
(1) a. *the singing the aria c. him singing the aria e. his singing (of) the aria
b. the singing of the aria d. *him singing of the aria

However, in this talk we argue that examples such as (1-a) (hereafter the+VPing) have been too quickly dismissed in the literature. We present new empirical observations concerning their use; these indicate that future insight into -ing nominalization crucially depends on connecting their morphosyntax to the discourse status of the referents of these nominals, on the one hand, and to whether they have type- vs. token reference, on the other.

We propose making this connection by analyzing the various -ing forms in light of the layered DP hypothesis (Zamparelli 1995).

The data: The+VPing is known to have existed in older varieties of English (Poutsma 1923, Jackendoff 1977, Abney 1987, Milsark 2005 and references cited there), but the sources that mention such examples do not consider them a relevant part of the syntax of contemporary English. For example, Milsark describes such structure as “entirely impossible in contemporary English”, citing examples similar to (1-a) as support (see also judgments in Moulton 2004, Newmeyer 2009); Abney mentions very briefly examples like (2-a,b) but sets them aside as idiomatic and “disquotational”, respectively. By “disquotational”, he means that the VP is effectively treated as an unanalyzed unit comparable to a pro-property.

(2) a. There’s no fixing it now. b. This telling tales out of school has to stop.

However, a search of the GloWbE corpus (corpus.byu.edu) reveals that the+VPing is alive and well; (3) provides representative examples.

(3) a. I’ve recently decided to learn how to wear a bit of make-up ... For a “normal” person, it’s the not wearing make-up that is stressful and prone to judgment.

b. There was a quiz in class the question who is the prime minister of Australia? They were in teams but another child commented that “you dont know the answer to that Luca’ ha ha ha and well he did but not in that split second. The topic came up at the dinner table that night. “Mum who is the prime minister of Australia”? By bedtime he was confiding in me and was upset about what happened so it wasn’t just the knowing the answer it was feeling like he was ‘stupid’.

c. [Context: I think the best solution is that your mom doesn’t just drop in, your [fiancé] gets a heads up...] I agree with the giving him a heads up and allowing him space.

d. [Context: It’s his iphone. He never lets me see it...] I wouldn’t say right away that keeping his iPhone on him all the time is an indicator... The not allowing you to see it would bug me big time though.

Characteristics of the data: This data has likely been overlooked due to the very special discourse conditions that must hold for the felicitous use of the+VPing. As the literature has observed, the+VPing is not licit (and not attested) in most argument positions; occurrences are almost always found as the focus of it-clefts (3-a,b), in the pivot of existential constructions (2-a), introduced by expressions such as I agree with... or I hear you on... (3-c), or as subjects of individual-level or generic predicates (3-d). We argue that the semantic commonality underlying these different syntactic positions is that they permit or require type-referential, as opposed to token-referential, expressions (see Carlson 1977, Barwise & Perry 1983, McNally 1992, Landman & Morzycki 2003, i.a. on the distinction and discussion of some of these contexts). A second characteristic is the discourse familiarity of the eventuality type referred to with the+VPing. All observed instances (with one systematic set of exceptions; see below) are discourse-linked to an eventuality description already present in the discourse. Neither characteristic is necessary for the minimally contrasting Poss+VPing construction, as witnessed in (4-a) where the referent of the construction is both token level and novel in the discourse; we have not found the+VPing in the same context, and examples such as (4-b) are notably degraded.

(4) a. But Cube got into an argument with Priority Records ... over his not getting paid an advance on his solo album.

b. ??...over the not getting paid an advance on his solo album.

Crucially, Poss+VPing is also able to receive a temporal specification independent of that of the main clause.

Thus, though Abney is correct in detecting something special about the+VPing, setting aside such examples as disquotational leaves unanswered the question of why precisely the+VPing, as opposed to e.g. -ing-of expressions, is used in these contexts, and why type-, as opposed to token-, reference is required.
Analysis: We follow the assumption defended in e.g. Abney 1987 that different gerunds can be distinguished in terms of the different sizes of the extended verbal projection selected by -ing. Specifically, drawing on an idea in Pires (2006), who analyzes certain cases of obligatory control gerunds as TP-deficient (e.g. that in *tried talking to Mary), we assign the+VPing the syntax in (5):

\[
(5) \quad \text{DP} [\text{VP} [\text{DP} \text{the+VPing}]]
\]

Following Kratzer (1996), we assume that the external argument is not introduced by V but rather by a higher functional projection that is missing in this case. As a result, there is no PRO in this representation, nor is there the possibility of an overt subject:

\[
(6) \quad \ast \text{The him singing the aria}
\]

This fits with the interpretation of the+VPing, as it is never controlled. The identity of the missing argument is typically inferred through the anaphoric relation (e.g. (3-d), where the+VPing picks up on *He never lets me see it); when the identity of the argument is not specified in the antecedent, neither is it in the+VPing (e.g. (3-a,c)). The lack of a Tense projection accounts for the failure of the+VPing to receive any temporal specification other than what might come from the antecedent; moreover, assuming that Tense is responsible for the existential quantification of the (token) event argument (Kratzer 1996), the lack of Tense also accounts for the lack of token event reference (though see below). Perhaps controversially, we treat nor as a VP modifier.

We account for the fact that these expressions have a type-level interpretation, as opposed to being ill-formed, by extending the layered-DP analysis of ordinary nominals first developed in Zamparelli (1995). On a slightly updated version of this analysis, nouns denote descriptions of kinds, rather than of token-level entities (see e.g. McNally & Boleda 2004); functional material – we assume Number – can convert the kind description to a token-level description that can take token-level modification ((7-a,b), see Espinal 2010 for compositional details). The analysis also permits representing definite kind-denoting nouns by allowing NP to complement D directly ((7-c,d); again, see Espinal 2010).

We propose an analogous representation for the+VPing, where VP denotes a description of event-types (e_k):

\[
(7) \quad \ast \text{the+VPing}
\]

Like (7-d), this will have type-level reference. However, we propose that there are three possible mechanisms for converting the -ing form into a token-level description, the details of which will be spelled out in the talk:
1) nonfinite Tense, which not only introduces a token event variable but also forces the introduction of an external argument, resulting in Poss-ing; 2) Number, which adds count/noncount features and yields -ing-of; and 3) coercion via an overt or implicit token-level restrictive modifier. To illustrate this last option, consider the following sentence from GloWbE, which appears near the end of a text describing a specific event of loss.

\[
(9) \quad \text{And underneath all of the sadness, the pain, the loss and the grief and the denial and the not wanting to believe it had happened, it showed us that yes, actually we did have a baby...}
\]

(9) clearly refers to a particular situation of not wanting to believe something that the speaker experienced. It is also worth noting that inspection of the context reveals that the definite article is used here not for anaphoric reference -- the not wanting to believe is not previously mentioned -- but rather it indicates uniqueness of the sort that restrictive relative clauses can induce.

Outlook: This study adds a novel type of evidence for the crucial role of the type/token distinction in grammar. On an empirical level, it opens new avenues for investigation into the subtle contrasts between the paradigm of -ing forms in (1). Finally, methodologically, it underscores the potential for large corpora to uncover the synchronic robustness and theoretical interest of what might have seemed a residual or even non-existent construction.