

Analyzing the Gerundial Patterns of prevent: New Corpus Evidence from Recent English

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Abstract

One well-known difference between British and American English concerns the verb *prevent*. In both varieties, the verb is commonly found in constructions with *NP from -ing*, as in [...] *the extreme temperature of the cold tenderises the flesh and prevents it from becoming tough* (NOW Corpus 2010), and in British English it is also commonly found in corresponding constructions lacking the preposition *from*, as in *Morgan [...] fastened a belt around his wrists to prevent him saving himself* (NOW Corpus 2011). There are major unresolved issues relating to the two types of constructions illustrated. One question is whether the constructions involve object control or a Raising rule. One novel idea proposed is that an *ACC -ing* analysis should be available for the pattern without *from*. The British and American segments of the NOW corpus offer good sources of data, which have not been used in earlier work on *prevent*.

Keywords: Object control, Subject to Object Raising, British English, *prevent*, NOW Corpus

Résumé

Une différence bien connue entre l'anglais britannique et l'anglais américain concerne le verbe *prevent*. Dans les deux variétés, le verbe se trouve couramment dans des constructions avec *NP from -ing*, comme dans [...] *the extreme temperature of the cold tenderises the flesh and prevents it from becoming tough* (Corpus NOW 2010), et en anglais britannique il se trouve aussi couramment dans des constructions correspondantes sans la préposition *from*, comme dans *Morgan [...] fastened a belt around his wrists to prevent him saving himself* (Corpus NOW 2011). Il existe d'importantes questions non résolues concernant les deux types de constructions illustrées. L'une d'entre elles est de savoir si les constructions impliquent un contrôle de l'objet ou une règle de montée vers l'objet. Une nouvelle idée proposée est qu'une analyse *ACC -ing* devrait être disponible pour le modèle sans *from*. Les segments britannique et

américain du corpus NOW offrent de bonnes sources de données, qui n'ont pas été utilisées dans les travaux antérieurs sur *prevent*.

Mots clés: contrôle de l'objet, montée du sujet vers l'objet, anglais britannique, *prevent*, Corpus NOW

1. INTRODUCTION

The present article considers the complementation of the verb *prevent*. It is well known that the verb syntactically selects two types of gerundial complement clauses. Consider the sentences in (1a–b), both from the British English component of the NOW Corpus (see Davies 2008–).

- (1) a. A hip injury prevented him from featuring at the beginning of the campaign before suffering a groin injury which [...] (2019-12-22 GB)¹
- b. Walking also helps to treat anxiety and depression and prevents these conditions starting in the first place. (2019-12-28 GB)

Prevent occurs as a matrix verb both in sentence (1a) and in sentence (1b). In each case the complementation of *prevent* involves a verbal gerundive *-ing* form. It is a commonly accepted view in English grammar that such gerundial constructions are sentential or clausal, and this view is adopted here. One reason for this approach is that it is then possible to represent the argument structure of the lower verb in a straightforward way. The two types of *-ing* clauses are different in that in the pattern of (1a) the complement construction of *prevent* is of the type NP *from -ing* and in (1b) it is of the type NP *-ing*, without *from*. For the purposes of discussion, the former pattern may be termed the 'NP *from -ing*' pattern, and the latter, without *from*, the 'bare NP *-ing*' pattern.

As regards the more detailed analysis of the NP *from -ing* pattern with *prevent*, there is a significant difference between the approach in Postal (1974) and that in Sag and Pollard (1991). In Postal's 1974 *On Raising*, he argued that a sentence of the type of (1a) involves Subject to Object Raising. (Dixon 1984: 593 also proposes a Subject to Object Raising analysis for *prevent*.) That is, in a Raising analysis the lower subject of sentence (1a), for instance, is raised from the subject position of the lower clause into the object position of the higher clause, and the subject of the lower clause is then what in later frameworks would be called an NP trace. The NP trace is coindexed, and coreferential with the NP raised, that is, *him* in (1a), with the coindexing being a concomitant of the movement rule.

The other classic analysis in the literature of the NP *from -ing* pattern selected by *prevent* is the approach presented by Sag and Pollard (1991). They include the verb *prevent* in their list of object control verbs. In other words, the object of *prevent* in (1a) is generated by phrase structure rules and the subject of the lower clause is

¹The token codes are the same as those supplied in the NOW Corpus (year-month-day variety), with the addition of the full form of the year, rather than just the last two digits.

then a PRO, an abstract pronominal NP that is not pronounced. In this approach there is no movement involved.

