

WHERE STRUCTURE AND MEANING CLASH: THE PROBLEMS OF CATEGORIZING DETACHED -ING CLAUSES¹

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This paper examines detached subjectless *-ING* clauses without a subordinator and the challenges of their syntactic analysis. A detached *-ING* clause may combine characteristics of an attribute, a predicative, and an adverbial modifier, and, oftentimes, structural analysis points to one function while semantic analysis suggests another. The difficulties for analysis largely stem from the participle's indeterminate nature between a verb and an adjective. In this paper, I argue that an *-ING* clause, depending on the degree of adjectivization of the participle, can be treated as both a non-finite verbal clause and an adjective clause, each fulfilling distinct syntactic functions.

Key words: detached clauses, loose parts of the sentence, *-ing* participial clauses, attribute, predicative, adverbial clauses, adjectivization

This paper examines subjectless *-ing* clauses without a subordinator, in comparison with verbless clauses realized by AdjPs, also referred to as *adjective clauses* here. The two structural types often occur as *loose* (extrapositional) *secondary parts*, i.e. placed outside the main framework of the sentence and marked off by punctuation in writing and intonation in speech. Although peripheral, they are still parts of the sentence and perform specific syntactic functions within it. However, their precise syntactic classification proves highly problematic, being complicated by a number of factors.

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First, detached parts of the sentence gain a certain level of independence, and, consequently, the distinctive features they exhibit when fully integrated become more obscure. A detached construction may simultaneously exhibit characteristics of an attribute, a predicative, and an adverbial modifier, and, oftentimes, structural analysis will point to one function while semantic analysis may suggest another:

(i). *Lee watched him, **smiling**. (East of Eden)*

The detached participle exhibits both predicative and adverbial characteristics. On the one hand, similar to a predicative, it refers to a nominal—the subject of the sentence—and is linked to it through the predicate verb. On the other, just like an AM, it conveys circumstantial information, describing the manner in which the action in the matrix clause is carried out, resulting in a clash between the structural and semantic features. Furthermore, if the participle were immediately appended to its nominal antecedent (*Lee, smiling, watched him.*), it would approximate a post-head attribute in a NP.

Determining the syntactic function of detached subjectless *-ing* clauses is particularly problematic due to the following factors:

- (1) lack of explicit subject;
- (2) lack of subordinator, and
- (3) the presence of a participle

Non-finite and verbless clauses attribute a quality, action, or state to some entity. Therefore, they may form either an intensive (copular) relationship to the entity, expressing its quality or property, or an extensive one, denoting an action or state. To achieve precise syntactic analysis of detached clauses, we must first identify their antecedent. By antecedent here we mean the entity in the matrix clause that is identical with the implied subject of the detached *-ing* or verbless clause (Quirk et al. 1985: 1125). Identifying the antecedent is crucial to the syntactic analysis, as attributes, predicatives, and AMs generally modify different word classes and parts of the sentence.

In *Absolute clauses* (AC), which contain a subject, this entity is explicit:

1. Non-finite AC: *We piled them up like they were logs, over two hundred, **arms and legs sticking out**.*

1.1. Verbless AC: *Liza Hamilton, **her apple cheeks flaming red**, moved like a caged leopard in front of the stove when Samuel came into the kitchen in the morning.*

(East of Eden)

Subjectless constructions, however, refer to an entity within the matrix clause, which may vary. This entity is typically assumed to be the subject of the superordinate clause (Quirk et al. 1985: 1121), though it can also be another nominal, as well as the entire matrix clause (the antecedent is given in bold):

(1a) **Samuel** knelt in the sandy soil, looking at the torn and broken edges of his bit.

(1b) In the Chop House he ran into young **Will Hamilton**, looking pretty prosperous in a salt-and-pepper business suit.

(East of Eden)

(1c) **Shoes cost from two hundred to eight hundred dollars a pair**, depending on whether they were made of “cardboard” or real leather.

(Gone with the Wind)

The absence of a subordinator adds to the complexity of the problem as a subordinator elucidates the meaning and, consequently, the function of the detached construction: e.g. *while* (temporal), *due to* (reason), *despite* (concession) are strong indications of an adverbial function. The formal inexplicitness of a construction without a subordinator invites multiple interpretations.

