



## Ing – Participle Functioning as Dangling Modifier in English Language : An Eclectic Study

Fatima Saad Salih

Ismail Fathi Hussien

Department of English Language /College of  
Education for Human Sciences / University of Mosul

Assist. Prof./ Department of English Language / College  
of Education for Human Sciences / University of Mosul

### Article information

#### Article history:

Received February 21, 2023

Review March 12, 2023

Accepted March 18, 2023

Available online December 1, 2023

#### Keywords:

Ing-Participle,  
Dangling Modifiers,  
Eclectic Model

#### Correspondence:

Fatima Saad Salih

[fs5233590@gmail.com](mailto:fs5233590@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This research paper follows Quirk, et al. (1985) model, which deals with grammar from different perspectives; syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. Due to its multidisciplinary nature, this eclectic model is used here to study one type of dangling modifiers in English; that is, (-ing) participle. Used as a dangling modifier in English, (-ing) participle is often described, in the literature, as an ambiguous, and multifunctional structure. Since there hasn't been any research that focuses on this type of dangling modifiers eclectically, this paper might be of considerable value in this regard.

The problem of this study is to determine how we can investigate (-ing) participle as a dangling modifier eclectically, and how it impacts the sentence's comprehension. In this respect, there are a number of questions and hypotheses that are utilized as unconfirmed tests for the treatment of the problem tackled here. One of the most noticeable hypotheses given here is that (-ing) participle, as a dangling modifier, affects the entirety of sentences, including all of their constituent words, rather than just the words it modifies. To test the reliability as well as credibility, the data samples consisting 10 distinct texts, as typical samples of the overall corpus consisting of 50 texts, have been gathered from literary works, linguistic textbooks, periodicals, and news reports. These samples have been examined in accordance with the theoretical principles of the multidisciplinary approach depicted in Quirk, et al. model (1985). One of the main findings of this study is that the examination of the nonfinite verb phrases of (ing) verb forms supports the idea that context has an impact on how dangling modifiers are analyzed. Furthermore, dangling modifiers change the meaning of the entire phrase rather than just the word they modify.

DOI: [10.33899/radab.2023.180977](https://doi.org/10.33899/radab.2023.180977), ©Authors, 2023, College of Arts, University of Mosul.

This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

صيغة التصريف مع (ing) مستعملة كتركيب وصفية متدلّية في اللغة الإنكليزية : دراسة  
انتقائية

فاطمة سعد صالح\*  
اسماعيل فتحي حسين\*\*

المستخلص :

يحتاج التواصل ، سواء في التفاعلات اليومية الفعلية أو في المؤسسات التعليمية الأكاديمية ، إلى تلبية شرط التفاهم المتبادل والمتابعة والرسالة المقصودة التي يتم تسليمها واستلامها واستنتاجها من قبل المحاورين. في هذا العمل الأكاديمي ، يتم أخذ ثنائيات المحاضرين والطلاب في الاعتبار من منظور نظرية الصلة ومحادثة المحاضر، وبالتالي دمج تدريس علم اللغة التطبيقي مع علم اللغة التداولي. توصلت الدراسة إلى استنتاجات نظرية وعملية: يجب أن يحقق التفاعل مبدأ الصلة بالموضوع ويحقق أهداف التدريس. التحفيز بوصفه بدء التفاعل هو الخطوة الأولى ، والتعبير هو دليل على نية المتحدث ويمكن ذكر ذلك بوضوح و / أو ضمناً ، اعتماداً على آلية استنتاجية مخصصة ، وتعديل علم لغة تداولي محلي يؤدي إلى فهم موجه للصلة ، أي النتيجة التي يتوصل إليها المخاطب. أظهرت الثنائيات التي تم تحليلها الترابط كمفهوم أساسي للألفاظ لتحقيق مبدأ الملاءمة ، في حين أن التماسك هو خاصية هامشية للتفاعلات. كما أظهرت الثنائيات الخصائص المتعددة لمحادثات المحاضر كما طرحتها النماذج المعتمدة في الدراسة الحالية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نظرية الصلة، حديث المحاضر، تعديل علم لغة تداولي محلي، العمارة العقلية المعيارية، التواصل الأستنتاجي الظاهري، آلية استنتاجية مخصصة، المعالجة الموازية.

## 1. Introduction

Dangling modifiers are realized in the English language by various structures and expressions. One of these structures is (-ing) participle which is the topic of this research paper. English features a variety of modifiers. However, not all of them are successful in modifying the target word, and in this situation, they are referred to be confusing and misused modifiers.

