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The Gerund and the *to*-Infinitive as Subject

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This corpus-based study shows that the distinction between the gerund and the infinitive cannot be accounted for in terms of the previously proposed oppositions between particularity and generality or between reification and hypothesis/potentiality. The corpus used does reveal certain distributional tendencies that distinguish the two forms, but they are also found to occur as subjects of the very same predicates. The explanation proposed to account for both distribution and the capacity of both forms to be used with the same predicate is based on a definition of their basic meanings as the condition determining their use in discourse. The distinction in meaning between these two constructions is shown to be more complex than that of a simple binary opposition, as the *to*-infinitive is a composite made up of the meanings of its two component parts—the bare infinitive and the preposition *to*—while the *-ing* is part of the verb's morphology.

Keywords: *nonfinite forms; infinitive; gerund; participle; subject*

In a great many cases, perhaps even the majority, it seems to make very little difference whether one uses the *-ing* or the *to*-infinitive as subject of a sentence, as can be observed by looking at (1a) and (1b):

- (1a) To have the Greek paper is not the great help that at first flush it seemed.
(*Brown University Corpus* 1964, P07 0640)
- (1b) Having the Greek paper is not the great help that at first flush it seemed.

The nuance separating these two sentences is so fugitive as to make it practically impossible to express, as anyone who has tried to explain it to an EFL/ESL student can attest.¹ Nevertheless, there are cases where the context is such that it only allows one of the two forms. Thus, only the *to*-infinitive is appropriate in (2) and only the *-ing* form in (3):

- (2) We come now to the very brink where hope and despair are akin. To waver is to fall. (Tolkien 1968, 914)
- (3) Writing a book is not unlike building a house or planning a battle or painting a picture. (Scheurweghs 1959, 205)

If the two constructions have the same meaning, how is it that they are not substitutable for one another in these contexts?

Previous Treatments of the Problem

The earliest attempt to define the semantic value of the gerund and the infinitive is found in Sweet (1903, 120), who claims that the gerund appears in sentences whose scope is general while the infinitive is used to refer to a particular occurrence. This distinction is taken up by F. T. Wood (1956, 11) in his article titled "Gerund versus Infinitive," where it is stated that the gerund "represents the activity as it were *in vacuo*, without reference to any agent or occasion," so that "when we say *Lying is wrong* we are thinking of the activity or the practise in a universal sense, as a vice having an existence independent of the individual who succumbs to it." Jespersen (1940, 193) also adopts this position and opposes *I hate lying* ("the vice in general") to *I hate to lie* ("in this particular case"), and *I don't like smoking* ("I object to the habit") to *I should like to smoke now*, which evokes a desire to smoke at this particular moment. Similar observations can be found in Poutsma (1904, 604), Kruisinga (1931, 274), Zandvoort (1957, 28), and Schibsbye (1970, 78).

It does not require much searching to find uses that contradict these claims. The *-ing* form, for instance, is used quite often to denote a one-time occurrence, as in (4):

- (4) Drinking all that milk has upset the baby's stomach.

Strangely enough, the *to*-infinitive construction, whose function is claimed to be that of evoking particular events, seems out of place in this context:

- (5) *To drink all that milk has upset the baby's stomach.

On the other hand, the *to*-infinitive is found quite naturally in general statements, as illustrated by (6) and (7):

- (6) To understand American politics is . . . to know people . . . (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, C11 1670)
 (7) To err is human; to forgive, divine. (Alexander Pope)

It is not surprising, therefore, to find some authors claiming the exact opposite distinction to hold between the *to*-infinitive and the gerund: the latter is particular and the former general. This is the opposition proposed by Koziol and Hüttenbrenner (1968, 182-83), as well as by Freed (1979, 152) in her book on aspectual verbs.

However, not all commentators see the distinction between the *-ing* form and the *to*-infinitive in these terms. Bolinger (1968, 124) represents another line of thought

that holds the infinitive to represent “hypothesis and potentiality,” whereas the *-ing* form denotes “reification” (which seems to mean the same thing as actualization). Bolinger illustrates the distinction he proposes by means of sentences such as the following:

- (8a) Can you remember to do that?
 (8b) Can you remember doing that?

The sentence with the *to*-infinitive construction expresses an event whose performance is desired to take place in the future (therefore “hypothetical”). The sentence with the *-ing* refers to an event that has already occurred (i.e., “reification”).

Many other authors have also associated the infinitive with the expression of the hypothetical. Dixon (1984, 590) claims that it denotes “yet unrealized activities”; Quirk et al. (1985, 1191) use Bolinger’s term *potentiality*; Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1971, 347-48) argue for a distinction between gerundive and *to*-infinitive complements in terms of “factivity” (i.e., presupposition of the truth of the complement) versus “nonfactivity,” a claim that is also made by Givón (1990, 534), who says that the *-ing* “tends to be used primarily in complements of implicative verbs.” Wierzbicka (1988, 164-65) analyzes the *to*-infinitive as involving speaker subjectivity (“a personal, subjective, first-person mode: ‘I want’, ‘I think’, or ‘I know’”) and “future orientation.” On the other hand, *-ing* complements, according to Wierzbicka’s analysis, are temporal and nontemporal. Nontemporal *-ing* complements refer to facts or to possibilities, as in *I regret [the fact of] quarrelling with Mary last year* and *Hal considered [the possibility of] becoming a karate instructor* (Wierzbicka 1988, 69). Temporal *-ing* complements, which occur “whenever time is relevant,” imply “sameness of time,” as in *She enjoyed talking to him* (69, 162).

Temporal *-ing* complements receive similar treatment in Langacker’s theory of cognitive grammar: “temporal coincidence is the hallmark of *-ing* . . . there is always some form of temporal overlap between the main and subordinate clause profiles” (Langacker 1991, 445). For Langacker, however, the *to*-infinitive is not defined in terms of temporality; on the contrary, he defines *to* as having an “atemporalizing function, i.e. from a process it derives an atemporal relation” (Langacker 1992, 306). *To* has this effect of “infinitivalization” because it is itself a “schematic infinitive” that “imposes a construal that is holistic, in the dual sense of (i) keeping all the component states in profile, while (ii) viewing them in summary fashion (as a single Gestalt), as opposed to the sequential scanning characteristic of a process per se” (Langacker 1992, 306).

Stowell (1982) takes the opposite approach: the *-ing* is atemporal—“the understood tense of the gerund is completely malleable to the semantics of the governing verb” (563)—but the *to*-infinitive contains a future tense operator: “the tense of a *to*-infinitive is that of a possible future” (562). This operator specifies that “the time

frame of the infinitival clause is unrealized with respect to the tense of the matrix in which it appears,” so that in (9) below, “Jenny has not yet bought the wine at the point at which she remembers to do so,” and in (10), “Jim does not succeed in locking the door when he tries to do so”:

- (9) Jenny remembered to bring the wine.
- (10) Jim tried to lock the door.

