Verbs Taking "to+v" or "v+ing" as Their Complements: A Cognitive Grammar Account

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Abstract

This paper intends to explain why some verbs take "to+v" as their complements while others take "v+ing" within the framework of Cognitive Grammar developed by Ronald Langacker. It is proposed that infinitives and present participles are perceived in different ways. They both lie on a continuum marked by a noun and a verb at two ends which can follow a matrix verb. However, the infinitive is more like a verb which profiles a process happening in the future, while the present participle is more like a noun which profiles a thing popping up as an immediate scope during the process of the matrix verb. Finally, two criteria are put forward to explain the reasons why verbs take "to +v" or "v+ing" as their complements. And more specific classifications and explanations about this construction are provided.

Keywords: Verb complement, Infinitive, Present participle, Cognitive grammar

1. Introduction

English verbs can be finite and nonfinite depending on whether they can be inflected by grammatical tenses. There are three types of nonfinite verbs: infinitive, participle and gerunds, which are difficult for EFL and ESL learners to understand and master. Especially learners cannot distinguish verbs taking "to+v" as their complements from verbs taking "v+ing" as their complements, for example:

(1). a. Jack asked to change his seat.

   b*. Jack asked changing his seat.

   c. Jack enjoyed doing his job.

   d*. Jack enjoyed to do his job.

They don't understand why (1a) and (1c) are acceptable while (1b) and (1d) don't work. Even worse, there are verbs which can take both as their complements, differing to a certain degree in their meanings, for instance:

(2). a. Jack forgot locking the door.

   b. Jack forgot to lock the door.

Therefore, many learners are puzzled with these questions: what verbs can take "to+v" as their complements? What verbs can take "v+ing" as their complements? What verbs can take both? And what are the differences? Unfortunately previous grammar books (Quirk et al 1985; Zhang Daozhen 2002; Zhang Zhenbang 1983) only list the typical verbs and give a brief description of the usages. Learners who have been studying English for many years still don't understand why we put infinitives after certain verbs instead of present participles, and make mistakes now and then. A better solution, I think, is to help learners to understand the cognitive motivations of infinitives and participles, so that they can use these different expressions based on their logical reasoning instead of incomplete grammatical rules. For this purpose, we will turn to theories proposed by Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 2008). Hopefully, Cognitive Grammar will provide a better explanation for the differences between infinitive and participles, helping learners to improve their grammatical competence.

2. Basic Tenets of Cognitive Grammar

Cognitive Grammar (CG for short) was proposed by Ronald Langacker in the last 80's of last century (Langacker 1987; Langacker 1990). Its fundamental claim is that grammar (or syntax) does not constitute an autonomous formal level of representation (Chomsky 1957, 1965). Instead, grammar is symbolic in nature, consisting in the conventional symbolization of semantic structure. Lexicon and grammar form a gradation consisting solely in assemblies of symbolic structures. An immediate consequence of this position is that all constructs validly posited for grammatical description (e.g. notions like "noun", "subject", or "past participle") must in some way be meaningful (Langacker 2008:5).

For defining basic categories of grammatical classes, Langacker (2008) adopts the term

entity to mean anything that might be conceived of or referred to in describing conceptual structure: things, relations, quantities, sensations, changes, locations, dimensions, and so on. In schematic diagrams, entities are shown as rectangles. Each category is characterized in terms of what an expression profiles. Thus, a noun is defined schematically as an expression that profiles a **thing** (in diagrams, a thing is represented by a circle or an ellipse) and other basic classes profile **relationships** (in diagrams, relationships are often depicted by lines or arrows connecting the entities participating in them). The most fundamental relationship is the distinction between a **process** and a **nonprocessual** relation. A process develops through time, represented by the arrow labeled t. These notions can be represented in the following diagram:
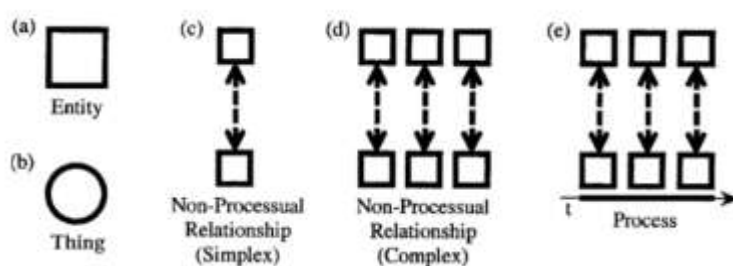

