

## The converb status of English and Italian participle clauses

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### 0. On converbs

The grammars of human languages differ widely and in fascinating ways.

Nevertheless, we often come across phenomena in unfamiliar languages which show striking similarities with phenomena in more familiar languages. Very few of such phenomena are universal, in the sense that they occur in every language, but many are found in various languages irrespective of their genetic and areal connections. As such, they must be seen as belonging, in some sense to be further specified, to universal grammar.

One such cross-linguistically recurrent category is the CONVERB.

Until very recently only few people knew the term. It was first introduced by Gustav John Ramstedt (1903), but it was long ignored. It was picked up again by Vladimir Nedjalkov e Igor Nedjalkov (1987), a fairly inaccessible publication, mentioned by Martin Haspelmath and embedded within the EUROTYP project. The breakthrough is in Haspelmath and König (1995).

That the first typological studies of converbs appeared in Russian linguistics comes as no surprise: the languages of Russian colonial areas of the Caucasus and Northern and Central Asia are the richest in converbs. The term itself is adopted from Altaic linguistics. Nedjalkov (1995) defines a converb as "a verb form which depends syntactically on another verb form, but is not its syntactic actant, ie. does not realize its semantic valencies" (Nedjalkov 1995: 25), and Haspelmath (1995) rephrases the concept by specifying its nature as "a nonfinite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination" (Haspelmath 1995: 3).

Another way of putting it is that converbs are verbal adverbs, just like participles are verbal adjectives. According to Haspelmath (1995), converbs are thus characterised by the following properties: they are 1. verb forms; 2. nonfinite; 3. adverbial; 4. subordinate. Moreover, following Nedjalkov, canonical converbs can occupy the position of an adjunct, that is of an adverbial, but cannot occupy the positions a) of the only predicate in a simple sentence; b) of nominal attributes like participles, c) of a clausal actant (it cannot be an infinitive or a gerund depending on such verbs as begin or stop), d) of a nominal actant like gerunds in subject or object position.

Not all of these properties are uncontroversial, when we look at converbs from a cross-linguistic perspective, but it is widely recognized that converbs are verb forms, that is inflectional forms of the verb distinctly marked by morphology. A converb is usually marked by an affix attached to the verb stem - suffixes are preferred over prefixes but the latter are not excluded; there are also nonaffixal converbs, formed by the vowel pattern CaCiC, and reduplication may serve the purpose: cfr.

#### A. TURKISH

Insan demir - i döğ - e döğ - e demirci ol - ur  
 person iron ACC forge CONV forge-CONV smith become-AOR

A person becomes a blacksmith by continually forging.

The following are more examples from all over the world:

#### B. MODERN GREEK

I kopéla tòn kitak - s - e xamojel - ondas  
 the girl him look AOR 3sg smile -CONV

The girl looked at him smiling

#### C. KHALKA MONGOLIAN

Xot - od or - z nom aw-aw  
 town - DAT go - CONV book buy - PAST

Going to town, I bought a book

#### D. LITHUANIAN

Saul - ei tek - ant pasiek - e - m kryzkel - e  
 sun DAT rise - CONV reach - PAST-1pl crossroads - ACC

When the sun rose, we reached crossroads/ The sun having risen

#### E. KOREAN

Achim mek - ko hakkyo ey kassey yo  
 breakfast eat - CONV school to went PAST

After eating breakfast, I went to school

F. HUALLAGA QUECHUA

Aywa - ra - yka - r            parla-shun  
Go - STAT - IMPF - CONV    talk - 1pl - IMPr

Let's talk as we go along/going along

As the variability in translation suggests, it is difficult to find a unique formal equivalent of these forms in English and Italian. Neither English nor Italian are, in fact, pure converb languages. This is further proved by the existence in our languages of a rich set of conjunctions, and it has been remarked that in languages that make extensive use of converbs, the role of conjunctions is less important, while languages rich in conjunctions generally lack converbs or assign to them a minor role.

Syntactically, converbs can fulfill three main syntactic functions:

A. the function of an adverbial in a simple sentence: converbs with this function are called **CONVERBS PROPER**:

1. Bashkir; Ap -ak    zur paroxod sajkal-yp    jöz- op    bar-a  
Very-whitebig steamer rock-CONV float-CONV go-PRES

The big, white steamer goes, floating, rocking

B. the function of a secondary or coordinate predicate: converbs with this function are called **COORDINATIVE CONVERBS**. This function is similar to the function of the English conjunction "and" or to asyndetic coordination

C. the function of the predicate of a subordinate clause: the analog of adverbial subordinate clauses in European languages. This type of converb is called **CONJUNCTIONAL CONVERB**.