Finally, the participle’s indeterminate nature between a verb and an adjective raises another question: *Does the -ing construction function as a non-finite (verbal) clause or a verbless (adjectival) one?*

This question is critical for determining whether the *-ing* clause expresses a quality, in the broadest sense, or refers to an action or state, and consequently, whether it establishes an extensive or intensive relationship to its antecedent. These insights will support the accurate categorization of the *-ing* clause as part of the sentence, as they cover the principal differences between attributes, predicatives, and adverbial modifiers.

1. Scope and objectives

The aim of this paper is to propose a framework for the syntactic classification of subjectless *-ing* clauses without a subordinator centered on the degree of adjectivization of the participle. While the existing views on their syntactic status vary, they are habitually treated as adverbial clauses. In my view, this classification is inconclusive, as it fails to account for the adjectival properties of the participle and the relationship it forms with the main clause. In this paper, I put forth the claim that a detached *-ing* clause may have all of the following functions:

- (1). Detached predicative
- (2). Detached attribute
- (3). Adverbial modifier

The criteria for classification largely depend on the adjectival properties exhibited by the participle and are based on the following questions:

- *Does the -ing participle have a verbal or adjectival reading?*
- *Which is the antecedent of the -ing participle?*
- *What kind of relationship—extensive or intensive—does it form with its antecedent?*
- *Where is the -ing participle positioned relative to its antecedent?*

As already demonstrated, these constructions are often characterized by ‘clashes’ between their semantic and syntactic features. Although the premise and objectives of this investigation are chiefly syntactic, meaning will be highlighted as a strong determining factor in the analysis.

2. Existing views on the syntactic classification of detached clauses

The syntactic status of detached verbless and non-finite clauses remains debated, with three primary functions identified: attribute, predicative, or adverbial modifier. Scholars differ on whether non-finite and adjective clauses share the same functions or should be treated separately, with emphasis on features like connection to the subject, mobility, omissibility, and semantic content.

Biber et al. (1999: 136, 201) distinguish non-finite and verbless adjectival clauses, classifying the former as supplementive adverbial clauses and the latter as detached predicatives. Similarly, Huddleston and Pullum (2005: 119, 134) assign distinct functions to AdjPs and *-ing* clauses, with AdjPs as “predicative adjuncts” and *-ing* clauses as “adjuncts in clause”, suggesting an adverbial function due to their circumstantial meanings.

In contrast, Grancharov (2009), Pavlov (2010), and Quirk et al. (1985) argue that formal differences do not entail distinct syntactic functions. Quirk et al. (1985: 1124) classify both types as “subjectless supplementive clauses” with an adverbial function, regardless of form. They focus on structural features like omissibility and mobility, typical of adverbials, and argue that *-ing* clauses convey circumstantial information while adjective clauses modify both the nominal antecedent and predicate, reinforcing their adverbial function. In this view, the quality expressed by the AdjP is perceived as transient or arising from the event in the matrix clause—for example, “*Nervous, the man opened the letter*” implies the man was nervous because he had to open the letter (Quirk et al. 1985: 425).

Grancharov and Pavlov, similar to Quirk et al., see non-finite and verbless clauses as fulfilling the same role, but they assign them attributive or predicative functions, not adverbial. Grancharov (2009: 44) argues that the historical connection to the subject of the matrix clause refutes an adverbial function, and that position relative to the antecedent and predicate verb determines whether the clause is an attribute or predicative. When placed immediately before or after the antecedent, it is an attribute; when separated by the predicate verb, it is a predicative.

(2a). *Reading the paper*, John was smoking a cigar. – Extrapositional Attribute

(2b). John was smoking a cigar, *reading the paper*.² – Extrapositional Predicative

In summary, existing classifications include adverbial clauses, detached attributes, and detached predicatives (or predicative adjuncts). Some analyses emphasize semantic value, while others focus on structural features.

I argue that *-ing* clauses remain underexplored, with limited analysis of the distinctions between their verbal and adjectival uses. The potential for participles to function fully as adjectives has important implications for the syntactic roles of detached *-ing* clauses, an aspect that has yet to be thoroughly addressed.

