

# A Syntactic Study of the -ING form

Yōko ICHIMURA

## Preface

This paper deals chiefly with the *-ing* form functioning as a subjective complement as well as objective. The *-ing* form, which traditional school grammar has treated either as a gerund or as a present participle, is herein classified into four categories such as gerund, present participle, simple *-ing* form, and verbal noun. As the initial step of study, this paper takes up the simple *-ing* form which differs from the other three in that it functions only as a complement.

English verbs can be arranged in several kinds according to the verbal form by which they are followed. For example, some of them may be followed by the infinitive, some by the *-ing* form, and others by the past participle.

Traditional grammarians seem to be more concerned with the distinction between a gerund and a present participle than with the structural function of the *-ing* form. Quoting Henry Sweet, "The gerund, as in *I remember seeing him*, is a noun-verbal, the present participle, which has the same form, being an adjective-verbal, as in *running water*."<sup>(1)</sup> On account of the identity of form of the verb-noun and verb-adjective, it is not clear whether the word following the (pro)noun is a present participle or a gerund, but in my opinion the distinction is not always important, though Japanese learners are too conscious of grammatical details. Compare these sentences:

(a) I don't like *his going* there alone.

(b) I don't like *him going* there alone.

According to school grammar, *his going* may be classified in terms of a possessive+a gerund, and *him going*, in terms of a pronoun+a present participle, respectively.

Following transformational grammar, which, however, "seeks to describe the operation of language,"<sup>(2)</sup> "these sentences (a) and (b) may have the same deep structures as follows:

MV → V NP

NP → it S

The deep structure can also be given in the following branching tree diagram:



idea without a subject in Japanese. Therefore, the deep structure of English as represented in  $S \rightarrow NP VP$  is an essential part of sentence building, though D Terence Langendoen claims in his *Essentials of English Grammar* that "deep structures should be stated in terms of the roll relationship rather than syntactic relationship."<sup>(4)</sup> We may create countless English sentences on the basis of the syntactic structural rules, for English is a living natural language.

Though language is not only a means of communication, but also a means of building a strong human relationship with others, we may also express ourselves by voice-less voices and word-less words, since speech has its limitation in expressing our ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Language, a product of accumulated culture, seems to reflect our personality as a whole.

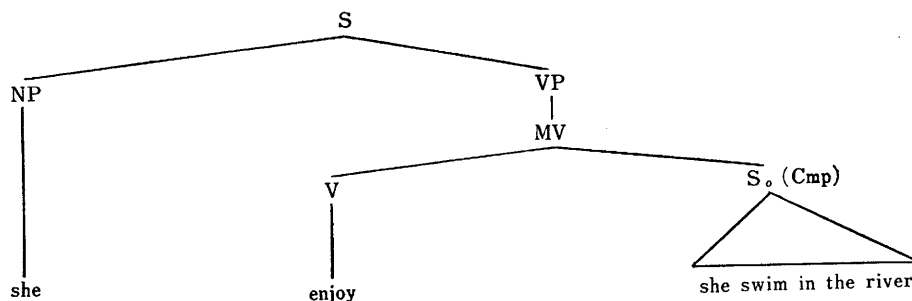
I should like to acknowledge with gratitude the very helpful advice of Prof. Fumio Nakajima of Tsuda College, who has kindly permitted me to attend his lecture on transformational grammar given at the graduate school of Tsuda College since 1970.

### (1) Subjective Complements

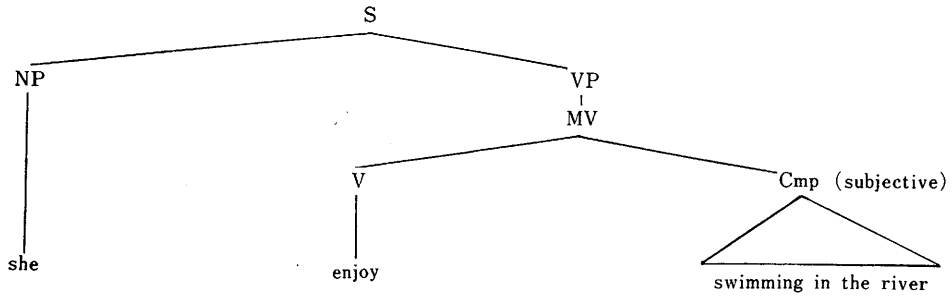
The simple *-ing* form functioning as a subjective complement may occur in transitive as well as intransitive verb construction. The *-ing* form in *she enjoys swimming in the river* has been regarded in school grammar as a gerund functioning as a direct object. *Swimming in the river*, however, is not a noun phrase, nor the object of *enjoy*, since cleft sentences like