As far as the bare NP *-ing* pattern selected by *prevent* is concerned, scholars have provided careful information on the incidence of the pattern, especially in British English, but the construction has received less analytic attention in the literature than the NP *from -ing* pattern. One reason may be the circumstance, often remarked on, that the bare NP *-ing* pattern tends to be virtually absent from current American English, where the NP *from -ing* construction is clearly predominant. (The bare NP *-ing* pattern is also found in Australian and New Zealand English (see Mair 2009), but these varieties deserve a separate treatment.) Thus Sag and Pollard (1991), for instance, appear to pay no attention to the bare NP *-ing* pattern, restricting their control analysis to the NP *from -ing* construction. However, Dixon (1984: 59) does put forward the view that the bare NP *-ing* construction is generated in the same way as the NP *from -ing* pattern, that is, by Subject to Object Raising. However, he does not offer arguments for his position. In his later grammars of English, he has suggested that what is here called the NP *from -ing* construction ‘relates to a post-object complement clause’, and what is here called the bare NP *-ing* construction relates to a ‘complement clause in object function’ (Dixon 1991: 237, 2005: 259). These statements do not necessarily lack insight, but they are enclosed in parentheses in both of Dixon’s grammars, and in neither grammar does the author engage in discussing the remarks further. Under these circumstances, there is a gap in the literature, justifying a closer look at the analysis of the two types of gerundial constructions, especially because today it is possible to make use of large electronic corpora of current British and American English.

The main task of the current article is to examine the syntactic properties of the two types of constructions. A great deal of attention has been paid in recent years to the recent history of the NP *from -ing* and bare NP *-ing* patterns with *prevent* (see for instance Rohdenburg 1995: 85–97, 2000: 36–7; Vosberg 2006: 149–57), including the virtual demise of the bare NP *-ing* pattern in American English in the twentieth century (see for instance Mair 2002, Ong 2011), and to potential semantic differences between the patterns (see Dixon 1991: 236, 2005: 259; Rudanko 2002: 57–8, 2003; Sellgren 2010), but the syntactic analysis of the two constructions in recent English (object control versus NP Movement) has attracted less attention. The advent of large electronic corpora also stimulated the present authors to take a fresh look at the syntax of *prevent*, with a focus on argument structures that the verb should be associated with.² With respect to each *-ing* pattern, the key question in any syntactic analysis is whether the pattern involves Subject to Object Raising (NP Movement) or

²Aarts (2012) discusses the syntax of *prevent* with NP *from -ing*, proposing that *from* is similar to infinitival *to*, and should be under the Infl node (Aarts 2012: 99), corresponding to the Aux node. However, *from* differs sharply from infinitival *to* in that only the latter permits post-auxiliary ellipsis, generally taken to be the strongest argument for the auxiliary status of infinitival *to* (Warner 1993: 64). Thus, while *John is reluctant to take chances, but I am not reluctant to* is well formed, **John is averse from taking chances, but I am not averse from* is not. We are therefore not persuaded of the analysis of *from* as an Aux. The

object control. A related question is whether there is a need for a third type of structure in the syntactic analysis of gerundial complements of *prevent*. The syntactic issue is tackled in section 3. Section 2 offers a descriptive survey of the different types of complements of *prevent* in a sample of very recent British and American English, and of the incidence of the two types of *-ing* constructions in very recent British and American English on the basis of the NOW Corpus.

As regards the choice of the NOW Corpus as the main source of data, it comprises over 10 billion words of newspaper data collected from online versions of newspapers and magazines published in 20 different countries. It contains articles beginning in 2010, and is updated daily. The more prominent varieties of English contribute the largest amounts of data towards the corpus, among them British English, whose share of the total is currently a little under two billion words. The choice of the NOW Corpus for the present study was motivated by its size and the consideration that it makes it possible to examine the complementation of *prevent* in very recent English.

There are other verbs of prevention in English that deserve study, including *block*, *hinder*, *keep*, and *stop* (for a fuller list of such verbs potentially deserving study, see Visser 1973: 2370–2373), but the authors have chosen the eponymous *prevent* for this study, because it is undoubtedly the central verb in this particular semantic area, and because the findings on *prevent* can then be expected to be a point of departure, and a point of comparison, in later analytic work on other verbs of prevention.

2. PREVENT IN A SAMPLE OF VERY RECENT ENGLISH

To shed light on very recent usage of complements of *prevent*, the present authors collected a sample of 200 tokens from both British and American English from the end of 2019, going backwards from December 31, 2019. For the data gathering, they used the simple search string ‘[prevent].[v*]’. Not specifying the context of *prevent* for this survey has the advantage of allowing the different types of complement to emerge. Obvious duplicates were counted only once in the survey.

In the datasets obtained, the number of irrelevant tokens not yielding information on the complementation structure of *prevent* was small. Examples included *This post will be subject to enhanced checks as part of our prevent duty* (2019-12-30 GB) and *Next, avoid words such as cure, prevent, reduce, treat or stop* (2019-12-26 GB).

The remaining tokens provide information on the complementation patterns of *prevent*. In the present dataset the most frequent type of complement is the NP, with 97 tokens in British English and 110 in American English. Examples are given in (2a–b). Another nonsentential pattern is the NP *from* NP pattern, with one token in the present dataset, given in (2c).

difference between infinitival *to* and *from* is a further reason for taking a fresh look at complements of *prevent*.

