

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF GERUND IN ENGLISH, ROMANIAN AND FRENCH

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Gerunziul este o formă nepredicativă a verbului, ambiguă nu numai în limba engleză, dar și în limbile română și franceză din cauza caracteristicilor sale atât verbale, cât și nominale. Cu toate că gerunziul s-a consolidat într-o categorie gramaticală distinctă de participiul prezent, cu care este adesea confundat, limita dintre aceste forme în *-ing* rămâne totuși discutabilă și necesită o cercetare minuțioasă. Unii gramaticieni consideră aceste forme ca două forme nepredicative distincte, alții însă le numesc foarte vag drept „*-ing-forms*”, adică forma în *-ing*.

This article is an attempt to present some new light concerning the gerund. It is presented through a treatment from the point of view of contrasting it with our mother tongue counterpart.

Nowadays the nominalization in *-ing* is a topic which is currently receiving intensive scrutiny and it is not so easy to study this grammatical form in comparison with its equivalents in Romanian and French. It is of great importance to understand the proper use of the gerund in English and its interpretation into Romanian and French.

The history of the different *-ing* forms has already been studied from the phonological, morphological and syntactic points of view. An enormous amount of data has been collected and a number of important facts have been established especially as regards formal verbal and nominal characteristics. The main interest in earlier studies has been focussed on the surface structure of the *-ing* form, and we still lack a satisfactory account of the historical changes which have made it possible to generate sentences like the following in present-day English [7, p.102].

1. I like (or dislike) his having read the book.
2. His seeing us together annoyed me.

The historical development of the English Language shows us a tendency, which we might call it from chaos towards cosmos. The old language had many endings, most of them with very vague meanings and applications. In Modern English they have been greatly reduced so that now the vast majority of words are inflected regularly.

The grammatical development and simplification has taken place not suddenly and from one cause, but gradually and from a variety of causes. It cannot be said that “the chief impulse to such changes is due to progressive thinking and advancing culture which made the traditional forms insufficient for the abundance of ideas in their mutual relations”, for some of the changes took place with greatest rapidity in centuries when culture was at low ebb. Chief among the general causes of the decay of the Old English apparatus of declensions and conjugations must be reckoned the manifold incongruities of the system: if the same vowel did not everywhere denote the same shade of meaning, speakers would naturally tend indulge in the universal inclination to pronounce weak syllables indistinctly (and the Old English flexional endings were all unstressed) thus: a, i, u of the endings were levelled in the one colourless vowel – e, and this could even after some time be dropped altogether in most cases.

The gerund is a descendant of the Old English Verbal Noun and the Present Participle; hence its double nature and its noun and verbal characteristics. In the Old English period the Verbal Noun had the ending *-ing*, *-ung*; and the Present Participle had the ending *-ende*. In the Modern Period the Verbal Noun and the Participle became merged into one form with the same ending *-ing*. As the result of blending of the two forms, the Verbal Noun in *-ing* began to develop verbal characteristics under the influence of the Participle, thus crystallizing into a new form, the gerund.

It is argued that the distinction between verbal and nominal gerunds is secondary and that the main difference between various kinds of gerunds concerns factivity and activity. The factive gerunds can express formal tense and can be formed from stative (nonactive) verbs like: to know, to resemble. A factive gerund is simply a gerund that can be paraphrased by a that-clause. Traditional and transformational generative grammarians

have long been aware of the fact that many gerundial phrases can be paraphrased by a that-clause introduced by the noun fact, as in:

“John’s having refused the offer was significant” – “The fact that John had refused the offer was significant”.

It has been explored the systematic differences between factive and non-factive predicates. They claim that the syntactic form in which a complement can appear is to a great extent dependent on whether the speaker presupposes the truth of a complement. They do not claim that there is a one-to-one relationship between the choice of complementizers and the semantics of a sentence. They claim, however, that there is a redundancy relationship between factivity and gerunds, and between non-factivity and infinitives. There are a few exceptions, such as know and realize, which are semantically factive but syntactically non-factive. There are also infinitives that are factive, but they belong to a definable class called 'emotive predicates'.

The systematic syntactic differences between factives and non-factives are the following:

(i) Only factive predicates allow the noun fact with a sentential complement consisting of a that-clause or a gerund to replace the simple that-clause.

(ii) Only factive predicates allow the full range of gerundial constructions to replace the that-clause.

(iii) Extra-position from subject position is optional for the verbs in the factive group but obligatory for non-factive verbs.

