

A Survey on How the Participial Construction is Taught in the Revised High School Textbooks: A Need for Some Cognitive Considerations

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Abstract: The participial construction is one of the most difficult grammatical structures for Japanese learners of English. Among some factors to making it difficult, this paper claims that the most important point is that the conventional instruction of this structure contradicts the principle of "...one form for one meaning, and one meaning for one form (Bolinger 1977)." The results of the survey on how it is taught in the high school textbooks revised in 2012 show that the main-stream instruction still lacks cognitive considerations derived from the above principle, so this structure will remain difficult to acquire. In order to make it easier to acquire, each instructor should complement the textbooks regarding (1) the interchangeability between the participial construction and compound sentences, and (2) the relationship among the three usages of "-ing" form, nominal, adjectival, and adverbial.

Keywords: "-ing" form, participial construction, present participle, gerund, adjectival/adverbial usages

1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that the participial construction is one of the grammatical structures that are difficult to acquire for Japanese learners of English. There can be several different factors that make it difficult. This study intends to (1)clarify the factors that make this structure difficult, (2)examine how those factors are treated in the MEXT-censored high school textbooks recently revised, and (3)present some ideas to improve the instruction to make this grammatical structure easier to acquire.

Although there are two types of participles, present and past, this study focuses on the present participle, because the form is the same as a gerund and it is a very important factor in the discussion.

2. Preceding Studies

Different literatures point out different factors as the cause of the difficulty, such as ways of interpreting its different meanings (Yamada 1991, Hatano 2013), absence of a conjunction, the subject, and tense (Yamaoka 2002, Kubota 2004), the relationship between the position of the participle cause and its meaning (Sonoda 1992, Komoto 2002, Tomita 2004) whether or not it functions the same as complex sentences (Nagai 1997), and so on.

Among these points, what the present writer thinks is the most important is that the conventional methods of instruction for this structure go against the principle presented in Bolinger (1977). Its main idea is "...the natural

condition of a language is to preserve one form for one meaning, and one meaning for one form (Bolinger 1977, x)." That means, if the forms are different, there always is something different in the meaning or function, and if the forms are the same, there always is some meaning or function in common.

For example, many textbooks explain that sentences in the active and passive voices are interchangeable, because they have the same meaning. However, this is not always the case as we can see in the following pair.

George turned the corner.

*The corner was turned by George.

The second sentence is unnatural because the corner is not affected (Bolinger 1977, 10). This is an example of different meanings for different forms. The next example is for the same meaning for the same form. Many high school textbooks explain that the present perfect has (at least) three different meanings - completion, experience, and continuance. It is usually expected in a dialogue that if someone uses it for completion, the other person responds to her/his utterance for the same meaning (completion). However, this is not always the case. Look at the next dialogue (Bolinger 1977, 19).

Edith: Max has been fired!

Ethel: So have I. Many times.

"Edith" is using the present perfect for completion and "Ethel" is using the same form for experience. This means

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that the form itself actually has one meaning, and its interpretation is left up to the listener or the reader.

3. Problems with Descriptions of the Participial Construction

Considering Bolinger's principle, there can be two points that make the participial construction difficult. First, the "-ing" form has three different usages: nominal, adjectival, and adverbial. When it functions as a noun, it is called a "gerund," and when it functions as an adjective or as an adverb, it is called a "present participle." What is used in the participial construction is the third one, the present participle used as an adverb.

Then, do these three usages have the same meaning, as claimed in Bolinger (1977)? Actually, they do not, because gerunds and present participles originally had different forms until around the age of Middle English. Since the pronunciations of those different forms were similar, they gradually came to be spelled similarly, and finally, the same. Therefore, their forms are superficially the same. Here lies a cognitive burden for the learners to distinguish between the different usages with the same form.

The other point is that there have been a considerable number of textbooks which claim that the meanings of the participial construction can be expressed in complex sentences (with a conjunction and the subject in the subordinate clause) and explain the procedure to rewrite complex sentences into sentences in the participial construction. As mentioned above, if the form is changed, the meaning is changed. So it is unreasonable to encourage the learners to rewrite sentences.

4. Method

All the textbooks for Communication English I and II that were revised in 2012 have been examined on (1) how the participial construction is described and (2) what types of practice exercises are used, especially focusing on whether there are considerations for the above mentioned two points that make this structure hard to acquire.

For point (1), the number of example sentences applying the following types have been counted.

- A: Form and meanings (those that show the structure and examples of different meaning)
- B: Comparison with complex sentences (those that explain that it is interchangeable with complex sentences)

- C: Polysemy and context dependency (those that explain the same form can have different meanings and it depends on the context)
- D: Comparison with the adjectival usage (those that explain that the present participle also modifies the nominal and therefore they should be distinguished from each other)
- E: Comparison with a gerund (those that make the learners aware that the same "-ing" form has a nominal usage and therefore they should be distinguished from each other)

Types D and E are for the cognitive considerations that the present researcher proposes, and Type B goes against them. For point (2), the number of questions have been counted based on the types of practice exercises.