If only these functions are represented, then we have a canonical converb. In many languages, however, these functions combine with other nonconverbal functions, that is to say the same suffix or morphological marker can be used to mark an infinitive, a participle or a gerund. In Estonian and in Turkish, for example, the converb has its own formal marking, distinct from the gerund, the infinitive and the participle, while in Estonian the same suffix can be used for converbs and participles and in Lithuanian the same suffix can be used for converbs and participles and infinitives. In English, a similar situation is found with -ING forms, which can be used to express a gerund, an infinitive and a participle. In the context of this discussion, we should distinguish these uses of the -ING form from its adverbial uses, which correspond to converbs proper:

2. Crying, the girl entered the room    CONVERB  
3. The girl entered the room crying    Gerund

- |                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 4. A crying girl entered the room     | Participle |
| 5. The girl started crying (= to cry) | Infinitive |
| 6. The girl's crying irritates me     | Nominal    |

The functions elsewhere expressed by converbs, in other terms, are expressed in the European languages by the nonfinite forms of the verb, that is gerunds, participles and infinitives, in adverbial function.

Kortmann (1995) has actually advanced the hypothesis that the -ING form is the prototypical converb in English, while in Italian it has been suggested that the prototypical form is the gerund. In a recent paper, however, I have tried to demonstrate that there is, in Italian, another candidate for converb status, namely the past participle (Bertuccelli Papi 1997).

In what follows, I would like to look more closely at English past participles contrasting it with the Italian forms in order to spell out the conditions that make it possible to use them in the construction of participle adverbial clauses .

It goes without saying that looking at these constructions from a "converb" perspective is not only a terminological matter. Quite to the contrary, it is a way of enriching the linguistic analysis by relating language systems to one another and, above all, by evaluating the capability of grammatical categories to rise from the status of language-specific categories to the status of universal categories which are realized in different languages by different formal means and with partially diverging meanings, but within functional limits which allow to identify the variability not as a random variability but as a variability bound by specific typological parameters.

If carried out from this perspective, the contrastive analysis between English and Italian participle clauses is no longer a pure description of a state of affairs. The converb category represents the *tertium comparationis* which turns a contrastive analysis into a typological research aiming at an explanation of the dimensions that make it possible to state the famous paradox according to which languages are all equal and still they all differ from one another.

## 1. English and Italian past participles as converbs

The main differences between English and Italian past participle clauses will be visible from the translations provided for the examples. The discussion will concentrate on two specific and tightly connected points of contrast between the two systems, namely a) possibilities and limitations for clause formation with past participles, and b) semantic properties of participle clauses.

1.1. Morphosyntactic properties of Italian past participle clauses.

As far as the possibility of forming adverbial clauses with past participles is concerned, both in Italian and in English the process is constrained. In Italian, transitivity and *Aktionsart* seem to be the crucial parameters. Specifically, participle clauses can be found with the past participles of verbs belonging 1. to transitive and intransitive action verbs or event verbs internally characterized by an end point (that is, intrinsically non durative); 2 to state verbs, or verbs whose past participles denote states. They cannot be formed with the participles of intrinsically durative intransitive actions or event verbs:

7. Partito da Roma puntuale, il treno è arrivato con 30 minuti di ritardo  
Having left (lit. \*Left) from Rome on time, the train arrived 30 minutes late
8. Arrivato a casa presto, Giorgio si mise a leggere il giornale  
Having got (lit. \*Got) home early, Giorgio started reading the newspaper
9. Svegliatosi presto, Giorgio si mise a leggere il giornale  
Having woken up (lit. \*Woken up) early, Giorgio started reading the newspaper
10. Annoiato dai lunghi discorsi, Giorgio abbandonò la seduta  
Tired with the long speeches, Giorgio left the meeting

Both "leaving" and "arriving" are in fact punctual verbs, denoting processes in which the starting point and the final point ideally coincide. 9 and 10 are equally well formed because the former includes the participle of a transformative verb, that is a verb at the end of which the subject finds himself in a different condition from the original one (sleep/wake), and the latter includes a resultative state verb.

The following, on the contrary, are not well formed, because the participles occurring in them belong to verbs which denote intrinsically durative actions:

11. \*Lavorato tutto il giorno, Giorgio si sentiva stanco  
Having worked (lit. \*Worked) all day long, Giorgio felt tired
12. \*Camminato nel parco, Giorgio tornò a casa  
After a walk (lit. \*Walked) in the park, Giorgio went home
13. \*Piovuto tutto il giorno, non siamo potuti uscire  
As it had rained (lit. \*Rained) all day long, we couldn't go out

The behaviour of telic verbs confirms the hypothesis: cf.

14. \*Dipinto tutto il giorno, Giorgio si sentiva rilassato  
Having painted (lit. \*Painted) all day long, Giorgio felt relaxed

15. Dipinta la staccionata, non resta che potare la siepe  
 Having painted (lit. \*Painted) the fence, we only have to trim the hedge

And the same holds for such couples as "fumato/ fumata una sigaretta", "mangiato/ mangiata la frutta";

It seems therefore that, in order to form a participle clause, the perfect aspectual component needs be either present or somehow made explicit. This indeed can be done with the introduction of an aspectual verb like "finire" (to finish) or "smettere" (to stop):

16. Finito di mangiare, ti potrai alzare  
 When you have eaten up (lit. \*Finished eating), you may go
17. Smesso di piovere, uscì un bel sole  
 Once it had stopped raining (lit. \*Stopped raining), the sun came out

The past participles of mental state verbs or verbs of feeling are closer to copredicative (adpositive) constructions, or nominal modifiers, and therefore, according to the definition proposed by Nedjalkov (1995), are probably further from converbial constructions:

18. Spaventata, corse a casa  
 Frightened, she ran home
19. Riconosciuto colpevole, l'imputato fu condannato  
 Found guilty, the defendant was convicted

## 1.2. Morphosyntactic properties of English participle clauses.

In English the constraints are more severe. As the translations provided for the examples above may already have suggested, it is always possible to construct adverbial clauses with passive past participles, while only very rarely are active past participles allowed in such constructions. More often, Italian active participles translate into -ING forms introduced by some subordinator, or into a perfect participle HAVING -ED.

