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AN INVESTIGATION ON GERUND AND INFINITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH

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**ABSTRACT**

This work is an attempt to present the gerund and infinitive in English, it aims to extend the linguistic structure. It makes use of the literature presented by each of the three schools of grammar. This research work includes a presentation of the forms the gerund occupies, the function it carries out and the meanings it expresses and is also concerned with different views regarding processes leading to the derivation of the gerund. It offers a brief account of some problems of usage and distinction between the gerund and the present participle.

A survey of the English infinitive is also conducted to demonstrate the forms the infinitive takes, the patterns where it occurs, the functions it performs and meanings it expresses. In addition to illustrating the process of the derivation of the infinitive this chapter deals with some relevant usage matters.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 The Problem:** Grammar does not tackle form and meaning in isolation. One of the basic problems encountered by many non – native learners in speaking and writing English is the choice of the correct grammatical form, particularly when there is subtle distinction of meaning between the seemingly similar structures, to correlate with a definite meaning. Gerund and infinitive both have more or less similar function and occupy almost the same position; and this will make the task of learning easier.

**1.2 Purpose of the Study:** This study basically aims at,

- Identifying in particular gerund and infinitive whether to use either the gerund or the infinitive in a certain place and determine which of the two is to occur or allowed.
- Giving a full exposition of the patterns which necessitate the use of the plain gerund and prepositional gerunds.
- Showing the cases where there is a choice in the use of both constructions with similar or different meaning
- Displaying the dissimilarities between the present participle and the gerund.

**1.3 Hypothesis:** In virtue of the fact the problems arise from differences in structure which entails difference in meaning, it is hypothesized that learners often misplace the infinitive and the gerund, in both speaking and writing, by using one of the two which is required without abiding by certain syntactic determinants. In addition, it is assumed that learners of English as a foreign language fail to recognize correspondences between meaning and form.

**1.4 The procedures followed in the study are the following:** presenting an accurate and adequate discretion of English infinitive structures by classifying their forms, identifying their patterns and investigating their functions.

1. Presenting a similar description of English gerund structure by classifying their forms, identifying their patterns and investigating their functions.
2. Outlying conclusions and putting forth some recommendations which could be useful for advanced learners. Teachers and text-book writes of English as a foreign language can benefit from the research .

**1.5 Value of the Study:** The value of the investigation undertaken in the study is a theoretical value which concerns teachers and text – book writes which help them identifying the positions and functions of different forms of English infinitive and gerund practice .

## 2. GERUND

2.1 Gerund is a Latin grammatical term for the non- finite form of a verb having the ending { - ing } as its characteristics mark and normally expressing an action without agreement with its subject in person or number. ( Perrin and Ebbit, 1972: 582; Liles, 1975: 124)

In old English , the gerund was originated as an abstract noun derived from a related verb by adding { - ing } to name its action, like learning. It had all the regular noun inflections and was used with definite article and often followed by a preposition phrase .

In middle English , its verbal meaning grew stronger and had , therefore , the capacity of a subject, an object and adverbial modifier , this { ing } was stranded in middle English as { - ing } , like learning .

In modern English , it is extended widely in use that it is possible to take a gerund of almost any verb in the language. ( Roberts, 1954: 187; Vallins , 1971 : 31-32 )

Like the infinitive, a gerund is a verbal noun . It has the same form with the present participle but differs in meaning and function . Whereas the gerund does the job of noun , the present participle does the job of an adjective. ( Sweet, H. 1968 :116 )

**2.2 Definitions of Gerund:** Bloomsbury (1999:782 ) refers that the gerund is a noun formed from a verb, describing an action ,state, or process. In English, it is formed from the verb's{-ing} form, "as smoking" is in the phrase "No smoking"

Allen,W ( 1967. 106 ) says that gerund is a part of the verb ending in {-ing} is sometimes the present participle and can have the force of an adjective as well as that of a verb :

3. There it is , lying on the floor!
4. The old man , rising to his feet , began to speak .

Gerund sometimes has the force of a noun as well as that of a verb

5. Reading is pleasant .
6. Reading books is pleasant .

A number of verbs can be followed by { - ing } form of adverb instead of the infinitive or a clause , when this is a gerund, it can be the object of the main verb , as ( it is also a verb itself ) can have its own object :

7. I don't like letters .
8. I don't like writing letter

Eckersley and Eckersley ( 1960 : 243 ) refer that the gerund is distinguishable in form from the present participle, whereas the participle is a verb adjective, the gerund is verbal noun :

1. Swimming is a lot of good exercise
2. Who really like swimming

### 2-3 Borderline Cases of Lexical Word Class Membership

In this section, we discuss -ing words as borderline cases with reference to 1-Noun V. verb 2-Noun V. adjectives 3-verb V. adjective.

