On Gerund Extraposition

Masataka Nᴇɴᴅᴀɪ

1. Introduction

The extraposition of the that-clauses and to-infinitives are one of the most important grammatical items. But in the case of gerund extraposition, it is not always clear in what cases it should be used. This study discusses the usage of gerund extraposition.

2. Examples of Gerund Extraposition

Following are examples taken from references by English authors.

1 It was nice having you to tea last Wednesday. [Allen : L.E.S]
2 It is so nice sitting here with you. [Horndy : Guide]
3 It's wonderful lying on the beach all day. [ditto]
4 It was a difficult business getting everything ready in time. [ditto]
5 It is enjoyable working here. [Leech : Communicative]
6 It was easy getting the equipment loaded. [ditto]
7 ". . . It's been awfully nice seeing you." [Maugham : Cakes & Ale]

3. Type of Predicates

[Yasui : Guide] shows that the predicates which expresses negative, or strong feelings are permissible ; instances are as follows,

1 negative : foolish, no use, useless, nuisance, annoying, irritating

2 strong : exciting, dull, wonderful, fun, easy

This text says 'not everything is permissible, and we should use only set expressions.'
[Yasui : Explanatory] presents a list of permissible and impermissible predicates.

1 permissible : easy, nice, no good, wrong, useless

2 impermissible : important, odd, weird, logical, rare, just, customary

The text says the gerund is restricted to those with emotional color, adding that in many cases these are used only colloquially except words like 'no use'. This sentence is a little equivocal, but what it means is, I presume, that these predicates are used mainly in colloquial situations except the 'no use' group.

In [Murata : Functional] following predicates are shown as permissible.

easy, hard, nice, pleasant, dull, exciting, irritating, regrettable wonderful, wrong, fun, no good, no use, useless

It says these predicates which show speaker's emotional reaction are permissible, while those which means only cognition are not. Impermissible ones are as follows

illegal, important, normal, common, out of the question

[Araki : Guide] lists about the same kind of right and wrong predicates.

1 right : ridiculous, fun, nice, useless, hard, irritating, understandable

2 wrong : illegal, out of the question

The above-mentioned lists of predicates have much in common. After referring to a few other handbooks of sentence examples, I made the following table.

A. Permissible

1. Set expression

no use, no good, useless

2. Degree of difficulty

easy, hard, tough

3. Agreeable emotion

fun, nice, good, pleasant, exciting, pleasant

4. Disagreeable emotion

dull, foolish, annoying, irritating, unpleasant, nuisance

B. Impermissible (logical without emotion)

odd, weird ; common, normal, rare, customary ; logical, illegal

I expect this list will be useful.

4. Comparison with Right Dislocation

As expected from examples in {2. Examples} gerund extraposition is mainly used in the collo-quial style. [CGEL] says this extraposition is 'uncommon outside informal style', and adds that gerund is 'incompletely adaptad to extraposition, notably by being resistant to bearing the main

focus." Thus of the next two utterances ;

   1 It's fun being a HÒSTess

   2 It's FÙN being a HÓSTess

we hear 2 rather than 1, and 2 is punctuated in writing as ;

It's fun, being a hostess.

This type of construction is what is called right dislocation. Right dislocation is originally quite different from extraposition, but in this case its only difference in writing is that it has a comma as a pause before gerund.

    Right dislocation is a way of expressing 'after-thought', and it is often heard in conversation. Therefore it seems difficult to draw a clear line between these two constructions.

    Gerund extraposition with impermissible predicates and gerund with sense subjects are non-grammatical or are low in grammaticality.

    * It's understandable John's owning two cars.   [Araki : Guide]
    * It is normal nowadays wearing glasses.   [Murata : Functional]

But if these sentences change into right dislocation, there is no problem.

It's understandable, John's owning two cars.
It is normal nowadays, wearing glasses.

5. Gerund Extraposition in Subjunctive

    Generally speaking, infinitive is hypothetical while gerund is factual.

    Therefore, it is dubious that gerund is often interchangeable with infinitive in extraposition as [Genius] says.   All the gerunds in the examples in {2. Examples} are factual.

    In this sense, in subjunctive, gerund extraposition has less grammaticality than that of infinitive and such examples are rare.

It would have been nice to know you.   [Araki : Guide]
?It would have been nice knowing you.

6. Conclusion.

From the above explanation following principles on gerund extraposition may be introduced.
1 we can use gerund extraposition in informal, or colloquial situation.
2 but we should mainly use those predicates which have emotional connotations
3 and we should avoid the gerund with its sense subject, and using this structure in subjunctive
4 all the above restrictions are cancelled if we use a comma in writing, that is, in right dislocation, though this is quite different grammatical kind of construction.

Masataka NENDAI

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