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**The cognitive discursive aspect of realization of polyfunctional  
linguistic units in the mass media (on the material of the gerund)**

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**Abstract.** The article deals with a cognitive-discursive research of gerund constructions in online editions of British newspapers and magazines such as The Guardian, The Times, and The Week. It studies the polyfunctional nature of the gerund and the way it is used in the mentioned editions to fulfil the main function of the mass media – to influence people’s minds and form their attitudes to reality. Texts of the online mass media obtain special features and refer to the media linguistics research field. Mass media has become not only the best way of entertaining, but the best instrument of manipulating. A gerund form as a dynamic linguistic unit combines substantive and verbal features expressed more or less within a certain context (semantic, syntactic and extralinguistic). The meaning of a gerund form can be defined in terms of pragmatic aspects of language. A recipient of a message interprets it according to the world view, background knowledge, age, culture, religion, social, and professional factors. From the point of view of the cognitive-discursive approach, polyfunctionality of the gerund allows it to fulfil complex functions of mass media discourse.

**Key words:** cognitive studies; discourse; mass media; polyfunctional unit; gerund.

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**Когнитивно-дискурсивный аспект реализации  
полифункциональных единиц в СМИ (на материале герундия)**

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена когнитивно-дискурсивным исследованиям функционирования герундиальных конструкций в онлайн версиях популярных

британских газет и журналов the Guardian, the Times и the Week. В ходе работы рассматривается полифункциональная природа герундия, которая позволяет использовать его в качестве средства достижения основной функции анализируемого дискурса – формирование у реципиента определенного отношения к окружающей действительности. Тексты онлайн средств массовой информации относятся к области медиа лингвистики, благодаря чему они получают дополнительные характеристики, обусловленные каналом коммуникации. Помимо того, что современные СМИ являются основным способом развлечения людей, они стали основным инструментом манипуляции. Динамика герундия как полифункциональной единицы, не завершившей процесс гипостазиса, позволяет ему сочетать в себе субстантивные и глагольные черты, которые проявляются в зависимости от речевой ситуации (семантического и синтаксического контекстов, а также экстралингвистических факторов). Обобщенное значение герундия может быть выявлено при условии анализа прагматического аспекта коммуникации, так как реципиент воспринимает текст, основываясь на собственной картине мира, фоновых знаниях, культуре, религии, возрасте, социальном и профессиональном окружении. Полифункциональная природа герундия, которая проявляется в рамках когнитивно-дискурсивного аспекта, позволяет выполнять комплексные задачи, стоящие перед СМИ.

**Ключевые слова:** когнитивные исследования; дискурс; СМИ; полифункциональная единица; герундий.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is a dynamic phenomenon. Any process of communication is determined by certain extralinguistic factors. It is necessary to know how the speech is connected to the reality and understand the pragmatic aspect of communication. For the present research it is important to divide and define the notions ‘text’ and ‘discourse’. The phenomenon ‘discourse’ has been studied by many prominent linguists such as T. van Dijk, E.S. Kubryakova, N.D. Arutyunova, A.A., Kibrik, V.I. Karasik, O.V. Aleksandrova, O.N. Prokhorova and others, but there are still a lot of scientific problems to solve.

For the first time, a concept of the cognitive analysis was introduced by Teun A. van Dijk, who understands the notion of discourse as the language representation of the text content [5]. The scientist considers the text from the point of view of external

factors determined by the circumstances in which the act of communication is taking place. He points out that we can understand a message properly only in case we understand the communicative situation.

N.D. Arutyunova also takes into consideration extralinguistic aspects and defines the term ‘discourse’ as the speech immersed into life [3, p. 137]. According to the definition the text obtains new features and meanings while existing in a certain situation.

As cognitive linguistics developed, different approaches to the notion appeared. In our research we consider discourse as a cognitive phenomenon connected to the process of speech making, and at the same time as a final result of a speech process represented in a certain completed (and recorded) form [10, p. 16]. As it follows from the definition, we study the text from the

point of view of its extralinguistic, pragmatic, social and cultural aspects, because speech is a targeted social action.

A.A. Kibrik states the difference between the notions 'text' and 'discourse'. According to the scientist, text is a result of communication, but discourse represents both sides at the same time – a process of speech and its result. O.V. Aleksandrova writes about the aspects of the text actualization from the point of view of mental processes and from the point of view of extralinguistic factors [1, p. 10]. As we can see, a process of speech is closely connected with the mental activity, our perception of existing reality and our world view.

