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O I P O S D R U



ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Dana Ioana NICULESCU

Particularități sintactice  
ale limbii române din  
perspectivă tipologică  
*gerunziul*



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



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**PARTICULARITĂȚI SINTACTICE ALE LIMBII  
ROMÂNE DIN PERSPECTIVĂ TIPOLOGICĂ  
*GERUNZIUL***



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**PARTICULARITĂȚI SINACTICE ALE LIMBII ROMÂNE DIN  
PERSPECTIVĂ TIPOLOGICĂ  
GERUNZIUL**

Autor: **Dana Ioana NICULESCU**

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limbii române din  
perspectivă tipologică  
*Gerunziul***



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române

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## ADDENDA

### Summary

#### **Syntactic Features of Romanian from a typological perspective. The Gerund**

This study analyzes the Romanian gerund, a non-finite verb form which reunites the uses of the Latin gerund and present participle. The perspective is typological: parallels with the other Romance and with Germanic languages are meant to reveal those aspects which are specific to Romanian or characteristic for a group of languages which includes it. The gerundial structures are discussed synchronically, in the generative frame, and diachronically, using a large 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century corpus.

The novelty of this work consists in unifying a modern theoretical perspective (the generative analysis) with the Romance and Germanic comparison and with not only a synchronic, but also a diachronic analysis. Previous studies have not discussed the gerundial configurations in such detail, reaching conclusions which regard the difference in syntactic complexity between them, the period in which they were in use, their frequency, the competition with other configurations which can substitute them, and the specificity of Romanian among other European languages.

Four configurations were selected for analysis: the gerund in modifier position in the DP, the direct and the indirect perception structures, the gerund after verbs of judgment, and aspectual periphrases with modalized and evidential meaning. They were selected on the basis of the fact that they have syntactic features which differ from the gerund's typical context of occurrence. I consider that the gerund in adverbial position is the prototypical configuration for the Romanian gerund. The structures which are analyzed by this study deviate from the prototype: in modifier position, the gerund gradually loses its syntactic complexity, becoming an adjective; when used after perception verbs it is not an adjunct, but an argument; with verbs of judgment, it is the complement of the prepositional complementizer *ca* 'as', the only preposition it can combine with, and in the

*presumptive* periphrases, it is the component of a complex verbal form, finite or non-finite, which encodes the epistemic modality or the evidentiality. Each configuration which is analyzed is placed in a larger context, by drawing parallels with the other syntactic structures which can occupy the gerund's position (such as, the adjective and the past participle, in the case of the gerund in modifier position, the past participle and the finite clause headed by different complementizers in the case of the direct perception structure, the infinitive and finite clauses for the indirect perception construction, the non-gerundial verbal forms, for the *presumptive* periphrases). These comparisons reveal the specificity of the gerund in each configuration.

***The gerund in modifier position. The adjectivation of the gerund***

The main objective of this chapter is to bring arguments for the gradual character of the process of adjectivation. Four gerundial structures in modifying position are distinguished (1-4).

- (1) *Îi admir pe copiii venind ei singuri să-și ceară iertare.*

them (I)admire PE children-the come.GER they.NOM alone to ask for forgiveness

'I admire the children that come on their own initiative to ask for forgiveness'

- (2) *M-am întors în camera cea încă mirosind a parfum.*

me=(I)have returned in room-the.F CEL.F.SG still smell.GER like perfume

'I returned in the room which still smelled like perfume'

- (3) *Mă uit la mâinile ei (cele) tremurânde acum (de frig).*

me (I)look at hands-the her CEL.F.PL tremble.GER.F.PL now of coldness

'I am looking at her hands that are trembling now of coldness'

- (4) *Mă uit la (\*acum) tremurândeale ei mâini.*

me (I)look at now tremble.GER.F.PL her hands

'I am looking at her trembling hands'

The structure under (1) is the verbal gerund configuration, which has maximum eventivity, i.e. it conserves all the verbal features of the base

from which it is derived (such as, the realization of the internal argument, to which it assigns the accusative case, sentential negation, and the placement of pronominal clitics in postposition). The verbal gerund can assign the nominative case to its subject. Its subject can be realized in the non-finite clause, but can only take the form of a pronominal anaphor, co-indexed with the DP that the gerund modifies.

