

## INVESTIGATING THE &lt;ING&gt; FORMS IN ENGLISH

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## Abstract

The use of <ING> form is enormously extensive in English and possibly poses some conceptual or grammatical difficulties for English teachers and learners. On the one hand, <ING> morpheme is attached to a verbal base resulting in a verbal form and function. Such form and function can be assumed to be the default case. On the other hand, <ING> morpheme can also be attached to a verbal base, but brings about adjectival and nominal functions. In relation to such usages of <ING>, Nida (1949) suggests that <ING> should simply be treated as a single morpheme with various usages. As a matter of fact, despite being used as a noun or adjective, <ING> forms still keep their verbal force. The case of <ING> forms uncovers the point where word-class indeterminacy exists and therefore they are prevalently regarded as trans-categorical, a sort of 'hybrid category' and 'seem to be core members of more than one category simultaneously' (Alexiadou 2013; Malouf 1996). This paper has two objectives: *firstly*, to elaborate the idiosyncrasies of <ING> forms which are certainly valuable for English teaching and learning and, *secondly*, to examine the distributions of <ING> forms in a small English narrative corpus by employing a quantitative analysis.

**Keywords:** *ING form, nominal gerund, present participle, verbal gerund*

## Introduction

The <ING> form, also referred to as present participle, is used in English extensively in English. Part of the reasons of its extensive uses certainly relate to the facts that, apart from its default verbal usage, <ING> morpheme can be attached to a verbal base to form a new word which is functionally similar to an adjective or a noun.

The <ING> morphemes enable certain verbs that cannot readily be altered into noun by means of affixing the common bound morphemes. A verb such as *go* and *run* cannot be altered into noun unless they are affixed with <ING> morpheme (excluding conversion process). This is different from the verbs like *develop* which can be suffixed with *-ment* to form a noun.

In general, it is widely accepted that a *V-ing* can have three distributions which are parallel to that of verbal (this is the default case), adjectival, and nominal. However, such classifications are in fact not the end of the story. They can be examined further to spark other insights that may relate to them including their indeterminacy. It is the purpose of this paper to elaborate the notions about the <ING> forms in English.

In addition to the explanatory purpose, this paper also analyzes a small corpus in which the distributions of the <ING> forms will be observed and quantitatively presented. The corpus under investigation is the short story written by Oscar Wilde entitles *The Happy Prince*. The short story is 3476 words in length and available online in *pdf*. The Data are gathered by using the feature *Find* of the Adobe Reader XI software. The morpheme <ING> is inserted to the feature which is then processed by the software, thus displaying all words that contain character sequence of 'ing' and their sentences in which they occur. The use of corpus is undoubtedly beneficial for language teaching and learning. One of the advantages is researchers/teachers can provide real, not invented examples, in their teaching materials. This is in line with Francis (in Baker, et al, 1993) who says corpus allows us to deal with realities rather possibilities.

## Theories, Data Analysis and Discussion

## Elaborating the &lt;ING&gt; Forms

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) assert that English verbs normally have five forms which are symbolized as follows: *V*, *V-s*, *V-ed<sub>1</sub>*, *V-ing*, and *V-ed<sub>2</sub>*. These forms are also referred to as *the base*, *-s form*, *past*, *-ing participle*, and *-ed participle* respectively. The index number of *V-ed<sub>1</sub>* and *V-ed<sub>2</sub>* is worth maintaining because regular verbs have the same form for both forms.

According to their tense-containing information, the five forms of these verbs can be classified into finite and non-finite verbs; the base, the <ING> participle and the *-ed* participle belong to non-finite group. On the other hand, the *-s form* and *past* are classified as finite. The easiest way to make distinction between the two is to observe whether or not they carry information about (past or present) tense. It is finite, if they show tense information and, conversely, it is non-finite if they do not contain information about tense. The clauses where they are found can be classified as finite or non-finite clause.

The trouble with linguistic classifications very often relates to the fact that there is no one to one correspondence between form or class and function. While a subject, by definition, must be realized by a noun phrase (NP), an NP may fill in other slots of a clause.

The <ING> forms for instance can have more than one function. They can occupy a verbal position, which is likely to be the default case, a nominal and adjectival position. In fact, such peculiarity in terms of functions is not exclusively attached to the <ING> forms. In English, the base can be used in different functions as well. It can be used in imperative, subjunctive, and in bare infinitive. However, the base and the <ING> form differ in some ways. *First*, the base does not undergo any morphological processes, either by derivation or inflection. Therefore, by formal definition, its forms remain the same regardless of the function it performs. *Second*, the base retains its function as the verb of the clause in question.

