

<p>The Contrastive Analysis of the English -ING Clause as Subject of a Sentence and its Albanian Correspondents</p>		<p>Linguistics</p> <p>Keywords: -ING clause, nominal function, verbal noun phrase, gerund construction, Albanian correspondent, EFL learner</p>
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Abstract

This paper aims at describing and analysing the structural differences and similarities between the nominal function of the –ING clause in English and its Albanian correspondents. Regarding the Albanian correspondents of the English –ING clause as subject of a sentence, the following correspondents have been detected: Albanian clauses are introduced by verbal noun phrases, gerund constructions, and clauses introduced by a verb phrase. In light of this, it is hypothesised that these structural differences and similarities may cause difficulties for the Albanian EFL classroom students learning the nominal function of the English –ING clause as subject of a sentence. The findings and the results from this paper may help the EFL teachers in overcoming difficulties in the teaching processes of the nominal –ING clause in English.

Introduction

The paper will target the two languages, English and Albanian, in relation to their syntactic structures. Based on this study, teaching complex English syntactic structures requires an exhaustive search for as well as use of methods and techniques transmitting knowledge to second language learners. While doing this, EFL teachers/students should pay attention to the role of the mother tongue influencing the second language acquisition. Most linguists say that the role of L1 is the most significant part at the early stages of second language acquisition. However, Pit Corder cited in Gass and Selinker (1993, p.23) disagrees with this view, arguing that it is not the starting point of the L1 in syntactic acquisition but it is a continuum of increasing complexity or as he called it a ‘*developmental continuum*’ which takes place in second language acquisition. It is because of this that it is assumed that EFL learners will have trouble in manoeuvring with these linguistic structures in their language output.

As mentioned above the EFL learner can face large difficulties in producing certain linguistic structures. According to the findings of this paper, Albanian EFL learner, in special cases, might face problems while producing English structures with the nominal –ING clause as subject of a sentence. One basic element for the success of the Albanian EFL learner lies in the ability to make generalisations of such structured correspondents.

Consequently, this paper intends to help Albanian EFL teachers/learners to overcome the problems they face while dealing with the complexities of the nominal –ING clauses. This study will focus on finding differences, similarities and identities between the English –ING clause as subject and its Albanian correspondents and by ranking them according to their relative learning difficulty.

Therefore, we will be utilising contrastive analysis as a method in conducting this research. Contrastive analysis as a steering mechanism in the process of foreign language teaching and has been applied for decades by many linguists. It has been used to find out the relationship between the mother tongue and any other languages that follow, such as L2, L3 etc. Therefore, it has also been used to predict and explain the difficulties in the process of language learning. Since the foreground of this thesis has to do with contrastive analysis between the English –ING clause as subject and its Albanian correspondents, the method stated above has been applied in order to highlight the errors that might be conducted by the Albanian EFL learners in second language acquisition.

1.1 The Contrastive Analysis of the English -ING clause as subject and its Albanian Correspondents

The nominal –ING clause is met in an array of functions. In such cases when it performs the function of subject, it is generally known as subject clause. Referring to the grammar reference books, it can be noted that the –ING clause is called as gerund construction when it behaves like a noun phrase, gerund clause, -ING participle etc. According to Duffley (2006), the –ING clause can take over the role of a substantive in a sentence functioning as the subject. The –ING clause in the function of subject usually expresses permanent or recurrent actions, simultaneous with the action expressed by the predicate verb (Moldova, 2005). In the same diploma thesis, it was cited that the nominal –ING clauses can be found only in: 1. declarative sentences and it is never used in interrogative sentences; 2. the nominal –ING clause as subject is always placed at the head of the sentence and any secondary parts never precede it; and 3. the nominal –ING clause as the subject is occasionally found in sentences beginning with *there is*, but its use is restricted to negative sentences where it is usually preceded by *no*. Biber *et al.* (1999, p.67) explains that the determiner *no* suggests that *denying* in (1) is a noun, while the following object *it* suggests that it is a verb. Quirk, *et al.* (1985) calls this construction as anomalous where the –ING is preceded by *no* and in rare cases by *any*.