The problem investigated in this paper is concerned with the troublesome subject of (-ing) participle as a dangling modifier, which is frequently misapplied and misinterpreted by speakers of English, including native ones. To approach the problem more practically and objectively, the paper sets the hypothesis that dangling modifiers are multi-disciplinary parts of speech that are contextually interpreted and, hence, require accommodation between interlocutors to reach a mutual understanding of these parts. To test the reliability of the hypothesis, the following question is raised: How can the (-ing) participle verb be analyzed from an eclectic perspective; a linguistic and extralinguistic perspective?

The main aim presented in the paper is to investigate the various occurrences of (-ing) participle verb in the English language that is analyzed with authentic data samples from an eclectic perspective; namely, that of Quirk, et al. (1985). The scope of this study includes the (-ing) participle verb as a misused modifier in various English texts; literature, physics, and news reports, with 50 data samples (or sentences) from the eclectic approach of Quirk, et al. (1985). The value of the study is that this research paper provides a real insight into the interdisciplinary (eclectic) nature of one of the types of dangling modifiers that has not been provided before in the literature.

This study, based on the qualitative method, examines the (-ing) participle verb as a dangling modifier collected from the data texts concerning its syntactic structures, semantic properties, and contextual functions. The pivotal aspect of this examination is to stress the fact that the improper use, or decontextualization, of this modifier, affects the meaning as well as the function of the sentences where it

---

\*قسم اللغة الانكليزية / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية / جامعة الموصل  
\*\* استاذ مساعد / قسم اللغة الانكليزية / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية / جامعة الموصل

occurs. In other words, it is to stress the fact that the discourse context influences its use and, hence, its interpretation.

The procedural steps of analysis followed here include: first, studying the syntactic features of (-ing) participle that include its position in the sentences examined, its parts of speech realized, and its relation to other words within the same co-text, i.e. whether it modifies the target word or not. The second step is to explain the semantic properties or features, regarding the comparison between the meaning of this modifier in isolation and its meaning as affected by the surrounding words, or co-text. The final step is to discuss the pragmatic functions of this modifier by showing the formality or informality of its usage and the influence of the context on its conceptualization. Due to the above analytical steps, the procedural process of analysis used here is, thus, eclectic in orientation and application, since it is based on several levels of linguistic analysis; syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Ebest, et al. (2003: 263), the dangling modifier is a shortened clause with a different topic than the main clause. As for Hale (2005: 1), dangling modifiers are "words or phrases that modify a clause in an unclear manner, because they can be applied to either the subject or the object of the clause." In the study conducted by Zwicky (2005), dangling modifiers are defined as expressions that are likely to cause listeners or readers to have comprehension issues (p. 2).

As for the effects of context on the use of dangling modifiers, Karin (2013: 117) states that in sentences such as 'wearing a blue skirt, the man was talking to festival organizers' "dangling modifiers don't just happen because of poor grammar; they also happen because people don't grasp the scenario or context in which the sentences with dangling modifiers are used." Thus, if the sentence is analyzed from the grammatical perspective only, it will be, according to Karin (ibid), incorrect and the modifier, in this sense, becomes dangling. However, she (ibid) argues that if we analyze the sentence pragmatically, taking into consideration that in some societies, such as the Scottish one where men tend to wear 'skirts' more frequently on official occasions, we will realize that such sentences "may not only be influenced by grammatical rules, but also by people's cultures". Therefore, according to her point of view, if we approach the sentence pragmatically, the modifier "wearing blue skirt" is not left hanging or dangling (ibid; also see Biber, et al. 1990: 552).

### **2.1 Definitions**

According to Quirk, et al. (1972: 757 & 1985:434), dangling modifiers are sometimes misused and this is often connected to "style faults". They were previously referred to as "unattached or unrelated participles", or "dangling participles."

Nominal clauses of the -ing participle function as the subject, object, subject complement, etc. (ibid). Additionally, nominal participle clauses, which function as postmodifiers to nouns or pronouns, are usually referred to as "reduced relative clauses". For example, "this is a liquid with a taste resembling that of soapy water" ( Quirk, et al. 1985). Nevertheless, the -ing participle clause bears the danger of a "dangling" or "unattached" participle, which is condemned in all grammar and writing textbooks, for native and non-native speakers. (Hooper .2003:79).

According to (Greenbaum&Nelson 2013:159)'' a dangling modifier has no subject of its own, and its implied subject cannot be identified with the subject of the sentence '. For example, 'Being blind, the women were guided across the street''.