Figure 1. Diagrammatical Representations (Langacker 2008:99)

Now a verb can be defined schematically as an expression that profiles a process. Other traditional categories including adjective, adverb, preposition and participle are all characterized as profiling nonprocessual (atemporal) relationships.

The perception of a verb is like a process of **scanning** which implies some kind of mental operation serving to register the uninterrupted occurrence of constitutive entities throughout their expanse. There are two types of scanning: **sequential scanning** and **summary scanning**. The former means mentally tracking an event as it unfolds through time; while the latter means all the component states are simultaneously active and available.

3. Cognitive Grammatical Views towards "to+v" and "v+ing"

The noun and verb schemas are polar opposites. These schemas are based on different cognitive abilities (grouping and reification vs. apprehending and tracking relationships). They contrast in the nature of their profile (thing vs. relationship), degree of elaboration (simplex vs. complex), and mode of scanning (summary vs. sequential). Between the two extremes lie expressions that differ from nouns because they profile relationships and from verbs because these relations are nonprocessual (Langacker 2008:112). We believe infinitives and present participles lie just somewhere between nouns and verbs.

3.1 The Infinitive: to v

The infinitive can be seen as intermediate, resembling the verb in one respect and the preposition in the other. Because it derives from the verb, the infinitive certainly views the component states in relation to time. Its atemporality must therefore be due to scanning---evidently, the infinitival *to* imposes summary scanning on the verbal process. Thus the infinitive *to v* preserves the component states of v, still conceived as extending

through time, but scans them in summary fashion.

3.2 Present Participle: V+Ing

Compared to infinitives, the elements referred to as present participles have a more substantial impact on the processual base. Affected are not only the mode of scanning but additional factors like profiling and focal prominence. In one way or another, participles invoke a certain vantage point for viewing the processual content. English shows this fairly clearly. The so-called present participle, formed with –ing, takes an "internal perspective" on the verbal process. The so-called past participle, derived by -ed (and a variety of irregular inflections), adopts a "posterior" vantage point.

The present participle profiles a complex relationship, whose characteristic feature is that it represents an internal portion of some longer process. Stated in CG terms, -ing imposes a limited **immediate scope** (IS) in the temporal domain. Since the immediate scope is the "onstage" region, the locus of viewing attention, those portions of the processual base that fall outside its confines are excluded from the profile.
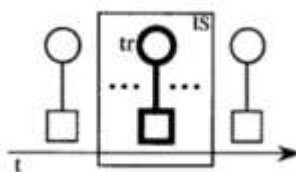

Figure 2. Immediate Scope(Langacker 2008:121)

This is seen in Figure 2, where the beginning and end of the verbal process lie outside the immediate temporal scope, which delimits the relationship profiled by the present participle. The ellipses (…) indicate a further effect of -ing: to abstract away from any differences among the focused states, thus viewing them as effectively equivalent. Hence the profiled relationship is construed as masslike and homogeneous. (Langacker 2008:120-21)

3.3 Nonfinite Verbs

Diagram (a) represents a process. Its profile is a complex relationship, scanned sequentially. Diagram (b) shows the minimal adjustment brought about by infinitivalization or participialization: the imposition of summary scanning (indicated by the absence of a bar along the time arrow). This does not itself imply a change in profile. An infinitive or present participle may still profile a complex relationship comprising all the component states of the verbal process. A summary view does however constitute one essential step toward nominalization. The other step is a shift in profile to a thing, which can be either a participant in the original process or else a conceptual reification of that process itself. The latter option is depicted in diagram (c) (Langacker 2008:119-20).
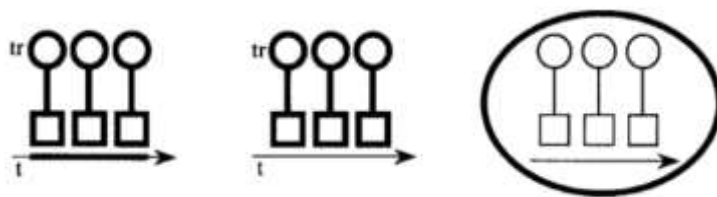
(a) verb   (b) nonfinite verb   (c) noun