3. Characteristics of Attributes, Predicatives, and Adverbial Modifiers

In this paper, I argue that formal differences between non-finite and adjective clauses signal functional distinctions and thus merit separate analysis. This argument is grounded in the specific syntactic and semantic characteristics of adjectives. Below, I briefly outline the features of attributes, predicatives, and adverbial modifiers.

Attributes, predicatives, and adverbial modifiers share some traits but differ morphologically, functionally, and semantically. Predicatives and adverbial modifiers are clause elements, while attributes are constituents of NPs, typically modifying the head noun in terms of quality, state, or property. Attributes are often adjectives (e.g., *intelligent students*, *people responsible*) or *-ing* participles (e.g., *amazing people*) and may also be realized as finite relative clauses (e.g., *The people who are responsible for the accident*). Being phrase constituents, attributes are omissible without affecting the grammaticality or meaning of the sentence.

² The example is borrowed from Grancharov, *English Syntax Practice Book*, 2009.

Predicatives also describe or identify a nominal antecedent but differ from attributes in that they must be adjectivized, excluding verbal participles:

(Att) *dazzling sun* -> (Pred) *The sun is dazzling*.

(Att) *setting sun* -> (VP) *The sun is setting*.

The relationship between the predicative and its antecedent is realized by a copular verb, which typically has little to no lexical content. A true³ predicative is not omissible as it completes the structure and meaning of the clause (e.g., **My mother is*. vs. *My mother is very caring*). Other copulas preserve their “ordinary full force” (Jespersen 1933: 90)⁴, making the predicative non-essential and omissible (e.g., *They married young*).

Adverbial modifiers, as defined by Biber et al. (1999: 762), serve three main functions: adding circumstantial information, expressing the speaker's stance, or linking the clause to another discourse unit. Unlike attributes and predicatives, adverbials modify the predicate or the entire matrix clause, but not NPs. They are typically omissible and mobile, often realized by a variety of constructions, excluding adjectives:

(3a) [*Unfortunately*], *he is not coming [today]*.

(3b) *He, [unfortunately], is not coming [today]*.

(3c) *He is not coming [today] [unfortunately]*.

Table 1 provides a summary of the relevant characteristics of attributes, predicatives, and adverbial modifiers discussed above:

Table 1. *Characteristic Features of Attributes, Predicatives, and Adverbials*

	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Predicative</i>	<i>Adverbial</i>
Modifies a nominal	√	√	X
Can be realized by an AdjP	√	√	X
Follows a copular verb	X	√	~ ⁵
Freely omissible	√	~ ⁶	√
Freely mobile	X	X	√ ⁷

³ According to their degree of connection to the copula, predicatives are classified into *true*, *supplementary*, and *extrapositional* (see Grancharov 2009: 32).

⁴ Jespersen (1933: 91) refers to such predicatives as *quasi-predicatives*.

⁵ The symbol “~” indicates non-typical yet possible properties, *i.e.* adverbials can follow a copula, but this is not their most typical position.

⁶ As previously mentioned, when the copula is a verb with retained lexical content, the predicative can be omitted.

⁷ Naturally, this will not apply to all adverbials, but the table strives to present the most typical characteristics.

4. Characteristics of the *-ING* Participle

The *-ing* participle shares properties of both verbs and adjectives, so it is commonly labelled ‘verbal adjective’ (Huddleston 1984: 318). Consequently, it can appear in both verbal positions—as part of a finite VP—and adjectival ones, such as an attribute or a predicative:

- [a]. The hosts *were entertaining* the guests. (VP)
- [b]. The *entertaining* couple hosted a lovely party. (Pre-Attr.)
- [c]. The artist *entertaining* the guests was a famous comedian. (Post-Attr.)
- [d]. The magazine *is entertaining* in style and content. (SubjPred)
- [e]. I found the film *quite entertaining*. (ObjPred)

Two central factors for distinguishing between the verbal and adjectival use of the *-ing* participle are the syntactic slot it occupies and its dependents (if any). A participle is treated as an adjective when it modifies a noun as part of a noun phrase (sent. [b] and [c]) or follows a copulative verb (sent. [d] and [e])⁸. Alternatively, in constructions with an auxiliary (sent. [a]) it represents the progressive-aspect form of a lexical verb.

