

Nikoleta GEORGIEVA*(Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv)*

ADJECTIVAL -ING PARTICIPLES: ROOTS AND MANIFESTATIONS OF ADJECTIVENESS

Abstract. *This paper investigates the adjectival nature of the English -ing participle, tracing its roots and examining its manifestations. The adjectival characteristics are conceptualized in two distinct ways: (1) adjectiveness – an inherent property of some participles, rooted in their semantic content, and (2) adjectivization – an acquired property resulting from syntactic deployment. The analysis reviews existing criteria for the classification of -ing participles in order to identify the most reliable ones and to organise them into distinct sets corresponding to each of the two phenomena. In addition, the study investigates both the principal meanings conveyed by adjectival -ing participles and the verb classes that hold the greatest potential for their derivation, presenting a meaning-based classification of adjectival -ing forms.*

Keywords: *-ing participles; adjectivization; adjectiveness; deverbization; participial adjectives; semantic classification*

Николета ГЕОРГИЕВА*(Пловдивски университет „Паисий Хилендарски“)*

АНГЛИЙСКИТЕ ПРИЧАСТИЯ НА -ING КАТО ПРИЛАГАТЕЛНИ ИМЕНА: ГЛАГОЛНИ КОРЕНИ И ПРОЯВИ НА АДЕКТИВНОСТ

Резюме. *Настоящата статия разглежда прилагателния характер на английското причастие на -ing, като проследява и изследва неговите корени и проявления. Прилагателните характеристики са концептуализирани по два различни начина: (1) адекватност – вътрешноприсъщо свойство на някои причастия, коренящо се в тяхното семантично съдържание, и (2) адективизация – придобито свойство, резултат от синтактична употреба. Анализът преразглежда съществуващите критерии за класифициране на причастията на -ing, за да идентифицира най-надеждните от тях и да ги организира в отделни групи, съответстващи на всяко от споменатите проявления. В до-*

пълнение изследването разглежда както основните значения, предавани от прилагателните причастия на *-ing*, така и глаголните класове, които имат най-голям потенциал за тяхното формиране, при което се представя класификация на прилагателните форми на *-ing*, базирана на значението.

Ключови думи: причастие на *-ing*; адекватизация; адекватност; девербализация; партиципални прилагателни; семантична класификация

This paper investigates the adjectival nature of the English *-ing* participle, tracing its roots and examining its manifestations. A hybrid category, participles stand at an intersection between verbs and adjectives, exhibiting features of both classes, and are customarily referred to as “verbal adjectives” (see Jespersen 1924; Huddleston 1984). In this paper, I take the stance that while the verbal and adjectival components coexist, they can be analysed hierarchically, with one being dominant and the other subordinate. Accordingly, some *-ing* participles are more firmly anchored in their verbal nature, while others take on a more adjectival form.

(i.) *an exciting story* – adjectival

(ii.) *a ticking clock* – verbal

Questions surrounding the adjectival characteristics of participles have been addressed by various authors (Bresnan 1982, Chomsky 1957, 1965, Downing and Locke 2000, Huddleston 1984, Laskova 2009, Nichols 1965, Vartianen 2012, Wasow 1977, among others). Extensive discussions of the matter have provided useful criteria and effective diagnostic tests for classifying a participle as an adjective. As comprehensive as the analyses may be, addressing the morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties of the *-ing* participle, the positions of different authors remain contradictory and, the overall picture, therefore, inconclusive.

A great deal of effort has been dedicated to identifying various markers of adjectiveness (see Downing & Locke 2000; Huddleston 1984, 1988; Nichols 1965; Wasow 1977), but rather little to its very source. In other words, we seem to have partial answers to the question “*How do we know if an -ing participle is an adjective?*”, but few, if any, to “*What makes -ing participles adjectival?*” or “*What kind of adjectival meaning do they convey?*”. Therefore, this paper offers both a detailed overview of the existing diagnostic criteria and a focused investigation into the source of adjectiveness and the semantic nature of adjectival participles.

1. Scope and Objectives

In the present study, the adjectival characteristics of the *-ing* participle are conceptualized in two distinct ways:

(1). as *adjectiveness* – an inherent, durable property of some participles predicated on their semantic characteristics,

(2). as *adjectivization* – an acquired property resulting from the syntactic deployment of a participle.

The former is exhibited by participles such as *interesting*, *fascinating*, *amazing*, *frightening*, *etc.*, many of which are listed in dictionaries as adjectives, and, therefore, their adjectivization is lexicalized. Such participles will be referred to as *adjectival*. The latter is more accurately viewed as a form of *deverbization*, i.e. loss of enough verbal characteristics to allow a participle to occupy adjectival syntactic slots, without acquiring all characteristic features of an adjective. For contrast, these participles will be termed *adjectivized*. The notion of deverbization can be exemplified by participles such as *playing*, *writing*, and *working*.

This paper pursues two main objectives. The first is to propose distinct sets of criteria for the proper identification of *adjectiveness* and *adjectivization*. To this end, the following questions are addressed:

- Are all existing criteria equally indicative of an adjectival nature, or are some more significant than others?
- If a participle fails to satisfy certain criteria, does that necessarily indicate a lack of adjectival status, hence a verbal one, or could it stem from other constraints?

Secondly, the study explores the adjectival essence of *-ing* participles in order to:

- identify the principal meanings conveyed by adjectival *-ing* participles;
- establish the sources of adjectiveness, i.e. the verb classes with the greatest potential for producing adjectival *-ing* forms.

2. Overview of Existing Criteria

In general, the classifications presented here adopt similar core approaches, concluding that the main criteria for an *-ing* participle to be considered an adjective include: 1) its ability to enter adjectival contexts; 2) the possibility for grading and pre-modification by *very*; and 3) the application of

prefixation and suffixation patterns typical of adjectives. Despite this general consensus, authors differ in the factors they choose to emphasize.

Downing and Locke (2000: 478) divide participles into two distinct subclasses: *participial adjectives* and *participial modifiers*. Their classification touches upon the frequency of usage of the two types, asserting that participles with pronounced adjectival characteristics (*interesting, amazing, charming, disappointing, pleasing*¹) “are never or very rarely used as part of a Verbal Group”, and much more likely to occur as attributive adjectives in a NP or predicative adjectives in a clause. In comparison, other members of the category (*annoying, exciting, frightening, surprising, boring, etc.*) demonstrate the same adjectival properties, while also retaining their capacity to participate in Verbal Groups. Ultimately, the authors distinguish between *adjectives* and *modifiers* based on whether a participle can be graded or intensified by *very*:

Participial Adjectives

very exciting news

The news is very exciting.