Figure 3. Diagrammatical Representations of Noun, Verb and Nonfinite Verb (Langacker 2008:119)

4. Further Exploration of Verb Phrases

Although Langacker (2008) gave a description and explanation on infinitives and present participles within cognitive grammar framework as stated above, he didn't move further to explain why some verbs go with infinitives while others go with present participles and why some verbs can take both, thus leaving these research questions to the present paper. After further explorations in cognitive linguistics and the corpus of V+ to +v and V+ v+ing, we find it totally possible to build up an explanation framework for this linguistic phenomenon. Our speculation and framework will be presented in the following.

For nouns, the archetype functioning as category prototype is the conception of physical object. For verbs, it is the conception of participants interacting energetically in a "force-dynamic" event (Talmy 1988). Both figure prominently in a more elaborate conceptual archetype which Langacker (1987) refers to as the billiard-ball model: we think of our world as being populated by discrete physical objects. These objects are capable of moving about through space and making contact with one another. Motion is driven by energy, which some objects draw from internal resources and others receive from the exterior. When motion results in forceful physical contact, energy is transmitted from the mover to the impacted object, which may thereby be set in motion to participate in further interactions.

Based on this billiard-ball model, we can see that what follows a verb should be something which can take the energy transmitted by it. A noun thus is the ideal object. Therefore, Verb + Noun is the most typical combination in all languages. When we turn to other grammatical classes, we find that this billiard-ball model is quite useful because it can help us to make a clear distinction between those elements which can or cannot follow the verb. For example, an adjective can not follow a verb, because the adjective profiling a property which cannot accept the energy transmitted by the verb. Such grammatical classes also include adverb, article, preposition, conjunction and interjection. We paid special attention to the verb. Can a verb follow another verb? After careful examination, we found theoretically it is still possible, because the energy of an action can be passed down to another action which can pass further down to other actions or objects. However, in English, this is only special cases. Only very small number of verbs can take another verb as its complement. For example:

(3) **Come see** what we're all about.
    Let's **go play** a little more before dinner
    Leave go of the child!
    He **made believe** to know everything about the secret.

Bill held my hands and didn't want to **let go**.

To summarize, verbs which can take another verb include *come, go, hear, help, leave, let, make and try*, are treated as special cases and sometimes they are considered as phrases or idioms. However, we find strong evidence in other languages, such as Chinese. In Chinese, two verbs can be used together, forming the so-called serial verbal construction. For instance,

(4) 他没在宿舍，**去踢**足球了。
    ta mei zai sushe, qu ti zuqiu le
    he not at dormitory, go kick football LE
    He was not at the dormitory. He has gone to play football.

(5) 我父亲昨天**来看**我了。
    wo fuqin zuotian lai kan wo le
    my father yesterday come see me LE
    My father came to visit me yesterday.

In Examples (4) and (5), you can see that two verbs, in these cases "去"and"踢", "来" and "看" can be used together. And these cases are natural and common uses of verbs. This proves that a verb can take another verb as its complement, but it only works under certain circumstances or in certain languages.

