

Questionnaire on Converbs (April 1993)

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A non-combined (or prototypical) converb may be defined

(a) positively - as a verb form semantically related to another verb form, and (b) negatively - as a verb form which does not occur in the position (1) of the predicate of a simple non-elliptical sentence, (2) of the attribute to a noun, (3) of the complement in complement (object) clauses, (4) of the subject. In the above mentioned four positions the following verb forms occur: (1) a finite form, (2) a participle, (3) an infinitive, (4) a gerund.

To the group of non-combined converbs belong, for instance, Russian forms in -a/-ya and -v(shi), Lithuanian forms in -dam and Estonian forms in -des. A converb may be also defined as a non-finite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination? (Martin Haspelmath, p.c.). Prototypical converbs are opposed to combined converbs which in addition to their main converbal? function may also perform one (or several) of the other functions mentioned above. Thus, an Estonian converb in -nud may also perform the function of a participle and an English converbal form in -ing may perform all the functions listed above. Thus, converbs may be typologized in accordance with the quantity of syntactic functions they may perform and also restrictions of their use in different syntactic functions.

From the semantic point of view converbs may be divided, first of all, into specialized (which express one, more rarely two clear-cut meanings) and non-specialized or contextual (the interpretation of one of their meanings depends upon a definite set of conditions, e.g. the lexical meanings of the verbs involved or upon the context). The Estonian and the Russian converbs are of the latter type. They may express such meanings as simultaneity / anteriority / cause / manner / condition / concession or even anteriority / posteriority depending of the position of a converb to the left or to the right of the finite verb form and the lexical meanings of a finite form and related to it converbal form. Specialized converbs may be further subdivided into (a) temporal, denoting either simultaneity, anteriority or posteriority of a converbal action? with respect to the action expressed by the finite form, and (b) adverbial proper,

denoting one of the following functions (or interclausal relations in terms of Bernd Kortmann): manner, instrument, cause, condition, purpose, concession, result, comparison, etc. The majority of converbs in Germanic and Romance languages belong to the contextual type. Most frequently converbs expressing simultaneity combine it with the meanings of manner / instrument (see section 7). Please, answer the following questions and translate the following sentences trying to give the closest syntactic variants to the given English constructions but at the same time paying attention to the naturalness (grammaticality) of the corresponding converbal constructions in your language(s). Morphemic line is necessary, whereas the translation is not. If necessary words may be changed.

Formal characteristics of converbs

1. Please, give the full list of the converbal (or converb-like) forms in your language(s) according to the specialist literature.
2. Can converbal phrases be augmented with adpositions, e.g.
 - (1) Before returning home, she bought flowers
 - (2) (When) driving at night, he was always careful
 - (3) (While) writing the letter, she thought of him
 - (4) With John driving, nobody remained calm
 - (5) Without a hand lifted he left the classroom
 - (6) By shouting at me you won't change anything

3. Are there perfective forms of converbs involving the use of an auxiliary verb ?

- (7) Having failed the exam twice, his idea was to return home
- (8) Having drunk this glass of wine I was a bit drunk
- (9) Having crossed the street I entered the bank

4. What are the negative forms of converbs ?

- (10) a. Having crossed the border, John had to look for a hotel
б. Not having crossed the border, John had to look for a hotel.
- (11) a. Knowing that he was away, she came to his place
б. Not knowing that he was away, she came to his place
- (12) a. Not (* without) wanting to give offence, he was silent;
- (13) Feeling better / not feeling any better, he decided

to stay at home

(14) a. Having seen the painting, John bought it

б. Not / without having seen the painting, John bought it

(15) Knowing / without knowing the time he went to the airport

(16) a. He moved away without (* not) answering.

b. Wearing / not wearing a shirt, she would surely catch a cold

5. Can converbs be used alone without any other elements in the converbal phrase ? (cf.:)

(17) Rising, he went to the door

(18) He went out talking

(19) Spanish. Lloviendo no salgo lit. Raining, I don't go out?.

Semantic properties

6. Can converbs in your language(s) express Manner, Instrument, Attendant Circumstances ?

(20) She left crying

(21) He entered limping / stumbling

(22) He arrived riding on a bicycle

(23) Norwegian Han kom løp-ende He came running?

(24) Danish Han kom gå-ende He came on foot?

Attendant Circumstances / Simultaneity:

(25) He spent the evening reading the newspaper

Instrument:

(26) They escaped by sliding down a rope

(27) He solved the problem by applying to his friend

(28) Danish Han kom cyclende / flyv-ende He came by bicycle / by plane?

7. Are converbs used only for the expression of temporal relations ? Can they be interpreted as expressing either anteriority or simultaneity as in (29) ?