On the other hand, <ING> forms undergo an affixation process as the '-ing' itself is a suffix which is attached to a base. In addition, it does not always function as a verb in a clause. Rather, they can occupy different functions although, like the base, its form stays the same (post-affixation). This situation then tempts some Grammarians to treat the <ING> form as belonging to different classes and it is the <ING> suffix taken to be responsible for the class shift. It is to elaborate this point that the following discussion is devoted.

Despite being debatable, the distinction between derivational and inflectional morphology may be important to address the discussion of the <ING> form. Katamba (1993) has observed three ways in which derivational affixes are used to create new lexemes. *First*, it can be done by modifying significantly the meaning of the base without changing its grammatical categories (*kind* and *unkind*). *Second*, addition of a derivational affix to the base can cause a shift in its grammatical class as well as a possible change in meaning (*hard* and *hardship*). *Finally*, a derivational morpheme may bring about a shift in the grammatical sub-class. It means it does not exactly shift the word-class (*friend* and *friendship*). Rather, they remain within the same word-class.

In contrast, Katamba says that inflectional morphemes do not change the referential or cognitive meaning of the base and do not cause a shift to the word-class of the base. Katamba concludes 'Inflectional morphemes are only able to modify the form of a word so that it can fit into a particular syntactic slot' (1993 p.51). However, such grammatical behaviors do not always fit and meet the requirements of word classification. This is in particular the case when the <ING> forms (and also the -ed forms) are being examined. Observe the examples below:

- [a] I am *thinking* of James
- [b] *Thinking* always makes him sleepy
- [c] ... it was clear to all *thinking* people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality, had disappeared (George Orwell 1984).

The word *thinking* in [a], [b] and [c] have the same forms. As a matter of fact, they are derived from the similar base: *think* which is suffixed with <ING>. What makes them different is their distribution/function. *Thinking* in clause [a] certainly acts as the verb; in [b], its usage is parallel to that of nouns functioning as the subject of the clause. In [c], *thinking* is used parallel to that of adjectives. Nida (1949) calls the last two occurrences as *Gerund* and *Gerundive* respectively. To test the accuracy of such claims in that the <ING> form can be variously distributed, a substitution test can be applied in which the three distributions are substituted for their real corresponding word-class. The examples above will now look like:

- [a] I am *talking* to James
- [b] *The teacher* always makes him sleepy
- [c] .. it was clear to all *smart* people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality, had disappeared.

The question is: how we should treat the morpheme <ING> in English? Is it inflectional or derivational? Referring to the criteria above-mentioned about the distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes, the form can fit to either classification. In [a] the <ING> morpheme is attached to a verbal base resulting in a similar word class and keeping its substantial meaning. In contrast, in [b] and [c], its addition to the verbal base causes a shift; it changes a verb into a noun and an adjective. With such grammatical behaviors, <ING> meets the requirements to be classified as a derivational morpheme. As a result, these <ING>s may be taken as separate morphemes which happen to be homophonous; they mark three different classes (Leech et al 1989).

However, the point to bear in mind is that <ING> forms obviously show how the word-classes are often indeterminate (Finegan, et al, 1992). In addition, Alexiadou (2013) concludes that the <ING> morphemes are 'transcategorical' and they differ from the established word-classes. This is the reason why an in-depth analysis of it is needed.

The trouble with <ING> forms in fact poses more subtleties than that depicted above. This complicatedness particularly relates to when the <ING> form is distributed which is parallel to that ofjectives or nouns (gerunds). Despite being used in the two usages, they still retains some verb-like properties. In that case, the <ING> forms may be considered as belonging to more than one category simultaneously (Alexiadou, 2013).

Before explaining further, it will be worth presenting the possible appearance of <ING> forms in English. Some Grammarians (see Eastwood (2002) formally groups the <ING> forms into present participle and gerund. In his categorization, present participle covers the verbal (in non-finite clauses) and adjectival usage of the <ING> forms. Huddleston and Pullum (2007) refer to the <ING> forms as gerund-participle because an <ING> form can be functionally similar to noun and adjective. Below I have tried to simplify their occurrences by constantly referring to the tripartite functional-classification mentioned above: verbal, adjectival (gerundive), and nominal (gerund) usage.

#### Verbal usage

The verbal usage can be subdivided into two: <ING> form occurs in finite construction and <ING> form occurs in non-finite construction. In the first occurrence, the presence of the <ING> is to mark the progressive aspect in the clause. For example, in *Mary is reading* the word *reading* has a verbal usage and together with the finite verb *is*, they mark the progressive aspect of the clause. Such example is referred to an <ING> form occurring in finite construction. This is commonly patterned in the *Be + V-ing* slot.

