

A Corpus-Based Diachronic Study of a Change in the Use of Non-Finite Clauses in Written English

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Occasional notes in secondary literature suggest that there is a growing tendency to use non-finite clauses in written English. It is partly attributed to the fact that during the process of historical development the English finite verb has lost much of its dynamism and the nominal elements of predication, namely infinitives, participles and gerunds have gradually become semantically more important. This paper deals with the occurrences of non-finite clauses in the tagged Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora, which are matching corpora of American English and British English respectively. The article looks at 1) the use of noun phrases followed by -ing participles, -ed participles and to-infinitives, 2) the use of -ing/-ed clauses with/without overt subordinators and 3) the occurrences of to-infinitive clauses. When the structural patterns 1), 2) and 3) were taken as wholes there was always an increase in the frequency of occurrence of non-finite clauses demonstrated by hundreds of examples in the Frown and F-LOB corpora. This may be considered significant since there is only a 30-year difference between the Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora. The findings thus completely support the premise that when the perspective of the research is diachronic, in written English non-finite clauses are becoming increasingly prominent.

Keywords

Corpus-based diachronic research; finite/non-finite clauses; written English; syntactic functions of clauses; language change

1. Introduction

There is an increasing propensity in written English towards the use of non-finite clauses. This trend can be gleaned from notes that occasionally occur in literature (Vachek, Hladký, Mair and Leech, Leech et al.). A trend in written English towards a non-finite mode of expression has been also indicated

by the findings of eight exploratory studies with a diachronic perspective (Malá, “Notes on Norms and Usage”, Malá, “Changing Clause Types”) which analysed academic texts from three disciplines (psychology, economics, sociology), newspaper articles from three newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, the *Daily Mirror*) and excerpts of continuous running texts taken from British fiction and American fiction. Each study contrasted the analyses of 100 consecutive sentences from a text published at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century and a text published towards the end of the 20th century or the beginning of the 21st century. Gradually 1,600 sentences that contained 5,318 clauses were analysed. The aim of the studies was to detect possible changes in the use of finite/non-finite clauses that occurred within a hundred-year time span. The analysis was carried out by hand. Sourced from within the continuous running texts, every explicitly expressed finite and non-finite predication was categorized either as a main clause, or a finite or non-finite subordinate clause. Subordinate clauses were placed into four syntactic categories, depending on the function they performed in sentences. The subcategories were the following: 1) Clauses used instead of clause elements which are normally expressed by noun phrases (a subject, object, complement); 2) Clauses occupying an adverbial element slot; 3) Clauses contributing to the complexity of noun phrases in the form of pre- and postmodification and 4) Comment clauses. Examples are below. In 1a) there is a finite clause functioning as a direct object, in 1b) a non-finite clause used as a direct object. Examples 2a) and 2b) illustrate a finite and a non-finite clause performing the function of an adverbial. In 3a) and 3b) there is a finite and a non-finite clause carrying out the function of postmodification. Example 3c) shows an *-ing* participle used as premodification. In the manual research *-ing* and *-ed* participles that were used as premodification and were derived from a verb base were counted as non-finite clauses. Finally, 4a) gives an example of a finite comment clause, while 4b) a non-finite comment clause. The theoretical basis for the analyses of sentences was *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al.) and *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al.). The most important finding valid for all the three registers – even for the fiction texts representing idiolects – suggested that current users of the written language employ non-finite clauses more frequently now than was the case a hundred years ago. This is obvious only when the perspective is diachronic. When the perspective is synchronic, there are always many more finite clauses than non-finite ones.

- 1a) He says *that he likes music*.
- 1b) She wants *to study English*.
- 2a) She will buy it *if she has enough money*.
- 2b) I got up early *to catch the train*.
- 3a) The man *who lives upstairs* is very friendly.
- 3b) The man *living upstairs* is very friendly.
- 3c) That has become a *growing* problem.
- 4a) He is *as you know* a good sportsman.
- 4b) *Generally speaking*, women live longer than men.

