

A Semantic Study on *-Ing* Participle and the Selection Between *To*-infinitive and *-Ing* Participle as Complement Clause

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Abstract: The semantic meaning of *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles are important components of the nonfinite verb forms in English and the selection between them when they function as complement clauses are the key issues of these two non-finite constructions. There are four parts in this study: the first part for the introduction of study background, the second for the definition of *-ing* participles, the third for the semantic meaning on *-ing* participle as complement clause, the fourth for the selection between *to*-infinitive and *-ing* participle as complement clause and fifth for the conclusion.

1. Introduction

To-infinitives and *-ing* participles are very common phenomena in everyday English use, especially when they function as complements. The two constructions have received great attention from many grammarians. For example Egan (2008) has done a usage-based study of infinitive and *-ing* clauses in English, Eberhard (1982) focused on semantic and pragmatic indeterminacy in non-finite verb complementation. Aarts (2011), Huddleston & Pullum (2002) have also made great contributions to the research of *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles in their significant works. Still, the selection between them when they are in complement clauses is very confusing for many English learners, just like what Quirk et al state: 'there is usually felt to be a difference of aspect or mood which influences the choice' (1985: 1191). Therefore, the differentiation between *to*-infinitival and *-ing* participle is of great significance for understanding English properly as well as speaking English accurately. Thus this thesis will discover the semantic meaning *-ing* participle complements according to specific licensing verb, and examples in our daily life will be used.

2. The Definition of *Ing*-participle

Deriving from a verb, the syntactic structure of *-ing* participle is made of a verb and the suffix *-ing*. Thus the concept of *-ing* participle needs to be considered with actions. For the *to* from *to*-infinitive origins from the preposition *to* on some degree, I would presume that the *-ing* participles in complement clauses has a great relationship with the *ing* from progressive aspect. Huddleston & Pullum define the progressive as 'marked by the auxiliary *be* + a following gerund-participle, has as its basic use the expression of progressive aspectuality: hence, of course, the name' (2002: 162). Further, Huddleston & Pullum address that progressive aspect involves six features, and two of which are of strong implicatures while the other four are not.

i The situation is presented as in progress, on going, at or through Tr.

ii The situation is viewed imperfectively.

iii Tr is a mid-interval within Tsit. [implicature]

iv The situation is presented as durative.

v The situation is presented as dynamic.

vi The situation is presented as having limited duration. [implicature] (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 163)

The Tr is the symbol for 'the time referred to' (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 125), and Tsit refers to 'the time of the situation' (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 125). The six features can be exemplified by the following sentences respectively from i to vi:

(22) I am doing my project.

(23) I was doing my project when my mum came to visit me.

(24) I was taking a shower until the water supply was cut off.

(25) I was taking a shower while my wife was cooking.

(26) When I left, Jill had her head buried in a book but Ed was watching TV. (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 167)

(27) She is cycling to work this week. (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 167)

These features share some of the same points with previous studies of -ing participle used as complements by some scholars, as Egan (2008: 109) points out that ‘Dixon bases his characterization on the notions of duration and ongoingness, Duffley his on the notion of interiority, and Langacker his on the notions of imperfectivity and interiority.’ Thus, although there are some disagreements among these scholars, the common features between the progressive aspect and -ing participle in complements testify the consumption that the -ing participle originates from the progressive aspect.

3. Semantic Analysis of -ing Participles as Complement Clause

‘The prosperities proposed by Huddleston for the progressive are designed to account for its use with activities and accomplishments. They can also account for its use with achievements and states in marked contexts’ (Egan 2008: 109). Thus, this section will discover the semantic meaning of -ing participle complements from the aspects of encoding activities, accomplishments, achievements and states. Besides, the features of progress aspects provided by Huddleston & Pullum will be used.

3.1 Semantic Analysis of -ing Participle Complements Expressing Activities

The sentence containing the -ing participle complements expressing activities can be exemplified as the following sentences:

(28) You can see the water falling down.

(29) We don’t want people smelling something funny. (Egan 2008: 111)

Firstly, the -ing complements characterized by ongoingness. Both of the two sentences describe an activity which is going on. We can see the falling water from sentence (28) and in sentence (29) we can imagine that people were smelling some disgusting flavors. The semantic meaning of the -ing infinitive is encoded by the licensing verb see and want and it is easy to judge that both of the activities are unfinished. Thus, secondly, the -ing complements encode the character of ‘The situation is viewed imperfectively’ (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 163). Thirdly, both of the actions are dynamic and durative. The surroundings are still moving forward when the two activities happen and the activities will last for some time as well.