1. There is *no denying it*. (Biber *et al.*, 1999, p.67)

Based on the Diploma Thesis of Moldova University “Contrastive Analysis of Gerund in English, Romanian and French” (2005:20), the nominal –ING form is used to express statements of general character. This is presented in the example below:

2. **Writing letters** is a waste of time.

In the above two sentences and other uses of nominal –ING clauses Duffley (2006) explores the aspectual and temporal impressions produced by the so-called gerundive uses of the –ING form. He underlines that it is commonplace in English grammatical analysis to treat the –ING form as “imperfective”, i.e. a form which evokes an event in progress, one which is only partly accomplished. This can be seen in the following sentence.

3. **Running the collars and cuffs through the mangle** was also Joe's idea. (“Martin Eden”, p.133)

Edhe **të tharët e jakave dhe të dorëzave të këmishave me anë të makinës me cilindra** ishte shpikje e Xhoit. (“Martin Eden”, f. 180)

The subject –ING clause in (3) shares the same tense as the main verb *was*. The Albanian correspondent of the English *running* is a gerund construction of neutral gender preceded by the article *të* – *të tharët*. The article *të* is used in singular nominative case. The time reference of the whole sentence is determined by the tense of the main clause verb *ishte* which is the past. Domi, *et al.* 1 (2002) make claim that these nouns such as *të tharët* derive from verbs and are formed with the nominalisation of the Albanian participle. As the time goes on this group of verbal nouns, as Domi *et al* call them, in Albanian language are largely being used less. The restriction of the verbal nouns of neutral gender in Albanian is due to the fact that a non-finite verb form called *gerund* is taking its place in Standard Albanian. According to Çeliku (2000:44), the Albanian gerund does not have the category of being indefinite, nor definite and it is not preceded by any determiner. Çeliku also states that the Albanian gerund of the form *të bërë* and *së bëri* is similar to the gerund of other languages. Because of this, the Albanian correspondent *të tharët* and other correspondents of this form, in this research, will be called as *gerund constructions*. Also, the Albanian correspondents of the type *kruajtja* and *palimi* as in examples (6) and (7) will be called as *verbal noun phrases*.

Below is another example of the nominal –ING clause as the subject followed by its Albanian correspondent, a gerund construction.

4. **Cooking for the night** was over, but the coals of the campfires still glowed on the ground by the camping places. (“The Grapes of Wrath”, p.154)

Të gatuarit e darkës kish marrë fund, po nëpër zjarre kish akoma ndonjë urë të ndezur.
 (“Vilet e Zemërimit”, f.261)

In conclusion, the Albanian correspondents of the English –ING clauses in (3) **të tharët** and (4) **të gatuarit** are gerund constructions introduced by neutral nouns, and it can be concluded that the –ING clauses as the subject of the sentences have similar structural patterns as their Albanian correspondents.

Another type of English gerund construction in the subject position may express a finished action. The following examples illustrate this point:

5. **The giggling** got out of control and turned into coughing. (“The Grapes of Wrath”, p. 147)
Qeshja duke se turfullonte ashtu në të qarë. (“Vilet e Zemërimit”, f.265)

In English the noun is usually preceded by a determiner. Many nouns have the article *the* in front of them, when the thing referred to has already been mentioned, and the nominal –ING clause is not an exception (Francis *et al.* 1998). Eastwood (2005) also shares the thought that such construction preceded by the determiner *the* expresses a specification rather than general idea. In some cases, the nominal use of the –ING clause is semantically very close to the verbal gerundive use (Duffley, 2006). 1. *The dismantling of the reactor took six months.* 2. *Dismantling reactors took six months.* Duffley He also explains that the -ING clause in both instances evokes events.

The Albanian correspondent in example (5) is verbal noun phrase **qesh-ja** expressed by a definite form of a feminine noun with the ending **-ja**.

Another case when the –ING form is preceded by the determiner '*the*' is illustrated in the following sentence:

6. **The scraping** was done now, and only a few drops of blood continued to fall from the carcasses into the black pool on the ground. (“The Grapes of Wrath”, p. 78)
Kruajtja tani kish marrë fund dhe vetëm më të rallë ca pika gjaku vazhdonin e binin akoma në një llonxhë të vogël e të zezë përdhe. (“Vilet e Zemërimit”, f.154)

The Albanian correspondents of the English gerund constructions in (5) and (6) are verbal noun phrases, and they denote an impression of a perfect aspect.

