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# **SELF STUDY**

**THE THEME: PROBLEMS OF SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF VERBALS**

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# **PROBLEMS OF SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS OF VERBALS**

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## **1.The notion of «Verbals» in Modern English**

The words of every language fall into classes which are called Parts of Speech. Each part of speech has characteristics of its own. The parts of speech differ from each other in meaning, in form and in function.

One of the parts of speech is the Verb. According to content, the verb can be described as word denoting action, the term “action” embracing the meaning of activity (to walk, to speak, to play, to study, process (to sleep, to wait, to live), state (to be, to like, to know), relation (to consist, to resemble, to lack) and the like. According to form, it can be described as a word that has certain grammatical features that are not shared by other parts of speech; they have the category of tense, aspect, voice. According to the function, verb can be defined as a word making up the predicate of the sentence.

The English Verbs can be divided into two main groups, according to the function they perform in the sentence – the finite forms and non-finite forms.<sup>1</sup>

The finite forms have the function of the predicate in the sentence and may also be called the predicate forms.

The non-finite or non-predicative forms can have various other functions. These forms are also called the verbals.

The non-finite forms or the verbals, unlike the finite forms of the verbs do not express person, number or mood. Therefore, they cannot be used as the predicate of a sentence. Like the finite forms of the verbs the verbals have tense and voice distinctions, but their tense distinctions differ from those of the finite verb.

There are three verbals in English: the participle, the gerund, and the infinitive. In Russian there are also three non-finite forms of the verb, but they do not fully coincide with those in the English language.

In English the verbals have the following characteristic traits:

a) They have a double nature: nominal and verbal. The participle combines the characteristics of a verb with those of an adjective; the gerund and the infinitive combine the characteristics of a verb with those of a noun.

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<sup>1</sup> Ilyish B.L. “The Structure of English Language” M., 1971, p.178

b) The tense distinctions of the verbals are not absolute like those of the finite verbs, but relative. The form of a verbal does not show whether the action it denotes refers to the present, past or future. It shows only whether the action expressed by the verbal is simultaneous with the action expressed by the finite verb or prior to it.<sup>2</sup>

In the sentence a verbal may occur.

a) singling (without accompanying words)

Eg. She went away smiling.

Reading is out of question, I can't fix my attention on books. – О чтении не может быть и речи, я не могу сосредоточить свое внимание на книгах.

b) in phrase (i.e. with one or several accompanying words – an object or an adverbial modifier to the verbal). The phrases form syntactic units serving as one part of the sentence. A phrase should not be confused with a predicative construction. Between the elements of a phrase there is no predicate relation as it does not include a noun or pronoun expressed by a verbal.

Eg. Not to disquiet his sister, he had said nothing to her of the matter.

c) in predicative constructions.

Eg. She heard him open the door and go out the yard.

All the verbals can form predicative constructions. They consist of two elements: a nominal (noun or pronoun) and a verbal (participle, gerund or infinitive). The verbal element stands in predicate relation to the nominal element. That is to say it stands in the subject and the predicate of the sentence. In most cases predicative constructions form syntactic units, serving as one part of the sentence. Eg. The sat down to supper, Jerry still talking cheerfully.

“Jerry still talking cheerfully” is a predicate relation to the noun Jerry, which denotes the doer of the action expressed by the participle.

## **2. General Characteristics of English Verbals**

The verb has finite and non-finite forms, the latter being also called verbals.

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<sup>2</sup> В.Л. Каушанская и др. Грамматика английского языка (на английском языке). 1973 М. С. 161

The verbals, unlike the finite forms of the verb, do not express person, number or mood. Therefore they cannot be used as the predicate of a sentence.

Like the finite forms of the verb the verbals have tense and voice distinctions, but their tense distinctions differ greatly from those of the finite verb.

There are three verbals in English: the participle, the gerund and the infinitive.

In Russian we also have three non-finite forms of the verb, but they do not fully coincide with those in the English language (причастие, деепричастие, инфинитив).

The characteristic traits of the verbals.

The characteristic traits of the verbals are as follows:

1. They have a double nature, nominal and verbal. The participle combines the characteristics of a verb with those of an adjective; the gerund and the infinitive combine the characteristics of a verb with those of a noun.