(29) Opening / closing the window he saw a stranger

Anteriority:

(30) (On) coming home we had supper

(31) Having had breakfast I went to the institute

Simultaneity:

(32) (While) living in the country I learned all about flowers

Posteriority:

(33) Before leaving for the institute I had dinner

(34) We ate before going to the river

8. Are there contextual converbs in your

language(s), i.e. converbs which can be interpreted as performing both temporal and non-temporal functions, as in (38) ? What are the possible conditions of realization of one of meanings / interpretations (pay attention to the semantic interplay of lexical meanings of the converb and the matrix verb) ?

(35) a. Crossing the street, John was hit by a car
(Simultaneity)

b. Crossing the street, John entered the bank
(Anteriority)

c. Crossing the street, John entered a different region
(Instrument)

(36) Knowing the importance of his evidence, the witness preferred to stay at home (Cause / Concession)

(37) Refusing to appear in court, the witness documented his fear of giving evidence (Simultaneity / Cause / Instrument)

(38) Standing on a chair, John can touch the ceiling
(Instrument / Condition)

(39) Lying on the beach, John always smokes cigars

(40) a. Using a sharp knife, he managed to cut the bread

b. Using a blunt knife, he managed to cut the bread

9. Are there specialized converbs expressing non-temporal functions (condition, cause, concession, purpose, result, etc.). Give examples.

10. What are the meanings of converbs formed of a verb denoting \square to be? ? In some languages converbs from the verbs meaning \square to be? perform causal or conditional functions and not temporal, cf.

(41) Being young, he decided to go abroad

(42) Being clean-shaven, he would look like my brother

(43) Being a sailor, he smokes a pipe

(44) Having been a sailor, John knows all about boats

(45) His father being a sailor, John knows all about boats

(46) French. Etant petit garçon, j'ai habite a Geneve

Syntactic properties

11. Can the converbal forms found in (29)-(34) be used as participles (= attributively) or infinitives (= in complement clauses) ? What is the diachronic relation between participles and converbs ?

12. Can converbs be used in Different-Subject constructions ? What is the form of the converbal subject (nominative / dative / genitive / possessive, any

other) ? Is there agreement in number / person / gender between the converbial subject and the converb ? What are the possible conditions which allow Same-Subject converbs to be used in Different-Subject constructions in your language(s) ? Other languages seem to allow such usage under the following conditions: 1) if the pragmatically salient person is the controller of the empty subject position in the converbial phrase (see (47)), 2) if there is a part - whole or possessive relation between two subjects (see (52)), 3) if the main clause describes the perceived situation (see (59)), 4) if a converb expresses condition or case and there is an overlap in the set of participants of the main and the converbial clauses.

Please, try to translate the following sentences using, whenever possible, converbial forms in place of English - ing forms.

(47) Looking for suitable phrases, several words crossed his mind

(48) Standing on the bath-mat and looking at her reflection in the mirror it was impossible to imagine herself young again

(49) (We) having paid our bill, the waiter brought us our hats

(50) Being in Europe for about a year, what is your impression of it ?

(51) Looked at closely, she could see his face was really a rather fine one

(52) Sitting quietly in the room, the memory reminded him of the past

(53) Driving to Chicago last night, a sudden thought came to my mind

(54) He was standing in front of me, his hands lifted to the ceiling

(55) The man went out, his coat being unbuttoned

(56) They returned home, the elder brother carrying a gun

(57) Her eyes still closed, she tried not to think of him

(58) His hat being blown off his head, he felt miserable

(59) Walking in the evening by the side of the river, a boat came by.

(Looking out of the window, there were the flower beds in the garden

(61) Knowing as much as you do, the situation is easily explained

- (62) The train being crowded, John had to remain home
(63) Being Sunday all the offices were closed
(64) Keeping his sorrows to himself, we didn't know how to help

13. Metalinguistic use of converbs

- (65) Putting it mildly, he is a dishonest person
(66) Frankly speaking, he is a scoundrel

14. Null or formal subjects in the matrix clause (cf. Russian translations)

- (67) Driving at a speed of 100 miles per hour it is / was not easy to read the road signs
(68) Crossing this street under the next lights, there is / will be a new restaurant

15. Can the position of the converbal phrase influence the taxis interpretation and / or the choice of the controller of the empty subject position, cf.:

- (69) a. Lying in the sun, John looked at her
b. , John looked at her, lying in the sun

What is the usual position of the converbal phrase ? Can converbs be used after the finite verb ? Do they express posteriority when used after the matrix clause ?

- (70) The tree fell down, crushing the roof of the house
(71) He went out slamming the door
(72) I fell down striking my head against the door
(73) Portuguese. Despenhou-se um aviao militar, morre-ndo o piloto (lit. A military plane crushed, the pilot dying?, i.e. ■and the pilot died?)

16. Can converbs be focalized, as in (74):

- (74) I doubt that he is walking along the street, stumbling

17. Are there voice distinctions (active - passive) in converbs ?

- (75) ?Being raised, he went to the door
(76) He went out being talked about