The distinction of -ing complements between the two sentences is that sentence (28) shares the character of ‘Tr is a mid-interval within Tsit’ (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 163) with progressive while sentence (29) doesn’t. Let’s first discuss the difference existing between the sentences themselves. Tr in (28) refers to the time of the water falling down and Tsit is the time of utterance, thus Tr is happening at the same time with Tsit. However, Tr and Tsit are not simultaneous. Tr in (29) is the time when people don’t smell funny flavors anymore and again the Tsit is the time of utterance, thus the Tr is later than the Tsit. To explain in another way, when the licensing verb belongs to wanting verbs, the -ing participle complement doesn’t ‘adopt a mid-interval perspective on the unfolding activity’ (Egan 2008: 111).

3.2 Semantic Analysis of -ing Participle Complements Expressing Accomplishments

As the surface meaning itself, -ing complements encoding accomplishments refer to ‘the situation in progress is one which, unless interrupted, will come to an end of its own accord (under its own momentum, in force dynamic terms)’ (Egan 2008: 114). Some proper examples are as the sentences below:

(30) She heard the phone ringing when she walked away.

(31) You will not forget being beaten by the stranger.

(32) In the early morning, I start preparing the breakfast for my husband.

All the situations in the three sentences in progress will come to an end by themselves and they share some common features. Firstly, for sentence (32), the phone was ringing so the -ing complement is profiled as ongoingness. Both of sentences (31) and (32) can be explained in the same way. Secondly, they can all be viewed imperfectly, thus the -ing complements from the examples are profiled as imperfective. Thirdly, all of the situations are presented durative for the actions of ringing, being beaten and preparing breakfast won't disappear instantly and will last for sometime. Hence the -ing participles carry the meaning of durative. At last, the surroundings of all actions are dynamic, which makes the -ing complements profiled as dynamic.

Nonetheless, the -ing complement in sentence (32) is the only one which can be profiled as mid-interval, and the -ing participle from sentence (32) is the only one which encodes limited duration. In example (30), Tr is in simultaneous with Tsit, however, in (31) Tr is later than Tsit, and in (32) there is no 'accomplishment viewed from a particular point within its unfolding' (Egan 2008: 112).

Further more, the -ing complement in sentence (31) encodes the event as having limited duration, differing from the other two examples. This is due to the instantaneous property of the licensing verb forget, nobody can keep forgetting for long time. Egan (2008: 115) explains it as 'This follows from the fact that an accomplishment, unlike an activity, is inherently bounded (it is telic)'.

3.3 Semantic analysis of -ing participle complements expressing states

In this section, I will talk about some -ing complements which express states. 'States are, by definition, imperfective and durative' (Egan 2008: 116). The following are some examples:

(33) I don't mind you talking loudly.

(34) I can't remember being in school.

(35) I can't imagine being like that, when I'm old. (Egan 2008: 117)

Talking loudly, being in school and being like that are the three states expressed by the examples. Interestingly, all the -ing complements in the three sentences resemble three features: imperfective, durative and mid-interval. To be more specific, it is easy to understand that a state must be unfinished and will last for a while, thus the -ing participles encode the imperfective and durative. Besides, all the Tr and Tsit in the three sentences happen at the same time so the -ing complements are profiled as mid-interval.

However, none of the -ing complements encode the ongoingness or dynamic. Egan states that 'One effect of using the progressive with a stative verb is to impose a limited duration construal on the situation in question. This is not the case with the -ing complement construction' (2008: 116). For instance, in sentence (35), the speaker only states her thought that she prefers a more elegant way to live when she becomes old, so nothing is in progress, at or throughout the Tr-being like that. Besides, in the light of Huddleston & Pullum's (2002: 167) explanation for dynamicity, if the progressive is inconsistent with a purely static situation, we can say it conveys some measure of dynamicity. The three states are consistent with static situations, hence the -ing complements are not profiled as dynamic.

3.4 Semantic analysis of -ing participle complements expressing achievements

Egan puts achievements as 'Achievements resemble states in that they do not occur freely with the progressive' (2008: 118). Since achievements resemble states and we have discussed that the -ing complements expressing states don't encode ongoingness and dynamic, the -ing complements expressing achievements that we will talk about in this section are not profiled as ongoingness and dynamic as well. The following are two examples offered by Egan:

(36) She regretted asking the question as soon as the words were out. (Egan 2008: 120)

(37) Perhaps he'd always secretly resented giving his name to another man's child, she thought sadly. (Egan 2008: 118)

I would say the -ing complements encoding achievements are more complex than the previous three groups for some of the progressive features are fuzzy and not very obvious. In sentence (36), the -ing complement encodes the durative but without the mid-interval, for the situation wouldn't stop instantly and the Tr is later than the Tsit. The difficulty lies on whether the -ing complement

encodes the perfective or imperfective. Egan believes it to be imperfective for the situation ‘are telic and are located anterior to the time of the matrix verb’ (Egan 2008: 120). There is no denying that Egan’s analysis is quite reasonable, but I would argue that –ing complement in (36) can be understood in the opposite way, for the licensing verb *regret* is presented in the preterite tense. The preterite tense means all the actions are completely done and the situation is finished as well. Thus the –ing complement in this sentence can be understood as not encoding the property of imperfective.

