

On the categorial distinction between ‘verbal’ and ‘adjectival’ participles

This talk assumes a syntactic approach to word-formation (Halle & Marantz 1993); using Serbo-Croatian (SC) and English as examples, I demonstrate that passive participles are deverbal adjectives and argue that what has been cast as a contrast in lexical category between different types of participles is better understood as reflecting the amount of verbal structure embedded under the adjectival layer. Although a uniform analysis of English passive participles as adjectives has been suggested before (e.g. Freidin 1975), the more common view in the generative literature is to assume a categorial distinction between ‘adjectival’ and ‘verbal’ participles (Levin & Rappaport 1986, a.o.).

I first examine the validity of the main diagnostics used to distinguish between the two types of participles in English, to conclude that they are unsuitable for establishing category differences. Existing work on English has highlighted an apparent conflict between environments that allow adjectives but not verbs, on the one hand, and the appearance of an agentive *by*-phrase, on the other. On the account pursued here, participles always have adjectival external syntax; the task is therefore to establish an alternative account for the distribution of *by*-phrases. Based on the impossibility of a *by*-phrase with participles in attributive position, it has been argued that only adjectival participles can appear as prenominal modifiers. However, this restriction in English is better explained as a conspiracy of two independent factors. First, the Head-Final Filter (Williams 1982) requires that a prenominal modifying expression be head-final, thus banning, for example, **the opened by John letter*, but also, crucially, **the fond of Sam boy*. Second, the general impossibility of scrambling PPs leftward within a prenominal modifier in English accounts for ungrammaticality of **the by John opened letter*. Note that this latter restriction does not hold in closely related Dutch (cf. Sleeman 2011:1574).

Additionally, the complement position of verbs such as *seem* and *remain* has been analyzed as unsuitable for verbal adjectives because it precludes agentive *by*-phrases (1a). However, an alternative explanation is that the semantics of *seem* and *remain* simply require that they take stative complements, whereas the *by*-phrase precludes a stative reading with deverbal participles formed from change of state verbs. Data from eventive nominalizations are well-known, and they also show that eventivity is not sufficient for a constituent to maintain the external syntax of a verb (e.g. *the opening of the letter by the teacher*). Note also that the *by*-phrase can reappear if the relevant participle is derived from a stative verb (1b).

- (1) a. The cake seemed baked (*by Justin).
b. The teacher seemed/remained appreciated (by the students).

Finally, Wasow (1977) suggests that some passive participles must be verbs because they, unlike pure adjectives, are followed by subcategorized material that is selected (2). However, this observation is empirically unjustified, given that some adjectives also have selectional requirements (cf. the English *fond* or *keen*). Additionally, the syntactic approach to word-formation provides us with a principled explanation for why the deverbal adjective *considered* in (2) and the verb *consider* require the same complement; the adjective in (2) contains the verbal structure that is responsible for selecting the internal argument.

- (2) John was considered/*obvious as the frontrunner for this position.

The overarching point of this discussion has been that the internal structure of a constituent affects its distribution. In order to examine this internal structure more closely, I turn to SC passive participles, whose rich morphology can inform our analysis of passive participles more generally. SC participles largely pattern with their English counterparts, modulo the fact that SC participles are influenced by additional factors, in particular viewpoint aspect.

All passive participles in SC show overt verbal morphology, including a theme vowel which is the exponent of the verbalizing head (Svenonius 2004) and optional aspectual morphology (3). Yet, in terms of their external syntax and other morphological characteristics, SC passive participles pattern with adjectives. Supporting this claim is adjectival morphology on all participles (4a), their ability to form comparative and superlative forms (4b), and the fact that they can be modified by the prefix *polu-* ‘half’, which attaches to adjectives (4c), but not to verbs (4d). All of the above crucially holds even when an agentive *by*-phrase is inserted.

- (3) is-traž-i-va-ti / is-traž-i-va-n
 PF-explore-V-IMPF-INF. PF-explore-V-IMPF-SUFF.
 ‘explore/explored’
- (4) a. tuž-n-a / (od strane moje majke) napis-a-n-a knjiga
 sad-ADJ-F.SG by-side my mother write-V-ADJ-F.SG book.F.SG
 ‘a sad/(*by my mother) written book’
- b. Valjevo je (od strane ljudi) najzagađeniji grad u Srbiji.
 Valjevo is by-side people SUP-polluted-COMP.M.SG. city.M.SG. in Serbia
 ‘Valjevo is (*by people) the most polluted city in Serbia.’
- c. Ova kuća je polulepa /već polusagrađena (od strane marljivih zidara).
 this house is half-pretty already half-built by-side hardworking builders
 ‘This house is half-pretty/already half-built (by the hardworking builders)’
- d. *Marljivi zidari su već polusagradili kuću.
 hardworking builders are already half-built house
 ‘The hardworking builders have already half-built the house.’

Based on these facts, I propose the structure of the stative passive participle in (4a) as shown in (5).

- (5) [_{AGR}P a [_{aP} n [_{AspP} na [_{VoiceP} od strane... [_{VP} a [_{√P} pis [_{NP} knjiga]]]]]]]]

Notice that the participle in (4a)/(5) receives a stative interpretation despite hosting an agentive *by*-phrase. Stative participles with agentive *by*-phrases are also allowed in Greek (see Anagnostopoulou 2003), but not in English (cf. (1a)). I argue this is because the perfective aspect in languages that encode it on the verb stem explicitly names the final endpoint of a situation and overrides the event implication of the *by*-phrase. The structure of eventive participles in such languages is identical to statives as in (5a), except that they must be derived from base or secondary imperfective stems. This is a different strategy than that used in English-like languages, where the distinction between eventive and stative participled can be attributed to the presence/absence of the projection that hosts the agent, VoiceP (Kratzer 2000).

The analysis presented here casts doubt on the distinction between adjectival and verbal passives cross-linguistically. If it is true that participles are simply adjectives which embed varying amounts of verbal structure, this has the desirable consequence of curbing the proliferation of categories (e.g. PartP in various analyses), both in the linguist’s arsenal and in the speaker’s mental grammar.

References: Anagnostopoulou, E. 2003. Participles and voice. *Perfect explorations*, 1-36. ► Freidin, R. 1975. The Analysis of Passives. *Language*, 51, 384-405. ► Halle, M. & Marantz, A. 1993. Distributed Morphology and the pieces of inflection. *The view from Building 20*, 111-176. ► Levin, B. & Rappaport, M. 1986. The formation of adjectival passives. *Linguistic inquiry*, 17, 623-661. ► Sleeman, P. 2011. Verbal and adjectival participles: Position and internal structure. *Lingua*, 121(10), 1569-1587. ► Svenonius, P. 2004. Slavic prefixes inside and outside the VP. *Nordlyd* 32(2): Special issue on Slavic prefixes, 205–253. Tromsø: CASTL. ► Williams, E. (1982). Another argument that passive is transformational. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 13(1), 160-163.