<ING> forms can also be found in non-finite clauses. Non-finite clauses are of course derived from their finite clause counterparts through a clause reduction process (except for the case of absolute constructions). In English, the part of the sentence that can be reduced is the dependent clause realized by a relative or adverbial clause. However, it may need affirming that the reason why the <ING> clauses (finite or non-finite) are taken as having a verbal usage is based on looking at the <ING> form as a constituent of the dependent clause where it is located rather than as a constituent of the sentence as a whole. Observe the examples below:

[a] Relative clause: I know the man *who is standing in front of the shop*.

[b] Adverbial clause: *Because he missed too many classes*, John failed his course.

[a] and [b] are complex sentences in which the dependent clauses are realized by a relative clause and an adverbial clause respectively. In both examples, they are still finite clauses. However, they can be reduced so that they become non-finite. The two examples above can be reduced into [c] and [d] below:

[c] Relative clause: I know the man *standing in front of the shop*.

[d] Adverbial clause: *Missing too many classes*, John failed his course.

Kaplan (1989) divides the <ING> forms found in non-finite clauses into two: restrictive (as in [c]) and nonrestrictive (as in [d]) although he uses the term 'participle' rather than '<ING> form' (the term is also used here). This distinction seems to be congruent with the distinction between restrictive relative clause and nonrestrictive relative clause which are physically marked with the presence of commas. However, as warned by Kaplan, the relation between nonrestrictive relative clause and nonrestrictive participle (NRP; <ING> forms found in non-finite clauses) appear to be weaker than that of relation between restrictive relative clause and restrictive participle (RP). Kaplan explains ways in which the RP and NRP can be distinguished. (1) NRP can modify proper nouns; RP cannot. For instance, this construction *Mary Ellen, looking grim, peeled the onion* is grammatical, but not this (where the commas are removed) \**Mary Ellen looking grim peeled the onion*. (2) NRP can modify sentences, but RP cannot. The NRP sentence *It was Tuesday, indicating that the delivery would probably be made at noon* is grammatical, but if it is altered into RP will result in an ungrammatical construction (the comma is removed) \**It was Tuesday indicating that the delivery would probably be made at noon*.

Based on the examples, NRP have 'adverbial flavor' because they can modify the verb phrase (VP) or the whole sentence. This is in contrast to RP which solely modify noun phrases (NP).

Another grammatical behavior embedded with NRP is their mobility (Kaplan, 1989). They can be found in sentence-initial or sentence-final. This supports their adverbial taste because, in English, adverbial is the most movable element of the sentence. For example, *Shivering all over, fourteen campers climbed onto the truck* can be reordered into *Fourteen campers climbed onto the truck, shivering all over*.

Kaplan also introduces absolute participle constructions. Such kinds of participles do not modify NPs. Rather, they modify the whole clause. Unlike reduced clauses, they have subjects and predicates in actual structure. For instance, *Max stayed at home, his white sport coat being dirty*. The sentence can be paraphrased into *Max stayed at home, since his white sport coat was dirty*. The paraphrased version clearly shows that the participle construction is derived from an adverbial clause.

#### Adjectival usage

The adjectival usage may also be subdivided into two: attributive and predicate. The attributive function is when the <ING> form modifies a head (noun) in a noun phrase (NP) construction. Therefore, attributive is a function to be dealt with on the level of phrase, not a clause. For example, in the NP *the inspiring teacher*, *inspiring* is the premodifier to the head *teacher*. The NP can be paraphrased into *the teacher who is inspiring*. A precaution must be taken into account while examining the paraphrased NP in that the sequence *Be + V-ing* within the NP does not mark progressive aspect. Such case can be made clearer when the verb is used in predicate position *the teacher is inspiring*. Nevertheless, that is not always the case. The NP *the sleeping child* has *sleeping* with an attributive position. Like the above example, it can be paraphrased into *the child who is sleeping*. However, unlike the former example, the sequence *Be + V<ING>* in *the child who is sleeping* certainly marks the progressive aspect carrying the meaning that the act of sleeping is in progress. This will better be shown if the same verb is used in predicate position *the child is sleeping* in which the sleeping is obviously being used as verbal, not adjectival. In the case of the verb *sleeping*, one may conclude that its function is adjectival when used prenominal, but verbal when it is used prenominal (paraphrased). Such grammatical state of affairs then add to the word-class indeterminacy of the <ING> forms.