Linguistics plays an important role in cognitive studies because it is connected with the process of linguistic representation of knowledge. The cognitive discursive approach combines cognitive principles and communicative paradigms. As a result of a cognitive process, a set of concepts (conceptual model of the world) is formed. Linguistic features are studied from the point of view of the conceptual analysis. It helps us to understand the principles of the wordforms collocability and combinability. Words are combined according to the conceptual structure, the rules of the compositional semantics, formally, functionally and according to the expressed ideas and notions. The main ideas of the present research can be described as the dialectical unity of language and speech, dynamics of linguistic processes determined by the nature of mental processes in a way they are generated and represented at the semantic level, and the necessity of considering extralinguistic aspects [4, p. 37].

#### **MAIN PART**

The present research deals with a cognitive discursive study of -ing forms (especially gerund forms) functioning in online versions of the popular British newspapers and magazines. The study is aimed at revealing how -ing forms behave in the media and how their polyfunctional nature is used for fulfilling tasks of the discourse in question. To study the cognitive part of units

we need to describe mass media as a linguistic phenomenon and analyze the main aspects of its functioning.

Some scientists consider mass media as the best example of the existing language. The development of the Internet transferred the research to the media linguistics branch as online versions of popular newspapers and magazines are now as widely spread as their printed editions were in the last century. The Internet has occupied almost all the spheres of our life. Wireless technologies and smart gadgets provide us with an opportunity of getting any information any time we need. For this reason, T.G. Dobrosklonskaya introduced the term 'media linguistics'. The scientist describes different aspects of the linguistic sphere in question: firstly, as the whole corpus of all the texts created within the mass media activity; secondly, as the inner language system equipped with a set of certain linguo-stylistic characteristics; finally, as a special mixed type sign system which combines verbal and audiovisual elements specific for every form of mass media – publishing, radio, TV or the Internet [8, p. 15].

Mass media communication represents interesting stylistic phenomena. The language of mass media is divertive. In some cases, one style transfers to another one. For example, colloquial expressions coexist with the literary language, historical notions with new terms, simple sentences with complex constructions. As news editions have become the best instrument of human mind manipulation, every structure is aimed at fulfilling the influential function of mass media. The main task of mass media is to create thoughts and opinions, norms of behavior and our attitude to events. We watch TV, read newspapers, entertain and unconsciously get a new world view, formed with the help of mass media means, where a text represents the main tool. We interpret events according to our culture, background knowledge, social and professional values. V.Z. Demyankov offers to study discourse from the point of view of the recipient who is

called ‘an interpreter’. The process of interpretation results in the actualized meaning and depends on the author and recipient’s intensions. The cognitive approach is anthropocentric. It deals with any linguistic unit within the scope of knowledge used to describe any object or phenomenon [6, p. 26]. Teun A. van Dijk describes the power of public discourse as follows: ‘we have seen that among many other resources that define a power base of a group or institution, *access to or control over* public discourse and communication is an important symbolic resource, as is the case for knowledge and information’ [13, p. 355].

As S.G. Ter-Minasova points out, there is a great difference between cultures influenced by many aspects of the development of a lingua-cultural society. Language and culture are closely connected. Cultural (or notional) world view is the realization of the world through the model of reality formed in human mind and expressed by means of a language. Language is the way of world perception by a certain society. Language, mind and culture are connected so close that they represent a unity and they can’t exist and function separately, without each other [12, p. 24]. The development of language in human mind is happening within the development of the society. English is a good example of how history creates the language. Even the historical periods of the English language coincide with social and political events. For example, the appearance of the Christianity introduced lexis and grammar of the Latin language. The Normans brought French which became the language of public and military officials and state affairs. Finally, the end of the War of the Roses led to the establishment of the literary language. Book-printing set the norms of the English language and made it widely spread. As we can see, the language is adapting to the changing reality to represent all the ideas and notions properly.

Grammar is a conservative field, but it reflects the world view and the functional-pragmatic approach is becoming more

recognizable. Traditional studies of syntax concerning the structural and semantic principles are moving to the field of the language philosophy [2, p. 20]. It is clear that ‘the grammar of a language is not just a long list of formal rules. A grammar may be seen as a cognitive achievement: it is the solution that generations of speakers of a speech community have found to structure their thoughts with the intention to communicate them to other people’ [15, p. 11].