Participial modifiers

**very falling leaves.*

**The leaves are very falling.*

Along the same lines, Huddleston (1984: 320) divides *-ing* forms into two groups: *central adjectives*, which correspond to Downing and Locke’s *participial adjectives*; and *modifiers*, which “lie towards the boundary between the verb and adjective classes” (ibid.), as seen in the examples ‘*setting sun*’ and ‘*falling prices*.’ In a later publication (1988: 112), the author elaborates on the contrast between verbal and adjectival participles, resolving to use distinct terms for the two types. Thus, the term *participle* is used “in a more limited sense than in traditional grammar, restricting it to word-uses that fall within the verb class [...]”, and “a ‘deverbal adjective’ or, more specifically, a ‘departicipial adjective’ [refers to] an adjective derived (by conversion) from the participial form of a verb.” The possibility of intensifying a participle with *very* is once again recognized as a determining factor, as *very* is exclusive to adjectives, unlike other grading items like *quite* and *rather*, which may modify verbs as well. In contrast to Downing and Locke, Huddleston emphasizes the ability of a participle to occupy specific syntactic positions, which he treats as a strong indication of adjectival status

¹ These are the original examples provided by the authors.

– namely subject and object predicatives. Furthermore, the author addresses the capacity of participles to take verbal or adjectival dependents², and to undergo a lexical-morphological process, such as prefixation by *un-* (*uninteresting*, *unappealing*, etc.).

Nichols (1965: 42) formulates two criteria that are to be satisfied at the same time for an *-ing* form to qualify as an adjective. According to the author, an adjective can:

- (1) occur between a determiner and a noun;
- (2) occur after a linking verb and pattern with an intensifier like *very*.

She illustrates her point with the following examples:

adjective:

the (very) inviting invitation;

The invitation is (very) inviting.

not an adjective:

**the very singing man*

**The man is very singing.*

Wasow (1977: 343) is another proponent of a classification that divides participles into adjectives and verbs. While the author examines *-ed* participles (referred to as “passive participles”) in particular, his analysis can be extended to their *-ing* counterparts, as his employed criteria largely coincide with those of the other authors mentioned here. Wasow outlines the following main requirements: (1) occurrence in a prenominal position; (2) occurrence as the complement of verbs like *act*, *become*, *remain*, *seem*; (3) prefixation by *un-*; (4) the behaviour of degree modifiers such as *very*, *more*, *most*, etc.

Table 1 below summarizes the criteria discussed above and illustrates how they apply to different *-ing* participles.

Table 1. Applicability of the criteria for adjectives to *-ing* participles (compiled by the author)

	exciting	working
Preposed attribute	an exciting man	a working man
Postposed attribute	a man exciting with his brave performance	a man working with animals
Subject predicative	The man is exciting.	(!)The man is working ³ .

² Verbal dependents include objects and process adverbs, while adjectival dependents are, for instance, intensifiers like *very*, *extremely*, *completely*, etc.

³ The example marked with (!) represents a grammatically correct sentence, which, however, contains a progressive verb form and not a subject predicative. This can be

Object predicative	I find the man exciting.	*I find the man working.
Modification by very	a very exciting man	*a very working man
Comparative and superlative forms	more/most/less/least exciting man	*more/most/less/least working man
Prefixation by un-	unexciting	*unworking

The illustrated discrepancy among members of the *-ing* participle category clearly suggests that they are not all on equal footing in terms of adjectiveness. However, I believe the discussion warrants a more thorough examination of the criteria themselves, as some are objectionable or, at the very least, inconclusive.

2.1. The *-ING* Participle in a Prenominal Position

The prenominal position has been frequently highlighted as compelling evidence of the adjectival properties of participles. There is widespread agreement that this slot cannot host verbal expressions; therefore, all prenominal participles are generally considered adjectival (Laskova 2009: 1). In her paper entitled *A comparative analysis of the English and Bulgarian participles with a view to their categorial status*, Laskova subjects this claim to scrutiny, providing persuasive arguments to the contrary. Although the analysis focuses on the *-ed* participle, I believe her observations can be aptly applied to the *-ing* participle.

Both the attributive and predicative slots bar finite verb forms; however, they are not equally restrictive regarding verbal lexical content. Attributes, both preposed and postposed, exhibit greater semantic heterogeneity compared to predicatives, as they can accommodate both *static* (permanent) and *active* (temporary, ongoing) properties. In other words, an attribute may ascribe both a quality and an action to its antecedent (as illustrated earlier by *exciting man* and *working man*).

A central argument for treating prenominal *-ing* participles as adjectives rather than verbs is their inability to take following verbal dependents. In this slot, a participle may neither take an object, nor can it be postmodified by an adverbial of any kind:

Direct object: **the reading books public*, **the having fun children*, etc.

Adverbial: **the arriving on time train*, **the walking slowly tourists*, etc.

easily demonstrated by the impossibility of replacing *is* with another copular verb: **The man seems/becomes/appears*, etc. *working*.

However, I maintain that the loss of certain verbal properties does not necessarily point to *adjectiveness*. Moreover, we must first consider what the source of this constraint is, i.e. does it result from a change within the participle, or rather stem from certain limitations of the syntactic slot itself.

According to Huddleston (1984: 320), it is a general characteristic of NP structure that pre-head modifiers cannot normally contain dependents following their own heads. This restriction does not appear to be in any way contingent on the word class that the pre-head modifier belongs to. Both Huddleston (*ibid.*) and Quirk et al. (1985: 420) underscore that adjectives with complementation cannot be used attributively (before the head), but can occur either in postposition, or as discontinuous AdjPs:

- *remarkable for its size building
- a building remarkable for its size
- a remarkable building for its size

This demonstrates that either the entire AdjP or the post-head dependent of the head adjective is shifted to the right of the antecedent. Laskova (2009: 1) provides a detailed discussion of the same phenomenon⁴, attributing it to the “right-recursion restriction,” which she defines as “an empirically set rule according to which the prenominal position in English cannot host elements containing a modifier to their right.”

In the light of the above, we can conclude that the inability of a prenominal participle to take verbal dependents is a direct consequence of a structural constraint inherent to the syntactic slot itself, rather than being contingent on the characteristics of its occupant.

