

A System for Identifying Participle Use

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Given the wide range of uses of the participle (which can seem a bit intimidating to beginning students—as well as to those whose Greek may be a bit “rusty”), it would be helpful to have some system for evaluating each instance as it is encountered in the text. The chart in the *Koine Reader* (p. 264) provides just such a tool. These notes explain how the flow chart tool works, then enough examples of participle use from the New Testament are given to fit each of the possible outcomes of the flow chart.

For each participle, begin at the top of the chart and follow the choices/questions until you terminate at a usage category. Since the presence of an article clearly identifies an adjectival participle, that is the first choice. If a given participle *does* have an article, you flow down to the right and know immediately that it is an adjectival participle. The next decision is whether or not there is a noun in the same clause with which the participle agrees in gender, number, and case. If there is, then the participle likely modifies that noun, so is classed as an attributive adjectival participle. If there is not, then the participle, as may any adjective, is likely functioning substantivally, taking the place of a noun.

If, however, the participle does not have an article (anarthrous), from the top of the chart you will flow down to the left. The next decision is whether or not the participle is in the nominative case or one of the oblique cases (i.e., genitive, dative, or accusative). Considering the oblique cases first, if the participle is genitive, we must decide if it is functioning as a genitive absolute. If it is, we’re finished and need go no further. If it is not a genitive absolute, then the only other alternative is that this is an adjectival participle—which is possible even without an article. (Remember that we said that a participle with an article must be adjectival; we did not say that all adjectival participles must have an article!) So you will follow the flow of the chart to the upper right and pick up with the same questions of grammatical agreement already summarized for articular participles.

If we are dealing with a dative participle, at least in the New Testament we could skip directly to the adjectival section of the chart since all dative participles in the New Testament are adjectival. (This is not the case outside the New Testament; in the Septuagint, e.g., there is the possibility of a dative absolute.)¹

Accusative case participles, however, present additional options. In the accusative, the anarthrous participle might be related to an infinitive. Since the infinitive is a non-finite form it cannot have a nominative case subject; it uses, rather, an accusative

¹ This is nothing unique to the language of the New Testament. The dative absolute is a rare use of the participle and the New Testament is not a sufficiently large corpus to encompass all possible grammatical constructions. If you are working in the Septuagint, consult the grammars for possible dative absolute constructions. There is also a category called a *nominative* absolute, but that is a specific use of the adjectival substantival participle and is always articular (see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 654).

substantive to identify the subject—and this may well be a participle. Since infinitives may take an accusative object, that presents another option.

Another possibility for an anarthrous accusative participle is use in indirect discourse which, in Greek, sometimes substitutes a participle (or an infinitive) for the finite main verb in the original statement.² See the example in the next section.

If an accusative participle fits neither of these categories (governed by an infinitive or used in indirect discourse), then it is probably functioning as an adjectival participle, so you flow to the right into that section of the chart.

But perhaps this is not an oblique case at all. A nominative case anarthrous participle has other options. The first thing we need to check is to see if it is used with an equative verb (usually εἶμι). If it is, it might be a periphrastic if the verb and participle together express a single idea. Or the participle may be functioning as a predicate nominative. (If it were the subject, it would have an article, but as an anarthrous form, it can only be the predicate.) This use is rare, but legitimate (see the example below).

An anarthrous, nominative participle, however, may not be related to an equative verb at all. So we next ask if it agrees in gender and number with another nominative case noun in the same clause. If it is, it is likely an adjectival participle, so we flow back up to the top right section of the chart. But if it does not, it is an adverbial participle. The majority of anarthrous participles will fall into this category. Our next task is to figure out just what the writer intends us to understand about the relationship between the situation described by the main verb and that described by the participle. We can do this by asking a series of questions:

- Does the participle describe something about the main verb?
- Does it complete the idea of the main verb?
- Does it refer to a separate, but parallel, event?
- Or is it not related to a finite verb at all?

