

Sein + participle constructions in German

Whereas the Eng. auxiliary *to be* in combination with a past participle always obtains a passive or stative reading (cf. *Peter's key is lost / is gone*), the corresponding Ger. auxiliary *sein* is ambiguous in such combinations between (at least) three interpretations: a. perfect tense (with intrans. verbs) like in *Der Hund ist (gestern) entlaufen* 'The dog ran away (yesterday)', b. stative (with intrans. verbs) like in *Der Hund (hier) ist entlaufen* 'The dog (here) is a stray', and c. passive (with trans. verbs) like in *Der Hund ist verwundet* 'The dog is injured.' WUNDERLICH (1997: 2) discusses the question whether the participle "is ambiguous between perfect and passive, or whether there exists a more basic representation that allows the multiplicity of functions." He argues that the participle may optionally have passive reading, but that everything else is contributed by the auxiliaries or by conditions under which the attributive construction is licensed. Advocating these hypotheses, I investigated how they could be adopted to include perfect constructions not designating a posterior situation and a type of *sein* + participle constructions that have neither perfect nor passive meaning. After dividing the *sein*-constructions into perfect and non-perfect constructions (which are in most respects clearly distinguishable), the non-perfect constructions can be subdivided into three subtypes as shown in table 1. This division is fairly subtle and by no means clear-cut. There seems to be a scale reaching from (stative) passive constructions like *der Schaden ist behoben* 'the damage is eliminated', which have verb-like and adjective-like features, up to clear adjectives like *beliebt* and *verrückt*, which have been totally isolated from the verbs they originally were derived from.

Table 1: constructions formed with *sein* + past participle