Diana (1996:255), on the other hand, explains that "a dangling modifier refers to no word in the phrase logically." She (ibid) adds that dangling modifiers are "introductory word clusters, like vocal phrases, that allude to an actor but do not name them." In this sense, readers anticipate that the next clause will identify the actor when a sentence begins with a modifier, and in that case, the modifier hangs (ibid). Additionally, she (ibid: 256) states that dangling modifiers are "terms that are likely to make it difficult for the hearer or reader to understand the phrase. A word or phrase that modifies a subject or word that doesn't exist is known as a dangling modifier."

Most significantly, Biber, et al. (ibid: 157) explain that when there is no connection between the linguistic world and the real world, modifiers may define the intended word but leave the word dangling. In this respect, they (ibid) argue that "when we say "poor man" in reference to a wealthy individual who recently lost a contract with another company, we do not mean that he needs money; rather, we are expressing sympathy."

According to the definition used in this paper, dangling modifiers, viewed from the eclectic perspective; namely, Quirk, et al . (1985) are defined as linguistic structures that cause ambiguity or misinterpretation by failing to achieve the intended modification, both in grammatical context and in the real world, which leads to miscommunication and misunderstanding on the part of English speakers, when they are treated linguistically or grammatically per se, apart from the pragmatic or the contextual effects involved. Dangling modifiers are seen in this way as multidisciplinary structures that are determined by the context and have pragmatic roles or goals that are meant.

## **2.2 Semantic Theory for Dangling Modifiers Analysis**

Multiple diverse semantic theories investigate various grammatical occurrences, proving that grammatical notions can be investigated not just syntactically but also semantically and pragmatically. One of these theories is the truth-conditional semantics.

### **2.2.1 Truth –Conditional Semantics**

What sentences mean is what has been called formal semantics or truth–conditional semantics and this is one of the ways to study natural language semantics. Natural language ( object language ) is any language that is used now or has been used before by a group of people as a means of communication (Palmer, 1981:195).

From the truth-condition semantics perspective, if any sentence contains modifiers but they are not used by people in normal communication, because it is not reasonable or not correct, then the modifiers of the sentence are dangling; for instance, "playing with two giant cats, the cage was opened." "Playing with two giant cats" is true, and the modification is accurate if and only if the clause is true in reality. Since there are no giant cats in reality and we cannot observe "a cage" moving around while playing with the cats, it is incorrect to argue that the cage is the one who engages in the game. However, there are

sentences that contain modifiers but are false in terms of their true condition, which affects the modifiers by making them dangling modifiers from a semantic perspective. Therefore, the truth-condition semantics theory is inadequate and too much limited, in scope and depth, to be used as a theoretical tool to study and analyze grammatical structures, in general, and dangling modifiers, in particular.

### **3. Methodology and Data Analysis**

The present study employs three procedural methods to analyse the data samples gathered: (1) highlighting the (-ing) participle verb to indicate that it is a dangling modifier, (2) classifying the sentence structure, and (3) coding the information found and performing semantic and pragmatic analysis on it.

Additionally, given the qualitative nature of this study, the data samples, which comprise 10 different texts and serve as representative samples of the corpus as a whole, which consists of 50 texts, were compiled from literary works, linguistic textbooks, journals, and news articles. These samples have been evaluated according to the theoretic of the multidisciplinary approach shown in the Quirk, et al (1985).

#### **3.1 . Non-finite Verb Phrase**

##### **A. (-ing) Participle**

Example (1): “Falling asleep in the office, the project is

refused” (Jackson, 1990)

The dangling modifier "falling asleep in the office," which functions as a dependent non-finite clause, consists of the -ing participle verb "falling," the noun "asleep," and the prepositional phrase "in the office" that should modify the subject who falls asleep. The clause is used to modify the subject of the independent clause, which is the main clause of this sentence; the modification can't be achieved since the subject "the project" is not the subject of the initial clause. The dangling participle "falling asleep" means that there is a person who is so tired that he is dropping asleep; "there is a person in the real world who is tired and falls asleep," but such an interpretation is not achieved because the subject is incorrect (Jackson, 1990:88). The subject is "the project," which is unanimated; it is something, not someone. Pragmatically, the function of the dangling modifier has not been achieved, which is to modify the subject or the doer of the action. Such a sentence cannot be considered formal or informal, because in both cases it cannot be used since there is no context that can be represented. Therefore, we cannot say the project "falls asleep."

Example (2): “Speeding down the hallway, the door to their chemistry

class came into their view” (Zwicky, 2005).

