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THE NOMINAL ROLES OF GERUNDS AND INFINITIVES

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Abstract

The theory of the nominal roles of gerundives and infinitives in the production of language has been a subject of researched for nearly a century. Recently, this theory has made serious comeback into the literature with significant a number of published studies. It has been demonstrated that grammatical structures, such as the present tense, future tense, reduce phonologically and morphologically to the point where the lexical items, once viewed as separate entities, have been reanalyzed and have become grammatically cohabited units in which the individual parts are difficult to distinguish and furthermore, this process occurs across languages including English. This paper presents on the nominalization of grammatical processes, in which expressions that are semantically associated with properties are transformed into noun-like expressions. Additionally, the paper pointed out several major difficulties that face an intentional type theoretic notion of property of English predicative constructions. It has also portrayed successful analysis of linguistic syntax on the nominal roles of gerunds and infinitives in English grammar.

Keywords

Gerunds, Grammar, Infinitives, Language, Nouns, Verbs

1. Introduction

It is quite a known fact that semantic theory for natural languages specifies what properties are and what it means to attribute a property to an individual in an act of predication. A theory of properties and predication seems in fact to be one of the most central tasks that any general semantics has to face. Formal semantics seems now to be established as a reasonably explicit level of linguistic theory in which it has been shown that significant empirical generalizations can be optimally captured (Thornton, 2016).

Previously Donner (1986) has observed the use of gerunds in Middle English. Gerunds and infinitives are well known to have subject-predicate structure, but they differ from each other in a number of respects. Similarly, Chierchia (1984) has highlighted on the syntax and semantics of infinitives and gerunds. On this notes recent work has described the development of nominal and verbal gerund in Middle and Early Modern English (De Smet, 2008). One major difference is the complementizer (COMP) position. Unlike infinitives, gerunds lack the COMP position entirely (Pires, 2002). One consequence of this is that there is no gerundive complementizer parallel to *for* or *that*. Sometimes, gerunds and infinitives can take a form of nouns, thus serving the same purpose as noun (Azar, 2011). Though use as nouns, like other nouns, gerunds and infinitives normally describe activities rather than people or objects (Schwartz & Causarano, 2007; Smith, 1972).

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2. Gerunds and Infinitives

A gerund is a noun made from a verb by adding "-ing." Gerunds are often used when actions are real, fixed, or completed. "I enjoy reading." The syntactic analysis here denote the verb "read" to be nominal gerunds due to addition of the "-ing". In contrast to gerunds, Infinitives are the "to" form of the verb, and are often used when actions are unreal, abstract, or future. For example: "I want to read". The "to" form of the verb "read" formed the infinitive of the syntax. Similar syntactic analysis were reported earlier, see e.g. Pires (2002). Sometimes the

use of a gerund or an infinitive can change the meaning of a sentence as seen below in sentences (1) and (2).

(1) I remembered to take my bath.

(2) I remembered taking my bath.

2.1 The Subject Form of Gerunds and Infinitives

Gerunds and infinitives function as the subject of a sentence this can be observed in the following examples:

(1) Playing poker game takes up too much of his time.

(2) To play poker game is his favorite fantasy.

The functional difference between “-ing” and infinitival clauses as objects of subject-control verbs has often been illustrated as regards to Modern and Present-day English. Comments on this topic have been found practically in all current handbooks, as well as in major grammars such as Palmer (2014), Quirk (2010) and Declerck (1991). More specialized treatments include those by Bolinger (1968), Beukema and Verspoor (1991), and particularly, Rudanko (1989) were also noted.

As regards Present-day English, the fullest analysis of subject-control verbs is doubtlessly as indicated by Rudanko (1989). Rudanko classifies most subject-control verbs on the basis of the semantic feature ‘volition’, which he envisages as comprising three categories or degrees, namely: **desideration**, **intention** and **endeavour**, plus their negative counterparts (Fanego, 1996). He is thus able to distinguish six subclasses, illustrated respectively by items like want (desideration), intend (intention in addition to desideration), venture (endeavour, desideration and intention), abhor (negative desideration), forbear (negative desideration and intention) and avoid (negative desideration, intention and endeavour).

By comparing the overall numbers of verbs in each class, Rudanko (*ibid.*) manages to show that “*in each category of positive volition verbs governing infinitival complements predominate, whereas in each category of negative volition gerundive complements predominate*” (Fanego, 1996). Furthermore, he also suggested that the preponderance of verbs of positive volition (taking the infinitival pattern) may be connected with the old force of to, as an element expressing purpose (Fanego, 1996).

Unlike Rudanko’s analysis, most other studies of subject-control verbs tend to concentrate on just a handful of predicates frequently occurring in both the infinitival and gerundive patterns in present-day English, namely the so-called ‘retrospective verbs’ forget,

remember, and regret and emotive verbs of liking and hating like dread, hate, like, love, loathe or prefer (Quirk, 2010).

