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A syntactic-semantic typology of German participle constructions

1.　　Introduction

In the literature, the term "participle construction" (PC) is typically used to describe clause-like constructions consisting of an uninflected present or past participle and arguments or adjuncts of this participle. These "prototypical" PCs function as adverbials or post-nominal DP adjuncts. An example of the former is given in (1):
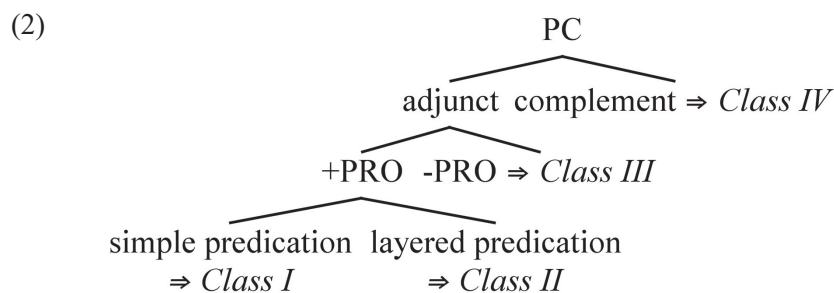
(1)　<u>Die　Stöße　erwartend,</u>　　wich　ich　ihnen　aus … (Filipović 1977, p. 57)
　　　the　impacts　expect.PRS.PTCP　avoided　I　them　PTCL

　　　'Expecting the impacts, I avoided them'

The article summarised here argues that this view of German PCs is too narrow. A corpus study of 2200 constructions from *Das deutsche Referenzkorpus* (DeReKo) and *The Oslo Multilingual Corpus* (OMC) shows that German PCs can be divided into four syntactic-semantic classes. The defining characteristic of all PCs is that they can be analysed as syntactically and semantically underspecified *Small Clauses* expressing a predicational relationship between the participial head and an implicit or explicit subject (e. g. Stowell 1981, 1983; Bowers 1993; Staudinger 1997). At the same time, they differ with respect to their syntactic status as adjuncts or complements, the realisation of their subject as implicit PRO or a case-marked DP and the complexity of their predicational structure.

2.　　Four classes of German PCs

A typology based on these criteria yields the following four classes of German PCs:

(2)　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　PC
　　　　　　　　　＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
　　　　　　　　adjunct　complement ⇒ *Class IV*
　　　　　　＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
　　　　　　+PRO　-PRO ⇒ *Class III*
　　　＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿
　　simple predication　layered predication
　　　⇒ *Class I*　　　　⇒ *Class II*

Class I: Adjuncts with an implicit subject

The class I constructions include, but are not limited to, the prototypical PC in (1), and constitute by far the most versatile construction type. These PCs function as adjuncts at clause (cf. (1)) or DP level (cf. (3)–(4)) and allow for a range of different interpretations, as described in detail in corpus-based studies like Rath (1971), Bungarten (1976), Filipović (1977), Brodahl (2018) and Høyem/Brodahl (2019). This class also includes pre-nominal DP adjuncts with a participial head, as shown in (4).

(3) Ein Kind, <u>sich mit der Hand die geblendet-en   Augen beschirmend</u>, kam im
    a   child REFL with the hand the blind.PST.PTCP-DAT.PL eyes   protecting   came in.the

Nachthemd an die Terrassentür … (OMC: PH1D.2.s.22)
nightgown to the patio.door

'A child, protecting its blinded eyes with its hand, came to the patio door in a nightgown'

(4) … wenn man eine <u>von einer größeren Herde bevölkerte</u>   Weide in Begleitung
    when one a   by a   larger   pack populate.PST.PTCP field in company

eines   ängstlichen jungen Hundes betritt … (OMC: KOL1D.3.s.59)
INDF.ART.GEN anxious   young   dog   enters

'… when one enters a field populated by a larger pack accompanied by an anxious young dog'

The PCs of this class are characterised by predication between the participial predicate and an implicit subject, which in line with generative theory (Chomsky 1981 et seq.) is assumed to be syntactically represented as PRO. This PRO subject is controlled by the modified noun when the PC is a DP adjunct and usually by the matrix subject when the PC is an adverbial.

Class II: Adjuncts with layered predication

PCs of class II are traditionally referred to as "accusative absolutes", although absolutes with a participial predicate have received little attention in the literature. These constructions contain a DP in the accusative case denoting a body part or possession of the matrix subject, which can be analysed as the explicit subject of the participle. They can also be introduced by the preposition *mit* 'with', in which case the subject DP is in the dative case, as in (6):

(5) Also   schweigt auch Ursula von der Leyen, <u>den   Kopf   gesenkt</u>   steht
    therefore keeps.quiet also Ursula von der Leyen, the.ACC head.ACC lower.PST.PTCP stands

sie da, <u>die   Hände   ineinander   verschränkt</u>.
she there the.ACC hands.ACC in.each.other fold.PST.PTCP

(DEREKO: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 18.6.2014, S. 6; Die Afghanistan-Frage)

'Therefore Ursula von der Leyen keeps quiet as well, standing there, her head lowered, her hands folded.'

(6) <u>Mit dem   Hinterteil in einer Regentonne steckend</u>   ist ein Betrunkener in
    with the.DAT behind.DAT in a   rain.barrel   stick.PRS.PTCP is a   drunk.person in

Speyer   eingeschlafen.
Speyer   fallen.asleep

(DEREKO: Mannheimer Morgen, 17.7.2013, S. 25; Betrunkener steckt in Tonne fest)

'With his behind stuck in a rain barrel, a drunk person fell asleep in Speyer.'