The gerund as a linguistic phenomenon demonstrates a case of the meaning actualization and world view formation. Gerund forms came into English from Latin and are formed with the help of the -ing suffix which is a derivational and inflectional unit at the same time and leads to the homonymy of grammatical forms. The gerund as we know it today is ‘a noun whose role has been broadened by its acquisition of verbal characteristics’ [16, p. 137]

Many scientists unite the homonymous wordforms into the -ing form class presented by different levels of substantive representation. The -ing suffix is a word-building meaningful element because suffixes and prefixes cannot be considered independent meaningful units as they refer to the bound morphemes and appear as meaningful linguistic units of a certain level only within the units of a higher level of linguistic hierarchy – lexemes [11, p. 132].

As it follows, gerund as an -ing form is a polyfunctional unit. The process of hypostasis (transfer from a one part-of-speech class to another) is not finished. For considering the word class of the ing-form scientists use syntactic context. To actualize the meaning of a gerund form the collocational and colligational aspects are to be studied within the dialectical approach towards the language [7]. The idea is that the specific dynamic nature of the gerund helps it to fulfil pragmatic tasks of mass media discourse.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

More than 200 examples in the articles from the most popular British political

newspapers and magazines such as The Guardian, The Times, The Independent, The Economist, The Week and The Daily Telegraph were studied within the present research. While analyzing the actual material we found out that -ing forms are frequently used for describing political events and current economic situations. The main feature of the -ing forms in the articles in question is polyfunctionality. The form gets verbal or substantive features according to the context in which it is used. To provide the meaning of a process the -ing form gets verbal characteristics. To create the meaning of a notion it performs substantive features. Such usage of polyfunctional units cannot be considered as a rule, but still we can describe this phenomenon as a linguistic trend.

To illustrate this point of view we give several examples of different representations of the wordforms *meeting* and *handling* while being different parts of speech and performing substantive or verbal representations within a syntactic context.

*Aside from that whole colonialism thing, Princess Michael of Kent, for example, has made headlines for wearing a racist brooch when meeting with Markle, and she reportedly named her pet black sheep "Venus" and "Serena" [20, URL].*

As it follows from the context, the -ing form *meeting* is participle I introduced in the sentence as a clause of time. It denotes simultaneous actions and the -ing form provides continuity to show that all the actions are happening while the meeting is going on. The adjective representation is close to a verbal noun and gerund.

For example:

*Trump's role in the production of a misleading statement about the meeting is reportedly part of Mueller's investigation [17, URL].*

The present statement demonstrates the realization of the -ing form *meeting* as a verbal noun. The category of the article determines the wordform as a noun. *The meeting* plays part of the prepositional object

and performs the maximum substantive representation of -ing forms.

*After the Chequers meeting yesterday Mr Trump travelled to meet the Queen for tea before flying to Ayrshire for a private weekend at his golf resort in Turnberry, where he joined his son, Eric [19, URL].*

This example presents a word sequence *after the Chequers meeting yesterday*. *Meeting* still represents substantive characteristics as it is determined by a definite article. But in case the article refers to the proper noun *Chequers*, used in a plural form, we can consider *meeting* here as a half-gerund in the function of the adverbial modifier of time. If it had any dependent elements or adverbs, it would become a gerund.

Another example of the -ing form usage:

*Donald Trump denies knowing of Russia meeting and attacks Michael Cohen [17, URL]*

*Russia meeting* is used in a headline without an article in a singular form and is determined by a proper noun *Russia* without a possessive case inflection. According to the syntactic context it cannot be called a gerund, because there are no elements to prove it (a direct object or an adverb). The -ing form can be considered here as a half-gerund. The polyfunctional nature of the -ing form at the example is used to represent more than a simple verbal noun, the -ing form here fulfils the meaning of continuity, the author points out that this *meeting* is a process with consequences. This example shows how the polyfunctionality of the gerund implements the function of the headline. The pragmatic aspect is reached by a significant linguistic unit.

