RESEARCHING THE -ING FORMS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The use of -ing form is enormously extensive in English and possibly poses some conceptual grammatical difficulties for English teachers and learners. On the one hand, -ing morpheme is attached to a verbal base resulting in a verbal form and function. Such form and function can be assumed to be the default case. On the other hand, -ing morpheme can be also attached to a verbal base, but bring about adjectival and nominal functions. In relation to such usages of -ing, Nida (1949) suggests that -ing should simply be treated as a single morpheme with various usages. As a matter of fact, despite being used as a noun or adjective, -ing forms still keep their verbal force. The case of -ing forms uncovers the point where word-class indeterminacy exists and therefore they are prevalingly regarded as trans-categorial, a sort of ‘hybrid category’ and ‘seem to be core members of more than one category simultaneously’ (Alexiadou 2013 : Malouf 1996). The paper has two objectives: firstly, to elaborate the idiosyncrasies of -ing forms which are certainly valuable for English teaching and learning and secondly, to examine the distributions of -ing form in a small English Narrative corpus by employing a quantitative analysis.

Key words: -ING form, nominal gerund, present participle, verbal gerund

ABSTRAK


Kata kunci: bentuk -ing, nominal, verbal
I. INTRODUCTION

The -ing form, also referred to as a present participle, is used in English extensively in English part of the reasons of its extensive uses certainly relate to the facts that, apart from its default verbal usage, -ing morpheme can be attached to a verbal base to form a new word which is functionally similar to an adjective or a noun.

The -ing morphemes enable certain verbs that cannot readily be altered into a noun by means of affixing the common bound morphemes. A verb such as go and run cannot be altered into noun unless they are affixed with -ing morpheme (excluding conversation process). This is different from the verbs like develop which can be suffixed with –ment to form a noun.

In general, it is widely accepted that a V-ing can have three distributions which are parallel to that of verbal (this is the default case), adjectival, and nominal. However, such classifications are in fact not the end of the story. They can be examined further to spark other insights that may relate to them including their indeterminacy. It is the purpose of this paper to elaborate the notions about the -ing forms in English.

In addition to the explanatory purpose, this paper also analyses a small corpus in which the distributions of the -ing forms will be observed and quantitatively presented. The corpus under investigation is the short story written by Oscar Wilde entitles The Happy Prices. The short story is 3476 words in length and available online in pdf. The data were gathered by using the feature Find of the Adobe Reader XI software. The morpheme -ing is inserted to the feature which is then processed by the software, thus displaying all words that contain character sequence of ‘ing’ and their sentences in which they occur. The use of corpus is undoubtedly beneficial for language teaching and learning. One of the advantages is researchers / teachers can provide real, not invented examples, in their teaching materials. This is in line with Francis (in Baker. et. al. 1993) who says corpus allows us to deal with realities rather possibilities.

II. THEORIES, DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

ELABORATING THE -ING FORMS

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) assert that English verbs normally have five forms which are symbolized as follows : V.V-s. V-ed1. V-ing and V-ed2. these forms are also referred to as the base. –s form. past. -ing participle. and –ed participle respectively. The index number of V-ed1 and V-ed2 is worth maintaining because regular verb have the same form for both forms.

According to their tense – containing information, the five forms of these verbs can be classified into finite and non finite verbs; the base, the -ing participle and the –ed participle belong to non-finite group. On the other hand, the –s forms and past are classified as finite. The easiest way to make distinction between the two is to observe whether or not they carry information about (past or present) tense. It is finite, if they show tense information and, conversely, it is non-finite if they do not contain information about tense. The clauses where they are found can be classified as finite or non-finite clause.

The trouble with the linguistic classifications very often relates to the fact that there is not one to one correspondence between form or class and function. While subject, by definition, must be realized by a noun phrase (NP), and NP may fill in other slots of a clause.
The -ing forms for instance can have more than one function. They can occupy a verbal position, which is likely to be the default case, a nominal and adjectival position. In fact, such peculiarity in terms of functions is not exclusively attached to the -ing forms. In English, the base can be used in different function as well. It can be used in imperative, subjunctive, and in bare infinitive. However, the base and the -ing form differ in some ways. First, the base does not undergo any morphological processes, either by derivation or inflection. Therefore, by formal definition, its forms remain the same regardless of the function it performs. Second, the base retains its function as the verb of the clause in question.

