



· 语言学论丛 ·

中近代英语中动名词 和现在分词混用现象考

石小军 张 晶 ©著

On the Confusion of Nominal
Gerund and Present Participle in Middle
English and Early Modern English



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前言

On the Confusion of Nominal Gerund and Present Participle in Middle English and Early Modern English 一书基于历史文献中的实例考证,从理论的角度对中古英语中动名词和现在分词现象展开探讨,并特别将关注点聚焦在英语语言发展史中各类语言句法现象变化最为频繁激烈的这近五百年间(1300—1800),V-ing + of-NP 形式的名词性动名词(Bare Nominal Gerund)曾经与现在分词的各种表现经常混用,且其尤为频繁地出现于现在分词进行时的句法位置,如:Why, I was writing of my epitaph. (1607 Shakespeare, *Timon* V, i, 188)这一特殊的历史语言表现上,并将此类语言表现在本研究中命名为混合进行时(Mixed Progressive)。

在先行研究中,包括 Jespersen (1931: 168—169), Visser (1969: § 1122, § 1869), Nehls (1974), Denison (1991: 388—389) 和 Fanego (1996: 102—106)等学者虽然均对此现象有过提及,但都没有给予足够的重视和做出客观全面的论述。这一存在于较长一段历史时期内、看似不符合语法规范的语言现象,并非一种偶然抑或简单的口语化地域性表现,它很可能是动名词和现在分词进行时在英语史中发生质的句法变化时的一种特殊痕迹、一种将要变化又尚未完全实现变化的中间性表现。通过深刻剖析这一现象,不仅能够进一步认识动名词和现在分词进行时现象之间特有的历史联系,还很有可能会为最终解决长期在历史语言学界达不成共识的关于动名词从 14 世纪后半期开始出现动词特征并且这类动词性动名词逐步占据动名词的主导地位、和现在分词进行时也在同时期内猛增且具体用法迅速完善的这两个语言变化的前后过程和实质的这一课题提供一些新的有效的认识角度。因此,本书在把握大量的相关例句和对各类数据进行认真归类分析的基础上,从一定程度上借助转换生成语法的理论视角,尝试对名词性动名词出现在现在分词的句法位置及其最终又消失于此的原因和过程展开了探讨。同时,在探讨混合进行时的过程中,还详细观察了动名词和进行时在上述特定历史时期的各类具体形态和一些极易被忽视的特征,并在此之上又进一步针对前者发生的历史质变提出了一些大胆的推测。另外,在研究方法上,此处将截至目前在各类相关先行研究中较为权威的 Jespersen (1931: 168—169) 的“合并论”贯穿于本研究的整体思路,本研究从其提供的一些线索和空间为切

入点,一步一步接近和重新审视了名词性动名词和现在分词混用现象的实质,并力图由此又打开一些多角度的关于认识动名词和现在分词进行时历史发展的窗口。本书内容大致如下。

在第一章的全书总介绍之后,第二章首先对出现频率最高的混合进行时现象的产生过程和原因进行了分析。Jespersen (1931: 176)认为这种混合进行时来源于在中、近代英语中较为普遍地被用来表达进行时含义的 *be + a + the sb*^①这一介词结构(其中 *a* 不是冠词而被认为是介词 *on* 的缩略形式),当 *a* 由于其简单的形态和发音被完全忽视掉时,*be + Ø + the sb* 的混合进行时即就此产生。本研究在肯定了 Jespersen 的这一“弱化说”(aphesis)的同时,通过大量例证和 *OED* 的理论支持又进一步补充了在同时期内同样被用来代替当时还极不发达的现在分词进行时表达进行时含义的 *be + in / at / on + sb* 也同样可能是混合进行时产生的根源,这之中,*on* 与 *in* 和 *at* 一样也可直接被省略,而不必一定要经过由 *on* 至 *a* 再到被完全省略的途径。