For the authors evoked in this section, then, the distinction between the *-ing* and the *to*-infinitive is defined in terms of temporality, either partially or totally. The *-ing* form is most commonly claimed to evoke an event that exists at the same time as some other event or point of reference; the *to*-infinitive is depicted as denoting an event that is hypothetical or future in some way.

The contradictions among the authors who adopt a temporality approach show that this type of explanation is not capable of accounting for the data in this area of usage. On one hand, the *-ing* form is said to evoke temporal overlap or sameness of time; another author claims, on the contrary, that this form is completely malleable with respect to time. And indeed, the evidence is rather in favor of this latter view, as the complete range of the *-ing*'s uses shows that it can evoke events that are not only simultaneous (11) but also past (12) and future (13) with respect to the events denoted by the main verb:

- (11) I am enjoying talking with you.
- (12) I remember talking with you.
- (13) I am considering talking with you.

As for the infinitive, most authors associate it with some form of futurity; Langacker (1992, 305), however, describes the *to*-infinitive as denoting an atemporal, holistic view of an event and attributes any notion of goal or futurity to the semantics of the main-clause verb or other time specifications present in the context. This view is incapable of accounting for the contrast between the gerund and the infinitive after the same verb, however. As for Stowell's (1982) analysis of infinitival constructions with *remember* in terms of futurity, it must be admitted that it is a rather peculiar “future tense operator” that evokes the real actualization of its event in the past, as does the construction in (9) above.

Another author has attempted to define the distinction between the *-ing* and the infinitive in terms of reference. Conrad (1982, 92) defines the gerund as “a referring noun phrase”: “the gerund always refers to one locatable instance, or several locatable instances, of actions, processes, states, etc.” The infinitive, in contrast, is treated as a “non-referring NP”: “the infinitive does not refer to individuated, locatable occurrences of the action, process, etc. denoted by the infinitive, but the

use of the infinitive is compatible with locatable occurrence” (118). This makes the infinitive “the unmarked term of the opposition: what is common to its various uses is the negative fact that it does not have a referring function” (118). A similar distinction to Conrad’s referring/nonreferring opposition is made by Chuquet (1986, 254). Based on Culiolian enunciative theory, Chuquet proposes that the gerund indicates that the occurrence of the event that it denotes has been “validated” by the speaker. The infinitive, in contrast, is the sign of an occurrence that is merely “validatable.” This opposition explains why the *-ing* can occur as subject of a verbal phrase in the progressive construction (14), while the *to*-infinitive cannot (15):

- (14) What did I tell you? Look! Stroking the cat is making my flesh creep.
 (15) *I am so tired that to write this letter is giving me a headache. (Chuquet 1986, 253)

The obvious problem with approaches such as those of Conrad and Chuquet is the use of the *-ing* form in conditional contexts, in which there is no real occurrence of the *-ing*’s event to be referred to or validated. With regard to a use such as (16),

- (16) I took a deep breath. Being angry wouldn’t help,

Conrad (1982, 116-17) attempts to explain the use of the gerund as due to the evocation of a “short-term referent,” drawing a parallel between (17) and (18):

- (17) If Emma were to bake *a cake*, *the cake* would be rich and sweet.
 (18) If I were to *become angry*, *being angry* wouldn’t help.

Chuquet (1986) takes a slightly different tack, claiming that in uses like (16), the speaker imagines the event as if its occurrence was validated.

If, however, the speaker can imagine an event as if its occurrence was validated in usage with the *-ing*, this amounts to abolishing the distinction between “validated” (the gerund) and “validatable” (the infinitive). As for the explanation based on the concept of short-term reference, one wonders why, if the implicit presence of a short-term referent is what allows the use of *being angry* in (16), it should not be possible to say things like (19) since a paraphrase similar to (18) could be applied in this context:

- (19) I took a deep breath. *The temper tantrum wouldn’t help.
 (19’) If I were to throw a temper tantrum, the temper tantrum wouldn’t help.

The noun phrase would rather have to contain the indefinite article in this case:

(20) I took a deep breath. A temper tantrum wouldn't help.

Furthermore, neither Conrad's (1982) nor Chuquet's (1986) explanation can handle uses such as (21):

(21) The doctor recommended taking a two-month holiday,

where there is no short-term referent or any impression of the speaker imagining the event 'taking' as validated.

Chuquet's (1986) approach also meets serious difficulties when faced with certain uses of the infinitive. In uses such as (22) below, it seems impossible to hold that the infinitive evokes the occurrence of its event as merely "validatable":

(22) To lose his bargain through the obstinacy of a fool, to have his patronage overlooked by a subordinate, choked him with rage. (Conrad 1982, 140)

Here the infinitive clearly evokes an event that actually took place. Such uses would not be a problem, on the other hand, for Conrad's (1982, 118) treatment of the infinitive as the "unmarked term" of the referentiality opposition and as such being "compatible with locatable occurrence." On a more general level, however, one may criticize the application of a markedness theory approach to meaningful items such as the *-ing* and the *to*-infinitive, as such an approach has the effect of emptying the unmarked term of the opposition of its meaning. If the infinitive is compatible with locatable occurrence, then it is not "nonreferring" and so cannot be opposed to the *-ing* in terms of referentiality. The only opposition left between the two forms is that the infinitive can be used in nonreferring contexts while the gerund cannot. Since (21) above shows that the gerund does occur in nonreferring uses in the absence of any short-term referent, the opposition dissolves completely. One is left then with the task of explaining how two meaningful forms can be so close to one another in some uses and so far away in others. While this task is delicate, this study hopes to show that it is not impossible.

The Explanatory Hypothesis

The explanation that will be proposed for the facts of usage observed in this area will be based on three parameters. The first of these is the inherent semantics of the *-ing* form and of the *to* plus infinitive construction. It will be assumed here that these forms do have an inherent meaning that preexists and is stored outside of any particular use that is made of them (Hirtle 1985, 73) and that this meaning has an underlying unity that makes it more than a mere list of the possible uses of a form (cf. Ruhl 1989). Consequently, an attempt will be made to define the meaning of the

-ing, the meaning of *to*, and the meaning of the bare infinitive to show how their inherent meaning comes into play in the type of usage under consideration here. The second factor that will be taken into account is the function of the two forms in the sentence. This will require a definition of subject function and an examination of its interaction with the meaning of the nonfinite form performing this function. The third factor to be considered is the nature of the predicate, in an attempt to discover any correlations between the gerund or the *to*-infinitive and the identifiable types of predicates.

The Inherent Meaning of the *-ing*

If one thing is clear from the foregoing discussion of the literature, it is that the *-ing* cannot be defined in terms of the notions of simultaneity, temporal overlap, or incompleteness. And yet it does evoke such impressions in many of its uses, for instance, in the following progressive construction:

(23) He was reading an Evelyn Waugh novel when I came in.