This would seem to confirm the thesis shared by most traditional grammars, that -ED clauses are "inherently passive" (Quirk *et al.* 1972: 994), and because they are syntactically and semantically passive, -ED participle clauses are restricted to four main types:

- A. (S) Vpass → Active SVO  
 When questioned, she denied being a member of the group
- B. (S) Vpass C → active SVOC  
 Considered works of art, they were admitted into the country

- C. (S) Vpass A → active SVOA  
Kept in the refrigerator, the drug should remain effective for at least 3 months
- D. (S) Vpass O → active SVOO  
Allowed unusual privileges, the prisoner seemed to enjoy his captivity

They are further characterized as having their own subject (absolutes) or having an implicit subject controlled by the one in the matrix clause (free adjuncts) (for a review of the varying terminology, see Kortmann 1991).

On closer examination, however, the picture turns out not to be so neat and clean as traditional grammars would have it. There are meaningful exceptions.

On the one hand, although probably sounding bad to purists' ears, scholars have collected a few examples of participle clauses which include active participles belonging to intransitive punctual verbs:

20. Arrived there, his first act was to kneel down (Kortmann 1991: 207)
21. Arrived at the spot, the party lost no time in getting to work (Visser 1972: 1255)
22. Lunch finished, the guests retired to the lounge (Quirk *et al.* 1972: 1120)
23. Dinner finished, we left for the opera (Kortmann 1991: 10)
24. Her butler gone, Mary must draw her own bath before retiring
25. With John gone, havoc will break lose
26. Holed up in a dig, they waited (*The Independent on Sunday*, September 1996)

On the other hand, a pair like the following shows that both the active and the passive readings of the same participle are allowed in adverbial clauses, given the appropriate context:

27. a. Hidden in the back, they found an axe  
b. Hidden in the back, he was carrying an axe

Moreover, some past participles of transitive verbs, originally passive, are no longer felt as true passives, and have become almost idiomatic

28. This said / All considered, the book is not without merit
29. He carefully lit a cigarette. That done, he took a pen and started to write
30. The discussion completed, the chairman adjourned the meeting for half an hour;

Finally, adverbial clauses are found with the past participles of mental state verbs or verbs of feeling:

31. Surprised at my reaction, he apologized
32. Much discouraged, he moved to London
33. Unknown to his closest advisers, he had secretly negotiated with an enemy emissary (It was unknown that he had = "all'insaputa").

It is not so much passivity that is involved in the latter cases, though, as rather the semantic notion of stativity, which extends also to cases like:

34. The girl, wrapped in a wonderful embroidered shawl, sipped nonchalantly

and which can be made to encompass examples 20 through 30, provided it is enlarged to include the expression of physical stillness resulting from some activity completion.

In other terms, I am trying to suggest that the criterion for the use of English -ED participles in adverbial clauses is not passivity; it is the presence of a feature +STATE, of which passivity is, admittedly, the prototypical expression. Stativity, however, is a complex semantic notion: it can be seen as a) resulting stativity, and in this case it is linked to the perfect aspect, b) intrinsic stativity, that is a feature characterizing the verb *Aktionsart*, or more generally, as c) lack of activity, in this case involving the global denotation of a verb. As such it intersects the categorial composition of verbs, adjectives and nouns, as translation often points out. Due to its multifaceted nature, stativity is responsible for the relatively unstable nature of past participles in English. Looked at from this perspective, the examples mentioned above are therefore particularly meaningful, as they witness an area of weakness in the grammar of English which is not unreasonable to view as undergoing a grammaticalization process involving the semantic components of nonfinite verb forms, adjectives and nouns.

This is partly confirmed by the fact that many -ED participles have definitely become adjectives, thus appearing in adverbial clauses where the passive sense either is nonexistent or has faded away:

35. Exhausted/ puzzled/ horrified/ tired/ astonished/ bewildered/ fascinated ..., he went home.

On the other hand, expressions like "present company excepted", "all told", "this said", "my sister included" seem to have achieved the status of idiomatic phrases, thus proving the autonomy of past participles originated as passive once they become the heads of adverbial clauses.

It is remarkably consistent with what I have tried to suggest so far that the same restrictions which apply to the use of -ED participles in adverbial function, hold for post and pre-modification.

