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THE ENGLISH GERUND AS A DYNAMIC PHENOMENON

Annotation. In this article, the English gerund is described as a dynamic language unit combining verbal and substantive features, their correlation in various speech situations appearing differently. The gerund appears to have a ‘mobile’ character – its functioning in speech shows that the interplay of verbal and substantive qualities in the gerund may develop to varying degrees, in some cases bringing to the fore either its verbal or substantive properties. The linguistic material analyzed makes possible to speak of various degrees of verbality and substantivity in the gerund, and of the factors and means that influence and define its functioning in speech.

Keywords: gerund; verbal system; substantivization; substantive and verbal features; English verb; substantivity; hypostasis; degrees of development; occasionalism; gerund’s dynamic nature; actual speech situation.

Introduction

The English gerund has always attracted and continues to attract the attention of many researchers in the field of English morphology. Consideration of the features of the gerund in their works is reduced, as a rule, to the statement that this language unit combines verbal and substantive properties and its functioning in various language utterances is given as examples. Sometimes there is an impression that the distinctive feature of the gerund is that it combines heterogeneous qualities. Such a mechanistic approach to this linguistic unit does not make it possible to discern its changeable and dynamic nature when we come up to its functioning in real speech situations.

Understanding the nature of the English gerund is of great importance in terms of learning English. For many learners of English as a foreign language its grammatical structure is perceived as a rigid and stable system in which parts of speech have a strict paradigm and immutable grammatical links. The functioning of the gerund shows that as a linguistic unit it causes certain difficulties in understanding its nature. Unlike other verbal forms it possesses a ‘mobile’ character. This article attempts to explain what factors contribute to the “mobility” of the gerund and how students can learn the dynamics of its functioning in speech.

Historically, the gerund has undergone a long period of development. As far back as in the Old English period, the verbal suffix -ing was used in the formation of abstract nouns. Later, in the Middle and New English periods to form nouns with the -ing from verbs has become a trend. In this respect, it is not a new phenomenon in English. However, despite such a long period, the gerund remains still a controversial issue - some researchers referred the gerund to the class of verbal nouns, others to the class of verbs. Mostly, they considered the gerund as a verbal form possessing both substantive and verbal features, noted its complexity and versatility, indicated the difficulty of referring to a particular part of speech. The transition of the gerund into a class of nouns was looked upon as a conversion (or a hypostasis, as sometimes is called [1]). But a closer look at the gerund reveals the fact that the gerund is a special kind of linguistic unit which by nature combines opposite properties. And these properties are realized in actual speech situations in different ways.



Materials and methods of research

Here are some examples borrowed from classical and modern English literature. “... *you can understand that I am not accustomed to doing such business in my own person.*” [2, p. 11]. *From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings* [2, p.117].

In the first case, *doing* is a form that preserves its connection with the verbal system and, according to syntactic rules, is combined *with accustomed to*. In the second sentence, this form appears in a different form – as a fully substantivized unit, categorically belonging to the class of nouns, having the characteristics of a noun (possessive pronoun, plural number) peculiar to such a unit. Its status is also confirmed by the dictionary entry data - the units of this kind, which have passed into the class of nouns, are exactly marked as nouns [3], [4], [5].

Although such cases attract a great deal of attention in terms of relations between parts of speech, of far greater interest are, in our opinion, the formations whose functioning in speech has certain features which make it difficult to unambiguously assign them to this or that part of speech, their *mobility* in which they find themselves in the process of speech, or, so to speak, a "snapshot" of their functioning. It would be interesting to show the extent to which verbal and nominal features correlate and interact in one function or another.

Regarding the different degree of representation of verbal/noun properties in a gerundial formation, let us consider two cases:

But vividly there rose before him the face he had seen light up, so tremulous and glad, at Bosinney's coming! [6, p. 310].

But, lying warm between those fine linen shirts of Emily's providing, he was visited by memories and tortures [7, p. 207].

It should be noted that such word combinations, being built according to a generally accepted syntactic model, are quite common in English. Structurally, they are a combination of two nouns, one of which is in the possessive case and is an attribute in relation to the other. They are completely substantivized units that are included in the category of nouns. However, the absence of verbal forms of governance, the absence of an object of governance puts them in a somewhat ambiguous position. Could we say that in this position they are fully isolated from their respective verb paradigms? Doesn't this position revive their verbality and semantically they acquire a meaning of action despite their substantive features?

In the following example, compared to the previous one, *providing* seems to be more advanced in terms of substantiation, which is to a certain extent due to the presence of the preposition *of* and the object *easy berths*:

... he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that colour [2, p. 135].

The definite article before *providing* and the preposition after it make *providing* as a unit that has fully broken away from the verbal system and obtaining the status of a verbal noun. We can speak here of a completion of the gerund's development, its conversion into another part of speech – the highest degree of substantivization.

