A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO INFINITIVE AND -ING CLAUSES

Claudia Leah
Assoc. Prof., PhD, University of Oradea

*Abstract: Dealing with a well-known, probably overdiscussed grammatical issue - **infinitive** and **-ing** non-finite verb forms- this paper's aim is to focus on some special types of subordinate clauses based on infinitive and -ing forms. It tries to identify, highlight, combine and compare some basic characteristics of these two non-finite verb forms with grammatical structures, clauses and functions, in order to show the existing correspondence between them, with all the differences and similarities that can be found in a comparative/contrastive study.*

Key words: *non-finite, infinitive, -ing, clauses, subordination*

Non-finite verb forms, or verbals represent a challenging theme to focus on because of the many confusions made in using them. The infinitive and the -ing verb forms have their own specificities, which distinguish them, but they may also have same contexts to be used in, which show their similarities. Generally speaking, infinitive and -ing forms seem to be very different.

According to Leech (2003:225-226), the term *infinitive* refers to a word, i.e. a basic form of the verb, such as *(to) be, (to) have, (to) do* to a phrase, i.e. a verb phrase which begins with an infinitive such as*: (to) be seen, (to) be reading, (to) have been written* and to a clause, i.e. a clause with an infinitive verb phrase, such as *to give a book to someone, to have read a book.*

Many linguists have discussed this problem of non-finite clauses and presented it in their work in many ways, emphasizing important and problematic issues. Leech (2003: 316-317) considers that non-finite clauses, which are clauses without a finite verb, are more common in written English than in spoken English. In a non-finite clause the verb form, also called non-finite verb or verbal can be:

- An Infinitive form with to (to + Verb)
- An –Ing form (Verb + ing)
- A Past Participle form (Verb + -ed)
- An Infinitive without to (Verb) (Less Common)

Modal auxiliaries do not have non-finite forms (Infinitive or Participle) and therefore, they

cannot occur in nonfinite verb phrases or clauses.

Non-finite clauses fall into three major categories:

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❖ ***To- Infinitive clauses****, whose specific features are:*

- usually have no subject or the subject is optional;

E.g. *The best thing is* ***to leave your friends for a while****.*

- if there is a subject, it is usually introduced by **for**;

E.g. *The best thing is* ***for you to leave your friends for as while****.*

- A to- Infinite clause can replace a finite clause.

E.g.*I hope to be present* - instead of – *I hope that I will be present*

❖ ***–Ing clauses***

Like Infinite clauses, -ing clauses bear such characteristics as those expressed below:

- there is usually no subject in the –ing clause, but the –ing verb uses the subject of the main clause as its own subject;

E.g. **Entering the room**, I broke my leg in the damaged floor.

- in more formal, written English –ing clauses sometimes do have a subject;

E.g. **The two friends having reached agreement** they returned peacefully to their dwellings.

- an –ing clause can take the place of a finite clause;

E.g.***Living in the town*** *we used to go out very frequently*. for

When we lived in the town*, we used to go out very frequently.*

- An –ing clause can be like a finite clause with both the subject and the verb omitted.

E.g. *He wrote his greatest novel* ***while working as a clerk****.*

He wrote his greatest novel ***while he was working as a clerk****.*

❖ ***Past Partcipal*** *clauses*

These are more common in written then in spoken English. They have a passive meaning.

- usually they have no object;

E.g. *The woman lay on the ground,* ***ignored by the people*** *passing by.*

- a Past Participle clause can have a subject different from the subject of the main clause;

E.g. *Both sides signed the agreement .* ***That done,*** *the chairman brought the meeting to an end.*(**that done= after that was done**)

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- a Past Participle clause can take the place of a finite clause.

E.g. *The boy **who was injured in the accident** was taken to hospital.*

*The boy **injured in the accident** was taken to hospital.*

The non-finite value of *Infinitive* and *–Ing* clauses determines the lack of morphological categories of number, person and gender. Some grammarians call this *deficiency*. According to Quirk(1972: 724-725) the absence of the finite verb from in the non-finite clauses means that they have no distinction of number, person or modal auxiliary. This, together with the frequent absence of subject, suggests their value as a means of syntactical compression.

An exemple like: *We met you[**when you?/we? were**] leaving the room*, shows how the advantage of compactness must be balanced against the stumbling block of ambiquity. A semantically parallel finite construction enables one to identify an understood subject:

E.g. *I asked **to leave** (I asked if I could leave)*

*I asked **herto leave** (I asked her if she would leave)*

When no referential link at all can be discovered with a nominal in the linguistic context, an indefinite subject somebody/something may be supplied or a definite subject I/you/he may be provided by the context:

E.g. ***To be a teacher** is to have a beautiful job**.(For someone to be teacher...)***

*Your marks are not very good, to be honest**.(.....,if I am to be honest)***.