\* What she enjoys is swimming in the river

are ungrammatical. If the cleft sentence test is reliable, we may conclude that *swimming in the river* is not a sentence embedded inside a noun phrase but embedded directly under the domination of a main verb, as in the following tree diagram:



where the complementizer is *-ing*. And when the identical NP deletion is applied, the subject of the embedded sentence is deleted, giving the structure that follows:



The main verb *enjoy* is so closely connected with *swimming in the river* as to constitute a verbal phrase, a unit of a verb + *-ing* form. We can not place any word between *enjoy* and *swimming in the river*, since the sense subject of the *-ing* form is identical with the subject of the main sentence. Then *enjoy* may belong to catenatives, “those full verbs that are followed by verbal forms with regular rules of co-occurrence.”<sup>(5)</sup> Prof. F. Nakajima, furthermore, classifies as “genuine” catenatives those verbs with which another verbal form always functions as a subjective complement.<sup>(6)</sup> Here are some examples to show a catenative + *-ing* form: Ellsberg has *admitted leaking* the papers to the Times./ Yara may *miss signing* of accord./ It is difficult for most individuals to *escape becoming* anything other than the echo of other peoples’ voices./ He wanted to *avoid sending* Americans to Asia./ Will you *consider helping* me with my work?/ It has *stopped raining*./ We couldn’t *risk leaving* him alone./ *Try cleaning* it with petrol./ But the State Department quickly *denied having* any information about him./ Have you *finished reading* the book?/ You should *practise speaking* English every day./ I would not be surprised if in the period after the U.N. General Assembly meeting the Egyptians would *resume firing* at the canal./ Mr. Nixon has *kept pressing* for a summit conference.

From a pedagogical point of view, those catenative verbs, which are supposed to follow the verbal form, whether it is the *-ing* form or *to*-infinitive, should be treated as a unit of verb + verbal form, for example, *enjoy* + *-ing* form, or *manage* + *to*-infinitive and so on. We should concern ourselves with the sense subject of the verbal form rather than the distinction between a gerund and a present participle. Because it is the sense subject itself that has something to do with the deep structure of a sentence, playing an important roll in transformational grammar.

Secondly, we will examine the sentence

She went *swimming in the river*.

School grammar may deal with *swimming (in the river)* as a present participle functioning as a subjective complement.

According to F R Palmer, the sentence is almost equivalent to:

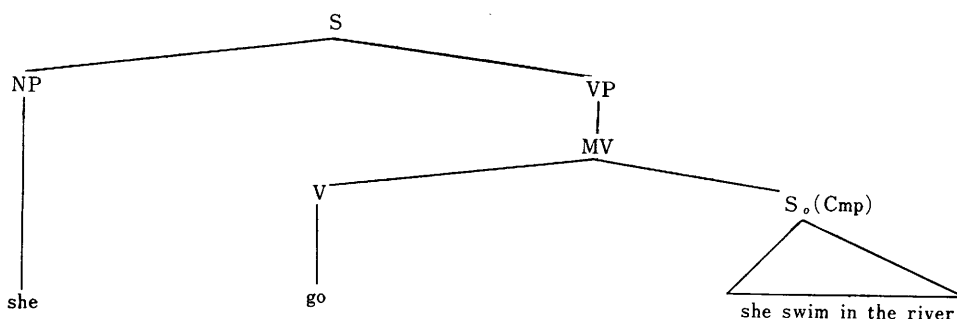
She went and swam in the river.