- (2) a. In fact, a supplement can help strengthen your hair and prevent hair loss. (2019-12-30 US)
- b. [...] a healthy lifestyle, which can still be effective in preventing progression towards more severe obesity. (2019-12-28 GB)
- c. We can not assure you that our insurance coverage is sufficient to prevent us from any loss or that we will be able to successfully claim our losses under our current insurance policy on a timely basis, or at all. (2019-12-30 US)

The bare NP complement is clearly a very frequent pattern with *prevent* today. As for the NP *from* NP pattern, only one token was found in the sample, but additional examples are easy enough to find elsewhere in the NOW Corpus, as for instance in *This is a calculated, intentional move on their part to prevent us from any further discovery in this case prior to the statute of limitations expiring* (2011-03-15 US). While the pattern may not be very common, it has likewise been noted by Herbst (2004), and, *pace* Aarts (2012: 97) and also *pace* Landau (2002: 485, footnote 19), the pattern should be recognized as possible in current English. The pattern is worth drawing attention to because in it *from* clearly seems to be a preposition, and the similarity, for instance, of [...] *prevent us from any further discovery in this case* [...] and [...] *prevent us from discovering anything further in this case* [...] suggests that the *from* of the NP *from* -*ing* pattern may also be analyzed as a preposition.

Proceeding to sentential complements attested in the sample, the main focus of this article is on the NP *from* -*ing* and bare NP -*ing* patterns of the types exemplified in section 1, but the present dataset brings up tokens of -*ing* complements of the type of those in (3a–d) that deserve to be noted, even if only one of each type comes up in the present dataset.

- (3) a. His movement and communications have been monitored and restricted to prevent his fleeing the country and tampering with evidence, [...] (2019-12-30 US)
- b. Workers in the large barge began to jump into the water to prevent from sinking with the ship. (2019-12-27 GB)
- c. I am aware that I do have the option of chemotherapy, but it's just so hard and so battering on the body. I'm trying to prevent going back to that, or at least prolonging the need for it. (2019-12-28 GB)
- d. An internet application program provider shall protect user information, and obtain the consent of users while collecting and using users' personal information in a lawful and proper manner and adopt proper measures, such as warning, limiting functions, suspending updates, and closing accounts, to prevent releasing illegal information content, keep records and report to the competent department. (2019-12-30 US)

Example (3a) is an example of POSS *Ing* (see Ross 2004). This pattern, with POSS as the overt subject of the lower clause, emerged in the seventeenth century (de Smet 2013: 191–2) and was prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but is less frequent in more recent English (see Rohdenburg 2000: 37). Example (3b) is a *prevent from* -*ing* construction, which differs from the pattern of sentence (1a) in

that in (3b) there is no overt intervening NP between *prevent* and *from*. As for (3c) and (3d), they are similar to (3b), except that there is no *from*.

Each of the lower clauses in (3b–d) has its own understood subject, and the understood subject in each case is PRO, since no movement operation is conceivable for any of the three sentences. A closer look at the sentences in (3b–d) reveals a difference in the way the understood subject of the *-ing* clauses can be interpreted. In (3b–c) it seems clear that the constructions are straightforward subject control structures, with PRO being coreferential with the subject of the matrix sentence. However, in (3d) PRO is not primarily coreferential with the higher subject, *an internet application provider*. Instead, the PRO permits a broader interpretation and the label PRO_{Arb} (see Chomsky 1986: 124–5) can be applied to the PRO in question.

The patterns of (3c–d) have been noted and illustrated in the comprehensive treatments of *prevent* by Poutsma (n.d.) and the *OED*. However, as far as the present authors are aware, neither Poutsma (n.d.) nor the *OED* mention the intransitive *prevent from -ing* pattern of (3b). Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 657) also do not include the verb in their list of verbs of abstention such as *keep from*. Nor is the pattern featured in the list of matrix verbs of the formula ‘Noun-Phrase + Verb Phrase + *from* + Verb-Phrase + *ing*’ in Bridgeman (1965: 25–26), which includes verbs such as *escape* and *refrain*. Before concluding that the usage represents a new discovery, it is of course necessary to ascertain that it has gained some currency in the language and is not a mere ‘flash in the pan’ in the present dataset. The NOW Corpus suggests itself as a source of further information here, and even if we only consider data from the first half of 2020, it is easy enough to find examples from both British and American English to substantiate the established status of the intransitive *from -ing* pattern in recent English. Two examples from British and American English are given in (4a–b) and (5a–b).