A distinction will consequently be made here between the meaning of the *-ing* as a permanent potential stored outside of any particular use and the way this potential is actualized in a given context. In its noncontextualized state, the *-ing* is simply the sign of interiority. To be more precise, it signals that the event's actualizer—what will be called here the event's spatial support (cf. Duffley 1995, 7-8)—is to be conceived as being within the confines of the event's beginning and end limits. When it is put into use in a particular context, this potential can be actualized in various ways. If the event is attributed to the spatial support as a property thereof at a precise moment in time, the resulting message will be that of an event divided into an accomplished and a yet-to-be-accomplished portion by the position within it occupied by the spatial support. This corresponds to the sense observed in (23) above. If, however, the spatial support of the event is not situated at any particular moment within the latter, this construes the event's interiority as a sum of positions occupied or occupiable by the spatial support. This, it is argued here, is the reason why in (24) below, the *-ing* evokes the whole of the event:

(24) Reading that Evelyn Waugh novel only took him four hours.

Conrad (1982, 112) points out that in uses of this type, the gerund is paraphrasable by the simple form of the verb evoking a complete action and not by the progressive; (24) above corresponds therefore to (24a) and not to (24b):

(24a) He read that Evelyn Waugh novel and it only took him four hours.

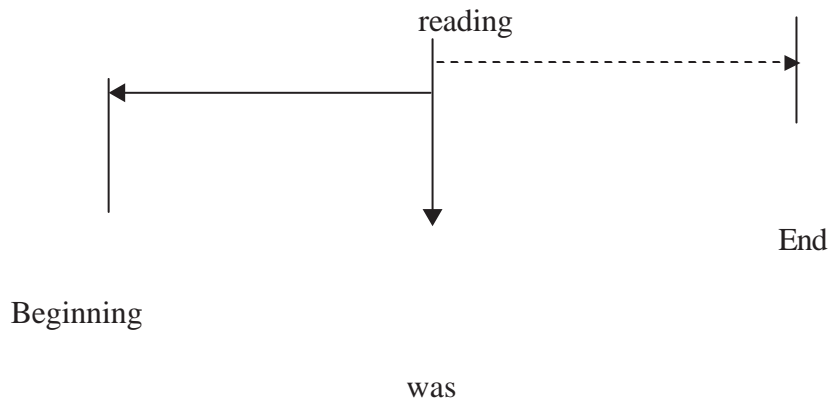


Figure 1: The Progressive *-ing* Construction.

- (24b) *He was reading that Evelyn Waugh novel and it only took him four hours.

It is also instructive in this respect to observe the compatibility of the gerundive *-ing* with the preposition *after*:

- (25) After reading the novel, he went to see the movie.

When the *-ing*'s spatial support is evoked as being located at a particular point within the event's interiority, on the other hand, the impression of incompleteness thus produced does not concord with the meaning of *after*:

- (26) *After he was reading the novel, he went to see the movie.

The gerundive realization of the *-ing*, denoting as it does the total interiority of an event, produces an impression very close to that of a verbal noun. It evokes the event as a homogeneous whole made up of all the internal positions of the spatial support. In contrast, in the progressive construction, the event is attributed to its spatial support at one particular moment within its duration, which produces an image corresponding to Figure 1.

This view of the *-ing* allows one to explain why it can produce effects of anteriority and posteriority alongside that of simultaneity when used as a complement of another verb, as illustrated in (11) through (13) above. If the *-ing* evokes the totality of its event as an entity unto itself—much like a noun—the temporal impressions observed above are to be explained as being due to the meaning of the main verb. In (11), the sentence evokes *talking with you* as “that which is being

enjoyed by me” (i.e., as the direct object of *enjoy*); this will obviously imply that the talking is taking place at the same time as the enjoying since one can only derive pleasure from an action at the same time as one performs it. In (12), *talking with you* is evoked as “that which is remembered,” which entails that the talking had to take place before the remembering. Last, in (13), talking is conceived as “that which is being considered by the speaker,” whence the implication that it corresponds to a possible course of action whose realization will necessarily be in the future if it ever comes to be.

In this study, it will be postulated that in subject function, the *-ing*'s potential meaning is actualized so as to evoke the total interiority of its event. This accounts both for the noun-like behavior of the gerund as well as for the holistic impression that it conveys, as can be perceived in (24) above. However, the *to*-infinitive phrase is also capable of holding the function of subject, and so it is not sufficient to point out the similarity of the *-ing* to the nominal category in order to characterize the difference between these two constructions. Consequently, we will now take a look at the semantic content of the *to*-infinitive phrase.

The Inherent Meaning of the *to*-Infinitive

The *to*-infinitive will be treated here as a phrase made up of two component parts. The verbal part of this phrase is constituted by the bare infinitive. This nonfinite form of the verb evokes the integral actualization of an event, represented in the abstract (cf. Duffley 1992, 142). If the event is an action, the bare infinitive will depict its total performance from beginning to end, whence the contrast between (27a) and (27b) below:

(27a) I saw him *walking* across the square.

(27b) I saw him *walk* across the square.

If the event is a state, the bare infinitive evokes its full-fledged existence at whatever point in time is referred to:

(28) He said I would *feel* funny and *feel* funny I did.

Perhaps the best description of the bare infinitive's meaning therefore is to characterize it as an abstract version of the meaning corresponding to the simple form of the verb (for a unified treatment of the latter, cf. Hirtle 1988). It situates all of what is involved in the verb's lexeme in an abstract image of event time that is not located with respect to the present but can be conceived as past, present, or future according to context. Thus, (29) can be interpreted as referring to past, present, or future knowledge:

- (29) What! Bob know all the answers to the exam! Impossible!
 (29') What! Bob knew all the answers to the exam yesterday!
 (29'') What! Bob knows all the answers to the exam!
 (29''') What! You claim that Bob will know all the answers to the exam next week!

As for *to*, it is claimed here that it has basically the same meaning as in its prepositional use (i.e., that of a movement leading up to a *terminus*) (cf. Duffley 1992, 16-17). Just as the noun *bank* defines the end point of the movement in *She is going to the bank*, so the bare infinitive *wake* denotes what lies at the end of the movement in the infinitival construction *She is going to wake up*. However, there is one difference between the two uses, which is due to the nature of the infinitive. Since the latter denotes the actualization of all that is involved in the verb's lexeme, this construes *to* as a movement leading to the actualization of an event. This implies that the starting point of the movement signified by *to* is conceived as corresponding to a prior position in time with respect to the infinitive's event.

This does not always entail, however, that the infinitive's event is evoked as nonactualized. The impression of futurity is indeed present in many uses of the infinitive:

- (30) She wanted to see him.
 (31) I hoped to be there on time.

These correspond to the case where the movement or path denoted by *to* is not actually followed through but evoked as a goal aimed at by the subject of the main verb. However, the event expressed by the infinitive can also be realized, as in

- (32) She got to see him.

Here *get* evokes the general idea of movement (cf. Gronemeyer 1999, 35), and this movement is conceived as actually leading to the accomplishment of the infinitive's event, so that the latter is represented as the result of the realization of the main verb's event.

The *to*-infinitive phrase is consequently similar to the gerundive *-ing* in that both evoke an event as a whole. What distinguishes them lies in the fact that whereas the *-ing* evokes the totality of what is involved in an event (i.e., an inside view), the *to*-infinitive phrase views an event from the outside, evoking the latter as the end point of a movement leading up to its actualization. In the case of the *-ing*, the actualization of the event is not at issue, but rather the event is seen in and for itself.

