

# The classification of non-finite complement constructions in English

## 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the question of how best to classify non-finite complement clause constructions in English. An approach frequently adopted in the literature is to classify constructions according to the semantics of the matrix verb. Thus Palmer (1988) operates with matrix verb classes *Perception*, *Attitude*, *Causation*, etc. Verspoor (2000) also uses terms like *Perception*, *Attitude* and *Causative*. Achard (1998) adopts similar categories for French. Another, less common, approach involves the classification of constructions with respect to the relationship between the matrix verb and the complement clause, and, in particular, the relationship in time between the two. This sort of approach has been taken by such scholars as Duffley (1992) who interprets all *to infinitive* constructions in terms of futurity, and Wierzbicka (1988) who interprets all *-ing* constructions in terms of simultaneity.

In this paper I will present the results of a large corpus-based study of non-finite complement clauses in present-day British English. The data for the study were taken from the British National Corpus. The study encompassed almost five hundred constructions containing over three hundred matrix verbs and three types of non-finite complement, *bare infinitive*, *to infinitive*, and the *-ing* form. Nine semantic classes of matrix verb such as *Perception* and *Attitude* were distinguished. These are described in section 2. Six classes were distinguished on the basis of the temporal (or ontological) relationship between the matrix verb and the complement clause. These include *Same-time*, *Forward-looking* and *Backward-looking* predications. These six categories are described in section 3. Section 4 contains a summary and a conclusion.

## 2. Classification according to the semantics of matrix verbs

There are two main types of constructions containing active-voice matrix verbs in English, *same-subject* (equi-subject, 'SS') constructions, in which the subject of the complement clause predicate is identical to the subject of the matrix verb, and *different-subject* ('DS') constructions, in which the subject of the complement predicate is different to the subject of the matrix verb. DS constructions were divided into six categories. Below is a concise semantic description of these categories. The descriptions utilise Langacker's notion of the interpretation of the profiled complement situation in terms of a "stage model" (1991: 284). *S1* stands for the matrix verb subject, *S2* for the subject of the complement clause predicate.

Perception constructions: *S1* merely registers the situation on stage.  
e.g. You *noticed me watching* you, I shouldn't wonder. (HGV 4587)

Mental Process constructions: *S1* registers the situation onstage, thinks about it and may form a judgement about its ontological status.  
e.g. Most scientists *believe the inflill to be* lava (GW6 803)

Attitude constructions:	<i>S1</i> registers the situation on stage and formulates an attitude towards it. e.g. <i>I dread mine reaching</i> their teens. (BLW 1071)
Communication constructions:	<i>S1</i> is not on stage as such, but may prompt the onstage <i>S2</i> from the wings, as it were, or may comment on the onstage situation to another member of the audience. e.g. The master <i>commands you to stay</i> . (HGE 788)
Enablement constructions:	<i>S1</i> either sets the stage for <i>S2</i> 's realisation of the complement clause situation or assumes the role of a minor character in assisting <i>S2</i> to realise it. e.g. <i>I let her warble on</i> for a while. (HGN 257)
Causation constructions:	<i>S1</i> directs the realisation of the complement clause situation by <i>S2</i> , who has no independent say in the matter. e.g. He halted, <i>forcing the rest of the field to bunch up</i> behind him. (HP0 2042)

There are six classes of SS construction, three of which bear identical labels to DS constructions, i.e. *Mental Process*, *Attitude* and *Communication*. The other three are described below. *S* stands for 'subject', *Sp* for 'speaker'.

Effort constructions:	<i>S</i> expends energy of some sort in order to realise some sort of situation. e.g. Vietnam <i>would strive to achieve</i> an early comprehensive political solution to the war in Cambodia. (HL8 81)
Aspect constructions:	<i>S</i> commences, continues or discontinues his or her participation in some sort of situation. e.g. They <i>began to ascend</i> the staircase. ... (G0E 3461)
Applied Attitude constructions:	Either <i>Sp</i> or <i>S</i> formulates an attitude about some situation (definitely) involving the latter. e.g. Nevertheless she <i>condescended to reply</i> . (CB5 2468)

Five of the six SS categories are traditional ones. The sixth, which I label 'Applied Attitude', contains constructions that partake, to some extent, of the characteristics of both Attitude constructions and of Aspect constructions. They resemble the latter in that they indicate clearly whether or not the complement situation was realised; they resemble the former in that they always encode an attitude of some sort, either on the part of the speaker or the subject, to this same situation.

Table 1 contains details of the various forms of non-finite complement found to occur with the various semantic classes of matrix verb in both SS and DS constructions.

