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ON THE QUESTION OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH

In this paper we shall consider participial and infinitival constructions which occur after a substantive in a postverbal position. Some of such constructions are commonly known as the "Accusative with the Participle (the Infinitive)". These constructions are so common and the knowledge of them is so trivial that we do not even bother to notice that sometimes the participle and the infinitive in the same position are not parts of the above mentioned constructions. The question is not merely a matter of terminology, it is a matter of correct understanding of English sentences. Let us take this example:

1. I saw some children crossing the street.

How do we understand the sentence? Does it mean 1/"I saw how some children were crossing the street" or 2/"I saw some children who were crossing the street"? In other words, is the participle here the second part of the construction "Accusative with Participle I" or is it used as an attribute to the word "children" ?

We borrowed this example from a textbook of English.¹ The authors of the textbook used the sentence to illustrate the construction "Accusative with Participle I". Formally, the words "children crossing" coincide with the construction, but in the given context, in our opinion, they cannot be regarded as such. We think that the second transformation of the given example is correct, and we have found confirmation of our point of view in "A Reference Grammar for Students of English" by Close R.A.² The author gives an example which is analogous to the given one :

2. I can see several people standing in the back. The author also writes that the participle "standing" is used here "as an adjective".

Another example which attracted our attention as erroneous was found in the "English Grammar" by Novitskaya T.M. and Kuchin N.D.³ / This example is as follows :

3. We saw Soviet films shown in many Bombay cinemas.

The authors give this example to illustrate the construction "Accusative with Participle II". But participle II in this sentence (shown) is definitely used as an adjective to modify the noun "films" and not as the second element of the above mentioned

construction. In other words, we understand this sentence as follows "We saw, Soviet films which were shown in many Bombay cinemas".

The constructions under consideration, as we have already said, are quite common and are widely used in English. That is why the discussion of the given problem seems to us very relevant, especially for teaching purposes. These constructions are described in every English grammar book, but the question of distinguishing between the verbals as the second element of the given constructions and as an attribute to the preceding substantive has hardly been touched upon. Usually, the authors prefer to explain the difference between the infinitive and the participle as the second element of such constructions⁴ which may also be important to a student of English.

In any case, we looked through a score of English grammar books and only in one of them, written by Kiachalova K.N. and Izrailevich E.E., is this question more or less described.⁵ The authors write that after the verbs to see, to watch, to notice a substantive can be followed by participle I which is used as an attribute to the preceding substantive, and they give the following example:

3. Not far from the park I saw a woman sitting on a bench. The authors also explain that such word combinations coincide in form with the construction "Accusative with Participle I", but they have a different meaning and can only be distinguished between by the context.

Now, what are the elements of the context that can help us distinguish one case from the other? In our opinion, it may be the meaning of definiteness or indefiniteness of the preceding substantive. If the substantive is used with the definite article or it is represented by a personal pronoun, then the participle can be regarded as the second element of the construction "Accusative with the Participle". And if we replace the indefinite pronoun "some" in our first example with the definite article (I saw the children crossing the street), then we shall be able to see that the meaning of the sentence will change and we shall understand it as "I saw how the children were crossing the street". In other words, we shall have the construction "Accusative with 'Participle I'".

On the other hand, if the substantive has the meaning of indefiniteness (and is used with the indefinite article or pronoun or without any determinative at all), then the following participle is usually an attribute to this substantive.

Syntactically, this can be explained as follows. If the substantive is indefinite, it will naturally require some modification and the following verbal will enter into an attributive relationship with it. If the substantive is definite, it does not require any modification and the following verbal enters into a predicative relationship with it, which is really the case with the constructions "Accusative with the Participle".

All these considerations usually apply in cases when the substantive and the participle follow the verbs to see, to notice, to watch. And even in such cases the rule is not absolute. Let us take this example:

4. Then he looked out of the window and saw clouds gathering. (Th. Dreiser)

In this sentence the substantive which occurs after the verb "saw" is indefinite, but the following participle is ambiguous as to its syntactic meaning. At any rate, we cannot be quite sure that the participle here is used as an attribute to the word "clouds", because the transformation "He saw clouds that were gathering" in the given context seems to be very doubtful. It is more natural to understand this sentence as follows "He looked out of the window and saw that clouds were gathering", which proves that the words "clouds gathering" in this context should be regarded as the construction "Accusative with the Participle".

Evidently, this happens when the participle has no modifying words, and it alone is not enough to fulfil an attributive function. But if we try and use some modifying words referring to the participle in the previous example, we shall see that the syntactic meaning of the participle will change and it will obtain an attributive meaning:

5. He ... saw clouds gathering *in the West*. (=He saw clouds that were gathering in the West)

On the other hand, there may be cases when the substantive is definite, but the following participle is used as an attribute. Let us take this example:

6. Jolion saw the figures of Holly and Val Dartie moving across the lawn. (J. Galsworthy)

In this sentence the participle "moving" is used as an attribute to the word "figures" (the figures ... that were moving). This usually happens when the substantive has some modifying words. The participle in this case is separated from the head word and loses its chance to enter into a predicative relationship with that word. In fact, the shorter the substantive part in such cases is, the less probability exists for the participle to be understood as an attribute, and when the substantive is represented by a personal pronoun such probability disappears altogether. And it is not without reason that English grammarians prefer to illustrate the "Accusative with the Participle" constructions with examples of this type:

7. I saw him working in the field. (Curme)

8. I saw him running. (Jespersen)

9. I saw the man crossing the road. (Hornby)

Difficulties of the same kind also emerge when the substantive is followed by the infinitive, especially when such word combinations occur after the verbs to want, to need, to like, to wish and the infinitive is used with the particle "to".

