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## GERUNDS AND PARTICIPLES IN MODERN ENGLISH

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### ABSTRACT

In addition to the traditional categories Noun, Verb and Adjective, English contains Gerunds, which are intermediate between Nouns and Verbs, and Participles, which are intermediate between Verbs and Adjectives. In this paper, *-Ing* forms in English are taken into consideration to evaluate the hybrid character of 'gerunds' and 'participles'. Analysis of previous research suggests that a gerund may operate as a noun in a derived nominal and a verb in a gerundive nominal because it neutralizes the disparity between nominal and verbal categories. Gerund and participle both overlap in their verbal properties and due to this similarity the distinction between them has converged in Modern English and many grammarians do not make any formal distinctions between them (Huddleston, 1984; Pullum, 1991; and Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

### INTRODUCTION:

The *ing* forms of English appear in a variety of contexts. In English grammar the most challenging area is illustrated in *We were talking about John having a vacation*, which contains a "gerund", the word *having*. The problem with words like *having* illustrated in this example is that they are half-verb and half-noun; making them seriously challenging for any grammatical theory. The details are well known and uncontentious, but there is a great deal of disagreement about precisely, or even approximately, how to accommodate gerunds. The history of modern linguistics is littered with attempts to do this: Rosenbaum (1967), Chomsky (1970), Jackendoff (1977), Baker (1985), Dienhart and Jakobsen

(1985), Abney (1987), Johnson (1988), Milsark (1988), Pullum (1991), Lapointe (1993), Wescoat (1994), Blevins (1994, 2005), Yoon (1996), Bresnan (1997), Kaiser (1998), and Malouf (1998)(cited in Hudson, 2000).

### ***Statement of the Problem:***

In this paper, I particularly discuss gerunds in English which are considered to be intermediate between nouns and verbs, and participles, which are considered to be intermediate between verbs and adjectives. To propose an explanation of their alternation, I will present sentences with *ing* forms exhibiting different properties.

### ***-ing Forms:***

There are at least four distinct *ing* suffixes in English.

- 1)
  - a. A *nominal* suffix in examples like: *hammering, painting, networking, phoning*.
  - b. A *deverbal* suffix that occurs on the noun head of derived nominals.
  - c. A suffix that occurs on the *gerund* head of gerundive nominals.
  - d. A *verbal* suffix that forms present participles.

This paper discusses the *ing* forms in (1b-c). To begin with, consider the following sentences:

- 2)
  - a. [Their sketching a new draft] took longer than expected.
  - b. [Their sketching *of* a new draft] took longer than expected.

(2a) and (2b) have many superficial similarities, and indeed are very similar in meaning. Both predicate a property (“taking longer than expected”) of an activity (sketching a new draft) and commit that it is being undertaken by the referent of “their”. However, the difference (the word *of* in (2b)) is manifest in meaning and distribution in other contexts, as in the following examples.

- 3)
  - a.\*?[The sketching a new draft] took longer than expected.
  - b. [The sketching *of* a new draft] took longer than expected.

Apparently, the *ing* forms seem to be similar but to explore why these similar forms behave differently when substituted with other members of the same category a few traditional rules and definitions are reviewed below.

### ***Gerundive Nominals:***

Miller, J.(1985:242) while distinguishing parts of speech according to their characteristics states, ‘Predication distinguishes verbs from other parts of speech; modification distinguishes adjectives; and reference distinguishes nouns, which constitute the nucleus of referring expressions, namely noun phrases. Of course, not all nouns in a given sentence can be described as referring, but only nouns are candidates for reference-bearing.’ Chomsky’s (1970) proposal that lexical elements may be ‘free with respect to the categorial features [noun] and [verb]’ is, however, directly applicable to the nominal constructions. Forms in *ing* provide the most plausible case of contextually-resolved neutrality (Blevins, 2005). For example, the form *painting* functions

as a verb in the progressive VP in (4a), as a noun in the derived nominal in (4c), and as the head of a verbal phrase within the gerundive nominal in (4b).

- 4)     a. They are painting the building.                   (Progressive VP)  
        b. Their reluctantly painting the building.       (Gerundive Nominal)  
        c. The reluctant painting of the building.       (Derived Nominal)

The standard generative insight about gerunds is that they have the *external* syntax of a nominal projection and the *internal* syntax of a verbal projection. Hudson (2000) argues that the gerund has the syntax of a nominal projection and the syntax of a verbal projection. Being a verb fundamentally involves the ability to take direct NP complements in a particular way, so verthood is primarily a matter of internal structure. In contrast, being a noun fundamentally involves the ability to function as an argument—e.g. as the subject or object—of another head, so nounhood is primarily a matter of external distribution. Generative theory usually takes “nounness” and “verbness” to be two orthogonal distinctive features, +/-N and +/-V.

