From phrase to clause(-like): on the development of verbal nouns in *-ing*

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The present paper investigates the phenomenon of phrases developing into clauses, and the possible causes behind such changes. To exemplify the phenomenon, the well-known and much discussed history of the de-verbal noun in *-ing* in English will be drawn on. As these forms were originally purely nominal in their behaviour, but began to acquire verbal syntax from the early Middle English period onwards, gradually becoming more and more clause-like, they seem to constitute a prime case of such development (cf. de Smet 2008; Fanego 1996, 2004; Jack 1988; Tajima 1985). The 'clausalisation' of the form is easily seen in the differences between the *-ing*-forms in the following examples (adjectival vs. adverbial modification, presence/absence of a determiner slot, *of*-object vs. direct object, etc.):

(1) At this horrible **murthering** of trew Christians (sdia2b)
(2) in **telling** ther jvdgments frielie (soff3).

Tying in with this issue is the history of another phrase, namely the one of the present participle, which was gradually dissociated from its adjectival origins from Old English onwards (cf. Swan 2003). The (in this regard) parallel development of these two non-finites can, then, explain their functional and formal merger during Middle English, seeing that when "clause-internal syntax and verbal morphology are insufficiently distinctive to keep different non-finite clause-types apart, mergers are to be expected" (de Smet 2010: 1184-1185).

This paper now attempts to identify the possible triggers of such change from phrase to clause, linking the development to current debates on the complexity of the internal syntax of nominal expressions (cf. e.g. Abney 1987), and stressing the peculiarity of de-verbal nominalisations (as well as adjectivisations) as "atypical members of their word class" (de Smet 2010: 1185; cf. also Rozwadowska 2005).

Empirically, the paper is based on an in-depth study of non-finites in the *Helsinki Corpus of Older Scots* (HCOS). The decision to focus on this descendant of Old English was driven by the fact that the formal collapse of *-ing*-forms and present participles was delayed until the early 15th ct. in the North (Gardela 2011; Dons/Moessner 1999), but both forms nevertheless developed clausal behaviour from early on. Scots evidence thus seems to support a considerable syntactic and functional approximation of the constructions before the morphological coalescence took place (de Smet 2010; Houston 1989; Wright 1995) and challenges theories which relate the clausalisation processes to the merger (cf. among others, Visser 1984; Langenhove 1925; Swan 2003).

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