The infinitive in this position can have various syntactic connections with the previous words and, for this reason, may be ambiguous. Let us take this example:

10. When other people want something *to keep* my dividends down, you will call out the police. (B. Shaw)

As a matter of fact, the infinitive here has triple ambiguity: 1/ it may refer to the preceding substantive as its logical subject and to the preceding verb and understood as the second part of the "Accusative with the Infinitive" construction (= * people want that something should keep); 2/ it may refer to the preceding substantive only and understood as its attribute (= people want something that would keep); 3/ it may refer to the subject of the sentence (people) as its logical subject and understood as an adverbial modifier of purpose (= people want something in order to keep).

No difficulty emerges when the infinitive is retroactive⁶, that is active in form and passive in meaning. In this case the infinitive is used as an attribute to the preceding substantive. For example:

11. I often feel I want someone to talk to. (A. Cronin)

There is no problem when the infinitive is used without the particle "to" after the verbs to see, to hear and so on. In this case it is, of course, the second part of the "Accusative with the infinitive" construction.

Difficulties arise, as we have already said, when the substantive and the infinitive are used after the verbs to want, to wish, to need, to like. Let us take this example :

12. She is going to the States and she *wants a caretaker to look* after her house. (I. Murdoch)

In this sentence after the verb "to want" there is the substantive and the infinitive. Formally, this word combination coincides with the construction "Accusative with the Infinitive". But it is not. Transformations (chosen by English informants) show that the infinitive here is used as an attribute to the preceding substantive (=she wants a caretaker who would look) .

Here, too, the meaning of definiteness or indefiniteness can help us distinguish between the infinitive as the second element of the construction "Accusative with the Infinitive" and as an attribute to the preceding substantive. If the substantive is indefinite, then the infinitive is most probably used attributively. And if the substantive is definite in meaning, then the word combination is the "Accusative with the Infinitive"

construction. We can see this, if we use the definite article with the word "caretaker" in the previous example :

13. She wants the caretaker to look after her house (= * She wants that the caretaker should look).

In some very rare cases such word combinations may be ambiguous. For example:

14. ... he just wants somebody to understand. (P. Abrahams)

(=... * he just wants that somebody should understand.)

(=... he just wants somebody who would understand)

Here, only the shades of lexical meaning of the verb "to want", which may be identified in a wider context, can help us distinguish between the above mentioned syntactic constructions.

Difficulties may also arise in distinguishing between the infinitive as an attribute to the preceding substantive and as an adverbial modifier of purpose. In this case it is important whether the infinitive can be correlated with some other preceding substantive as its logical subject (not the substantive after which the infinitive stands) which is usually possible if such a substantive expresses an animate object. Let us take this example:

15. The news did something to arrest the run of the new doctor's unpopularity. (A.Cronin)

In this sentence the infinitive is an attribute to the preceding substantive (= something that arrested). But if we replace the word "news" with a word expressing a human being (*The secretary did something to arrest the run ...*), then it will be possible to correlate the infinitive with the word "secretary" as its logical subject and understand it as an adverbial modifier of purpose (*The secretary did something in order to arrest the run ...*). And still, there is some possibility to understand the infinitive as an attribute to the word "something" (*The secretary did something that arrested the run ...*), because the indefinite substantive requires some modification. But if we replace the word "something" with some definite substantive, say the word "this", then the infinitive in such a sentence can be understood only as an adverbial modifier of purpose (*The secretary did this to arrest the run ... = in order to arrest*).

We suppose that the meaning of definiteness or indefiniteness of a substantive may predetermine usage and meaning of other words and forms in a sentence. Let us take this example:

16. She wanted to close a door behind her ... (G. Greene)

In this sentence the words "to close a door" have a figurative meaning. But if we use the word "door" with the definite article, the whole word combination will obtain its direct meaning.

Or let us take this example :

18. Houses built in our town have all modern conveniences .

In this context the participle "built" expresses the meaning equivalent to the present indefinite tense (Houses that are built). But if the substantive to which the word "built" refers obtains the meaning of definiteness, then it will require a continuous aspect to express the present (The houses being built ...). On the other hand, if we use the participle "built" after this substantive with the definite article, it will express the past (The houses built in our town = The houses that were built). At the same time the continuous form of this participle seems to be improbable with the word "Houses" when it has the indefinite meaning in the given context (* Houses being built in our town ...).

Summary

The participle occurring after a substantive and the verbs to see, to watch, to notice, to observe is not always the second element of the "Accusative with the Participle" construction. Sometimes it is an attribute to the preceding substantive.

The meaning of definiteness or indefiniteness of the preceding substantive can help us distinguish between these two syntactic meanings of the participle. If the substantive has the meaning of definiteness, then the participle is, as a rule, the second element of the above mentioned construction, and if the substantive has the meaning of indefiniteness, then the following participle is, as a rule, an attribute to it, because such a substantive requires some modification.

The infinitive occurring after a substantive and the verbs to want, to need, to wish, to like is not always the second element of the "Accusative with the Infinitive" construction. Sometimes it is used as an attribute to that substantive.

Here, too, the meaning of definiteness or indefiniteness of the substantive can help us distinguish between these two syntactic meanings of the infinitive. If the substantive has the meaning of definiteness, then the infinitive is the second element of the "Accusative with the Infinitive" construction, and if it has the meaning of indefiniteness, the infinitive is an attribute to it.

The infinitive in the same position can also be used as an adverbial modifier of purpose. In this case it must be able to correlate with some other preceding substantive (not the substantive after which the infinitive stands) as its logical subject, which is possible if this substantive expresses an animate object. The meaning of definiteness of the preceding substantive contributes much to that, too.

The meaning of definiteness or indefiniteness of a substantive may predetermine usage and meaning of some other words and forms in a sentence.

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