THE -ing PARTICIPLE AND THE GERUND: PECULIARITIES AND CONTEXT DIFFERENCES

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Abstract: *The present participle and the gerund are two grammatical homonymous form and the difference between them can be established only in a context, with the help of specific determinatives. The –ing form is a polyvalent form, being convertible into various parts of speech and it is also a polyfunctional form which can accomplish, in different contexts, diverse grammatical functions. While the characteristic feature of the present participle is its verbal function, the gerund has a double function, nominal and verbal. In most cases this double function is brought out by the presence in a context of noun determinatives and prepositions as well as of verbal determinatives and modifiers. Some difficulties of making a distinction between present participle and gerund are caused by the fact that, though the –ing verbal forms fall into one or two clearly marked categories, their identity has favoured the development of certain uses that don't fit into either.*

Key words: *participle, gerund, context differences*

The *–ing* form of the verbs has mainly two functions, representing, on the one side, *a participle*, and, on the other, *a gerund*. The difference between these two grammatical homonymic forms can be established only in a context, with the help of specific determinatives.

Taking into account that in contemporary English the-*ing* participle and the gerund are usually considered as two different verbal forms with an identical form, they can also be viewed as two internal grammatical homonyms, with different functions, of the same bi-functional verbal form.

In English the Non-Finite forms of the verb could give birth, through conversion, to other parts of speech. As concerns the *–ing* participle and the gerund, many grammarians agree to the idea of including, in "the *–ing* form", the verbal noun and the verbal adjective too, as external grammatical homonyms of the Non-Finite form. In fact, "the *–ing* form" is a *polyvalent* form, being convertible

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into various parts of speech and is also a polyfunctional form which can accomplish, in different contexts, various grammatical functions but belonging to the same part of speech.

As a general rule, *an indefinite participle* (*-ing* participle) expresses an action or a state simultaneous with that expressed by the predicate of the sentence.

In attributive use an English indefinite (present) participle usually corresponds to a present participle in other languages.

eg.	As a child he had once been rescued with great difficulty from a *burning* house. The girls *playing on the violin* is his sister.

The present participle may be used in *the Accusative with the Participle* which it differs slightly in that it generally implies continuous action or state.

eg.	He felt his heart *beating* wildly. She heard him *coming* downstairs.

In the above examples the present participles refers to an action represented as being in progress and having a certain duration. An accusative with present participle, but without the alternative construction with a plain infinitive, is also found after verbs like: *to catch, to keep, to leave, to set, to start* etc.

eg.	His remark left me *wondering* what he was driving at. He tried to start the engine *running*.

The verbs that take an accusative with present participle may also stand in the passive, a construction that may be denoted as *Nominative with Present Participle*.

eg.	He was seen *climbing* the hill. She admitted that he had been caught *napping*.

A present participle in a free adjunct position is sometimes preceded by a noun or pronoun functioning as its subject. This is called *the Absolute Participle construction* and it is especially frequent in literary English as spoken English usually prefers a dependent clause. The relation implied may be one of time, reason or attendant circumstances:

eg.	The authorities *having arrived*, the ceremony began. *There being* another experiment to be performed, we went into the laboratory. On the old man's death, the property was divided, the greater part *going to* the elder son, the remainder to the younger.

The imperfective or durative aspect of the present participle also applies to its predicative use. The construction (to be + present participle together forming the verbal predicate) is known as the progressive, because it usually denotes an

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action or an activity as in progress. In the case of certain verbs which in themselves express continuity and duration, there seems to be little difference of meaning between the simple and the progressive forms. For instance, in newspaper accounts of weddings we may find both *The bride wore a dress of white silk* and *The bride was wearing a dress of white silk*. The verbal-adjectival character of the present participle makes the progressive more descriptive here than the purely verbal character of the simple form.

The 'dynamic' character of the progressive makes it particularly suitable for use in descriptive and in emotional contexts: *In another year I shall probably be growing tea in Ceylon*. The speaker is drawing a mental picture of himself as he will be a year hence.

Either the descriptive or the emotional character of the progressive is often in evidence in sentences with *always* or its synonyms (*constantly, perpetually, for ever,* etc). The repetition expressed in such sentences may be either "descriptive" or a source of irritation:

eg.	Mary is always *complaining* of the cold. He'*s* for ever *finding* fault with whatever I do..

In contrast with the indefinite participle, the perfect participle always connotes the idea of an action or state prior to the action or state denoted by the definite verb: *Having read* for an hour, he went to bed. The syntactic functions of the perfect participle are:

a)of an Adverbial Modifier or part of an Adverbial of Time;

b) of an Adverbial Modifier or part of an Adverbial Modifier of Clause:

eg.	*Having done* his homework, the girl went out. *Having been* a good mathematician, he could help you.

The characteristic feature of the present participle is its verbal function, while the characteristic feature of the gerund is its double function, nominal and verbal. In most causes this double function is brought out by the presence in a context of noun determinatives (possessive adjectives, demonstrative adjectives) and prepositions as well as of verbal determinatives and modifiers.

eg.	*His handling* of the situation was masterly. *Reading* history is her favorite pastime. I object to *being treated* like a child. John began *reading* slowly.

We may note that the gerund shares many of its syntactic properties with the infinitive with *to*. Thus both occur as the subject, object or nominal predicate of a sentence, though only the gerund can take noun-qualifiers. Both may be qualified

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by an adverb or adverbial phrase, take an object or a subject, and be used in the perfect tense and the passive voice.