The “verbal force” of prenominal participles is further disputed on the basis of semantics. It is widely recognized that, when used in adjectival positions, the -*ing* participle often expresses a permanent attribute rather than a concurrent event (Poutsma 1923: 189). Quirk et al. (1985: 1325) also propose that “the possibility of modification by a present participle depends on the potentiality of the participle to indicate a permanent or characteristic feature.”

⁴ The author focuses on *-ed* participles, which she divides into three groups: 1) bare participles (*written*), 2) pre-modified participles (*carefully written*), and 3) post-modified participles (*written carefully*). It is suggested that bare and pre-modified participles are ambiguous between verbs and adjectives, with their categorical status ultimately depending on the context, but post-modified participles are exclusively verbal since they cannot enter in adjectival contexts (Laskova 2009: 4-5).

In my view, this use of the participle facilitates the inference of permanence/state, without disallowing an ongoing/dynamic reading. Consider the following

- When **the walking man** reached the edge of the light, he stopped. (COCA, 2008/FIC)
- My path took me down to the pond, where a family of geese would scatter at my approach, and the stillness of the water was broken occasionally by a **jumping** bass. (COCA, 1998/FIC)

Both participles refer to concurrent actions, without any hints at permanence or habituality. Therefore, the intended meaning can vary depending on the context. Nevertheless, both interpretations still support the verbal over the adjectival reading of the participle. Moreover, verbal and adjectival *-ing* attributes realize different types of relationship with the antecedent:

- a working man = “a man who works/is working”
- a fascinating man = “a man who is fascinating”

An adjectival participle invariably stands in a copular relationship to the antecedent. Paraphrasing the NP into a clause causes an adjectival participle to transition from an attributive adjective to a predicative one, while a verbal participle shifts from an attribute to part of a VP.

The observations in this section show that the prenominal use of *-ing* participles is an unreliable criterion for adjectiveness.

2.2. The *-ING* Participle as a Predicative

As already demonstrated, the prenominal slot can host both verbal and adjectival expressions. Conversely, the predicative slot – whether subjective or objective – is exclusive to adjectival expressions, completely disallowing verbal *-ing* participles.

In a corpus-based study, Biber et al. (1999: 516) conclude that “semantically, the most frequent predicative adjectives of conversation tend to be evaluative and emotive”. Franhäg (2013: 159) also highlights the pronounced descriptive characteristics of the slot, stating that it is mainly occupied by *descriptors* (e.g. *cute, interesting*), as opposed to *classifiers* (e.g. *chemical*) and *identifiers* (e.g. *eldest*).

In principle, constructions following the pattern <BE + *-ING/-ED* participle> allow for two interpretations due to the dual nature of both constituents – an analytical VP or a syntactic unit:

(i). *an auxiliary + a content verb*a. passive voice: *The letter was written anonymously.*b. progressive aspect: *The students are writing.*(ii). *a copula + subject predicative*a. -ed participle: *The building was demolished.*b. -ing participle: *The building was imposing.*

The status of an -ing participle following the verb *be* is considerably less ambiguous than that of its -ed counterpart. Firstly, progressive verb forms exhibit far greater dynamism than passive constructions, as they present an action or situation as incomplete, unbounded, or in progress (Leech 2004: 25). Since none of these notions are typically attributed to adjectives, the contrast between the two interpretations of the pattern is particularly sharp.

Secondly, transitivity plays a crucial role, as the vast majority of adjectival -ing participles are derived from transitive verbs – for example, *appalling*, *charming*, *frightening*, *disturbing*, etc. Therefore, their function can be entirely determined by the presence or absence of an object:

(a). *While other boys were too busy **intimidating** [them] or **teasing** [them], I was **charming** [them]!* (COCA, 1992/MAG) – Verbal use

(b). *Gradually, she realized that Henry was **charming** and handsome and clever and more than aware of his own attractions.* (COCA, 2019/FIC) – Adjectival use

The fact that these participles can occur after *be* without taking an object proves their autonomous existence as adjectives, which are formally identical yet separate from the verbal -ing forms. In contrast, a *Od* is obligatory with the -ing forms of transitive verbs that lack adjectival properties, such as *put*, *bring*, *cost*, *enjoy*, *need*, *resemble*, indicating that they do not have an adjectival use:

– *The guests were enjoying.

On the other hand, in the majority of cases, the function of intransitive -ing participles can be just as easily determined. Verbs like *jump*, *run*, *sing*, *dance*, *play* may not require a *Od*, and still, it is highly doubtful that anybody would perceive their -ing forms after *be* as adjectives:

(1) e.g. The children [are jumping/running/singing/dancing/playing]. – VPs

The verbs at the base of these participles expressly refer to actions, having a prominent dynamic component of meaning – features not associated with

adjectives. These verbs are categorized similarly across different semantic classifications of the verb: ‘activities’ (Vendler 1957), ‘action verbs’ (Leech 2004), ‘actions’ (Lyons 1977), with the essential notion of activity making them resistant to an adjectival reading.

We can conclude that, compared to the *-ed* participle, the adjectival reading of the *-ing* participle is less reliant on argument structure and contextual cues, with the primary source of adjectiveness rooted in semantics.

The discussion of the subject predicative can also be extended to the object predicative. Subject and object predicatives differ in two ways: (1) the entity they refer to, which is either the subject (in the case of the subject predicative) or the direct object (in the case of the object predicative), and (2) the presence of a copula, which is explicit with the subject predicative but implied with the object predicative. In the case of the latter, the lack of an explicit copula eliminates the possibility of interpreting the participle as part of a progressive VP. Verbal participles cannot occupy the objective predicative slot at all, as their use is ungrammatical and nonsensical:

- The characters make the story **exciting**/***working**.
- The students considered the lesson **intriguing**/***teaching**.

The predicative slot effectively distinguishes between verbal and adjectival *-ing* participles. Therefore, the ability of an *-ing* participle to occupy this slot is a crucial and highly reliable indicator of inherent adjectiveness. The reverse is also true: the inability of an *-ing* participle to function as a predicative provides solid proof of its lack of adjectival properties.