- (4) a. When you are writing a long series, burnout becomes a big issue. So you have to keep challenging yourself. Brooks avoided this pitfall by writing about something different at times, which helped prevent from falling into some kind of a predictable rut. (2020-05-11 GB)
- b. They want you to find out why you did it. That’s what’s going to help prevent from doing it in the future. (2020-01-10 GB)
- (5) a. An investor will have to sell the stock to prevent from losing any further gains over the next few years. (2020-06-04 US)
- b. Make sure that you are up to date on all your vaccinations because they do help prevent from getting additional viruses, and things that can be transmitted [...] (2020-01-23 US)

Of the additional examples, (4a) and (5a) are in line with the subject control interpretation of the original example in (3b). A possible analysis for this pattern might involve a construction with a reflexive, and in the case of (5a), for instance, a variant of the type *An investor will have to sell stock to prevent himself/herself from losing any further gains over the next few years* seems possible. (The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this possibility.) Such constructions with reflexives are found easily in the NOW corpus, as in [...] *I can not prevent myself*

from peppering my replies with glottal stops if a cabbie asks me [...] (2019-12-08 GB), and a sentence such as (3b) would involve the omission of the reflexive pronoun. On the other hand, subject control is not applicable in (4b) and (5b), and a PRO_{arb} can be postulated.

Proceeding to the NP *from -ing* pattern and the bare NP *-ing* patterns in the dataset, the findings in the sample are presented in Table 1.

	British English	American English
NP <i>from -ing</i>	71	72
bare NP <i>-ing</i>	25	1

Table 1: NP *from -ing* and bare NP *-ing* complements of *prevent* in a sample of very recent British and American English

The overall findings are in accordance with expectations in that the bare NP *-ing* pattern is much less frequent in the American English sample. However, the proportion of the bare NP *-ing* pattern turned out to be much lower in the present dataset of British English than what would have been expected on the basis of some other fairly recent work, where the proportion of the bare NP *-ing* pattern was almost equal to the NP *from -ing* pattern (e.g., see Mair 2002, 2006). In the present sample, the transitive NP *from -ing* pattern turned out to be almost three times as frequent as the bare NP *-ing* pattern. At the same time, it should be added that the figures in Mair's (2019: 359) very recent article, based on the Brown Corpora, also give some indication of a decrease in the proportion of the bare NP *-ing* pattern in British English in relation to the NP *from -ing* pattern, compared to the proportion in the 1990s. That the bare NP *-ing* pattern might indeed be receding in very recent British English is a possible hypothesis, but it cannot be fully substantiated on the basis of the present sample, since the particular text type might also be a factor.

In view of the rarity of the bare NP *-ing* complement in very recent American English, it seems reasonable to draw mainly on the British English dataset when discussing the syntactic structures of that pattern.

3. CORPUS DATA AND THE SYNTAX OF NP *FROM -ING* AND BARE NP *-ING* COMPLEMENTS OF *PREVENT*

As far as the syntactic analysis of NP *from -ing* and bare NP *-ing* complements of *prevent* is concerned, there is a noteworthy difference between the approaches in Postal (1974) and Sag and Pollard (1991). Postal's comments also cover some other verbs that are semantically similar to *prevent*, but his focus is on *prevent*, and he considers such examples as *I prevented Jack from kissing the gorilla* (Postal's sentence 159a), reaching the conclusion that for constructions exemplified by his sentence, a Raising analysis is the 'only one that does not run into obvious difficulties' (Postal 1974: 163). This means essentially that the NP *Jack* in Postal's

sentence is generated by phrase structure rules as the subject of the lower clause and is then raised by the rule of Subject to Object Raising (NP Movement in later frameworks) into the object position of the matrix sentence. (Postal's approach was conceived before trace theory, but in later frameworks with trace theory an NP trace is left behind in the subject position of the lower clause.)

Regarding Sag and Pollard (1991), they present their view of the analysis of *prevent* as part of a wide-ranging discussion of different types of control constructions in English, and it comes under their *order/permit* type of object control verbs. They write:

Verbs of the *order/permit* type all submit to a semantic analysis involving STATES OF AFFAIRS (SOAS) where a certain participant (the referent of the object) is influenced by another participant (the referent of the subject) to perform an action. [...] The influencing participant may be an agent (as in *Kim persuaded Sandy to leave*) or a nonagent (as in *Ignorance of thermodynamics compelled Pat to enroll in a poetry class*). The semantics of all verbs in this class thus involves a SOA whose relation is of the INFLUENCE type. With respect to such SOAS, we may identify three semantic roles, which we will refer to as INFLUENCE (the possibly agentive influencer), INFLUENCED (the typically animate participant influenced by the influence) and SOA-ARG (the action that the influenced participant is influenced to perform (or, in the case of verbs like *prevent* and *forbid*, NOT to perform). (Sag and Pollard 1991: 66)

Sag and Pollard (1991: 66) suggest that some verbs, including *allow* and *permit*, that have uses with three arguments of the type described in the quotation, also have a Raising analysis (with two arguments). However, they do not mention *prevent* among these, and therefore it is reasonable to think that they regard *prevent* as a verb involving control, that is, object control, and not Raising. In the quotation provided, *prevent* is mentioned without *from*, but they also provide a list of verbs of the *order/permit* type, and in that list they include the verb with *from* in parentheses (Sag and Pollard 1991: 65). Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that their reference to *prevent* in the quotation is meant to apply to the pattern of (1a), where *from* is present.