2. The tense distinctions of the verbals are not absolute (like those of the finite verb), but relative; the form of a verbal does not show whether the action it denotes refers to the present past or future; it shows only whether the action expressed by the verbal is simultaneous with the action expressed by the finite verb or prior to it.

3. All the verbals can form predicative constructions, i.e. constructions consisting of two elements, a nominal (noun or pronoun) and a verbal (participle, gerund or infinitive); the verbal element stands in predicate relation to the nominal element, i.e. in a relation similar to that between the subject and the predicate of the sentence. In most cases predicative constructions form syntactic units, serving as one part of the sentence.

They sat down to supper, Manston still talking cheerfully. (Hardy)

Manston still talking cheerfully, is a predicative construction with a participle: the participle talking stands in predicate relation to the noun Manston, which denotes the doer of the action expressed by the participle.

In the sentence a verbal may occur:

- (a) singly, i.e. without accompanying words.

She... went away smiling. (Dreiser)

Reading is out of the question — I can't fix my attention on books. (Collins)

To decide is to act.

(b) in phrases, i.e. with one or several accompanying words (an object or an adverbial modifier to the verbal). The phrases form syntactic units serving as one part of the sentence.

A phrase should not be confused with a predicative construction: between the elements of a phrase there is no predicate relation as it does not include a noun or pronoun denoting the doer of the action expressed by a verbal.

The windows of the drawing-room opened to a balcony overlooking the garden.

She tried to tranquillize him by reading aloud.

Not to disquiet his sister, he had said nothing to her of the matter.

(c) in predicative constructions.

My mistress being dead..., I had to look out for a new place.

There is no mistake about his being a genius.

She heard him unbar the door and go out into the yard.

### **3. The Infinitive and its syntactic functions**

The infinitive representing an action in its most general form is often treated as an initial form of the verb<sup>3</sup>, but from the point of view of some linguists<sup>4</sup> the infinitive developed from the "Verbal noun," which in course of time became verbalized, retaining at the same time some of its nominal properties. Thus in Modern English the infinitive, like the participle and the gerund, has a double nature, nominal and verbal.

1. The nominal character of the infinitive is manifested in its syntactic functions. The infinitive can be used:

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<sup>3</sup> Шахматов А.А. Синтаксис русского языка. Вып. 11, Л., 1977, р.43

<sup>4</sup> Каушанская и др. Грамматика английского языка (на английском языке) с. 195

(a) as the subject of a sentence.

To go on like this was dangerous.

(b) as a predicative.

Her plan was now to drive to Bath during the night.

(c) as an object.

I have never learnt to read or write.

2. The verbal characteristics of the infinitive are as follows:

(a) the infinitive of transitive verbs can take a direct object.

He ... began to feel some curiosity ...

(b) the infinitive can be modified by an adverb.

I cannot write so quickly.

(c) the infinitive has tense and aspect distinctions; the infinitive of transitive verbs has also voice distinctions.

In Modern English the infinitive has the following forms:

	Active	Passive
Indefinite	to write	to be written
Continuous	to be writing	to be being written <sup>5</sup>
Perfect	to have written	to have been written
Perfect Continuous	to have been writing	to have been being written

The tense and aspect distinctions of the infinitive.

Like the tense distinctions of all verbals those of the infinitive are not absolute but relative.

1. The Indefinite Infinitive expresses an action simultaneous with the action expressed by the finite verb, so it may refer to the present, past or future.

I am glad to meet you. (P. Abrahams)

I was glad to see Mr. Paul. (Ch. Bronte)

Mr. Forsyte will be very glad to see you. (Galsworthy)

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<sup>5</sup> Rarely used. See John Millington-Ward. Peculiarities in English. London, 1987, p 250

2. The Continuous Infinitive also denotes an action simultaneous with that expressed by the finite verb, but it is an action in progress. Thus the continuous infinitive is not only a tense form, but also an aspect form, expressing both time relations and the manner in which the action is presented.

They happened, at the moment, to be standing near a small conservatory at the end of the garden. (Collins)

3. The Perfect Infinitive denotes an action prior to the action expressed by the finite verb.

"I'm glad to have seen you," he said.

An intimate friend is said to have dined with him that day.