#### 2-3-1 Noun V. Verbs

The ing-participle form of the verb is easily confused with base form of many nouns ending in -ing.  
7- Scoring the first goal.

When the noun form preceded by determiners or adjective; followed by an of-phrase or relative clause.

8- The bannign of some chemicals.

9- Some enthusiastic biding from Bloomfields.

10- Her dancing which was bad beyond measure.

2-3-2 Nouns V. Adjectives.

The ing- word most typical positions for nouns or adjectives, we consider it as head of a noun phrase with determiners or modifiers if needed, and consider it an adjective phrase-typically after the verb Be, with degree adverb modifiers (eg. Very, too) if needed.

11- It was very confusing.

12-He was so interesting.

13- Jenn's heart was too loving and forgiving.

2-3-3 Verbs V. Adjectives

The ing-participle of the verb is often difficult to distinguish from a participle adjective. For example, the progressive form of the verb ( be + verb-ing ), as in "is working". If the ing-word is followed by a verb complement (such as an object ).

14- He is eating lunch

On the other hand, if it is preceded by a degree adverb such as very, so, and too it is just an adjective.

15- He was too tempting.

(Quirk, 1999 :67-68)

2-4 Gerund and Finite Verbs

The case of the gerund phrases imply many feature of the finite verbs at the underlying level:

2-4-1 Both gerund and finite verbs may have subjects:

16- A- I insisted on his leaving.

B- I insisted that he had left.

2-4-2 Both may be intransitive or transitive :

17- A- His winning was fortunate. ( intransitive ).

B- His winning the game was fortunate. ( transitive ).

2-4-3 Both may be linking, taking subject complement:

18- A- Seeing is believing.

B- He looks happy.

2-4-4 Both make distinctions in voice and tense:

19- A- He is afraid of being someone. ( active )

B- He is afraid of killed being. (passive )

20- A- I remember taking this photograph. ( present )

B- I remember having taking this photograph. (present perfect ) ( Frank, 1972: 310 )

2-5 Simple Gerund

Little et al, 1959:789 refers the "simple gerund" is a non-finite form of the verb in English consisting of the base + suffixal morpheme {-ing }. It is called "simple" because it stands alone in certain characteristic sentence positions. In other words, it is not accompanied by an object, a complement, or a modifier. In such a case, the gerund functions either as a nominal or adjective or adverbial.

20- Mary dislikes writing.

2-6 The-ing Participle

The inflection is spelled -ing, which is added to the base:

Pass/passing          carry/carrying          be/being.

Here are additional spelling rules particular cases:

1- If the base ends in -e , drop the -e before the -ing :

drive/driving          make/making

But if the base ends in -ee , oe , or , -y keep the final -e :

See/seeing dye/dyeing .

7-2- If the base end in -ie , change the -l to -y and drop the -e:

Die/dying tie/tying.

3- In general, double the consonant letter before -ing if all these three conditions apply:

A-The base ends in a single consonant letter.

B-A single vowel comes before that consonant letter .

C- The final syllable of the base is stressed , as it must be if the base is monosyllabic:

Tip/tipping rod/rodding permit/permitting forbid/forbidding.

There is no doubling if :

A- The base ends in two or more consonant letters:

Sing/singing fight/fighting.

B- There are two vowel letters before the final consonant of the base:

Read/reading reveal/revealing.

C-The final of the base is not stressed:

Limit/limiting differ/differing. (Greenbum: 1996, 122 – 123 )

2-7 Ing-Clauses

Ing-clauses can have a range of syntactic roles:

A- Subject :

22- Having a fever is not pleasant.

B- Subject predicative :

23- The real problem is getting something done about the cheap imports.

C- Direct object:

24- I started thinking about Christmas.

D- Prepositional object :

25- No-one could rely on his going to bed early last night.

E- Part of noun phrase:

26- I think he smashed two cars coming down the road.

