Towards a typology of participial systems

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This study is a typological survey of participial systems, i.e. paradigms of non-finite verb forms employed for adnominal modification that are attested in individual languages. The study is based on the data from 86 genetically and geographically diverse languages possessing the relevant forms. The main goal is to provide a comprehensive overview of participial systems and parameters underlying them, and to discuss certain cross-linguistic tendencies related to these matters.

Setting aside the languages that have only one participial form, we can notice that participial systems in the world's languages are primarily based on orientation (relativizing capacity of the forms, cf. Haspelmath 1994: 153), TAM distinctions, or the intersection of the two.

Orientation-based systems mostly consist of inherently oriented participles, i.e. forms that can only relativize one particular participant. Four types of oppositions are attested in the systems of this kind:
1. active (S/A) vs. passive (P), e.g. Wolio (Austronesian, Indonesia, Anceaux 1952);
2. absolutive (S/P) vs. agentive (A), e.g. Urarina (isolate, Peru, Olawsky 2006);
3. subject (S/A) vs. non-subect, e.g. Dolakha Newar (Sino-Tibetan, Nepal, Genetti 2007);
4. active vs. passive vs. oblique, e.g. Warihio (Uto-Aztecan, Mexico, Félix Armendáriz 2005).

When a language has several participial forms exhibiting the same type of participial orientation (in this case, almost always contextual), the participial system of the language is usually based on TAM distinctions demonstrated by the forms. The distinctions themselves can belong to different subdomains within TAM. For instance, Nanga (Dogon, Mali, Heath, ms.), differentiates between perfective and imperfective participles, while Tamil (Dravidian, India, Lehmann 1993: 284) has an opposition between future and non-future.

Although orientation and TAM can form participial systems on their own, it is fairly common for languages to have participial systems based on both parameters simultaneously. Interestingly, hardly any of these languages have symmetric systems where the two parameters are independent from each other. All of them have at least some deficiencies in their paradigms, e.g. English does not have either a present passive participle or a past active form.

As a result of the study, two typological generalizations can be formulated concerning the organization of participial systems. First, if a language has a participial form inherently oriented towards a certain participant, then it has participial forms inherently oriented towards all the

participants more accessible to relativization. This can be regarded as an extension of the Keenan & Comrie's (1977) Accessibility Hierarchy related specifically to participles. Second, based on the fact that almost all participial systems considered in the study are asymmetric if they are based on both orientation and TAM characteristics of participial forms, we can conclude that these parameters are interrelated, which reflects the mixed nature of the participle as a hybrid (verbal–adjectival) category. This observation is also in line with the earlier studies on interrelation between morphosyntactic alignment and TAM, such as DeLancey (1981), and it supports the semantic and pragmatic nature of this connection.

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