The translation of *-ing* nominal constructions into Spanish: a corpus-based study

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1. Introduction

The *-ing* ending is a complex resource in English that realizes various syntactic functions and conveys a wide range of meanings. A clear understanding of the syntactic functioning of the *-ing* form might contribute to a correct interpretation of its meaning, which is essential for the translator. In addition to being ambiguous and multifunctional in English, another complication to bear in mind is the fact that one specific *-ing* construction can be equivalent to various expressions in a given target language. This paper aims at extending our knowledge about the relation between the English *-ing* form and Spanish. In particular, it deals with the translation of *-ing* nominal constructions into Spanish on the assumption that the gerund might not be equivalent to such *-ing* constructions, since it is a central resource to realize adverbial meanings through adverbial-like constructions.[1] My study takes a syntactic approach, focusing on the function of such constructions and their grammatical implications for translation. In order to analyse these phenomena, I have worked with a parallel corpus, where one half is made up of original texts in English that allows us to carry out a descriptive analysis of the constructions that are considered the problem for translation. Simultaneously, the corpus provides an empirical repository of translational options in the target language, which, being functionally equivalent to the original text, provide information on the functional contrastive relation between the two linguistic codes.

2. The problem: *-ing* [nominal] constructions

Due to its morphological and syntactic ambiguity the *-ing* form is rather challenging in grammar. Even in the early stages of the English language it was associated with two word classes: abstract nouns ending in *-inge*, which belong with the so-called gerund, and the present participle of the verbal paradigm. In the evolution of the language the *-ing* verbal form took over the functions of the original gerund, along with its own functions as an adjective and as a verb, resulting in a multifunctional resource. On the one hand, the *-ing* ending is fairly productive for word formation, generating full adjectives and nouns which are categorised as such within the system. On the other hand, it takes part in many syntactic constructions, all of them different in grammatical nature. Apart from some fossilized cases, there is no clear-cut classification of most *-ing* forms, which, more often than not, retain their verbal nature irrespective of their actual function in a given text. This broadens their complexity.

One particular construction that might trigger problems is that *-ing* form which, in a given co-text, has taken on a nominal status, resembling nouns either in form and/or function. Following Biber *et al.* (1999: 230), nominal constructions are here conceived of as «not only phrases headed by a noun or pronoun, but all constituents which appear in positions characteristic of noun-headed structures including, for example, phrases with adjectives used as noun phrase heads (7.6.2.) and complement clauses».

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[1] I refer to the so-called ««gerundios adjuntos»» (Fernández Lagunilla 1999), the high frequency and centrality of which for conveying adverbial meanings make them one more autonomous resource for the realization of such meanings.

This paper considers: a) simple noun phrases (NP) where the head is an *-ing* form surrounded by the typical constituents of an NP such as premodifying determiners, which hint at the nominal nature of such a head, and b) *-ing* constructions that are non-finite nominal clauses. I will refer to the former as a gerundial NP and to the latter as a non-finite complement clause. The *-ing* form functioning as the head of the NP considered here is not immediately perceived as a noun by itself. The co-text determines this specific function. Thus, the criteria according to which the constructions identified have been classified are the surrounding co-text and the rank they belong to, as well as the assumption that the translational options might differ from one another. In either case the *-ing* ending is part of a sentence element which syntactically functions either as subject, object and/or predicative, the latter two being verb complements. Verb complementation, which occupies most of the second part of the study, provides a further motivation for analysing these nominal constructions. Verb complementation is a very tricky matter in English syntax, especially in the case of interpretation on semantic grounds, which is essential for translation.

3. The data

Six hundred eighteen parallel concordances the original English half of which contains an *-ing* nominal construction are described in context. After the description of the English constructions, their translational options are analysed so as to identify recurrent patterns, which make up an inventory of functional equivalents. Data have been taken from the *Actres Parallel Corpus*, an English-Spanish translation corpus of over 2 million original English words and their translation into Castilian Spanish. For this study, a smaller population of 244,276 words representative of fiction and non-fiction discourse (books) has been selected. Using a web browser[2] a search for verbs ending in *-ing* was conducted, resulting in 4,668 hits, out of which the occurrences under present consideration carried out a nominal function. Table 1 shows the number of occurrences of each type of construction distributed in syntactic functions.