2.3. Prefixation by *un-*

The possibility of prefixation by *un-* was shown as another commonly accepted criterion for adjectiveness. Siegel (1973) employs this phenomenon as grounds for treating some “passive participles” as adjectives, or *unpassives*. According to the author, “the most striking feature of unpassives [...] is the nonexistence of well-formed active sentences from which they could have been derived” (302). In other words, the term covers verbs which can be prefixed by *un-* only in the passive (*-ed* participle) form but do not have active-voice equivalents:

*e.g. uninhabited (*uninhabit), untouched (*untouch), unknown (*unknow), etc.*⁵

⁵ These and more examples can be found in Wasow (1977: 339)

This observation can be extended over to the *-ing* participle as well, as there exist a number of *-ing* participles with *un-* that lack a finite-verb equivalent with the same prefix, such as:

unamusing, unassuming, unbecoming, unchanging, unconvincing, undying, unending, unfailing, uninspiring, unmoving, untiring, etc.

These forms invite several important observations in support of their adjectival interpretation. First and foremost, not only do they lack a corresponding finite verb (**unamuse, unassume, etc.*), but the participles themselves cannot occur in verbal contexts:

- *I heard him **convincing**/***unconvincing** his parents to let him attend the party.*
 - *I can see him **dying**/***undying**.*
 - *Physicians can become infected while **caring**/***uncaring** for their patients.*

The examples illustrate that these participles can neither take Ods nor fit in contexts where a process of any sort is implied (e.g. *while*). The latter supports the inference of a permanent characteristic feature.

The prefix *un-* is not exclusive to adjectives, as it also combines with verbs; however, the verbal and the adjectival uses have two distinct meanings. As Laskova (2009: 3) points out, the verbal prefix exhibits what can be described as a *reversative* meaning. Thus, “to unlock a door” means to reverse the action of locking it. With adjectives, however, the prefix forms antonymous pairs and often indicates that an event (in the broadest sense) is unfeasible or never took place: *unbreakable = cannot be broken; untouched = has never been touched* (rather than ‘the touching’ being undone). The meaning of *un-* within the sample of *-ing* participles presented here clearly aligns with the adjectival prefix: for example, ‘an unconvincing argument’ refers to one that cannot or has not succeeded to convince.

It is important to note that the impact of *un-* also varies depending on the status of the participle to which it is appended. The majority of the participles in the presented sample are already adjectival according to the criteria discussed so far. While, in principle, they can also function as verbs, the meaning of *un-* in these forms clearly suggests that their adjectival sense is the relevant one. In adjectival participles the prefix *un-* causes a strictly semantic shift, creating another adjective with an opposite meaning, i.e. an antonym:

*appealing – unappealing, challenging – unchallenging,
forgiving – unforgiving, inspiring – uninspiring, etc.*

However, the *un-* pattern also includes forms in which the base participle is verbal: *unbelieving*, *unchanging*, *undying*, *unending*, *unfailing*. In these cases, the prefixed and non-prefixed participles represent lexical items belonging to two distinct word-classes and, therefore, cannot be treated as an antonymous pair. Moreover, the changes triggered by the addition of *un-* extend beyond the juxtaposition of *positive* vs. *negative*. Being verbal, the root participles bear the implications of a process – something incomplete and in motion. In contrast, their prefixed counterparts have shed these notions entirely, instead denoting a static quality. Thus, *undying* does not mean ‘not currently in the process of dying’ but *immortal*. This contrast is evident in the following pairs of NPs:

- believing community – unbelieving youth⁶ (=incredulous)
- changing demographics – unchanging nature (=immutable)
- ending year – unending cycle (=eternal)
- dying man – undying love (=immortal)
- failing economy – unfailing optimism (=constant)

As the participles shift from verbs to adjectives, they undergo a transformation in their core part-of-speech meaning, resulting in the additional juxtapositions of *process/action* vs. *state/quality*, *dynamic* vs. *static*, *ongoing* vs. *permanent*.

Finally, we should make a note of a different type of *-ing* participles with *un-*, such as *unbending*, *uncovering*, *undressing*, *unleashing*, *unmasking*, *unsettling*, etc. They differ from the sample considered earlier in two ways: firstly, each corresponds to a prefixed finite verb (*unbend*, *uncover*, *undress*, *unleash*, *unmask*, *unsettle*), and, secondly, the prefix implies reversal of the action. Among those mentioned here, *unbending* and *unsettling* are the only two that have prominent adjectival characteristics and can occupy slots unavailable to the other three forms, such as:

Subject predicative

- 1(a). The news is *unsettling*.
- 1(b). Our will needs to be *unbending*.

Object predicative

- 2(a). I found the ritual *unsettling*.

⁶ The contrast is less obvious in this pair, perhaps due to *believe* being an atelic verb, unlike *end*, *die*, and *fail*, which have an implied endpoint.

2(b). His conservatism made him *unbending*.

Although their finite forms have a positive counterpart (*to bend, to settle*), the participles derived from them are not adjectival and, therefore, not their antonyms: **Our will is very bending.*; **The news is very settling*.

In contrast, the other *un-* participles cannot follow copulative verbs, which suggests that they are verbal expressions: [**seems undressing/uncovering/unleashing/unmasking*].

It can be deduced that, although not absolute, prefixation by *un-* can still be a reliable indication of adjectiveness. However, it should also be noted that the inability to append this prefix to a participle does not necessarily imply the absence of adjectival characteristics. There is a large number of *-ing* participles which are undoubtedly adjectival but simply do not pattern with this prefix. For example:

annoying, astonishing, charming, disgusting, enchanting, stunning, etc.

Their incompatibility with the prefix is morphologically motivated and not indicative of verbness.

2.4. Grading and Intensification

It has thus far become evident that a participle's capacity to be graded and intensified, particularly by *very*, is attributed great significance. At the same time, we must account for the fact that adjectives are conventionally divided into gradable and non-gradable categories. Members of the latter subclass do not collocate with *very*, nor do they have comparative or superlative forms (**very perfect, *more impossible, *most dead*, etc.). In this sense, while the ability to use *very* serves as evidence of a participle's adjectival status – since it can never modify a verb – the inability to use it alone should not necessarily be taken as evidence against adjectiveness. Consider the following examples:

[1a]. *The studio recording was the record, which preserved the **undying** aura of mystery.* (COCA, 2018/FIC)

[1b.] *From the kitchen we can hear the deep **unrelenting** groan of clogged gears.* (COCA, 2019/FIC)

Neither of the two participles – *undying* and *unrelenting* – combines well with *very*, nor would either typically take comparative or superlative forms. At the same time, they satisfy all other outlined criteria for adjectives:

- both are used in an adjectival context (prenominal position)

- both are prefixed by the adjectival *un-*
- both can be used predicatively: ‘Our love is undying.’, ‘The storm is unrelenting.’
- In addition, *unrelenting* is coordinated with another adjective (*deep*).