The discrete cases of the the NP *the inspiring teacher* and *the sleeping child* deserve to be further explained. In addition to the progressive case, other tests including the addition of the adverb *very* and *more* and *most* may be employed. While the former can be premodified by these adverbs, the latter cannot; *the very inspiring teacher*, *the most inspiring*, and *more inspiring* are grammatical in English, but not *\*the very sleeping child*, *\*the most sleeping child*, or *\*more sleeping*. Such distinct grammatical behaviors may become a reasonable basis to say that some <ING> forms whose distributions are parallel to that of adjectives are more adjectival than the others. Kaplan (1989) sums up that the <ING> forms that allow the more adjectival uses have a meaning related to 'emotional impact' and those that has less adjectival uses have a meaning related to 'physical impact'.

#### Nominal usage

Nominal usage is commonly referred to as gerund. Gerund is further subdivided into two kinds: verbal gerunds and nominal gerunds. Both differ in the degree of verbal force they carry; verbal gerund, as its name suggests, is more verbal than the nominal one.

The naming of it as verbal or nominal gerund is particularly 'interesting' because it bears a circular notion. Gerund is obviously derived from a verb by morphological process so that it is very often called as a verbal noun. In terms of verbal and nominal gerund, their name seems to be triggered by fact that the former, as said above, possesses more verbal qualities than the latter. Therefore, it does not really mean a gerund which is derived from a verb. Rather, it is a verb derived from a noun although the proper definition would be a gerund that shows more verbal characteristics. Likewise, the term nominal gerund suggests a double naming of the same thing as both basically refer to noun. This can be taken as a clue to its nominality. By definition, nominal gerunds have less verbal qualities than verbal gerunds although they, of course, are still more verbal than common nouns.

While verbal gerunds (VGs) and nominal gerunds (NGs) show some similarities, it is their dissimilarities that are under investigation here. The following discussions about both are referred to Alexiadou (2013) and Malouf (1996). VGs and NGs are similar in that they occur in nominal position for example as subject and object of clauses. They also bear the same semantic relationship to the DPs that accompany them as their corresponding verbs do. For example:

- [a] John's destroying the book
- [b] John's destroying of the book

In [a] and [b] the agent is *John* and the event is *destroying* and the *book* is the item being destroyed.

As for their differences, Alexiadou summarizes them as follow:

Complementation. VGs takes accusative complements as in example A; NGs' complements are introduced by the preposition 'of' as in example B.

Pat disapproved of me/my leaving the room

Pat was surprised of his *answering of the question*

Modification. VGs can be modified by adverbial modifiers as in example A below; NGs by adjective modifier as in example C. This may be connected to the traditional pairing of adverb-verb and adjective-noun. Adverbs commonly modify verbs and adjectives modify nouns. In general, adverbs bear close relationship with verbs, not noun.

Pat disapproved of me/my quietly *leaving the room*

\*Pat was surprised of his quietly *answering of the question*

Pat was surprised of his *prompt answering of the question*

\*Pat was surprised of his *prompt answering the question*

Negation. VGs can take an auxiliary and therefore it can be negated with the particle 'not' as shown in the examples A and B; in contrast, NGs cannot take an auxiliary and cannot be negated. This makes sense because particle 'not' cannot negate a noun. This is another clear proof of why the VGs is said to have more verbal force than the NGs.

John's having criticized the play annoyed us

Pat's not having bathed for a week disturbed the other diners.

\*John's having criticized of the play annoyed us

\*The not processing of the election results created a scandal.

Internal structure. VGs do not have the internal structure of a NPs; NGs do. In *John's criticizing the book annoyed us*, the genitive case *John's* cannot be replaced by any determiner such as *the* or *that*. The following constructions are ungrammatical \**That criticizing the book annoyed us* or \**the criticizing the book annoyed us*. Conversely, such genitive case in NGs can be replaced by determiners. Therefore, *John's* in *John's criticizing of the book annoyed us* can be substituted for *the* thus producing *the criticizing of the book annoyed us*.

### Analyzing the Corpus

Below is presented the distributions of <ING> forms in the *The Happy Prince* corpus. The sum and percentage are given for ease of presentation.

<ING> usage						
Verbal			Adjectival		Nominal	
Finite Clause	Nonfinite Clause		Attributive	Predicate	Verbal Gerund	(Nominal) Gerund
Progressive	RP	NRP				
32	8	5	1	1	3	6
57.89%	14.28%	8.92%	1.78%	1.78%	10.71%	10.35%

Table 6 Distribution of <ING> form in corpus *The Happy Prince* (sum and percentage)

The table shows how the <ING> forms are distributed in three different usages: verbal, adjectival, and nominal. Each will be explained consecutively below.