On the other hand, -ing forms undergo and affixation process as the ‘ing’ itself is a suffix which is attached to a base. In addition, it does not always function as a verb in a clause. Rather, they can occupy different functions although, like the base, its forms stays the same (post-affixation). This situation then tempts some Grammarians to treat the -ing form as belonging to different classes and it is the -ing suffix taken to be responsible for the class shift. It is elaborate this point that the following discussion is devoted.

Despite being debatable, the distinction between derivational and inflectional morphology may be important to address the discussion of the -ing form. Katamba (1993) has observed three ways in which derivational affixes are used to create new lexemes. First, it can be done by modifying significantly the meaning of the base without changing its grammatical categories (kind and unkind). Second, addition of a derivational affix to the base can cause a shift in its grammatical class as well as a possible change in meaning (hard and hardship). Finally, a derivational morpheme may bring about a shift in the grammatical sub-class. It means it does not exactly shift the word-class (friend and friendship). Rather, they remain within the same word-class.

In contrast, Katamba says that inflectional morphemes do not change the referential or cognitive meaning of the base and do not cause a shift to the word-class of the base. Katamba concludes ‘inflectional morphemes are only able to modify the form of a word so that it can fit into a particular syntactic slot’ (1993 p.51). However, such grammatical behaviours do not always fit and meet the requirements of word classification. This is in particular the case when the -ing forms (and also the –ed forms) are being examined. Observe the examples below:

a. I am thinking of James  
b. Thinking always makes him sleepy  
c. …….. It was clear to all thinking people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality, had disappeared (George Orwell 1984)

The word thinking in (a),(b),(c) have the same forms. As a matter of fact, they are derived from the similar base: think which is suffixed with -ing. What makes them different is their distribution/function. Thinking in clause (a) certainly acts as the verb; in (b), its usage is parallel to that of nouns functioning as the subject of the clause. In (c), thinking is used parallel to that of adjectives. Nida (1949) calls the last two occurrences as Gerund Gerundive respectively. To test the accuracy of such claims in that the -ing form can be variously distributed, a substitution test can be applied in which the three distributions are substituted for their real corresponding word-class. The examples above will now look like:
a. I am talking to James
b. The teacher always makes him sleepy
c. ........ It was clear to all smart people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality, had disappeared

The question is: how should we treat the morpheme -ing in English? Is it inflectional or derivational referring to the criteria above-mentioned about the distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes, the form can fit to either classification. In (a) the -ing morpheme is attached to a verbal base resulting in a similar word class and keeping its substantial meaning. In contrast, in (b) and (c), its addition to the verbal base causes as a shift: it changes a verb into a noun and an adjective. With such grammatical behaviours, -ing meets the requirements to be classified as a derivational morpheme. As a result, these -ings may be taken as separate morphemes which happen to be homophonous; they mark three different classes (Leech et al. 1989).

However, the point to bear in mind is that -ing forms obviously show how the word-classes are often indeterminate (Finegan et al. 1992). In addition, Alexiadou (2013) concludes that the -ing morphemes are ‘transcategorial’ and they differ from the established word-classes. This is the reason why an in-depth analysis of it is needed.

The trouble with -ing forms in fact poses more subtleties than that depicted above. This complicatedness particularly relates to when the -ing form is distributed which is parallel to that of adjectives or nouns (gerunds). Despite being used in the two usages, they still retains some verb like properties. In that case, the -ing forms may be considered as belonging to more than one category simultaneously (Alexiadou 2013).

Before explaining further, it will be worth presenting the possible appearance of the -ing forms in English. Some grammarians (see Eastwood 2002) formally groups the -ing forms into present participle and gerund. In this categorization, present participle covers the verbal (in non finite clauses and adjectival usage of the -ing forms, Hulstone and Pullum (2007) refer to the -ing forms as gerund participle because an -ing form can be functionally similar to noun and adjective. Below I have tried simplify their occurrences by constantly referring to the tripartite functional-classification mentioned above: verbal, adjectival (gerundive), and nominal (gerund) usage.