另外,在对相对简单明了的混合进行时的产生过程展开考察的同时,本研究又对全部 66 个具体实例进行了细致观察,并且发现一个非常统一一致的现象,即在这个位置上出现的动名词无一例外地均为 *ØV-ing + of-NP*(简称 BNG^②)类型的名词性动名词,即在主干的 *-ing* 形之前没有定冠词 *the*;而众所周知,在同一历史时期同样也非常典型且存在至今的、在主干的 *-ing* 形之前有定冠词 *the* 的名词性动名词 *Det. V-ing + of-NP*(简称 DNG^③)却被完全排除在这一句法位置之外。值得注意的是,这两种动名词之间的区别长期以来一直都没有引起学界的足够重视,很多学者为了研究的便利起见,甚至将二者等同为一体。但由此处后者完全被排斥在这一位置之外的语言事实可见,二者之间应是有本质区别的,从中甚至可能会找到造成后者得以保留而前者却被淘汰的这一动名词发展变化的原因。本研究通过对大量的相关实例进行分析、在包括对 BNG 和 DNG 内部本身和它们所处于的前后语言环境的逐一细致考察之后发现: BNG 中的 *of-NP* 一般更倾向为 *-ing* 形中的原形动词意义上的宾语,而 DNG 中的 *of* 短语则多为 *-ing* 形中的原形动词意义上的主语;同时,由于 BNG 内部本身一般缺少动作的执行者(*understood subject / implied agent*)而使所传递的信息相对不完整,因此对其前后的语言环境较为依赖,且其意义上的主语也常常可以在周边环境中找到,从而构成一种 BNG 和其外部环境的相互控制(*control*)关系。而 DNG 由于本身的内部结构实际是一个主语和不及物动词的组合,所以其所表达的信息相对独

① Jespersen(1931:XXVII)将 *sb* 定义为 *substantive*,此处特指相当于名词的动名词。

②③ BNG 和 DNG 两个专门术语及其简称最早由 De Smet(2007)提出,本研究沿用了这一说法。

立和完整,对其前后的语言环境依赖程度也相对较弱,相互之间即多为非控制(non-control)关系。同时,本研究所发现的 BNG 和 DNG 之间的区别可以解释缘何是前者而非后者出现在混合进行时的这一疑问。因为现在分词进行时一般为 SVO(动作实施者+助动词 be + Verb-ing + 动作承受者)的结构,显而易见,由我们所发现的 BNG 的第一个本质特征得知,其内部本身已具备 V 和 O 的要素;同时其第二个本质特征所表现出的对其外部环境的依赖以致其经常需要借助外部环境中的某一要素来担当其内部-ing 形中 V 的意义主语 S,才能实现一个相对完整独立的信息的传递,所以,现在分词进行时 SVO 的结构与 BNG 的本质特征相吻合这一前提条件最终导致了 BNG 在现在分词进行时结构中的出现,而 DNG 本身特征同 SVO 的组成要素之间存在有重复和相悖之处,使其终究无法出现在这一句法位置。因此,一方面本研究所总结出的 BNG 和 DNG 的本质区别有理有据地证明了混合进行时中仅有 BNG 出现的原因,另一方面 66 个混合进行时的实例也是对我们 BNG 和 DNG 本质区别上的认识的正确性和合理性的一个有力支持和客观证据。

更为重要的是,在探讨 BNG 和 DNG 的本质特点的过程中,在对大量相关-ing 实例进行考证的基础上,本研究作了一个大胆的推断,即相对于 DNG, BNG 对动词性动名词的产生和发展起的作用会更大一些。本研究发现动词性动名词也具备同 BNG 较为相似的一些特征,比如,其内部结构也为 V+O,即词尾的 NP 与-ing 形中 V 构成谓语和宾语的关系;另外,由于其本身也缺乏 ing 形中 V 的动作实施者,其也常需要借助外部环境中的相应要素的支持来实现一个完整的意思表达。因此本研究推断在动名词的历史质变和发展过程中,动词性动名词和 BNG 以其相似性而属于一个集合,最终前者淘汰后者而成为现代英语中动名词的一种主要类型。虽然本研究没有能够证明出发生在二者之间优胜劣汰的详细过程,但从十五世纪开始曾经长期在各类动名词表现中占主导地位的 BNG 使用频率逐渐下降、而与此同时新生的动词性动名词使用频率逐渐上升的这众所周知的语言发展史实,似乎可以成为对在二者之间所发生的优胜劣汰的一个诠释。另外, DNG 以其不同于上述两种动名词的独有特征而保持了相对独立性,最终导致和另一集合的胜者动词性动名词一起作为动名词的主要形式存在于现代英语当中。毫无疑问,该猜想还需要在今后的进一步研究中加以详尽证实。

