

On the multi-layered nature of diachronic transcategorial processes: the case of the English gerund
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Abstract

This paper examines transcategorial processes of nominalization and verbalization in the history of the English gerund and argues that the categorial shifts which the gerund has undergone are best described as **gradual** and **multi-layered** developments of a general **functional** nature. Gerunds in Present-day English have been characterized as instances of intersective gradience, as they “fuse verbal and nominal elements” to varying extents (Aarts 2004: 20). This synchronic gradience results from a long-term diachronic process in which a subset of gerunds adopted a verb phrase- rather than noun phrase-like structure, leading to a split (Aarts 2004:36) between the original nominal gerund (NG, (1)) and a new, more verbal gerund type (VG, (2)):

- (1) *Brown’s deft painting of his daughter is a delight to watch.*
- (2) *Brown deftly painting his daughter is a delight to watch.*

While the **morphosyntactic** changes (and variation) in English gerunds have been documented extensively (Fraser 1970; Fanego 2004; Hudson 2007), the semantic and functional aspects of the transcategorial processes occurring in the gerund have only recently been taken note of (Croft 2007; De Smet 2008; Traugott & Trousdale 2010).

A detailed analysis of 2000 gerunds from the PPCME2, PPCEME and PPCMBE shows that (1) the morphosyntactic verbalization of the gerund is closely linked to significant changes in its discoursefunctional and semantic behaviour; (2) the NG too, while not undergoing notable formal changes, went through critical functional changes suggesting increasing nominalization. It appears, then, that diachronic transcategorial processes do not exclusively involve morphosyntactic phenomena, but, as the NG shows, also (and sometimes predominantly) operate in a construction’s functional-semantic layers. Specifically:

- (i) From Middle English onwards, the gerund verbalized in that it acquired clausal rather than nominal grounding strategies (Langacker 2009: 149), i.e. by means of control and temporal integration with the matrix clause (3) instead of through determiners:

- (3) a. In *erecting a figure ryght at noone* I fynd the moon to be just in the angle of the east. (1612, PPCEME)
- b. I will prove, First, That he had a malicious Intent in *making of this Book*. (1590, PPCEME)

This ‘**indirect clausal grounding**’ became the most frequent grounding strategy for formally verbalized VGs (50.6%), but had disappeared as a grounding option for NGs by Late Modern English (3b). NGs, however, came to allow a fuller range of nominal grounding elements, including the indefinite article (e.g. There was a perpetual slamming and banging of doors [1837, PPCMBE]);

- (ii) NGs gradually became more likely targets for **anaphoric tracking** (from 15% in EmodE to 23% in LModE), indicating that they increasingly take part in the nominal system of identification and reference. VGs moved in the opposite direction (10% in EmodE to 7% in LmodE);

(iii) A similar increase in the 'nominality' of NGs is attested in their **semantic** and **aspectual properties**. A distinctive collexeme analysis (Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004, Hilpert 2006) shows that while VGs continue to profile events/actions rather than physical objects, NGs increasingly express events/actions with an object-like aspectual bounding and lexicalized nominal ing-forms become more prominent.

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