

English embedded complements: the *-ing* form

The English *-ing* form, often also called (*verbal*) gerund in sentences like (1) is often believed to display a mixture of verbal and nominal properties, thus posing problems for any grammar theory. I will argue that this is actually not the case for every construction involving the *-ing* form, but only for two distinct subclasses, with the majority of cases belonging to subclasses which do not display these problems.

- (1) We object to joining this club.

The verbal properties of the *-ing* form include the ability to govern an object as opposed to a genitive phrase, the modification by adverbs, and subjects in a non-genitive case. Additionally, the *-ing* form can also show tense and voice distinctions and can be negated by *not* as opposed to *non*.

On the other hand, the fact that the *-ing* form can appear as subject or object, that it can be coordinated with NPs and can be a complement to prepositions has led to the claim that the *-ing* form has to be nominal at some level as well (Bresnan 2001, Hudson 2003). These mixed properties lead to problems in analyzing the construction as most analyses proposed to solve the problem involve an exocentric phrase structure.

As a first step to solve the problem I argue that the properties mentioned above and other tests Bresnan (2001) suggests as evidence to show the nominal character of the *-ing* form can called into question. Other complements like the *to infinitive* or *that* clauses behave similarly to the *-ing* form in tests which normally suggest a nominal character of the phrase. For example, these complements can be used as subjects, be complements to prepositions and behave similarly in tough-movement, topicalization etc.

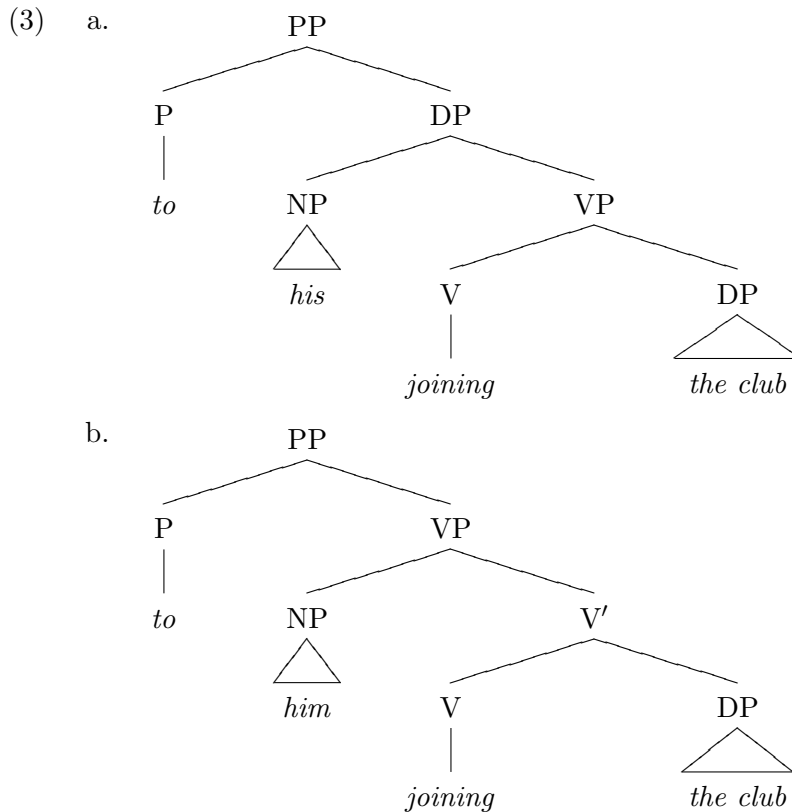
It will be necessary to divide constructions involving the *-ing* form into different subclasses. Malouf (2000) proposed a distinction into three different subclasses, *POSS-ing*, *ACC-ing* and *PRO-ing*. The *-ing* form is sometimes also used after *no* in constructions like (2b). Thus, a fourth subtype, *DET-ing* can be added.

- (2) a. POSS-ing: *We object to his joining the club.*
b. DET-ing: *No joining the club.*
c. ACC-ing: *We object to him joining the club.*
d. PRO-ing: *We object to joining the club.*

That these constructions have to be analyzed differently can be seen in the fact that the *POSS-ing* and *ACC-ing* construction cannot be conjoined. Other tests involving coordination and extraction show that the *ACC-ing* construction really behaves like a clause in contrast to the *POSS-ing* and *DET-ing* construction which behaves like a nominal phrase. It can further be shown that the *PRO-ing* construction behaves like the *ACC-ing* construction (Malouf 2000).

This then leads to two different analyses for the different subtypes of the *-ing* form. While the *POSS-ing* and *DET-ing* constructions really display a nominal external distribution and thus have to be analysed accordingly, the *ACC-ing* and *PRO-ing* construction can be analysed as a sentential complement. It is thus not necessary to embed the VP inside a DP, which was suggested by Bresnan (2001), as this analysis results in an exocentric phrase structure and it is not clear why the *ACC-ing* and *POSS-ing* constructions should behave like a clause in, for

example, coordination or extraction when it is embedded inside a DP. Thus, while I follow Bresnan (2001) in her analysis of the *POSS-ing* construction shown in (3a), which can also be used for the *DET-ing* construction, I propose the analysis in (3b) for constructions involving the *ACC-ing* and *PRO-ing* form.



Thus, two different analyses are offered for the two different categories of *-ing* forms. These analyses also mirror the historic development of the *-ing* form as it first was a nominalized verb which in the Middle English period began to acquire verbal properties (Fanego 2004). After a period where it could display mixed verbal and nominal traits (van der Wurff 1991), nowadays only purely verbal or nominal constructions are possible. Taking into account that the *POSS-ing* construction is, at least in British English, considered to be old-fashioned and often even obsolete, this completes the picture of the development of the *-ing* form from a nominalized verb to a structure displaying mixed properties to a now purely sentential complement, the *ACC-ing* and *PRO-ing* constructions which do not display any nominal characteristics any more.

References

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