The following gerund construction as in (7) can be pre-modified by certain structures giving the specification to the whole structure. This happens with the genitive determiner as seen in the example below:

7. **My packing** was nearly done – only an evening dress to fold, and Henry wasn't due for another half an hour. (“The End of the Affair”, p.77)
Palimi i teshave gati ishte kryer – vetëm duhej ta bëja truq edhe një fustan tëmbërëmjes, e Henry s'do të vinte edhe gjysmë ore. (“Fundit i Aferës”, f. 123)

It is commonplace in English that a gerund construction is either preceded by a genitive or objective case. Quirk, *et al.* (1985:1064) verify this idea that the genitive case is preferred when the item is in the initial position of the sentence. They claim that the use of the genitive determiner itself provides the –ING form with a nominal characteristic. The possessive is used in front of the –ING form to indicate that something is owned by someone or belongs to someone (Francis *et al.* 1998).

When the pronoun stands in an initial position, the possessive form is preferred as shown in the case stated above (Lyne, n.d.). The nominal –ING clause functioning as the subject of the sentence preceded by a genitive determiner refers to a fact or an action (Quirk *et al.* 1985). The examples from our corpus such as (7) demonstrate the fact what Quirk *et al.* claim of an action. The verb **was** is a linking verb allowing no object after it. Because of this, the adverb *nearly* which partly fulfils the meaning of the verb shows some kind of unknown action between X and Y.

The thorough combination of depth and breadth analysis of the nominal –ING clause as the subject shows certain peculiarities of an on-going process or what Quirk *et al.* (1985) named *an action*. The nominal –ING clause in subject position preceded by a genitive can syntactically result in ambiguity. *My packing* can either refer to the action of packing or to the mode of packing (Quirk *et al.* 1985). The confusion of the –ING clause with such double interpretation derives from the verbal nature of the –ING form.

The Albanian correspondent *palimi* in terms of function is a verbal noun phrase. In terms of structure it is different because there is no pre-modifier as the English *my*, even though there are post-modified nouns in Albanian with possessives such as: *vendi ynë, makina e tij* (Domi *et al.* 1, 2002). These deverbal nouns are not the same with our case of verbal noun phrase *palimi*. The Albanian verbal noun *palimi* is dependent on the main verb *ishte* which is the past simple of *është*.

The nominal –ING clause in (8) has a different Albanian correspondent. It is a clause introduced by a verb phrase. The following example illustrates this:

8. **Watching a coast as it slips by the ship** is like thinking about an enigma. (“Heart of Darkness”, p.8)

Ta vështrosh bregun si shket pranë anijes është si të zgjidhësh një enigma. (“Zemra e Errësirës”, f. 20)

The –ING clause *watching a coast as it slips by the ship* and the rest part of the sentence *is like thinking about an enigma* can be compared to this form: X like Y. The main verb *is* serves the two nominal -ING clauses with their similar structures. If *thinking about enigma* takes the initial position then the meaning of the sentence is not typically the same because of its semantics. That is why Pullum & Zwicky (1999) enumerated that the –ING form is not unitary in English.

In a detailed analysis Biber *et al.* (1999) showed that the biggest problem in distinguishing nouns from verbs, however, is that of the naked –ING form, where a word ending in –ING could either be a noun or a verb, and occurs without any of the clear noun criteria in its context. In this study we treat it as a gerund construction:

9. I find that **writing** is like drinking. A man must learn to control it. (FICT) (Biber *et al.*, 1999, p.67)

According to Blaganje and Konte (2005) the –ING form as in our example (8) *watching a coast as it slips by the ship* has a verbal character and functions as predicator in non-finite clauses where **a coast** is the direct object of **watching**.

