

Early Slavic participle clauses and their typological parallels

Nilo Pedrazzini

Keywords: *Early Slavic, participle clauses, switch reference*

Much like in Ancient Greek, there are two widely used constructions with a participle in Early Slavic, chiefly functioning as When-clauses: conjunct participles (1a), which are functionally controlled (Dalrymple et al. 2019: 543) by an argument of the matrix clause (typically its subject), and absolute constructions (1b), where both the participle and its subject occur in the dative regardless of coreferentiality.

- (1) a. *i se rekъ udari imъ o zemlju*
and this say.PTCP.PFV.NOM.M.SG strike.AOR.3SG 3SG.INST to ground
'And when he₁ said this, he₁ struck him₂ to the ground.'
- b. *i se emu rekšju poidoša protivu sobě*
and this 3SG.DAT say.PTCP.PFV.DAT.M.SG go.AOR.3PL against REFL
'And when he said this, they moved against each other.'

Building on the approach of Haug & Pedrazzini (2023), but working at the subtoken level, this paper aims to recast the functions of Early Slavic participle clauses in a cross-linguistic perspective. First, it presents evidence, using probabilistic semantic maps built from massively parallel New Testament translations (Mayer & Cysouw 2014), that the distribution of conjunct participles and absolute constructions in the earliest Slavic attestations (Figure 1) finds very close parallels, respectively, in same-subject (ss) and different-subject (ds) markers in languages with fully-fledged switch-reference systems (Figure 2).¹

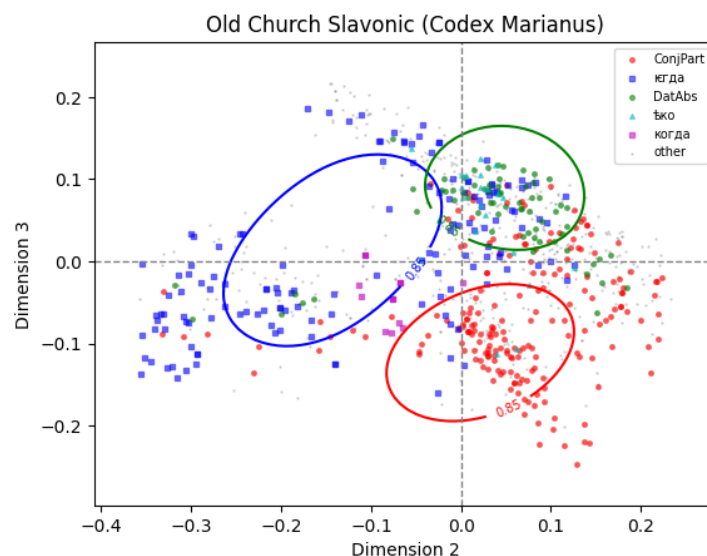


Figure 1: Probabilistic semantic map for Old Church Slavonic, with contour areas from a Kriging interpolation of the most frequent items.

This part of the analysis indicates that, particularly in more elevated registers (e.g. liturgical texts), Early Slavic participle clauses closely correspond to *canonical* (Haiman & Munro 1983: ix) switch-reference markers in genealogically and areally unrelated varieties. Within the shared semantic space of participle clauses and *jegda* 'when' clauses, participle constructions are also shown to be much more likely to correspond, cross-linguistically, to markers of sequentiality (e.g., Pular *bay* 'when.SEQ' [Evans 2017], Alamlak *-hatě* 'SEQ.ss' [Bruce 1984], Tboli *timbow* and *tikóng* 'when.SEQ' [Porter 1977], and Fon(gbe)'s resumptive pronoun with an overt antecedent *é-è* <ée> [Lefebvre & Brousseau 2002]; Figure 3). There are, in fact, well-known cross-overs between switch-reference and sequentiality markers cross-linguistically, notably clause chaining constructions, a clause-linking strategy not dissimilar to the common stacking up of participle clauses leading up to the main, finite verb in Early Slavic (2).

¹All maps presented here were generated starting from the occurrences of English *when* in the New Testament and its parallels in around 1400 varieties. Morphological subordinators were automatically extracted following the method described in Pedrazzini (2024) and post-labelled when relevant.