The research task here is then to question whether data from a very large corpus might shed light on aspects of the syntactic analysis of the two types of NP *-ing* clauses selected by *prevent*. The corpus consulted is the NOW Corpus, up to the end of June 2020, and the method of analysis is to consider such special NPs in their idiomatic uses which may distinguish between control and Raising constructions. One such NP is the NP *cognizance*, found in the idiom *take cognizance*, but the disadvantage in this case is that this NP is very rare, and relevant combinations with *prevent* can also be expected to be extremely rare. The present authors also considered the NPs *advantage*, part of the idiom *take advantage*, *heed*, part of the idiom *pay heed*, and *tabs*, part of the idiom *keep tabs*, but searches for relevant tokens, of the type *They prevented tabs (from) being kept on our movements*, did not yield examples for British or American English. However, existential *there* is a more promising target for investigation, because it is a frequently occurring NP, and also among the standard arsenal of diagnostics that can be used to separate control and Raising constructions from each other (see Davies and Dubinsky 2004: 7–8). The search

string used was ‘[prevent].[v*] there’, and it retrieves 64 tokens. Not all of them are relevant. For instance, consider (6), where *there* is not dependent on *prevent*.

- (6) If this is not prevented there is a danger of the Super 6 teams being a warehouse system attracting players [...] (2018-05-09 GB)

However, most of the 64 tokens are relevant. There are some very isolated tokens, of the magnitude of one or two, in some non-core regional varieties of English in the corpus, but the figures from British and American English are given in Table 2. They are supplemented with tokens from two other core varieties, Australian and Canadian English.

	<i>from -ing</i>	bare <i>-ing</i>
BrE	1	14
AmE	5	6
Australian E	1	4
Canadian E	2	1

Table 2: *From -ing* and bare *-ing* complements of *prevent* in environments of existential *there*

The figures are so low for Australian and Canadian English that it is probably best to regard them as having curiosity value only, and to set them aside with that, but illustrations from British and American English are given in (7a–b) and (8a–b).

- (7) a. It is the last substantial strip left which prevents there from being an urban sprawl from London to Crawley [...] (2010-02-13 GB)
 b. We would love to be accessing those patients to prevent there being a problem in the future. (2012-07-30 GB)
- (8) a. [...] it seems like a mistake to let the need for weepy in-memorial strings prevent there from being a guitar anywhere on stage. (2016-05-23 US)
 b. “France is doing everything to prevent there being a lot of people coming to pray,” (2019-11-07 US)

The figures from Great Britain and the United States are not very high overall, taking into account that the segments of the NOW Corpus in question are very large. However, even these fairly low figures offer a surprise. In spite of the very clear predominance of the *from -ing* pattern in relation to the bare *-ing* pattern in the British English data that was observed in section 2 of this study, it turned out that in the particular diagnostic environment being considered here, there is an unexpectedly clear preference for the bare *-ing* complement in the British English data. Sentence (7a) is the only token of the *from -ing* type in this diagnostic environment, and the figure for the bare *-ing* pattern is as high as 14. As for the American English data, the figures are almost even, but in view of the well-known general predominance of the *from -ing* pattern in relation to the bare *-ing* variant with *prevent* in American English, which was also confirmed for very recent data above, the finding still shows an

unexpectedly high frequency of the bare *-ing* variant in this particular syntactic environment.

It is also appropriate here to consider passive sentences with *prevent* and with NPs in idiomatic constructions. Sentences with the NP *there* are hardly suitable for this purpose (see Postal 1974: 159, footnote 55), but Postal, as reported by Landau (2002: 487–488), has pointed to idiom-like constructions that may be considered. The constructions in question are extremely rare, but Postal has drawn attention to idiomatic sentences such as those in (9a–b):

- (9) a. Strings were prevented from being pulled.
 b. The rug was prevented from being pulled out from under Mary.

There are speakers who may be hesitant or dubious about the status of one or both of the sentences in (9a–b), but taking Postal's intuitions, not contested by Landau (2002: 487–488), into account, the present authors have not marked them as ill formed. They may then be compared with the versions without *from*, given in (10a–b). (Postal does not consider the versions without *from*.)

- (10) a. ??Strings were prevented being pulled.
 b. ??The rug was prevented being pulled out from under Mary.

The sentences in (10a–b) appear less well formed than those in (9a–b). The Complexity Principle, established by Rohdenburg (1996), may be a factor, with the more complex (passive) environment favouring the more explicit variant with *from* and contributing to the ill-formedness of (10a–b) but it is questionable whether it is sufficient to account for it by itself (see the penultimate paragraph of this section).

