

Common errors in use of Gerunds to non-specialist students

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Abstracts: *The gerund is an interesting category of English grammar. It has characteristics of both a noun and a verb. It can add action to noun phrases, contributing greater dynamism to a sentence. However, students of English often make errors when they use the gerund. Therefore, this article works entails studying the uses of gerund and conducting a survey for errors analysis. Base on the results of the survey, the types of errors and causes have been found. Solutions to the problems have been suggested.*

Keywords: *Gerund, purposes, solutions.*

1. Introduction

It is inevitable that in learning English as a foreign language, Vietnamese students usually have problems on account of the differences between Vietnamese and the target language. It is proved that English grammar is complex and often causes humiliation to students. The gerund is one of the complex language categories that students have to learn. Due to its various uses, it is assumed that there are many errors which may be made. In fact, quite a few students admit that gerund is one of the biggest problems of grammar and they often make errors in the use of gerunds. This article is conducted, which focuses on errors in the use of gerunds among the non-specialist students at Hai Phong University.

2. Development

2.1. Literature review in brief

Gerunds have been described by many grammarians. Generally, they focus their attention on the definition, formation, function of the gerund, modifiers of gerunds in gerund phrases and their uses. John Sinclair (1990) deals with the formation of the present participle and that of the gerund. He also introduces the *-ing* noun, another name of the gerund, and classified the gerunds into two kinds: count and uncount. Randolph Quirk, et.al (1985) refers to the gerund as the nominal- *ing* clause. They just name the functions of the gerunds: subject, direct object, subject complement, appositive, adjectival complementation and prepositional complement. They specify the use of the genitive cases in gerundival clauses and the use of the gerund after negative adjective *no*. Meanwhile, John Edwood (1994) gives a quite understandable picture of

gerund. He gives the form of gerund (simple gerund, perfect gerund, and the negation of gerunds) but he pays much attention to patterns and clause [3]. R.A. Close (1979) describes the functions of the gerund as well as the difference between the gerund and the present participle. He also concentrates on cases where gerunds are obligatory, cases in which the gerund and infinitive are acceptable, cases in which the gerund and the infinitive are possible but with the different meanings [4]. Kam Chuan & Kam Kai Hui (1992) not only give the definition, the functions of the gerund, mention that the gerund is a verbal noun and the participle is a verbal adjective but they also deal with the modifiers of gerund in gerund phrases. Besides, they point out some common errors in use of gerunds (errors in the use of nouns and pronouns before gerunds, the use of wrong verb forms...). Much research has been done but only Kam Kam Chuan & Kam Kai Hui (1992) pinpoint errors in the use of gerunds. Therefore, it is essential to have a study of common errors in use of gerund.

2.2. Common Errors in the use of gerunds

2.2.1. *Survey:* This part presents the finding of the practical research with one hundred non-specialist students at Hai Phong University. A completion test was used to collect the data. The overall objectives of the survey questionnaire are to test students' understanding of the gerund and find out the errors. The survey is divided into two parts. Part A, is designed to get information about informants and students' English competence. Part B is conducted to evaluate how much the students have known and mastered the gerund.

2.2.2. *Result of the survey:* In the first part of

the survey, the students were asked to give their self - assessment of their English levels and their understandings of verbal types. A great number of them (63%) said that their English is not really good. Forty – one percent stated that they were rather good at English. Nine percent said they were good at this subject. Four percent stated that they were excellent. Only two students confessed that they were bad at English. The part A shows a significant view that every student could quickly recognize the form of the gerund and the infinitive. However, most of them could not distinguish the gerund from the present participle.

Also base on the survey analysis, it can be identified which error level of the gerund is the highest and which is the lowest. The order is as follow:

- Error in the use of gerunds after the, negative objective *no*: 66.15%
- Error in the use of gerunds as subjects: 45.02%
- Error in the use of gerunds after possessive: 39.69%
- Error in the use of gerunds as direct objects: 32.03%
- Error in the use of gerunds as adjective complements: 31.77%
- Error in the use of gerunds as subject complements: 28.13%
- Error in the use of gerunds as object of a preposition: 25.00%
- Error in the use of gerunds after idiomatic expressions: 11.46%

2.2.3. Common errors and causes

Errors in the use of gerunds after the negative objective *no* is most common, account for 66.15%. There are three students whose percentage of errors of using gerunds after the negative *no* is 100%. This number is high if compared to nine respondents who did not make any errors. Generally, the negative *no* is used as adverb of not some types of gerundive phrases, which are after structure “there+ a form of *be*” and show the prohibition of certain activities. It is assumed that the students made these mistakes since they failed to understand the theory that they have been taught.