Function	Gerundial NP	Non-finite nominals	Total
Object	29	310	339
PrepObject	5	109	114
Subject	34	72	106
Predicative	12	25	37
Adverbial	22	–	22
Total	102	516	618

Table 1. Classification of the *-ing* nominal constructions and their functions

4. The study: The translation of gerundial NPs and of *-ing* non-finite nominal clauses

My study comprises two parallel individual analyses. First let us turn to the one involving the translation of gerundial NPs.

Most of these elements are made up of an *-ing* construction that is pre-modified by an article or determiner, including adjectives. Any gerundial NP is a sentence element syntactically, and most of them belong to those functions centrally realized by a noun, as shown in table 1. The translational options for this construction are illustrated in Figure 1.

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[2] The browser used is IMS Corpus Workbench, which is accessible online. Access is restricted due to some text copyright restrictions.
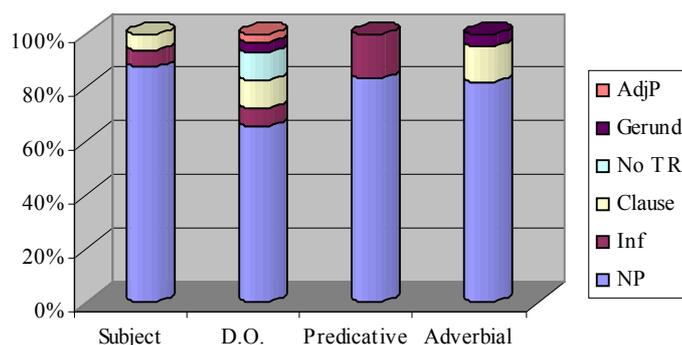
Figure 1. Translational options of gerundial NPs in terms of their function

As expected, the NP is the most frequent option for translating gerundial NPs functioning as subject. There are two infinitives and two full clauses where the gerundial noun becomes the finite VP of the clause.

> 1. …the *having* of rights depends on receipt of a special sort of social recognition and...
>
> 1T. ..*tener* derechos depende de recibir un tipo especial de reconocimiento y…

The range of translational options for gerundial NPs functioning as a direct object is wider. Nineteen are translated as an NP and keep the syntactic function of the original, which is also preserved by the two infinitives found.

> 2…he could not possibly shatter the *covering*
>
> 2T. …comprendió que no era posible romper*la*

There is a shift on three occasions where the original direct object is transposed into a full clause, where the main VP conveys the meaning of the gerundial NP.

> 3. …I send down a prophet or two to do the *yammering* for Me.
>
> 3T. …envío a un profeta o dos para que *se quejen* por Mí…

One possible strategy is not to translate a given instance, which involves two main options: a) either omitting a whole concordance completely or b) omitting part of it for acceptability reasons (idiomatic omission). Sentence fragment 4T below is an example.

> 4…. of how he had to take over the *running* of her inn, of their growing debt
> 4T. …de que él entonces había tenido que hacerse cargo de Ø la posada; de sus crecientes deudas

There is one gerund among this group of translational options, which is rather suspicious because the gerund is not a central resource for realizing the function of direct object in Spanish, nor for expressing the meanings associated with it. However, the gerund found functions as an adverbial of manner, as the concordance 5T shows:

> 5. …but had retired, earning extra money by doing a little *babysitting* now.
>
> 5T. …pero ahora estaba retirada y se ganaba algún dinero *cuidando niños*

The options chosen in 3 and 5 exemplify an up-ranking shift whereby the original direct object of the main verb of an adverbial subordinate clause of purpose (3) or manner (5) is translated by an adverbial construction itself, comprising its lexical meaning and the function of the element in which it is embedded.

On the other hand, there is one instance of down ranking, whereby the original direct object is translated into a post-modifying adjective phrase within the new direct object,

which is headed by the post-modifier of the original construction. Consider 6T:

> 6. ….he was simply sensing the *blooming* of my overweening pride?