Postmodification by -ED participles is, again, allowed with passive participles:

- 36. A report written by my colleagues appeared last week
- 37. Any coins found in this site must be handed to the police

but is generally excluded with active participles:

- 38. \*The man left/ come/ arrived/ is my uncle

Exceptions occur, however, where the -ED participle is preceded by certain adverbs, as in:

- 39. The train recently arrived at platform 1 is from York
- 40. A man just come from the meeting/gone to India/ told me about it.

Similarly, -ED active participles normally resist premodification, but there are exceptions, notably when the participle is preceded by an adverb:

- 41. \*the arrived immigrant/ the newly arrived immigrants
- 42. The vanished treasure/ a retired teacher/ risen/fallen/increased costs
- 43. Our recently departed friend
- 44. A newly-born child /\*A born child/ (cf. "A born musician", where the participle has acquired a specialized meaning as the expression of rare qualities).

These constructions are presumably patterned on

- 45. A brown-eyed girl/ \* an eyed girl

and probably along the same path must be placed

- 46. A well-read / softly spoken / learned person

If a person who has "brown eyes" is a "brown-eyed" person, then a person who has "learned a lot" is a "learned" person, a person who has "read a lot of good books" is a "well-read" person, and a person who has "always spoken softly" is a "softly-spoken person".

The ratio behind the hypothesized grammaticalization path is then, presumably, the conflation of the two patterns HAVE+PP and HAVE+ADJ, based on a reanalysis, allowed by the stative component of the past participles, of the structure HAVE+PP = VP (have done) as HAVE+ADJ = Possess a quality/ property.

As always happens with grammaticalization processes, this situation results from some weakness points in the system, as I was saying above, and my hypothesis is that such weakness points cluster around the lack of a precise categorial status of English past participles. As the data discussed so far suggest, English past participles participate of both a verbal and an adjectival nature, but they tend to be most attracted by the adjectival pole, while the verbal component, specifically the perfect aspect, either remains in the background and consequently has to be reintroduced by HAVING -ED, or goes completely lost.

This analysis, pointing to a situation of uncertainty in the definition of the precise categorial status of the English past participle both with respect to adjectives and with respect to -ING participles, accounts for the main asymmetries with the Italian system. Compared to the Italian ones, English active participles are more "deverbalized" (Lehmann 1988), i.e. they are not sufficiently informative about their verbal qualities to stand by themselves in adverbial clauses. This implies that there is a gap in the English system of nonfinite adverbial constructions which makes it possible for -ING participles to overextend functionally, as we shall see in the next section, thus qualifying as the prototypical converb form as actually suggested by Kortmann (1995). In other terms, English past participles clauses are very weak converbs.

The following diagram summarizes the results of the discussion so far

	passive →	(+STATE)	
-TO	active →	TRANS/INTR (- Durative)	INTR (*+Durative)
	passive →	(+STATE)	
-ED	active →	*TRANS +/- Durative	some INTR +/- Durative

The asterisk marks the impossibility of using -ED participles of active verbs for converb constructions, a condition which matches the impossibility for -ED participles to be used as post or premodifiers, except for a few cases which are semantically connected to some idea of stativity: the examples upon which the diagram is based are repeated below:

Italian:

47. Ferito gravemente, morì dopo poche ore (passive, + state)
48. Bevuta una birra, accese una sigaretta (transitive, - durative)
49. Partito puntuale, arrivò in ritardo (intransitive, - durative)
50. \* Camminato nel parco, rientrò a casa (intransitive, +durative)

English:

51. Seriously wounded, he died a few hours later (passive, +state)
52. \*Drunk a beer, he lit a cigarette (transitive, -durative)
53. (Having drunk a beer/After drinking a beer, he lit a cigarette)
54. ?\*Left on time, he arrived late (intransitive, -durative)
55. (Leaving on time, he arrived late)

but

56. Arrived there, his first act was to kneel down (intransitive, -durative)
57. \*Walked in the park, he went back home (intransitive, +durative)

## 2. Variable position

Both English and Italian participle clauses preferably occur in front position, before or after the subject of the superordinate clause but normally before the superordinate clause predicate. End position is also possible in Italian when the participle clause has a clear temporal meaning, while it seems to be excluded for concessive or other meanings of the construction.

Copredicative constructions can also occupy sentence final position, both in English and in Italian. In any case, they are intonationally or graphically separate from the rest of the sentence:

58. (Toltosi il cappello), Giorgio, (toltosi il cappello) entrò in chiesa, (?toltosi il cappello)  
(Taking off his hat), George, (taking off his hat) went into the church, (taking off his hat)
59. (Partito in orario), il treno, (partito in orario) arrivò con 30 minuti di ritardo, (\*partito in orario)
60. "(Having left on time), the train, (having left on time) arrived 30 minutes late, (having left on time)
61. (Mangiata la frutta), potrai alzarti da tavola, (mangiata la frutta)  
(When you've eaten your fruit), you may go, (when you've eaten your fruit)
62. (Spaventata), corse a casa, (spaventata).  
(Frightened), she ran home, (frightened)

In general, the marginal position of a subordinate clause follows the principles of functional sentence perspective. Sentence initial position generally identifies the TOPIC of the sentence. This, as we will see in a while, has consequences for the problem of subject reference control.