The Function of the Forms

In the uses under consideration in this study, both the *-ing* and the *to*-infinitive phrase have the function of subject. In English, this function involves a stable correlation between meaning and sign such that

- (a) on the meaning level, the subject denotes the ‘VERBING’ entity in the event designated by the verb (thus, *Mary* denotes the person who did the noticing in *Mary noticed that there was no more wine*);
- (b) on the level of the sign, the verb agrees with its subject (either third person vs. non-third person, as in *The student(s) want(s) to see you* or first vs. third singular vs. plural, as with *am/is/are*); and
- (c) also on the level of the sign, the subject has or is replaceable by a form belonging to the *I, he, she, it, we, they* series of pronouns.

These criteria define a linguistic category in English because if one has (b) and (c) on the level of the sign, one always observes (a) on the level of meaning. One can, of course, evoke a ‘VERBING’ entity by other means than a subject, as in *Her early recognition of the problem averted an embarrassment for the host*, where the possessive pronoun *her* performs this semantic role with respect to the action of recognizing. Due to the absence of the semiological criteria, however, such structures will not be treated here as examples of the linguistic category of subject in English.²

The *-ing* meets the three criteria for English subjecthood in the type of usage that will be examined in this study. In a use such as

- (33) Drinking too much alcohol has ruined your father’s life,

it not only corresponds to the entity that did the ruining but also causes third-person agreement in the main verb (*has* vs. *have*) and is replaceable by the third-person-singular neuter pronoun *it*:

- (34) . . . and it has ruined my life too.

The same characteristics are found with the *to*-infinitive phrase. Thus, in

- (35) Certainly I looked for no such friendship as you have shown. To have found it turns evil to great good. (Tolkien 1968, 799)

to have found it denotes the entity doing the turning of evil to great good. In addition, it governs third-person singular agreement in the verb *turns* and is recallable by a third-person-singular neuter pronoun:

- (36) Yes, it certainly does turn evil to great good.

Since both the *-ing* and the *to*-infinitive have the same function of subject in the uses that will be the object of our consideration, the differences in message between them, which account for their not being mutually substitutable in all contexts, must be due to the inherent semantics of the two forms. We are now ready to turn to a closer observation of the types of messages that each can express in order to confront these with our explanatory hypothesis and see whether it can account for what we observe.

Looking at Usage

The corpus study is based on an examination of 276 examples of the *-ing* and the *to*-infinitive in the function of subject in the Brown University (American English) and Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (British English) corpora (147 occurrences of the *-ing* form and 129 of the *to*-infinitive). The use of a corpus allows one to draw certain conclusions about overall tendencies of usage. However, our observations will not be confined to the statistical level, as we will also zoom in on usage in certain types of contexts as manifested by particular sentences.

Some General Observations

One obvious observation revealed by the study of the corpus is that there is no significant difference between the gerund and the infinitive as to their capacity of expressing particularity or generality. Although the *-ing* form shows a slight favoring of genericity in both the Brown University (42 vs. 37) and the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (40 vs. 28) corpora, the infinitive is very equally balanced—35 versus 32 in favor of genericity in Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen and 35 versus 26 in favor of the particular in Brown. Past tense, however, shows exclusive association with particularity with the *-ing* in Brown (all 19 occurrences of the *-ing* with a past-tense main verb are particular, as compared to only 7 of the 14 occurrences of the *to*-infinitive). Since the past tense favors particularity in Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen both with the *-ing* (11 out of 14) and the *to*-infinitive (10 out of 13), this is probably due to the tense of the main verb rather than to the nonfinite form functioning as subject. The overall pattern shows, nonetheless, the absence of any significant distinction between the two constructions in terms of generality or particularity.

This is no surprise for the explanatory hypothesis proposed here since there is nothing in the inherent semantics of the *-ing*, the preposition *to*, or the infinitive that would prevent them from being conceived as evoking both particular and generic events according to the context. Depending on whether the nonspecified spatial support involved in the *-ing* or the infinitive³ is left nonspecified or identified by some element of the context or co-text, both of these forms are capable of denoting either a particular or a general meaning.

As for the distinction between hypothesis and reification/actualization, there is stronger evidence for it in the corpus. The distribution of usage with the infinitive is much more heavily weighted in favor of contexts evoking nonrealized events (112 vs. 14) than it is with the *-ing* (95 vs. 52). There are many more conditional contexts (27 vs. 8) and futurizing predicates (29 vs. 13) with the *to*-infinitive than with the *-ing*. This supports Jespersen's (1940, 166) observation that "the infinitive seems more appropriate than the gerund to denote the imaginative (unreal)." This being said, it must be pointed out nevertheless that the *-ing* is not infrequent in contexts evoking nonrealized events, as these constitute fully one-third of its uses. What distinguishes the *to*-infinitive is that close to 90 percent of its uses involve contexts denoting nonrealized events. This can be explained quite readily by our hypothesis, based on the presence of the preposition *to* introducing the infinitive. The meaning of *to* has the effect of representing the infinitive's event as the end point of a movement starting from a prior position in time. While the notion of movement can be conceived as running through to its term and therefore as resulting in the actualization of the infinitive's event, the corpus statistics show that the most frequent case is that in which the infinitive's event is construed as something yet to be attained (i.e., in the offing with respect to the time of the main verb's event). It is too strong a claim, however, to hold, as does Bolinger (1968, 124), that "only the *-ing* will do to refer to the actual past event." Cases such as (69) below show that this is not accurate; indeed, in approximately 10 percent of its occurrences, the *to*-infinitive expresses an actually realized event. The hypothesis proposed here allows us to explain both of the senses observed in the corpus according to whether the movement leading to the infinitive event's actualization is conceived as followed through to its end point or not.

Mutual Substitutability: Nonsubstitutability

If we turn now to the distribution of the two constructions with particular types of predicates, it was observed in the corpus that no examples of the *-ing* form were found with the predicates *desire*, *ambition*, *aim*, *purpose*, or *goal*, which occurred exclusively with the *to*-infinitive:

- (37) And it was the House he loved. *To be* the presiding officer of it was the end of his desire and ambition. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, B03 0280)
- (38) *To vindicate* Lord Raglan, the Commander-in-Chief, is his purpose—as it was Kinglake's; but Kinglake was animated also with hatred of Napoleon, with whose mistress he had been in love; and Mr. Hibbert is not biased by frustrated desire. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, C08 11)
- (39) . . . it had not been with an egotist's rage for fame that he had held precious his naval career. Another field had given him fame enough to satisfy any egotist. It was for love that he had served the Navy. *To have* someday that

love returned was what he had lived for. Now the hope was gone. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, P07 1150)