Blevins (2005) discusses deverbal nominal constructions in English which are basically of two types; derived and gerundive nominal constructions. Derived nominal constructions are noun phrases that contain a deverbal noun while gerundive nominal constructions are noun phrases that contain a present participle. I will elucidate these in the sections below.

#### ***Syntactic Properties of Gerundive Nominals:***

Gerundive nominals as Pullum (1991) notes can occur as subjects, direct objects and prepositional objects and can also occur in topicalized position as shown below in (5) where they are italicized. Generally they can occur wherever NPs can.

- 5)     a. *John having painted the building* was nice.  
        b. I disliked *John painting the building*.  
        c. They didn't approve of *my leaving without a word*.  
        d. *Their rejecting the offer*, I guess we had no reason to anticipate.

After this brief introduction and examples of *ing* forms, we can argue as Blevins (2005) notes that gerunds or the ‘gerundive nominals’ that they head, are regarded as canonical examples of ‘mixed categories’. The descriptive problem with gerundive nominals is that although they are like NPs in their distribution, they show some signs of being an NP in their internal structure but also some very clear signs of being like VPs. ‘Analyses of gerundive nominals thus aim to combine nominal and verbal properties in a single representation in such a way as to minimize the deviation from endocentric patterns. A gerund can be ‘used as’ a noun in a derived nominal and ‘used as’ a verb in a gerundive nominal because it neutralizes the contrast between nouns and verbs. A participle may likewise function as a verb in a periphrastic verbal construction, or as an attributive adjective in a noun phrase’ (Blevins, 2005). Curme (1935: 215) notes that the gerund may have ‘the full force of a verb, but at the same time...the function of a noun’, while ‘the present participle now has the same form as the

gerund'. So, gerund and participle both overlap in their verbal properties and due to this similarity the distinction between them has converged in Modern English and many grammarians do not make any formal distinctions between them (this point will be explained later in the essay).

### *Gerundive Nominals and Derived Nominals:*

It is generally assumed that verbs head the gerundive nominals, while derived nominals are headed by nouns. This accounts directly for the complement structure variation illustrated in (6):

- 6) a. John's painting of the building. (Derived Nominal)  
 b. John's painting the building. (POSS-ing Gerundive Nominal)  
 c. John painting the building. (ACC-ing Gerundive Nominal)

The head complement schema in (7a) can be instantiated by the nominal expansion in (7b) and by the verbal expansion in (7c).

- 7) a.  $X' \rightarrow X Y''$   
 b.  $N' \rightarrow N PP$   
 c.  $V' \rightarrow V NP$

The rules in (7b) and (7c) sanction head-complement structures in which the mother preserves the features of the  $V'$  or  $N'$  on the lefthand side, and the daughters preserve the features of the elements on the righthand side. These rules thus express a default correlation between category and complementation that distinguishes nouns from verbs in general, and 'nominal uses of gerunds' from 'verbal uses of gerunds' in particular (Blevins, 2005). Hence the  $N$  and  $V$  nodes admitted by the rules in (7b) and (7c) resolves the neutrality of *painting* to  $V$  in (8 b-c) and to  $N$  in (8a).

- 8) a. [ $N''$  John's [ $N'$  [ $N$  painting] of the building]]  
 b. [ $N''$  John's [ $V'$  [ $V$  painting] the building]]  
 c. [ $N''$  John [ $V'$  [ $V$  painting] the building]]

The analysis in (7a) corresponds to the derived nominal in (8a) and follows the general pattern in English nominals, as the sentence with deverbal noun occurs with a prepositional phrase complement. While the noun phrase complements of the verb *painting* in the counterpart gerundive nominals in (8b-c) conform to the verbal pattern in English.

According to Jespersen's criteria<sup>1</sup> of derived nominals, the internal structure of derived nominals conforms in all relevant syntactic respects, to a nominal

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<sup>1</sup> Nominal properties of gerunds (Jespersen, 1940:89 cited in Blevins, 1994): the gerund in the following syntactic respects is.....exactly like any other nexus-substantive:

1. it can be the subject, predicative or object of a sentence, also the object of a preposition.
2. it can form a plural.
3. it can form a genitive.
4. it can be used with a definite and indefinite article.
5. it can take other adjuncts.

pattern (Blevins, 1994). The following examples in (9) exemplify nominal characteristics.

- 9) a. many paintings of the building.  
 b. each subsequent painting of the building.  
 c. the painting of the building that John bought.