“Here Go, rather like Keep, is almost adverbial.” The second verb indicates the action which took place—he swam in the river. “Go collocates with verbs that imply movement—Fish, Hunt, Look For, etc., but is followed only by the simple *-ing* form (not any of the participials).”<sup>(7)</sup>

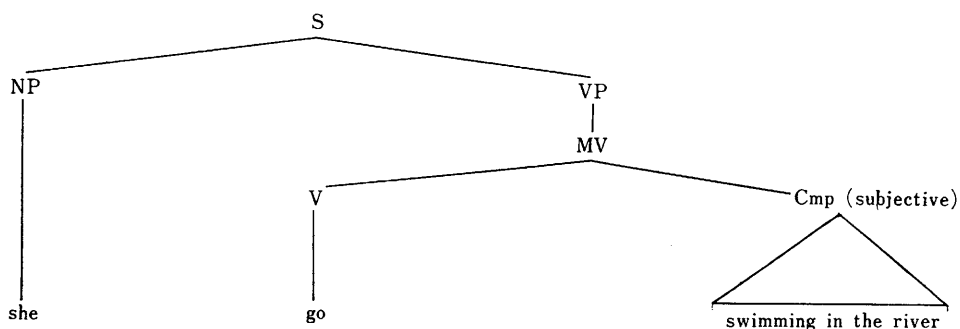
Observing the sentence

She went swimming in the river

from the angle of transformational grammar, we may assume that *swimming* is not a present participle but a simple *-ing* form which functions as a subjective complement. The sentence above could be shown in the following branching tree diagram:



With the *-ing* complementizer present, and assuming the application of the identical NP deletion transformation, the structure generated would be as follows:



Go is frequently followed by the *-ing* form of those verbs which are concerned with sports, as in *Tom went hunting| fishing| playing golf*. Besides, we have some examples here: *Mary went shopping with her mother.* / *Did he go looking for his child?* / *I used to go dining and drinking for the evening with him.*

At first glance, the sentence *she went swimming in the river* appears to be identical to *she enjoys swimming in the river*, except for the verbs. It has become clear now that the deep structures of these two sentences are identical, and so are the surface structures.

Yet the main verbs *go* and *enjoy* are not of the same kind: the one is intransitive, the other transitive. The point is that (1) the simple *-ing* form as a subjective complement may occur in both transitive and intransitive verb construction, though in school grammar, the *-ing* form following a transitive verb may be regarded as a gerund with the function of a direct object and (2) the verb, which is linked intimately with verbal forms such as *-ing* form, may be defined as a catenative, with which a verbal form works as a subjective complement.

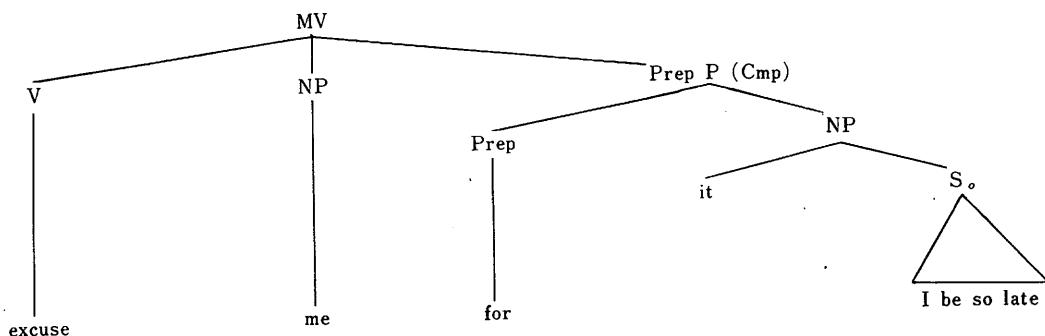
## (2) Objective Complements

The next problem that we are going to examine is the *-ing* form following prepositional verbs such as *prevent from*, *accuse of*, *congratulate on* and so on. Sentences like