From a syntactic perspective, the dangling modifier is "speeding down the hallway," which functions as a nonfinite clause consisting of the -ing participle verb "speeding", and the prepositional phrase "down the hallway." (ibid) The modifier is dangling because it is not connected to the person who is speeding. It modifies a thing, which is the door. From a semantic perspective, there is someone who is walking quickly to reach somewhere. The doer of the action is not the door but the people. The person is not mentioned by the user, and this makes the non-finite verb a dangling modifier syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. The concept of accommodation helps us reach a proper interpretation even if there is a

problem in syntax because readers will depend on their background knowledge to reach a proper interpretation.

Example (3): “Walking angrily to the physical lab, the experiment of electricity caused damage to the whole area because of some miscalculation that happened as a result of their poor work.” (Zwicky, 2005).

"Walking angrily to the physical lab" is a dangling participle that functions as a dependent clause made of the non-finite verb "walking," the adverb "angrily," and the prepositional phrase "to the physical lab." It should modify the subject "the experiment" as the subject of dependent and independent clauses. However, from a semantic perspective, "walking angrily to the physical lab" indicates that there is a person who is angry and unsatisfied about something. The interpretation shows that the experiment is the one walking angrily; such an interpretation is not acceptable. Therefore, the non-finite clause contains a dangling modifier since there is no correspondence between the two subjects of the two clauses.

Example (4): “Walking carefully to the mailbox, the sky is dappled by the cloud, a beauty over our motley crew.”  
(shakhnoza, 2021)

The dangling modifier "walking carefully to the mailbox" is made of the participle verb of (-ing) “walking” , adverb “ carefully” as well as the preposition phrase “ to the mailbox” and this clause function as a dependent clause, it is syntactically dangling since it does not modify the correct subject (ibid). The sentence expresses that "the sky strolling to the mailbox", moving from one place to another place. The truth condition of the sentence is not fulfilled because what has been used by the user cannot be seen in real life. The listener or the reader won't be able to accommodate the speaker or writer since they can't presuppose that there is a "sky that moves in life" ( shakhnoza, 2021:8). So if they depend on their background knowledge, then they can interpret it as someone who is walking to the mailbox and looking at the sky (Bolkestein&Mackenzie , 1985:665).

Example (5): “Sitting on the park bench, the sun disappeared behind the dark cloud.” (shakhnoza, 2021)

The dangling modifier "sitting" is the non-finite verb in the sentence that syntactically functions as a dependent clause. The modification is not complete since there is no correspondence between the subjects of the two clauses (Brinton, 2000:545). Semantically speaking, the interpretation of the sentence shows that the sun sits on the bench, which is incorrect; therefore, the sentence is dangling not only syntactically but also semantically and pragmatically since the truth condition of it is not fulfilled, and we cannot accommodate this sentence because we do not see the sun sit in our lives (Huang,2007:14).

Example (6): “Walking to the bus stop, the clouds start raining” (Quirk, et al .1985)

Syntactically speaking, the dangling modifier "walking to the bus stop," which syntactically functions as a non-finite phrase made of the verb "walking" and the prepositional phrase "to the bus stop." it is considered a modifier for the subject "the clouds." (Quirk, et al .1985) states that "The participle phrase defines the closet subject." However, in this case, the participle "walking" is dangling because it does not modify the correct subject since there are no correspondences between the subjects of the two clauses. Semantically and pragmatically speaking, the meaning of the sentence does not fulfill the rule of truth-condition sentences. "The sentence is true only and only if it is true in real life." According to this concept, we can say that it is not possible to consider "The cloud walk to the bus stop" even pragmatically it is not possible because no one can accommodate the interpretation of the sentence since there is no context in which the cloud walk in life.

Example (7): "Running quickly to the park, the light appeared in the sky." (Quirk, et al 1985)

The dangling modifier "running quickly to the park" syntactically functions as a dependent clause that alters the subject "the light" of the independent sentence, but it is not the suitable subject for the dependent clause since there is no correspondence between the subjects of the two clauses (Carter & McCarthy, 2006:223). Semantically and pragmatically speaking, the meaning is that "the light runs quickly to the park", such interpretation is not correct because it does not correspond to the theory of accommodation and the truth – condition; we cannot find light run in the real world , we cannot think that there is light in our lives and it is common to everyone that the light can walk or run, such an interpretation is not acceptable which leaves the dependent clause as a dangling modifier.

Example (8): "smashing the radio , the interior of the room became silent." (Quirk, et al 1985)

"Smashing the radio" is a dangling modifier that syntactically functions as a dependent clause made of the non-finite verb "smashing" and the noun phrase "the radio". The clause is dangling because it does not modify the correct subject, which is not the same subject as the initial clause. This causes the ambiguity of the sentence since, both semantically and pragmatically speaking, the meaning will not be clear and correct if we consider "the room" as a human being who can act such as "smashing." The reason for using the (-ing) participle verb at the beginning is to draw the receiver's attention to the state of the doer of the action: there is someone who is angry and smashes the radio.