The systematic differences between factives and non-factives are correlated with a semantic difference, illustrated by:

E.g.: 1) I regret that it is raining. (factive)

2) I suppose that it is raining. (non-factive)

An action type gerund is the *-ing* form used after verbs like: to begin, to continue. Important is the fact that these action type gerunds never take formal tense and the logical tense that they express, is simultaneous with that of the ‘aspectual verb’ itself, as in:

“John *had begun working* before you came in”; and

“John *will begin working* next Monday”.

There are different approaches concerning the problem of the *-ing* form. The *-ing* form is divided into two groups: participle I and gerund. Some grammarians, including Barchudarov, consider that there is no reason to accept these as two different morphological forms, since they do not differ in paradigms, calling these forms simply *-ing* forms. He also believes that these terms – participle I and gerund – are not unacceptable, but using them one should bear in mind that these are not two different morphological forms, they are two types of the syntactical usage of one form. The others consider the forms of participle I and gerund to be different verbals. Smimitsky, for example, states that there are more difference between the gerund and participle I, although they are homonymous in form, than between the gerund and the infinitive. That is why the gerund and participle I cannot be considered as one form. Blokh, considers that these are two different verbals, nevertheless, sees “the ground for raising this problem.” It consists of the fact that “the outer structure of the two elements of the verbal system is absolutely identical: they are outwardly the same when viewed in isolation” [2, p.118]. That is why in the American linguistic tradition the two forms are recognized as one integral *V-ing*.

Another aspect of the *-ing* forms problem is the distinction between participle I and the gerund. The main difference between them is that the gerund has the properties of a noun whereas participle I has the properties of an adjective.

So the English gerund is the non-finite form of the verb, which combines the properties of the verb with those of the noun. It is formed by adding the suffix *-ing* to the base form of the verb. The English gerund is not restricted in number and person by any grammatical subject and it has no mood distinction. It can not express predication by itself, but can be only part of the predicate, and as part of the predicate it must always be in connection with the finite form of the verb. The English gerund has also verbal and nominal characteristics. Having nominal characteristics it can perform the function of subject, object, predicative, and can be preceded by a preposition or a passive form. When the gerund has verbal characteristics it has tense and voice distinctions. What is traditionally called tenses in verbals differ greatly from the tenses of the finite forms. The tenses of the finite forms indicate the time of the action. The forms that are called tenses of the gerund comprises relative time indication; they usually indicate whether the action expressed by the gerund coincides with the action of the finite forms of the verb (in present, past or future) or is prior to the action of the finite forms of the verb (in present, past or future).

The Romanian gerund combines the properties of the verb, adjective, adverb and noun. Besides voice, mood and tense the Romanian gerund has the grammatical category of person and number. It has both syntactical verbal characteristics: the gerund of notional verbs represents actions as a process; and morphological verbal characteristics: it has the grammatical category of voice, it expresses a modal meaning (usually the action is considered real, sometimes – possible, conditional, expected and seldom – as a request, advise or command) and temporal meaning.

Like the English gerund, the French gerund is confused with the French present participle, because of their identical form, and is distinguished from the present participle by the presence of the preposition 'en'. The French gerund shows the action in progress and does not have temporal value; and has an invariable form. The French gerund expresses an action which is simultaneous with the action expressed by the predicate verb. It has also a compound form, which marks the accomplishment of the action. The subject of the French gerund is never expressed; it is obligatory the same with that of the principal verb.

The English gerund has the syntactical function of: subject, predicative, part of a compound verbal predicate, direct and prepositional object and adverbial modifier. It is used with preposition in the function of prepositional object, attribute and adverbial modifier; and without preposition in the function of subject, predicative, part of a compound verbal predicate and direct object.

The Romanian gerund has the syntactical function of direct and prepositional object, attribute and adverbial modifier. While the French gerund, has only the syntactical function of adverbial modifier.

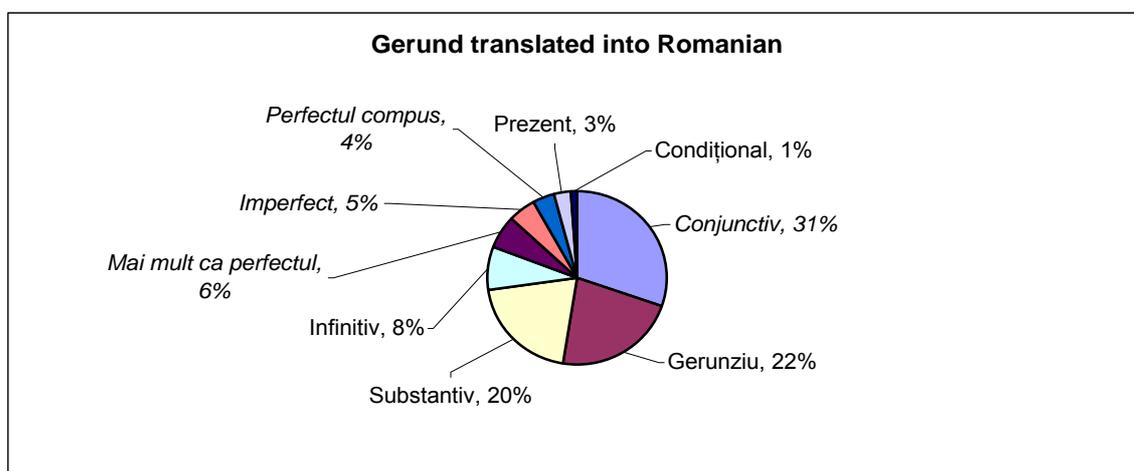
The gerund and the verbal noun coincide in form but have different combinability: the verbal noun can be determined by an article, can be modified by an adjective, can be used in the plural form and takes a prepositional object. While the gerund can not be determined by an article but by an adverb, can not be used in the plural form and can not take a prepositional object.