Regarding the theoretical significance of the results emerging from Table 2 and the comments on the passives, it is not easy to propose final conclusions, but as regards the active patterns without *from*, the numbers of bare *-ing* complements are noticeable in Table 2, especially in British English. Such sentences cannot be analyzed as control constructions, since the NP *there* cannot bear a theta role. That is, the NP *there* must be syntactically generated in the lower clause in sentences such as (7b) and (8b). This finding is solid and it is compatible with a Raising analysis.

Whether the evidence of sentences (7b) and (8b) is a convincing argument for a Raising analysis of the pattern without *from* is a separate question. It was pointed out above that the passives in (10a–b) sound unlikely to speakers, while the variants with *from* sound better. This state of affairs brings up a third possibility. This is that *prevent*, when it selects a bare *-ing* complement, may involve an ACC Ing complement. That type of construction was argued in Postal (1974: 105, note 16) to be appropriate for a class of verbs in English, including *resent*. He pointed out that while an active sentence of the type *They resented it happening to Bob* is well formed, a passive version of the type **It was resented happening to Bob* is ill formed. This is explained under the assumption that the NP *it* is generated in the subject position of the lower clause and that it then stays in that position. In other words, verbs of this class do not permit Subject to Object Raising (with the proviso that the lower subject is in the oblique (or non-nominative) form even

though remaining in situ (see Postal 1974: 105)). The underlying assumption is that an NP raised by Subject to Object Raising can be expected to permit passive variants. This is a reasonable assumption to make since there are quite a number of matrix verbs with objects that undergo Subject to Object Raising that even prefer the passivization (or some other movement operation) of the raised NP, including *allege* (Postal 1974: 304) to leaving it in situ.

A *resent* type analysis for the derivation of bare *-ing* constructions of *prevent* would account for the occurrence of sentences such as those in (7b) and (8b), and the ill-formedness of passivized versions without *from*, as in (10a–b). Accepting that passivized versions are better with *from -ing*, as illustrated in (9a–b), it appears that a Raising analysis is needed in the case of the *from -ing* complement.

The bigger picture to emerge from this discussion of the syntax of *prevent* is that the verb resists simple categorization as regards the distinction between object control and Subject to Object Raising. With respect to the *from -ing* pattern, it can be said with confidence that control structures involving object control are needed for that type of complement. For instance, consider sentences such as that in (11) for British English and that in (12) from American English from the present dataset.

- (11) Their being outside the government did not prevent the voters from holding them accountable on December 12. (2019-12-28 GB)
- (12) [...] if he came in and found Turner or if Pinkney prevented him from coming in, she would be arrested, according to documents. (2019-12-30 US)

In the sentences of (11) and (12), the verb selects three arguments and has an interpretation based on influencing, spelled out by Sag and Pollard (1991: 66) as typical of object control; the surface subject represents the object of *prevent* in each case.

It is also possible to associate the object control analysis with a particular sense of the verb, namely, that of ‘stop, keep, or hinder (a person or thing) *from* doing something’ (*OED*, sense 14a). It can be added that in the case of sentence (1a) it is also easy to form a passive of a type where the derived subject is linked to *prevent*, of the type *He was prevented from featuring at the beginning of the campaign*.

Keeping the focus on the *from -ing* pattern, the discussion also suggests that an object control approach is not the only analysis of the pattern with *prevent*. If we can accept Postal’s view (see above) that (9a–b) are well formed, it is plausible to think that they involve Subject to Object Raising. In these sentences the surface subjects are the NPs *Strings* and *The rug*, idiomatically used, and they are linked to the predicates of the lower clauses. As a consequence, they must have been generated in the lower clauses and then raised into the higher clauses by Subject to Object Raising.

Going beyond the small datasets and idiomatic uses, it is possible to strengthen the case for a Raising analysis of the NP *from -ing* pattern, because it is easy enough to find passivized sentences not involving special NPs where it seems clear that the surface subjects originate in a lower clause and do not represent the original direct objects of *prevent*. In such configurations the verb thus selects two arguments, not three. Consider the sentences in (13a–b), from the British English segment of the NOW Corpus.

- (13) a. Two children, aged seven and nine, were prevented from being prosecuted for a knife-related offence because of their age, [...] (2003-03-01 GB)
- b. As a result of this personal conflict, the nine-pounder gun was prevented from being re-loaded, and was eventually captured by the Infantry, [...] (2010-04-08 GB)

In (13a–b) *prevent* does not have the sense of ‘influence the referent of NP_O not to perform some action,’ to hark back to part of the formulation provided by Sag and Pollard (1991: 66). Instead, in (13b), for instance, the NP *the nine-pounder gun* represents the underlying object of the verb *re-load* and is raised from the lower clause by Subject to Object Raising, and the sense of *prevent* is causative, along the lines of ‘bring it about that not S₂.’ Or, to give a more elegant definition, it is possible to refer to a particular sense of the verb in the *OED*: ‘To preclude the occurrence of (an anticipated event, state, etc.)’ (sense 9.a of the verb in the *OED*).