The gerund shows a greater degree of substantiation in combination with possessive pronouns, which, as A.I. Smirnitkiy noted, by their nature "*are close to the adjectival modifier of a noun*" [8, p. 100]. For example:

Do tell me about your exploring [9, p. 225].

The possessive *your* acts as a modifier to the gerund, which suggests a relatively high degree of substantivity of *exploring* in this word combination. The absence of the object of action also contributes to the degree of substantivity. But the verb meaning of the action is preserved – if, for example, an experiment is made and *your exploring* is compared with *your exploration*, the phrase similar in meaning. *Exploring* differs from *exploration* in that there is an action in it, thanks to which this unit acquires volume and dynamism. *Exploring* is a development, *exploration* is a statement.



In the following statement the situation is somewhat different - the verb form is prepositioned with the definite article:

I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written [1, p. 119].

As we know, English grammars unanimously assert that the article is always placed before the noun with which it is connected. Based on this statement, we could say that *the writing* is an entity belonging to the category of nouns. But is there such a direct correlation? The definite article is an important sign of *subjectness*, and when combined with the word that follows it unambiguously indicates its categorical meaning. Consider the context of this situation. It is about the note received by Sherlock Holmes from an unknown person, he gives it to Dr. Watson, who expresses his opinion about the handwriting, the paper on which it is written. When Watson recalls that "*I carefully examined the writing*," he is referring to a particular subject they know about, and *the* is here most likely of a clarifying character. Of course, by accompanying the verb form *writing*, he is subjecting it to a certain degree of substantivity. In our opinion, the article *the*, although it alienates *writing* from the verb system, does not sever its ties with that system, which is unambiguously indicated by the presence of another verb form *written*.

A similar verb-substantive 'collision' can be seen in the following case, where in one statement two identical forms in -ing collide, one as a verb form in the predicate and the other as a gerund formation:

'He wasn't googling people,' said Robin. 'I was the one doing the googling, while he was working on another case.' [10, p. 86].

According to the context, there is an emotional altercation between the participants of a domestic scene, in which everyone tries to figure out who is doing what. Accordingly, is the use of emphatic verb constructions. The connection of *the googling* with the verb system is more than obvious. The use of the definite article looks like it serves more for emphatic purposes, although it should be recognized that its presence represents *googling* in a slightly different functional aspect.

The following statement is structurally similar to the previous ones, but with one important difference:

Tony, still feeling rather guilty in spite of Brenda's heroic coping, came down too breakfast to see his guest off [9, p. 46].

Here the verb form *coping* is combined with *heroic*, an adjective. As we know, one of the characteristics of a noun is its combinability with adjectives. *Heroic* increases the substantivity of *coping*, and unequivocally makes *coping* a noun. A verbal noun is a unit which, as has already been said, fully completed its development and become a separate word, that is, it has broken away from its verb system. Here, for now, we have an example of how *coping* reveals and realizes its potential for transition to another part of speech. But, as we have seen earlier, its inherent verbality can, depending on a speech situation, come up to the fore.

Here is an example in which, in our opinion, the strengthening of the substantive features of the gerund happens:

The buzz in the street was like the humming of flies [10,p.1].

Two substantivizing factors – the definite article *the* and the preposition *of* – are exerting their influence on the -ing form, making the degree of expression of the substantive features in it relatively high. Of particular importance is the preposition *of* related to *humming*, which is known to be one of the morphosyntactic features of the noun class. One could conclude that the substantive nature of the gerund prevails over its verbality and thus consider *humming* as having an independent character, i.e. having a status of a separate word. Such a conclusion would hardly be correct. Yes, the degree of substantivity nature of the gerund is higher than in the previous cases, but it is nothing more than the realization of the gerund's property to act in different functional roles. In order to become a full-fledged and independent linguistic unit, *humming* should be characterized by regular reproduction in speech, which results in its appropriate perception, understanding and interpretation of this construct as a independent linguistic fact. In this case, *humming* happens to be on the verge



of two parts of speech - a verb and a noun, and this is the difference between this formation and the above-mentioned word *coming*.

In the next case, the gerund is under the influence, if it may be said so, of *opposite* trends.

There is some talk of his managing it this coming season [11, p. 616].

On the one hand, the pronoun *his* indicates the substantive character of managing, on the other hand, the direct complement expressed by the pronoun *it* unambiguously emphasizes a feature of verbality in this form.

When considering the above examples, the dynamic nature of the English gerund becomes evident. On the one hand, it can be combined with articles and adjectives, which emphasizes its *subjectness*, on the other hand it reveals its connection with the verb system. Depending on the nature of its functioning within an utterance, one or another of its features - substantive or verbal - may intensify, dominate or recede into the background. The mobility of this linguistic unit is largely determined by the ratio and interaction of verb-substantive factors.