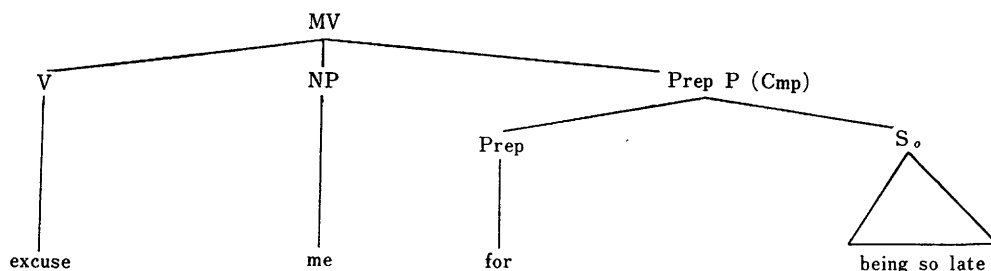
*Excuse me for being so late.*

Failure did not *deter* him *from trying* again.

are examples of cases where a preposition + *-ing* functions as an objective complement. The deep structure of the first sentence is:



Through the application of (1) the nominalizing transformation (introducing the nominalizer *poss-ing* to the embedded sentence) and (2) the "it" deletion transformation, we may have the surface structure as follows:

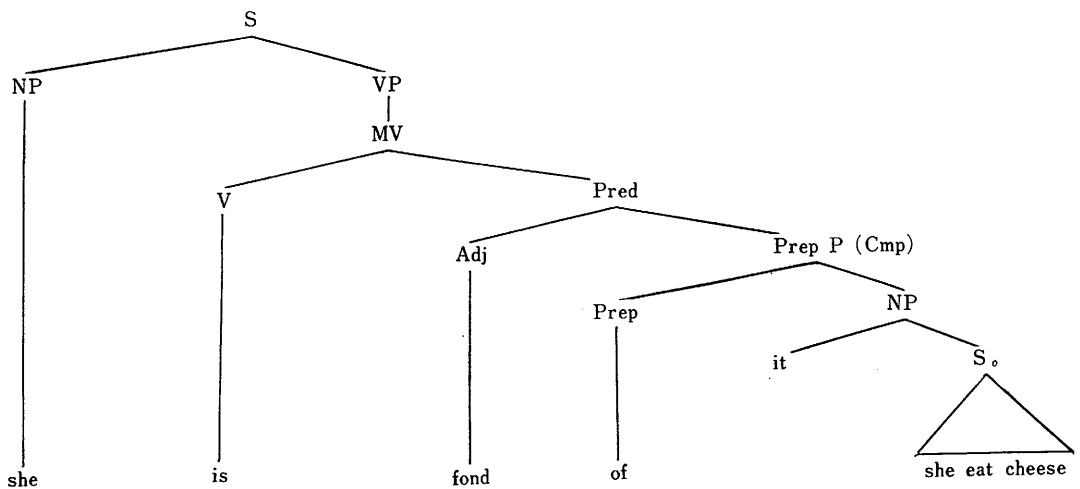


Here the prepositional phrase for *being so late* is an objective complement, and the sense subject of the *-ing* form is identical to the object of the main sentence. We have some examples: I don't *blame* you *for doing* that./ I *suspect* him of *stealing* the purse./ What *bars* you *from coming* to the theater with us?/ The rain *prevented* me *from coming*./ The Belgrade newspaper *Borba* *accused* the United States of *neglecting* the rights of people to solve their own problems./ U. S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers *charged* Moscow *with using* "strident" cold war rhetoric./ He *thanked* those present *for coming*./ A friend of mine *was criticized* by a powerful local businessman *for riding* a bicycle to school./ *Protect* the children *from catching* cold./ He *punished* me *for being* dishonest./ Father *advised* her *against marrying* in haste./ I *congratulate* you *on passing* the entrance exam./ President Nixon *cautioned* ranking congressional and administration leaders *against raising* expectation that his plan for a visit to Communist China might mean an early end to the Vietnam war./ Dean Rusk, Secretary of State in the John F Kennedy and Lyndon B Johnson administrations, *warned* in a 1961 cable to President Kennedy *against sending* U. S. troops into Vietnam.