In terms of argument structure, the presence of a direct object (see [a] and [c]) indicates a verbal function, and pre-modification by ‘very’, ‘more’, or ‘most’ warrants an adjectival reading. The possibility for an *-ing* participle to be graded and intensified is commonly employed as a central criterion for determining its adjectival status (see Downing, Locke 2000: 478; Huddleston 1984: 320, Wasow 1977: 343, Nichols 1965: 42). It should be noted that this possibility is directly related to the semantic content of the participle rather than its syntactic function:

(4a) *very entertaining hosts, more entertaining hosts*

(4b) **very returning hosts, *most returning hosts*

The observations made so far illustrate the indeterminate nature of the participle, as they reveal a certain contradiction between the two listed factors: in sentence [c] the participle occupies a typical adjectival position, while simultaneously taking a Od, which suggests a verbal status. Furthermore, a clash occurs between the syntactic and semantic levels in *returning hosts*—while the syntactic position of a preposed attribute is a

⁸ Sent. [e] contains an *Co*, as ‘entertaining’ stands in a copular relationship with ‘the film’; object predicatives typically occur immediately after the Od. The link verb is not explicit but perceived as ellipted (‘I found the film [to be] entertaining.’).

strong indication of an adjectival status, the semantic value of the participle disallows its grading and intensification, thus suggesting otherwise.

The syntactic slot most reflective of the degree of adjectivization of the participle is that after the verb “be”. The *adjectiveness* of the *-ing* participle is crucial in the pattern <BE + *-ING* participle>, as the dual nature of both constituents permits two possible interpretations:

1. *Auxiliary verb + a content verb: The children are playing.*
2. *Copular verb + an adjective: The children are annoying.*

While both examples feature an *-ing* participle, its status as a verb or adjective determines whether it forms an intensive (copular) or extensive relationship to the Subject, and consequently, whether the entire construction represents an analytical verb form or a syntactic unit. In sentence (2), the participle is derived from the transitive verb ‘annoy’, so the lack of a Od is strong enough evidence of its non-verbal use. However, when a participle is derived from an intransitive verb (*playing*), it is its semantic value that serves as a determining factor, as illustrated in the following:

The children are running/jumping/singing/dancing, etc.

Despite the lack of verbal arguments, neither of the participles can be perceived as adjectives, which can be explained by their reference to activities and lack of descriptive value. The relationship with the antecedent (‘the children’) is undoubtedly extensive.

4.1. Criteria for Adjectivization of *-ING* Participles

The adjectival status of *-ing* participles can be assessed based on four criteria outlined by Quirk et al. (1985: 402–3):

1. *They can freely premodify a nominal head in a NP;*
2. *They can freely occur in a predicative function;*
3. *They can be premodified by the intensifier ‘very’;*
4. *They can take comparative and superlative forms.*

Adjectivization should be viewed as a gradient rather than an absolute category. The application of the four criteria can be illustrated by comparing two participles occupying opposite ends of the scale of adjectivization: *playing* (verbal) and *annoying* (adjectival):

Table 2. *Criteria for Adjectivized Participles*

	Playing	Annoying
Premodifier of a noun	√ <i>playing children</i>	√ <i>annoying sound</i>
Predicative function	X <i>*The children are playing.⁹</i> <i>*I consider the children playing.</i>	√ <i>This sound is annoying. (Cs)</i> <i>I find this sound annoying. (Co)</i>
Premodification by 'very'	X <i>*very playing children</i>	√ <i>very annoying sound</i>
Comparative and superlative forms	X <i>*more/most playing</i>	√ <i>more/most annoying</i>

The *-ing* participle, however, is not restricted to single words but also covers phrases containing an auxiliary, which make distinctions of aspect and voice:

- *Indefinite (Non-perfect) Active: writing*
- *Perfect Active: having written*
- *Non-Perfect Passive: being written*
- *Perfect Passive: having been written*

Only the indefinite form meets adjectival criteria, though marked forms can still be analyzed in terms of their extensive or intensive relationship to the antecedent. Marked forms mostly occur as detached constructions, making their analysis essential to the present study.