Like PCs of the first class, these constructions function as adjuncts at clause or DP level, but semantically they are much more restricted. These PCs denote (resultative) states and generally have no traditional adverbial reading, but simply describe an "accompanying circumstance" (Kortmann 1991).

Interestingly, class II PCs do not simply express predication between the explicit DP_{ACC} subject and the participle, but also between a PRO subject and the construction [DP_{ACC} (…) PTCP]. As Høyem (2019) shows for similar constructions, anaphora in these PCs are not bound by the local DP_{ACC} subject, but by a matrix argument, indicating that a co-referent PRO subject must be present in the adjunct as well:

(7) Er_i hängt tief in einem Campingstuhl, PRO_i [die   Beine]_j   von **sich**_{i/*j}/***ihm**_i
     he   hangs deep in a   camping.chair   the.ACC legs.ACC   from REFL   him

     gestreckt
     stretch.PST.PTCP

     (cf. DeReKo: Rhein-Zeitung, 10.6.2014, S. 32; Routine am Ring: Vier Tage feiern)

     'He is lying in a camping chair, his legs stretched away from him.'

Class III: Adjuncts with a subject in the nominative case

The third class of German PCs are also absolutes, i.e. adjuncts with an explicit subject-predicate structure. The explicit subject of these constructions is a DP in the nominative case that typically denotes a subpart of a plural antecedent in the matrix clause, yielding a distributive or partitive relation between the matrix object and the PC subject in (8):

(8) Das Hauptmotiv … zeigt [[Lady Di]_i … zusammen mit [Prinz Charles]_j …]_{OBJ.}, **er**_j
     The picture   shows Lady Di   together   with Prince Charles   he.NOM

     kühl geradeaus   blickend,   **sie**_i   verdruckst   in sich hinein kichernd.
     cold straight.ahead look.PRS.PTCP she.NOM   timidly   in REFL into   giggle.PRS.PTCP

     (DeReKo: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 10.4.2010, S. V2/4; Eine Lady verschwindet)

     'The picture shows Lady Di together with Prince Charles, him looking coldly straight ahead, her giggling timidly to herself.'

These nominative absolutes are intonationally detached adjuncts, which seem to adjoin in a very high structural position (cf. Czepluch 1996; Høyem 2018). Unlike PCs of the first two classes, these constructions contain no PRO subject, but simply express predication between the nominative DP and the participial predicate.

Class IV: Complements

The PCs of the final class are complements of certain verbs selecting a propositional complement. The verbs in question are ECM verbs (*Exceptional Case-Marking*, Chomsky 1981) such as *glauben* 'believe' in (9), as well as main verb *haben* 'have' in (10):

(9) Er … hatte als Wunderkind gegolten   und sich zu Großem erwählt
     he   had   as   wonder.child been.regarded and REFL to greatness choose.PST.PTCP

     geglaubt.
     believed

     (Kehlmann, Daniel (2013). *Die Vermessung der Welt*. 28. Ed. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, p. 84.)

     'He had been regarded as a wonderchild and believed himself to be chosen for something great.'

(10) Ich hatte eine Kirsche im Mund und den Kopf hochgestreckt, als ich
      I   had a.ACC cherry.ACC in.the mouth and the.ACC head.ACC hold.high.PST.PTCP as I

      dem riesigen Kometen mit den Augen zu folgen suchte … (OMC: EC1D.1.7.s.54)
      the huge   comet   with the eyes to follow tried

      'I had a cherry in my mouth and my head held high as I tried to follow the huge comet with
      my eyes.'

In accordance with traditional analyses of Small Clauses as complements of ECM verbs
(e.g. Stowell 1981, 1983; Bowers 1993; Staudinger 1997), I argue that there is a predica-
tional relationship between the DP (*sich*/*den Kopf* above) and the participial predicate, and
that the matrix verb selects the PC [DP_{SU} (…) $PTCP_{PR}$] as a propositional complement. A
similar analysis of main-verb *haben* 'have' is proposed by Businger (2011) and Høyem
(2019) and adopted for PCs of class IV.

3.   Discussion and concluding remarks

This typology indicates that there are interesting and previously undescribed correlations
between the distribution, interpretation and internal structure of German PCs. A PC is syn-
tactically and semantically underspecified, and depending on its structural position in a
given context, it is interpreted either as an adverbial modifying different domains of a
clause (cf. Frey/Pittner 1998; Pittner 1999), an adjunct modifying a noun or as the com-
plement of a verb. Furthermore, there is a correlation between the structural position of a
PC and the realisation of its subject. In accordance with Stowell's (1981, 1983) theory of
Small Clauses, a PC contains a case-marked subject when it occurs in an argument posi-
tion, but a phonetically empty PRO when it is an adjunct. While adjunct PCs of class I
occur with a PRO subject and complement PC of class IV with a case-marked DP, class II
constructions contain both in their layered predicational structure, which could be ana-
lysed as two PrPs (*Predication Phrase*, Bowers 1993*)* in adjunct and complement posi-
tions, respectively, following Høyem (2019):

(11) $[_{PrP/adjunct}$ PRO *mit*/Ø $[_{PrP/complement}$ $DP_{DAT/ACC}$ (…) PTCP]]

How the explicit subject in the nominative absolutes of class III is to be explained within
this theory remains an open question.

In conclusion, German PCs constitute a versatile class of Small Clauses. The article sum-
marised above gives an overview of the syntactic and semantic characteristics of different
types of PCs in German, which can hopefully serve as a starting point for further analysis
of this empirically and theoretically interesting phenomenon.

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