*Table 1: Forms of complement occurring with various type of matrix verb in both different-subject and same-subject constructions*

	<i>Complement forms</i>		
	<i>to infinitive</i>	<i>bare infinitive</i>	<i>-ing</i>
Mental Process	<i>DS/SS</i>		<i>DS/SS</i>
Attitude	<i>DS/SS</i>		<i>DS/SS</i>
Communication	<i>DS/SS</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS/SS</i>
Perception	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS</i>

Effort	<i>SS</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>SS</i>
Enablement	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS</i>
Causation	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS</i>	<i>DS</i>
Aspect	<i>SS</i>		<i>SS</i>
Applied Attitude	<i>SS</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>SS</i>

How informative is Table 1? It seems impossible to draw any inferences with respect to the form of a complement given the information contained in the first column. In the next section we will consider the question of whether a classification in terms of TAM (Tense-Aspect-Modality) relations is more informative in this respect.

### 3. Classification in terms of TAM relations between matrix verb and complement situation

The second mode of classification is based on the relationship between the matrix verb and the complement situation and, in particular, on whether the latter is profiled as occurring at a particular time vis-à-vis the time of the matrix verb. Even the most cursory glance at corpus data will reveal that some complement situations are profiled as occurring at the same time as the situation encoded by the matrix verb, some as occurring before that time, and some after it. These three types are labelled *Same-time*, *Backward-looking* and *Forward-looking*, respectively. There are three other types. One of these encodes what Langacker (2000) calls *general validity predications*, i.e. situations profiled as occurring at more or less regular intervals. The remaining two constructions encode mental acts. *Contemplation* constructions encode situations as unfolding before the mind's eye of the subject, with no intimation as to whether this situation has ever been, or ever will be, realised. *Judgement* constructions involve the formulation of hypotheses about some situation or some participant in a situation.

These six classes are defined and exemplified below. Again, 'S' stands for 'subject', 'Sp' for 'speaker'.

Same-time constructions: Either *Sp* or *S* profiles some situation as occurring simultaneously with the matrix verb. e.g. I *can taste blood running* down the back of my throat..... (A74 3123)

Backward-looking constructions: Either *Sp* or *S* profiles some situation as occurring before the time of the matrix verb. e.g. Adam *stopped walking* and stared at her. (HA6 1924)

Forward-looking constructions: Either *Sp* or *S* profiles some situation as occurring after the time of the matrix verb. e.g. He then *requested Lucy and Jean to come* into the kitchen. (HHB 4158)

General constructions: *S* profiles some situation as likely to occur on a more or less regular basis. e.g....God's own country, as the Canadians *delight to call* it. (A0P 217)

Judgement constructions: Either *Sp* or *S* hypothesises that a certain situation is true. e.g. Theodora *judged her to be* in her early forties.... (HA2 802)

Contemplation *S* imagines a situation as occurring in some domain. e.g. For a wild  
 constructions: moment she *contemplated locking* the door against him... (JYE 3415)

Table 2 contains details of these six classes of constructions.

*Table 2: Forms of complement occurring with various type of matrix verb in both different-subject and same-subject constructions according to the relationship between the matrix verb and the complement situation*

	Complement forms		
	<i>to infinitive</i>	<i>bare infinitive</i>	<i>-ing</i>
1. Same-time		<i>DS</i>	<i>DS/SS</i>
2. Backward-looking			<i>DS/SS</i>
3. Forward-looking	<i>DS/SS</i>	<i>DS/SS</i>	<i>DS/SS</i>
4. General	<i>DS/SS</i>		
5. Judgement	<i>DS/SS</i>		
6. Contemplation			<i>DS/SS</i>

The classification in this table has several obvious advantages compared to the one in Table 1. In the first place we can see at a glance that it allows for 18 possible combinations of form and function, of which only 9 are realised, in contrast with Table 1, which allows for 27 possible combinations of which as many as 24 are realised. In addition, Table 2 highlights similarities between the functions of DS and SS constructions which are camouflaged in Table 1. Moreover, Table 2 shows the complete predictability of the form of non-finite complement in the case of four of the six categories.

#### 4. Summary and conclusion

In section 2, nine semantic classes of matrix verb such as *Perception* and *Attitude* were distinguished. It transpires that each of these classes of matrix verb occurs with at least two sorts of non-finite complement clause. Classification based on the semantics of the matrix verb has therefore very limited predictive power. In section 3 the constructions in the study were classified with respect to the relationship between the matrix verb and the complement clause. Classification of the data in these terms shows that the form of non-finite complement in the case of four classes is completely predictable. In the case of the *Same-time* category, there are only two non-finite complement options. Thus it is only the form of non-finite *Forward-looking* constructions that remains totally unpredictable in this classification. I therefore conclude that this form of classification of non-finite complements is to be preferred to one based on classes of matrix verb.

#### Bibliography

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