On the other hand, the *-ing* occurred in nonconditional contexts with a large number of what could be called concrete descriptive verb phrases, a type of predicate that had no equivalent usage attested with the infinitive:

opens a new career
brings new industries
gives X as a result
delays someone's work
reduces tension
signals/indicates X
develops a sense of responsibility
gives drive/relief
kills the pests
aerates old wine
stops
gives someone more time
improves the reaction
makes someone a man/meek
causes a lurch
gives someone indigestion
fouls the commutator
rotates a valve
leads me to the next topic
reorders the crystal
opens with X
brings down the sum
makes someone more confused

Here are a few examples with their full contexts:

- (40) *Giving up* the violin opened a whole new career for Iona Schmidl-Seeberg, a tiny Hungarian who Fritz Keisler had predicted would have a promising career on the concert stage. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, A30 0360)
- (41) *Issuing* bonds for plant construction has brought new industries to certain regions. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, B16 1800)
- (42) Chiggers were a common pest along streams and where gardens and berries thrived; so small as to be scarcely visible to the eye, they buried themselves in the victim's flesh. *Bathing* the itching parts with kerosene gave relief and also killed the pests. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, F26 0820)

- (43) Go steady on greasing and work strictly to the instruction book, for too much grease can bring a train of trouble. It could cause the motor to over-heat. *Overgreasing* the rear bearing could foul the commutator. And if there is too much in the gear box a stream of surplus might be blown into your face! (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, E03 56)
- (44) *Operating* either side-pedal rotates, by a linkage device, a rocker valve, because of which oil from the control valve is directed to the clutch units in a 'shuttle transmission' unit situated between the torque convertor and a sliding mesh gear-box. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, E29 169)
- (45) *Living* the life of the Torah makes us meek: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of Peace (Psalm 37, 11)." (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, D04 140)

The explanation for the exclusive occurrence of the *to*-infinitive as subject of predicates denoting desire and purpose is fairly obvious. Since the subject is declared to be a goal or object of desire, it is normal for it to be represented as the end point of a movement or path, whence the use of the preposition *to* with the infinitive. As for the nonoccurrence of the infinitive with concrete descriptive predicates of the type illustrated above, this can be accounted for by the fact that these contexts represent one event as the agent responsible for the performance of another event, a construal that requires evoking the first event simply as an entity having the role of agent in the other event. This corresponds to the view of an event in and for itself, as an entity made up of the totality of its own interiority, a view signified by the *-ing* form of the verb.

Three examples were found that might seem to be exceptions to this principle:

- (46) The right to leave legacies should be substantially reduced and ultimately eliminated. *To perpetuate* wealth control led by small groups of individuals who played no role in its creation prevents those with real initiative from coming to the fore, and is basically antidemocratic. When the proprietor dies, the establishment should become a corporation until it is either acquired by another proprietor or the government decides to drop it. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, G22 1380)
- (47) Looked at from above, the model of the Holford scheme leaves an impression of congestion, jumble, confusion and meanness. *To imagine* a pedestrian's view from somewhere near the foot of Eros does not contradict such impressions but reinforces them. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, B19 95)
- (48) Tremendous damage may be done to a child by laughing at what are very real fears. As adults, we know that their fears are groundless, indeed to us they appear laughable, but to a child they are very real. Not that I am suggesting that children should be molly-coddled—they must be made to face their fears, to see through them and come out on the other side as vic-

tors. *To ridicule* them only pushes them farther into themselves, so that they become unable to speak about it to anybody and the seeds of any amount of trouble are sown, the harvest of which may still be being reaped at forty or fifty. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, D06 10)

A first thing to be noted is that these sentences lack the objective, descriptive character of (40) to (45) above. In (46) and (48), there is a negative bias against the performance of the actions expressed by the *to*-infinitive subjects: they are treated as actions that should not be done, and the predicates *prevents those with real initiative from coming to the fore* and *only pushes them further into themselves* denote unwanted consequences ensuing upon their realization. These sentences are thus equivalent to conditional structures in which the *to*-infinitive corresponds to the condition and the main predicate to the consequence:

- (46') If you perpetuate wealth control led by small groups of individuals who played no role in its creation, that prevents those with real initiative from coming to the fore.
 (48') If you ridicule them, that only pushes them farther into themselves.

Consequently, the *to*-infinitive is employed in these sentences for its ability to prospectivize and thereby evoke its event as merely hypothetical. A similar impression of the hypothetical underlies (47) as well, although it is not associated with an undesirable consequence. Here the impression is one of 'even if' (i.e., of an imaginary point of view adopted in order to see whether it might contradict the impressions obtained from looking at the Holford scheme from above). In usage with concrete predicates, therefore, the *to*-infinitive does more than merely evoke the agent of some other event as does the *-ing* form; it presents this agent as a theoretical condition that, if realized, would produce the occurrence of the main predicate's event.

This is also what explains the occurrence of the more concrete descriptive type of predicate with *to*-infinitive subjects in conditional contexts such as

- (49) *To give* a patient the wrong type of blood, said the doctor, would likely kill him. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, G54 0180)
 (50) She could not open the refrigerator door. The weight of water against its lower part was too much. Bother, I don't like tea without milk. But I'd better leave it. *To open* the door would spoil some food anyway. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, K17 96)

The administration of the wrong type of blood and the opening of the refrigerator door are viewed here as hypothetical conditions that, if realized, would produce unwanted consequences. Indeed, in ten of the eleven examples of this type attested in

the corpus, there is an undesirable consequence attached to the realization of the *to*-infinitive's event:

- (51) *To use* advanced figures, particularly if not danced well, can often result in a candidate being marked badly, so the first precept is, don't do too much. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, E13 78)
- (52) *To insist* on a level of performance in programming and budgeting completely beyond the capabilities of the recipient country would result in the frustration of the basic objective of our development assistance to encourage more rapid growth. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, H02 0270)
- (53) *To greet* them with repulsion would turn what before was neutral into something bad. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, J52 1500)

In the one case where the consequences are not clearly negative, there is a doubt in the person's mind as to whether the execution of the plan is advisable or not:

- (54) She had used his rumpled shorts as the very image of his childishness, his lack of control, his general male looseness, while she remained cool, airy, and untouched, the charming teacher who disciplined an unruly body. *To have* her underclothes linked with his on the floor would draw her visibly into a struggle both bitter and absurd.
Something in the back of his mind was aware that the magnificence of the plan lay in his faith, that the idea would work because he believed in it . . . (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, P28 1390)

Substitutability with the Same Type of Predicate: Nonrealized Events

Both the *to*-infinitive and the gerund occur in contexts with certain predicates that imply nonrealization of the event denoted by the subject. A first group of predicates involves the notion of requirement. Here are all of the examples of the verb *require* in the present tense:

- (55) Now, to add to the already unbelievable extremes found in one nation, we have the two new states of Hawaii and Alaska. *To hope* to cover just one region of this land and to enjoy all of its sights and events and, of course, to bring back pictures of your experiences, requires advances planning. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, E12 0050)
- (56) . . . in a competitive market, the customer feels his weight and throws it around. *Providing* good customer service requires as thorough a marketing and general management planning job as the original selling of the product. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, E28 0310)

- (57) 'De Revolutionibus' is not just a collection of facts and techniques. It is an organized system of these things. *Solving* astronomical problems requires, for Copernicus, not a random search of unrelated tables, but a regular employment of the rules defining the entire discipline. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, G30 1560)

Although the *to*-infinitive could be substituted for the *-ing* in (56) and (57)—with a slight difference in meaning that we will come back to later—the *-ing* could not be substituted for the *to*-infinitive in (55). The impression of an event whose realization is very hard to achieve and may not even be guaranteed by respecting the requirement mentioned does not fit with the gerund. This can be explained by the fact that *to* can present the infinitive's event as something aimed at but whose achievement remains prospective, an element of meaning that is absent from that of the *-ing*. In (56) and (57), the gerund places more focus on what is involved in providing good customer service and solving astronomical problems, an impression that is consonant with the meaning of the gerund as defined above.