For sentence (37), we can judge the features of imperfective and durativity easily for the situation is going on, unfinished and will last for some time. Besides, the –ing complement in this utterance is profiled as mid-interval. To be more specific, in this sentence, *Tr* refers to the time that he resented giving his name to another man’s child and again the *Tsit* is the time when the utterance happens. *Tr* and *Tsit* are in simultaneous position for if he resents giving his name, he must be doing it.

4. The Selection Between *to*-infinitive and *-ing* Participle as Complement Clause

Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 1240-41) states that ‘the selection is not random: verbs with similar meanings tend to select the same form-types, and where a verb allows both major form-types we very often find a difference in meaning that is at least partly motivated by their general characteristics’. To explain it in another way, the selection between *to*-infinitive and *-ing* participle relies on the verbs. Generally, there are three main types of verbs: 1) the verbs taking only *to*-infinitives, such as *plan*, *hope* and *prepare*; 2) the verbs taking only *-ing* participles, such as *mind*, *keep*, *enjoy*; and 3) the verbs taking both *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles, such as *like*, *remember* and *start*. Proper examples are as follows respectively:

(38) I plan to study French.

* I plan studying French.

(39) * I enjoy to study English.

I enjoy studying English.

(40) I like to study English.

I like studying English.

To show the differences between the *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles when they are used as complements, the type of verbs which can take both *to*-infinitive and *-ing* participle will be discussed. Furthermore, there is not a considerable difference between the two constructions in some cases, while elsewhere we may find a variety of differences between *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles. In this chapter, verbs will be divided into three groups according to their semantic meanings: verbs of causation, verbs of perception and verbs of attitude.

4.1 Selections of both *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles licensed by verbs of causation

With verbs of causation, ‘S1 directs the realization of the complement clause situation by S2, who has no independent say in the matter’ (Egan 2008: 23). Some of the causation verbs such as *cause*, *force*, *get*, *have*, *start*, *stop* and *leave* can license both of the non-finite constructions as complement. Proper examples are illustrated below:

(41) a. I hope I can bring you to see from my perspective.

b. The results brought him crying for a whole day.

(42) a. The machinist finally got the machine work.

b. The machinist finally got the machine working.

Firstly, the *to*-infinitive and *-ing* participle differs from each other in term of emphases. Both of the subjects of the main clause *I* and the results direct the realizations of the situations in the complement clauses. For (41) a, the addresser emphasizes the hope of changing the addressee’s view. It emphasizes the changing from one point to another, which is the feature enjoyed by *to*-infinitives. Nevertheless, sentence (41) b. stresses the existing fact, which he cried badly, without any notions of changing.

Secondly, the *-ing* participle emphasizes more on the progress. (42) a. expresses that the

machine works while (42) b. entails that the machine is working now. The difference is that the to-infinitive is non-progressive, focusing more on the result, on the contrary, the -ing participle is progressive. Another verb which can represent this feature is have. Compare the following sentences:

- (43) a. They had me read the whole text book.
b. They had me reading all afternoon.

In this pair, both sentences show the realization of the complement clause situation. Sentence (43) a. focuses more on and changing between two statuses, from not reading to reading. Thus it is unlikely to say They had me read the whole letter all afternoon. However, the -ing participle emphasizes on the progressing process. There is an image that a child is being forced to read the text book in front of the public, thus all afternoon can be added.

4.2 Selection between to-infinitives and -ing participles licensed by verbs of aspectual

Aspectual verbs refer to the verb that may continue or discontinue an action or a situation, example verbs are like continue, cease, begin, start and so on. When the complement is licensed by some of them, there is 'often no perceptible difference in meaning' (Huddleston & Pullum 2001: 1241). This property of interchangeability can be exemplified by the following sentences:

- (44) a. He continued to work as if nothing had happened.
b. He continued working as if nothing had happened.

Both of the nonfinite constructions in (44) a. suggest that the subject worked again after some bad events happened. Thus the to-infinitive and -ing participle is interchangeable between them.

However, interchangeability doesn't mean there is no difference between them. For (44) a., the to-infinitive indicates that he stopped for a while and began to work again. There is a new occurrence of the action of working. In (44) b., the -ing participle encodes that he didn't even stop for a second when he was listening to the bad news. The -ing participle emphasizes the progress of his keep working and the whole process was uninterrupted.