The second modifying structure (2) displays a verbal gerund which is preceded by the adjectival determiner *cel*. It is a rarely attested configuration, in which the non-finite form is argued to have low eventivity. The *cel*-gerund also preserves all the syntactic features of its base; the only difference with the configuration (1) consists in restrictions concerning lexical and grammatical aspect. These restrictions are shown to be triggered by the presence of *cel*. The determiner *cel* tends to accommodate the gerund's characteristics to that of the adjective, which is its typical complement.

The third gerundial structure (3) contains the adjectival gerund placed in postnominal position. Two configurations with postnominal adjectival gerund were distinguished: one in which the gerund is phrasal, i.e. it takes complements, and one in which it is lexical, i.e. it only combines with specifiers. The phrasal postnominal adjectival gerund accepts locative and modal adverbial modifiers of verbal type, and it does not take adjectival degree markers. The lexical postnominal adjectival gerund cannot combine with verbal adjuncts, but can take degree modifiers; it behaves similarly to the structure under (4), the prenominally placed adjectival gerund. The only difference is that the first one is a restrictive, while the second is a non-restrictive modifier. Both types of postnominal adjectival gerunds can have an episodic reading, while the prenominal one can only have individual reading.

The analysis of the gerund in modifier position led to the realization of a hierarchy based on its varying syntactic complexity (5). The two verbal gerunds placed on top of the hierarchy differ as far as their degree of eventivity is concerned; the phrasal postnominal adjectival gerund is still associated with an event argument, while the lexical post- and prenominal adjectival gerunds are purely stative/adjectival in nature. The *cel*-verbal and

the phrasal adjectival gerunds display mixed categorial behaviour, having both verbal and adjectival features.

- (5) the highly eventive verbal gerund → the cel-verbal gerund → the postnominal adjectival gerund (phrasal → lexical) → the prenominal adjectival gerund

#### *The direct perception configuration*

The chapter which discusses the gerund in the direct perception structure reveals a number of typological characteristics of Romanian. Romanian direct perception verbs (DPVs) can only select the gerund among non-finite forms (6). Differently than in other Romance and in Germanic languages, they can also select finite clauses, headed by a variety of complementizers (*cum, că* and *cum că* 'that' – up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century).

- (6) Îl văd alergând / \*a alerga.  
him (I)see running A run.INF  
'I can see him running'

The diachronic analysis has shown that all the structures which are selected by a direct perception verb in contemporary Romanian were already in use in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the first texts written in Romanian are attested. The only evolution that was noticed is the one regarding the aspectual verb class selected by direct perception verbs. The gerunds of *fi* 'be' and *avea* 'have' after direct perception verbs were attested in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century corpus, exclusively in translations. These two K-state verbs, having an episodic reading in the contexts that were identified, are not allowed to occur in this configuration in modern Romanian. It appears that old Romanian used to follow a pattern similar to contemporary English (*I saw him being dressed like a clown / I saw him having a seizure*), admitting verbs which denote episodic properties to occur as complements of DPVs, but underwent a typological shift, not allowing K-state verbs in this configuration any more after the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This feature groups differentiates modern Romanian from other Romance languages.

- (7) ș-ară vedea frate-său sau soru-sa **goli fiind**  
him.DAT=(he)would see brother=his or sister=his naked be.GER  
'He would see his brother or sister being naked'

(Coresi, *Lucrul apostolesc*: 149, 16<sup>th</sup> c.)

- (8) îi văd (\*fiind) îmbrăcați în togă (contemporary Romanian)  
them.ACC (I)see being dressed in toga  
'I can see them being dressed in a toga'

Another syntactic feature, which groups Romanian with Spanish and distinguishes it from other Romance and from Germanic languages, is the restriction on the gerundial passive formed with the verb *fi* 'be' (9).

- (9) O văd (\*fiind) bătută de fratele ei.  
her.ACC (I)see being beaten by brother-the her  
'I can see her being beaten by her brother'

I argue that (at least) in Romanian, the impossibility of the passive morpheme *fi* to occur after a DPV is triggered by the fact that, in the passive configuration, *fi* is not an auxiliary, but is the same verb *fi* from copulative, locative/existential structures, a stative verb. Therefore, this restriction receives the same explanation as the one regarding K-state verbs in general.