F-Complement of preposition :

27- The art of expanding limited recall by asking leading, open –ended question is a subtle on. (Quirk, 1999 :199-200)

2-8 Verbs Followed by the Gerund

Eckersley and Eckersley (1960:246 ) refer it is not always easy to decide when the gerund should be used after a verb. This is the gerund usage:

2-8-1 The Following Verbs Take a Gerund after Them: (advise , avoid , consider , delay , deny , detest , enjoy , mind...etc )

28 - I couldn't avoid meeting him.

Mind , with the meaning "object to" is generally used in interrogative and negative sentence

29- Do you mind answering my question?

30- I don't mind working overtime.

2-8-2 The Gerund is also used after nearly all " phrasal verbs"

31- She burst out crying.

32- You must keep on trying.

2-8-3 It is used too, after the Phrases: it's no good , it's no use , sick of.

33- Its no use crying over spelt milk.

34- I'm tired of meeting the same people day after day.

### 3.0 INFINITIVE

3.1 In the old English , the infinitive had a single characteristics ending { an } like : radian, sing an in normative and accusative cases and { - anne } in active case , which weakened during the middle English period to { -en} or { -e } n the former case and { -enne } , { - rn} , { -e} in the latter case , and was then finally lost altogether . in the modern English , the infinitive has therefore the simple uninflected form of the verb

which is employed in two ways, either (a) simply alone which is identical in form with the present tense for all persons in the plural and for the first and second persons in the singular (drink, ride, sing.) or (b) in dependence on the preceding particle (to 'like: to drink, to ride, to sing). Little: et al (1959: 1001; Vallins, 1971: 31; Onions, 1971, 112)

Bufman and regovin, (1986:846) state that the infinitive is used to be classified as a verbal. A verbal in this sense is defined as a noun-finite verb form which combines the characteristic of verb with those of noun, an adjective, or an adverb, but which lacks the power to form a sentence, i.e. it can't make a statement, ask a question, or give a command. It often enables the writer to save words, avoid tiresome repetition and vary sentence patterns.

Perrine and Abbott (1972: 601) state that an Infinitive is a Latin grammatical term for the non-finite verb form expressing the general sense of the verb form expressing the general sense of the verb, i.e. an action or state without reference to manner and without restrictions for person or number.

### 3.2 Definitions of Infinitive

Al-Hamash, K (1976: 256) notices that the infinitive refers to the verb form that is not inflected as far as form concerned. It is identical with simple present tense except that it does not have the third person singular marker, infinitive in another word, functions as a noun of action, but has much force as well as the infinitive could be formed from any full verb in English language.

Crystal, D (2003: 175-176) defines it as a traditional term for the non-finite form of the verb usually cited as its unmarked or base form e.g. walk, kick, though some languages make it syntactically or morphologically. In English, the infinitive form may be used alone or in conjunction with the participle (the To infinitive), e.g:

42. He wants to go.

43. He saw her go.

The form without To is sometimes known as bare or zero infinitive.

Level, D (2001: 453) says that infinitive is a verb that generally appears with the word to and acts as noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

41. The firefighter would like to sleep.

Bloomsbury (1999: 962) defines infinitive a form of verb with no reference to a participle tense, present or subject. In English, an infinitive is usually preceded by the word "to" as in "to see".

**3-3 The Bare Infinitive:** A construct in which the base of the verb is not marked with the morpheme "to" as in "I can go". The old English nominative and accusative infinitive which had the suffix {-an} is the source of the bare infinitive (Little et al, 1959: tool). Because of the loss of inflectional ending the bare infinitive is now identical in form with present tense, except for the third person singular indicative which adds {-s}. The bare infinitive is also alternatively called "to-less", simple, plain or "pure" infinitive as indicative by different grammarians. (Roberts, 1959:199)

**3-4 The To – Infinitive:** A construct in which the base of the verb is preceded by the morpheme "to" as in "I want to walk". "to" was at first felt as an ordinary preposition indicating direction as in "I was moved to ask a question", yet in the course of time its meaning weakened and is now considered a grammatical implement with no meaning of its own. It is construed as a particle rather than a preposition. (Jespersen, 1977: 330; Roberts, 1954: 200)

**3-5 The split Infinitive:** Some grammarians condemn the use of the "split infinitive" i.e. the placing of a word or words between the "to" and the verb of "to quickly agree", "to really understand". But the split infinitive dates back to the thirteenth century and can be found in the work of many famous authors.