Yet, the gerund is mainly used in the following cases: as part of a prepositional adjunct; as an object or adjunct to a number of verbs (some of them followed by adverbs) and verbal phrases; as an adjunct to and after the phrase *there is no*.

eg.	He walked out of the house without *saying* good-bye. At last he gave up *smoking*. These pictures are well worth *looking at*.

Like the other non-finite forms of the verb, the gerund may be a part of some complex constructions, in which the verbal element is placed predicatively towards a noun or a pronoun that expresses the action denoted by the gerund:

eg.	I do not approve of *his going away*. He seemed vexed by *Peter's not expressing* any curiosity on the subject. It reminded us, for the first time since *our being called*, of its existence.

Sometimes the noun or the pronoun that expresses the action denoted by the gerund stands in the Accusative even if it is about a person.

eg.	It's simply beastly *everyone knowing* your affairs.

The predicative construction where the logical subject of the gerund stands in the accusative represents a homonymous syntagm with the accusative with *–ing* participle construction, but it differs from it because of the syntactical relations it contains.

Predicative constructions with the gerund accomplish, as a rule, the syntactical function of a direct or a prepositional object, of a subject or of an adverbial.

The gerund in a given sentence or clause may refer to a subject of its own. The gerund is usually preceded by the stem of a noun or indefinite pronoun, or by a possessive pronoun. The same is to happen in sentences opening with *it is (was) no good, it is (was) no use*. In other languages the equivalent is usually a clause.

eg.	We were accustomed to uncle (Jack, his) eating a big breakfast. I don't like everybody (your) *leaving* home for two weeks. It was no good his wife (her) *trying* to calm him.

In literary English a preceding noun is frequently put in the genitive and, in initial position, before a gerund functioning as the subject of the sentence, the genitive is generally used in all styles of English. On the other hand, in non-initial position the object form of a personal pronoun is often used instead of a possessive pronoun, especially in colloquial English.

eg.	What's the use of ***me*** *going* there?

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The genitive (or possessive pronoun) is always used in *of* – adjuncts to nouns, when the noun is the logical object of the gerund. The *of* – adjunct may also be used predicatively.

eg.	I found him thinking of a scheme of his friend's *leaving*. The dinner was of aunt's own *cooking*.

The perfect gerund denotes an action taking place before the action denoted by the personal verb: I remember *having seen* them. The syntactical functions of the perfect gerund are fewer than those of the indefinite gerund: Direct Object; or part of a Direct Object, part of a Prepositional Object; Indirect Object or part of an Indirect Object; part of an Adverbial Modifier of Time; Part of an Adverbial Modifier of Cause; Part of an Adverbial Modifier of Concession.

As the distinction between present participle and gerund is made on the basis of function, not on that of form, yet there are cases where it may offer some difficulty. In some of the cases the difficulty is only apparent. Thus in *a running man* (a man who runs) we have to do with a present participle, in *a running competition* (a competition in running) with a gerund.

The distinction may be proved by the difference in stress and intonation. In *a dancing doll* (a doll that dances) the participle and the noun have even stress, the participle is pronounced on a high level tone, the noun on a failing tone. In *a dancing master* the noun is pronounced on a falling tone.

Some constructions with a present participle as a predicative adjunct or in a semi-predicative function:

eg.	He was accustomed to *eating* a big breakfast. (gerund) In ten minutes he had *them* all *laughing*. (accusative with participle) Do you happen to know the number of men *playing*? (participle in a semi-predicative function)

We may find it easy to find out whether one has to do with a present participle or a gerund. If we are to compare:

'I can't understand a clergyman *going to* a cinema' with ' She was surprised to see a clergyman *going to* a cinema' or with 'The letter was found by a clergyman *going to* a cinema, it will be clear that, while *going* in the second example is equivalent to *go*, in the third example to *who was going*, no such substitution is possible in the first example.If we compare *I hate any one listening when I'm telephoning* with *I hate being disturbed when I'm telephoning*, it will be seen that *listening* (like *being*) is a case of the gerund after *to hate*, with the stem of an indefinite pronoun for its subject.

The distinction between *present participle* and *gerund* may be a valuable help in the analysis of certain constructions. On the other hand, there are cases

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where the distinction is not, perhaps, impossible, but where a decision either way is at any rate not wholly convincing. It is, no doubt, justifiable to call the verbal forms in *–ing* present participles in: *He is busy packing, She spent the morning writing letters, He tears his jacket climbing trees.*There is little to choose between such combinations as *He went on laughing, He kept(on) laughing*, *He continued laughing*. In the latter two the form *–ing* may be analysed as a gerund because it functions to some extent as an object to the transitive verbs *keep (on)* and *continue*. *To go on*, on the other hand, is an intransitive verb that cannot take an object, so the affinity of *He went on laughing* with the other combinations is obvious.

Some of the majority of cases verbal forms in *-ing* naturally fall into one or two clearly marked categories, their identity has favoured the development of certain use that don't fit into either. These uses are not very clearly differentiated from either the present participle and the gerund, but pass into them by almost imperceptible gradations. They are among the most interesting features of the English verbal system, but in no way invalidate the traditional classification, which is based on the recognition of a distinction inherent in the language itself.

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