2. Brown/Frown versus LOB/F-LOB corpora – methodology of the research

In the manual research which used the 100 sentences as units of analysis, the findings – even though consistently suggesting a tendency towards a non-finite mode of expression in all the eight exploratory studies – were nevertheless derived from a rather small dataset. This paper deals with the frequencies of occurrence of non-finite clauses in the tagged Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora. In the manual research finite clauses were always contrasted with non-finite ones. The corpus-based diachronic study focused on non-finite clauses only. The aim was to try to verify the most important finding of the manual research, namely that non-finite clauses are becoming more and more prominent. This was done not by contrasting finite clauses with non-finite ones as in the manual research, but by comparing the development of some non-finite structural patterns. The tagged Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora were chosen because they more or less contain the same registers of written English as were used in the manual research, which are academic English, newspaper language and fiction. The Brown Corpus is characterized as follows: “One million words of edited written American English; created in 1961; divided into 2,000-word samples from various genres (e.g., press reportage, fiction, government documents)” (Meyer 143). The Frown Corpus replicated the Brown Corpus, the only difference being the year of its publication – 1991. The same applies to the LOB and F-LOB corpora which represent British English. In the version analysed, the Brown corpus had 1,360,000 words. To make the frequency counts of all the four corpora comparable, the numbers obtained from the Brown corpus were normalized and adjusted to one million.

Otherwise, normalizing was not necessary because the other three corpora contained one million words. Another reason why the tagged Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora were chosen was the diachronic perspective of the study. The Brown and LOB matching corpora were collected in 1961 while the Frown and F-LOB matching corpora were collected in 1991. In other words, there was a thirty-year time span between the Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora, “which broadly corresponds to the interval of one generation that is usually considered the minimum period required to clearly identify and document linguistic change in real time” (Mair, “Three Changing Patterns” 106).

The tagged corpora enabled us to explore the following patterns: 1) Noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-infinitives, 2) *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators, and 3) The occurrences of *to*-infinitive clauses. To find out the functional variety that occurred within the individual structural patterns and to check whether the examples found by the computer fit the structural pattern analysed, thirty examples representing a particular structural pattern from each corpus were exposed to manual post-processing. In 1) those were examples 1-10, 301-310 and 701-710 for noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, noun phrases followed by *-ed* participles and noun phrases followed by *to*-infinitives, altogether 360 examples; in 2) those were examples 101-110, 401-410 and 801-810 for non-finite *-ing/-ed* clauses with overt subordinators (prepositions, conjunctions), and non-finite *-ing/-ed* clauses without overt subordinators, altogether 240 examples. Finally, in section 3) those were examples 201-210, 501-510 and 901-910 in each corpus, thus another 120 examples. On the whole, 720 examples were post-processed in this manner. The individual sections will now be dealt with in turn. Parts of the sentences illustrating the issues discussed are italicized. In the tables next to the frequency counts for the Frown and F-LOB corpora there are always arrows pointing upwards or downwards which indicate whether the frequencies of occurrence increased or decreased in the corpora collected in 1991.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1 Noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-infinitives

Noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-infinitives were explored separately. Table 2 shows the frequency counts for noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles in the four corpora. There are three different kinds

of non-finite clauses. In an overwhelming majority of cases *-ing* participles following noun phrases function as postmodification. Instead of a full relative clause there is an *-ing* participle. This is illustrated in example (1). There are also some examples of absolute participle constructions whose subjects are anaphorically linked to the superordinate clause. The link is indicated by a lexical means often introduced by *with* as in example (2), or by a pro-form as in example (3). In some cases, an *-ing* participle could be converted to a clause linked by coordination. Thus *saying* in (4) could be replaced by *and said*. Only one example (5) out of those 120 that were post-processed did not belong to the structural pattern analysed. In this specific example, a noun phrase was followed by an *-ing* participle because the structure was interrogative.

- (1) The campaign *leading to the election* was so quiet, ... (Brown)
- (2) But a proper contest, *with a successor coming in*, restored the authority of the premiership ... (F-LOB)
- (3) ...it soon became a ...fight between the cable industry and over-the-air broadcasters, *each using their own media* ... (Frown)
- (4) Mr. Peter Robinson ... welcomed the ceasefire *saying* it was indicative of the mood of the vast majority of people. (F-LOB)
- (5) What was our *teacher crying for*... (Frown)

Table 2 Noun phrase + -ing participle

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
1,846	1,991 ↑	1,782	1,977 ↑

Table 3 shows that the frequency of occurrence of noun phrases followed by an *-ed* participle is lower in Frown and F-LOB. In an absolutely overwhelming majority of cases an *-ed* participle functioned as postmodification. This can be seen in example (6). Examples (7), (8) and (9) illustrate the structural varieties that do not belong to the pattern analysed. In (7) a noun phrase is followed by an *-ed* participle because it is a clause of condition without a conjunction and it is necessary to use inversion. In (8) the ellipsis is caused by coordination. In (9) there is a question in the present perfect tense. In a few cases the past tense was wrongly tagged as past participle. Altogether, there were 12 examples out of 120 that did not belong to the pattern analysed.