2.1 Verbal Usage
The verbal usage can be subdivide into two -ing forms occurs in finite construction and -ing form occurs in non-finite construction. In the first occurrence, the presence of the -ing is to mark the progressive aspect in the clause. For example, in Mary is reading the word reading has a verbal usage and together with the finite verb is, they mark the progressive aspect of the clause. Such example is referred to an -ing form occurring in finite construction. This is commonly patterned in the: Be + V-ing slot. -ing form can also be found in non-finite clauses. Non-finite clauses are of course derived from their finite clause counterparts through a clause reduction process (except for the case of absolute constructions). In English, the part of the sentence that reduced is the dependent clause realized by a relative or adverbial clause. However, it may need affirming that the reason why the -ing clauses (finite or non-finite) are taken as having a verbal usage is based on looking at the -ing form
as a constituent of the dependent clause where it is located rather than as a constituent of the sentence as a whole. Observe the examples below:

a) Relative clause : I know the man who is standing in front of the shop.

b) Adverbial clause : Because he missed too many classes, Jhon failed his course.

a and b are complex sentences in which the dependent clauses are realized by a relative clause and an adverbial clause respectively. In both examples, they are still finite clauses. However, they can be reduced so that they become non-finite. The two examples above can be reduced into c and d below:

c) Relative clause : I know the man standing in front of the shop.

d) Adverbial clause : Missing too many classes, Jhon failed his course.

Kaplan (1989) divides the -ing forms found in non-finite clauses into two : Restrictive (as in c and non restrictive as in d although he uses the term ‘participle’ rather than ‘-ing form’ (the term is also used here). This distinction seems to congruent with the distinction between restrictive relative clause non-restrictive relative clause which are physically marked with the presence of commas. However, as warned by Kaplan, the relation between non-restrictive relative clause and non-restrictive participle (NRP : -ing forms found in non-finite clauses) appear to be weaker than that of relation between restrictive relative clause and restrictive participle (RP). Kaplan explains ways in which the RP and NRP can be distinguished. (1) NRP can modify proper nouns : RP cannot. For instance, this construction May Ellen, looking grim, peeled the onion is grammatical, but not this (where the commas are removed) *Mary Ellen looking grim peeled the onion.

(2) NRP can modify sentences, but RP cannot. The NRP sentence It was Tuesday, indicating that the delivery would probably be made at noon is grammatical, but if it is altered into RP will result in an ungrammatical construction (the comma is removed) * It was Tuesday indicating that the delivery would probably be made at noon.

Based on the examples, NRP have ‘adverbial flavor’ because they can modify the verb phrase (VP) or the whole sentence. This is in contrast to RP which solely modify noun phrase (NP).

Another grammatical behaviour embedded with NRP is their mobility (Kaplan, 1989). They can be found in sentence initial or sentence final. This supports their adverbial taste because, in English , adverbial is the most movable element of the sentence. For example, Shivering all over, fourteen campers climbed onto the truck can be reordered into Fourteen campers climbed onto the truck, shivering all over.

Kaplan also introduces absolute participle constructions. Such kinds of participles do not modify NPs. Rather, they modify the whole clause. Unlike reduced clauses, they have subjects and predicates in actual structure. For instance, Max stayed at home, his white sport coat being dirty. The sentence can be paraphrased into Max stayed at home, since his white sport coat was dirty. The paraphrased version clearly shows that the participle construction is derived from an adverbial clause.

2.2 Adjectival usage

The adjectival usage may also be subdivided into two : attributive and predicate. The attributive function is when the -ing form modifies a head (noun) in a noun phrase (NP) construction. Therefore, attributive is a function to be death with on
the level of phrase, not a clause. For example, in the NP *the inspiring teacher*, *inspiring* is modifier to the head *teacher*. The NP can be paraphrased into *the teacher who is inspiring*. A precaution must be taken into account while examining the paraphrased NP in the sequence *Be + V-ing* within the NP does not mark progressive aspect. Such case can be made clearer when the verb is used in predicate position *the teacher is inspiring*. Nevertheless, that is not always the case. The NP *the sleeping child has sleeping* with an attributive position. Like the above example, it can be paraphrased into *the child who is sleeping*. However, unlike the former example, the sequence *Be + V-ing* in the child who is sleeping certainly marks the progressive aspect carrying the meaning that the act of sleeping is progress. This will better be shown if the same verb is used in predicate position *the child is sleeping* in which *the sleeping* is obviously being used as verbal, not adjectival. In this case of the verb sleeping, one may conclude that its function is adjectival when used prenominally, but verbal when it is used prenominally (paraphrased). Such grammatical state of affairs then add to the word class indeterminacy of the -ing forms.