- (2) *i povelěvъ narodomъ vъzlešti na trěvě i priemъ*
 and command.PTCP.PFV.M.NOM.SG crowd.DAT lay.down on grass and take.PTCP.PFV.M.NOM.SG
pęť chlěbъ i dvě rybě vъzbrěvъ na nbo blgsvi.
 five bread and two fish look.up.PTCP.PFV.M.NOM.SG to heaven bless.AOR.3.SG
 ‘Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves and the two fish, and looked up to heaven, and said a blessing’ (Matthew 14:19)

A clear connection between absolutes and ds, and between conjunct participles and ss markers, was first proposed by Bickel (1999), who argued that pragmatic competition between these constructions likely gave rise to many synchronic switch-reference systems, including those in Muskogean, Yuman, and Uto-Aztecan varieties (Bickel 1999: 46). The systematic similarities between Early Slavic participle clauses and switch-reference systems extend beyond canonical configurations. Drawing particularly from Roberts’s (1988) and Stirling’s (1993) account of non-canonical switch reference in Papuan languages, the second part of this paper analyzes motivations for some relatively well-known cases of non-canonicity in participle constructions from different diachronic and diatopic Early Slavic varieties, specifically co-referential absolute constructions, and insubordinated absolutes and conjunct participles (i.e. syntactically independent, coordinated, or with no apparent matrix clause). For example, a shift in agentivity of a subject (3), a shift in time, location or grounding (from background to foreground) (4) is shown to warrant the use of co-referential absolute constructions, similarly to how these same factors can explain the use of ds markers in some switch-reference systems.

- (3) *i přišedšju vyšegorodu razbolě se velmi.*
 and come.PTCP.PFV.M.DAT.SG Vyšegorod.DAT get sick.AOR.3.SG REFL very
 ‘And when he_{AGENT} came to Vyšegorod, he_{EXPERIENCER} got very sick.’
 (Primary Chronicle, Codex Laurentianus f. 54d)
- (4) *i všedšim v gorodъ utěšista volodimerce*
 and enter.PTCP.PFV.DAT.PL in city.ACC.SG console.AOR.3.DU people of Vladimir.ACC.PL
 ‘And when they entered_{SHIFT IN SETTING} the city, they consoled the people of Vladimir.’
 (Suzdal Chronicle, Codex Laurentianus f. 126r)

Similarly to how ds markers in some switch-reference languages are systematically used in bridging constructions (cf. Guérin & Aiton 2019), dative absolutes very often repeat *some* portion of a previously foregrounded unit (a verb or one of its nominal arguments) and re-purposes it, as it were, as the background for a new foregrounded eventuality (cf. Pedrazzini 2022, 2023), which motivates many instances of subject co-referentiality between absolutes and their matrix (5).²

- (5) [*prizovi mi ju*]_R *da se poveseľju dnъs s njeju. [...]* [*prizvaně*
 summon.IMP to.me her so.that REFL enjoy.PRS.1SG today with her [...] summoned.PASS.DAT
že byvši ei]_B *pride k njemu*]_C
 PTC be.PTCP.PFV.DAT 3SG.DAT come.AOR.3SG to 3SG.DAT
 ‘‘Summon her, so that I can enjoy myself with her today. [...] After being summoned, she came to him.’ (Life of Mary, Abraham’s Niece, Bđinski Sbornik f. 7v)

A shift in mood or ‘actuality’ (Stirling 1993), such as introducing direct speech (6), or in parenthetical and metadiscursive clauses (7), may instead warrant the insubordination of a participle clause.

- (6) *onomu že rekšu něstъ došla zapadъnyichъ stranъ arijaňskaja*
 that.DAT PTC say.PTCP.PFV.DAT not be.PRS.3SG reached Western land Arian
chula
 controversy
 ‘He said that the Arian controversy had not reached the Western lands’ (Vita of Isaakios of Dalmatos, Codex Suprasliensis f. 99r)
- (7) *ot mě:stę:tb : ko ga:vo:šb : i : ko : so:di:lb : po:py:ta:i:=ta mi : konę : a :*
 from Mestjata to Gavša and to Sdila find.IMP=PTC me horse and
mě:stę:ta : sę : va:ma poklanę :
 Mestjata.NOM.SG REFL 2.DAT.DU bow.PTCP.IPFV.M.NOM.SG

²R = reference clause; B = background clause; C = continuation clause.