Говорят, что в этот день у него обедал его близкий друг.

After such verbs as to mean, to expect, to intend, to hope used in the Past Indefinite, the Perfect Infinitive shows that the hope or intention was not carried out.

I meant to have gone there.

I meant to have given you five shillings this morning for a Christmas-box, Sam. I'll give it you this afternoon, Sam. (Dickens)

The same meaning can be conveyed by the Past Perfect of the finite verb followed by the Indefinite Infinitive.

I had meant to go there.

He had meant to marry me. (Eliot)

Some English grammarians prefer the latter construction.

Note. — The idea, however, is often expressed in the following way: I meant to go there, but never did.

4. The Perfect Continuous Infinitive denotes an action which lasted a certain time before the action of the finite verb. It is not only a tense form, but also an aspect form.

For about ten days we seemed to have been living on nothing but cold meat, cake and bread and jam. (P. Abrahams)

The voice distinctions of the infinitive.

The infinitive of transitive verbs has special forms for the Active and the



Passive Voice:

It is so glorious to love and to be loved...

In sentences with the construction there is the infinitive of some verbs can be active or passive without any change in the meaning:

There's no time to lose. (P.Abrahams)

There is no time to be lost. (Eliot)

There is nothing to fear (to be feared).

The use of the infinitive without the particle to (the bare infinitive).

In Modern English the infinitive is chiefly used with the particle to<sup>6</sup>. In Old English to was a preposition used with the infinitive in the dative case to indicate purpose (to writenne meant 'in order to write'). Later on to was re-interpreted as the formal sign of the infinitive and came to be used not only to denote purpose but in other cases as well. Still there are cases when the so-called bare infinitive (the infinitive without the particle to) is used. They are as follows:

1. After auxiliary verbs.

I don't understand the meaning of this passage.

We shall go there at once.

2. After modal verbs except the verb ought.

If one cannot have what one loves, one must love what one has (Wilson)

3. After verbs denoting sense perception, such as to hear, to see, to feel etc.

In a few minutes they heard him ascend the ladder to his own room. (Hardy)

I never saw, you look so before.

I felt my heart jump.

The verb to be after the verb to feel is used with the particle to: I felt this to be very true. (Dickens)

4. After the verb to let.

Let us be the best friends in the world! (Dickens)

5. After the verb "to make" in the meaning of 'заставлять' and the verb "to have" in the meaning of 'заставлять, допускать, велеть'.

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<sup>6</sup> Ganshina M., Vasilevskaya N., English Grammar, M., 1973, p.213

What makes you think so?

I... had them take my baggage.

The verb to have in the meaning of 'допускать' is chiefly used after the modal verbs will and would in negative sentences.

I will not have you call him Daniel any more.

I would not have you think that I am selfish. (Trollope)

6. After the verb to know when its meaning approaches that of to see, to observe (the verb to know never has this meaning in the Present Indefinite).

I have so often known a change of medicine work wonders.

In this case, however, the particle to is sometimes used:

I have never known her to weep before. (P. Abrahams)

After the verbs 'to hear', 'to see', 'to make' and 'to know' in the Passive Voice the to-Infinitive is used.

He was heard to mention your name several times.

They were seen to leave the house early in the morning.

The child was made to obey.

Sir Pitt Crawley was never known to give away a shilling or to do a good action.

7. After the verb to bid.

I bowed and waited, thinking she would bid me take a seat.

The verb to bid is obsolete and is not used in colloquial speech.

8. After the expressions had better, would rather, would sooner, cannot but, nothing but, cannot choose but.

You had better go to bed and leave the patient to me.

I would rather not speak upon the subject.

I would sooner die here, at your feet ... than see you married to such a one as that. (Trollope)

I cannot but think so. (P. Abrahams)

There was nothing left for him to do but watch and wait.

She does nothing but make scenes from morning till night. (Shaw)

I looked long at that picture, and could not choose but look. (Ch. Bronte)

‘Had better’, ‘would rather’, ‘to do nothing but’ belong to colloquial English, whereas cannot but and cannot choose but are characteristic of elevated style.

9. In sentences of a special type (infinitive sentences) beginning with why.

Why not come and talk to her yourself? (Reade)

The particle to is often used without the infinitive if it is easily understood from the context.