In negative non-finite clauses, the negative particle is placed immediatly before the verb: E.g *It's his fault for **not passing** the exam. Our solution is **not to talk** to him anymore*.

Grammarians consider that identifying the subject of a non-finite clauses is somentimes difficult because of the confusion it often creates, since quite frequently we do not know whether the subject belongs to the subordinate or is part of the main clause. Thus, the solution suggested by the grammarians is to apply the attachment rule. According to Quirk (1972: 756-759), the rule, which may be called the attachment rule is the following: if the subject is understood rather than actually present, it is assumed to be identical in reference to the subject of the superordinate clause:

E.g. *The oranges**, when (they are) ripe**, are picked and sorted.*

In abbreviated clauses (i.e. non-finite clauses or verbless clauses introduced by a conjunction) such as the above, a direct ellipsis of the subject and operator may be postulated.

Although the attachment rule is traditionally stated with reference to Participles, it applies just as much to Infinitival clauses as to Participle clauses. The following are sentences of graded acceptability:

E.g. *To climb this mountain, we had to take various precautions.*

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To climb this mountain , various precautions had to be taken.

Identifying the subject is not the only problem concerning non-finite clauses. According to Quirk (1972: 759-760), a second problem about non-finite clauses is the difficulty of defining the range of semantic connections that they may bear to the main clause when no subordinator is present. The following examples show something of the wide range of meanings possible for non-finite clauses:

E.g. *Being a farmer, he works a lot.(*i.e. *As he is a farmer , he works a lot).*

*Using a sharp axe, he fought his way into the building. (*i.e. *By using a sharp axe, he*

fought his way into the building).

*Cleared, this place looks very nice. (*i.e. *When cleared, this place looks very nice).*

These adverbial clauses resemble non-restrictive clauses, implying the versatile connective function of the coordinator *and*. Non-restrictive relative clauses (introduced by *and*) are capable of assuming, according to the context, a more precise semantic role:

E.g. *The child, who was upset by his father's treatment, decided to leave the house.*

The child was upset by his father's treatment and decided to leave the house.

The child, upset by his father`s treatment, decided to leave the house.

Unlike relative clauses non-finite clauses can occur freely in initial, medial or final positions: E.g. *Upset by his father`s harsh treatment, the child decided to leave the house.*

The child decided to leave the house, upset by his father`s harsh treatment.

The same point may be illustrated with –ing clauses:

E.g. *Scratching his head, the little boy didn't know what to say. (The little boy scratched his head and didn't know what to say).*

Non-finite clauses can be found in all positions, initial, middle and even in the final position and in turn they can post-modify a noun phrase. Quirk (1972: 876-879) considers that post-modification of the noun phrase is possible with non-finite clauses (- ing clauses and Infinitive clauses) and the correspondence between restrictive relative and non-finite clauses can be illustrated as follows:

reads

is reading

The boy who *read* *the text is my cousin*

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was reading

will read/ be reading

The boy reading the text is my cousin.

where the latter will be interpreted as equivalent to one of the former (more) explicit versions.

There are several types of post-modification by non-finite clauses such as: non-restrictive and appositive post-modification.

According to Quirk (1972: 881-882) non-restrictive post-modification can also be achieved with non-finite clauses:

E.g. *The boy, to be seen daily at the library, has dedicated his life to books.*

The car, crossing the street, had terrible crash.

The non-finite clauses have, in this case, an obvious correspondence with non-restrictive relative clauses:

E.g. *...who can be seen daily at the library...*

...which was crossing the street...

If we move the non-finite clause in front of the related noun, the correspondence disappears:

E.g. *Crossing the street, the car had a terrible crash*.

Non-finite clauses may be found involved in an implicit relation with a wide range of different constructions. For example, the following non-finite clause: *The woman, wearing a black dress, looked quite slim in it*, could be a reduction of a relative clause: *...who was wearing...*, of a causal clause*: ..because she was wearing...*, or of a temporal one*: ...whenever she wore... .*

In Quirk's opinion (1972: 882-883) the appositive post-modification is possible and common to Infinitive clauses. A restrictive example, such as:

E.g. *The idea to join their group was a good one.*

would correspond to the finite clause: *that we/they should join their group*, though the use of the modal should in this case is quite uncommon.