Syntactically, the gerund after a DPV is analyzed as a Mood Phrase; its tense is dependent on the tense of the main verb and its aspect is obligatorily imperfective. In other Southern Romance languages (Spanish and Italian), it was analyzed by previous studies as a Tense Phrase, while in French and in Germanic languages, it was argued to be an Aspect Phrase (Felser 1999).

Another syntactic feature that is specific for Romanian is the possibility for the [+personal], [+specific] anaphoric pronominal subject of the gerund to be realized and to be assigned the nominative case. In the case of nominals with the features [-personal] and/or [-specific], it is difficult to decide which case is assigned by the verb (the nominative or the accusative). If the accusative is assigned, it will not be differentially marked. Therefore, one cannot come to a conclusion regarding the possibility to lexicalize the gerundial [-personal] and/or [-specific] nominative subject encoded as a full nominal in DPV configurations.

### *The prepositional gerund and the gerund of indirect perception*

The prepositional gerund with *ca* 'as' and the gerund in indirect perception configurations occur both typically with head verbs which contain the semantic component [judgment].

(10) Îl consideră ca fiind numai el vinovat.

him.ACC (they)consider as be.GER only he.NOM guilty

'They consider him a great pianist'

(11) Nu-l văd devenind tocmai el un mare pianist.

not=him.ACC (I)see become.GER exactly he.NOM a great pianist

'I cannot see him of all people becoming a great pianist'

The analysis of the prepositional gerund focuses on its syntactic characteristics and on its diachronic evolution. The preposition *ca* 'as' is analyzed as a complementizer which is placed low in the complementizer phrase (a FinPhrase with the feature [-Finite]). The *ca*-gerund lacks the Topic and Focus projections of the complementizer domain.

The diachronic study shows that, very rarely, a verb of judgment can combine with a gerund as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The preposition *ca* 'as' does not occur in the structure until the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it was added as a result of the French influence on the language. Since its introduction in this gerundial structure, its realization has been obligatory or optional, depending on the verb (the two verb classes, with obligatory / optional *ca* are lexically determined). Starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the equivalent infinitival structure is more frequently used with a verb of judgment.

A specific feature of Romanian in Romance and Germanic context is that it can substitute the prepositional gerundial structure with a finite clause whose subject is controlled by the main verb's direct object.

The gerund in indirect perception configurations displays less syntactic restrictions than the one in DPV structures. It is characterized by temporal independence, the same aspectual restriction (it encodes only the imperfective aspect, not the perfective), no restrictions regarding the verb's lexical aspectual class, and, as a consequence, the possibility for the *fi* 'be' passive gerund to occur in the structure.

The possibility to lexicalize the gerund's subject encoded not only pronominally, but also as a full NP, to which the nominative case is assigned, is a syntactic feature which distinguishes Romanian from other Romance and from Germanic languages.

The indirect perception structure is attested starting with the earliest Romanian texts and is less frequent than the *că* 'that' finite clause in every period in the evolution of the language.

### *The Romanian presumptive structures*

Four Romanian gerundial periphrases encode the *presumptive*, a term used as an umbrella for two semantic areas: epistemic modality and evidentiality. The four structures are the gerundial indicative future tense (12), the gerundial present conditional mood (13), the gerundial present subjunctive mood (14) and the less used gerundial infinitive (15), a literary variant of the subjunctive configuration. These are the only gerundial periphrastic constructions that are in use in contemporary Romanian, in its literary variant (the inventory is higher if one looks at dialectal varieties and at older stages of the language).

(12) O fi dormind.

(he)AUX.FUT be sleep.GER

'He must be sleeping'

(13) Am auzit că ar fi dormind.