The discrete cases of the NP *the inspiring teacher her and the sleeping child* deserve to be further explained. In addition to the progressive case, other tests including the addition of the adverb very and more and most may be employed. While the former can be premodified by these adverbs, the latter cannot: *the very inspiring teacher, the most inspiring, and more inspiring are grammatical in English, but not *the very sleeping child, *the most sleeping child, or *more sleeping*. Such distinct grammatical behaviours may become a reasonable basis to say that some -ing forms whose distributions are parallel to that of adjectives are more adjectival than the others. Kaplan (1989) sums up that the -ing forms allow the more adjectival uses have a meaning related to ‘emotional impact’ and those that has less adjectival uses have a meaning related to ‘physical impact’.

### 2.3 Nominal usage

Nominal usage is commonly referred to as gerund. Gerund is further subdivided into two kinds verbal gerund and nominal gerunds. Both differ in the degree of verbal force they carry: verbal gerund, as its name suggests, is more verbal than the nominal one.

The naming of it as verbal or nominal gerund is particularly ‘interesting’ because it bears a circular notion. Gerund is obviously derived from a verb by morphological process so that it is very often called as a verbal noun. In terms of verbal and nominal gerund, their name seems to be triggered by fact that the former, as said above, processes more verbal qualities than the latter. Therefore, it does not really mean a gerund which is derived from a verb. Rather, it is a verb derived from a noun although the proper definition would be a gerund that shows more verbal characteristics. Likewise, the terms nominal gerund suggests a double naming of the same thing as both basically refer to noun. This can be taken as a clue to its nominality. By definition, nominal gerunds have less verbal qualities than verbal gerunds although they, of course, are still more verbal than common nouns.

While verbal gerunds (VGs) and nominal gerund (NGs) show more similarities, it is their dissimilarities that are under investigation here. The following discussion about both are referred to Alexiadous (2013) and Malouf (1996). VGs and NGs are similar in that they occur in nominal position for example as subject and object of clauses. They also bear the
same semantic relationship to the DPs that accompany them as their corresponding verbs do. For example:

a) Jhon’s destroying the book
b) Jhon’s destroying of the book

In (a) and (b) the agent is Jhon and the event is destroying and the book is the item being destroyed. As for their differences, Alexiadou summarizes them as follow:

Complementation, VGs takes accusative complements as in example A: NGs’ complements are introduced by preposition ‘of as in example B.
Pat disapproved of me / my leaving the room.
Pat was surprised of his answering of the question

Modification, VGs can be modified by adverbial modifiers as in example A bellow : NGs by adjective modifier as in example C.
This may be connected to the traditional pairing of adverb – verb and adjective-noun. Adverb commonly modify verbs and adjectives modify nouns. In general, adverbs bear close relationship with verbs, not noun.
Pat disapproved of me / my quietly leaving the room.
*Pat was surprised of his quietly answering of the question
Pat was surprised of his prompt answering of the question
*Pat was surprised of his prompt answering the question

Negation, VGs can take an auxiliary and therefore it can be negated with the particle ‘not’ as shown in the examples A and B: in contrast, NGs cannot take an auxiliary and cannot be negated. This makes sense because participle ‘not’ cannot negate a noun. This is another clear proof of why the Vgs is said to have more verbal force than the NGs.
Jhon’s having criticized the play annoyed us
Pat’s not having bathed for a week disturbed the other diners.

*Jhon’s having criticized the play annoyed us
* The not processing of the election results created a scandal.

Internal structure, VGs do not have internal structure of a NPs; NGs do. In Jhon’s criticizing the book annoyed us. The genitive case Jhon’s cannot be replaced by any determiner such as the or that. The following constructions are ungrammatical
*That criticizing the book annoyed us or *the criticizing the book annoyed us. Conversely, such genitive case in NGs can be replaced by determiners. Therefore, Jhon’s in Jhon’s criticizing of the book annoyed us can be substituted for the thus producing the criticizing of the book annoyed us.