No examples of verbs of requirement were found with a gerund subject in future or conditional contexts, although such usage was attested with the infinitive:

- (58) *To find* a place for them in their theory of knowledge would require them to revise the theory radically, and yet that theory was what they regarded as their most important discovery. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, J51 1880)
- (59) *To play* the guitar as he aspires will devour his three-fold energy as a historian, a poet and a singer. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, G34 0360)

Even though the gerund could conceivably be used in such contexts, the fact that it did not occur in either corpus is another manifestation of the natural affinity of the *to*-infinitive for prospective and hypothetical contexts.

Other predicates with which both forms of subject are attested include the notions of *step* and *way*. Here are the relevant examples:

- (60) In life we learn to play our roles and we 'freeze' into patterns which become so habitual that we are not really aware of what we do. We can see others more clearly than we can see ourselves, and others can see us better than we see ourselves. *To learn* what we do is the first step for improvement. *To accept* the validity of the judgments of others is the second step. *To want* to change is the third step. *To practice* new procedures under guided supervision and with constant feedback is the fourth step. *To use* these new ways in daily life is the last step. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, J30 1510)

- (61) Does our society have a runaway, uncontrollable growth of technology which may end our civilization, or a normal, healthy growth? Here there may be an analogy with cancer: we can detect cancers by their rapidly accelerating growth, determinable only when related to the more normal rate of healthy growth. Should the accelerating growth of technology then warn us? *Noting* such evidence is the first step; and almost the only “cure” is early detection and removal. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, G22 0010)
- (62) That we can hope to see such policies pursued in India is doubtful. But it is possible that we can have, over a period of time, some marginal influence on the pattern of progress. *To withhold* aid is not the way to exert this influence. On the contrary, more aid, better administered, offers the best hope of success. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, G52 36)
- (63) *Ridiculing* a child for being afraid or *forcing* him to meet the feared situation are poor ways of dealing with the problem; more effective solutions include explanations, the example of another child, or conditioning by associating the feared object, place or person with something pleasant. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, J47 0290)
- (64) “Some day,” I told Eileen, “that guy will kill us both.” She just wouldn’t listen. *Getting* drunk every night was the only way I could handle the situation. Eileen seemed to feel the same way. We still had that much in common. The trouble was, drinking cost money. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, K18 1080)
- (65) *Following* a guide, and gratefully so, is an excellent way to see all the important places when everything is strange and new. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, E36 0100)

Subtle differences can be observed with this type of predicate as well. Regarding (60) and (61), one gets the impression in the latter of the author giving away his bias by the use of the *-ing* and implying that he has indeed noted evidence of the runaway growth of technology; in (60), on the other hand, the various steps are presented as what one must try to do in order to improve and not as something implied to be already done. Comparing (62) and (63) reveals another nuance: in the latter, *ridiculing* and *forcing* constitute two measures belonging to a whole set of possible ways of dealing with a child’s fears; they have the status of items on a list, just like the noun *explanations* and the noun phrase *the example of another child*. In (62), ‘to withhold aid’ is one of two mutually exclusive options set out before the British government and corresponds to what it is or is not going to do; it evokes one of the possibilities in an inescapable choice of immediate courses of action, rather than a more abstract discussion of what sort of intervention produces the best results from among the various measures possible in such a situation. Some of this more abstract impression associated with the *-ing* can be felt in (65) as well, perhaps along with a reference to the interiority of the event (in the sense that it is while one is follow-

ing the guide that one sees the important sights). In (64), the *-ing* is used to directly denote what the speaker actually did (*getting drunk every night*) as the only way he could deal with the situation; the *to*-infinitive would have evoked the slightly different notion of what the speaker opted to do in order to deal with the situation.

Judgmental Predicates

There are a certain number of predicates expressing moral evaluations of goodness, opportuneness, desirability, pleasantness, and so forth that allow as subjects both the gerund and the infinitive. Kirsten (1985, 84-85) refers to such predicates as “attitudinal,” but he wrongly associates them exclusively with the *to*-infinitive, setting up an ‘attitudinal vs. factive’ opposition between the latter and the *-ing* form. The *-ing* form can be distinguished from the *to*-infinitive in three different ways in these contexts. First, it can, as Kirsten proposes, refer to an event that is being or has been performed, whereas the infinitive denotes something nonrealized, as in the following pair of examples with the predicate *problem*:

- (66) Apples come from a farm in Vermont where they are not sprayed. Oranges and grapefruit are shipped from Florida weekly from an organic farm. *Finding* sources for these high quality foods is a problem. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, F04 1250)
- (67) The stage is constantly full of them; indeed, there are never fewer than eight of them on stage, and that is only for the more intimate numbers. They can be exuberant or sentimental, flirtatious or funny, but the only thing they seem unable to be is dull. *To pick* out particular numbers is something of a problem, but one or two identifiable items are too conspicuously excellent to be missed. There is, for example, a stunning Krakowiak that closes the first act; . . . (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, C03 1780)

Whereas (66) refers to something that the school is already doing but that is difficult to pull off, (67) evokes a challenge that is rhetorically presented as hard to meet (i.e., as not yet met), even though the author goes on to single out a certain number of particularly excellent numbers.

The gerund can also give impressions of descriptive factuality compared to the stronger emotive overtones associated with the *to*-infinitive. The following two contexts illustrate this in a context with a predicate denoting unpleasantness:

- (68) Men seem almost universally to want a sense of function, that is, a feeling that their existence makes a difference to someone, living or unborn, close and immediate or generalized. *Feeling* useless seems generally to be an unpleasant sensation. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, G43 0550)

- (69) *To have* to exchange, even for a fortnight, the warm happiness of being with Neil, of sharing with him their growing love, of watching how everything was progressing at the farm she was coming to love as much as he did, for Elizabeth and her lectures, for spells of baby-sitting, and keeping at arm's length the rather callow young men whom Elizabeth seemed to know, was far from pleasing. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, P16 38)

Conrad (1982, 128) points out regarding examples such as (69) that they correspond to paraphrases with putative *should*, so that (69) above can be glossed as "That she should have to exchange the warm happiness of being with Neil for Elizabeth and her lectures was far from pleasing." However, he then misses the mark by claiming that the infinitive has a non-referring meaning, so that (70) below implies that "the place had a general attraction for them" and they couldn't be there without being happy, while (71) means that "the reason that the stay made them happy was a lucky coincidence of the particular circumstances of this particular (individual) situation":

- (70) To be there made us feel happy.
 (71) Being there made us feel happy.