- (6) ...Sir Roy had found messages *sent from the government* were unsatisfactory. (LOB)

- (7) Had *the referee shown* the yellow card..., the player would have modified his mood... (F-LOB)
 (8) Each film has to be judged on its merits and *decisions taken*. (F-LOB)
 (9) Has *President Bush forgotten* that he pressured the OAS... (Frown)

Table 3 Noun phrase + *-ed* participle

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
2,933	2,908 ↓	3,017	2,811 ↓

In the structural pattern NPs + *to* infinitive shown in Table 4, all the examples found by the computerized research that were post-processed could be categorized. They belonged to 5 kinds of non-finite clauses. Most of them were categorized as the infinitive of purpose (10) and postmodification (11). The three remaining kinds were represented by only a few examples each. In (12) there is a non-finite clause used as a direct object, which is a clause element normally expressed by a noun phrase. Example (13) shows the structure of the infinitive of purpose when the subjects in both clauses are different. Sentence (14) illustrates the use of the introductory *it* and extraposition of a non-finite *to*-infinitive clause which functions as a notional subject.

- (10) It urged that the city take steps *to remedy this problem*. (Brown)
 (11) The briefing ... underlines Labour's determination *to keep the issue high on the political agenda*. (F-LOB)
 (12) ... said that date would allow John Major *to use the Conservative Party Conference as an election platform*. (F-LOB)
 (13) Miyazawa urged his country to wait patiently for Russia *to sort out its domestic problems*. (Frown)
 (14) that it would be a great error *to do so* ... (LOB)

Table 4 Noun phrase + *to* infinitive

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
3,413	3,773 ↑	3,123	3,805 ↑

Table 5 shows the total frequency counts for noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-infinitives in all the four corpora. In Tables

2, 3 and 4, the arrows pointing upwards or downwards next to the numbers in Frown and F-LOB indicate whether the absolute numbers increased or decreased. Even though there was a fall in the frequency of occurrence of noun phrases followed by *-ed* participles in both the Frown and F-LOB corpora, when all the patterns are considered as a whole, the frequency counts clearly rise, with noun phrases followed by *to*-infinitives being the most frequent structural pattern.

Table 5 Noun phrase + -ing participle, -ed participle, or to-infinitive

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
8,192	8,671 ↑ 480	7,922	8,593 ↑ 671

3.2 Non-finite *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators

In the tagged corpora, it was possible to find also non-finite *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators. When an overt subordinator (preposition or conjunction) is used, it makes the semantic relationship between the main clause and subordinate clause unequivocal. Table 6 exhibits the frequency counts for the structural pattern preposition, conjunction + *-ing* clause in the four corpora. Most commonly they were analysed as participle *-ing* clauses functioning as an adverbial as in (15), participle/gerund *-ing* clauses performing the function of an adverbial as in (16) and gerund *-ing* clauses playing the role of a prepositional object. This is shown in example (17).

- (15) *Although playing with the wind ...*, they were never able to control the play. (LOB)
- (16) *Before entering the service*, Pfaff for five years did clerical work with a ... firm.... (Brown)
- (17) Yet the UK and the USA have blatantly pursued policies directed *at keeping refugees out*. (Frown)

Out of the 120 examples checked in the four corpora, seven cases with the prepositions followed by an *-ing* structure did not belong to the category of non-finite *-ing* clauses with overt subordinators. The most common reasons why the preposition and an *-ing form* occurred next to each other were the presence of a continuous tense or a compound noun. They are shown in examples (18) and (19) respectively.

- (18) ...just after she was *like waking* from a bad dream. (LOB)
 (19) Two Americans and seven Cubans were executed *by firing* squads today.
 (Brown)

Table 6 Non-finite -ing clauses with overt subordinators

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
2,173	2,167 ↓	1,789	2,041 ↑

Table 7 displays the numbers for prepositions/conjunctions followed by *-ed* forms. The numbers are very small in comparison to the other structural patterns. Conjunctions followed by *-ed* forms were always analysed as adverbials as in example (20). If a preposition occurred next to an *-ed* form, it was an *-ed* participle used as premodification of a noun phrase as in example (21). In the manual analysis, examples of *-ing/-ed* participles derived from a verb base that were used as premodification were also counted as non-finite clauses. In this study, however, such patterns were not examined.