Example (9): "returning the kitchen tools , three plates were broken." (Quirk, et al 1985)

Syntactically speaking, "returning the dishes to the neighbors" is a dangling modifier that functions as a non-finite clause consisting of the –ing participle verb "returning" and the noun phrase "the kitchen tools" (Quirk, et al. 1985: 1123). The clause is dangling because its implied subject does not correspond with the independent clause's object ("three plates"). Because the clause is passive, the doer of the action is unclear, and the meaning is ambiguous because the independent clause's structure is short and passive. "Three plates were broken," so it is not clear by whom these plates were broken. At the same time, contextually, it is not possible to consider that the plates can move around.

Example (10) “practicing five hours in a week, the badminton match is cancelled.” (Quirk, et al 1985)

"Practicing five hours in a week" syntactically functions as a dangling modifier, and it consists of the (-ing) participle verb "practicing" and the adverb phrase "five hours in a week." The dependent clause “practicing five hours in a week” modifies the object, "the badminton," of the passive sentence "the badminton match is cancelled", as the subject of the dependent clause, and this is incorrect because the meaning of the whole sentence will change if we consider "the badminton" as the one who does the practice. The user tries to show the reason why the match is cancelled by stating the number of hours for the practice, and it looks like it is not enough, but the use of the short passive structure (without using the –by phrase) causes confusion in the interpretation and makes the (-ing) participle “practicing” as a dangling modifier (ibid).

#### **4. Conclusions**

1.The major goal of the present study was to investigate the (-ing) participle verb as a dangling modifier that may be noticed in formal English literature. The following are some of the study's most important conclusions.

1.The examination of the nonfinite verb phrases of both (ing) verb forms supports the idea that context has an impact on how dangling modifiers are analyzed. Furthermore, dangling modifiers change the meaning of the entire phrase rather than just the word they modify.

2.Quirk ,et al .(1985) are the best paradigm for this study because they approach words in an eclectic manner. The study has investigated the dangling modifiers from syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic angles.

3.The study shows that if a modifier fails to accomplish its syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, or any one of these perspectives , it is referred to as a "dangling modifier."

4.The study demonstrates that the initial purpose of the placement of dangling modifiers is to direct the reader's attention to the main theme.

5.The analysis shows that practically all sentences in which the subject is omitted have a function, typically grammatical or pragmatic.

6.A dangling modifier, or one that is not tied to a fixed phrase by itself, is one that is not a part of a definite word. Using it does not imply that the sentence's modifier is grammatically incorrect because, even when used correctly, modifiers are frequently misapplied pragmatically and leave the reader with an unanswered question. As a result, if a word does not accomplish all or any of the following, it is considered a hanging modifier in this study: the semantic, pragmatic, or syntactic analysis.

#### **References**

Aijmer , K . (2013) . Understanding Pragmatic markers a varitional pragmatic approach . Edinburgh University .



- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Longman: Pearson Education Limited.
- Bolkestein, A., deGroot, C., & Mackenzie, J. (1985). *Syntax and Pragmatics in Functional Grammar*. Foris Publication Dordrecht.
- Brinton, L. (2000). *The Structure of Modern English: A Linguistic Introduction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub.
- Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (2006). *Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide; Spoken and Written English Grammar and Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Demirezen, M. (2012). *An Analysis of the Problem-Causing Structures of Simple Sentences for Turkish University Students*, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 135
- Gelderen, E. (2010). *An Introduction to the Grammar of English: Revised Edition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Pub. Co
- Greenbaum, S., & Nelson, G. (2013). *An introduction to English Grammar*. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Hale, C. (2005). *Dangling modifiers :dangling modifiers –grammar tins*. Compass Ross
- Hopper, P. (2003). *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge University Press
- Huang, Y. (2007). *The oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*. United Kingdom. Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, H. (1990). *Grammar and Meaning: A Semantic Approach to English Grammar*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Lepore, E., & Ludwig, K. (2007). *Donald Davidson's truth – theoretic semantics*. Clarendon press
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Palmer, F. (1981). *Semantics*. Cambridge university press
- Quirk, R., Leech, G., Greenbaum, S., & Svartvik, J. (1972). *A Grammar of Contemporary English*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Quirk, R., & Greenbaum, S. (1973). *A University Grammar of English*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman
- Shakhnoza, U. (2021). *Semantics and Pragmatics Aspect of Motion Modifiers in Discourse*. London: Longman.
- Zwicky, M. (2005). *Dangling modifiers: Adventures in the Advice Trade*