In actual fact, almost the exact opposite is the case: (71) with the *-ing*, like (68), tends to suggest a general fact;⁴ (70) with the infinitive, like (69), suggests a reaction to a particular stroke of good or bad fortune. (It should be pointed out, however, that these are not the only possible interpretations of these sentences.) The point of the discussion of these examples is that the *to*-infinitive lends itself to usage in which an attitude is expressed with respect to the opportuneness of a particular event that circumstances have happened to bring about. The explanation for this lies in the fact that the meaning of *to* can be used to evoke an event's coming-to-be: the reference to the event's coming-to-be and achieving reality-status is exploited in these cases to suggest that the event should never have come to be at all. The *-ing*, in contrast, is unable to "attack" the event in its prior conditions, as it evokes the event directly, in its interiority. Consequently, it lacks the critical and emotional overtones that are sometimes associated with the *to*-infinitive.

A third type of impression found with the *to*-infinitive with judgmental predicates is that of the achievement of a result, where the *-ing* form involves focus on the process or activity. This is the shift in point of view that one would feel, for example, if the gerund were substituted for the *to*-infinitive in (72):

- (72) . . . he writes in a manner that is completely informal. The views are expressed just as if we were talking with him over the dinner table. *To write*

literary criticism in this way is not as easy as it looks. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, G41 8)

The preposition *to* is used here to evoke the writer's achieving of the actualization of this result; it therefore reinforces the impression that the speaker wishes to convey of this being something very difficult to attain. The *-ing* form would cause one to avert to what is involved in the writing process itself and lack these admiring overtones.

Equative and Comparative Contexts

Under this heading are grouped together a number of constructions in which two actions are declared identical or similar. The first type involves the use of the verb *be* as a copula between a gerund and an infinitive. Three combinations are attested:

- (73) *Complimenting* is lying. [gerund + gerund] (Jespersen 1940, 168)
- (74) *To understand* American politics is, simply, to know people, to know the relative weight of names—who are heroes, who are straw men, who controls, who does not. [infinitive + infinitive] (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, C11 1670)
- (75) *To ask* me to believe that so inexpressibly marvelous a book was written long after all the events by some admiring follower, and was not inspired directly by the Spirit of God, is asking me to accept a miracle far greater than any of those recorded in the Bible. [infinitive + gerund] (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, D06 0240)

In the first type of construction, the idea expressed is that of an identity between two actions: complimenting and lying are presented as being one and the same thing. The impression is very similar in the second type; all the infinitive does is to represent things in terms of the (hypothetical) attainment of actualization: if someone understands American politics, that means that he or she knows people and the relative weight of names.

However, the infinitive + infinitive construction can express another type of meaning not found with gerund + gerund constructions. As observed by Jespersen (1940, 168), it most frequently denotes that "the second act or state is regarded as a necessary or immediate consequence of the first," as in

- (76) *To be* different is to invite shame and doubt; and it is better to be shamed and criticized by one's parents, who already consider one different and difficult to understand, than by one's peers, who are also experiencing a similar groping for and denial of adult status. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, F39 0720)

- (77) *To run* through the books in their chronological sequence is to get a sharper perspective. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, G45 134)

This falls in very nicely with the hypothesis proposed here concerning the meaning of the *to*-infinitive. In these uses, the significante of *to* is used to evoke the arrival at actualization (i.e., the occurrence) of the first event as the condition responsible for the occurrence of the second one; that is to say, the use of two infinitives evokes a relation between two coming-to-actualization. The copular connection of two gerunds, on the other hand, can only evoke a relation of identity due to the gerund's resemblance to a substantival noun: it evokes an event as an entity being equated with another entity and can therefore be compared to the sentence with two nouns in (78) below:

- (78) Politics is trickery.

The third type of construction, infinitive + gerund as in (75) above, resembles the gerund + gerund structure in that it never expresses the notion of consequence but always that of identity. The use of the infinitive subject is associated either with a judgmental, as in (75), or a hypothetical notion in the predicate, as in (79):

- (79) *to teach* a boy merely the nature of things . . . would be giving him but a shallow conception of the universe. (Jespersen 1940, 168)

The absence of the consequential interpretation can be readily explained by our hypothesis: since the *-ing* does not evoke the coming-to-actualization of the second event but merely its nature, it can only denote an identification of the nature of the first event. This qualitative characterization may involve a judgment of the opportuneness of the first event's actualization, as in (75), or it may be predicated of an event that has not yet come to be, as in (79).

It may be asked why there are no cases of the fourth possibility of combination of the two forms under study, namely, gerund + infinitive:

- (80) *Seeing her is to love her.
(81) * ?Slandering is to expose the faults of another in his absence.

The need to evoke two actualizations, one leading to the other, in cases like *To see her is to love her* would explain the unacceptability of (80). And (81), while perhaps not strictly impossible, sounds very awkward due to the shift in point of view from the entitative to the eventive. This reminds one of the shift that occurs in the type of definition condemned in writer's handbooks illustrated in (82) below:

- (82) Do not use *when* and *where* after *is* in definitions. *Scuttling a ship is a process by which [NOT is when] holes are cut in its bottom to sink it.* (Rosa, Eschholz, and Roberts 1996, 155)

We are thus able to explain not only the impressions observed in the three attested constructions but also the avoidance of the fourth possibility.

An interesting contrast can be observed between the gerund and the infinitive as subject of the predicate *is like doing X*. With the *-ing*, the effect is simply one of declaring two experiences to be similar in certain respects:

- (83) “This was the coolest, calmest election I ever saw,” Colquitt Policeman Tom Williams said. “*Being* at the polls was just like being at church. I didn’t smell a drop of liquor, and we didn’t have a bit of trouble.” (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, A01 1710)
- (84) *Learning to live is like learning to skate: you begin by making a ridiculous spectacle of yourself.* (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, C08 197)

In the one example attested with the infinitive, the comparison harbors a judgmental attitude toward the actualization of the infinitive’s event:

- (85) *To propose that men be religious without having religious institutions is like proposing that they be learned without schools.* (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, D10 0230)

The predicate could be replaced here by *is ridiculous*, and the use of *to* allows the judgment to be applied to the very bringing into being of the event “propose.”

