A cross-linguistic perspective on 'nominal' vs. 'verbal' construal in English and German.

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The present paper addresses the different types of construal imposed on events by Present-day English verbal gerunds. More specifically, it aims to empirically assess the functional hybridity of the English gerund by examining its translational equivalents in German.

The formal hybridity of verbal gerunds, which have a clausal internal syntax but the external distribution of a noun phrase, has provoked many discussions concerning their categorial status (see De Smet 2010 for an overview). Moreover, recent studies have shown that verbal gerunds display functional hybridity as well, ranging from "conceptually dependent", clausal uses, such as the subject-controlled gerunds embedded in adverbial slots in (1), to more "conceptually autonomous", uncontrolled uses in (2), which are reminiscent of regular abstract nouns (Maekelberghe 2017; Fonteyn *et al.* 2015; cf. Langacker 1991: 25).

(1) a. She never read the Word without *first casting the dice to guide her*. (GECCo, fiction)
    b. Then he got a thrashing for *getting in the way*. (GECCo, fiction)
(2) a. *Meeting the world's energy challenges* will require a sustained global effort over many decades. (GECCo, essay)
    b. (…) where lard cans of tomato plants are kept, and a pallet for *sleeping at night*. (GECCo, fiction)

English gerunds, with their combination of nominal and verbal properties, are, in this respect, a typical illustration of the so-called "boundary permeability" of English (Berg 2014), whereby linguistic categories are said to display fuzzy boundaries on both a formal and functional level. The German language on the other hand, with its strong inflectional system, typically has sharp boundaries between linguistic categories (Berg 2014: 489, Hawkins 1986). As such, verbal gerunds can be translated by either fully nominal constructions, such as -*ung* nominalizations or nominalized infinitives (see also Demske 2002, Hartmann 2014), or fully clausal structures, such as non-finite and finite subordinate clauses.

Drawing on data from GECCo, a 1,000,000 words multi-register English-German parallel corpus (Hansen-Schirra et al. 2007), the present paper examines factors that play a role in the choice for a particular translation strategy, both language-internal (clausal function; referential and aspectual properties; verb lemma) and language-external (genre). Preliminary results paint a rather complex picture, showing that gerunds can be translated by a wide range of constructions and suggesting that the choice for a more 'nominal' or 'verbal' construal of a situation is a multi-faceted one.

Examining the English gerund system through the lens of its German counterparts, it is argued, not only presents an innovative way of empirically assessing the noun-verb continuum in English, it also sheds new light on how 'nominal' vs. 'verbal' construal is operationalized in two closely related yet morphologically very distinct languages.

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