He and his three men could not defend Rollingen even if they wanted to.

The particle ‘to’ may be separated from the infinitive by an adverb; this is the so-called split infinitive. It is hardly ever used in colloquial English.

He was unable, however, to long keep silence. (P. Abrahams)

#### **4. General characteristics of Participles in Modern English.**

The participle is a non-finite form of the verb which has a verbal and an adjectival or an adverbial character.

There are two participles in English — Participle I and Participle II, traditionally called the Present Participle and the Past Participle.

These traditional terms are open to objection on the ground that Participle I does not necessarily refer to the present, just as Participle II need not refer to the past. The difference between them is not a difference in tense, but chiefly a difference in voice.

Participle I is formed by adding the suffix -ing<sup>7</sup> to the stem of the verb; the following spelling rules should be observed:

(a) If a verb ends in a mute e, the mute e is dropped before adding the suffix -ing: to give — giving, to close — closing.

(b) If a verb ends in a consonant preceded by a vowel rendering a short stressed sound, the final consonant is doubled before adding the suffix -ing: to run — running, to forget — forgetting, to admit — admitting.

A final l is doubled if it is preceded by a vowel letter rendering a short vowel

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sound, stressed or unstressed: to expel—expelling, to travel — travelling.

(c) The verbs to die, to lie and to tie form Participle I in the following way: dying, lying, tying.

A final y is not changed before adding the suffix -ing: to comply — complying, to deny — denying.

The formation of Participle II.

According to the way in which the Past Indefinite and Participle II are formed, verbs are divided into three groups: regular verbs, irregular verbs, and mixed verbs.

1. Regular verbs. They form the Past Indefinite and Participle II by adding -ed to the stem of the verb, or only -d if the stem of the verb ends in -e.<sup>8</sup>

to want —wanted

The pronunciation of -ed (-d) depends on the sound preceding it. It is pronounced:

[əd] after t, d:

wanted [wɒntəd], landed [lændəd]

[d] after voiced consonants except d and after vowels:

opened ['əʊpənd], played [pleəd];

[t] after voiceless consonants except t:

worked [wɜ:kt].

The following spelling rules should be observed:

(a) Final y is changed into i before the addition of -ed if it is preceded by a consonant.

to carry — carried

y remains unchanged if it is preceded by a vowel.

to enjoy — enjoyed

(b) If a verb ends in a consonant preceded by a short stressed vowel, the final consonant is doubled.

to stop —stopped

Final r is doubled if it is preceded by a stressed vowel.

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<sup>8</sup> Зятковская Р.Г. Суффиксальная система современного английского языка. – М., 1971. – 188 с.

to occur — occurred

Final r is not doubled when preceded by a diphthong,

to appear — appeared

Final l is doubled if it is preceded by a short vowel, stressed or unstressed:

to compel — compelled

2. Irregular verbs. Here belong the following groups of verbs:

(a) verbs which change their root vowel.

to sing — sang — sung

(b) verbs which change their root vowel and add -en for Participle II.

to speak — spoke — spoken

(c) verbs which change their root vowel and add -d or -t.

to sell — sold — sold

(d) verbs which change their final -d into -t.

to send — sent — sent

(e) verbs which have the same form for the Infinitive, Past Indefinite and Participle II.

to put — put — put

(f) verbs whose forms come from different stems.

to be — was, were — been

to go — went — gone

(g) special irregular verbs.

to have — had — had

to make — made — made

to do — did — done

(h) defective (anomalous) verbs.

can — could

must

ought

may — might

will — would

shall — should

3. Mixed verbs, their Past Indefinite is of the regular type, and their Participle It is of the irregular type:

to show — showed — shown

As has already been stated, the participle has a verbal and an adjectival or adverbial character. Its adjectival or adverbial character is manifested in its syntactic functions, those of attribute or adverbial modifier. (Some participles have lost their verbality altogether and have become adjectives: interesting, charming, alarming, etc., complicated, distinguished, furnished, etc.

E.g. an interesting book, a charming girl, the alarming news; a complicated problem, a distinguished writer, a furnished apartment.)