The Albanian correspondent in (8) is different from one might expect. Traditionally, it is assumed that the nominal –ING clause in subject position has a noun correspondent in Albanian. This exception enriches the study itself by bringing attention to the idea that if there are two nominal –ING clauses in a sentence of the same rank being interchangeable with each other with no major differences in meaning, then the nominal –ING clause in subject position has a verb correspondent in Albanian. The Albanian correspondent *Ta vështrosh bregun si shket pranë anijes* is a finite clause with verb phrase in the present simple preceded by a short form of the pronoun **ta**. The **ta** form is derived from the short form of the pronoun **të** in dative and the short form of **e** in accusative. Their combination has resulted in **ta** as a co-joined form of **të** and **e**.

The borderline cases of the –ING clause functioning as the subject has its limitations and extendibility. A proposal by Biber *et al.* (1999, p.67) suggests that the noun status of a word is particularly obvious when it takes a plural: *meeting/meetings*. In addition, Blaganje and Konte (2005) warned us not to confuse the pure nouns ending in –ING. Such nouns have acquired a set concrete meaning, expressing the result of an activity. Unlike these concrete nouns, most of the gerund constructions derived from verbs do not take plurals. The case with *merchandising* in (10) shows the peculiarities of this kind. It is an uncountable verbal noun.

10. They knew the buyer man would get much more, but they didn't know how to do it. **Merchandising** was a secret to them. (“The Grapes of Wrath”, p72)

E dinin mire që ai matrapazi do t'i shiste të gjitha me një cmim shumë më të lartë, por se qysh do të mund ta bënin vetë këtë, nuk e dinin. Mendja e tyre s'e rrokte dot misterin e **tregtisë**. (“Vilet e Zemërimit”, f.143)

The Albanian correspondent in (10) is a verbal noun phrase introduced by a definite noun of genitive case **tregti-së**. In addition, it is also mentioned that Albanian nouns in genitive are used in various functions (Domi *et al.* 1, 2002, p108). The Albanian correspondent has moved forward to the end of the sentence taking the position of the extra posed subject. Albanian nouns in extra position are usually used in genitive case. The use of these kinds of sentences in Albanian is more restricted than the use in initial position of the subject.

The nominal –ING clause as the subject of a sentence can have certain correspondents in Albanian due to the stylistic fact of expressing ideas and processes. This commonly happens when the –ING fills the slot of subject (Biber *et. al.*, 1999, p.67).

The –ING clause as in (11) is followed by a prepositional phrase which consists of *from* and a noun group (Francis *et al.* 1998). The –ING can sometimes follow a determiner as previously described.

11. **The whining from the distance** was softer and softer until it could not be heard at all anymore. (“The Grapes of Wrath”, p. 167)

Rënkimet aty jashtë u topitën gjër sa s'u dëgjuan më fare. (“Vilet e Zemërimit”, f.299)

Duffley (2006) writes that the nominal –ING clause as the subject must be construed with prepositions specifying the relation of –ING form with respect to its adjunct (*the whining from the distance*). In his work Duffley (2006) also mentioned that some –ING forms are also construed with prepositions rather than with direct objects and the –ING form functions exactly like a noun in taking a prepositional-phrase modifier introduced by the preposition *from*. The nominal –ING clause *the whining from the distance* evokes an action in progress which expresses a change when followed by the rest of the sentence, as demonstrated above. In this function the nominal –ING clause is associated with the aspectual impression of imperfectivity (Duffley, 2006, p18).

The English –ING clause *the whining from the distance* in (11) as its Albanian correspondent has a verbal noun phrase *rënkimet aty jashtë*.

1. Categorization of the Differences, Similarities and Identities between the English – ING clause as the Subject of a Sentence and its Albanian Correspondents, Reflecting their Relative Learning Difficulty

1.2.1 In section 1.1, there are cases in which the Albanian correspondents of English –ING clauses as the subject of a sentence are different, similar or identical. Due to this variety of correspondents, the Albanian EFL student may feel puzzled about the various functions and meanings of the English –ING clauses. As a result, it can be predicted that he or she may experience difficulty in acquiring the functions of this form.

1.2.3 The initial position of the gerund construction as the subject of a sentence preceded by a determiner is identical to its Albanian correspondent (a verbal noun phrase), e.g. *The scraping was done now* vs. *Kruajtja tani kish marrë fund*. Therefore, it can be predicted that the Albanian EFL students will not have difficulties in learning this form.