Evidently, the restriction on *very* stems from a semantic characteristic of the participles which, however, does not interfere with their adjectival reading, nor does it suggest a verbal one.

To rule out the possibility of a verbal reading completely, we can test these participles’ compatibility with a different type of modifiers. As suggested by Laskova (2009: 4) and Huddleston (1984: 320) among others, process (or manner) adverbs characteristically modify verbs and not adjectives. As an example, adjectives like *beautiful*, *warm*, *clever*, *green* cannot combine with process adverbs such as *slowly*, *quickly*, *carefully*, *thoroughly*, etc. The most obvious explanation for their incompatibility is the semantic clash between the *static*, *permanent* quality denoted by the adjective, and the idea of dynamism implied by the adverb.

Let us now apply the process-adverb test to the participles in [1a] and [1b]:

[1a.] **the slowly/carefully undying aura of mystery.*

[1b.] **the deep, quickly/thoroughly unrelenting groan*

These observations demonstrate that, despite the significant importance assigned to the ‘very-test,’ this criterion is not infallible. The vast majority of adjectival *-ing* participles do, in fact, combine with *very*, making it a generally reliable criterion. However, we must also account for exceptional cases and propose an effective approach for their disambiguation. It is evident that the inability to pair a participle with ‘very’ is not an absolute indication of a lack of adjectiveness or the presence of a verbal interpretation. In such ambiguous cases, the verbal reading can be conclusively ruled out by checking for compatibility with process adverbials. The conjunction of these two tests ultimately yields convincing results.

2.5. Suffixation by *-ly*

Another morphological process relevant to the *-ing* participle is the addition of the suffix *-ly* to form adverbs. Suffixation by *-ly* is common with adjectives, but also observed with a large number of *-ing* participles:

- astonishingly, disturbingly, interestingly, strikingly, surprisingly, etc.

The capacity of participles to take the *-ly* suffix can be attributed to their adjectival characteristics, as this derivational pattern is chiefly associated with adjectival participles and is not available to all members of the participial category. While all adjectival participles can be readily made into adverbs, others, like *running*, *cooking*, *farming*, *missing* are completely resistant to such transformation.

In his discussion of the adjectival characteristics of participles, Vartiainen (2008: 7) employs suffixation by *-ly* as one of five selected criteria for determining an *-ing* participle's adjectival status. To illustrate his point, the author compares *interesting/interestingly* and *playing/*playingly*. However, I would argue that using a single verbal participle is a misrepresentation of the true state of affairs. There are, in fact, a number of participles that are verbal in meaning and can, nonetheless, take the *-ly* suffix, such as:

exceedingly, jokingly, laughingly, increasingly, longingly, mockingly, questioningly, teasingly, smilingly, vanishingly, wonderingly, etc.

It becomes evident that while the *-ly* derivational pattern is common with adjectival participles, it is not at all exclusive to them. On a different point, a principal discrepancy can be observed between the types of adverbs derived from adjectival and verbal participles, as well as their respective behaviours. Adjectival participles frequently produce intensifiers that modify other adjectives, adjectival participles, or adverbs:

surprisingly well, alarmingly high, embarrassingly bad, glaringly obvious, terrifyingly realistic, strikingly similar, stunningly beautiful, astonishingly complex, devastatingly charming, intimidatingly intelligent, etc.

Nevertheless, many of them also collocate with verbs, functioning as adverbs of manner:

- I asked you not to come here any more, " he said **threateningly**. (COCA, 2012/FIC)
- The season began **promisingly** before the wheels suddenly fell off. (COCA, 1997/NEWS)
- I'll bet you had plenty of chances, " she said **flatteringly**. (COCA, 1996/FIC)
- David nodded **understandingly**, then pulled me into an embrace. (COCA, 2019/FIC)
- His hostess smiled **invitingly** but did not get up. (COCA, 2004/FIC)

- I didn't either, Ruth replied **forgivingly**. (COCA, 1991/FIC)

Adverbs derived from verbal participles can generally function both as intensifiers to adjectives and as adverbs of manner modifying verbs, although the latter seems to be somewhat more common.⁷

(1) Intensifiers to adjectives

- Medical treatment for autism is **exceedingly** expensive. (COCA, 2012/BLOG)
- Such meetings are becoming **increasingly** rare. (COCA, 2019/TV)
- They're each **vanishingly** tiny, about the width of three human hairs apiece. (COCA, 2012/WEB)

(2) Adverbs of manner

- A fellow reporter **jokingly** said that "we were like word machines". (COCA, 2012/WEB)
- [...] we would go out to certain bars in the city that he would **laughingly** refer to as elephant graveyards, because of the older, less desirable clientele. (COCA, 2018/FIC)
- As they neared the livery, Courfeyrac nudged him **teasingly**. (COCA, 2019/FIC)
- Reverend Yates stared at her **questioningly** but she would not meet his gaze. (COCA, 2019/FIC)
- For a long moment, Ellen let her mind drift **longingly** through her memories of that brash, foolish, wonderful girl. (COCA, 2018/FIC)

The presented evidence demonstrates that adjectiveness has some influence over suffixation by *-ly* and the resulting adverb. While we can identify general correspondences between the nature of the participle and the types of derived adverbs, the process is not entirely consistent or predictable. Furthermore, adverb derivation was demonstrated as possible with both adjectival and verbal members of the category and, therefore, it cannot serve as a definite criterion for adjectiveness.

⁷ Adverbs like *smilingly*, *longingly*, *questioningly* generally do not collocate with adjectives. However, others can modify both verbs and adjectives, for example *mockingly quiet*, *teasingly enigmatic*, *laughingly simple*.

3. Criteria for Adjectiveness and Adjectivization: A Division

The discussion in this section revealed various shortcomings and pitfalls in the commonly accepted criteria for identifying the adjectival properties of participles. In my view, the gaps and inconsistencies in existing approaches stem from the fact that the inherent and the acquired adjectival properties are considered indiscriminately. However, as already demonstrated, adjectiveness and adjectivization represent distinct phenomena that differ in both origin and manifestation – the former rooted in semantics and the latter in syntactic deployment. The two do not always coincide, as seen in cases where participles occur in an adjectival position but retain verbal semantic content. Moreover, the absence of adjectiveness restricts the range of adjectival contexts available to an *-ing* participle. These differences warrant the formulation of separate sets of criteria for the two phenomena in order to precisely distinguish between adjectival function and adjectival essence.