38 – He likes to half close his eyes. (Eckersley, Eckersley, 1977: 235)

**3-6 Infinitive Phrase:** Praninskas, J (1957: 275 – 276) states that infinitive phrase simply an infinitive together with its subject and / or complement. Such phrases also function as units in a sentence pattern: 39- To say such a thing is nonsense.

40 – I was not willing to go alone.

3-6-1 Complement of the Adjectival

Stageberg , ( 1981 : 288 ) refers that complement has been used thus far to mean any nominal completer of the verb , such as subjective complement and direct object . Now we shall broaden the term to include two more kinds of completers :

41- I fear that they are lost .

42 - I am fearful that they are lost .

In the first sentence " that they are lost " is obviously a complement of the " DO" type , that is , it is a nominal functioning as the direct object of the verb . Since the second sentence closely parallels the first in meaning and form.

### 3-6-2 Infinitives and Infinitive Phrase as a Subjects

A. Nominal subject position ,before main verb , may be filled by an infinitive , thought , this is not a very frequent pattern .When used, it is almost always as a statement subject is followed by an S- form verb . The subject of an infinitive phrase so is by far.

43 - Anyone to succeed at college requires effort .

b. Displaced subject is the name sometimes given to an infinitive phrase which occur after the verb in a sentence which begins with anticipatory " it " .Note that when the subject of in infinitive is pronoun , it is an object form preceded by for

44- It is not easy for me to study in a foreign language . Praninskas , J ( 1975 : 275 )

### 3-6-3 Infinitive phrase Adverbials

It is necessary to distinguish between the infinitive phrase of the verb . The distinction can easily be made by substitution ,as you :

45- He works to succeed . ( Adverbial modifier-p :6 )

46- He wants to succeed . ( object – p : 7 ) Stageberg , (1981 : 273 )

### 3-6-4 Infinitive and Infinitive Phrases as Direct Object :

A. When the subject of the infinitive object is the same as subjective of the sentence it is not repeated .

47- They fail to realize their handicap .

48-They try to understand their assignments.

b. When the subject of an infinitive is different from the subject of the sentence , it appears before the infinitive .If pronoun , it is an object form .

49- They encourage them to study science

50- They expect them to do their best .

Praninskas,J ( 1975 : 275 – 276 )

### 3-6-5 Infinitive as Passive Voice

Brookes and Ross, ( 1967 : 169 ) refer that the passive voice is formed by using the required tense of auxiliary to be the past participle of the given verb :

Affirmative : subject + to be + past participle.

51- To be answered by all students .

52- To be given to the poor .

Questions : to be + subject + past participle .

53- Are all questions answered by me .

### 3-7 Infinitive Without To

Hamash , k ( 1979 : 344 ) refers that infinitives without { to } are quite common in English . They occur in the following positions :

After the modal auxiliaries ( can , could , shall , may , must , would , and might ) e.g :

55- I can read English .

56- We must work hard.

B. The auxiliaries ( do , does ,did ) precede infinitives without " to " in negative , interrogative and emphatic expression e.g. :

57- Did he go to school ?

C- Infinitives without to are used after the following verbs : feel , hear , see , smell , help , let , and make .

58- Let him go .

In the sentences notice that the infinitives is preceded by either a noun or an subject pronoun .

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The attempt made in this study to analyze the infinitive and the gerund in English has revealed the following observations

- I. Both infinitive and gerund are grammatical forms referable to verb – conjunction , but they preserve sometimes the special functions and meanings of nouns, sometimes of verbs and sometimes they preserve the characteristics of both , however the verbal element often seems to be stronger in the infinitive, for example, " I like to play " suggests that I want to perform the act with gerund the noun element seems to be stronger. yet , this nominal characteristics is not avoid of an indication of process in which someone or something is engaged
- II. The gerund is less of a verb than the infinitive since it does not join in the conjugation of the finite verbs , and more of a noun, for it can be joined to another noun by means of a preposition .
- III. Though different in form , both are non-finite verbs . the rule for the gerund is to add{-ing} to the verb while of the infinitive is to add either to before the stem of the verb or leave the verb alone , Besides, both may take the form of phrases when followed by complements .
- IV. Both may be correctly defined as that part of the a verb which names the action , with or without naming the doer . The study has shown that both are alike in that more than not , their subject are implied

When there is in the principle clause no word that can serve as subject , it becomes necessary for both to have subjects of their own , in this case , the two constructions differ in the form of their subject : the infinitive requires “ for ” before its subject and the gerund requires as subject the gerund of noun or possessive of pronoun .

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