

College of Education  
University for Humanities Department of English  
Post-Graduate Studies



**A Course in Morphology and Syntax**

**M.A. Methodology**

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**Non-Finite Clauses**

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## Introduction

All the sentences we looked at before had a verb that showed tense (present or past). These are called finite clauses. A non-finite clause doesn't have a verb that shows tense — it's tenseless. Main clauses must always have tense (they are finite). So, non-finite clauses can only be subordinate clauses.

Example:

- **Finite clause:** *She runs every day.* (The verb "runs" shows present tense.)
- **Non-finite clause:** *Running every day, she stays fit.* ("Running" has no tense — it's non-finite and the clause is subordinate.)

## Part I: The form of non-finite clauses

### The Form of Non-Finite Clauses

Non-finite clauses are different from finite clauses in more than just tense.

1. Non-finite clauses do not have tense.
2. They often do not have a subject (no noun doing the action).
  - In contrast, finite clauses must have a subject that matches the verb.
    - Example (finite): *She eats vegetables.*

- Example (non-finite): *Eating vegetables is healthy.* (no subject is shown)

### **Covert Subject (Hidden Subject):**

Sometimes the subject of a non-finite clause is hidden (covert). This happens in two ways:

#### **a. The subject is general and not specific**

[1] [Chatting with the construction workers] is a good way of [wasting time].

#### **b. The subject is the same as the subject in the main sentence**

[2] Hedda enjoys [chatting with the construction workers].

When the subject is the same as the main subject, we say the main subject **controls** it. Example: Hedda enjoys...etc. In contrast the subject of "Chatting." When the subject is general and has no controller, it's called **free**. Example: *chatting with the...etc.* → No one controls it, so it's free and general.

## **The Form of Non-Finite Verbs**

Non-finite verbs are traditionally divided into (I) infinitives and (II) participles. Each of these is further divided:

**I. INFINITIVE verbs:** a. Bare infinitive b. To-infinitive

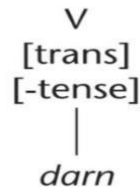
**II. PARTICIPLE verbs:** a. Passive participle b. -ing participle

## Bare Infinitive Verbs

A bare infinitive is the base form of a verb — just the verb without “to” and without any tense (no -s, -ed, or -ing). It’s called “bare” because it’s not covered by anything — no “to”, no auxiliary, and no tense. Examples:

She made him [darn her socks].

→ “*darn*” is a bare infinitive. No *to*, no tense.



## To-Infinitive Verbs

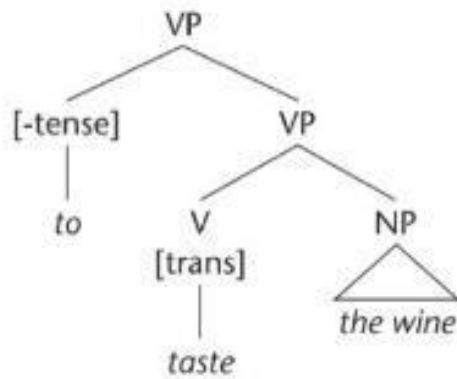
To-infinitives are verbs that come after the word "to", like:

- *to eat, to go, to be, to help, to dance*

These verbs are also non-finite (they don’t show tense — no past or present).

Examples:

- We declined his invitation [to taste the wine].  
(*to taste* = to-infinitive)

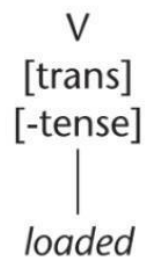


- The verb after "to" uses the base form: *to go*, *to win*, *to run*
- You can add:
  - PERF: *to have eaten* (perfect)
  - PROG: *to be eating* (progressive)
  - PASS: *to be beaten* (passive)
- But you can't use modals like *can*, *should*, *might* in non-finite clauses because modals are always tensed.

## Passive Participle Verbs

These verbs look like past participles (the third form of the verb) and have a passive meaning. They are used without "to" or helping verbs like "was" or "were". Examples:

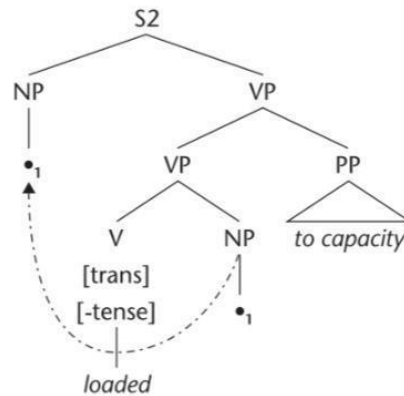
[The palanquin loaded ], we took a rest.



[14] [Loaded to capacity], the palanquin lurched on.

In [14] it is not overt but is controlled by – understood as identical to – the main clause subject (the palanquin). In the subordinate clause of

[14], then, there will be both a subject-gap and an object-gap

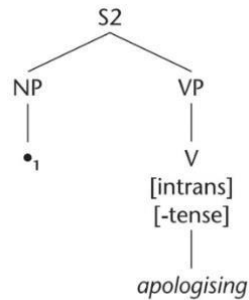


## ing Participle Verbs

Just like *to-infinitive* clauses, we can also use -ing verbs (called -ing participle clauses) in non-finite clauses. Instead of starting with “to,” these clauses start with a verb + -ing.

Examples:

- He had trouble [apologizing].



We don't call these "progressive participles," because they are not always about actions happening right now. Some verbs cannot be used in the progressive tense (with "is/was ...ing"), but they can appear in -ing participle clauses.

Examples with stative verbs:

- Wrong: *I am knowing the answer.*
- Correct: Knowing the answer helps me stay calm.

## Complementisers and non-finite clauses

As in finite clauses, there are two complementiser positions in non-finite clauses. These are filled by the (unfronted) C1 complementisers, for and whether, and (fronted) C2 wh-expressions. I shall represent all subordinate clauses as introduced by C1 and dominated by S' (unless complementing a preposition) but I shall only represent the C2 position and S'' when necessary

### C1 Complementisers: "for" and "whether"

In to-infinitive clauses (like *to eat*, *to play*, *to help*), we sometimes use words called complementisers to connect the clause to the main sentence.