- (20) *If approved*, shareholder voting ... would be a blow to ... executives and directors. (Frown)
 (21) When he was a kid, Charlie Watts made a saxophone *out of rolled up* newspaper... (F-LOB)

Table 7 Non-finite -ed clauses with overt subordinators

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
150	148 ↓	88	146 ↑

Since in the tagged corpora special tags were assigned to full stops, commas, semi-colons and dashes, which often precede non-finite clauses without overt subordinators, it was possible to find out the frequency counts for these structural patterns as well. Table 8 shows the frequency of occurrence of non-finite *-ing* clauses without overt subordinators. The most common functions of this structural pattern are shown in (22), (23) and (24), namely an adverbial (more than half of the examples which were post-processed), non-defining postmodification of a noun phrase that could be extended to a full relative clause and present participle constructions in place of a co-ordinate

clause. Rather exceptionally, there were also examples of extraposition with introductory *it* shown in (25). Examples (26) and (27) illustrate structures which do not belong to this pattern. In (26) *following* is a lexicalized preposition, in (27) *slashing* is a verbal noun.

- (22) *Planning a Christmas wedding*, Andrew is also preparing for high office ... (F-LOB)
- (23) As personnel clerk, she handled thousands of entries, *ranging from appointments to jobs* ... (Brown)
- (24) He brushed aside evidence showing his complicity in illegal acts, *saying* it was an...error of judgement... (Frown)
- (25) It is infectious, almost child-like, *drawing* the audience into the company of his own imagination. (F-LOB)
- (26) *Following its success* ..., ABTA president John Dunscombe said he was confident more changes would follow. (F-LOB)
- (27) ...both sides agree that penalties need to be increased in an effort to cut down on the amount of hooking, *slashing* and high sticking that takes place. (Frown)

Table 8 Non-finite -ing clauses without overt subordinators

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
2,380	2,762 ↑	2,312	2,515 ↑

Table 9 shows the most common functions performed by the structural pattern non-finite *-ed* clauses without overt subordinators. In (28) it performs the function of an adverbial, in (29) it is non-defining postmodification. And finally, in (30) an *-ed* participle is in place of a coordinate clause because *focused* could be changed into *and focuses*. There is a rising tendency in the use of these forms even though the numbers were and are lower than those for the structural pattern punctuation marks + *-ing* participle. Some examples again do not fit, e.g., *avoided* after a comma in (31) is part of the present perfect tense.

- (28) *Stunned by remorse*, she swears to look after him for the rest of her life. (LOB)
- (29) Europe, *divided by language and culture*, lacks our flexibility. (Frown)
- (30) The business owned by GE is small, *focused* on domestic appliances. (F-LOB)

(31) He has, for example, *avoided* ... (Brown)

Table 9 Non-finite -ed clauses without overt subordinators

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
878	1,162 ↑	1,076	1,140 ↑

Table 10 displays the numbers when non-finite *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators are taken as a whole. They show a clear increase by several hundreds of cases in the corpora collected in 1991. However, when looking at Tables 6 and 7 showing *-ing/-ed* clauses with overt subordinators, we can see that in British English (the LOB and F-LOB corpora), there is a considerable increase in the amount of these structures, while in American English (the Brown and Frown corpora) there is a slight fall. The numbers for *-ing/-ed* clauses without overt subordinators convey an opposite impression exhibited in Tables 8 and 9. The increase of these structures in American English is much bigger than in British English.