To begin, based on the observations made so far, the adjectival slots available to the *-ing* participle can be hierarchically arranged according to the extent to which they indicate adjectival properties, as follows:

1. most indicative: subject and object predicative;
2. less indicative: prenominal attribute;
3. least indicative: postnominal attribute.

The predicative slot is the only one that entirely bars verbal expressions and, therefore, categorically signals adjectiveness. The two types of attributes are ranked according to the varying degrees of deverbization that each triggers. In the prenominal slot, the verbness of the participle is diminished mainly due to the structural constraints of the slot limiting its ability to take verbal dependents. In contrast, its verbal characteristics can be fully realized in the postnominal slot, which is considerably more flexible. Positioned after its antecedent, the participle can freely take verbal dependents, including objects and a range of adverbials:

- *We can only work with what we've got, which is the community of people **paying [attention]**.* (COCA, 2018/FIC) – Direct object
- *Every day there were fights among the people **living [there]**.* (COCA, 2019/NEWS) – Adverbial of place
- *Unlike many contemporary artists **working [today]**, Scheidly's work is not just provocative, but also technically well done.* (COCA, 2012/WEB) – Adverbial of time

- *Rokey was immediately impressed by the dignity of the woman **walking [slowly]** up the ramp beside Poyser.* (COCA, 2000/FIC) – Adverbial of manner

The postnominal slot is not inherently adjectival. Postpositive attributes are habitually treated as reduced relative clauses, regardless of their morphological realization (Swan 2005: 9, 410). The slot can host adjectival participles (e.g. *something interesting*), while also being highly accommodating of verbal ones (e.g. *someone trying to succeed*), which makes it the least indicative of adjectival properties.

3.1. Criteria for Adjectiveness

The criteria that account for adjectiveness, i.e., an adjectival essence, and that can be applied across the *-ing* participial category to distinguish between adjectival and non-adjectival members can be narrowed down to three items.

An *-ing* participle is adjectival if:

1. It can function as a predicative (subject or object);
2. It can be graded and intensified by “very” **and/or**;
3. It cannot be modified by an adverbial of process.

These criteria were selected as they cover properties that are manifested consistently, independent of potential restrictions of the syntactic slot. Another reliable indication of adjectiveness is premodification by *un-* provided its meaning is not reversative. However, it is excluded from the central criteria as: (1) it does not represent a general capacity but is associated with particular participial forms; (2) it is largely contingent on morphological characteristics. What is meant by (1) is that it is not the theoretical potential for prefixation but the actual instance of a prefix that signals adjectiveness. For instance, the participles *ending* and *dying* have the capacity to be premodified by *un-*, however, the non-prefixed forms are not adjectival.

Table 2. Prefixation by *un-* as an indication of adjectiveness (compiled by the author)

	predicative	grading and intensification	adverbial of process
ending	* <i>The struggle is ending.</i>	* <i>very ending</i>	<i>ending slowly</i>
dying	* <i>Their love is dying.</i>	* <i>very dying</i>	<i>dying slowly</i>
unending	<i>The struggle is unending.</i>	* <i>very unending</i>	* <i>unending slowly</i>
undying	<i>Their love is undying.</i>	* <i>very undying</i>	* <i>undying slowly</i>

Table 3 below presents a non-exhaustive list of adjectival *-ing* participles in accordance with the outlined criteria.

Table 3. Adjectival *-Ing* Participles (compiled by the author)

A–C	D–E	F–L	M–R	S–Z
aggravating	daunting	fascinating	maddening	satisfying
alarming	debilitating	flabbergasting	menacing	shocking
alluring	depressing	flattering	mesmerizing	sickening
amazing	devastating	freeing	mortifying	soothing
amusing	disappointing	frustrating	mystifying	spellbinding
annoying	discouraging	fulfilling	nauseating	staggering
appalling	disgusting	fuming	nurturing	striking
appealing	disheartening	gratifying	overwhelming	stunning
astonishing	disorienting	harrowing	perplexing	stupefying
astounding	distressing	haunting	pleasing	surprising
beckoning	disturbing	horrifying	promising	terrifying
beguiling	distracting	humbling	puzzling	thrilling
bewildering	electrifying	humiliating	ravishing	tiring
boring	embarrassing	hypnotizing	reassuring	troubling
calming	enchanting	infuriating	refreshing	undying
captivating	encouraging	inviting	rejuvenating	unnerving
caring	engaging	invigorating	relaxing	unrelenting
charming	enthraling	interesting	revealing	unsettling
chilling	enticing	intriguing	rewarding	upsetting
comforting	entertaining	irritating	riveting	welcoming
compelling	exasperating	jarring		worrying
concerning	exciting	lasting		
convincing	exhilarating	liberating		
		loving		

3.2. Criteria for Adjectivization

Adjectivization was previously defined as a phenomenon in which a participle exhibits the syntactic properties of an adjective while retaining its verbal semantic content. In some cases, an adjectivized participle combines both verbal and adjectival syntactic properties, simultaneously occupying an adjectival slot and taking verbal dependents. This is frequently observed with participial postmodifiers (see 3 above).

Adjectivization is determined according to the following criteria:

An *-ing* participle is adjectivized if:

1. It occurs as a premodifier in a NP.
2. It occurs as a postmodifier in a NP.

These slots are categorical proof of adjectivization. However, since they can host both verbal and adjectival semantic content, the participle occupying them must undergo further testing to determine its status. If the participle satisfies the criteria for adjectiveness (see 3.1.), it is adjectival, otherwise it is verbal.

4. Source of Adjectiveness and Semantic Properties of Adjectival *-Ing* Participles

Having set concrete criteria for distinguishing between adjectival and non-adjectival *-ing* participles and provided an extensive sample of members that meet the criteria for adjectiveness, the next task at hand is to explore and isolate the properties that they have in common. While the criteria serve as an effective tool for recognizing the outer (chiefly syntactic) manifestations of adjectiveness, an investigation into the semantic content of adjectival participles can help to gain an understanding of their true adjectival essence. Additionally, an in-depth exploration of the characteristics of their verb stems will provide valuable insights into the ultimate *source(s)* of adjectiveness. Since participles are deverbal forms, such analysis will help identify the following:

- (1) the principal meanings conveyed by adjectival *-ing* participles;
- (2) the verb classes that hold the greatest potential for producing adjectival participles.