‘From Mestjata to Gavša and to Sdila. Get a horse for me. (And Mestjata bows to you (both)).’
(From *Birchbark letter* N422, translation by Schaeken 2018: 146)

Given how non-canonical participle clauses are found particularly frequently in original (non-translated) sources and outside of sacred and liturgical Old Church Slavonic texts, the clear cross-linguistic parallels incidentally also support the ‘nativeness’ of the Early Slavic constructions and their independent use from their Greek counterparts (a long-standing issue in Early Slavic linguistics; cf. Trost 1958; Birnbaum 1958; Růžička 1958, 1961, 1963; Večerka 1961, 1997; Skupskij 1993; Worth 1994; Corin 1995; Collins 2004, 2011).

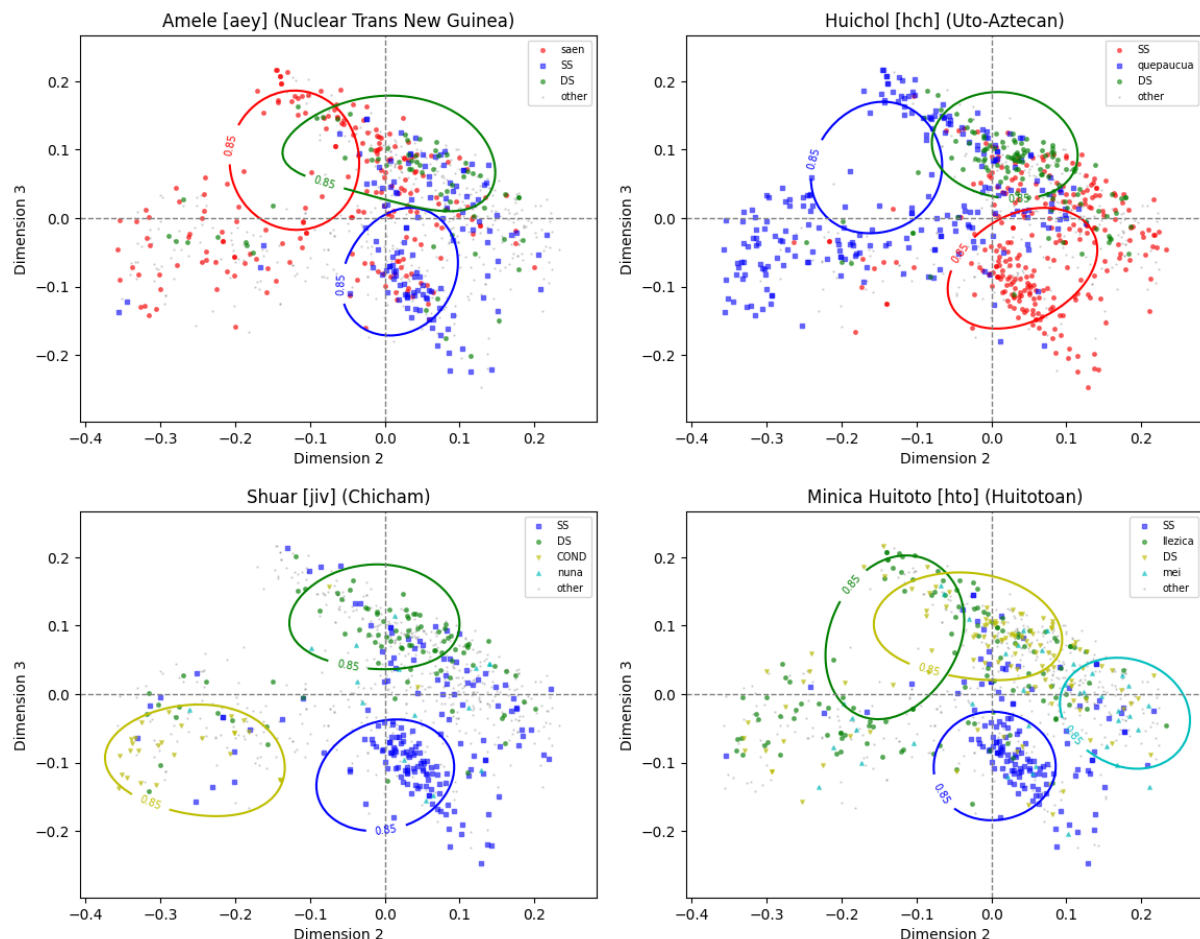


Figure 2

References

- Bickel, Balthasar. 1999. From ergativus absolutus to topic marking in Kiranti: a typological perspective. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* 25. 38–49.
- Birnbaum, Henrik. 1958. Zur Aussonderung der syntaktischen Gräzismen im Altkirchenslavischen. Einige methodische Bemerkungen. *Scando-Slavica* 4. 239–57.
- Bruce, Les. 1984. *The Alamlak language of Papua New Guinea (East Sepik)*, vol. 81 Pacific Linguistics, Series C. Canberra: Australian National University.
- Collins, Daniel E. 2004. Distance, subjecthood, and the early Slavic dative absolute. *Scando-Slavica* 50. 165–181.