### 2.1. Extraction, restrictiveness and focusability

In Italian, participle clauses can be focused by focus particles like *solo* (only) or *anche* (also, even):

63. Solo finito il libro potrò dedicarmi al Congresso  
Only when I have finished (lit. Only finished) my book, will I be able to concentrate on the Conference
64. Anche se curata con gli antibiotici, l'influenza può tornare  
Even if you take (lit. treated with) antibiotics, you can catch flu again

They can be the focus of polar questions:

65. Passate da noi prima di cena o finito lo spettacolo?  
Will you come round before dinner or after the show?

they can be cleft:

66. È solo una volta venduta la casa che potrò pagare i debiti  
It's only after selling the house that I will be able to pay my debts

and allow extraction from the superordinate clause:

67. (Venduta la macchina, Giorgio comprò una bicicletta)  
(After selling his car, Giorgio bought a bicycle)  
Cosa comprò Giorgio, venduta la macchina?  
What did George buy after selling his car?

In English, the same processes apply to passive participles, but they are hardly acceptable with active participles:

68. Seen from that angle, the question seems so complex  
a. Only seen from that angle does the question seem so complex  
b. It is seen from that angle that the question seems so complex  
c. What does the question look like, seen from that angle?
69. Arrived there, he knelt down  
a. ?Only arrived there did he kneel down  
b. ?It is arrived there that he knelt down  
c. ?What did he do, arrived there?

### 3. The subject of participle clauses

Both in English and in Italian, the majority of participle clauses contain past participles with implicit subjects whose reference is controlled by the subject of the superordinate clause. In English the participle clauses with overt subjects are

termed "absolutes", the ones with implicit subject controlled by the matrix clause "free adjuncts".

Both in English and in Italian, participle clauses constructed with the past participle of intransitive verbs can have a lexical subject, while participle clauses constructed with the past participle of a transitive verb do not allow explicit subjects:

70. Partita Sandra, Giorgio si dedicò al suo lavoro  
Once Sandra had left (lit. Left Sandra), Giorgio turned to his work
71. With John gone, havoc will break loose
72. \*Conosciuta Elena Giorgio, tutti cominciarono a fare pettegolezzi  
lit. Met Elena Giorgio, everybody started gossiping

Subject reference control does not seem to be either an entirely syntactic or an entirely semantic phenomenon. Syntactically, the controller of an implicit subject does not need to be a subject, and semantically it does not need to be an agent: as examples below show, it can be almost any case:

73. Una volta nominato direttore, a. Giorgio licenziò Marco  
Once appointed director, Giorgio dismissed Marco
- b. molti si rivolsero a Giorgio  
many people turned to Giorgio
- c. di Giorgio non ci si poteva più fidare  
Giorgio could no longer be trusted
- d. su Giorgio non si poteva più contare  
we could no longer rely on Giorgio
- e. con Giorgio non si poteva più parlare  
we could no longer speak with Giorgio

It holds in Italian as in other languages, however, that the syntactic subject position attracts coreference whenever possible. The much discussed example

74. a. Lying idly in the sun, John watched Mary  
b. Lying idly in the sun, Mary was watched by John

which is claimed to show that coreference is established by the surface subject, has a partial equivalent in Italian when the two individuals are of the same gender, otherwise agreement solves the problem:

75. a. Sdraiato pigramente al sole, Giorgio osservava Sara  
Lying (lit. lied-AGR masc-sing) idly in the sun, Giorgio watched Sara
- b. Sdraiata pigramente al sole, Sara si sentiva osservata da Giorgio  
Lying (lied-AGR fem-sing) idly in the sun, Sara felt watched by Giorgio

but

76. a. *Sdraiato pigramente al sole, Giorgio osservava Marco*  
 Lying (lit. lied-AGR masc-sing) idly in the sun, Giorgio watched Marco
- b. *Sdraiato pigramente al sole, Giorgio si sentiva osservato da Marco*  
 Lying (lit. lied-AGR masc-sing) idly in the sun, Giorgio felt watched by Marco

Haspelmath (1995) explains the variability of subject control reference in pragmatic terms:

the generalization that seems to apply to the large majority of nonsubject controlled converbs is that the controller is a pragmatically highly salient participant with whom the hearer or reader can empathize. (Haspelmath 1995: 37)

This would also account for the cases where a grammatical principle seems to be at stake:

Since control is by a highly salient participant when it is not by the subject participant, and since the subject is most often the most salient participant of the clause, the most economic statement would be simply that the implicit subject is controlled by the most salient participant. This way we would eliminate converb control completely from the syntax and rely exclusively on pragmatics. (Haspelmath 1995: 37)

Italian participle clauses only partially support this claim - agreement being probably the greatest obstacle. An interesting argument in favor of it, however, is the interaction between syntactic and information structure: in order to be identified as the subject of an otherwise subjectless participle clause, the subject of the superordinate clause must be an informationally unmarked theme. Because in declarative sentences the theme normally coincides with the subject, this is why we can state that coreference is syntactically based.