> 6T. …estaba simplemente tanteando mi arrogante orgullo *recién brotado*?

The preferred option for translating gerundial NPs functioning as predicatives is the NP, which occurs in 84% of the cases.

> 7. …which is the *policing* and *protecting* of state boundaries against foreigners
> 7T. …que es el *control policial* y *la protección* de las fronteras del Estado contra extranjeros…

The predicative function is preserved in all instances except two, where the translation changes the copular verb for a transitive verb with direct object. The other two instances are translated into an infinitive, one of which is a Prepositional Object (PrepO) and the other a direct object.

Twenty-one gerundial nouns are actually part of a prepositional phrase (PP) functioning as an adverbial. Even though the whole construction does not resemble nominals functionally, it was interesting to see how such gerundial heads have been translated into Spanish. Almost all the heads are translated into a noun which is part of a PP. Four instances become adverbial clauses where the *-ing* NP becomes either a VP (two non-finites and one finite), or a gerund.

> 8. Amid all the *honking* and *hooting* from the river, he doesn't even hear the door close

> 8T. En medio del *ruido de bocinas* y *sirenas* del río, ni siquiera oye cerrarse la puerta

Finally, there are 5 instances of PrepO which are translated into an NP, pre-modified as in the original, functioning either as PrepO or as a direct object, depending on the matrix verb of the translation.

> 9. …a process of democratic iteration which resulted in the *abolishing* of Germany's rather antiquated…
> 9T. …un proceso de iteración democrática que resultó en la *abolición* de las leyes de ciudadanía alemanas más…

The description of the data has revealed gerundial NPs which do not necessarily have a central nominal function as example 8 illustrates. Yet, the NP is a central equivalent, which, in the right co-text, might convey various meanings. This shows that, on its own, a gerundial NP is a referential element whereas in context, it is a carrier of adverbial as well as descriptive meanings.

4.1. *The translation of* -ing *non-finite nominal clauses*

Formally, these *-ing* constructions do not resemble nouns so closely, but the whole construction functions as a noun. The bulk of the data within this group consists of verb complements, although there is a great deal of non-finite nominal clauses functioning as subject that are worthy of attention.
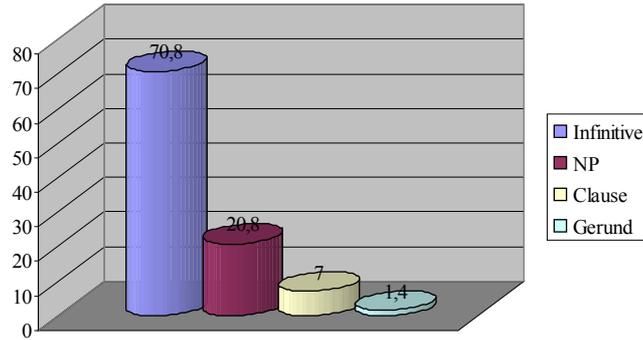
Figure 2. Translation of *-ing* Subject clauses

By far, the most frequent option for translating *-ing* Subject clauses is the infinitive. This is, along with the NP, which ranks second in my results (see Figure 2), one of the central resources in Spanish for realizing this syntactic function and the referential meaning which the original construction conveys. The fact that the infinitive is preferred to the NP might be due to the translators' interest in preserving formal equivalence since both non-finite constructions are grammatically correct in either language.

> 10. *Reading* half a dozen pages of Keats is like yielding to seduction.

> 10T. *Leer* media docena de páginas escritas por Keats es como ceder a la seducción.

Several concordances have been translated into a full clause, two of which are adverbials of manner realized by «*al* + infinitive», which implies a drastic change in meaning and syntactic function. A full clause also implies a syntactic shift. Finally, one subject has been translated into a gerund, which shows a misuse of this form motivated by the assumed equivalence with the *-ing* form.