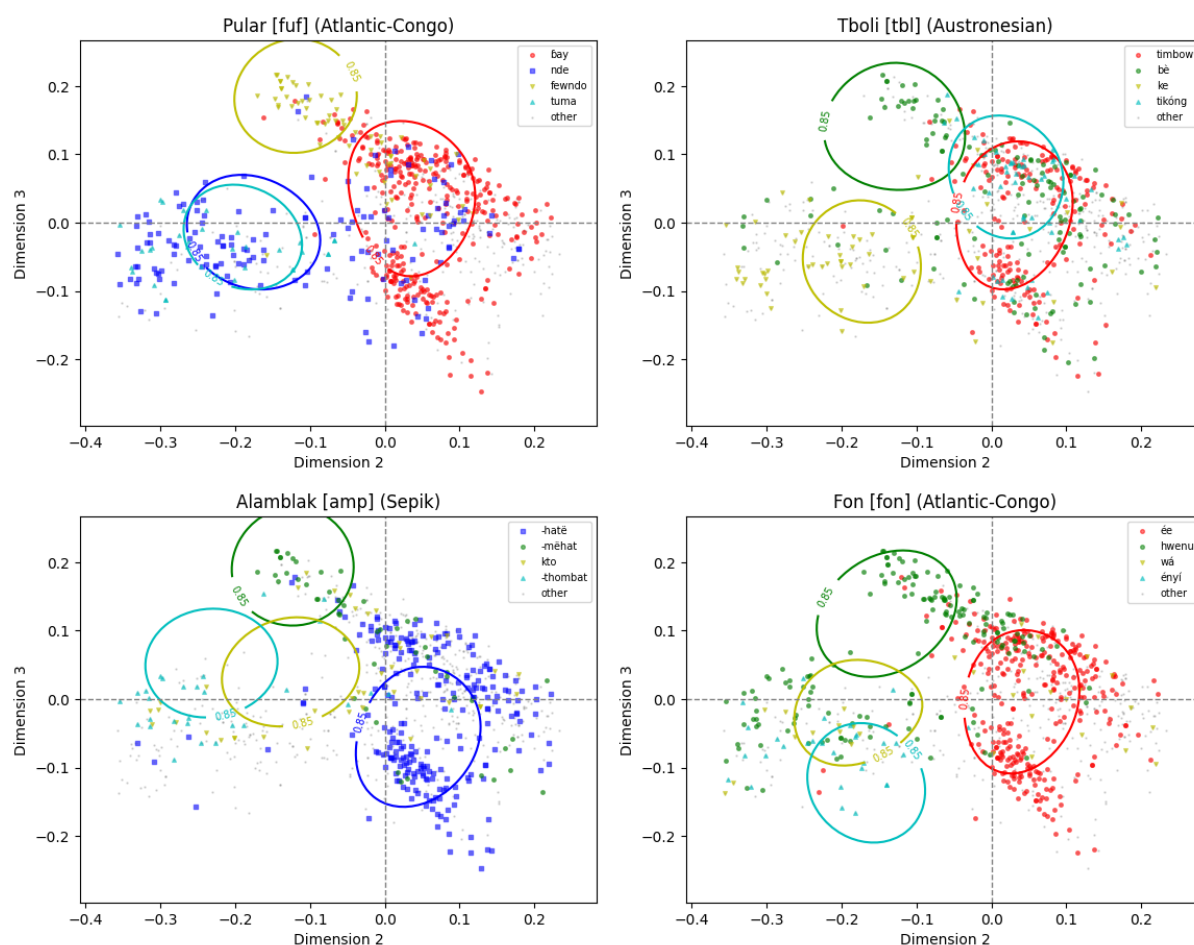


Figure 3

- Collins, Daniel E. 2011. The pragmatics of “unruly” dative absolutes in Early Slavic. *Oslo Studies in Language* 3(3). 103–130.
- Corin, Andrew R. 1995. The dative absolute in Old Church Slavonic and Old East Slavic. *Die Welt der Slaven* 40. 251–284.
- Dalrymple, Mary, John J. Lowe & Louise Mycock. 2019. *The Oxford Reference Guide to Lexical Functional Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press Oxford.
- Evans, Barrie. 2017. A teaching grammar of Pular. Ms.
- Guérin, Valérie & Grant Aiton. 2019. Bridging constructions in typological perspective. In Valérie Guérin (ed.), *Bridging constructions*, 1–44. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- Haiman, John & Pamela Munro. 1983. Introduction. In John Haiman & Pamela Munro (eds.), *Switch reference and universal grammar*, ix–xv. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Haug, Dag & Nilo Pedrazzini. 2023. The semantic map of *when* and its typological parallels. *Frontiers in Communication* 8. doi:10.3389/fcomm.2023.1163431.
- Lefebvre, Claire & Anne-Marie Brousseau. 2002. *A grammar of Fongbe*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Mayer, Thomas & Michael Cysouw. 2014. Creating a massively parallel Bible corpus. In *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC'14)*, 3158–3163. Reykjavik, Iceland: European Language Resources Association (ELRA).

- Pedrazzini, Nilo. 2022. One question, different annotation depths: A case study in Early Slavic. *Journal of Historical Syntax* 6(7). 1–40. doi:10.18148/hs/2022.v6i4-11.96.
- Pedrazzini, Nilo. 2023. *A quantitative and typological study of Early Slavic participle clauses and their competition*: University of Oxford dissertation.