Let's consider these alternatives in reverse order. Although rare, occasionally an adverbial participle isn't related to a finite verb at all. Perhaps there isn't even a finite verb in the same clause. These are called "independent participles" and sometimes function as imperatives, other times they seem to take the place of another finite verb form. In either case, we have to translate them as if they were finite forms, supplying whatever subject the context requires. This is a "last resort" category and should not be selected unless there are no other grammatical options.

Another possibility is that the participle is related to the main verb only in that it describes a parallel event related to the main verb. It does not modify or describe the action of the main verb. These participles we call attendant circumstance participles. In Wallace's words,

² Discussion of this construction goes beyond the scope of this article other than the example in the next section. For further details, see D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 645–46; see also 456–58 and other pages listed in the index s.v. "discourse, indirect."

The attendant circumstance participle is used to communicate an action that, in some sense, is coordinate with the finite verb.... [yet] it cannot exist without the main verb. It is translated as a finite verb connected to the main verb by *and*. The participle then, in effect, “piggy backs” on the mood of the main verb.³

This enables a writer to refer to two parallel events, but place the focus on one of them (the finite form) and away from the other (the participle).

Another possibility is that the participle completes the idea of the main verb. This is much more commonly done with a complementary infinitive, but the participle can function in a similar fashion, though rarely. See the example below.

The most common use of an adverbial participle is to describe the action of the main verb in some way. Only the context can determine what the relationship is, and some instances might be explained in one of several ways. This, however, is the heart of “participle exegesis.” The flow chart lists the possible relationships between participle and verb. It is recommended that you consider them in the sequence listed here. More common uses are generally listed first. The exception is the temporal category. Every adverbial participle could be classed as temporal since any two actions must be either antecedent, simultaneous, or subsequent to any other action⁴; this category is intended only for those participle which seem to have the temporal relationship as the primary focus, so it should be the “last resort” classification in this area.

Examples of Participle Use in the NT

The following examples illustrate each of the classifications possible from the flow chart. In each passage the participle in view is italicized, as is the equivalent English phrasing in the translation given. (See the grammars, esp. Wallace and Young, for additional examples.)

1. πόθεν οὖν ἔχεις τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν; (John 4:11, from where, then, do you have the *living water*?). The participle is in second attributive position (article, noun, article, modifier).
2. ἰδοὺ ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων σπεῖραι (Mark 4:3, behold, *the sower* went out to sow).
3. Ταῦτα αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος αὐτοῖς, ἰδοὺ ἄρχων εἷς ἐλθὼν προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγων... (Matt 9:18, *While he was saying* these things to them, behold, a ruler, coming, bowed to him, saying...). The subject/verb in the main clause is ἄρχων ... προσεκύνει, whereas the participle refers to what *Jesus* was doing.

³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 640. It is important to read Wallace’s entire discussion since there are five key criteria for this classification (640–45).

⁴ Note the categories here; participles express only *relative* time: antecedent, simultaneous, or subsequent, *not* past, present, or future—and even these relationships come from the context, not the tense of the participle (though there are some common temporal patterns).

- 4.a. Ἡ ἀγνοεῖτε, ἀδελφοί, γινώσκουσιν⁵ γὰρ νόμον λαλῶ, ὅτι ... (Rom 7:1, or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to *those who know* [the?] law—that...).
- 4.b. Τίني δὲ ὁμοιώσω τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην; ὁμοία ἐστὶν παιδίοις καθήμενοις ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς... (Matt 11:16, but to what can I compare this generation? It is like children *who are sitting* in the marketplace...).
5. Διαμαρτύρομαι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ μέλλοντος κρίνειν ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς... (2 Tim 4:1, I testify before God and Christ Jesus—the one who is about to judge *the living* and the dead...).
6. Ἀκούσας δὲ Ἰακώβ ὄντα σῖτία ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ (Acts 7:12, but Jacob, hearing *that there was* grain in Egypt). [Original statement: ἐστὶν σῖτία ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ.]
7. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς παρακούσας τὸν λόγον λαλούμενον λέγει τῷ ἀρχισυναγωγῷ μὴ φοβοῦ, μόνον πίστευε (Mark 5:36, but Jesus, ignoring the word *being spoken*, said to the synagogue ruler, “do not fear, only believe”).
8. Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως (Eph 2:8, for by grace *you are saved* through faith).
9. Ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (Heb 4:12, for the word of God is *living*). [Verbless clause; supply the equative verb εἰμί.]
10. τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν· ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς (Rom 8:24, for in hope we were saved, but *visible* hope is not hope). [Formally, “hope *being seen*”]
- 11.a. ἀποστυγοῦντες τὸ πονηρόν, κολλώμενοι τῷ ἀγαθῷ (Rom 12:9, *hate* the evil, *cling to* the good).
- 11.b. καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ (Rev 1:16, and *he had* in his right hand seven stars). [No finite verb in this sentence except one in a subordinate clause.]
12. καὶ ταχὺ πορευθεῖσαι εἶπατε τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ὅτι ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν (Matt 28:7, and *go* quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead).
13. ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς διατάσσειν τοῖς δώδεκα μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ (Matt 11:1, when Jesus finished *instructing* his twelve disciples).