In (9) the derived nominals are compatible with other types of nominal morphology; the deverbal head may be freely pluralized, (9b-c) illustrates that derived nominals may contain adjectives and restrictive clauses both known as Noun modifiers.

The consistent nominal character of derived nominals is reinforced by their inability to accommodate verbal elements, illustrated below in (10). Derived nominals in (10) form anomalous structures with auxiliaries *have* and *be*, adverbs and the verbal particle *not*.

- 10) a. \*John's having painted of the building.  
 b. \*their having been painting of the building.  
 c. \*the paintings of the building frequently.  
 d. \*a not painting of the building.

On the other hand, gerundive nominals exhibit verbal characteristics. In addition to main verbs with NP objects, as in (11b and c), gerundive nominals may also contain perfect and progressive auxiliaries and their VP complements, as (11a

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6. it can have a subject and object with it in the same way as other nexus-substantives.

7. it can enter into compounds.

Verbal properties of gerunds (Jespersen, 1940:89-90 cited in Blevins, 1994):

1. by using adverbs freely with it.
2. by forming a perfect.
3. by forming a passive, also a perfect passive.
4. by taking an object without a preposition.
5. by being preceded by there as a lesser subject.

and b) illustrates. Gerundive nominals also permit adverbs in (11c) and freely combine with the verbal negative particle *not*, as (11d) indicates.

- 11) a. Kim('s) having painted the building.  
 b. Kim ('s) having been painting the building.  
 c. Kim ('s) painting the building frequently.  
 d. Kim ('s) not painting the building.

Moreover, gerundive nominals are incompatible with nominal elements in (12) and cannot combine with plural morphology, adjectival modifiers or relative clauses like derived nominals.

- 12) a. \* Kim('s) paintings the building.  
 b. \* Kim('s) frequent painting the building.  
 c. \* Kim('s) painting the building that John bought.

These properties differentiate both POSS-ing and ACC-ing gerundives from derived nominals.

### *Gerunds as Present Participles:*

Huddleston (1984), Pullum (1991) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002) note that Modern English does not keep any formal distinction between gerunds and present participles and that they have converged. The distinct morphological analyses attributed to the heads of derived and gerundive nominals as illustrated by Blevins (1994) are given in (13).

- 13) a. [N [V stem paint] ing]  
 b. [V [V stem paint] ing]

For the purposes of economy, the gerundive *ing* may be collapsed with the *ing* suffix that forms the present participle. Nominals with non-NP complements illustrate the difference in (14). The derived nominals in (14) are ill-formed while the gerundive nominals and the corresponding participial verb phrases are both well-formed. A negative or an adverbial makes well-formed participial VPs.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 14) a.*the sketching a new draft       | a'. his not sketching a new draft              |
| b.*the learning to read                | b'. his learning keenly to read                |
| c.*the fighting all the time           | c'. their fighting all the time                |
| d.*the driving carelessly              | d'. your driving carelessly                    |
| e.* the insisting that the sky is blue | e'. your insisting again that the sky is blue. |
- ( Blevins, 1994)

Consider the following examples illustrating a significant difference between gerundive and progressive constructions, where a verb like *forget* may readily occur in gerundives like (15a) but is much less acceptable in the corresponding progressive in (15b).

- 15) a. His [v' [v forgetting] my name] was embarrassing.  
 b. \*He is [v' [v forgetting] my name].

### ***Adjectival Gerunds:***

Participles are traditionally described as “verbal adjectives”. Consider the following sentences:

- 16) a. The child is [V' [v smiling]].  
 b. [N' the [N' [A smiling] child]]

The alternation between the predicative and attributive use of *smiling* in (16) is a general characteristic of participles. The *smiling* in progressive phrase (16a) can occur in attributive (16b) (Quirk et al., 1985).

### ***Semantics of Gerundive Nominals:***

There are however semantic variations in gerundive and derived nominals. For instance, in (6b-c) the genitive noun phrase functions unambiguously as the agentive subject of the verbal predicate *painting the building*. The individual *John* may be interpreted as the painter of the building, though he may be interpreted as the supervisor of the painting job. Furthermore, propositions like *the painting of John* can have at least three readings; a picture representing John; John's work or skill as a painter and the process of painting John by someone else. *Painting* can be replaced by other nouns as *picture* or *photograph* in (6a).

### **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, there are two basic types of deverbal nominal constructions in English; derived and gerundive nominal constructions. Derived nominal constructions are noun phrases that contain a deverbal noun while gerundive nominal constructions are noun phrases that contain a present participle. A gerund may operate as a noun in a derived nominal and a verb in a gerundive nominal because it neutralizes the disparity between nominal and verbal categories. Thus, modern English does not keep any formal distinction between gerunds and present participles and many grammarians agree that they have converged.

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