#### 4. Semantic properties

On the basis of purely semantic criteria, Nedjalkov (1995) distinguishes three main types of converbs:

- a) specialised converbs, which are associated with only one or two circumstantial interpretations regardless of the context;
- b) contextual converbs, which may have a variety of interpretations depending on the context and cotext;

c) narrative converbs, which merely express a "coordinative connection", typically between more than two events, such that the plot is advanced.

If Italian participle clauses are to be considered converbs at all, then they are instances of the second type, their interpretation depending on the interaction between a basic meaning and a fairly wide variety of syntactic, semantic and contextual factors. Their basic meaning, however, is not so vague as it is the case with gerunds: given the constraints on formation which we stated at the beginning of this paper, it turns out that participle clauses may have two main basic meanings, upon which only a limited set of interpretations can be built. The first is the temporal meaning of anteriority, the second is a simultaneous state meaning. Enrichments of the former are the causal, concessive and conditional interpretations; extensions of the latter are the manner, attendant circumstances and possibly narrative interpretations.

Even though within the more limited range of uses discussed in section 1, English past participle clauses receive the same set of interpretations; the most widespread meaning is that of "attendant circumstances" while individual readings -conditional, concessive, temporal, causal - often made explicit by subordinators, are triggered by the context or retrieved inferentially on the basis of presupposed knowledge.

#### 4.1. Italian

A possible test to distinguish temporal from non temporal interpretations is the insertion of *appena / una volta* ("as soon as / once"). These adverbials select the temporal interpretation of anteriority, while they cannot be used with state meanings.

77. Spaventata, si nascose in un angolo /\*Una volta /\*Appena  
Frightened, she hid in a corner

##### 4.1.1. The anteriority meaning

The anteriority meaning is associated with the past participles of verbs including a perfect component. This is particularly clear in the case of punctual verbs and telic verbs but it can be easily extended to all non-durative action verbs. As stated above, the insertion of *appena/una volta* makes this reading explicit. *Una volta* globally refers to the perfect component of the action. *Appena* presupposes perfection and focuses the end point, introducing a notion of immediacy in the succession of events:

78. Una volta/appena arrivata lì, telefonai a casa  
Once/ As soon as I got there (lit. got there), I called home

#### 4.1.2. Causal readings

The following sentence shows an ambiguity between causal, temporal, and possibly concessive readings of the participle clauses:

79. L'imputato, chiamato in causa, non ha replicato  
 (lit. The defendant, summoned, did not reply)  
 Having been summoned/ In spite of the fact that he had been  
 summoned, the defendant did not reply

The next, on the contrary, has a clear causal reading

80. Arrivata in ritardo, Maria non poté leggere la sua relazione.  
 Having arrived (lit. Arrived) late, Mary could not read her paper

This reading is not due to any intrinsic property of the participle clause. Instead, the causal connection between the two events is triggered by our knowledge of the world. In fact, a modification in content like in

81. Arrivata a Roma, Maria non poté leggere la sua relazione  
 Having arrived (lit. Arrived) in Rome, Maria could not read her  
 paper

cancels the causal link between the two events.

#### 4.1.3. Concessive meaning

The concessive interpretation is generally associated with more explicit coding; an adverb in the superordinate clause (*comunque, tuttavia*: "however") or an introductory conjunction (*pur, sebbene, per quanto*: "though, although") is required in order to make this sense explicit:

82. Partito in ritardo, il treno arrivò *tuttavia/comunque* puntuale  
 (lit. Left late, the train arrived on time anyway)  
 Although it left late, the train arrived on time
83. *Per quanto/ Sebbene* laureata col massimo dei voti, Laura non ha ancora trovato un lavoro.  
 Although she got her degree with beautiful marks, Laura has not yet found a job

#### 4.1.4. Conditional meaning

The conditional reading is associated with specific properties of the superordinate clause. Present, future and conditional modalities allow a hypothetical reading of

the participle clause, in contrast with the causal or concessive readings associated with perfect modalities:

84. Detto così, potrebbe suonare offensivo (conditional)  
Put that way, it might sound offensive
85. Anche detto così, potrebbe suonare/suonerà offensivo  
Even put that way, it might sound offensive

The conditional link can, but needs not, be made explicit by the introduction of "se" (*if*):

86. Se ben presentata, la proposta sarà votata da tutti  
lit. If put forward nicely, the proposal will be voted by everybody

The conditional reading is linked to the projection of perfect states in the future. In different terms, it includes a deictic component of posteriority with respect to the locutionary moment. Consequently, it is in conflict with the anteriority meaning and is therefore excluded in such cases as:

87. Partito in ritardo, il treno arrivò puntuale/ arriverà puntuale  
Although it left (lit. Left) late, the train will arrive on time  
Having left (lit. Left) late, the train arrived on time anyway

Italian participle clauses then seem to confirm the general tendency of converbs to receive more than one interpretations following the order established by the SCALE OF INFORMATIVENESS and/or COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY first proposed by Foley and VanValin (1984) and further elaborated by Kortmann (1991). The criterion upon which this scale is built is the amount of knowledge and/or contextually provided evidence required by the identification of a specific relation. According to this scale, "attendant circumstance" is a very weak relation, while concessivity is very strong. Causal relations are more informative than temporal ones and, within the latter domain, anteriority is more informative than simultaneity.