The conclusion with respect to the NP *from -ing* pattern is therefore that it may involve either object control or Subject to Object Raising, and that each syntactic analysis may be associated with a specific sense of the verb. The associations of the two syntactic analyses of the *from -ing* pattern to two different specific senses of the verb has not been noted in the literature before, as far as the present authors know, and it helps to give a grounding to the present analysis.

Proceeding to the bare NP *-ing* complement pattern with *prevent*, the present authors propose that an ACC *Ing* analysis is applicable to the pattern. This proposal is motivated by the findings given in Table 2, where an astonishingly high number of the special NP was found with bare *-ing* complements, and by the ill-formedness of the passivized versions of such sentences with special NPs, as illustrated in (10a–b). The sentences in (7b) and (8b) are thus analyzed as involving ACC *Ing*, not Subject to Object Raising.

The conclusion that the bare NP *-ing* pattern with *prevent* can involve ACC *Ing* complements and does not involve Subject to Object Raising brings up the question of whether the bare NP *-ing* pattern can involve object control. That is, the question is whether in a sentence without any special NP an ACC *Ing* analysis is likewise applicable to bare NP *-ing* complements, with the NP remaining in the lower clause, or whether an object control analysis should be countenanced for such sentences, with the NP a constituent of the higher sentence. To illustrate, consider the example in (14).

- (14) [...] we are determined to do all we can to prevent such weapons reaching our streets. (2019-12-28 GB)

To approach the question from the point of view of constituent structure, we may note that pseudocleft sentences such as those in (15a–b), from the NOW Corpus, are well formed.

- (15) a. What health officials want to prevent is people believing the common adage of ‘I’ve had the flu. It wasn’t that bad.’ (2019-10-13 US)
- b. What we are trying to prevent is students putting out their hands when they fall because that’s going to cause an injury. (2013-07-22 US)

On the analogy of the sentences in (15a–b), a pseudocleft variant of sentence (14), abridged in non-essential ways, also seems possible, as in (16).

(16) What we are determined to prevent is such weapons reaching our streets.

On the reasonable assumption that substrings in the focus position of a pseudocleft sentence are constituents (see Higgins 1973: 12; Duffley 2000: 227, 2006: 36–37; Duffley and Fisher 2021: 85), the well-formedness of sentence (16) suggests that the NP of the bare NP *-ing* complement, even when not a special NP (*such weapons* in the case of (14)), can indeed be a constituent of the lower clause.

It is also pertinent to take note of a comment in the *OED* on what has here been called the bare NP *-ing* pattern:

With gerund but without *from*. The construction *prevent me (you, etc.) going* appears to be short for *prevent me (you, etc.) from going*, perhaps influenced by *prevent my (your, etc.) going* (see sense 9b) from which it is, in any case, indistinguishable (in the absence of a written apostrophe) when a plural noun precedes the gerund. This construction has sometimes been criticized as incorrect. (*OED*, comments under sense 14 of *prevent*)

The suggestion that the bare NP *-ing* complement may have been influenced by what may be called the POSS *Ing* pattern (see Ross 2004), as in *prevent my going*, and that it is often hard to distinguish it from the POSS *Ing* pattern provides some background or perhaps even indirect support for the idea that even in the absence of a special NP, the bare NP *-ing* pattern in a sentence such as (14) might not involve object control.

Another way to approach the question is to consider the syntactic behavior of the NP in question. The most obvious rule to consider is Passivization. Kaunisto and Rudanko (2019: 122–4) provide some evidence of recent usage based on the Hansard Corpus (2014) that is relevant here. The sentence in (17) is one of their examples:

(17) Matthew Kelly, county councillor of county Clare, was prevented addressing his constituents, [...] (Hansard, House of Commons, May 10, 1901)

Sentence (17) attests that the pattern has existed in fairly recent English, and Kaunisto and Rudanko (2019: 123) show how it was relatively frequent in the nineteenth century, with as many as 66 tokens in the 1880s. However, they also show that in the twentieth century its frequency has been very low, to the point that no tokens at all were found in the Hansard Corpus in the period from the 1960s to the 1990s. This represents a dramatic decline, with the pattern going into desuetude, and it makes it easy to understand why Aarts (2012), while also noting that the construction was found in earlier English, starred a sentence of the type **The sailor was prevented drowning the cat*, alongside of the well-formed *The sailor was prevented from drowning the cat*. On the basis of data from those four decades, it would be reasonable to put forward the claim that the bare NP *-ing* pattern should be limited to the ACC *Ing* construction and that an object control analysis should be excluded for the pattern. That said, it still needs to be added that the British National Corpus (BNC, 2001) brings to light one token suggesting object control: *If one person is prevented getting AIDS by the officer* [...] (KRL 4350, 1985). The token shows that object control cannot be totally excluded for the bare NP *-ing* pattern even during those

decades, even if there was a tendency at that time to view the construction as being of the ACC *Ing* type.