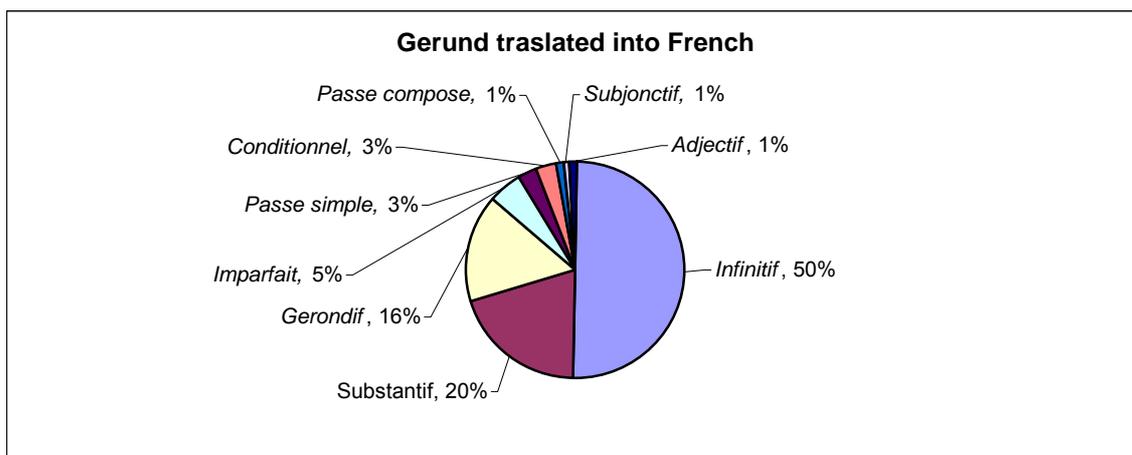
The Romanian gerund corresponds mostly to the English participle I, but there is no verbal grammatical form – participle I – as such in Romanian. Besides the meaning of the participle I, the Romanian and French gerund embraces partly the meaning of the English gerund too.

After analyzing a lot of examples with the gerund from literary works and their translation into Romanian and French we can state that:

The English gerund has a more substantive character, is more abstract and is always used with prepositions. In Romanian things are different: the gerund is seldom used with prepositions and combines the properties of a verb, adverb, adjective and noun. While the French gerund is always preceded by the preposition 'en', shows an action in progress, which is simultaneous with the action expressed by the predicate, has an invariable form and has the same subject with that of the principal verb. Thus, the English gerund does not always correspond to the Romanian and French gerund, but is translated by means of some other tense or parts of speech.

In order to establish in a detailed and clear way the means and ways of translating the English gerund into Romanian and French, and to show the differences and similarities between the gerund in English, Romanian and French we elaborated the following diagrams:





As a result of our contrastive analysis of the Gerund in English, Romanian and French we ascertained that the English Gerund does not always correspond to the Romanian and French Gerund, but it is translated by means of another tense or part of speech. For instance, the English Gerund can be translated into Romanian as: *Conjunctiv* 30%, Gerund 22%, Infinitive 20%, *Mai Mult ca Perfectul* 6%, *Imperfect* 5%, *Perfect Compus* 5%, Present 3%, Conditional 1% and *Participiu* 1%; and in French as: Infinitive 50%, Noun 20%, Gerund 16%, *Imparfait* 5%, *Passe Simple* 3%, Conditional 3%, *Passe Compose* 1%, Subjunctive 1% and Adjective 1%.

Thus, the English Gerund corresponds to the Romanian *Conjunctiv* and to the French Infinitive. This topic raises many important questions as to the English Gerund that is why it is nowadays receiving intensive examination. And it is of great interest since every student learning English faces difficulties in understanding and translating the English Gerund.

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