And while it would be impossible to compile an exhaustive list of all adjectival participles in the English lexicon, this knowledge can contribute to the formulation of a clear pattern for their derivation.

4.1. Meaning-Based Classification of Adjectival Participles

Introducing a classification of adjectival *-ing* participles will provide a structured framework for discussing the phenomenon. Therefore, I have organized them into several rough⁸ semantic classes based on the prevalent meanings observed within the sample presented in Table 3:

- **Emotional response** (triggering a feeling or emotional reaction): aggravating, alarming, annoying, appalling, appealing, boring, charming, comforting, concerning, depressing, disappointing, discouraging, disheartening, disgusting, disturbing, distressing, embarrassing, encouraging, endearing, exasperating, exciting, flattering, frightening, frustrating, gratifying, harrowing, haunting, horrifying, irritating, mortifying, moving, nauseating, overwhelming, pleasing, revolting, rewarding, shocking, sickening, soothing, surprising, terrifying, thrilling, touching, troubling, uplifting, unnerving, unsettling, upsetting, worrying, etc.
- **Cognitive response** (engaging or impacting the mind):
 - amazing, amusing, astonishing, astounding, bewildering, captivating, challenging, compelling, confusing, convincing, distracting, engaging, enlightening, entertaining, fascinating, inspiring, interesting, intriguing, mystifying, perplexing, puzzling, staggering, striking, etc.
- **Existential impact** (initiating the start or shift in a state, condition, circumstance):
 - debilitating, devastating, energizing, exhausting, freeing, humbling, invigorating, liberating, menacing, relaxing, refreshing, rejuvenating, revealing, stimulating, threatening, tiring, etc.
- **Inherent qualities** (describing stable traits and dispositions):
 - adoring, approving, caring, deserving, disapproving, enduring, forgiving, giving, inviting, lasting, loving, nurturing, missing, promising, trusting, understanding, wanting, welcoming, etc.

The commonalities among the members of the four classes, however, extend well beyond superficial similarities in meaning. The verb stems from which

⁸ The classes are described as “rough” because many of the participles exhibit semantic properties common to multiple classes at the same time. Their multifaceted meaning hinders clear-cut categorization and, as a result, their placement in a given class may seem objectionable.

the participles are derived exhibit notable parallels in their argument structure and the thematic roles they encode – patterns that, in turn, bear important implications for the meanings of the resulting participial forms.

First, the majority of adjectival participles are derived from transitive verbs, requiring a direct object. An exception is presented by a handful of members that take a prepositional complement instead: e.g. *appeal (to sb)*, *approve/disapprove (of sth)*, *care (for/about sth)*, *engage (in sth)*, *last (for long)*.

In addition, some of the verb stems can be described as ambitransitive, as they may occur with or without a Od, which is often accompanied by some variation in meaning. However, it can be generally inferred that the transitive use is the one relevant to the adjectival *-ing* participles derived from them, while the intransitive can be linked to their verbal participles. For instance, the adjectival *relaxing*, as in “a relaxing weekend”, refers to the type of effect something exerts on somebody or something else (i.e. *the weekend relaxed them*). In many cases, the distinction between the verbal and adjectival *-ing* forms can also be drawn based on the nature of the antecedent –namely, whether it is animate or inanimate:

1. *relaxing*

1(a). verbal: animate antecedent, e.g. “*relaxing people*” – people who are having a rest;

1(b). adjectival: inanimate antecedent, e.g. “*relaxing music*” – music that relaxes people;

2. *staggering*

2(a). verbal: animate antecedent, e.g. “*a staggering man*” – a man who is walking unsteadily;

2(b). adjectival: inanimate antecedent, e.g. “*a staggering masterpiece*” – a masterpiece that staggers people.

Transitivity implies the involvement of more than one semantic participant in the event or situation denoted by the verb. Broadly speaking, there is one entity initiating the happening and another one (or more) being affected by it. According to Haspelmath (1994: 153), the involvement of multiple semantic participants also allows for variation in orientation: for example, the verb may be agent-oriented (*I scare him*), or patient-oriented (*I fear him*). Haspelmath (ibid.) contends that the notion of orientation also applies to certain adjectives, in which case it may be directed either toward the experiencer or the stimulus, as illustrated by *apprehensive* (experiencer-

oriented) and *dreadful* (stimulus-oriented)⁹. Similarly, adjectival participles – considering the thematic fields they reflect – also involve the interaction between a *stimulus* and an *experiencer*. This highlights another important distinction from their verbal counterparts, which more typically relate to the AGENT-PATIENT configuration. Compare the following:

	AGENT	PATIENT
Verbal	<i>a living man</i>	<i>a dying man</i>
	STIMULUS	EXPERIENCER
Adjectival	<i>a confusing question</i>	<i>a caring mother</i>

Further support for the claim that adjectival participles encode the thematic roles of *stimulus* and *experiencer* can be found in Beth Levin’s *English Verb Classes and Alternations* (1993). An overwhelmingly large portion of the sampled participles – particularly those of emotional and cognitive response – are derived from a single class which the author terms “verbs of psychological state (Psych-Verbs)” (188). Levin’s work is predicated on “the assumption that the behavior of a verb, particularly with respect to the expression and interpretation of its arguments, is to a large extent determined by its meaning”. Thus, the author introduces a comprehensive classification of English verbs based on (1) their meaning; (2) the syntactic expression of their arguments; and (3) the theta-roles assigned to them.

Psych-verbs are further divided into four subclasses based on the binary oppositions of *transitive* vs. *intransitive* and *stimulus* vs. *experiencer* oriented.

