

Review of Bouzada-Jabois, Carla. 2021. *Nonfinite Supplements in the Recent History of English*. Bern: Peter Lang. ISBN: 978-3-034-34226-1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3726/b19142>

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This monograph explores subjectless *-ing* and *-ed* supplement constructions in the recent history of English from a corpus-based perspective. Supplements are defined as constructions in the clausal periphery that do not fulfil a core syntactic function within the matrix clause, and whose deletion typically does not have syntactic, semantic or grammatical consequences for either the structure or the interpretation of the clause. Despite their peripheral status, supplements are prototypically linked to the main clause in various ways. The analysis of these two very common types of non-finite supplement allows for a better characterization of the periphery of the clause in terms of more and less prototypical elements. The monograph also contributes to the description of the diachronic variation of the features that characterize the construction in Late Modern English and Present-Day English. On this level, the study reveals increasing homogeneity among supplements over time and proposes that this reflects a trend towards the regularization of the non-finite periphery in English.

Chapter 1 introduces the construction which is the focus of the study and Chapter 2 presents the review of the relevant literature and a survey of the main features that characterize it, also providing a terminological overview of the concept of supplement and examining a number of features that have been used to define this concept with a view to establishing a clear-cut definition of the term and distinguishing it from other similar constructions. Chapter 3 deals with methodological issues concerning corpus linguistics in general, the corpora used for the analysis of supplements in the study, as well as the retrieval process used to build the database. Chapters 4 and 5 represent the



core of the study and provide an in-depth analysis of *-ing* and *-ed* supplements in Late Modern English and Present-Day English. The final chapter summarizes the results of the study and proposes possible avenues for future research.

The author is aware that the subject of her study is not easy to define. She proceeds through a rigorous examination of the various tests proposed in the literature for identifying supplement clauses and concludes, quite rightly, that neither the impossibility of clefting (p. 72), nor the impossibility of being the focus of a question (p. 75), nor the fact of being outside the scope of negation (p. 77), nor that of being excluded from verb phrase anaphor (p. 79), are sufficiently reliable diagnostics for identifying such clauses, as shown in (1)–(4) respectively:

- (1) a. *Going down a hill*, the horse threw him over his head.
 b. It was going down a hill that the horse threw him over his head.
- (2) a. *Told of some business that drew her to where he was hiding*, she said she would be glad to help.
 b. When did she say that she would be glad to help?
- (3) a. *Just staying in the shade*, one does not remain hydrated.
 b. One does not remain hydrated just staying in the shade but drinking lots of water.
- (4) a. *Used with due care*, this ointment may be applied again and again to the same region of the body.
 b. And *so* may this other ointment [= this other ointment may be applied again and again to the same region of the body if used with due care].

She concludes that “the syntactic dependency or integration of supplements with respect to their main clauses is viewed as a scalar property of the construction, in that it involves a continuum from more to less syntactically dependent or integrated supplements” (p. 80). To be included in the database of the study, supplements do have to meet certain criteria however: “they have to show a clearly adverbial reading, be able to move to a position other than post-subject, and be understood as influencing the whole event in the main clause and not just the subject” (p. 86).

Even these minimal criteria are not unambiguously applicable, however. First of all, it is hard to define what a ‘clearly adverbial reading’ is: for example, if

correspondence to a *how*-question is taken to characterize the prototype of such a reading, the adjective *sick* would have to be analyzed as manifesting an adverbial ‘manner’ reading in (5) below:

(5) She was sick.

Bouzada-Jabois herself is aware moreover of the difficulty in distinguishing non-restrictive reduced adjectival clauses from adverbial supplement clauses (pp. 44–47). Non-restrictive adjective clauses can be argued in certain cases to meet the third criterion, that of influencing the whole event, as illustrated by (6) below:

(6) The children, who had eaten their fill, were allowed to leave the table.

Here the adjectival clause provides the reason for the occurrence of the main verb event. Such clauses might be excluded by the second criterion from the category of supplements due to their inability to move to a position other than post-subject; however, the equivalent *-ing* clause, *having eaten their fill*, can be fronted to pre-subject position, as in (7):

(7) Having eaten their fill, the children were allowed to leave the table.

This makes the inability of the non-restrictive adjectival clause in (6) to move to a non-post-subject position appear attributable to the need for the antecedent of the relative pronoun to occur before the pronoun itself, which has nothing to do with supplemental status.