45.02 % of the errors involve using the gerunds as subjects. The mother tongue influences students when they use the gerunds. In Vietnamese, a word might have multiple functions as both a noun and a verb. The student applies the way of using their own language to English; therefore, they made mistake. For instant: *Some people think that the (sell) of bonds*

is beneficial. (Answer: *sell*; Correct answer: *selling*)

The errors linked with the use of gerund after possessives make up 39.36%. For example: *What about my (come) to see you tomorrow?* (Answer: to sell; correct answer: selling). The number of student holds 100% percentage of errors is 8 students. The theory of the gerund shows that it can be preceded by a possessive or a noun in a possessive case since it is a noun. Limited knowledge of grammatical rules holds accountable for this kind of errors.

By comparison, the errors caused by using of gerunds as direct objects occupy 32.03%. None of the student took 100% of errors. Most of them had difficulties in identifying an infinitive or a gerund after some verbs; besides, they base themselves on the meaning of the sentences to decide either the gerund or the infinitive. Therefore, ignoring the grammatical rules poses the problems in using gerunds.

As can be seen from the survey analysis, due to the difference between the two language systems, the percentage of errors in the use of gerunds as a subject complement is 31.77%. The subject complement in English must be a noun, and to make a noun, the *-ing* is added to a verb. However, in Vietnamese, a noun and the verb are in the same form. This is a popular mistake of students, especially in speaking. For example: *I like (watch).....TV and (play)....table tennis.* (Answer: *watching, play*; Correct answer: *watching, playing*).

The errors in use of gerunds as objects of a preposition constitute 28.13%. There was no student made 100% of errors in this use of gerunds although the highest percentage is 75%. The errors show a noticeable contribution to the number of errors. By dint of not learning grammatical structures in which the gerund is used, a number of students could not distinguish the preposition *to* from *to* as a part of infinitive. For instance: *I have no objection to (hear)....your story again.* (Answer: *to hear*; correct answer: *hearing*).

The percentage of errors in the use of gerunds as adjective complements makes up 25% meanwhile the highest percentage is 75%. For example: *She felt awful (leave)....him.* (Answer: *to leave*; correct answer: *leaving*). This type of error is mainly caused by the limited knowledge about grammatical structure. It seems to students that only the infinitive is used after the adjective.

The least common type of error is the errors in using gerund after idiomatic expressions; it stands

at 11.46%. The main cause of this type is that the students ignored grammatical structure. For example: *It is no good (talk)... to him.* (Answer: *to talk*; correct answer: *talking*)

3. Suggested solutions

3.1. Suggested solutions

It is important for the teacher to enable the student to get the importance of the gerund in the English language. The teacher should introduce all possible uses of the gerund to the student. The use must be shown systematically (such as definition, form, function, and meaning), memorably and vividly (for example: remarkable examples, pictures, videos, or mind maps). The simplified and clarified information help the student have an overview of the gerund, from that on they can understand and remember it better.

Additionally, it would be better for teacher to include the differences between gerund and present participle in the lecture. The teacher is to explain the cases where the gerund is needed and cases in which both the gerund and the infinitive have the same meaning. A list of words concerned with those uses is necessary. As for some verbs employing a gerund and an infinitive, the teacher should clarify the difference between the two choices.

The teacher should help the student minimize the influence of the mother tongue by comparing the two languages in terms of word class, information and use. Moreover, teacher should provide students with some useful techniques to help them use gerund correctly. The best way to help student memorize and master the gerund is to give them practice even in writing and speaking as much as possible.

To students, the first thing they should pay their attention to is to master the gerund uses. They cannot write and speak correctly if they do not know how the gerund is used. In addition to practice activities in the class, students can do extra exercises in some comprehensive grammar books, website, or apps as well as writing and listening activities fitted with gerunds.

Another item which should be paid attention to is grammar. Most of the sentences related to the gerund contain grammar structures which the student has no choice but to learn by heart. Furthermore, making up sentences with gerunds require care from students. They should read the instruction and enhance their linguistic competence in order to fully apply the gerund in speaking, writing or understanding the text.

3.2. Suggested activities/ exercises

There are quite a few exercises or tasks on gerunds in grammar and test books. Teacher could make use of them to consolidate what students have learnt. Moreover, they should design particular exercise type as well as practical activities to minimize students' errors in the use of gerunds. Here are some suggested exercise types:

- Decide whether the underline words are gerunds or present participles: This type of exercise designed to help students distinguish the gerund from the present participle.

- Rewrite the sentences: This task is aimed at helping students know functions of gerunds as well as structures in which the gerund is used.

- Translate sentence into English: This type of exercise is designed to consolidate what student have learnt about the gerund in terms of structures, functions, and meaning. It requires students' understanding of the gerund. By doing this exercise type, students can reduce the influence of the mother tongue.

- Embed gerunds into skills practice: With this kind of activity, students have to remember and sharpen both their skills and the gerund while they practice.

4. Conclusion

It is undeniable that grammar is very important in the language system. However, it is complex and often causes embarrassment to students of English. The gerund is a grammatical category that is said to have caused an abundance of difficulties to learners. Taking this point into the consideration, a survey was conducted and some suggested solutions to the problems have been made. It is hoped that the article can made certain contribution to the English teaching and learning practices./.

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