

Michael Skiba

Participial Prepositions and
Conjunctions in the History of English



English and Beyond

herausgegeben von Hans Sauer, Gaby Waxenberger und Monika Kirner-Ludwig

Coverabbildung: Presentation miniature from *Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*, one of the first printed books in the English language, translated by Anthony Woodville, 2nd Earl Rivers, and printed by William Caxton, who is credited with contributing largely to the enrichment and standardization of the English language. The miniature shows Rivers and Caxton presenting the book to Edward IV, accompanied by his wife Elizabeth Woodville and son Edward, Prince of Wales. Lambeth Palace Library, MS 265.



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List of Abbreviations¹

AND	Anglo-Norman Dictionary
ANST	Anglo-Norman Source Texts
BNC	British National Corpus
CALD	The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary
CGEL	Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language
CLMET	Corpus of Late Modern English Texts
CMEPV	The Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse
COCA	Corpus of Contemporary American English
COHA	Corpus of Historical American English
DOE	Dictionary of Old English
DOEL	Dictionary of the English Language
HC	Helsinki Corpus of English Texts
LDCE	The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English
MED	Middle English Dictionary
OALD	The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PCEEC	Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence
ThLL	Thesaurus Linguae Latinae

1 Further bibliographical information about the dictionaries and corpora can be found in the list of literature.

1 Introduction

1.1 Prepositions and conjunctions based on participles

Present Day English is a highly analytic language, which makes the classification of word classes a complex process in which morphological, syntactic and semantic aspects are closely related. Since most words lack morphological marking, the exact status of a word has to be derived from its context and function. This does not mean, however, that there are no word classes in English and that words can be used in random functions. Words can belong to more than one word class, and word classes are not discrete items but rather overlap on a gradual cline (Leisi and Mair 1999: 86; Traugott and Trousdale 2010: 22).

In my study, I am going to focus on prepositions and conjunctions which have participial marking and which can be found in English since Middle English times. These items are of particular interest because prepositions and conjunctions are traditionally described as closed word classes, so an influx of so many new items can be regarded as extraordinary. It will be shown in this study that prepositions and also conjunctions are not closed word classes at all (Kortmann and König 1992: 671–673).

This can be seen in the following examples:

- (1) Considering the conditions in the office, she thought it wise not to apply for the job.
- (2) Considering his age, he has made excellent progress in his studies.
(Quirk/Greenbaum 1985: 660)

In example (1), *considering* is a participle because it has a subject in the matrix clause (*she*). Example (2), however, does not have a subject because *he* is not the one who is considering anything. So is *considering* in (2) a dangling participle, or is it a preposition which could be replaced by *with regard to*? In this study, I will provide arguments for the latter analysis.

Due to the aforementioned problem of classifying word classes there is a lot of disagreement in dictionaries and grammars with regard to the grammatical status of many participial forms in English. While a word like *during* is undisputedly categorized as a preposition, there is much uncertainty concerning items like *including* and *excluding*: *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (2005), *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2009) and *The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2008) have entries for *including*, prep. and *excluding*, prep., whereas the *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) has only *excluding*, prep., but not *including*. *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1989) has neither entry. Even the *OED* is inconsistent:

there is a separate entry for *including*, prep., whereas *excluding* is listed only as an adjective. Importantly, the entry for *including*, prep., is recent. Until 2016, *including* only had an entry as an adjective, and in the third edition (September 2016), the independent full entry of a preposition was added. Generally, there is a lot in the state of flux during the revision of the *OED*. Many items have been promoted from quasi-prepositions or quasi-conjunctions to full-fledged prepositions and conjunctions.

The *OED* has full prepositional entries for many present participial forms (*abating, barring, bating, concerning, considering, depending, during, enduring, ensuing, excepting, failing, following, including, moyening, nongainstanding, notagainstanding, noughtagainstanding, noughtwithstanding, out-taking, passing, pending, regarding, reserving, respecting, saving, touching, withstanding, indurand, moyenant, non-obstant, pendant, touchant, absent*) and some past participial forms (*excepted, reserved, out-taken, seen, 'cep/ 'cept, except, outcept, past*). Furthermore, there are full conjunctive entries for *being, during, excepting, notwithstanding, noughtwithstanding, providing, saving, seeing, so being, provided, purveyed, reserved, except, and outcept*. Leading grammars do not follow the *OED* in this labelling: Huddleston and Pullum list only some of the items, labelling them as “homonymous with the gerund-participle or past participle” (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 611); Quirk et al. list only some of them, too, labelling them “marginal prepositions with verbal affinities” (1985: 667).