Recourse to the criterion of omissibility is also fraught with problems. Following De Smet (2015), Bouzada-Jabois analyzes the *-ing* clauses in (8) and (9) below as “optional and therefore supplemental” (p. 87):

(8) At night workers just sat around *playing cards or sleeping*.

(9) (...) merchants who stood by the door of the custom-house *watching the disembarkation of a cargo*.

On the methodological level, treating these two clauses as ‘optional’ implies a view of the sentences containing them as abstract sequences detached from the intentions of the speaker/writer who produces them. In no way are the *-ing* clauses in (8) and (9) optional with respect to the speaker’s intended message, however. The optionality test simply shows that the circumstantial adverb *around* and the circumstantial prepositional phrase *by the door of the custom-house* define the verbs *sit* and *stand* sufficiently for them to

make sense as predicates without the subsequent *-ing* clauses. It is very risky to draw conclusions about the structure of these two sentences based on such a criterion. Moreover, if one applies the criterion that the author borrows from De Smet (2015) for distinguishing the supplement clauses in (8) and (9) from the complement integrated participial clause in (10) below, according to which the complement can be identified by the fact that its omission “broadens the semantic scope of the main clause” (p. 89), the two purported supplements would also qualify as complements:

(10) The receptionist is busy filling a fifth box.

Just as *The receptionist is busy* has a broader semantic scope than the verbal predicate in (10) above, so the truncated predicates in *Workers just sat around* and *Merchants stood by the door of the custom-house* have a broader semantic scope than the full ones in (8) and (9).

The author subscribes to De Smet (2015)’s conclusion that the reason for the obligatoriness of the participle clause in the *spend time* construction illustrated in (11) below is “pragmatic rather than syntactic” (p. 91):

(11) (...) and she spent the entire evening convincing her that Uts was desperately passionately in love with her.

This claim is purported to be supported by the fact that the participle clause may be omitted if the time-word carries extra modification, as in (12), or is followed by a prepositional phrase or adverbial, as in (13):

(12) Julie spent a *restless and weary* evening, which passed into a restless and weary night

(13) She arrived in Jamaica in April, intending to spend six months *there*.

The purportedly pragmatic character of the obligatoriness of *convincing her that Uts was desperately passionately in love with her* leads Bouzada-Jabois to exclude such constructions from her corpus. One may legitimately question however whether the presence of a prepositional phrase, such as *with Susan* in (14) below, which would be included in Bouzada-Jabois’ corpus due to the acceptability of *she spent the entire evening with Susan*, fundamentally changes the role of the participle clause in the construction instantiated by (11) above:

(14) (...) and she spent the entire evening *with Susan* convincing her that Uts was desperately passionately in love with her.

On a more general level, there are fundamental problems with the distinction adopted by the author between ‘syntax’ (complementation defined as the determination of arguments by a predicate) and ‘pragmatics’ (obligatoriness of certain adjuncts due to discourse requirements). Goldberg and Ackerman (2001) propose that obligatory adjuncts such as those occurring with the passives of accomplishment verbs (*This house was built last year* versus **This house was built*) can be accounted for by pragmatic requirements, in this case the need for the utterance to have an informational focus. Thus, *This house was built* does not provide significant information about the house, since we know that all houses are built. This observation raises the very important question of the contribution made to the determination of obligatoriness by pragmatic factors, which obviously have nothing to do with clause structure.¹ The idea behind the complement/adjunct distinction is that a complement is required in order to complete the meaning of its head, without which the latter would be incoherent, while an adjunct merely adds a further characterization to its head, restricting the latter to a proper subset of its denotation (see Dowty 2003: 34). However, it is questionable whether one can determine essentialness versus accidentalness outside of a context: thus, for example, the verb *tell* is usually treated as a three-place predicate involving an agent, a patient and an addressee; however, in a use such as (15) below there are but two arguments and there is no feeling at all that the other one has been ellipsed:

(15) The author tells the story using a third person.

Some authors hold therefore that no diagnostic criteria have emerged that will reliably distinguish adjuncts from complements, e.g., Dowty (2003) or Herbst (2020). This undermines the syntax vs. pragmatics distinction at the basis of Bouzada-Jabois’ delimitation of her corpus (p. 94), according to which

all of the constructions included in this analysis may be regarded as completely optional elements because they are not syntactically required by the main clause in any sense and therefore do not take part in the complementation pattern of the main verb.

