



HISTORICAL NOTE ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE PARTICIPLE

Hamzayev Hasan

Teacher, Department of French language and literature,
Faculty of Roman-German Philology, Karshi State University
Phone: +998990313280

ABSTRACT

The French participles go back to the corresponding participles of Latin, except the compound form and passive form of the present participle. The past participle comes from the participium perfecti passivi, the present participle from the participium praesentis activi. Both Latin forms agreed with the noun, the first in gender and number: dictus-dicti, dicta-dictae, etc., the second in number: cantans-cantantes. Both forms were available. Nowadays, the present participle is invariable. The gerund goes back to the Latin gerundium, but in French it represents a completely new grammatical category. In Latin, it was a noun.

Keywords: participle, past participle, French language, gerund, present participle, gerundium, passing.

Introduction

Nowadays, it is a particular form of the verb. It was not until French that the gerund became a form of the verb. Its grammatical value was formed under a strong influence of the infinitive, with which it competed to assume its various functions in popular Latin. So much so that in French, the gerund has only remained the function of a circumstantial complement. Here, however, the gerund clashed with the present participle. In the Latin language, this was widely used to mark different circumstances so that the two forms were often in competition. Moreover, in Old French the gerund has merged, in terms of form, with the present participle. The gerund has become invariable. But, the morphological means which distinguished the participle and the gerund in old French were very poor and the agreement of the participle was not always carried out there. Often then, we did not know exactly what form we were dealing with, the particle *en* not yet being the mark of the gerund.

Ex: *Son petit pas s'en turnet cancelant* [=chancelant ou en chancelant].

It was perhaps the influence of the invariable form of the gerund which was visibly confused with the participle. In Old French, it is true, the gerund could be combined with a preposition, a faculty that has remained with it from the Latin gerundium: *ci*, in modern French those archaic and frozen phrases that come to us from the old language: during his lifetime, on his seat, reluctantly. But the use of prepositions gradually diminished, with the exception of *en*, which later became the gerund index. Until the 15th century, present participles acquire the feminine *e*, but this time again the *e* extends only to forms expressing



a state or a quality. Moreover, these variations were not regulated. Only in the 17th century did grammarians seriously concern themselves with it. While putting a barrier between the participle and the verbal adjective, this rule brought the participle closer to the gerund. It is the particle which served, this time, as a distinctive monkey. Thus, the gerund has consolidated into a grammatical category, quite distinct from the present participle. Syntax was much freer in the Middle Ages and even still in the sixteenth and twelfth centuries than it is today: the remarks, generally so fine and so just by Vaugelas, had not yet all passed "into the letter" at the end of the century of Louis XIV. Is that a reason to make them nowadays, when they have introduced so much clarity into the tongues? And to reproach a Montaigne, a Boussuet or a Racine with alleged "faults", which were not then recognized as such. In short, we will limit ourselves to drawing the reader's attention to two points, the first of which will be the present participle and the verbal adjective, and the second the French gerund, that is to say the present participle preceded from *to*. The middle Ages confused the participle and the adjective and the 17th century usually barely distinguished them. Didn't the French Academy itself define grey: "the color closest to blue"? It was, however, beginning to be accepted that the present participle, which marks an action or a passing state, remains invariable, while the adjective, which marks a prolonged quality or state, has the value of a qualifier and agrees in gender and number with the noun of which it is epithet or attribute. This is how Racine, who consults Guilleragues and Bouhours, makes Hermione say. *Crying after his chariot, you want me to be seen* Crying, marking here an action that is prolonged, while this other line from Andromache expresses the passing act of a supplicant:

N'est-ce pas a vos yeux spectacle assez doux.

Que la veuve d'Hector pleurant a vos genoux? The distinction between the two jobs was not in vain but had only just been admitted, the young Racine, in a letter from Uzès, writing again from one of those beautiful Southern women who had troubled him: "I had some rather tender and rather approaching idea of an inclination. different spellings, especially for verbs in -ger (divergent *and divergent, careless, etc.*) , for verbs in -guer (tiring *and tiring , intriguing and intriguing, etc.*), for verbs in -guer (*fatigant et fatigant, intrigant et intrigant, etc*), and even for other verbs -quer(*communiquant et communicant, etc*). As indeed, in the words of an ancient poet:

Without its excaptation, the present participle has remained variable in certain locutions: : *séance tenante, à la nuit, les ayants cause berf*, in one of a dozen easy-to-remember expressions, and less numerous than the exceptions *confirming the rule* in the all too famous spelling reform project proposed last spring by someone left to say that there was a lot more in this rainy summer, fortunately moreover, because there were more exceptions than the rules. I will no doubt be forgiven - the second point of this note - for naming *gerund* , like my excellent colleague Adolphe V.Thomas, the present participle preceded by the preposition *in* : "C'est en forgeant qu'on devient frogeron". Today's rule that such a gerund placed at the beginning of a sentence or a member of a sentence must correspond to a noun and a subject pronoun of the main clause: ex "Tout en marchant mon amie me dit ". I quote here. V.Thomas. The participle expresses a secondary action by relating it to the noun. It



presents the action as a property of the name. This brings the participle closer to the adjective. In French, the participle is represented by a system of forms, the main ones being the present participle and the past participle. The past participle has no derivatives, while the present participle has three. Starting from the simple active form of the latter (type: *lisant*), we obtain with the help of the auxiliary verbs and the past participle:

1. the simple passive form: *étant lu*;
2. the active compound form: *ayant lu* (le pp.composée)
3. the passive compound form: *ayant été lu*.

For the value and use of these forms see below.

The present participle and past participle names given to its forms are fixed by tradition, but they do not seem well chosen.

Conclusion

Moreover, the differences in meaning that exist between the forms of the French participle are often based on the distinctions of voice. Representing these peculiarities of the grammatical value of the participle in a short term, which should only reflect the essential, is quite difficult. Also, specialists in Germanic languages get out of the difficulty by giving the participle forms a simple number: see In German, “das Partizip I” (which corresponds to the present participle). These numbers say nothing to the mind, but at least they create no ambiguity. French grammarians should perhaps imitate them.

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