> 11. *Getting* the media to repeat your words as if they were truth, with hardly a question being asked is a method…

> 11T. *Haciendo* que los medios de comunicación repitan sus palabras como si fueran verdad, sin que apenas las cuestionen, es un método…

4.1.1. Translational options of *-ing* complement clauses

Three types of verb complementation have been identified in terms of the matrix verb; PrepO, [direct] Object and Predicative Complement. The semantics of the matrix verbs and the complementation pattern have been taken into consideration for the analysis.
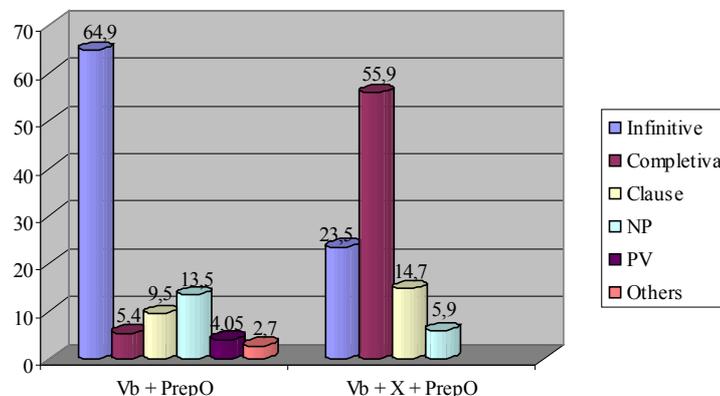

Figure 3. Translational options of *-ing* Prepositional Objects

Thirty-four verbs which govern a PrepO take a direct object as well. Most of these verbs are enablement verbs such as *prevent X from -ing* or *hinder X from -ing*. The most frequent option to translate these constructions is a nominal subordinate clause[3] functioning as the direct object of the main verb of the translation. By this strategy the original D.O. becomes the subject of the translational option.

> 12. How do we prevent it from *happening* again and rid the world of the horror?
>
> 12T. ¿Cómo impedir *que volviera a suceder* y librar al mundo del horror?

There are other nominal subordinate clauses realized by an infinitive, which functions either as the direct object (7 instances) or as PrepO (6 cases). The infinitive ranks second, followed by some full clauses and a couple of NPs.

The remaining concordances take a PrepO alone. Most of them are translated into an infinitive functioning as PrepO. Other options are a couple of *completivas* and an NP.

> 13. The President asked me to focus on *identifying* what the next attack might be and preventing it.
>
> 13T. El presidente me pidió que me centrara *en identificar* cuál podía ser el próximo ataque y evitarlo

Some options imply a syntactic change whereby the matrix verb of the translation requires a direct object, mostly realized by an infinitive. This syntactic change occurs 9 times. Seven original PrepOs are translated as a full clause, and three others as a verbal periphrasis, which might function either as a VP or as an element.

4.1.2. Translational options of *-ing* objects and predicatives

All the main verbs have been classified according to Egan's semantically based study in order to find out specific complementation patterns and see if the translational options vary considerably from one type to another. When considering *-ing* complementation in terms of the semantics of the matrix verb, it became evident that some clauses are not so clearly nominal. Table 2 shows the matrix verbs found and their verb complementation pattern. As can be seen, the table includes prepositional verbs as well, which are the ones dealt with in the previous section.

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[3] By nominal subordinate clause I refer to *subordinadas completivas* in Spanish..

	Verbs	**Complement pattern**
Aspect	Become, Begin, Break out, Carry on, Cease, Continue End up, Finish, Go, Quit, Go on, Keep, Remain, Resume, Start, Stop	Vb + O
Perception	See, Watch, Hear, Catch, Notice, Feel, Find	Vb+O+ ing Pred
Attitude	Avoid, Can't help, (Can't) resist, Give up, Enjoy, Feel like, Like, Mind, Resent, Risk, Want, Persist in, Accuse X of, Worry about	Vb + O Vb + O+ PrepO
Causation	Bring, Get X, Have X, Keep,	Vb + O Vb+ O+ PrepO
Enablement	Avoid, Need, Involve, Entail, Stop, Warn X, Refrain X, Hinder X from, Prevent X from, Ban X from,	Vb + O+ PrepO
Mental	Remember, Recall, Imagine, Consider, Think of/about, Concentrate on, Dream of, Fantasize about,	Vb + O+ PrepO
Communication	Propose, Suggest, Talk about, Say about,	Vb + O
Effort	Try, Resist	Vb + O