In the above speculation, we can see that as the complement of a verb, the noun and the verb are taking two ends of a continuum as shown below:
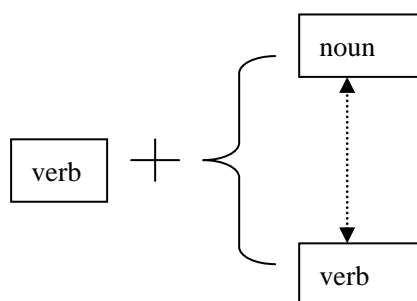
Figure 4. Verb Complement Continuum

In te following, let's find out what is in between and how they are placed. As elaborated in section 2, a noun profiles a thing, which is scanned summarily and has no feature of temporality, while a verb profiles a process which is sequentially scanned and takes the feature of temporality. We can take these two features (scanning and temporality) as two parameters to define the elements which can follow a verb. We can show these relations in the following diagram:
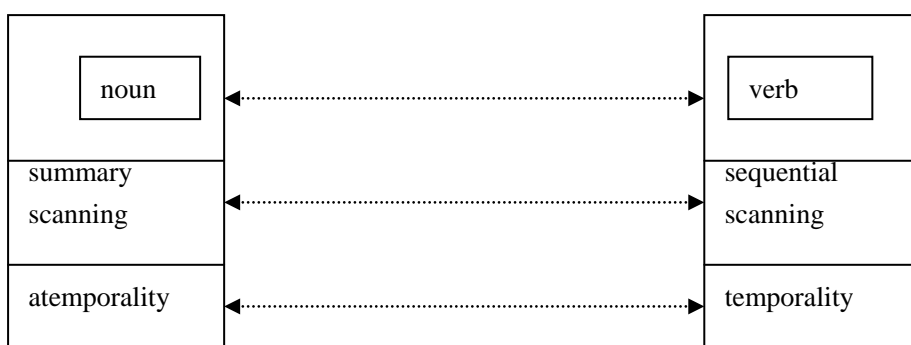
Figure 5. The Characterization of the Continuum

According to their scanning types and temporality types, other grammatical classes, such as infinitive and present participles, can be placed on this continuum.

5. The Placement of Infinitive and Present Participle

The next question is how to place infinitives and present participles, that is, which of the two is nearer to the verb end of continuum. Check the following examples first,

(6) a. I hope *to see* you soon.

b. We enjoy *seeing* the film.

In (6a), *to see* carries a strong sense of action and process, which is more like a verb. It evolves along the time line and scans sequentially. However, in (6b), *seeing the film* is more viewed as a whole event. It is holistically perceived. It is more like a noun. The temporality is backgrounded. That is why in some grammar books (such as Zhang Daozhen 2002), v+ing following the matrix verb is not categorized as present participle. He defined them as gerunds, which is more like a noun.

Based on the above speculation, we can place *to+v* and *v+ing* into the continuum in the following way:
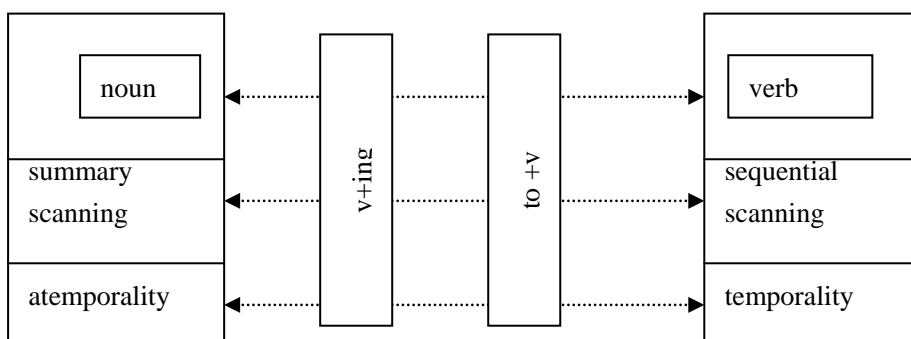