Moreover, these remarks are relevant to another fundamental issue: the degree of morphosyntactic linkage between clauses and the iconicity principle.

According to the definition proposed by Foley and van Valin (1984), the ICONICITY PRINCIPLE states that

it will always be the case that the strongest semantic relations will be expressed in the most tightly linked syntactic configurations found in the language, the weaker relations in the less tightly linked constructions (Foley and van Valin 1984: 271)

or, in Givon's terms

the more two events/states are integrated semantically or pragmatically, the more will the clauses that code them be integrated grammatically (Givón 1990: 826).

The picture which emerges from our description of Italian participle clauses nicely fits this scale: the past participles of state verbs range among the least informative relations, their meanings being enrichments of the simultaneity dimensions; the past participles of action or event verbs range among the most informative, their meanings being enrichments of the anteriority relation, with the specificity of the conditional as stated above. Among the latter, the concessive relation is the one which most needs explicit coding.

#### 4.2. Semantic properties of English past participle clauses.

Free adjuncts and absolutes differ as to the range and nature of interpretations they may receive; moreover, there are considerable differences between augmented and unaugmented absolutes. Free adjuncts may receive a wider range of interpretations than absolutes: grammarians agree, however, that at least the meanings of cause, time and attendant circumstances can be expressed by both, even if according to Kortmann (1995), free adjuncts are mostly used to express time (34.1%), then circumstantial (26.8%), and cause relations (26.3%), while absolutes are used to express primarily circumstantial (58.8%), then cause (20.8%), and time relations (6.7%):

Cause:

88. All our savings gone, we started looking for a job

Time:

89. Cleared, this site will be very valuable

Circumstance:

90. Wrapped in her shawl, she was shivering

Some of these meanings can be made explicit by subordinators. The subordinators allowed for -ED clauses are the following:

*With, without, although, as, as if, as soon as, as though, even if, if, once, though, unless, until, when(ever), where(ver), whether ... or* (conditional, concessive), *while, whilst*: here are some examples

91. With the mortgage paid, they can afford a nice holiday

92. Although written very badly, it still is worth reading

93. As soon as retrieved to memory, it sounded perfectly natural

94. If treated immediately, it will have no consequences

95. Unless told otherwise, do not send money .

#### 4.2.1. Conditional meanings

When adverbial clauses are not introduced by a subordinator, however, there may be considerable indeterminacy as to the semantic relationship to be inferred.

Among the factors that constrain the interpretation of -ED clauses are modals. In modalized sentences, the meaning which prevails is the conditional one:

- 96. Left to his own devices, he might make a lot of confusion
- 97. Dressed a little more elegantly, she would be much nicer

Notice, however, that when no modal is specified in the superordinate clause, the participle clause is perceived as a *when*-clause:

- 98. Left to his own devices, he makes a lot of confusion
- 99. Dressed a little more elegantly, she looks much nicer
- 100. Taken in the prescribed dosage, the drug is very effective
- 101. Clean-shaven, George resembles my father.

#### 4.2.2. Temporal meanings

As we have already noticed in the first section, within the semantic area of temporality, English -ED participle clauses are able to express simultaneity, while anteriority is more typically expressed by -ING forms or by perfect participles HAVING -ED. This can be checked in the reverse direction, that is translating from English into Italian:

- 102. Leaving home at 6, he arrived at the hospital at 8;  
Uscito di casa alle 6, arrivò all'ospedale alle 8  
?? Uscendo di casa alle 6, arrivò all'ospedale alle 8  
(o.k. Uscendo di casa alle 6 arriverò all'ospedale alle 8)
- 103. Setting sail for the island in the fall of 1740, he reached his destination in the spring of 1741  
Salpate le ancore nell'autunno del 1740, raggiunse la destinazione nella primavera del 1741  
??Salpando le ancore nell'autunno del 1740, raggiunse la destinazione nella primavera del 1741

In both cases, the Italian gerund would imply a conditional reading requiring a future reference in the main clause.

In the following examples, on the contrary, English -ING forms express simultaneity, but they are nonetheless equivalent to Italian -TO participle clauses:

104. Lying on the beach, he was suntanning  
Sdraiato sulla spiaggia, si abbronzava
105. Sitting in the garden, he was reading the newspaper  
Seduto in giardino, leggeva il giornale.

The anteriority meaning can be made explicit via the subordinators "once" and "as soon as":

106. Once boiled, the fish must be kept in the fridge
107. As soon as arrested, the man was interviewed by journalists.

#### 4.2.3. Present, past and perfect participles;

A subtler question, now, is that of the relationship between past participles, present participles, and perfect participles. Provided that -ING forms, -ED forms and HAVING -ED forms can all express anteriority, is it possible to single out any further shades of meaning associated to each of them?