Table 2. Matrix verbs that take *-ing* complement clauses

a) *Aspect verbs* are very frequently complemented by an *-ing* clause, whose subject is the same as that of the matrix verb (Egan's SS constructions). The presence of the complement clause is necessary for the matrix verb to convey its meaning fully. The vast majority of 'aspect verb + *-ing* clause' constructions (98 out of 117) are translated into a verbal periphrasis (VPer), which is central for conveying aspect in Spanish.

14. Two of the junior sprats began *weeping*, so I stood up

14T. Dos de los alevines más jóvenes *comenzaron a llorar*, por lo que me enfrenté

Another minor option is a full clause, where the aspectual reference of the matrix verb is either completely lost or maintained through the semantics and tense of a given lexical verb as in 15.

15. My mood kept *surging* from ineffable sadness to huge irritation

15T. Mi humor *oscilaba* entre una tristeza inefable y una enorme irritación

b) *Perception verbs* rank second in taking *-ing* verb complementation. According to Egan, all these constructions take another object, which is both the direct object of the matrix verb and the S of the *-ing* clause. He names them S2 constructions. After perception verbs *-ing* clauses function as predicative complements, which hints at a certain adjectival nature. However, these clauses have their own S, the whole construction functioning as a nominal object of the matrix verb. It is an interesting construction where translational options draw patterns that imply various syntactic shifts. The most recurrent option is a predicative gerund[4], which characterizes the D.O. of the matrix verb as shown in example 16.

16. From the touchline I heard Ben and Peter *screaming* my name and I …

16T. Oí a Ben y a Peter *chillando* mi nombre desde la línea de touch, y les …

Several constructions are equivalent to a *completiva*; finite *completivas* consist of the matrix object functioning as S and the *-ing* form as the finite VP (17T). On the other hand, there is another strategy whereby the *-ing* clause becomes a non-finite *completiva* on its own, realized by an infinitive, following the object of the matrix

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[4] Gerundios ppredicativos (Fernández Lagunilla 1999).

verb[5] (18T).

> 17. I felt a tiny hand *tugging* at my dress and looked down…
>
> 17T. Sentí *que una manita me tiraba* del vestido y bajé la vista…
>
> 18. …all his people to come and watch him *riding* through it…
>
> 18T. …convocó a todo su pueblo para que fuera a ver*le cabalgar* bajo él…

Another option worth commenting on is the use of a relative clause whose finite VP belongs with the *-ing* clause. This option is similar to the participle, which is also used as a predicative on some occasions.

> 19. Sophie felt the ghost of her grandfather *whispering* in her ear.
>
> 19T. Sophie sintió el fantasma de su abuelo *que le susurraba* al oído

With the exception of finite *completivas*, which function as direct object, all the options described up to this point keep the predicative, and, therefore, the characterizing function of the original construction. The remaining options are rather peripheral and most of them realize a different function: full clause, referential clause, adverbial clause, PPs with adverbial meaning, or omissions.

c) Two *attitude verbs* take an S2 construction: *need* and *want*. A finite *completiva* as D.O. is the preferred option for translating such constructions (8 instances).

> 20. We do not want them *saying* where they are going when they take off…
>
> 20T. No queremos *que nadie diga* dónde van cuando despeguen…

Other minor options keep S2 as the object of the matrix verb which is characterized by predicative complements realized by adjectives (2 cases) or modified by a relative clause (1 case). The rest are SS constructions. The inventory of translational options of these constructions is rather heterogeneous and there seems to be no regularities. The infinitive and *completivas* appear more frequently as direct object.

> 21. It was obvious Hank enjoyed *picking* fights…
>
> 21T. Estaba claro que a Hank le encantaba *buscar* camorra…

d) *Causation verbs* take all S2 *-ing* complements, whereas *Enablement* verbs take an *-ing* complement immediately. In either case, an infinitive functioning as direct object is the most frequent option.

