The evolution of the Romanian finite gerund
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In early modern Romanian (EMR), verb forms that had underspecified Tense features and no phi-features (such as the finite gerund) could denote both a [realis] (actual, factual) and an [irrealis] eventuality (including under this term the non-assertive moods, as well as epistemically modalized predications) (Han 1998, Nikolaeva 2007). The Fin head of these verbal forms had the features [+Finite], [+/ -Realis]. In contemporary Romanian, the underspecification of T and the absence of agreement are allowed only if the verb is [+Finite], [-Realis]. In other words, a restriction in modality appears for certain finite Fin heads. Proof for this change of the Romanian verb system will come from the diachronic evolution of the finite gerund. The analysis will also explain its disappearance at the end of the EMR period.

Starting with the oldest attestations of Romanian and throughout the EMR stage (16th to 18th c.), the gerund occurred not only in adjunct, complement, or DP modifier positions, but also in predicate position, as a finite verb form (1-3). The finite gerund is attested mainly in translations, but also in original texts. The diachronic data concerning the finite gerund will come from the analysis of an extensive 16th and 17th century corpus that will be compared with the results of Alboiu’s (2013) analysis, based on a smaller later (end of the 17th-18th c.) corpus and with the contemporary Romanian gerundial structure.

(1) [iară ei îmblându in cetăți dereptu sfântu cuvântul tău] și săntu uciși și dzuas și noapte (CS.1590-1602: 11v)

‘and they walk in cities to spread your holy word and are killed day and night’

(2) Miră-se amu Hristosu, [că nefiindu sutasălu izrailteanu], wondered=REFL.3SG now Christ because not-be.GER commander.the Jewish
nici scriptura jidovească de el știindu (CC2.1581: 251)

‘Christ was surprised now, because the commander was not Jewish, neither did he know the Jewish Scripture’

(3) [Ainte de toți adinsu voi iubosti pururea aibându], derep ce iubostea coopere
above of all between you love always have.GER because love.the covers
multîmea păcatelor (CV.1563-83: 80r)

‘Above all always love one another, so that love should cover your many sins’

When it functions as the predicate of the clause, the EMR gerund is a finite verb that lacks phi-features. Building on Rizzi’s (1997) seminal work on the structure of the left periphery, Bianchi (2003) and Adger (2007) consider the Finiteness head to be the locus of an interpretable feature, [+/-Finite], which causes for the eventuality to be interpreted as being either independent or anaphoric to the Speech event of the matrix clause. More specifically, for Bianchi (2003), finite predications have independent tense and agreement (which licenses referentially independent subjects), while non-finite predications have an anaphorically identified tense and subject referent. Working on Romanian data, Alboiu (2010, 2013) shows that phi-features are
associated with Force, not Finiteness. The author puts forth that the possibility of having a referentially independent subject is not a feature of the finite inflection, but it is determined by the phasal/non-phasal character of the verb phrase (Chomsky 2008). Therefore, in Romanian, the difference between finiteness and non-finiteness actually boils down to the absolute/anaphoric temporal interpretation of the clause (Hill 2013).

We shall follow Alboiu (2013), who argued that the 17th-18th century finite gerund has an independent tense feature and that the present/past/future values are obtained not syntactically, but pragmatically (in the discourse). Since this manner of specifying the temporal value of a predication is marked, it was abandoned after the 18th century. Next to independent tense, other arguments for the finite character of the gerund in predicate position are: the coordination with root clauses (1), the presence of complementizers in Force that select a [+finite] head (2), and its occurrence as the only verb form of a matrix clause (3).

In the 16th century, the finite gerund is attested with both indicative – [+Realis] – value (1,2) and directive subjunctive/imperative – [-Realis] – value (3). The irrealis finite gerund disappears in the 17th century, while the [+Realis] finite gerund continues to be attested until the end of the 18th century. This is the time when a restriction appears on predicates that are underspecified for Tense and have no agreement features: their Fin head must have the feature [-Realis]. Since in the 18th century the finite gerund only had a realis modal value, this specialization of the Finite head leads to the disappearance of the gerund in predicate position. Further proof is the fact that all the Contemporary Romanian predicates that are underspecified for Tense and lack phi-features have the modal feature [-Realis], such as the infinitive and the supine with imperative value (A se reține / De reținut! ‘Keep in mind!’), or the perfect subjunctive with optative value (Ah, să fi mers și eu/tu/el(...) ieri/azi/săptămâna viitoare în excursie! ‘If only I/you/he... had gone/went/would go yesterday/today/next week on the trip!’).

In the contemporary language, the irrealis feature favors the underspecification of Tense and non-realization of agreement. Romanian evolved in the same direction as other Romance and non-Romance languages: non-finite forms that occupy the predicate position tend to have a modal interpretation, to be non-assertive (Bianchi 2003, Adger 2007, Nikolaeva 2007, Avram and Hill 2007).

Bibliography:
Alboiu, Gabriela 2013. ‘The TAM System of Gerund Clauses in EMR’. ACED 15 Conference. 6-8 June 2013, University of Bucharest.