There are cases of non-finite post-modification where no corresponding finite opposition exists: *Any attempt to escape is useless. (*Any attempt that one should escape is useless).*

A non-restrictive example such as:

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E.g. *The idea, to leave this job and join their company, was a good one.*

leaves the subject of the non-finite clause to be understood from the context: *that I should leave my job and join their company.*

With –Ing clauses, appositive post-modification is possible only if the clause is headed by a prepositional phrase as in: *The issue of learning French.*

The –ing clauses in appositive structures have prepositions which are absent in the corresponding finite clauses: *The hope of passing the exam ~ X hopes that he will pass the exam.*

According to Leech (2001: 227-228) there are two kinds of Infinitive clauses:

The to-Infinitive clause, in which the verb is used after the particle to (to + verb) and the Bare Infinitive clause, in which the verb does not follow the particle to (verb), and which is much less common.

The Infinitive clause is called a clause because it can have such elements as subject, object, complement and adverbial, as well as an Infinitive verb phrase

As Infinitive clause is similar to a finite subordinate clause for example a that-clause or an if-clause, as the following examples show:

E.g. *I'm sorry to have done such a mistake.* means

I'm sorry that I did such a mistake. (that-clause)

or

It's good for you to be ready by 8 o'clock. means

It's good if you are/were ready by 8 o'clock. (if-clause)

Like Infinitive verbs, To-Infinitive clauses have many uses, they follow a series of verbs, adjectives, nouns and can have a lot of functions. Thus, Infinitive clauses follow:

Some verbs (as subjects): *to hope, to like, to want, to begin, to learn, to expect*.

…verb + to + verb (…)

E.g. *I expect to see you later.*

John is hoping to learn Chinese.

To-Infinitive clauses may also follow some linking verbs as a complement: *be, seem, appear*: E.g.*This food seems to be very tasty*.

They follow the object after some verbs as: *to ask, to tell, to expect, to consider:*

… verb + object + to + verb (…)

E.g. *The teacher told us to come back later*.

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They follow such adjectives as: *easy, hard, difficult, ready.*

…adjective + to + verb (…)

E. g. *This car is easy to drive.*

They follow some nouns which come from verbs or adjectives: *desire, wish, will*:

...noun+ to+ verb(...)

E.g. *I told him my desire to go abroad*.

General nouns like: *time, place, way, reason*

E.g. *I'll find a way to solve this problem.*

They follow some common nouns or pronouns. The Infinitive is similar in meaning to a relative clause. The meaning is that of purpose.

...noun/pronoun + to+ verb(. . .)

E.g. *Can I buy something to eat?*

I want a person to help me carry my luggage.

Sometimes the Infinitive clause is linked to the noun/pronoun by a preposition: *Could you call somebody to talk to?*

They can follow such adverbs as: *too* or *enough*, usually with a word between:

"too/enough + to + verb (...)

E.g. *I received enough water to drink.*

They can act as a subject; more usually, the to-Infinitive is a delayed subject at the end of a clause beginning with it:

...to + verb (...) + verb (...)

E.g. *To prove his generosity would be easy.*

Also:

...it + verb (...) + to + verb (...)

E.g. *It would be easy to prove his generosity.* (delayed subject)

It's useless to apologize, because I won't forgive you. (delayed subject)

They can act as an adverbial, especially of purpose (answering the question why?, what…for?)

E.g. *Why did you run so much? To lose on weight.*

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In formal style, we add in order to or so as to before the Infinitive clause.

…clause + in order/so as + to + verb(…)

E.g. *They are working very much, (in order) to earn more.*

The car brakes need repairing, (so as) to prevent a possible accident.

Bare Infinitive clauses are much less common than to-Infinitive clauses. We use Bare Infinitive clauses in the following situations:

After the verb *to help* or after a verb idiom such as *had better* or *would rather*:

E.g. *This perfume helps keep you fresh.*

We'd better be careful.

After the object following such verbs as: *to make, to see, to hear, to let.*

E.g. *The story was so interesting, it made me think about it a lot.*

After *what/all* + subject + verb (…) do + be…

E.g. *What I've done is make them speak.*

All I did was report the news.

After *rather (...) than* expressing preference.

E.g. *I'd rather read a thousand books than travel three days by bus.*

I prefer to do my own repairs, rather than take the car to a garage.

Although different in form, -Ing clauses resemble a lot Infinitive clauses; the former category is similar to the latter since it can occur after a set of verbs, after specific nouns, pronouns and in addition, to that they can act as adverbials just as Infinitive clauses do. According to Leech (2001: 232-235) an –Ing clause can easily be recognized because it begins with an –ing verb and it is a subordinate clause with several different uses within the sentences.