The auxiliary 'having' always indicates an action, implying an extensive relationship. 'Being', on the other hand, can be both an auxiliary and a copula:

- 'being' + AdjP: 'Adam crawled quietly into the water, **being very careful to make no splash.**' (East of Eden)*
- 'being' + -ED Participle: '**Being welcomed and wanted**, Scarlett felt a glow of warmth.' (Gone with the Wind)*

In sentence (a), 'being' is a copula connecting the implied subject and the subject predicative. However, in (b) its function is indeterminate,

⁹ The sentence is grammatical, but it contains an analytical form of the verb 'play' and not a combination of a link verb and Cs.

oscillating between an auxiliary and a copula, depending on whether the combination is interpreted as a passive voice construction or as a linking verb and an adjective. The same dependencies apply to the perfect passive participle form ‘having been + *-ed* participle.’

In conclusion, while only the indefinite *-ing* participle shows clear adjectival characteristics, forms involving the verb *be* can establish an intensive relationship between clause elements and potentially fulfil a predicative function.

5. Characteristics and Syntactic Functions of Detached *-ING* and Adjective Clauses

The two structural types share fundamental characteristics. First, both are mobile, occurring in initial, medial, and final positions, i.e. they can be directly appended to their antecedent, placed before or after it, or separated from it by the predicate verb. While mobility and omissibility are often seen as signs of an adverbial status, I argue that these traits result from the loose attachment to the main sentence structure. Additionally, omissibility is not unique to AMs; both attributes and predicatives can also be omitted, though predicatives are subject to some restrictions.

Table 3. *Positions of -ING Clauses and Adjective Clauses Within the Sentence*

<i>-ING Clauses</i>	<i>Adjective Clauses</i>
<i>Having made up his mind</i> , Samuel set about doing it well.	<i>Full of apologies</i> , the manager approached us.
Samuel, <i>having made up his mind</i> , set about doing it well.	The manager, <i>full of apologies</i> , approached us.
Samuel set about doing it well, <i>having made up his mind</i> .	The manager approached us, <i>full of apologies</i> .

Secondly, both structural types display ambiguous semantic values. Adjective clauses are inherently descriptive, but when detached, they often take on additional adverbial nuances. In contrast, *-ing* clauses with non-adjectival participles lack descriptive content and convey purely circumstantial information, the exact nature of which remains indeterminate:

(i) ***Having eaten their fill**, the children were allowed to leave the table.*¹⁰
[= after they had eaten their fill] [= because they had eaten their fill]

Meaning alone does not suffice to classify the clause as an adverbial. As mentioned earlier, the connection of the detached element to the subject of the main clause is used as evidence against its potential adverbial function, as AMs do not modify nominals.

In my view, what is relevant is not only the presence of a connection to a nominal but also the nature of this connection. There is an obvious and significant difference between:

(ii) *And then a new voice came into it, **saying coolly and with contempt** [...].*

(iii) *This was new to them, **exciting and frightening**.*

(East of Eden)

While both participial clauses refer to the subject of the main clause, they differ significantly in function and meaning. In (ii), the detached element is a non-finite verbal clause that attributes an action to the antecedent, forming an extensive relationship. In contrast, (iii) consists of two strongly adjectivized *-ing* participles. This construction is analyzed as a verbless clause realized by an AdjP, which forms a copular relationship with its antecedent.

Paraphrasing can further support this analysis. Grancharov (2009: 44) and Biber et al. (1999: 137) suggest that detached clauses result from condensation, where the verb “be” is ellipped and the subject is recoverable from the main clause. Thus, these clauses can be seen as “nested structures”, with the *-ing* participle first analyzed as a clause element, and the entire *-ing* clause then examined as part of the sentence.

Paraphrasing the detached constructions into finite clauses yields two distinct clause structures:

(ii) *And then a new voice came into it and [the new voice **said coolly and with contempt**] – SVA*

(iii) *This was new to them and [**this was exciting and frightening**]. – SVP*

In (ii) the participle functions as predicate verb, indicating a sequence of actions performed by the same agent. Given the lack of descriptive force, the absence of a copular relationship to the nominal part, and the circumstantial meaning, the detached element does not qualify as a predicative, and is, therefore, classified as an adverbial clause. This applies

¹⁰ Quirk et al. *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985: 1124)

to all *perfect active participles* as well, as they consistently maintain a verbal reading (e.g., *having left*).

In contrast, in (iii), the two adjectivized participles exhibit descriptive content and establish an intensive relationship with the subject of the sentence. Their predicative function within the clause is preserved after condensation, making the entire construction a detached subject predicative.

