Discourse functions of predicative participles

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In this paper I look at the information structural (IS) properties of predicative participles, with a special focus on how they interact with the discourse context.

I argue that predicative participles have three main functions: 1) frames 2) independent rhemes 3) rheme elaborations. These differ in how they interact with the discourse context and with the matrix verb.

Frames are anaphoric, referring to events which have already been described or are easy to accommodate. They either serve as bridges between scenes in discourse, or they pick up the main narrative thread after an excursus. I argue that they are semantic presuppositions, which project out of embeddings such as mood, as in (1), where the πιστεύοντες in the second ἴνα-clause is anaphoric to the πιστεύητε in the first clause; but the second participle is interpreted outside the scope of the second ἴνα – otherwise the sentence would be pleonastic.

 (1) ἵνα πιστεύητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, son of God, and that, when you believe this, you might have eternal life in his name.' (John 20.31)

Independent rhemes present new information and thus have the same IS status as the matrix verb. These are the ones we can find in the long sequences of participles ended with a finite verb which are characteristic for Ancient Greek. I argue that these are independent rheme (comment) domains which are interpreted within the same frame (i.e. belonging to the same topic) as the matrix verb. In their interaction with the context, independent rhemes behave similarly to main verbs, but are more constrained in their construal options since they are always temporally linked to the left and right verbs (i.e. there are no narrative jumps, prolepses, or retrospections as is possible with main verbs). Independent rhemes are often translated with coordinated verbs, especially when they occur in embeddings, where they do not project:

(2) ἀπαγγείλατέ μοι, ὅπως κάγὼ ἐλθὼν προσκυνήσω αὐτῷ
 'Tell me, so that I too can go there and adore him.' (Matthew 2.8)

Rheme elaborations are participles that do not form their own rheme (comment) domain, but are parts of the matrix verb's domain. Typically, they pro-

vide more information about the matrix event. They do not interact with the context at all, only with their governing verb. The matrix verb also provides the reference time for the participle, which means that there is always simultaneity between governing verb and participle, even when the latter is a oristic as in (3):

(3) σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.
'Save yourself by going down from the cross.' (Mark 15:30)

I will argue that this threefold distinction, though not immediately visible in Greek syntax, is nevertheless grammatical and influences the semantics of participles. Because of the freedom of word order in Greek, syntactic rules, although in principle categorical, give rise to massive ambiguity. Still, data from annotated corpora can help us find distribution patterns which are probabilistic reflects of the syntactic rules. The corpus I use is the Greek New Testament, and the phenomena I will look at are lexical variation, participle constituent length and aspect, which all differ greatly according to position in the sentence.