# Acquisition of the –Ing Form (Nouns, Verbs and Adjectives)

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**Abstract**: During the process of acquiring or learning a language, the person starts learning the participles in which the learner has to add the suffix -ing ending to the verb to indicate that the action is happening at the time of speaking which can be confused with the gerunds or the adjectives (the adjectives are considered by some grammarians as a part of participles, but in this research it's considered as a separate form) which also end with -ing suffix. That could pose a big problem for the learner because the forms are very similar to each other. This research is going to study the problems that people face in acquiring the -ing form and the differences between the nouns, verbs and adjectives that end in -ing suffix .This research is also going to study the results of a questionnaire that was given to 40 second year English students in Mu'tah University who are asked to answer 20 multiple choice sentences that contain 10 sentences with (-ing) ending answer and 10 sentences with infinitive answer. The results of the questionnaire show that 39% of the students have difficulty in choosing the right answer.

**Index Terms**: Acquisition, -ing, English, Verb, Noun, Adjective.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the main way of communication in the world is language, people tend to acquire each others' languages in order to be able to communicate their thoughts and ideas to other people who don't speak their native language. Language acquisition is something that all humans have in their nature because it's essential for communication and without it life won't be able to go on, it is the process that a person goes through to be able to comprehend and produce language in order to communicate. In order for someone to acquire a language completely, he/she needs to acquire all parts of that language like phonology, syntax, morphology , semantics and vocabulary and each one of these parts poses its own number of problems and difficulties.

When people start acquiring the -ing form they think that it only occurs in the present participle that is defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary as : " a participle that typically expresses present action in relation to the time expressed by the finite verb in its clause and that in English is formed with the suffix *-ing* and is used in the formation of the progressive tenses " . The present participle comes as the continuous part of the verb, it's expressed by adding -ing suffix to the end of the verb, such as "He was shopping", but these learners may face other forms of -ing such as the gerunds and adjectives ending with an -ing suffix. Wikipedia (2017) mentions that gerunds are nouns that are derived from a verb or correspond to a verb but are classified as a noun such as " the breaking of the window was unfortunate", they could also be fossilized words such as "ceiling and morning", an adjective is a word that gives more information about something such as " The man is boring ", according to Wikipedia (ibid) there are several types of adjectives, two of them are verbal adjectives and deverbal adjectives, the verbal adjectives behave as a verb by taking an object but function as an adjective by modifying a noun, such as " The man wearing a hat is my father", whereas deverbal adjectives seem to be derived from a verb but behaves as an ordinary adjective, for example "That was a very interesting speech ", they have the same form as the principles but grammatically behave as adjectives, by not taking objects. The -ing nouns and also the to-infinitive in some cases, follow some common verbs such as the verbs of  liking and disliking (detest, dislike, like, love) for example: "I always like going to the zoo", also it comes after phrases that contain the word "mind" such as (wouldn't mind, couldn't mind…..) for example : " I wouldn't mind going to the zoo with you " and after verbs of saying and thinking such as (deny, imagine ,remember…)for example " He denied going to the zoo ", it also comes after some verbs such as (begin, finish, practice ,avoid……). -Ing nouns differ in their uses, they can be used as the subject of a verb "Teaching kids is not easy", can be used as the object of a verb "Kids enjoy learning ", as the object of a preposition "Kids are interested in playing outside" and it comes after a noun "Who is that girl jumping in the garden?".

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The -ing form also follows nouns that follow a verb, for example: "I saw everybody going to the zoo" and " I found someone trying to jump". Some people confuse the difference between the verbs that are followed by -ing and to-inf, there are verbs that can be followed by both the -ing form and the to-inf but with a slight difference in meaning because the -ing form emphasizes the verb but the to-inf emphasizes the preference of the action, e.g "I stopped to smoke/ I stopped smoking".

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of the -ing form started many years ago, and continues up till now.

Schybsbye (1965:61) points out that in Traditional Grammar it's believed that there are two forms of -ing form : the Gerunds and the Participles. Gerund is considered as a form that has nominal and verbal features at the same time and these features are often apparent in the same context whereas the participles don't have any nominal features, only verbal features are apparent in them.