Table 10 Non-finite -ing/-ed clauses with/without overt subordinators

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
5,581	6,239 ↑ 658	5,265	5,842 ↑ 577

3.3 *To*-infinitive clauses

Table 11 exhibits the absolute numbers of the structures with the *to*-infinitive shown by the computer. At first sight, it is obvious that the numbers in Table 11 are much higher than those in the other tables. Mair states that a *to*-infinitive clause is “the most frequent type of nonfinite complement clause throughout the history of English ...; it is also extremely flexible functionally ...” (*Infinitival Complement Clauses 2*). Non-finite *to*-infinitive clauses were used instead of clause elements that are normally expressed by noun-phrases, as postmodification, adverbials and in very few cases also as comments. In other words, they could be put in all the categories used in the manual research. In (32) a *to*-infinitive clause performs the function of a direct object. In (33) there is a subject to subject raising construction, the structural variation being

a finite clause *It is expected that legislation will be introduced on Monday*. In (34) a non-finite *to*-infinitive clause as a notional subject is extraposed and the sentence starts with introductory *it*. Example (35) shows a *to*-infinitive clause performing the function of postmodification. In (36) and (37) there are *to*-infinitive clauses functioning as adverbials. In (36) there is the infinitive of purpose, which was used very frequently. In (37) there is a *to*-infinitive clause of sufficiency – excess which, in comparison with the infinitive of purpose, occurred in a very small number of cases. Example (38) illustrates a *to*-infinitive comment clause, which also does not occur very often. In altogether 24 cases (20%) out of the 120 that were post-processed in the four corpora, a *to*-infinitive structure could not be put in any of the four categories because it was part of a complex verb phrase. This is illustrated in example (39). However, even if we reduced the numbers in Table 11 by 20%, they would still be very high, which is in agreement with Mair mentioned above.

- (32) The engines fell into a lake as the pilot dumped fuel and tried *to control the plane...* (Frown)
- (33) He said *legislation ... is expected to be introduced Monday*. (Brown)
- (34) ... it is false *to say the absence of a peace treaty with Germany causes no real danger*. (LOB)
- (35) ... the best way *to rule out such a tragic contingency* would be to sign a peace treaty. (LOB)
- (36) Doris Day will pop up with ... Milt Rackmil at the Carnegie theatre tomorrow *to toast 300 movie exhibitors*. (Brown)
- (37) ...the health service has not got enough money *to treat patients in a reasonable time*. (F-LOB)
- (38) ... *not to mention* the A's beating the Jays in five games for the 1989 AL pennant. (Frown)
- (39) The other \$15 million *is to be allotted* to municipalities on a matching fund basis. (Brown)

Table 11 *To*-infinitive

Brown	Frown	LOB	F-LOB
14,548	15,327 ↑ 779	15,833	16,424 ↑ 591

The findings in 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 could be summarized as follows. When we explored noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-

infinitives in section 3.1, the research revealed an increase in the frequency counts for noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles. They functioned mainly as postmodification, adverbials expressed by means of absolute participle constructions and *-ing* participle clauses that could be converted to a clause linked by coordination. The frequency counts for noun phrases followed by *-ed* participles decreased in the Frown/F-LOB corpora. They always carried out the function of postmodification. The most substantial rise in the frequency of occurrence combined with the widest functional variation was found in the structural pattern noun phrases followed by *to*-infinitive clauses. In most cases it expressed an adverbial by means of the infinitive of purpose when the subjects of the superordinate and subordinate clauses are the same, as well as when they are different. In this respect postmodifying “*to*-clauses are more flexible than participle clauses” because “they can occur with both subject and non-subject gaps ...” (Biber et al. 632). Moreover, among those examples that were post-processed, the second most common function of the structural pattern noun phrase followed by a *to*-infinitive clause was postmodification. Then there were also cases of clause elements normally expressed by noun phrases, e.g., a direct object or an extraposed notional subject. On the whole, it can be said that there was a clear increase in hundreds of examples in both the Frown (480 examples) and F-LOB (671 examples) corpora (see Table 5).

As for the non-finite *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators that were explored in section 3.2, the frequency counts show that when we consider them as a whole, the development is the same as in 3.1, namely that there is a clear increase in hundreds of examples in both the Frown (658) and F-LOB (577) corpora (see Table 10). Non-finite *-ing* clauses are more common than *-ed* clauses. Both *-ing* and *-ed* clauses without overt subordinators functioned as adverbials, non-defining postmodification and they were also used in place of clauses that could be linked by coordination. On top of that, there were cases of extraposed *-ing* clauses in the structure with introductory *it*. On the other hand, *-ing* clauses with overt subordinators were used mainly as adverbials and prepositional objects, while *-ed* clauses with overt subordinators as adverbials and premodification. However, a closer look at Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9 reveals a very important difference between British and American English. While in British English (the F-LOB corpus) the frequency counts for both *-ing/-ed* clauses with and without overt subordinators (conjunctions, prepositions) go up rather evenly (310 cases for *-ing/-ed* clauses with overt subordinators and 267 cases for *-ing/-ed* clauses without overt subordinators), the situation in American English (the Frown corpus) is totally different. There is a slight

fall of *-ing/-ed* clauses with overt subordinators (8 cases) and a significant rise (666 cases) in *-ing/-ed* clauses without overt subordinators. The fact that *-ing/-ed* clauses without overt subordinators prevail rather significantly over those with overt subordinators in American English certainly results in potential ambiguity of meaning. Overt subordinators are important because they make the semantic relationship between clauses unequivocal.