1. SUBJECT-STIMULUS / OBJECT-EXPERIENCER

1.1. TRANSITIVE: *amuse, amaze, baffle, shock, etc.*

1.2. INTRANSITIVE: *appeal to, matter to, jar on, etc.*

2. SUBJECT-EXPERIENCER / OBJECT-STIMULUS

2.1. TRANSITIVE: *adore, love, forgive, trust, etc.*

2.2. INTRANSITIVE: *marvel at, approve of, care about, etc.*

The class of adjectival -ing participles is predominantly composed of forms derived from the *amuse*- and *appeal*-type verbs, i.e., where the subject represents the STIMULUS and the object the EXPERIENCER. Consequently, the participles derived from them can be said to exhibit a *causative meaning*, as

⁹ These are the original examples provided by Haspelmath (1994: 153).

they denote the effect exerted by the subject upon the experiencer. For instance:

- a. [a shocking revelation] = [a revelation that causes shock]
- b. [a fascinating story] = [a story that evokes fascination]
- c. [a frightening sight] = [a sight that triggers fear]

While these roles align neatly with the classes of EMOTIONAL and COGNITIVE RESPONSE, their application to the EXISTENTIAL IMPACT class may seem somewhat objectionable. This is because the participles in this class refer to a shift in the object's circumstances or state of being, rather than its psychological condition, thus verging on the domains of AGENT and PATIENT¹⁰. Even if that be the case, the members preserve the causative notion, as well as the opposition of an active participant (initiator) versus a passive one (patient). Thus, the classes of EMOTIONAL RESPONSE, COGNITIVE RESPONSE, and EXISTENTIAL IMPACT all share the underlying notion of "evoking a reaction or triggering a shift in the (psychological or existential) state of the experiencer".

Finally, the participles expressing INHERENT QUALITIES represent both the most incongruous and internally inconsistent class within the classification. This group exhibits considerably greater heterogeneity in terms of meaning, argument structure, and thematic orientation. While it is possible to delineate several recurring thematic domains, many of its members resist clear-cut categorization. Tentatively, the following domains may be outlined:

- **attitude:** adoring, approving, disapproving;
- **state of being:** enduring, lasting, missing, wanting;
- **personality traits or dispositions:** caring, deserving, forgiving, giving, inviting, loving, nurturing, promising, trusting, understanding, welcoming¹¹.

Additionally, the members differ in argument structure, including members taking a Od (*adore, love, deserve, forgive, give, invite, promise, trust, understand, welcome*), others requiring a prepositional complement (*approve,*

¹⁰ Problems concerning the definition of thematic roles were to be anticipated, as the topic is a highly controversial one. In the words of Dowty (1991: 547), "There is perhaps no concept in modern syntactic and semantic theory which is so often involved in so wide a range of contexts, but on which there is so little agreement as to its nature and definition, as THEMATIC ROLE [...]".

¹¹ *Forgiving, inviting, loving, trusting, understanding, and welcoming* can be viewed as marginal cases that fall between the categories of *Attitude* and *Personality Traits and Dispositions*.

disapprove, care), and yet others which are ambitransitive but whose adjectival participle can be linked rather to their intransitive use (*last, endure, miss, want*).

The thematic roles encoded by the verb stems within this class are also dissimilar from the others. The members that refer to a psychological state – *adore, love, care, approve, disapprove, trust*, etc. – invert the STIMULUS-EXPERIENCER configuration, assigning the EXPERIENCER role to the subject and the STIMULUS one to the object, as illustrated by:

- I_(experiencer) [adore / love / trust / approve of, etc.] you_(stimulus).

The members that fall outside the PSYCHE-VERBS class project more varied thematic relations and may assign the subject the roles of AGENT (*promise, invite, welcome, nurture*, etc.), and THEME or PATIENT (*last, endure, deserve, miss*).

Notably, the fundamental differences of the verb-stems within the INHERENT QUALITIES class also result in a distinct type of adjectival meaning. Despite the variation in thematic relations, all participles in the class share a key characteristic – the lack of causative meaning. Any notion of causation or effect is either very subtle – as in *inviting, welcoming, and promising*, where some degree of impact may be inferred – or entirely absent, as in *lasting, missing, wanting*, and similar forms.

In light of the observations made so far and in view of the tasks formulated earlier, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, with regard to the types of adjectival meaning, adjectival participles serve a descriptive, rather than a classifying or identifying function. The meanings expressed by them can be divided into two principal categories:

- (1). causative, denoting the effect – psychological or existential – that their antecedent exerts onto another entity;
- (2). non-causative, denoting personality traits, dispositions, or states of being of the antecedent.

Secondly, the vast majority of adjectival -ing participles are derived from verbs of psychological state that encode SUBJECT-STIMULUS and OBJECT-EXPERIENCER thematic relations. This class of verbs therefore constitutes the most productive source of adjectival -ing forms. Additionally, adjectiveness commonly arises out of SUBJECT-EXPERIENCER psyche-verbs, in which case the resulting participles typically lack a causative meaning. Finally, the category comprises exceptional members derived from verb-stems that fall outside the psyche-verb class – e.g. *inviting, promising, welcoming, lasting*, etc. My contention is that such participles have undergone a process of

deverbization, shedding the notions of activities or states of being entirely and acquiring the meaning of a stable trait or general disposition. Moreover, the semantic link between the verb and the adjectival *-ing* form is often weakened, as the quality cannot necessarily be inferred from the action itself. Just because someone is *inviting* another person somewhere does not mean they have an *inviting* (i.e., attractive or welcoming) manner. Similarly, one may be *understanding* something without being an *understanding* (i.e., compassionate or empathetic) person. Lastly, the adjective *wanting*, which means *absent*, *missing*, is very loosely connected to the principal meaning of the verb *want*.

5. Conclusions

The analysis in the present paper was guided by two key questions: *How can we tell if an -ing participle is adjectival, and what makes it so?* To address these, a range of morphological, syntactic, and semantic criteria established in the literature were examined. It was concluded that many of the traditional tests are affected by various external factors that do not necessarily reflect the adjectival nature of the participle itself. Accordingly, the criteria were reorganized into two distinct sets –those indicating adjectiveness, as an inherent property, and those signalling adjectivization, as an acquired one.

Adjectival *-ing* participles were found to originate predominantly from verbs of psychological state, typically involving SUBJECT–STIMULUS or OBJECT–EXPERIENCER relations. These forms express either causative meanings, denoting the effect of an entity on another, or non-causative meanings, referring to inherent traits or states of being. A small group of exceptional items, derived from non-psychological verbs (e.g. *inviting*, *promising*, *welcoming*, *lasting*), represents cases of pronounced deverbization, where the adjectival meaning diverges considerably from that of the base verb.

These findings reveal a consistent derivational pattern and a specific range of meanings characteristic of adjectival *-ing* participles, thereby contributing to a fuller understanding of the adjectival dimension of the *-ing* form.

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List of Abbreviations

AdjP	<i>adjective phrase</i>
NP	<i>noun phrase</i>
Od	<i>direct object</i>
VP	<i>verb phrase</i>

Nikoleta Georgieva, PhD student
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv
Plovdiv, Bulgaria,
e-mail: nicolettag@uni-plovdiv.bg