However, Kaunisto and Rudanko (2019: 123–4) also note that the 2000s, the most recent decade available of the Hansard Corpus (2014), brought a resurgence of the pattern in the corpus, with as many as 31 tokens. An example is given in (18), from Kaunisto and Rudanko (2019: 122).

- (18) We would not want to be prevented obtaining information about a property that someone had failed to declare when making a claim for benefit [...] (Hansard, House of Lords, Feb. 1, 2001)

Such dramatic fluctuations in the use of the pattern in very recent decades suggest that the bare NP *-ing* pattern may be undergoing change, with the object control pattern again becoming increasingly available to the bare NP *-ing* complement of *prevent* in very recent British English.

Confirming the trend favoring the availability of object control with the bare NP *-ing* pattern, Kaunisto and Rudanko (2019: 124) also provided further examples from the British English component of the NOW Corpus. Their latest example is from 2017. Consulting data from the same corpus for even more recent years for this study, the present investigators used the search string ‘[vb*] prevented [v?g*]’, where ‘[vb*]’ stands for a form of the verb *be*, and retrieved six tokens. Three of them are not relevant, with an example of an irrelevant token given in (19), but three are relevant, with examples given in (20a–b).

- (19) Scientists say that half of all premature births could be prevented using simple tests and antibiotics. (2018-06-10 GB)
- (20) a. Milner tries to get away from Young but is prevented doing so by his opponent, who grabs hold of his shirt [...] (2019-02-24 GB)
- b. There were plenty of Toon fans who wanted to attend but we’re prevented doing so by petty vindictiveness. (2019-01-09 GB)

The sentence in (19) does not represent object control, but those in (20a–b) do. They are also quite in line with the typical semantics of object control, with the sense of the verb being ‘to stop, keep or hinder (a person or thing) from doing something’ (*OED* sense 14a). The sentences in (18) and (20a–b) are also worth noting because they show that the Complexity Principle, while it would favor the variant with *from*, is not strong enough to block such sentences in current British English.

To sum up the discussion of the bare NP *-ing* complement with *prevent*, it is argued here that the ACC *Ing* complement is relevant to its analysis. Object control, on the other hand, does not seem to have had much prominence with the bare NP *-ing* complement in the second half of the twentieth century, but there is increasing evidence that it is available in recent British English.

4. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This article was designed to inquire into the syntactic properties of NP *from -ing* and bare NP *-ing* complements of the matrix verb *prevent*, with evidence from large

corpora. It is well known that the former pattern is commonly found in both British and American English, and that the latter pattern is more or less restricted to British English, as far as fairly recent usage is concerned. In section 2 the authors examined the complementation of the verb in fairly small samples of British and American English, without specifying the context of the verb, with the original aim of shedding light on the incidence and the status of the two types in these varieties. That section provided two surprising results. Firstly, the frequency of the bare NP *-ing* pattern in British English turned out to be lower than expected. Secondly, the investigation also brought to light an unexpected complement of *prevent*, as in *Workers in the large barge began to jump into the water to prevent from sinking with the ship*. As far as the present authors are aware, the construction has not been noticed in earlier work on *prevent*, but additional illustrations are presented from both British and American English. In light of the data here, the pattern deserves to be recognized as an innovative construction, and more work on its emergence and spread in British and American English is desirable.

In section 3 the discussion moved onto comparing the more familiar NP *from -ing* and bare NP *-ing* constructions. It has sometimes been taken for granted that the same syntactic analysis should be applied to both constructions. However, the present study argues that this is not the case. As far as the NP *from -ing* construction is concerned, it is argued that the pattern straddles the divide between object control and Subject to Object Raising, and that both structures should be permitted for the verb. Further, it was argued that each structure can be linked to a specific sense of the verb. As for the bare NP *-ing* construction, it is suggested that an ACC *Ing* analysis should be postulated for it. Object control was also possible in the nineteenth century, but during several decades of the twentieth century it seems to have become more marginal. However, in very recent English there is clear evidence that object control is again more readily available to *prevent* when the verb selects the bare NP *-ing* complement. Such trends of change will naturally bear watching in future decades. Another obvious research task is to consider other verbs of prevention in relation to the syntactic analyses proposed in the present article.

CORPORA

- BNC (The British National Corpus), version 2. 2001. A 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language. Distributed by Oxford University Computing Services. <<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>>
- Hansard Corpus (British Parliament). 2014. The Hansard Corpus contains nearly every speech given in the British Parliament from 1803–2005 (about 1.6 billion words). <<https://www.english-corpora.org/hansard/>>
- NOW Corpus (News on the Web Corpus). 2008–. The NOW Corpus contains 14.2 billion words of data from web-based newspapers and magazines from 2010–present. <www.english-corpora.org/now/>

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