*He opened with a blistering attack on Germany for being a "captive" of Russia — about the most obvious case of projection imaginable — and then blasted most of the rest of NATO members for not meeting the standard of spending 2 percent of their economy on the military [21, URL].*

The -ing form in the example above is used within a construction *blasted for not*

*meeting the standard*. The introducer verb *blaster for* invites the gerund *meeting* which has a direct object *the standard* demonstrating verbal characteristics. It is worth noticing the gerund form *meeting* is not used in its basic meaning which is, according to the Oxford Dictionary, ‘arrange or happen to come into the presence or company of (someone)’ [14, URL]. It is used in the meaning ‘fulfil or satisfy (a need, requirement, or condition)’ [14, URL]. The negative particle *not* determines the united meaning of the wordform and denotes ‘they didn’t follow the prescribed rules.’ As we can see the gerund form here substitutes the meaning of a subordinate clause and is used as a semantically-efficient unit.

There are some cases when a part of speech cannot be defined. The polyfunctional nature of the gerund is performed by a ‘half gerund’:

*During the summit in Helsinki, Putin appeared to dominate Trump, and the US president faced a storm of criticism at home for his handling of the meeting* [17, URL].

Here we can see a half gerund *handling* with a possessive pronoun *his*. Possessive pronouns can be used with both nouns and gerunds, so we can consider *handling* here both as a noun with -ing suffix or as a gerund. The difference between a noun and a gerund is that a gerund represents a grammatical meaning of a process; a noun is mainly used for the nomination of a result or an object [9]. In this case the hypostasis is not finished and even the syntactic context cannot help us to define the grammatical class. The only thing we can define is the substantive nature of -ing form represented in the example. The meaning of the wordform *handling* according to the Oxford Dictionary will be derived from the meaning of the verb *handle*, because there is no special meaning for the wordform *handling*. It denotes ‘manage a situation or problem’. It is worth mentioning that the wordform is not used in its main meaning ‘feel or manipulate with the hands’, as we can see from the root morpheme ‘hand’. It is obvious that the -ing form is used for

achieving the illusion of a continuing process. The author’s intention is to show that it was not just the president’s mistake. He stresses that the whole negotiations were not under the control of Donald Trump. As the author points, Mr Trump allowed Mr Putin to be the leader in the talks. The described reality is transformed by means of the -ing form to express a dynamic process. The linguistic unit forms the picture of talks where the American president does not play the main role.

*President’s handling of Benalla scandal met with anger and disappointment outside Paris* [18, URL].

Another example of the polyfunctionality of the -ing form. *President’s handling* from the one side, can be a combination of a noun in a possessive case or, from the other side, it is a gerund determined by a noun in a possessive case. The semantic context cannot help us to define a part-of-speech class, but the -ing morpheme brings the meaning of an action in a process. The meaning is the same as in the previous example, but the nature of the -ing form is more substantive as it stays in a function of a subject. It is important that the phrase is used in the article’s headline, so we can see the -ing form substituting a subordinate clause.

*Mr Trump referred repeatedly to “a suggestion” that he had given Mrs May for handling the Brexit negotiations, but said: “I think she found it maybe too brutal . . . I can fully understand why she thought it was a little bit tough.”* [19, URL].

The construction *had given Mrs May for handling the Brexit negotiation* includes the introducer verb *had given* with a direct object *Mrs May* and a gerund *handling* with a direct object *the Brexit negotiations*. The gerund construction is used here in a rare function – an adverbial modifier of purpose. The nature of the gerund is verbal because of a direct object and it expresses the grammatical meaning of a systematic approach in dealing with the situation, but it still has the function of a noun to support its substantive part. The lexical meaning is the same as in the previous examples – ‘manage a

situation or problem'. The gerund again substitutes the meaning of a subordinate clause and is used as a semantically efficient unit.

### CONCLUSIONS

The analysis has shown that in a particular situation, on the level of discourse, the gerund acts as a polyfunctional unit and is used in the discourse for pragmatic reasons to express an action in a process. Constructions obtain substantive or verbal characteristics allowing mass media to influence people's mind. The cognitive nature of the gerund reflects the reality through the description of an action creating a certain impression on the basis of the recipient's world view. Gerund constructions save the meaning while substituting bigger utterances. As it follows, a gerund can be used for fulfilling a complex and important task of mass media discourse – broadcasting the information in the 'right' way, changing people's attitude to the reality, and forming their conceptual system.

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