In sentence (iii), the sentence-final position of the detached clause aligns with the typical ordering of clause elements. However, as noted earlier, detached elements can also occur in sentence-initial position, which raises questions about the applicability of the predicative role. The positional aspect was also highlighted as a criterion for distinguishing between *loose attributes* and *loose predicatives*.

In my view, the predicative classification applies to adjective clauses that modify the subject in both an initial and a final position. The movement operation does not affect the internal structure of the condensed clause, nor the position of the adjective or adjectivized participle within it. Therefore, the shift in position does not translate to a shift in syntactic status, and the detached clause should be treated as a fronted predicative.

A predicative function is also exhibited by clauses featuring the form *being* in which it functions as a copula:

(5a) *Adam crawled quietly into the water, **being very careful to make no splash**.*

[Adam was very careful to make no splash] – *SVP*

In the pattern <BE + -ED Participle>, *be* is indeterminate between an auxiliary and a copula, causing ambiguity in syntactic analysis between adverbial and predicative roles. The classification ultimately depends on contextual cues.

Additionally, an adverbial function can generally be inferred when the antecedent of the detached element is the entire matrix clause. Such instances approximate style or content disjuncts:

(5b) *I'd have to charge you fifty cents or more a foot, **depending on what we find down there**. [‘whether I charge you fifty cents or more depends on what we find down there’]*

(*East of Eden*)

Although rare, the same position can also be occupied by an adjective or an adjectivized *-ing* participle, functioning as a condensed comment clause:

(5c) **Surprising**, it was she who initiated the divorce proceedings.¹¹

Certain unattached participles can also serve a true adverbial function. Set expressions like *strictly speaking*, *continuing our story*, *judging by appearances*, etc., are common and acceptable, mainly in colloquial style (Grancharov 2009: 47). They cannot qualify as predicatives since their implied subject is entirely absent from the main clause:

(5d) And **strictly speaking**, you do not believe anything nearly as strong as that content.¹²

Thus far, we have examined detached *-ing* clauses in sentence-initial and sentence-final positions, where the subject of the main clause serves as their antecedent. This analysis does not address the position immediately following the antecedent, which poses the most difficulties for syntactic analysis. In such cases, these clauses may occur medially or finally, appended either to the subject or to another nominal entity (the antecedent is in bold):

(5e) *Rarely did two men meet, or three stand in a bar, or a dozen gnaw tough venison in camp, that **the valley's future**, paralyzing in its grandeur, did not come up, not as conjecture but as a certainty. (East of Eden)*

(5e.1) *Most likely all dreams, when being retold, should begin with **the opening statement**, revealing and startling in its simplicity, which I heard from Aya, who was then four. (Physics of Sorrow)*

In this position, detached elements can be paraphrased as non-restrictive relative clauses rather than independent finite clauses. Such paraphrasing is impossible when the detached clause either precedes the antecedent or is separated from it by the predicate verb:

(5f) *[Reaching behind the garments], Cyrus brought out his shotgun. (East of Eden)*

**Who was reaching behind the garments, Cyrus brought out his shotgun.*

**Cyrus brought out his shotgun, who was reaching behind the garments.*

¹¹ The sentence is adapted from Quirk et al. (1985: 426).

¹² Moss, S. *Probabilistic Knowledge* (2018)

Assigning a predicative function to such constructions does not seem viable. The two options for analysis are a post-head attribute or an adverbial clause. Distinguishing between the two is particularly challenging because neither adjectivization nor the presence of a copular relationship are reliable criteria. Unlike the predicative, an attribute can be realized by both adjectival and non-adjectival participles. Furthermore, an intensive relationship is not an obligatory requirement, as relative clauses can attribute qualities, states, and actions to their antecedent:

working people
people working abroad
people who work abroad

One reliable marker of an adverbial function is the presence of an auxiliary or the verb *be* in the *-ing* clause because these forms typically cannot function as post-modifiers in NPs (Quirk et al. 1985: 1125):

(5g) *And Cal, having gone this far, proceeded with his self-punishment.*

(5g.1) *The coyote, being wild, lives close to man and his chickenyards.*

(*East of Eden*)