> 22. the whole threat of hellfire and damnation that keeps them *doing* My will goes out the window
>
> 22T. entonces toda la amenaza de fuego eterno y condena que les hace *hacer* lo que Yo quiero se va al garete.
>
> 23. …inside her with a piece of wire, something that involves *hooking* and *dragging*
>
> 23T. dentro de ella con un alambre, algo que implica *enganchar* y *arrastrar*

e) The *-ing* clauses complementing verbs of *Mental Process* are frequently translated into a finite *completiva* or an infinitive functioning as the direct object of the matrix verb. Only *imagine* takes an S2 *-ing* complement, which is translated into a predicative gerund characterizing the object of the clause as in 24.

> 24. I imagined myself *pacing* back and forth trying to place my stake in the spot where I would build my house
>
> 24T. Me imaginé a mí misma *yendo y viniendo*, intentando clavar mi estaca en el emplazamiento en el que edificaría mi casa sin llegar nunca a decidirme

f) The *-ing* complement of *Communication verbs* and verbs denoting *Effort* is always translated into an infinitive, which functions as a direct object or PrepO depending

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[5] This option has been illustrated as «infinitive» in figure 4 for the sake of clarity.

on the matrix verb

> 25. He proposed *naming* the months after the seasons of the year, festivals, and holy celebrations
>
> 25T. Propuso *nombrar* los meses según las estaciones del año, las festividades y las celebraciones sagradas
>
> 26. She tried *talking* to him
>
> 26T. Trató *de hablarle*

Figure 4 shows the translational options of *-ing* complements for each matrix verb.
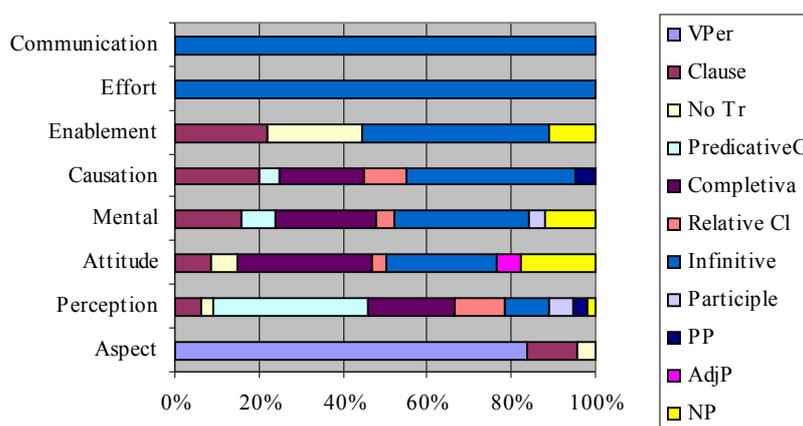

Figure 4. Translational options of *-ing* verb complements

5. Conclusions

The nominal status of the *-ing* constructions under consideration is justified in terms of their form, the surrounding co-text, and their syntactic function. In formal terms, two types of constructions have been distinguished, both of which participate in a core group of syntactic functions. Non-finite *-ing* complement clauses are more frequent than simple gerundial NPs, the translation of which is fairly immediate into either a noun or an infinitive, which are central resources for conveying reference. The translation of non-finite nominals is more complex and has revealed a wide array of options. The following observations might help translators:

1. Verb complementation is determined by the nature of the matrix verb so that the combination makes a meaningful whole.

2. After perception verbs an *-ing* complement acquires of a characterizing function, the syntactic distribution favours of which the use of a predicative gerund in Spanish.

3. An infinitive functioning as O or a subordinate nominal clause (*completiva*) are central equivalents to *-ing* verb complementation.

4. Most syntactic functions share the realization of referential meanings. Thus, a syntactic shift (e.g. from direct object to PrepO) hardly ever implies semantic change.

5. Translational options which differ from the original construction formally risk functional equivalence. These are marginal cases, though.

The study has established linguistic correspondences which, being produced in assumedly equivalent communicative contexts, fairly guarantee functional equivalence.

9

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