- Pedrazzini, Nilo. 2024. Mapping ‘when’-clauses in Latin American and Caribbean languages: an experiment in subtoken-based typology. In Manuel Mager, Abteen Ebrahimi, Shruti Rijhwani, Arturo Oncevay, Luis Chiruzzo, Robert Pugh & Katharina von der Wense (eds.), *Proceedings of the 4th Workshop on Natural Language Processing for Indigenous Languages of the Americas (AmericasNLP 2024)*, 24–33. Mexico City, Mexico: Association for Computational Linguistics. doi:10.18653/v1/2024.americasnlp-1.4.
- Porter, Doris. 1977. *A Tboli grammar*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.
- Roberts, John R. 1988. Amele switch-reference and the Theory of Grammar. *Linguistic Inquiry* 19(1). 45–63.
- Růžička, Rudolf. 1958. Griechische Lehnsyntax im Altslavischen. *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 3. 173–85.
- Růžička, Rudolf. 1961. Struktur und Echtheit des altslawischen dativus absolutus. *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 6. 588–96.
- Růžička, Rudolf. 1963. *Das syntaktische System der altslavischen Partizipien und sein Verhältnis zum Griechischen*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- Schaeken, Jos. 2018. *Voices on Birchbark: Everyday Communication in Medieval Russia*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Skupskij, Boris I. 1993. Proisxoždenie datel’nogo samostojatel’nogo v pervonačal’nom slavjanskom perevode evangelija. *Slovo* 41-43. 49–59.
- Stirling, Lesley. 1993. *Switch-Reference and Discourse Representation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Trost, Pavel. 1958. O dativu absolutní. In Karel Horálek & Josef Kurz (eds.), *Sborník slavistických prací, věnovaných IV. Mezinárodnímu sjezdu slavistů v Moskvě*, 33–35. Prague: Universita Karlova ve Státním pedagogickém nakl.
- Večerka, Radoslav. 1961. *Syntax aktivních participií v staroslověně*. Prague: Státní Pedagogické Nakladatelství.
- Večerka, Radoslav. 1997. The influence of Greek on Old Church Slavonic. *Byzantinoslavica* 58. 363–84.
- Worth, Dean S. 1994. The dative absolute in the Primary Chronicle: Some observations. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 18. 29–46.