第三章继续解析了混合进行时在英语语言发展中消失的原因和过程。本章再次从 Jespersen 的合并理论入手,首先指出 Jespersen 所认为的现在分词进行时来自于 be + [P→Ø] + the sb 结构和在十五世纪还非常不完善的 be + present participle 的合并这一说法并不十分合理确切。在此,本研究通过运用和引申转换生成语法体系的大规则(major rule)和小规则(minor rule)概念,尝试对现在分词进行时在短时期内所

完成的重要的量变和质变这一过程给出了新的更为客观的解释。同时,我们还从具体例文中发现 DNG 和动词性动名词均参与了现在分词进行时的突变过程,从而证明了二者之间所存在的又一相似之处,并为第二章提出的关于动名词发展的推论又提供了一个证据。

其次,本研究还进一步透过 Chomsky(1995)的词典项目(Lexicon)和演算体系(Computation)的视角,证明了 Jespersen 的“合并论”所无法解释的动词性动名词和现在分词进行时在历史上出现过的平行发展的原因和实质。通过运用该理论的核心原则,即把发生屈折变化(Inflection)后的动词作为一个词典项目(lexical item),放入到各类语言现象的演算体系当中,再经过一系列句法规则的制约引导,最终生成不同的语言现象,本研究发现在从名词性动名词到动词性动名词转换过程中和现在分词进行时产生的过程当中,在各自的主要动词 *V-ing* 内部都极其一致地发生了一个从名词性([+N])到动词性的([+V])的质的转换。这一语言现象内部从[+N]到[+V]的转换不仅指出了动名词和现在分词进行时的平行性发展的原因和实质,同时也为混合进行时现象的最终消失做出了解释。因为 BNG *V-ing* + *of* + NP 是一个典型的名词性[+N]词典项目,当现在分词进行时中的 *V-ing* 在句法发展的结果阶段最终转变成为一个动词性词典项目[+V]时,很显然,作为[+N]的 BNG *V-ing* + *of* + NP 已不再适合现在分词进行时中的这个[+V]句法位置,所以导致混合进行时的最终消失。在 Chomsky 的理论体系中,本研究还观察到 BNG 和动词性动名词在名词的内部阶层构造中均属于同一个阶层 N' ,而 DNG 则位于比二者高一个阶层的 N'' ,在此又找到了一个关于 BNG 和动词性动名词之间存在相似性的理论支持。同时,一直存有争议的 Chomsky 的词典项目和演算体系原则从本章所阐述的语言的历时变化(Diachronic change)中也找到了有力支持,这也是本研究的一个重要的学术贡献。

本章最后仍又对混合进行时现象的最终消失做出了专门深入分析。具体通过对 198 例 *be* + *P*(*at* / *in* / *on* / *a*) + *sb* 表现的具体观察指出,该结构中的 *sb* 即动名词词组在名词形式和动词含义之间所存在的不一致(Mismatch)是导致混合进行时最终被界定为不合乎语法而就此消失的又一根本原因。

第四章又对名词性动名词出现于现在分词的其他句法位置,诸如状语、表语和定语表现中的混用现象进行了分析,揭示出了这几类混用现象的共通性。但由于这几类例文的数量总和都不及混合进行时例文的数量,因而此处得出的结论也难免会具有一定的局限性。最后的第五章即为本研究的一个小结。