In the majority of the cases considered by Kortmann (1991), -ING free adjuncts and absolutes denote events immediately preceding the ones in the matrix clauses, with the former often representing a necessary prerequisite for the occurrence of the latter:

108. Catching sight of her, he slowly raised his right hand (=K. 2b)
109. Lifting the telephone, she asked for room 1410 (= K. 2c)
110. Rising, the Duke went to a side table (=K.2e)

In translating the three sentences into Italian, only *-to* participle clauses would be appropriate, while the gerund would be understood as the expression of a "same time" action. Immediate succession, however, is not a relevant constraint on the anteriority relation expressed by adjuncts with a present participial head; in fact, the event described by such adjuncts may identify *any perfect interval* preceding (and including) the interval at which the matrix proposition is true. An interesting group of examples under this respect is the one in which the events can be arranged both on a time and on a space line, along a path or itinerary. In both the following sentences, for instance, the present participial clauses identify time intervals which are logically located in a not immediate past, and for which we would expect a perfect aspect:

111. He had arrived at Moisant Airport shortly before 7.30 a.m., driving from the cheap motel on Chef Menteur Highway where he had stayed the night before (=K 3d)
112. He arrived in Munich from tel Aviv by way of Istanbul, changing passports twice and planes three times (=K 3e)

It is worth noticing that in neither case would an Italian *-to* participle translation be appropriate. If such is the case, though, the question that comes to the fore is the relationship between present and perfect participle adjuncts. It goes beyond the scope of our discussion investigating the structural conditions for the use of either construction: we are only interested in the semantic nuances linked to the use of present and perfect participles as a term of comparison for finding out the proper semantic domain of past participles within the temporal area of anteriority (suffice it to say that perfect participles are less heavily constrained than both present participles and past participles as to the kinds of verbs allowed in the construction and as to the position in the complex sentence).

If the choice between past participles and perfect participles is constrained by the necessity of specifying the aspectual component for the participles which involve a state component, as we have seen in the first section, the choice between present and perfect participles is not merely a matter of personal preference.

Quite often, while most present participle constructions do not express a semantic relation more informative than "time before", perfect participles tend to acquire a causal overtone. This happens most frequently when they are placed in sentence final position, while at the beginning of the sentence they receive a temporal interpretation as the strongest possible:

- 113. He sat in his armchair, took a cigarette, lit it. Having done this, he opened his book and started to read it
- 114. He decided to go away, having waited even too long.

One of the factors that influences the interpretation of free adjuncts and absolutes selecting a causal over a temporal reading is negation:

- 115. Having crossed the border, John looked for a place to stay overnight
- 116. Not having crossed the border, John looked for a place to stay overnight.

Moreover, within the domain of temporal anteriority, perfect participles may have a "retarding effect" as Jespersen noticed (Jespersen 1931: 183), which consists in slowing down a narrative shifting the reference time backward. This is further proved by the fact that instantaneous predicates, or predicates denoting events inherently bound up with the event described in the matrix clause, tolerate less the use of the perfect participle: thus

- 117. Having lifted the phone, she asked for room 1410
- 118. Having inflated her lungs, she screamed,

all sound awkward, because the time interval separating the events is perceived as unnaturally large, while the same could not be said, for instance, for

119. Having climbed the hill, he had to go through the wood and then cross the bridge.

It is not only a matter of the accomplishment verb: the use of the perfect participle also triggers a reading which presupposes a prior planning of the events, as if they had been explicitly scheduled in that order.

Similar remarks extend to the use of Italian "AVENDO -TO" constructions. Like in English, in Italian the choice between *-to* participles and *avendo -to* is not entirely free, because the latter is associated with the same semantic values as English "having -ed" constructions. Unlike English, however, Italian needs not resort to either the lexicalization of the perfect component via "having" or to the -ING form to express anteriority: the *-to* participle can fulfil the function. (This was not the case in Old Italian, when the past participles of both transitive and intransitive verbs needed the insertion of a perfect component "stato" ("been") (Bertuccelli Papi 1981).

#### 4.2.4. Concessive meaning

Concession is the most informative semantic relation that free adjuncts and absolutes may express. This relation is not always easy to detect; most frequently it is identified inferentially, both on the basis of lexical items present in the context and with the help of a great amount of knowledge of the world:

120. Once practiced mainly by a handful of small European partnerships, the field now includes competitors from almost every major financial centre.
121. Even redecorated, the house looked gloomy;

## 5. Conclusions

The systems of English and Italian differ as to the possibilities of constructing adverbial clauses with past participles, due to the different nature of the nonfinite forms in the two languages; this has consequences for the question that we have tried to investigate here, that is, if past participles can be considered likely candidates for converb status. The conclusion that can legitimately be drawn from our discussion is that Italian past participles can, while some English past participles cannot, and others are subject to more restrained conditions. Specifically, it appears that the nonfinite verbal forms which can plausibly be considered converbs are in fact those forms which are able to stand by themselves

as the main predicates of a subordinate clause. Consequently, they must have verbal character, not adjectival character. In so far as English past participles mostly exhibit an adjectival behavior, they are excluded from functioning as converbs, even if there are borderline cases which prevent us from assuming a clearcut position.

Therefore, we may conclude that English -ED participles are only very feeble, weak converbs, even though the areas of uncertainty that we have pointed out make it possible for the system to evolve towards other directions.

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