Lastly, the corpus shows that in constructions where the predicate is made up of *be + Noun*, only the *-ing* occurs with nouns that are purely classificational or descriptive and have no judgmental overtones. Below are some examples:

- (86) It indeed needs to be emphasized that actions in the primary sense of the word are necessarily intentional. *Making* a telephone call, for instance, would not be an action under that description unless the performance were intentional . . . (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, G63 40)
- (87) *Borrowing* in anticipation of current taxes and other revenues is a routine procedure of the majority of municipalities at all times. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, H07 0620)
- (88) *Stealing* from cars is about the commonest kind of crime in the book. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, L04 170)
- (89) Several materials or combinations of materials can be used to construct a satisfactory feed bunk. . . . No one material is best for all situations. *Select-*

ing bunks by economic comparison is usually an individual problem.
(*Brown University Corpus* 1964, E27 1740)

With respect to the last two examples, it is interesting to compare the noun phrases *the commonest kind of crime in the book* and *an individual problem*, which merely categorize the subject, to the noun phrases *a problem* in (67) above and *a sin* in (90) below, which express a judgment or attitude concerning the possibility or opportuneness of the infinitive event's actualization:

- (90) *To speak* of Papa dying was a sin. It could never happen as long as God was alert and the Drew steeple stood guard with its peaked lance. (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, K06 0950)

Mere categorization requires seeing an event as an entity belonging to a class, which explains the use of the *-ing* form rather than the *to*-infinitive.

A Problem Case

The use of the perfect infinitive in past counterfactual conditionals still poses some problems of analysis:

- (91) I replied at once. *To have hesitated* would have meant suspicion, and he had a tinge of that already. (*Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus* 1978, L15 65)

Such examples are not entirely problematic, however, in that, as noted by Jespersen (1940, 166), they are a manifestation of the affinity of the infinitive for the expression of the nonreal. What is puzzling nonetheless is that while the perfect form of the gerund is unacceptable as a substitute for the infinitive, the simple gerund seems to work:

- (91') *Having hesitated would have meant suspicion.
(91'') ?Hesitating would have meant suspicion.

In (92) below, its acceptability is even clearer:

- (92) *To have applied* statewide the decisions of the two cases heard in Superior Court, in my opinion, would have placed us clearly out of compliance with the Wagner-Peyser Act . . . (*Brown University Corpus* 1964, J46 1580)
(92') Applying statewide the decisions of the two cases heard in Superior Court would have placed us clearly out of compliance with the Wagner-Peyser Act . . .

Why this difference in acceptability of the simple gerund? And why does the simple gerund work but not the perfect construction? The answers to these questions would require a clearer view of the role of the perfect construction in counterfactuals. Since the past tense is exploited in such contexts not for its temporal value of “prior to the present” but for its modal value of “nonreal with no chances envisaged of becoming real” (cf. Duffley 1998, 93), the perfect construction would seem to be employed in counterfactuals in order to situate hypothetical events before the present moment. For the perfect to be interpreted in this way, however, some signal of hypothesis seems to be required; this would be provided by the conjunction *if* in conditional clauses and by *to* with infinitival subjects. The absence of a signal of hypothesis to indicate this construal would therefore explain the unacceptability of the perfect construction of the gerund in these contexts. As for the acceptability of the simple gerund, it follows from the analogy between the latter and the nominal substantive: just as nouns can occur freely as subjects of past counterfactual predicates, so can gerunds, as shown by (92'') below, which is parallel to (92):

(92'') *The statewide application* of the decisions of the two cases heard in Superior Court would have placed us clearly out of compliance with the Wagner-Peyser Act . . .

As this explanation hinges on the analysis of the role of the perfect in counterfactuals, it must await further research into the latter before it can be considered to be confirmed.

Conclusion

This study has at least shown very clearly what the distinction between the gerund and the infinitive is not. Neither the distinction between particular versus general nor that between reification versus hypothesis/potentiality, nor any of the derivative oppositions in terms of factivity versus nonfactivity, referring versus nonreferring or validated versus validatable, can account for the full range of meanings expressed by these two forms in their use as subject of the sentence.

The distinction between the two constructions could be described to some extent in terms of distribution. The corpus reveals a powerful tendency for the *to*-infinitive to be used in contexts evoking nonreal events (90 percent of its occurrences). However, the *-ing* form is also used to refer to nonreal events in one-third of its uses, and there remain the 10 percent of the uses of the infinitive that refer to actually realized events. Moreover, the two forms can occur as subjects of the same predicates, as is the case with the verb *require*, the nouns *step*, *way*, *problem*, and so forth.

The only way to explain both the distribution and the capacity of both forms to be used with the same predicate is an approach that views their basic meanings as

the condition accounting for their use in discourse. It has been proposed that the distinction in meaning between these two constructions is more complex than that of a simple binary opposition. The meaning of the *to*-infinitive is a composite made up of the meanings of its two component parts: the bare infinitive, which corresponds to an abstract version of the simple form (evoking an action as a complete realization from beginning to end and a state as having a full-fledged existence at some point of reference), and the preposition *to*, which evokes the bare infinitive's event as the end point of a path or movement leading up to its actualization. The meaning of the *-ing* form evokes the event as a totality of interiority (i.e., as an abstract entity very similar to the representation provided by a deverbal noun). This explains the greater indifference of the *-ing* to the distinction between realized and nonrealized events, while the prior point of view implied with respect to the event by the meaning of *to* accounts for the preponderance of nonrealized events with the infinitive. Nevertheless, it has been observed that the use of a judgmental predicate commenting on the opportuneness of the event's coming into reality can call for the use of the *to*-infinitive to evoke an actually realized event. Indeed, this is the case in all of the uses of the *to*-infinitive referring to real occurrences. Avoiding the reduction of the gerund's and infinitive's meanings to a binary opposition and attempting to define them for what they are in themselves has thus led to a reconstruction of their meanings that is able to explain both why previous authors got the impressions they did and why their explanations only work in some cases. This is an indication that some progress has been made in our understanding of the *-ing* form and the *to*-infinitive in subject function.

It should be noted *in fine* that the corpus used in this research was limited in size due to the preliminary nature of this study, which is a first attempt to provide a test of the hypotheses proposed here. Larger corpora do contain instances of certain constructions that have not occurred in the sample examined.⁵ However, the fact that they do not occur in a 2-million-word sample that includes all the major genres of writing in both American and British English is certainly significant with regard to the tendencies of usage in this area.

Notes

1. One can understand, then, why Quirk et al.'s (1985) *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* makes no comment on the semantics of the gerund/infinitive opposition in subject function.
2. Moreover, the possessive construction above can also denote that which corresponds semantically to the direct object, as in *Her early removal from the house averted an embarrassment for the hosts*.
3. Cf. Duffley (1992, 121-23) for a characterization of this support in terms of the concept of "generalized person."

4. Although it could refer to a particular experience since the *-ing* form of itself can express both the particular and the general.

5. For instance, the 100-million-word British National Corpus contains the following occurrence of the *-ing* form with the predicate *purpose*: *Responding to this question . . . is the purpose of this book* (AS6 180). That this should be possible is not surprising since the gerundive realization of the *-ing* is like a noun, and nominal substantives can occur as subjects of the predicate *be the purpose*, as illustrated by another example from the same corpus: *. . . an examination of the first of these is the purpose of the following chapters . . .* (H7S 286). The fact that only the infinitive occurred in the 2-million-word corpus is, however, indicative of a tendency favoring the use of the infinitive with this type of predicate, and this tendency calls for an explanation, which this study has attempted to provide.

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