本研究虽仅仅着眼于一个细微的极易被忽视的历史语言现象,却引出了动名词和现在分词在语言发展史中所有过的互相影响互相作用的这

一重要语言事实,并在推理这一语言变化的实质的过程中,将 Jespersen 和 Chomsky 两位语言学大师的观点和理论有机地结合起来,使两类语言理论体系在此得以相互传承和相互补充。同时,本研究中没有能够解决的一些问题点,比如动词词性动名词是具体如何在同 BNG 的共存中最终淘汰后者而成为一个稳定的语言现象,以及相比较进行时态很早就已经发展完善的现在分词的其他用法是否也对进行时和动名词的历史发展起到过作用等都将会作为笔者今后的课题,会继续探讨研究下去,为动名词和现在分词进行时的历史发展过程这一研究领域做出自己的学术贡献。

最后,本书的完成离不开学界专家同仁的大力支持。感谢本研究的合作同事张晶博士,感谢她为本书撰写所做的大量的例文收集、输入、统计、分析和整理工作;感谢笔者的导师日本庆应义塾大学的儿马修教授,东京学芸大学的长原幸雄教授,广岛大学的地村彰之教授和中尾佳行教授,是他们将笔者领进了历史语言学这个学术领域,感谢诸位恩师十几年来的悉心栽培和始终如一的照顾;另外感谢英国牛津大学(University of Oxford)圣彼得学院(St Peter's College)的 Terry Hoad 教授和比利时鲁汶大学(University of Leuven)的 Hendrik De Smet 教授在百忙中仍抽出宝贵时间来认真解答笔者在研究过程中的各种疑问,并对本书的英文文稿提出了很多宝贵的修改完善意见;感谢笔者所任教的对外经济贸易大学科研处和英语学院的大力支持;最后,感谢英语学院院长王立非教授,北京大学出版社的张冰老师和黄瑞明老师,从本书开始的选题到最后完成的近三年间,均给予了笔者极大的支持和鼓励,在此也一并表示衷心的感谢!由于笔者能力和水平有限,书中必有诸多不足之处,欢迎海内外专家同仁批评指正。

石小军

2010 年 6 月于牛津

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Puzzle

One of the puzzling facts in the historical development of gerund in English is why, over five hundred years covering Middle English (henceforth, ME) and Modern English (henceforth, ModE), nominal gerund was quite frequently used in various positions where we would now use present participle. Examples (1)—(5) illustrate this point:

(1) Progressive construction:

- a) Eny... offre that *were moderynge of youre hoole title, or of eny of youre claymes* beyonde the see (OED). (1414 *Proceedings Privy Council* (1834) II, 141, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1869))
- b) Why, I *was writing of my epitaph*. (1607 Shakespeare, *Timon* V, i, 188, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1869))
- c) he [sc. Hercules] appear'd with a Majesty and a Loftiness which he never us'd to wear when he *was taming of Monsters* upon the earth. (1728 A. Boyer & Littlebury, tr. *Adventures of Telemachus* (Gotha 1826) 292, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1869))

(2) Participial construction:

- a) [they] caused the seyde William horribly to be manassed of hys deth, *betynde and dismembryng of hys persone*. (1424 *The Paston Letters* (Gairdner), I p. 17, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1122))
- b) Whiche myght be sene to se her syt, So bysely *turnyng of the spyte*. (1569 John Heywood, *The Four PP*. (Manly Spec. I) 953, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1122))
- c) her memory ... shall strengthen Mine arme against my foe, which else would droope, *suspecting of her loose*. (1632 Rowley, *All's Lost by Lust* (Belles Lett. Ser.) I, ii, 31, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1122))
- (3) Absolute participle construction:
 - a) The fals contryved evidens that weren sealed be old tyme with the comoun seall, *unwetyng of them*. (1483 Chron, *London* (1827) 131, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1077))
 - b) and then cam the corpse with iiij penons of arms borne a-bowt her stayffes torchys bornyng a-bowt her with xij of ys servands *beyryng of them*; (1553—1559 *Helsinki Corpus*, E1, *Machyn Diary* 47, quoted from Fanego (1996: 105))
 - c) That I do beg this life, if it be sin, Heaven let me bear it! You *granting of my suits*, If that be sin, I'll make it my morn prayer To have it added to the faults of mine, And nothing of your answer. (1603 Shakespeare, *Meas.* II, iv, 70, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1122))
- (4) Manner participle construction:
 - a) then *cam* the men rydyng, *carehyng of torchys* a lx bornyng , at bowt the corsse all the way; (1553—59 *Machyn Diary*, 101, quoted from Fanego (1996: 104))
 - b) She *sat milking of her cow*. (1594 Rob. Greene, *A looking-Glass for London* (Mermaid) I, iii, p. 94, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1869))
 - c) wenches ... *sitt* in the shade *singing of ballads*. (1648—54 *Letters of Dor.* Osborne to W. Temple (ed. Moore Smith) 51, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1122))
- (5) Participle following the so-called perception verb:
 - a) hee *found* him *basting of himselfe* against a great fire. (1563—87 Foxe, *Actes & Monuments* (1631) III, xii, 897/1, quoted from Visser (1973: (§ 2084))

b) Home, and there *find* my wife *making of tea*. (1667. *Pepys's Diary*, June 28th., quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1869))

c) I suppose this letter will *find* thee *picking of Daisies*. (1711. *Addison, Spect.* no. 131, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1122))

Among the five constructions, the first one occurred with the greatest frequency. I have collected sixty-six examples of this type in all. The frequency of the remaining four constructions (2)–(5) is much lower; the total of the examples of these four types is only thirty-four¹.

Some scholars have dealt with these constructions, including Jespersen (1931: 176–177), Visser (1973: (§ 1122, § 1869)), Nehls (1974), Denison (1991: 388–389), Elsness (1994: 14–15) and Fanego (1996: 102–106). All of these works, however, do not give detailed and convincing explanation to them, especially to the constructions in (2)–(5).

On the basis of his rich collection of examples, Visser (§ 1869) states that these constructions are attested from the late fourteenth century² and became “substandard about the beginning of the nineteenth century”.

Jespersen (1931: 176), putting the type (1) (henceforth, “mixed progressive”) into the chapter entitled “The Expanded Tenses”, remarks that the frequent occurrence of the mixed progressive “would seem to point to their [= the mixed progressive] origin from the combination with *a + ing*, as the object after the sb [substantive: S. S.] in *ing* had *of* regularly”, like the following examples in (6):

(6) *be + a + the sb (verbal substantive) with of + NP*

a) he had *been a hunting of the hare*. (1523–5 *Berners, Froissart* VI, 54, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1870))

b) the quene of Hungry and her doughter *was a sporting of them* at a castell. (1523–5 *Berners, Froissart* IV, 45, quoted from Visser ((1969: § 1870))

c) yet he's always *a complaining of you*. (1705 *Vanbrugh, Confederacy* (Mermaid) II, i, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1870))

Here, *a* is a weakened prepositional remnant of the full preposition *on*, and plays the role of a preposition. Therefore, “the form in *-ing* is not the participle, but the noun” (cf. Jespersen (1931: 168)). When *a* “was then dropped (by aphesis)”, the mixed progressive occurred.

Elsness and Denison share Jespersen's view to a certain extent. Elsness (1994: 15) states that “the object of a gerundial verbal

commonly appears with an *of*-construction", so the *V-ing + of + object* in the mixed progressive could be a "pointer to the original construction" of the mixed progressive, which is a prepositional construction *be + P + the sb.* In this original construction, the verb in the *sb* functions "as a gerundial prepositional complement (cf. Jespersen (1931:176)". Furthermore, he gives (7), trying to show the nature of the mixed progressive.

(7) And this Gabriel Holmes did advise to have had two houses set on fire, one after another, that while they *were quenching of one*, they might *be burning another*. (1667 *Pepys's Diary*, July 4th, quoted from Visser (1969: (§ 1219))

Since the phrase "*were quenching of one*" parallels a progressive form of present participle "*be burning another*", he considers that the mixed progressive should be "indeed treated as progressives".