Most of the <ING> forms found in the corpus are used as verbal. 80.35 % of the data are included in the verbal usage either in finite (57.14%) or non-finite construction (14.28%). The finite clause construction is further subdivided into two kinds: those used in dependent clauses and those in independent clauses. 34.37% and 65.62% respectively. Since they are used in finite clauses, the suffix <ING> marks the progressive aspects in the clauses and fits the frame *BE + V-ing*. Several examples (underlined> are provided below:

Verbal/Finite/ Independent/Progressive:	<i>I <u>am just starting</u></i> <i>He <u>is leaning</u> over a desk covered with papers</i> <i>My friends <u>are flying</u> up and down the Nile</i>
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Verbal/Finite/ Dependent/Progressive	<i>He <u>picked up crumbs</u> outside the baker's door when the baker <u>was not looking</u> and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings</i> <i>So the Swallow <u>flew over</u> the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars <u>were sitting</u> at the gates</i>
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Another subdivision of the verbal usages constitutes the non-finite clause construction. This can be categorized into Restrictive Participle (RP) and Non-Restrictive Participle (NRP). Of the first, eight

occurrences are found equal to 14.28% and five occurrences (8.82%) of the second of the total data. Several examples are given below:

Verbal/Non-Finite/RP	<i>He looked up he found the beautiful sapphire <u>lying on the withered violets</u></i> <i>He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children <u>looking out listlessly at the black streets</u></i>
Verbal/Non-finite/NRP	<i>Then he flew gently round the bed, <u>fanning the boy's forehead with his wings</u></i> <i>And she ran home, <u>laughing</u></i>

As for the nominal usages (gerund), nine occurrences are found or equal to 16.07%. However, their usages cannot precisely be subdivided into nominal and verbal gerunds. It is due to the fact that some <ING> forms functionally similar to nouns occur alone without complementation, modification, negation, and so forth. This makes them neutral in position as they have the possibility of being turned into nominal or verbal gerunds. Such data may be simply called as 'gerund' as they are functionally similar to that of nouns. Of the nominal usages as a whole, four occurrences (7.14% of the total data) belong to this type; meanwhile, two occurrences of nominal gerunds (3.57%) and three verbal gerunds (5.35%) of the data as a whole are found. They are presented below:

Gerunds	<i>... but I love <u>travelling</u>, and my wife, ...</i> <i>... and my wife, consequently, should love <u>travelling</u> also</i> <i>He passed by the palace and heard the sound of <u>dancing</u></i> <i>Thinking always made him <u>sleepy</u></i>
Nominal Gerunds	<i>... but more marvellous than anything is the <u>suffering of men and of women</u>.</i> <i>Then they melted the statue in a furnace, and the Mayor held a <u>meeting of the Corporation to decide what was to be done with the metal</u>.</i>
Verbal Gerunds	<i>... remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for <u>having artistic tastes</u></i> <i>The Happy Prince never dreams of <u>crying for anything</u>.</i> <i>He picked up crumbs outside the baker's door when the baker was not looking and tried to keep himself warm by <u>flapping his wings</u></i>

Finally, there are two occurrences for the <ING> forms distributed as adjectival; one (1.78%) is used in attributive position and another one (1.78%) in predicate position. Both are shown below:

Adjectival /Attributive	<i>... saw the white faces of <u>starving children</u> ...</i>
Adjectival /Predicate	<i>They <u>were</u> so bright and <u>glistening</u></i>

### Conclusion and Suggestion

As shown above, the <ING> forms are not as simple as that of grouping their usages as verbal, adjectival, or nominal. Despite being used as nominal or adjectival, they appear to maintain their verbal force. Such grammatical behavior help to uncover the indeterminacy of the <ING> forms. Functionally, they may turn nominal or adjectival; grammatically, they remain verbal.

As for the corpus analysis, it shows the majority of the <ING> forms are used as verbal either in finite clauses or in nonfinite clauses. This result may not be surprising as the <ING> morpheme can be said to be prototypically an inflectional morpheme attached to a verbal base to form a new verbal usage (word-class remains the same). However, such finding may be affected, in one way or another, by the text type under consideration. The corpus analyzed in this paper constitutes a narrative text which normally provides plenty of direct sentences (conversation). Therefore, to undertake and compare the use of <ING> in different text types may be a good idea for future research in order to spark new insights on the subject matter. In addition, a corpus analysis enables the teachers and learners to get exposed to real utterances rather than possible or invented ones.

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