*Anyone who is belonging to this organization will be invited to join the march.*

clearly demonstrating that the adnominal participial is in fact a distinct and independent category of postmodifier.

\*5 E.g. Jones<sup>1)</sup> and Ling 100<sup>14)</sup>

\*6 I.e. as reckoned according to a longstanding tradition of grammatical orthodoxy

## REFERENCES

- 1) P. Jones & J. Farness: *College Writing Skills*, San Diego: Collegiate Press (2002)
- 2) British Broadcasting Corporation: *BBC Learning English*  
[URL <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/learnit/learnitv305.shtml>>]  
(retrieved: Jun. 28, 2009)
- 3) M. Swan: *Practical English Usage*, Oxford: OUP (1995)
- 4) H. Hasselgard: *The Grammar Homepage: Non-finite Subordinate Clauses*  
[URL <<http://folk.uio.no/hasselg/GR2-ch13.html>>] (retrieved: Jul. 3, 2009)
- 5) C. Hill: *English 301/501: Modern Grammars*

- [URL < <http://www.english.uwosh.edu/hill/Grammars/1121.html>>] (retrieved: Jul. 3, 2009)
- 6) Onestopenglish Team: *Onestopenglish*  
[URL <<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59427&docid=146364>>] (retrieved: Jul. 8, 2009)
- 7) G. Martin: *The Phrase Finder*  
[URL <[http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin\\_board/28/messages/788.html](http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/28/messages/788.html)>] (retrieved: Jul. 15, 2009)
- 8) S. Greenbaum: *The Oxford English Grammar*, New York: OUP (1996)
- 9) *Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, Glasgow: HarperCollins (1988)
- 10) *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Philippines: G.&C. Merriam Co. (1976)
- 11) *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: OUP (1993)
- 12) R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum et al.: *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, New York: Longman (1985)
- 13) H. Cramer: *Latin Participles*  
[URL <<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~kdickson/latparticiples.html>>] (retrieved: Jul. 17, 2009)
- 14) Ling 100: *Linguistic 100 – Grammar and Usage: Participles and Participial Phrases*  
[URL <<http://courses.washington.edu/ling100/slides/Ling%20100%20Week%208%20Part%201-REV.pdf#search=%27nonrestrictive%20participle%20phrases%27>>] (retrieved: Jul. 20, 2009)

(Accepted Mar. 9, 2010)

(和文要旨)

分詞句の副詞的機能について

Alan Bunyan

本論考の目的は、主として副詞（句）に使われる付加詞－離接詞の分類法を、分詞（句）に適用することの可能性を探ることにより、後者を文法的役割に即して合理的に扱うことである。