Figure 6. The Placement of Infinitive and Present Participle

As stated by Langacker (2008), *-ing* imposes a limited immediate scope in the temporal domain. It takes an internal perspective while past participal *–ed* adopts a posterior vantage point. If defined from this approach, to-infinitives usually have a future orientation. Therefore,
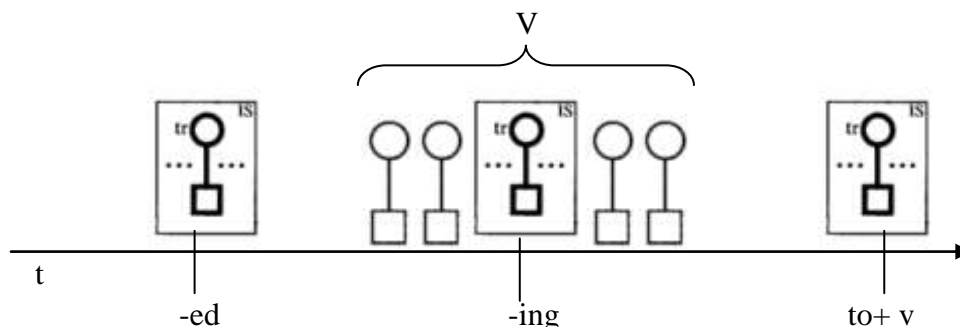
we can depict them in one diagram like this:

Figure 7. The Immediate Scopes of Infinitives, Present Participle and Past Participle

Along the time *t* axis, the matrix verb big "V" profiles a process, in between popping up the immediate scope triggered by *–ing*. The past participle *–ed* usually designates actions happening before the matrix process while the infinitive *to+v* showing actions to happening in the near future.

6. Analysis of the Constructions of Verbs Taking v+ing or to+v

In order to understand the V+ v-ing and V+to+v constructions, it is necessary to analyze the interactions between V and *v-ing* and *to+v*. In English, some verbs can only take *to+v* as their complements, such as *afford, agree, decide, decline, fail, hope, offer, pretend, promise, refuse, wish*. Some verbs can only take *v+ing* as their complements, such as *admit, avoid, consider, deny, delay, enjoy, finish, imagine, mind, practise, risk, suggest*. However, there are some verbs which can take both *to+v* and *v+ing* as their complements, differing slightly in their meanings, such as *dread, hate, like, love, prefer, start, continue, cease, remember, forget, regret*. The question here is whether our cognitive framework can explain this phenomenon.

After deep and careful analysis, we find that we can use two criteria to make the distinction. The two criteria are developed based on what we speculated in section 5, which are:

1) *to+v* is more like a verb, profiling a process, while *v+ing* is more like a noun, profiling a thing.

2) *to+v* implies an action happening in the future while *v+ing* implies an action happening during the process of the matrix verb.

By combining these two criteria, we can judge whether a verb should take *to+v* or *v+ing* as its complements. Look at the following examples,

(7) a. We managed to put the fire out.

b. They failed to fulfill the plan.

c. She preferred to stay behind.

d. We can't afford to stay at a five-star hotel.

It is very clear that the *to+v* constructions have the property of temporality and will happen

after the actions designated by the matrix verbs. For instance, in (7a), "to put the fire out" is the purpose of the action "manage" and it will take place after the end of the action "manage". Other sentences are in the same situation which can be diagrammed as follows:
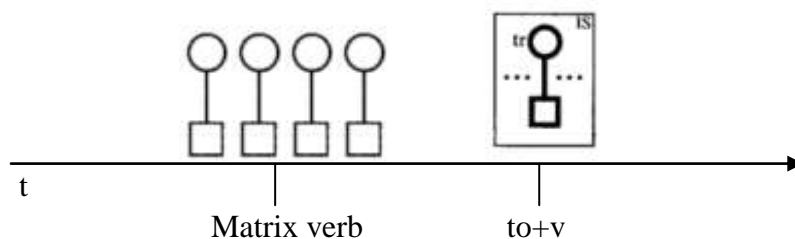

Figure 8. The Position of Infinitive on the Time Axis

For verbs taking *v-ing* as their complements, for instance,

(8) a. Do you enjoy teaching English?

b. I dread going to the big parties.

c. I finished reading the book last night.

d. He considered going to see Paul in person.