The potentials of the gerund are so broad that phrasal verbs also happen to find themselves in the orbit of its functioning. In itself, the question of phrasal verbs in English is of great interest due to the fact that phrasal verbs are a productive basis for the formation of new language units based on the model 'verb + adverb / preposition - compound noun' with the status of nouns, sometimes with a change in the original meaning (makeup, takeoff, check-in, breakthrough, crackdown, dropout, feedback, takeover, etc.) [12, p.4; p.105]. For our work, however, of much greater interest are the cases where the gerund phrases of phrasal verbs are drawn into the system of verb-substantive relations.

In the case below, we see the gerundial form *clearing up* (of the phrasal verb *to clear up*) endowed with substantive features:

From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee ... [1, p.125].

The question arises: what degree of substantiation can we speak of in this case? In terms of English syntax, all the properties of a noun are evident: the combinations with the possessive pronoun *his*, the preposition *of*.

A free, 'floating' nature of a gerund allows to break away from the verb system and function as an unstable formation with varying degrees of verbality and substantiveness. The author/speaker can, in accordance with his plan or intention, strengthen certain features using the changeable nature of a gerund, bringing to the fore its substantive features, as in the example above. Perhaps, these kinds of formations can be referred to as occasionalisms, created intentionally for the use in situations where such use of gerund phrases imparts a certain imagery to the description. Phrasal verbs, no less than other verbs, are very active in their dynamics, they easily acquire nominative features and can develop into a full noun. Here is an example of it, with an accompanying speech situation: the main character, who divorced his wife, was pulling out boxes of his belongings from the house. A housemate, seeing this, remarks in passing, 'Having a clear-out?' 'A clear-out' is fixed in the dictionary as a full-fledged noun [4], [5]. In the above *his clearing up* of the meaning of action is still shines through the imposed signs of the noun.

One more example to show how the above-stated is effected in real speech:

... I found myself ... assisting in the secure tying up of Irene Adler, spinster, to Godfrey Norton, bachelor [2, p. 125].

Tying up has all the characteristics of a noun: combination with the definite article, an adjective *secure*, and prepositions *of*. If compared with *his clearing up of*, it is obvious that *tying up* is more advanced in terms of substantivization. It would be correct to say that they are at different stages of acquiring the qualities of a substantive.



Conclusions

In this paper we have tried to show the gerund (gerund formation) as a dynamic linguistic unit, in which opposite trends coexist and interact. In each case of the gerund's functioning in speech, verbal and substantive features appear differently, depending on the specific linguistic situation. Our work is an attempt to identify the degrees of development of this unique unit, its dynamic nature.

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АҒЫЛШЫН ГЕРУНДІ ДИНАМИКАЛЫҚ ҚҰБЫЛЫС РЕТІНДЕ

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада ағылшын герунді етістік пен субстантивтік белгілерді біріктіретін динамикалық тіл бірлігі ретінде сипатталады, сонымен қатар олардың әр түрлі сөйлеу жағдайларындағы қатынасы әртүрлі жолдармен көрінеді. Герунд "мобильді" сипатқа ие, яғни оның сөйлеудегі қызметі герундтегі ауызша және субстантивтік қасиеттердің өзара әрекеттесуі әртүрлі дәрежеде дами алатындығын және кейбір жағдайларда ауызша немесе субстантивтік қасиеттерінің біреуі ғана бірінші орынға қойылатындығын көрсетеді. Талданған тілдік материал, герундтегі етістіктің және субстантивтіліктің әртүрлі дәрежелері, сондай-ақ оған әсер ететін факторлар және сөйлеу функциясына ықпал етуші құралдар туралы сөйлеуге және тілдік жағдайларда герундтің анық емесіс-әрекетін көрсетуге мүмкіндік береді.

Кілт сөздер: герунд; вербальді жүйе; сын-есімдік; субстантивті және вербальді ерекшеліктері; Ағылшын етістігі; субстантивтік; даму деңгейлері; кездейсоқтық; герундтің динамикалық табиғаты

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АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ГЕРУНДИЙ КАК ДИНАМИЧЕСКОЕ ЯВЛЕНИЕ

Аннотация. В данной статье английский герундий рассматривается как активная языковая единица, объединяющая в себе глагольные и субстантивные признаки, соотношение которых в различных речевых ситуациях оказывается разным. Герундий обладает «мобильным» характером – его функционирование в речи показывает, что взаимодействие глагольных и субстантивных качеств в герундии может развиваться в разной



степени и в некоторых случаях на первый план как глагольные признаки, так и субстантивные. Проанализированный языковой материал позволяет говорить о разных *степенях* развития глагольности и субстантивности в герундии о факторах и средствах, которые оказывают влияние на функционирование герундия в речи и способствуют неоднозначному поведению герундия в языковых ситуациях.

Ключевые слова: герундий; глагольная система; адъективация; субстантивация; субстантивные и глагольные признаки; английский глагол; субстантивность; окказионализм; динамическая природа герундия.