Finally, as regards the frequency of occurrence of the *to*-infinitive which was explored in section 3.3 in all the four corpora, the findings are in harmony with the other non-finite structures studied in sections 3.1 and 3.2. They again prove a rise in hundreds of examples in both the Frown (779) and F-LOB (591) corpora (see Table 11) even though about 20% of examples of those that were post-processed had to be excluded because they were part of a complex verb phrase. The examples that could be categorized, however, were put in all the four main categories used in the manual research. They were used instead of clause elements normally expressed by noun phrases, as postmodification, as adverbials and in a very small number of cases also as comments.

4. Conclusion

Diachronic research into written English indicates that in contemporary English, non-finite clauses are becoming increasingly prominent. This study looked at the development of non-finite clauses over a period of 30 years using the potential of the tagged Brown/Frown versus LOB/F-LOB corpora. It was possible to examine noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-infinitives, then *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators and also the occurrence of the *to*-infinitive. The computer always revealed sets of examples that corresponded to individual structural patterns. After that, it was necessary to carry out manual post-processing. Altogether 720 examples were post-processed to assess the functional variety that occurred within individual structural patterns. They were also examined to see whether the examples exhibited by the computer really fit the structural patterns analysed. Since “the few inflectional endings that do exist in English are homonymous” (Dušková 207), the computer sometimes showed examples of verbal nouns instead of gerunds or *-ed* forms that were incorrectly tagged as past participles instead of past tenses. With reference to the *to*-infinitive, a distinction had to be made between a *to*-infinitive as part of a complex verb phrase and a *to*-infinitive functioning as a clause element. Fortunately, only a small number

of examples found by the computer had to be excluded. The categories were the same as those used in the 8 exploratory studies that preceded this study when the analysis was carried out by hand.

The three structural patterns under analysis were 1) noun phrases followed by *-ing* participles, *-ed* participles and *to*-infinitives, 2) *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators and 3) the occurrence of the *to*-infinitive. When these three constructions were considered as wholes, a significant increase in the frequency of non-finite clauses was noted. Hundreds of examples were discovered in the Frown and F-LOB corpora. This may be considered significant because there is only a 30-year difference between the Brown/Frown and LOB/F-LOB corpora. However, it is important to emphasize that the tendency to use a non-finite mode of expression is not a feature of Modern English. It started much earlier as is indicated by some comments in literature. "In Old English, with very few exceptions, finite complement clauses were the norm. From around the thirteenth century, the infinitival variants emerged and started spreading (Leech et al 183) ... in the seventeenth century the gerund emerged and started spreading" (185). Vachek adds that during historical development the English finite verb lost much of its dynamism and as a consequence there was "a shift of the semantic centre of gravity from the finite verb on to the nominal element of predication" (35), which means a shift towards infinitives, participles and gerunds that gradually become more and more prominent. Such comments explain a growing tendency towards a non-finite mode of expression when the perspective is diachronic and match up with the findings of the research discussed above. The Brown/Frown corpora represent American English, while the LOB/F-LOB corpora represent British English. Comparing the numbers for both varieties of English, it seems that the general tendency to a non-finite mode of expression is common to both. The only difference appears to be *-ing/-ed* clauses with/without overt subordinators. In British English there is an increase in the numbers of both *-ing* and *-ed* clauses with and without overt subordinators while American English displays a clear growing tendency towards using *-ing/-ed* clauses without overt subordinators. The findings supported by the corpora explored are certainly more substantial than the findings achieved by manual research. However, the study has its limitations. A clear tendency towards a non-finite mode of expression would be demonstrable if both finite and non-finite forms could be used interchangeably and non-finite forms prevailed. Such issues have not been considered. Nonetheless, the results have indicated a tendency

in written English. It is evident that some items examined in this study could be analysed separately in much greater detail.

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