Fanego (1996: 102—103) gives a few comments on the characteristic of the mixed progressive. She says that the mixed progressive is "a variant of the progressive" in spite of the fact that "the object of the verb surfaces as an *of*-phrase, thus resembling the object of a nominal gerund." Concerning the only six examples of the mixed progressive that she found in the Helsinki Corpus, she observes that all of them are "in a passage markedly colloquial in tone" and they are, so to speak, "informal" expressions. Thus, in view of the marginality, scarcity and informality of the mixed progressive, she concludes that it has not the "gerund status".

All of the above scholars do not give any explanation for how the mixed progressive disappeared.

Much less attention even has been paid to the construction (2)—(5), probably because of the scarcity of examples. Visser, for example, presents a list of examples of these four types, but makes no further comment. However, Jespersen (1931: 177) gives a brief explanation to them: "The same construction with *of* before the object (i. e., the mixed progressive) is also extended to the participle in other connexions". Here, by "other connexions" he probably means the other syntactic positions in which a present participle can occur besides (1), namely those in (2)—(5). Especially, Jespersen (1931: 169, 173) points out that the original construction of the type (4) is another gerundial prepositional construction, i. e., *go* (or other verbs of movement or rest) + *on / a + the sb.*, "in which other verbs than *be* are combined alternatively with *on + -ing*, *a + -ing* and finally the *ing* -form alone". On the other hand, Fanego (1996: 104) does

not think that the two examples of the type (4) that she found in the Helsinki Corpus should be included “in the overall count of gerunds”. Although a large number of examples with present participles like (8 a-b) are found there,

(8) a) She came singing songs.

b) He stood looking at the crowd.

she finds only two examples of the type (4), which are “both in the private diary of Henry Machyn”. Taking into account the scarcity and colloquialism of examples of the type (4), Fanego suggest that such examples as *She came singing of a song* should be “treated participially”, like (8 a-b).

I agree to some part of Jespersen’s view; I accept that the *be* + *a* + the sb with *of* + *object*, i. e. , (6) could be the origin of the mixed progressive as Jespersen says. But I would like to suggest that we should rather consider that the original construction of the mixed progressive was the *be* + P (*on/in/at/a*) + the sb with *of* + *object*, not merely *be* + *a* + the sb with *of* + *object*.

Furthermore, the focus of my observation and discussion differs from that of Jespersen’s. Jespersen focuses on the process whereby the present-day English (henceforth, PE) progressive was formed.

Jespersen uses the existence of the mixed progressive as indirect evidence to support his “amalgamation” hypothesis. He states (1931: 169) that after the old ending of present participle *-ende* was changed into *-ing*, the participle in *-ing* thus became identical with the verbal substantive. Then an amalgamation of (9a) and (9b) took place as shown in the following (9). (9a) is the combination of the auxiliary verb *be* and the participle in *-ing*, here, the *be* + *V-ing* is a continuation of OE “*be* + *V-ende*...”; while (9b) is the combination *be* + *on* + the sb, in which *on* became *a*, or was dropped (by aphesis) (cf. Seki (2007:50)).

(9) a) *be* + _{VP}[*V-ing* ...] (a continuation of OE “*be* + *V-ende*...”)

b) *be* + \emptyset + _{NP}[*V-ing*]

↑ ... (by aphesis)

a ... (by weakening)

↑

on

To Jespersen, the existence of the mixed progressive is the evidence

that the *a* was omissible from the *be + a + the sb.* Thus, (9b) appeared, and then the merger between (9a) and (9b) occurred. And in the course of the merger, (9a) obtained the progressive meaning from (9b); while (9b) obtained or strengthened the VP character (verbal gerund has the VP character). Finally, as a result, the current progressive form was produced.

Furthermore, Jespersen (1931: 169) considers that “this amalgamation accounts not only for the greatly increasing frequency of” (9a), “but also for the much greater precision with which the expanded forms are used in modern times”.