I hated the hollow sound of the rain pattering on the roof. (Du Marnier)  
(attribute)

And then she turned to the title-page, and looked at the name written in the schoolboy hand. (Ch. Bronte) (attribute)

The verbal characteristics of the participle are as follows:

1. Participle I of a transitive verb can take a direct object.

Opening the door, he went out on to the terrace.

2. Participle I and Participle II can be modified by an adverb.

Leaving the room hurriedly, he ran out. (P. Abrahams)

Deeply affected, Priam Farll rose and left the room. (Bennett)

3. Participle I has tense distinctions; Participle I of transitive verbs has also voice distinctions. In Modern English Participle I has the following forms:

	Active	Passive
Indefinite	writing	being written
Perfect	having written	having been written

The tense distinctions of the participle.

Like the tense distinctions of all the verbals, those of the participle are not

absolute but relative.

Participle I Indefinite Active and Passive usually denotes an action simultaneous with the action expressed by the finite verb; depending on the tense-form of the finite verb it may refer to the present, past, or future.

When reading *The Pickwick Papers*, one can't help laughing.

When reading *The Pickwick Papers*, I couldn't help laughing.

When reading *The Pickwick Papers*, you will roar with laughter.

He looked at the carpet while waiting for her answer.

Me returned to the hut, bringing in his arms a new-born lamb.

Being left alone, Pauline and I kept silence for some time.

Sometimes Participle I Indefinite denotes an action referring to no particular time.

The last turning had brought them into the high-road leading to Bath. (Hardy)

Participle I Perfect Active and Passive denotes an action prior to the action expressed by the finite verb.

Mr. Bumble, having spread a handkerchief over his knees..., began to eat and drink. (Dickens)

They were, indeed, old friends, having been at school together. (Walpole)

It should be noted that a prior action is not always expressed by Participle I Perfect: with some verbs of sense perception and motion, such as to see, to hear, to come, to arrive, to seize, to look, to turn and some others, Participle I Indefinite is used even when priority is meant.

Turning down an obscure street and entering an obscurer lane, lie went up to a smith's shop.

Hearing a footstep below he rose and went to the top of the stairs. (P. Abrahams)

Participle II has no tense distinctions; it has only one form which can express both an action simultaneous with, and prior to the action expressed by the finite verb; the latter case is more frequent.

His sister's eyes fixed on him with a certain astonishment, obliged him at last

to look at Fleur.

I was reminded of a portrait seen in a gallery. (Du Maurier)

In some cases Participle II denotes an action referring to no particular time.

He is a man loved and admired by everybody.

The voice distinctions of the participle.

Participle I of transitive verbs has special forms to denote the active and the passive voice.

When writing letters lie does not like to be disturbed.

Being written in pencil the letter was difficult to make out.

Having written some letters he went to post them.

Having been written long ago the manuscript was illegible.

Participle II of transitive verbs has a passive meaning, e. g. a broken glass, a caged bird. Participle II of intransitive verbs has no passive meaning; it is used only in compound tense-forms and has no independent function in the sentence unless it belongs to a verb which denotes passing into a new state, e. g. a withered flower, a faded leaf.

### **5. The characteristics of the Gerund in Modern English**

The gerund developed from the verbal noun, which in course of time became verbalized preserving at the same time its nominal character. The gerund is formed by adding the suffix -ing to the stem of the verb, and coincides in form with Participle I.<sup>9</sup>

As a natural result of its origin and development the gerund has nominal and verbal properties. The nominal characteristics of the gerund are as follows:

1. The gerund can perform the function of subject, object and predicative.

They say smoking leads to meditation. (Collins) (SUBJECT)

I like making people happy. (Shaw) (OBJECT)

The duty of all progressive mankind is fighting for peace. (PREDICATIVE)

2. The gerund can be preceded by a preposition.

I am very, very tired of rowing.

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<sup>9</sup> World Book Encyclopedia Vol.1 NY. 1993 p.298



3. Like a noun the gerund can be modified by a noun in the possessive case or by a possessive pronoun.

"I wonder at Jolyon's allowing this engagement," he said to Aunt Ann.  
(Galsworthy)

Is there any objection to my seeing her?