In the absence of those markers, the *-ing* forms generally remain ambiguous between attributes and adverbials. Such cases, however, appear to be influenced to some extent by the degree of adjectivization of the *-ing* forms. Both adjective clauses and adjectivized participles in a post-nominal position, whether detached or not, bear little, if any, adverbial meaning:

(5h) *Her eyes traveled to his hair, **dark and thick and vibrant**, styled in a casual perfection* (COCA, 2009/FIC)

(5h.1) *If you could invite three famous **people, living or dead**, to dinner, who would they be?* (COCA, 2017/NEWS)

Both examples above qualify as attributes. In contrast, detaching a postnominal verbal *-ing* clause tends to enhance its adverbial meaning:

(5i) *She felt that people **having a good time** were wide open to the devil.*

(5i.1) *She felt that people, **having a good time**, were wide open to the devil.*

(*East of Eden*)

In [5i], the *-ing* clause is functionally equivalent to a restrictive relative clause, implying “people who have a good time”, while in [5i.1], it has

prominent circumstantial nuances of meaning, implying “people, while having a good time”. Other examples exhibiting the same dependency are:

[5i.2] *Tier eyes, **looking at me**, were never brighter.* (COCA, 2015/FIC)

(= *as they were looking at me*)

[5i.3] *These people, **living in a state of constant anxiety**, usually have the ability to say 'no' to anything that will affect their promised path to the good life of Reilly.* (COCA, 2012/BLOG)

(= *since they live in a state of constant anxiety*)

However, the acquisition of adverbial nuances by detached verbal *-ing* clauses is not universal or consistent, and some instances still lean towards an attributive analysis:

[5j.4] *The majority of Elliot's photographs portrayed smiling people, **living in community** and content with their way of life.* (COCA, 2003/ACAD)

6. Conclusions

Detached subjectless *-ing* clauses without a subordinator can perform three syntactic functions: subject predicative, adverbial, and attributive. Their classification primarily depends on the degree of adjectivization of the participle. Additional factors influencing their categorization include: 1) the antecedent of the *-ing* clause, 2) the type of relationship—intensive or extensive—between the *-ing* clause and its antecedent, and 3) the position of the *-ing* clause relative to the antecedent and the predicate verb.

According to the formulated criteria, *-ing* clauses exhibiting a predicative function are either realized by adjectivized participles or include the copula *be*. These clauses may occur in either an initial or final position but must refer to the subject of the main clause as their antecedent. While such clauses often acquire adverbial nuances of meaning, these nuances are insufficient to classify them as adverbial clauses.

Non-adjectivized *-ing* participles occupying the same syntactic position do not meet the criteria for predicatives, as they establish an extensive relationship with their antecedent. This characteristic, combined with their pronounced circumstantial meaning, suggests an adverbial function. An adverbial function is also attributed to *-ing* clauses whose antecedent is the entire matrix clause, including certain unattached participles, also referred to as dangling modifiers. Another reliable indicator

of an adverbial function is the auxiliary *having*, which consistently signals a verbal interpretation of the *-ing* form.

Finally, a detached *-ing* clause can be analyzed as an attribute when it has a nominal antecedent and occurs immediately after it, either medially or finally. The adjectivization of the participle supports this analysis, while the absence of adjectival properties renders the construction ambiguous between an attributive and an adverbial interpretation. Detaching a non-adjectival *-ing* clause often enhances its adverbial characteristics, though this correlation remains inconsistent and unreliable.

The present study offers a systematic framework for analyzing the syntactic functions of detached subjectless *-ing* clauses without a subordinator, highlighting the significance of adjectivization and other contextual factors in their classification. These findings hold potential relevance for theoretical linguistics, particularly in understanding the interplay between syntax and semantics. Future research, incorporating a broader corpus of authentic examples, could further refine this framework and explore its applicability to other detached constructions as well.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AdjP	<i>adjective phrase</i>
Attr	<i>attribute</i>
AM	<i>adverbial modifier</i>
Co	<i>object complement</i>
Cs	<i>subject complement</i>
NP	<i>noun phrase</i>
ObjPred	<i>object predicative</i>
Od	<i>direct object</i>
Post-attr	<i>postposed attribute</i>
Pre-attr	<i>preposed attribute</i>
Pred	<i>predicative</i>
SubjPred	<i>subject predicative</i>
VP	<i>verb phrase</i>