1.2.4 The following case of the –ING clause as the subject is similar to the Albanian correspondent, e.g. *Cooking for the night was over* (a non-finite clause) vs. *Të gatuarit e darkës kish marrë fund* (a gerund construction). This close similarity between the two structures in the two languages suggests that the Albanian EFL students should not have difficulty in the acquisition of this English structural pattern.

Similarly, the structural similarity between the gerund construction preceded by a determiner in the initial position of the sentence and its Albanian correspondent can be seen in the following example. The English determiner *my* pre-modifying the –ING form in its Albanian correspondent is substituted by the definite article *i, palim (i)*, for e.g. *My packing was nearly done* vs. *Palimi i teshave gati ishte kryer*.

Due to this similarity between the gerund construction and its correspondent in Albanian, it can be hypothesized that the Albanian EFL student may not face considerable difficulty in learning it.

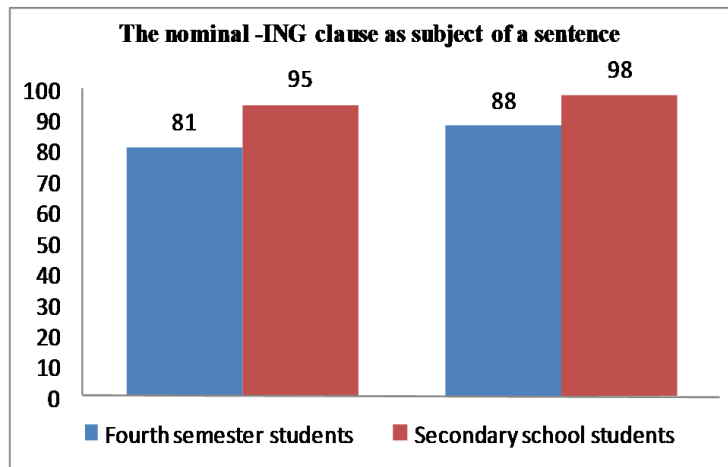
1.2.5 In the description of the –ING clause as the subject in section 1.1, it has also noted that there are certain cases where the English nominal –ING clause as the subject is different from its Albanian correspondent, e.g. *Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma* (a tense-less clause) vs. *Ta vështrosh bregun si shket pranë anijes është si të zgjidhësh një enigma* (tensed clause). A reasonably correct prediction can be made that the Albanian EFL student should face great difficulty in the acquisition of this structure.

In conclusion, a general rule that the English gerund construction (*my packing, the scraping, etc.*) has, as does its Albanian correspondent, verbal noun phrases can be made. Whereas, an English –ING clause (*watching a coast as it slips by the ship*) has as its Albanian correspondent a finite clause with a verb phrase.

2. Conclusion

The performance and the results of all pilot questionnaire participants are displayed in tables below.

The nominal –ING clause as	Fourth year secondary students of	Correct Responses Percentage %	Fourth semester students of Syntax 1	Correct Responses Percentage %
Subject of the sentence		a) 95%		a) 81%
		b) 98%		b) 88%



Based on the ranking of the differences, similarities and identities between the English nominal –ING clause as subject and its Albanian correspondents according to their relative learning difficulty, this paper reached the following conclusion:

Due to the variety of the Albanian correspondents of the –ING clause as subject of a sentence, the Albanian EFL student can become puzzled about various functions and meanings the English –ING clause has. Therefore, it can be predicted that he or she may experience difficulty in acquiring these functions. This hypothesis was not entirely correct, as seen from the results of the pilot questionnaire.

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the fourth semester participants used the –ING clause correctly and ninety-five percent (95%) of the secondary school participants used the –ING clause as subject of a sentence correctly.

From the description of the nominal –ING form above, it can be concluded that whenever we come across the gerund constructions in English, their Albanian correspondents are verbal noun phrases. When the –ING form is a nominal clause as subject of the sentence it sometimes differs from its Albanian correspondent. The example in (8) confirms this and furthermore, it has been concluded that their Albanian correspondents are similar in structure and function except in an isolated case such as (8) which appears to have different structure: a clause introduced by a verb.

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