The verbal characteristics of the gerund are the same as those of the participle:

1. The gerund of transitive verbs can take a direct object.

I had now made a good progress in understanding and speaking their language. (Swift)

2. The gerund can be modified by an adverb.

She burst out crying bitterly. (Hardy)

3. The gerund has tense- distinctions; the gerund of transitive verbs has also voice distinctions. The forms of the gerund in Modern English are as follows:

	Active	Passive
Indefinite	writing	being written
Perfect	having written	having been written

There is no gerund in the Russian language and the English gerund is rendered in Russian in different ways:<sup>10</sup>

(a) by a noun.

Dancing had not begun yet... (Mansfield)

(b) by an infinitive.

She had tea with Cipriano before leaving. (Lawrence)

It is no good hiding our heads under our wings. (J. Steinbeck)

(c) by "деепричастие".

And without waiting for her answer he turned and left us. (Du Maurier)

On seeing Bella he stopped, beckoned her to him, and drew her arm through his. (Dickens)

(d) by a subordinate clause.

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<sup>10</sup> Швейцер А.Д. Теория перевода (статус, проблемы, аспекты). М., 1988. с.98

He regretted now having come.

It should be observed that though the active forms of the gerund may be rendered in different ways, the passive forms are nearly always rendered by a clause.

As she contemplated the wide windows and imposing signs, she became conscious of being gazed upon. (Dreiser)

After having been informed of the conference in my lady's room he immediately decided on waiting to hear the news from Frizinghall. (J. Steinbeck)

The tense distinctions of the gerund.

The tense distinctions of the gerund; like those of the participle, are not absolute but relative.

1. The Indefinite Gerund Active and Passive denotes an action simultaneous with the action expressed by the finite verb; depending on the tense form of the finite verb it may refer to the present, past, or future.

He can swim for any number of hours without tiring. (Hichens)

She walked on without turning her head. (Hardy)

2. The Perfect Gerund denotes an action prior to that of the finite verb.

She denies having spoken with him.

He was ashamed of having shown even the slightest irritation. (Bennett)

However, a prior action is not always expressed by a Perfect Gerund; in some cases we find an Indefinite Gerund. This occurs after the verbs to remember, to excuse, to forgive, to thank and after the prepositions on (upon), after, and, without.

I don't remember hearing the legend before. (Hardy)

You must excuse my not answering you before. (Collins)

I thank you for restraining me just now. (Ch. Bronte)

On leaving the house we directed our steps to the nearest shade. . (Collins)

The Perfect Gerund may also be used after the above mentioned verbs and prepositions.

He did not remember having been in that room. (J. Steinbeck)

The voice distinctions of the gerund.

The gerund of transitive verbs has special forms for the active and the passive

voice.

He liked neither reading aloud nor being read aloud to.

It is to be observed that after the verbs to want, to need, to deserve, to require and the adjective worth the gerund is used in the active form, though it is passive in meaning.

"The slums want attending to, no doubt," he said.

He realized that his room needed painting.

Differences Between Gerund and the Participle/Verbal Noun

The gerund and the participle.

In most cases the differentiation between the gerund and the participle does not present any difficulty.

Unlike the participle the gerund may be preceded by a preposition, it may be modified by a noun in the possessive case or by a possessive pronoun; it can be used in the function of a subject, object, and predicative. In the function of an attribute and of an adverbial modifier both the gerund and the participle may be used, but the gerund in these functions is always preceded by a preposition.

There are cases, however, when the differentiation between the gerund and the participle presents some difficulty; for instance, it is not always easy to distinguish between a gerund as part of a compound noun and a participle used as an attribute to a noun. One should bear in mind that if we have a gerund as part of a compound noun, the person or thing denoted by the noun does not perform the action expressed by the ing-form: e.g. a dancing-hall (a hall for dancing), a cooking-stove (a stove for cooking), walking shoes, a writing-table, etc.<sup>11</sup>

If we have a participle used as an attribute the person denoted by the noun performs the action expressed by the mg-form: e.g. a dancing girl (a girl who dances), a singing child, etc.

However, there are cases which admit of two interpretations; for example a sewing machine may be understood in two ways: a machine for sewing and a machine which sews; a hunting dog may be a dog for hunting and a dog that hunts.

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<sup>11</sup> B.S. Khaimovich, B.I. Rogovskaya. A Course in English Grammar. 1966 p. 98