Along this line, Quirk et al. (ibid.) note, “the infinitive syntax indicates that the action has already taken place as denoted by the verb has begun. On the other hand, the participle part indicates the reverse by portraying a preceding event or occasion at the time indicated by the main verb”. This difference, was also clearly illustrated by Palmer (2014) in the following pair:

(3a) I remembered doing it.

(3b) I remembered to do it.

Often scholars have interpreted the distinction in meaning between the two structures with retrospective verbs as a manifestation of a more general bias of the infinitive towards potentiality, and of that of the -ing form towards performance. Thus Bolinger (1968) commented on such sentences like (3a-b) above, observes that “the summation seems quite in agreement that a proper semantic contrast does exist between the nominalizations carried by -ing and those carried by the infinitive. Hence, it contrasts between reification versus hypothesis or potentiality”; similar comments were also argued by Quirk (2010).

It should be noted that, the appearance of infinitive as subject at the beginning of sentence (as in 4b) is highly uncommon, but it usually appear as a complement of the Subject:

(4a) His favorite fantasy is to play football for Super Eagle.

The gerund can also play this role:

(4b) His favorite fantasy is playing football for Super Eagle.

2.2 Gerunds and Infinitives as Noun Complement and Appositive

It is a common phenomena that these verbs can identify a noun especially when they play the role of Noun Complement and Appositive:

- a. Her desire to play tennis for SLU became an obsession.
- b. I could never understand her desire to play tennis for SLU.
- c. His burning desire in life, playing tennis for SLU, seemed a goal within reach.

The infinitive is often a complement used to help define an abstract noun as described somewhere else see Stowell (1982), a detailed narrative was expounded. Example, following the adjectives listed on the Table 1 below with an infinitive phrase one can easily see how the phrase modifies and focuses the noun.

Desire - Their desire to play in the championship game,

Motivation - a motivation to pass all their courses,

Permission- her permission to stay up late,

Reminder - a gentle reminder to do your work

Table 1: *Adjectives that Anchor an Infinitive Phrase*

Adjectives		
advice	opportunity	refusal
appeal	order	reminder
command	permission	request
decision	plan	requirement
desire	possibility	
fact	preparation	suggestion
instruction	proposal	tendency
motivation	recommendation	wish

2.3 Gerunds and infinitives as Object of a Preposition or as Direct Object

Although not common for infinitives assuming the role of object of a preposition, in contrast, gerunds are commonly found taking the role of Object of a Preposition. Let us examine the following:

(5a) He wrote a research article about dealing with Climate change.

(5b) He thanked his coach for helping him to deal with the pressure.

Two prepositions, **except** and **but**, will sometimes take an infinitive.

(5c) The committee had no choice except to elect Musa chairperson.

(5d) What is left for us but to pack up our belongings and leave?

On this and related matters, similar syntactical analyses as denoted in (5a-d) were presented (Pires, 2002).

Sometimes a choice between gerund and infinitive forms as direct object is to be taken. It is rarely an issue for native English speakers, deciding whether to use a gerund or an infinitive after a verb can be perplexing among students for whom English is a second language.

Examples:

(6a) Why do we decide to run, but we would never decide running?

(6b) We might avoid running, but we would not avoid to run.

(6c) We might like running and would also like to run.

From sentences above (6a-c), it is clear that some verbs take gerunds, some verbs take infinitives, and some verbs take either. Such verbs that take other verb forms as objects are called **catenatives** (meaning to link, as in a chain).

The below examples (Table 2) provide a list of some of the verbs that may be followed by a gerund if they are describing an "actual, vivid or fulfilled action".

Love - We love running.

Begin - They began farming the land.

Table 2: Verbs that are followed by a Gerund

VERBS					
Emotion			Choice or Intent		
care	hate	love	agree	hope	prepare
desire	like	regret	choose	intend	propose
hate	loathe	yearn	decide	need	refuse
			decide	plan	want
			expect	prefer	wish
Initiation, Completion, Incompletion			Mental Process		
begin	get	start	forget	learn	remember
cease	hesitate	try	know how		
commence	manage	undertake			
fail	neglect				
Request and Promise			Intransitives		
demand	promise	threaten	appear	seem	tend
offer	swear	vow	happen		

Sometimes, verbs are followed by an infinitive, but they will also be accompanied by a second object as in:

We asked the intruders to leave quietly. They taught the children to swim. The teacher convinced his students to try harder.

In resonance, gerunds accompany a form of the verb *to go* in many idiomatic expressions too: Let's go shopping. We went jogging yesterday. She goes bowling every Friday night.

3. Conclusion

Though gerund, like any other noun, could freely occur, in principle, with any of the verbs under analysis, it is clear that at this stage these are found with infinitives far more numerous than with gerunds. Examination of a significant number of verbs leads to the conclusion that an adequate grammar of English must allow for both gerunds and infinitives derived nominal role. There are almost as many verbs that can function as such presented in this paper. Among several verbs presented, syntactical analyses have delineated the difference in their usage and circumstances of usage between them. From what I have presented so far, it is now clear that whether or not a verb has gerundive or infinitive nominal role depends on how the nominal is formed.

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