We can see that *v+ing* actions here are perceived as a whole, that is, the so-called summary scanning. And it usually happens as an immediate scope during the matrix verbal process. For example, in (8a), "teaching English" is taken as an event, as a thing. And it happens along the process of "enjoy" as diagrammed below:
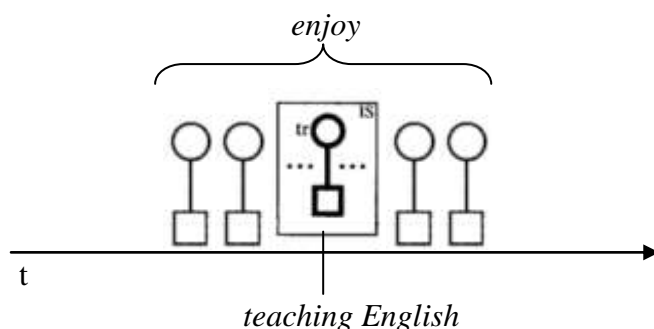

Figure 9. The Position of Present Participle on the Time Axis

According to Quirk et. al. (1985:1192), there are three classes of verbs which can take both *to+v* and *v+ing* as their complements. Firstly, emotive verbs, such as *dread, hate, like, loathe, love* and *prefer*. The bias of the infinitive towards "potentiality" tends to favor its use in hypothetical and nonfactual context, e.g.

(9) Would you like to see/*seeing my stamp collection?

On the other hand, the participial construction is favored where the speaker is referring to something which definitely happens or has happened

(10) Brian loathed ?to live/living in the country.

Here *to live* implies that Brian could exercise choice about where to live, whereas *living*

presupposes that he actually did live in the country and probably had no choice in the matter.

This type of verbs also works out in our framework. *To+v* is more like a verb that will happen in the future while *v+ing* is more like a noun that is happening or has happened.

The second type is the aspectual verbs of beginning, continuing and ending. E.g.

(11) Lucy started/continued/ceased to write/writing while in hospital.

The contrast between "potentiality" and "performance" may influence the choice:

(12)a. He started to speak, but stopped because she objected.

b. He started to speak, and kept on for more than an hour.

The third type is retrospective verbs, such as *forget, remember* and *regret*. For this type, the "potentiality"/"performance" distinction becomes extended into the past so that there is a temporal difference between the two constructions. The infinitive construction indicates that the action or event takes place after (and as a result of) the mental process denoted by the verb has begun, while the reverse is true for the present participle construction, which refers to a preceding event or occasion coming to mind at the time indicated by the main verb (Quirk et. al. 1985:1193).

(13) a. I remembered to fill out the form. [I remembered that I was to fill out the form and then did so]

b. I remembered filling out the form. [I remembered that I had filled out the form]

This further proves that our criteria still work in these types of verbs. If they take *to+v* as complement, it means something is going to happen. If they take *v+ing* as their complement, it means something has already happened.

7. Conclusion

Our main purpose of this study is to look for a better explanation for the verbs taking *to+v* (infinitive) or *v+ing* (present participle) as their complements by borrowing ideas from Cognitive Grammar. Up to now, it is proved that Cognitive Grammar does work in this aspect.

Our major finding is that elements which can work as the complements of a verb form a continuum. One end is the noun and the other end is the verb. Infinitives and present participles lie just on this continuum. However, infinitives resemble more like a verb. They profile a process which is sequentially scanned and takes the feature of temporality, representing an immediate scope showing actions happening in the near future. Present participles resemble more like a noun. They profile a thing, which is scanned summarily and have no feature of temporality.

Two criteria are proposed to explain the difference between the infinitives and present participles following the matrix verb: first, infinitive is more like a verb, profiling a process, while present participle is more like a noun, profiling a thing; second, infinitive implies an

action happening in the future while present participle implies an action happening during the process of the matrix verb.

Our framework is applicable in explaining the three classes of verbs which can take both infinitive and present participle as their complements (Quirk et. al. 1985).

This finding has great implications for both EFL and ESL learners and teachers. The cognitive explanation operating on the logical and reasoning level can generate better results. In the future, we may design some experiments to testify our speculations.

Acknowledgement

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