Ramirez (2014:4) states that gerund is a non-finite form of the verb, and that the non-finite forms of the verbs have lost their verbal characteristics but acquired some nominal, adverbial or adjectival features in return, for example :" The painting is nice".

Aarts (2006: 213) on the other hand mentions that he can reduce the intersection between two categories in the syntax of the gerund: verbs and nouns and he thinks that the category of 'Gerund' shouldn't be one of the categories added to nouns and verbs.

Taher (2005: 30) points out that Gerund is a noun that is formed from a verb and he states that there is more than one kind of nominalization which in turn have different nominal and verbal properties. These terms have some differences in their meaning and structure. For example "John's refusing the offer was out of anger" is a gerund.

Quirk (1985: 1290) mentions that the gerund can be modified by adverbs as in "Brown's deftly painting his daughter keeps him out of others. -which is a gerund". He also points out that some adjectival -ing forms get their adjectival character through word formation (attention-catching, appetizing–looking…). Quirk also mentions that the progressive tenses are constructed of the -ing form and that the helping verb (be) is combined with the non-finite verb, for example "He is calling her now".

Kakzahnova, Omarov and Mukanova (2002: 106-108) state that the gerunds consist of two characteristics: nominal and verbal. They also mention that gerunds only take only syntactical categories of noun but not morphological categories. Gerunds lack the characteristics of person, number and mood, that's why they can't be fully referred to verbs, e.g "visiting relatives is fun". Gerunds express time relatively, in relation to the action of the predicate in the sentence. Because gerunds lack some nominal categories, they can't be fully referred to nouns because it doesn't have plural form, it's determined by an adverb not an adjective and it can't be preceded by any article.

Cook (1996:12-20) states that some verbs can be followed by both gerunds and to-infinitive, with a difference in meaning, for example "I stopped to smoke" there is a sequence of actions, first the person stopped then he lit a cigarette, but in "I stopped smoking" in this sentence the sequence is first the person was smoking and then he stopped, it's important that the non-native speaker memorizes the differences between them because there is no rule to explain the differences in meaning. The non-native speaker needs to study the different functions of the -ing form because they have to analyze the (verb +ing ) closely before deciding it's grammatical category.

Ioup and Kruse (1983: 159) argue that the gerundive complements appear late in the acquisition process of adult speakers of Egyptian Arabic because it's difficult to generalize because their usage is more idiosyncratic. *Pullum (2008: 326) mentions several properties for Gerunds such as: it can be modified by an adverbial "it was a very interesting show", It can contain the negating particle not "it was not an interesting show", It allows auxiliaries, so it may occur in perfect or passive forms and it can also take an object.*

## III. ANALYSIS

This research shows the analysis of the answers of 40 subjects about the -ing form and to-infinitive, it shows their knowledge of the usages of -ing form.

Because of the possessive (s) attached to the subject in the first sentence the answer is a gerund because of its nominal features, but the problem here is that the right answer was chosen by 12% Of the subjects while most of the subjects 67% chose the infinitive verb, which gives the impression that the subjects have no understanding of gerunds ,whereas in sentence number (3) which also has the possessive (s) attached to the subject, it seems that the subjects have a visible problem in understanding the usage of the gerunds and the to-infinitive because 52% subjects chose the gerund and 47% subjects chose the to-infinitive, which is a very different answer from the first sentence, here more than half the subjects chose the correct answer but also a big number of the subjects chose the to-infinitive which indicates that the subjects don't know that (v+ ing) may have properties of a noun, and while almost everyone chose the infinitive verb in the first sentence no one chose it in the third which means that the

subject may have been confused by another factor other than their lack of knowledge of the infinitive verbs. Sentence number 9 is also similar to sentences number 1 and 3 because it also has possessive (s) attached to the subject and 70% subjects chose the right answer which is (barking), where in addition to having possessive (s) for the subject it is also followed by a noun, but 30% of the subjects chose the infinitive verb which brings us back to the first sentence where a big number of subjects chose the infinitive verb too, this indicates that the subjects still don't know the usages of all the -ing forms.