In the chapter on supplements in Late Modern English, the author examines the formal (mainly positional) and semantic features of these constructions. In the section on semantic features, she employs Kortmann’s (1991: 121) scale of informativeness in order to classify the 19 adverbial meanings found in the corpus into four broad

¹ The fact that one could accept *This house was built* in a fairy-tale, as in *This house was built, but that one just appeared out of nowhere*, confirms the importance of pragmatic considerations for this question.

categories: 1) CCCC+ (which includes concession, contrast, condition, purpose, cause, result and concessive-conditional meanings), 2) temporal (which includes anteriority, posteriority and simultaneity), 3) manner, and 4) elaboration (which includes accompanying circumstances, addition, specification, exemplification, comparison, substitution and deictic-representational supplements). Her adaptation of Kortmann's scale raises a couple of problems. Firstly, Bouzada-Jabois does not follow the scale for the ranking of 'simultaneity', which is classified as less informative than 'manner' by Kortmann, nor for 'specification/exemplification', which are classified as more informative than 'simultaneity' in Kortmann's analysis. This departure from the original scale is neither mentioned nor justified. The second problem is that Kortmann's (1991: 120) scale was constructed exclusively for "present-participial free adjuncts/absolutes" and Bouzada-Jabois makes no adjustment for the *-ed* participles which are part of her corpus data. This is a critical defect for the temporal readings, as Kortmann justifies placing 'simultaneity' very low on the informativeness scale because he assumes it to be the unmarked value for the present participle. The unmarked value for the past participle, however, would not be 'simultaneity' but 'anteriority'.

Unresolved issues also arise in the discussion of the augmentation of supplements by means of connectors such as *with*, *rather than*, *besides*, *while*, etc. The received wisdom regarding the presence of connectors (see Kortmann 1991; Fonteyn and van de Pol 2016) holds that the more informative the meaning of a supplement, the more likely it is to be marked by a connector. However, the number one adverbial meaning marked by a connector in Bouzada-Jabois' corpus —'manner'— is located in the lower half of Kortmann's scale of informativeness and, in addition, the lowest member of Kortmann's scale —'accompanying circumstance'— ranks near the top of the list of adverbial meanings signaled by a connector² in Bouzada-Jabois' data. The author gives two reasons why 'manner' is thus ranked (p. 238). The first is that the manner category contains a great number of *-ing* forms that are introduced by the preposition *by* which could be claimed to be gerundive and so nominal rather than verbal. This argument does not carry much weight, however, as Bouzada-Jabois herself argues against it (pp. 39–40), demonstrating that such forms are verbal and not nominal. The second reason adduced is that Fonteyn and van de Pol (2016) regard 'manner' as one of the most informative adverbial categories. Since this stands in direct contradiction to Kortmann's

² This is also the case for the Present-day English data (pp. 306–307), although accompanying circumstance is the sixth rather than fourth among the most frequently augmented adverbial supplement.

scale, one would have expected some discussion of the superiority of Fonteyn and van de Pol's claim. Disappointingly, none is provided. Concerning the other problematic category, 'accompanying circumstance', Bouzada-Jabois observes that the augmented occurrence of this type represents only 21 percent of the total occurrences of adverbials denoting accompanying circumstances, which makes non-augmentation the norm for this type of adverbial. That is indeed the case, but it does not explain the disconnect between informativeness and augmentation with this category. Moreover, Bouzada-Jabois fails to point out that three other categories that rank very high on the informativeness scale are majoritarily non-augmented, as only 13 percent of adverbials expressing cause, 10 percent of those expressing purpose and 0 percent of those expressing result are preceded by an augmentor.

As a final note, it could be pointed out that the evidence is even stronger than Bouzada-Jabois makes it out to be for her claim that the data indicate a marked crystallization of the status of supplements and absolute constructions as sentential peripheral elements in modern and contemporary English (p. 320). Not only does the data show a statistically significant decrease in the most informative types of supplements and absolutes from Late Modern English to Present-Day English but, overall, the frequency of supplements has declined by a whopping 70 percent over this period (as Bouzada-Jabois shows in the graph on p. 261) and that of absolute constructions by 12 percent (as shown by van de Pol and Cuyckens 2014). This finding thus represents a significant contribution to the study of the periphery of the sentence in the recent history of English.

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