Visser is rather cautious by calling the phenomenon “[c]onversion or functional shift” (1966: 1217), giving the following example:

(3) *'Pending the result, I want you to remain.*

Visser states: “Absolute constructions with an *-ing* form are often used in such a way that the form in *-ing* may be felt as operating like a conjunction or preposition” (1966: 1217–8). He characterizes this use as “often only in a transition stage” (1966: 1218).

With regard to participial prepositions Kisbye (1971) explains that “[a]n offshoot of the clause-equivalent and absolute functions is the use of the present participle with the value approaching that of a preposition”, and that this use is a “direct imitation of Latin and French” which becomes “common after the 14th century” (1971: 35). He adds that “[t]he past participle is less liable than the present to stiffen into a preposition under French and Latin influence” (1971: 77). This different treatment of participial vs. prepositional forms makes it obvious that the status of many of these items is unclear and its assessment is still in a state of flux.

In order to understand how these items can be categorized appropriately, the transition from participial to prepositional use has to be examined. Brinton and Traugott (2005)

have raised this question in one of their case studies. They call these items “converbs” which function as “non-finite adjuncts” with “adverbial” functions (2005: 117) and explain that there was a “[r]einterpretation of *V-ing* forms” in Middle English (118) and Early Modern English (119). They further state that this development has become rare in Modern English but “nevertheless occurred recently with respect to *following*” (119).

Mustanoja in his *A Middle English Syntax* (1960) lists only seven participial prepositions: *accordant/according to* (355), *except* (377), *excepting* (377), *notwithstanding* (394), *outtaken* (404), *past* (405), and *saving* (407). In my study, I will show that as early as in Middle English there were many more such items and that the pattern is productive even today.

1.2 The aim and structure of the present study

The aim of this study is to investigate the origins, development and grammatical properties of participial prepositions and conjunctions in English. The findings will then be situated into the context of the history of English and language change in general.

It becomes clear just from scanning the *OED* entries that the items in question originated in Middle and Early Modern English under the influence of Anglo-French and Latin. This first impression is confirmed in further dictionary and corpus work. In order to illuminate the underlying mechanisms and details of the emergence of participial prepositions and conjunctions in English, a combination of both extensive and intensive dictionary and corpus work has been performed in this study. Since the *OED* entries have already shown the influence of Anglo-French and Latin, a comparative investigation of the situation in Latin, Romance and Germanic languages will be made to get a view of the big(ger) picture. Furthermore, an overview of the theoretical framework of the topic will be given both in a historical perspective and with regard to current linguistic research.

The aforementioned overview will be the starting-point of this study. In Chapter 2, a brief history of participles, prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs as grammatical categories in grammar writing and lexicography will be sketched, then an overview of current research pertaining to the topic will be given. In Chapter 3, the big(ger) picture will be presented by contextualizing the development of participial prepositions and conjunctions in the general development of Romance and Germanic languages starting with Proto-Indo-European.

The empirical part of this study, which is the backbone of my study, will be introduced in Chapter 4 with methodological considerations regarding the problems of working with historical and diachronic corpora and regarding the categorization of findings. Chapter 5 will then summarize the general tendencies of my findings in the *Helsinki Corpus* with a particular focus on chronology and text genres.

INTRODUCTION

The main chapter of this book is Chapter 6, where I will present word profiles of every item followed by a detailed discussion of the respective item. This chapter is based on a range of dictionaries (*OED*, *MED*, *DOEL*, *AND*) and historical/diachronic corpora (*HC*, *CMEPV*, *PCEEC*, *CLMET*) and will end with a conclusion based on the findings of all the dictionaries and corpora.

In Chapter 7, the investigation will move from diachrony to synchrony with an examination of some most recent items (*according to*, *based on* and *looking at*) and a view of the current development based on the *COHA*, the *COCA* and the *BNC*. I will show that the pattern of participial prepositions is still productive today and has even been taken over by native words (*looking at*).

Finally, Chapter 8 will provide a general conclusion and an outlook for further research.

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