Sometimes the blank space may be preceded by a noun such as in sentence two where 62% of the students chose the correct answer which is a participle because it has more verbal characteristics and no nominal characteristics, the subjects apparently have no problem in distinguishing the participles because possibly that's what they learned first when they started studying English although 37% of them chose the noun (painter).The blank space could also be preceded by a pronoun such as in the sentences (13),(16) and (19) ,the pronouns can't be followed by participles or to-infinitive, it must be followed by a gerund which is obviously understood by the subjects in sentences (13) and (16) with a slight difference in numbers, while sentence (19) is a little more complicated, because in (13), 57% of the subjects chose the correct answer but 42% chose the to-infinitive which indicates that still there are subjects that don't have a full understanding of the differences between them, in sentence (16) 77% subjects chose the correct answer and only 22% subjects chose the to-infinitive which is much less than in the previous sentence, whereas in sentence (19) only 12 out of 40 students  (30%) chose the correct answer and this may be due to the fact that this sentence has two blank spaces, the first space must be filled with a gerund because it's preceded by a pronoun which in turn is preceded by an adjective and the second space should be filled with a participle.

When the blank space is preceded by an adjective, it should be filled with a to-infinitive, such as in sentences (4) and (17) which are modified by the adjective (unable), both of these sentences show that the subjects have a very good understanding that after adjectives come to-infinitives because in the fourth sentence the correct answer was chosen by 75% subjects and 25% subjects chose the -ing answer while in sentence (17) 72% subjects chose the to-infinitive. There are other sentences that have adjectives before the space, like the sentences (6), (11) and (14) ,(6) and (11) are both preceded by adjectives but their percentages differ a little bit from each other because in the 6th sentence the to-infinitive was chosen by 50% subjects while in the 11th sentence it was chosen by 72% subjects which indicates that the students are uncertain about their answers, and the 14th sentence the blank space is preceded by an adverb but modified by an adjective which confused 40% of the subjects ,but still the correct answer was chosen by 60% subjects. This proves that the students don't have a lot of problems with the to-infinitive.

In the fifth sentence 67% subjects chose the correct answer which is a gerund which means that 32% subjects don't know that after prepositions they should use gerunds not infinitive verbs. While when the blank space is followed by verbs or (verb to be) such as in the 8th sentence, it must be filled with a gerund because the space needs to have something with nominal features, in this sentence the correct answer was chosen only by 50% subjects though 32% subjects think that the infinitive verb is a more suitable answer, this indicates that these students don't understand the gerunds and they seem to think it's participle not gerunds.

The seventh sentence is about to-infinitive, it has two parts, both of them are preceded by verbs which can't be followed by any –ing form, but can be followed by to-infinitive, this is understood by 62% of the subjects. The same thing happens in the 12th sentence because 57% subjects chose the to-infinitive while 42% students think the answer should be an infinitive verb.

In the 15th sentence the space is preceded by a pronoun but the answer isn't a gerund because this sentence has a syntactic  movement which brings the prepositional phrase to the end of the sentence while originally the space should be preceded by the verb (kind) which means that the space should be filled with to-infinitive. The correct answer was chosen by 70% subjects. The 20th sentence could take two answers and both of them are correct, the -ing form and the to-infinitive, where 77% subjects chose the gerund which indicates that they know that they shouldn't chose the infinitive verb answer.

In the 18th sentence the blank space is followed by a prepositional phrase which in turn is followed by a (verb to be),which means that it should be filled with a gerund (going) because it means the idea of going ,not an action. This was chosen by 75% students because they have a good handle on the -ing form.

In this questionnaire, out of 800 answers only 493 are correct. This makes a percentage of 61% of correct answers. This percentage provides evidence for the assumption that Arab students have difficulties in distinguishing the -ing answers from to-infinitive answers, they have problems with gerunds, participles and adjectival -ing.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This research is about the different usages of the -ing, which can be a participle, an adjective and a gerund. These types are very different from each other which posses some problems for the acquisition of the English language. A questionnaire was given to 40 students and therefore analyzed, and according to the analyzed data the results seem to vary because some of the students have problems in distinguishing between the types of -ing and the to-infinitives, they have a good understanding of the to-infinitive but they face some problems in distinguishing gerunds since they confuse them with participles. The research analyses gerunds that follows possessive (s), prepositions, pronouns, verbs and that it's followed by verb to be. It also analyses the positions of adjectives and participles. The analyzed data shows that 61% of the subjects are capable of distinguishing the different types of -ing.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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