2.4 Analysing the Corpus
Below is presented the distributions of -ing forms in The Happy Prince corpus. The sum and percentage are given for case of presentation.

-İng usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Adjectival</th>
<th>Nominal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finite Clause</td>
<td>Non-finite Clause</td>
<td>Attributive</td>
<td>Predicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>RP</td>
<td>NRP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table distribution of -ing form in corpus
The Happy Prince (sum and percentage)
The table shows how the -ing forms are distributed in three different usages: verbal, adjectival, and nominal. Each will be explained consecutively below.
Most of the -ing forms found in the corpus are used as verbal. 80.35% of the data are included in the verbal usage either in finite (57.14%) or non-finite construction (14.28%). The finite clause construction is further subdivided into two kinds: those used in dependent clause and those in independent clauses, 34.37% and 65.62% respectively. Since they are used in finite clauses, the suffix -ing marks the progressive aspect in the clauses and fits the frame Be + V-ing. Several examples (underlined) are provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>32</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57.89%</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>8.92</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
<td>10.71%</td>
<td>10.35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Verbal / Finite / Independent / Progressive
I am just starting
He is learning over a desk covered with papers
My friends are flying up and down the Nile

Verbal / Finite / Dependent / Progressive
He picked up crumbs outside the baker’s door
the baker was not looking and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings
So the swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making marry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates.

Another subdivision of the verbal usages constitutes the non-finite clause construction. This can be categorized into restrictive Participle (RP) and Non Restrictive Participle (NRP), of the first, eight occurrences are found equal to 14.28% and five occurrences (8.82%) of the second of the total data, several examples are given below:

Verbal / Non-finite / RP
He looked up he found beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets
He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets

Verbal / Non-finite / NRP
Then the flew gently round the bed fanning he boy's forehead with his wings
And she ran home, laughing

As for the nominal usages (gerund), nine occurrences are found or equal to 16.07%. However, their usages cannot precisely be subdivided into nominal and verbal gerunds. It is due to the fact that some -ing forms functionally similar to nouns occur...
alone without complementation, modification, negation, and so forth. This makes them neutral in position as they have the possibility of being turned into nominal or verbal gerunds. Such data may be simply called as ‘gerund’ as they are functionally similar to that of nouns. Of the nominal usage as a whole, four occurrences (7.14% of total data) belong to this type: meanwhile, two occurrences of nominal gerunds (3.57%) and three verbal gerunds (5.35%) of the data as a whole are found. They are presented below:

Gerunds

... but I love travelling and my wife.
... and my wife, consequently, should love travelling also
He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing
Thinking always made sleepy

Nominal Gerunds

... but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women
Then they melted the statue in a furnace, and the Mayor held a meeting of the Corporation to decide what was to be done with the metal

Verbal Gerunds

... remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes
The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything
He picked up crumbs outside the baker’s door when the baker was not looking and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings.

Finally, there are two occurrences for the -ing forms distributed as adjectival: one (1.78%) in used attributive position and another one (1.78%) in predicate position. Both are shown below:

Adjectival /Attributive
... saw the white faces of starving children

Adjectival /Predicate
They were so bright and glistening

III. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
As shown above, the -ing forms are not as simple as that of grouping their usages as verbal, adjectival or nominal. Despite being used as nominal or adjectival, they appear to maintain their verbal force. Such grammatical behaviour help to uncover indeterminacy of the -ing forms. Functionally, they may turn nominal or adjectival: grammatically, they remain verbal.

As for the corpus analysis, it shows the majority of the -ing forms are used as verbal either in finite clauses or in non-finite clauses. This result may not be surprising as the -ing morpheme can be said to be prototypically an inflectional
morpheme attached to a verbal base to form a new verbal usage (word-class remains the same). However, such finding may be affected, in one way or another, by the text type under consideration. The corpus analysed in this paper constitutes a narrative text which normally provides plenty of direct sentences (conversation).

Therefore, to undertake and compare the use of -ing in different text types may be a good idea for future research in order to spark new insight on the subject matter. In addition a corpus analysis enables the teachers and learners to get exposed to real utterances rather than possible or invented ones.

REFERENCES