(I)have heard that (he)AUX.COND be sleep.GER

'I've heard that he is sleeping (but I cannot vouch for it)'

(14) N-am auzit să fi dormind.

not=(I)have heard SĂ(SUBJ) be sleep.GER

'I haven't heard that he is sleeping (but I cannot vouch for it)'

(15) N-am auzit a fi dormind.

not=(I)have heard A(INF) be sleep.GER

'I haven't heard that he is sleeping (but I cannot vouch for it)'

This chapter focuses on the diachronic evolution of these configurations, to establish when the meaning extension mood/tense – modality / evidentiality took place, for how long each identified structure



was in use and whether the epistemic use of these moods precedes or follows their evidential use. The gerundial future and conditional periphrases are attested as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the gerundial subjunctive starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> and the infinitive, starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The gerundial periphrases preserve their original modal and temporal use in present-day Romanian (the subjunctive only partially and not with full acceptability). The meaning extension is already attested in the 16<sup>th</sup> century for the gerundial conditional, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for the periphrastic future and subjunctive forms and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the periphrastic infinitive. I regard the semantic extension as a process which affected the conditional, the subjunctive and the infinitive moods, as well as the future tense, as a whole, and not the gerundial periphrases in particular. Adopting this perspective, the corpus analysis shows that the *presumptive* use of these verbal moods/tenses is older than their first attestation in a gerundial periphrasis. All the three finite non-gerundial verb forms already had a modalized and/or evidential use in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The gerundial subjunctive has undergone the most visible change in diachrony (its use with verbs of report has diminished considerably and its occurrence in main clauses with evidential value is not allowed in contemporary Romanian, while it is attested up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century).

As far as the general direction of semantic change in Romanian is concerned (modality – evidentiality or evidentiality - modality), no firm conclusion can be drawn, since some periphrases are first attested with their modalized use (the future tense), while others, with their evidential use (such as, the conditional).

In order to test the degree of grammaticalization of the category of aspect in Romanian, a synchronic analysis was made of the modalized simple and gerundial future forms. I concluded that the two verb forms are generally in free variation, which shows that (the imperfective) aspect is weakly grammaticalized in Romanian.

A number of typological conclusions were drawn on the basis of the analysis of the gerundial periphrases. What is specific for Romanian is that

all the four gerundial structures have developed both a modalized and an evidential meaning. These two uses are predominant in contemporary Romanian, while their original meaning is much less frequently attested. In the other Romance languages, the inventory of verbs that encode modality and evidentiality is more reduced. Italian appears to be the only Romance language besides Romanian in which the (non-gerundial) future, the subjunctive and the conditional moods have developed either a modalized or an evidential meaning.

As the gerunds which enter a relationship with the VP/IP differ in syntactic complexity, I put forth the following hierarchy:

- (16) the gerund in adverbial position → the prepositional gerund → the gerund in indirect perception structures → the gerund in direct perception structures

### *Conclusions*

The synchronic analysis of the four gerund configurations that were discussed in this study showed that their syntactic structures do not reach the complexity of the gerund in adverbial position. While the latter is part of a full Complementizer phrase, the four structures that were discussed above are FinPhrases (prepositional gerund), Mood Phrases (the gerund in perception structures, as well as the verbal gerund in modifier position) or Aspectual Phrases (the adjectival gerund), respectively. They display each a series of syntactic restrictions, which are triggered by their different syntactic structure, by the type of nominal/verbal element which heads them and by the position they occupy in relation to their head.

The diachronic analysis of the four gerundial structures has shown that there is little variation, as most configurations were attested as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The exceptions are the adjectival gerund and the prepositional gerund, attested from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on. The differences between the stages in the evolution of Romanian generally regard the frequency of the structures, their semantic values, or the type of syntactic restrictions imposed by the head.

A number of typological conclusions were reached, as a result of a Romance and Germanic comparison. One exclusively Romanian structure was identified, the gerund with the adjectival determiner *cel*. A number of

configurations are common for a group of Romance languages, and also for some of the Germanic languages that were taken into account: the gerund as a complement of a direct and indirect perception structure and the gerundial future with modalized meaning. Some structures are common among the Romance languages and are also found in English (the gerundial periphrases – leaving aside the particular auxiliary choice and the different semantic values). Other structures can be found in all the Romance and Germanic languages that were discussed: the verbal gerund in modifier position and the *as*-prepositional gerund.

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