

Re: German participles

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- *From:* "Ray" <raymondaliasapollyon@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 24 Jun 2006 03:12:14 -0700
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Oliver Neukum wrote:

Joachim Pense wrote:

Am Fri, 23 Jun 2006 09:50:24 +0200 schrieb Oliver Neukum:

Ray wrote:

Hi,

I'd like to invite the native speakers of German or anyone familiar with the language among you to examine the following sentence:

"Acht Gestalten, die Gesichter hinter Tuechern und Wollmuetzen versteckt, schlendern langsam zum Haus Nummer 128. "

Someone told me that "die Gesichter hinter Tuechern und Wollmuetzen versteckt" is a reduced relative clause. But I doubt it. Can it be an "absolute participial construction" instead?

No, because the reference to "Gestalten" is clear. It is an elliptical construction. You can get their from a relative clause, an attributive genitive or a prepositional construction.

Couldn't it translated into Latin, using an ablativus absolutus? (I won't try, i don't feel at home translating into Latin.) Would an

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ablativus absolutus be impossible if there was an attributive relation to the subject?

What cannot be rendered as an absolute ablative in Latin?

But apart from Latin, I don't think absolute constructions are very common in German.

They are not. But we have some absolute constructions.

(1)

for example:

Acht Gestalten – ihr Weg ist in der Sommersonne getrocknet worden – schlendern langsam zum Haus Nummer 128

This can be shortened elliptically:

Acht Gestalten, ihr Weg in der Sommersonne getrocknet, schlendern langsam zum Haus Nummer 128

I have a question here. Ekkehard and the other Oliver said the noun phrase in this sort of absolute participial construction is in the accusative case. But your example involves "ihr Weg" in the nominative case. Why?

Ray

Or turned into a relative clause:

Acht Gestalten, deren Weg in der Sommersonne getrocknet worden ist, schlendern langsam zum Haus Nummer 128

(2)

Or the archaic absolute genitive:

Sehenden Auges und gezückter Waffe reitet der Held in den Kampf.

(3)

Or as an adverb:

Tief in Gedanken versunken schlendern acht Gestalten langsam zum Haus Nummer 128.

But you cannot use the full range of absolute constructions of English:

The defeated enemy fleeing under full sail the admiral ordered

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pursuit.

In German this requires a subordinate clause:

Weil der besiegte Feind unter allen Segeln floh, befahl der Admiral, ihn zu verfolgen.

From a synchronic POV, you might probably call the construction absolute. From a diachronic/historical POV though, your suggestion that it is elliptical needs evidence. Does anybody know anything about the history of this kind of construction in German?

In German you can still put a subordinate clause into the main clause without conjunctions.

Regards
Oliver