The –ing clause is sometimes called either a Gerund construction (when it behaves like a noun phrase) or a Present Participle construction (when it behaves more like an adjective phrase).

The –ing clauses are called clauses by grammarians because they can have clause elements such as object, complement and adverbial after the –ing verb. Usually, they do not have a subject before the –ing verb, but it is possible to have –ing clause construction with subject.

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E.g. *He insists on calling you now.*

Calling him, she told him the truth.

In the case of a personal pronoun subject, we use the object pronoun (e.g. us) rather than the subject pronoun (e.g. we): *He insists on our calling him now.* (formal) and *He insists on us calling him now.* (informal) In a negative –ing clause, *not* goes before the verb –ing: *He insists on not calling you until next Monday.*

As mentioned before, Infinitive and –Ing clauses have some features of their own and moreover they fit into some patterns like those written below (e.g. main verb+verb-ing)

-Ing clauses follow many verbs (as object): Main verb + Verb-ing (…)

E.g. *I have enjoyed seeing you*

Would you mind speaking more slowly?

They follow the noun phrase after some verbs: Verb + noun phrase + Verb-ing (…)

E.g. *I don't mind you living here.*

Tomorrow, we can watch the little dog being fed.

They come before the main verb as subject:

Veb-ing (…) + verb (…)

E.g. *Reading novels helps enlarging your vocabulary.*

Watching TV can be a waste of time.

-Ing Clauses After a Preposition

The next set of patterns show –ing clauses employed after a preposition:

Abstract nouns (hope, chance, act, etc.) + of + Verb-ing (…)

E.g. *The difficulty of writing poems made him put an end to his career as an artist.*

The hope of finding his brother, turned into an obsession.

Adjective + Preposition + Verb-ing (…) e.g. good at, afraid of, tired of, angry with.

E.g. *I'm tired of being considered a fool.*

He's good at surprising me.

Verb + adverbial/noun phrase + preposition + Verb-ing (…) e.g. prevent someone from verb-ing, stop someone from verb-ing, look forward to verb-ing

E.g. *I'm looking forward to seeing you.*

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They accused me of betraying you.

This construction can also occur in the passive form: I was accused of betraying you.

-Ing clauses after a noun or a pronoun are similar to relative clauses, but without who or which followed by the verb be. They are more common in writing.

E.g. *All the students learing in this university were foreigners*. (= students who were learning in this university…).

The Santa Claus brought the child a gift containing delicious sweets. (= a gift which contained delicious sweets).

The dress was bought by someone wearing a red hat. (= someone who wore a red hat).

-Ing clauses as adverbials can follow or precede the main clause. These are also more common in writing and are formal in style.

E.g. *The man greeted me, smiling ironically.*

Being the best in the class, he was awarded with a sum of money.

In this type of clause, the –ing form behaves like an adjective and it goes with the subject in the main clause. For instance, in the first sentence the man is the one who is smiling.

The –ing clause can also take a middle position in the main clause:

E.g. *The children, having done their homework were awaiting the dinner. (… after doing their homework…).*

It's impossible to make a clear distinction between the to-Infinitive clause and the –Ing clause. However there are some rules to consider related to the choice between the to-Infinitive and –Ing clauses.

A to-Infinitive clause never follows a preposition, but an –ing clause often does.

E.g. *I told him to go home.*

I accused him of telling me lies.

After a main verb (e.g. *to love, to like*), the to-Infinitive often describes possible action, while an –ing clause describes the actual performance of the action.

E.g *I'd like to go abroad – but I've got to stay in my country.*

I like going abroad. It's very nice visiting new places.

There are similar differences for other verbs of liking and disliking: *like, dislike, prefer, hate*, etc.

With the verbs: *remember, regret, forget* to-Infinitives are used to express future or present events and –Ing clauses are used to talk about past events.

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E.g. *Don't forget to turn off the computer.*

I'll never regret having met you.

With the verbs begin, start, continue, cease, there is often little or no difference between the two verbal forms.

E.g. *I began to work/working on this project yesterday.*

One should avoid using to-Infinitive or two –ing forms one after another:

I'd like to begin – teaching / to teach – as soon as possible

are beginning – to work / working – on this project

In conclusion, we can state that the non-finite verb forms are special structures, important in English, and that the non-finite clauses are distinct types of subordinate clauses, specific to the English language, which, although have many features in common, are also characterized by many obvious differences.

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