On the basis of a large number of relevant data that have been collected, I would rather put main focus on the mixed progressive itself, namely, how it began to be used and how it ceased to be used. At the same time, concerning Jespersen’s “amalgamation” hypothesis, I think there are five points worth reconsidering. The first two of them concern filling in Jespersen’s insufficient description, and the other three concern the fact that the “amalgamation” hypothesis can not give an adequate explanation for the three related historical linguistic facts to which we will turn below.

The first point is that Jespersen is not explicit enough as to the contents of “the sb” that is placed after the *be + a*. This leads, as I will touch upon later, to Nehls’s criticism of Jespersen’s explanation for how the mixed progressive and the current progressive were produced. Jespersen cites many instances of *be + a + V_i-ing* (*V_i* = intransitive verb), like (10):

(10) *be + a + V_i-ing*

a) *Hee’s a birding* (Sh Wiv IV. 2.8)

b) *carders, who were merrily a working* (Deloney 33)

c) *I thought I was a-breeding* (Defoe Rox 274)

Obviously, here, the sb (*birding*, *working*, and *breeding*) are nominal gerund. The question concerning Jespersen’s *be + a + the sb* is whether the *V_i-ing + Object* (*V_i* = transitive verb), i. e., verbal gerund could enter the position of the sb or not. Historically, in OE and early ME (henceforth, EME), the gerund was only a pure nominal one without any verbal force. So the sb after the *be + a* was solely *V_i-ing* or *V_i-ing + of + Object*. From late ME (henceforth, LME), however, verbal gerund began to occur. Also around 1500—1700, the *be + a + V_i-ing* reached its peak (cf. Nakao (1972: 324). My

understanding is that verbal gerund could occur after *be + a* around the period from LME to EModE, although in small number. I consider that Jespersen thinks in the same way as I do, though he does not mention it in particular. For he (1931: 169—177) cites a few instances like *be/go + on/a + V_i-ing + object* like (11), along with a great number of instances of *be/go + a + V_i-ing* (cf. (10)) in the two sections entitled “Verbs with *ing*, with or without *on*, *a*” and “Be with *on*, *a + ing*”.

(11) They’re always *a doin’ some gammon of that sort* (Di P295, quoted from Jespersen (1931: 175))

Therefore, I think Jespersen also regards the *doin’ some gammon of that sort* as the sb, but not the participle.

Denison (1993: 406—407) summarizes Nehls view (1974) towards the mixed progressive. Nehls considers that *be + a + V_i-ing + object* (cf. (11)) is also another variant of the mixed progressive. He takes the *V_i-ing + object* after *be + a* to be a verb phrase (henceforth, VP). So the coexistence of the “two” mixed constructions leads Nehls to conclude that the occurrence of the mixed progressive has no connection with the lost *a*, although he does not give any reason why the mixed progressive occurred.

The second point is that Jespersen does not pay any attention to the verbs used in the structures of (9b): *be + P + (at / in / on / a) + the sb*. On the basis of the observation of 198 examples of *be + P + (at / in / on / a) + the sb* (cf. Appendix), it becomes clear that there is a certain restriction on the verbs.

About 17.2 % (34 examples) of the one hundred ninety-eight instances do not have the progressive meaning. The verbs in the remaining 82.8 % (164 examples) are mostly limited to the verbs (cf. (6), (10)) that express the contents of hunting (e. g. hunt, shoot, breed, bird and fish), movement (e. g. come, go) and war (e. g. fight, kill, hang). The number of verbs that do not meet this description is very small.

The third point is that the “amalgamation” between (9a) and (9b) can not account for “the greatly increasing frequency of” (9a), i. e. the progressive form, and “for the much greater precision with which the expanded forms are used in modern times” as Jespersen (1931: 169) considers. I have already mentioned that only some special verbs were used in the structure of *be + P + the sb*, i. e. (9b). As well, it is generally regarded that the expression of (9a) is rare and even some of