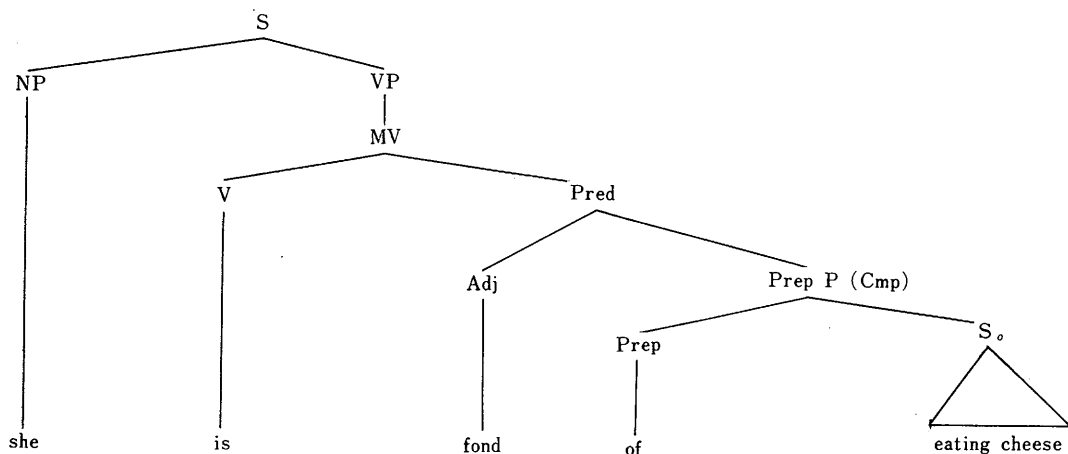
Certain predicates like *fond of*, *accustomed to*, and *capable of* are also employed with the *-ing* form. In this case, the prepositional phrase may serve as an objective complement. For example, the sentence

She is fond of eating cheese.

may have the following deep structure :



The nominalizing transformation introduces the nominalizer *poss-ing* to the embedded sentence. The identical NP deletion is obligatory here, since the sense subject of the *-ing* form is identical with the subject of the main sentence. This may give the surface structure below :



The other examples are: The customer *grew tired of* waiting./ She is always *fond of* talking./ I am *accustomed to rising* at six./ He is quite *capable of* doing that./ She is *used to getting up* early./ Post, N. Y. Times stay *barred from printing* Vietnam war article./ Are you *interested in studying* insects?/ He was *incapable of understanding* a woman like this./ You need not be *afraid of being* late./ Some people are rather *proud of being* indifferent to their clothes./ But he stopped *short of predicting* publicly that Peking's delegates would enter the U. N. during the assembly session opening on Tuesday./ I'm *aware of Peking's thinking* although I have had no contact with Peking, direct or indirect./ Brandt said that powers other than the United States also have been *active in establishing* relations with China.

We should be more concerned with the structural function of the *-ing* form than with the distinction between a present participle and a gerund. As mentioned above, catenative verbs should be treated as a unit of verbal form such as avoid + *-ing*, practise + *-ing*, and so on. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that some kinds of verbal forms are not *to*-infinitive, but only the *-ing* form, when used with prepositional verbs and some adjectives. In order to use English as a means of communication, the learner should familiarize himself with these complex phrases through practice.

### Notes

- (1) Sweet, Henry. (1960) *A New English Grammar*. Oxford. Part I p. 116
- (2) Thomas, Owen. (1965) *Transformational Grammar and the Teacher of English*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. p. 15
- (3) \_\_\_\_\_ p. 24



- (4) Langendoen, D. Terence. (1970) *Essentials of English Grammar*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. p. 62
- (5) Palmer, F R (1968) *A Linguistic Study of the English Verb*. Longmans. p. 15
- (6) Nakajima, Fumio (1970) "The kinds of Objective Complement" ELEC Bulletin No. 31 p. 27
- (7) Palmer, F R (1968) *A Linguistic Study of the English Verb*. Longmans. p. 163
- (8) \_\_\_\_\_ p. 157
- (9) Hornby, A. S. (1962) *A Guide to Patterns and Usage in English*. Oxford. p. 50

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