[Note: the translations in the following examples are deliberately translated in a rather “tame” fashion; you can improve each one by reflecting the contextual relationships of the participle to the main verb. This also avoids giving you an answer too quickly!]

⁵ Yes, this is a participle (PAPMPD), and yes, it is identical in form to the 3PPAI finite form. How do you tell them apart? Context. Here Paul is speaking (1S, λαλῶ) to the Romans (vocative ἀδελφοί and 2P, ἀγνοεῖτε); it makes no sense here to insert a statement about what “they” (3P) know.

- 14.a. ὁ οὖν Ἰησοῦς κεκοπιακῶς ἐκ τῆς ὁδοιπορίας ἐκαθέζετο οὕτως ἐπὶ τῇ πηγῇ (John 4:6, Therefore Jesus, *being weary* from the journey, sat thus on the well).
- 14.b. κοπιῶμεν ἐργαζόμενοι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν (1 Cor 4:12, we labor, *working* with our own hands).
- 14.c. διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν (Rom 1:21, therefore, *knowing* God, they did not glorify him as God).
- 14.d. καιρῷ γὰρ ἰδίῳ θερίσομεν μὴ ἐκλύομενοι (Gal 6:9, for in due time we will reap not *losing heart*).
- 14.e. οὗτο δὲ ἔλεγεν σημαίνων ποίῳ θανάτῳ ἤμελλεν ἀποθνήσκειν (John 12:33, but he said this *signifying* by what sort of death he would die).
- 14.f. καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδίδασκεν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν δοξαζόμενος ὑπὸ πάντων (and he taught in their synagogues *being glorified* by all).
- 14.g. ἐπορεύοντο χαίροντες ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ συνεδρίου, ὅτι κατηξιώθησαν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀτιμασθῆναι (Acts 5:41, they left *rejoicing* from the presence of the council because they were counted worthy to suffer on behalf of the name).
- 14.h. ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς (Rev 19:20, *living* the two were cast into the lake of fire).

Key

1. Adjectival attributive
2. Adjectival substantival
3. Genitive absolute
- 4.a. Dative, Adjectival substantival
- 4.b. Dative, Adjectival attributive
5. Governed by an infinitive (obj)
6. Indirect discourse
7. Accusative, Adjectival attributive
8. Periphrastic
9. Predicate nominative
10. Nominative, Adjectival attributive
- 11.a. Independent participle, imperatival
- 11.b. Independent participle, indicative
12. Attendant circumstances
13. Complementary participle
- 14.a. Adverbial, causal
- 14.b. Adverbial, means

- 14.c. Adverbial, concessive
- 14.d. Adverbial, conditional
- 14.e. Adverbial, purpose
- 14.f. Adverbial, result
- 14.g. Adverbial, manner
- 14.h. Adverbial, temporal

Bibliography: D. Black, *SGM*, ch. 11; W. Mounce, *BBG*, chs. 26–30; S. Porter, *IGNT*, ch. 10; D. Wallace, *BNTS*, 266–85; D. Wallace, *WGG*, 612–55; R. Young, *YIG*, ch. 10.