- A1: Verb form changes
- A2: Fill-in-the-blanks
- A3: Word order arrangement
- B: Rewriting from/into complex sentences
- C1: Translation from Japanese into English
- C2: Translation from English into Japanese
- D: Distinction from the adjectival usage
- E: Distinction from gerunds

Types A1 through A3 are related to Type A in point (1), and Types C1 and C2 are related to Type C likewise.

5. Results

Figure 1 shows the results of the survey on how the participial construction is described. The largest number of example sentences were used for Type A, presenting the form and some examples of different meanings. There were not so many sentences used for Type B, comparison with complex sentences, as expected. As for the cognitive considerations, no explanation was found for comparison with the adjectival or the nominal usages of the "-ing" form.

Figure 2 shows the results of the survey on what types of practice exercises are used. In disagreement with the ratio in **Figure 1**, the largest number of questions were used for Type B, rewriting from or into complex sentences, which go against the cognitive considerations proposed by the present researcher. Since there were no example sentences in Types D and E in point (1), there naturally were no practice exercises here, either.

Figure 1

		N	Ratio to the total(%)
A	Form and meanings	56	74.7
B	Comparison with complex sentences	12	16.0
C	Polysemy and context dependency	7	9.3
D	Comparison with the adjectival usage	0	0.0
E	Comparison with gerunds	0	0.0
Total		75	100.0

Figure 2

		N	Ratio to the total(%)
A1	Verb form changes	39	30.0
A2	Fill-in-the-blanks	16	12.3
A3	Word order arrangement	5	3.8
B	Rewriting from/into complex sentences	56	43.1
C1	Translation from Japanese into English	10	7.7
C2	Translation from English into Japanese	4	3.1
D	Distinction from the adjectival usage	0	0.0
E	Distinction from gerunds	0	0.0
Total		130	100.0

6. Conclusion

The results of the present survey show that the general tendency in the instruction of the participial construction in the high school textbooks revised in 2012 still lacks the cognitive considerations proposed from the principle, “one form for one meaning, and one meaning for one form.” The participial construction will still remain difficult for the learners to acquire unless each instructor complements the textbooks with some cognitive considerations. The proposals for such cognitive considerations in this paper are as follows.

(1) The instructors should stop explaining that the participial construction is interchangeable with complex sentences, because if the forms are different, the meanings are different. They should explain that it can mean something similar (not “the same”) to some of them depending on the contexts.

(2) The instructors should give the learners some cognitive tasks to distinguish between the three usages of the “-ing” form, because they look the same to the learners even though they are not.

(2)-1 First, the learners should be aware that present participles and gerunds are basically different things with the same form; the former modify some other parts of the sentence, while the latter do not modify anything.

(2)-2 Then, the learners should be able to distinguish between the adjectival and the adverbial usages of the present participle; the former modifies nominals and the latter modifies clauses, and is called the participial construction.

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Appendix. MEXT-censored Textbooks Checked (In the order of MEXT announcement)

English Communication I (The same titles of Communication English II in 2013)

- 清田洋一（ほか）：『All Aboard! Communication English I』東京：東京書籍. 2012.
- 浅見道明（ほか）：『Power On Communication I』東京：東京書籍. 2012.
- 田辺正美（ほか）：『PROMINENCE Communication English I』東京：東京書籍. 2012.
- 松林世志子（ほか）：『ENGLISH NOW I』東京：開隆堂. 2012.
- 生井健一（ほか）：『Discovery English I』東京：開隆堂. 2012.
- 霜崎實（ほか）：『CROWN English Communication I』東京：三省堂. 2012.
- 森住衛（ほか）：『MY WAY English Communication I』東京：三省堂. 2012.
- 金子朝子（ほか）：『VISTA English Communication I』東京：三省堂. 2012.
- 伊東治己（ほか）：『New ONE WORLD English Communication I』東京：教育出版. 2012.
- 八代京子（ほか）：『On Air English Communication I』東京：開拓社. 2012.
- 岡田圭子（ほか）：『Compass English Communication I』東京：大修館. 2012.
- 村野井仁（ほか）：『Genius English Communication I』東京：大修館. 2012.
- 卯城祐司（ほか）：『ELEMENT English Communication I』東京：啓林館. 2012.
- 竹内理（ほか）：『LANDMARK English Communication I』東京：啓林館. 2012.
- 松坂ヒロシ（ほか）：『POLESTAR English Communication I』東京：数研出版. 2012.
- 畠山利一（ほか）：『BIG DIPPER English Communication I』東京：数研出版. 2012.

- 西光義弘（ほか）：『COMET English Communication I』東京：数研出版. 2012.
- 市川泰男（ほか）：『UNICORN English Communication I』東京：文英堂. 2012.
- 倉持二郎（ほか）：『Grove English Communication I』東京：文英堂. 2012.
- 鈴木寿一（ほか）：『MAINSTREAM English Communication I』東京：増進堂. 2012.
- 鈴木寿一（ほか）：『NEW STREAM English Communication I』東京：増進堂. 2012.
- 野村和宏（ほか）：『Perspective English Communication I』東京：第一学習社. 2012.
- 築道明（ほか）：『Vivid English Communication I』東京：第一学習社. 2012.
- 田中茂範（ほか）：『PRO-VISION English Communication I』東京：桐原書店. 2012.
- 望月正道（ほか）：『WORLD TREK English Communication I』東京：桐原書店. 2012.