Here comes another example:

- (45) a. The clock began to strike twelve.
b. The clock began striking twelve.

Both of the sentences are grammatically acceptable. Again, the to-infinitive focuses on the change from one point to another and the -ing participle pay more attention to the process. To be more specific, (45) a. refers to the action of the first strike while (45) b. indicates the whole process of striking twelve times.

However, in these cases that the addresser focuses on the ongoing activity, the to-infinitive and -ing participle can not be exchanged. Consider the following group of sentences:

- (46) a. Don't start to tell me how to run my life. (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1241)
b. Don't start telling me how to run my life. (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1241)

Simply, the speaker's meaning is Don't tell me how to run my life, what he doesn't want is the homiletic speech from the addressee. Since the content spoken by the homilist has to be a process, -ing participle in sentence (46) b. will function better than the to-infinitive in (46) a.

4.3 Selection between to-infinitives and -ing participles licensed by verbs of attitude

As what we have discussed before, attitude verbs express a person's inner thoughts about an event or situation. Example verbs can be *like*, *hate*, *love*, *dread* and so on. The chapter illustrating the semantic meaning of to-infinitive has pointed out that positive verbs are more likely to be followed by to-infinitive while negative verbs often come with -ing participles. Thus in this section, I will focus on the semantic difference of two non-finite complements licensed by the same verb.

Firstly, the meaning expressed by to-infinitive is more temporal and comparatively, the notion illustrated by -ing participle is more lasting. Taking the verb *like* as an example:

- (47) a. I like to swim.
b. I like playing football.

Both of the sentences express the positive attitude to the sports. However, sentence (47) a. refers to the attitude at the moment, even, for once. On the contrary, the attitude conveyed by (47) b. is

more long lasting, even, it's the habit developed in many years. Imagine a situation, my friend ask me whether I want to go for swim after school. My answer may be *I like playing football, but I like to swim with you*. The answer is not self-contradictory at all, for football is my favorite sport but I want to do something different this time.

Secondly, 'The infinitival is more associated with change, the gerund-participle with actuality' (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1241). Here comes the example:

- (48) a. I'd like to be a teacher.
b. I like being a teacher.

The identity of the speaker for (48) a. can be a graduating student who is looking for jobs, while the speaker of (48) b. must be already a teacher. Thus the *to*-infinitive in (48) a. focuses on the change which will happen in future, however, the *-ing* participle pay more attention to the status now. Besides, *to*-infinitive shows that the speaker still have other choices, it can be a doctor though the speaker prefers to be a teacher. Nevertheless, there seems to be no other options for the speaker of (48) b., it's unlikely to say I like being a doctor when the subject is a teacher.

Take a negative verb *hate* as the last example:

- (49) a. I hate to say goodbye.
b. I hate saying goodbye.

What the *to*-infinitive implies in (49) a. can be that *I don't want to say it, though I will say it*. The situation may be a mum telling her five year old naughty boy to say goodbye to a visitor at home but the child says *I hate to say goodbye*. Naturally, one can only say *hate to- infinitive* when he hasn't done it. In the same way, if the subject hates saying goodbye, the subject must have experienced the feeling of saying goodbye before. Thus, again, the *to*-infinitive indicates the future while the *-ing* participle implies the status.

5. Conclusion

Generally, this thesis studies *-ing* in complement clauses theoretically and makes a detailed analysis of semantic meanings of them with quite a few example sentences. Accordingly, the following conclusions have been reached.

Firstly, the *-ing* participles in complement clauses enjoy many common features with the *-ing* participles in progressive aspects. The *-ing* participles may express *activities*, *accomplishments*, *states* and *achievements* in different contexts. Most of the cases with *-ing* participle complements can be profiled as *imperfective* and *durative*, and the prosperities of *ongoingness*, *mid-interval*, *dynamic* and *limited duration* may suit the *-ing* participles in some specific contexts.

Secondly, this thesis has devoted to a relatively systematic interpretation of the selection between *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles when they function as complements. There is no denying that in many cases the *to*-infinitives and *-ing* participles in complement clauses are interchangeable; the semantic differences between the two non-finite constructions should not be neglected. To be more specific, 1) *To*-infinitive is abstracted as the change of (stop)-start-stop, while the *-ing* participle focuses more on the progressing process or the existing status. 2) The situation conveyed by *to*-infinitives is more temporal; on the contrary, *-ing* participle implies a long lasting activity.

Last but not least, during the process of doing the analysis, the writer found that to reveal the semantic meanings of *to*-infinitive and *-ing* participle in complement clause, it is essential to find out their respective concepts. Consequently, exploring the concepts of infinitives and *-ing* participles lies in putting them into specific contexts and taking their linguistic representations into account.

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