

CHAPTER 3

A HEURISTIC FOR TEACHING THE USE OF EITHER GERUNDS OR
INFINITIVES WITH THE MATRIX VERBS 'STOP', 'REMEMBER',
'FORGET', AND 'REGRET'

A successful subject-matter programmer must also have clear objectives in mind regarding what he plans to teach in his subject area. The subject matter selected for the present project was use of gerund and infinitive complements with the matrix verbs 'stop', 'remember', 'forget', and 'regret'. This particular subject matter was selected because ESL students in particular exhibit confusion over when to use gerunds and infinitives, and rarely have a clear idea of the meaning changes suggested by choice of gerund or infinitive with the above four matrix verbs. In each of these cases, choice of complement depends on whether the action in the complement preceeds or follows that in the matrix. The following chapter outlines a theoretical construct for teaching gerunds and infinitives, in particular those four mentioned above.

3.1 The Need for Courseware Teaching Gerunds and Infinitives

From a student's point of view, there may be some logical rules for using gerunds in some instances and for using infinitives in others, but there is certainly a third set of rules not at all apparent to the learner which defines the use of gerunds or infinitives in cases where it would seem that either would logically fit. Typifying this latter

realm of gerund and infinitive use is the case where a verb takes either a gerund or infinitive object complement.

Praninskas (1975:xvii,4) says of this gray area, "Certain verbs frequently take ing-form objects but never infinitives. Other verbs may be followed by ing-forms or infinitives and express the same meaning. In a few cases an ing-form object expresses a meaning which is different from that of the infinitive object. This situation is very confusing for a learner and is the source of many mistakes." Therefore, lessons enabling students to decide, on some logical basis, whether to use a gerund or infinitive, especially in verb object complements, would be welcome to students of ESL.

3.2 A Linguistic Analysis of the Grammar Point in Question

Perhaps the most striking of recent discoveries about gerunds and infinitives were made by Kiparsky and Kiparsky (1970), who classify certain matrix verbs as being either factive and non-factive. Factive verbs are those for which presuppositions are constant under negation. These take gerund complements. With non-factive verbs, no presuppositions are possible regarding the matrices (and/or the presuppositions do not hold under negation), and these take infinitive complements.

However, the Kiparskys express awareness that not all verbs in English fit so neatly into factive and non-factive paradigms. There is also a set of verbs which are

"indifferent" to factivity. Some of these verbs exhibit a difference in meaning when used with either a gerund or infinitive complement. For example, the verb 'remember' is marked in deep structure as taking factive complements in the strings 'I remembered drinking that last beer' and 'I didn't remember drinking that last beer', but is not so marked when used in the strings 'I remembered to drink that last beer' and 'I didn't remember to drink that last beer'. In other words, the gerundive and positive infinitival complements presuppose an act of drinking one last beer, which would suggest that the matrix was factive, except that negation of 'remember' with an infinitival complement suggests that the act did not take place. Substitutions of the "indifferent" verbs 'stop' and 'forget' yield similar results.

The concept of factivity ties in nicely with Bolinger's (1968) characterization of the gerund as having "reifying" force. The just mentioned anomalies are also logical considering that infinitives are associated with "unrealized possibilities" and gerunds with "possibilities conceived as actualities" (1968:127). However, a more rigorous explication of the behavior of the verbs 'remember', and 'forget' is possible if it is assumed that such verbs are dually marked in the lexicon to be at times factive and at other times implicative.

Karttunen (1971) found that there exists a class of verbs, implicatives, which, like factive verbs, "involve presuppositions, although in a different way. An implicative verb, such as 'manage', carries a presupposition that it represents a necessary and sufficient condition for the truth of its complement sentence." (p. 357) As we have seen, if a verb is factive, its presupposition stays constant regardless of negation. But for implicative verbs, the truth of whose complements depend on some condition inherent in the verb, the presupposition reverses with negation. (And if a verb is neither factive nor implicative, there is no presupposition.) For example, if we say 'Ronald managed to fool the electorate', the presupposition is that the electorate was fooled. This presupposition is then reversed if we say 'Ronald didn't manage to fool the electorate'. Some implicatives convey positive concepts, and some of these have negative counterparts. For example, the positive-implicative verbs 'remember' and 'manage' have the negative counterparts 'forget' and 'fail', respectively. Hence, the negated string 'Ronald DIDN'T fail to fool the electorate' presupposes again that the electorate was fooled, while the affirmative negative-implicative denies that presupposition.

3.3 A Pedagogically-Oriented Heuristic for Teaching the Grammar Point in Question

As is often the case in teaching grammar, few (or none) of the preceding considerations need be conveyed to the

students. However, just as one needs a whole bed to lie in before one can get a good night's sleep, so must a subject-matter instructor have a firm grasp of the field before attempting to teach aspects of it to students. Also, he must see where the material he is teaching fits into the students' previous exposure to the subject. The following observations concern how an instructor might approach a pedagogically-based grammar on one aspect of the subject of gerunds and infinitives.

Students of ESL can relatively easily be taught to recognize to-less infinitives, gerunds following prepositions, and infinitives of purpose, but it is at this point that students are often left to their own devices in making sense of gerunds and infinitives. However, the student could now be taught to utilize the fact, mentioned by Bolinger, that gerunds are used in complements describing an event that has already taken place, whereas infinitives are used if the time of the event is future or uncertain. Evidence of this is especially obvious with certain verbs that accept both gerund and infinitive complements.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1980:390) note exercises developed by Bill Gaskill in which he attempts to exploit this characteristic in teaching students that, with verbs like 'remember', 'forget', 'stop' and 'regret', "if the action in the matrix clause precedes the action in the complement, then the infinitive is used." On the other hand,

"if the action in the matrix clause follows the action in the complement, then the gerund is used." For example, in 'I forgot to wipe off the blood,' the action in the matrix, forgetting, precedes the action in the complement, which has not yet occurred. On the other hand, in 'I forgot wiping off the blood', wiping blood has already occurred prior to the action of forgetting.

Verbs which imply clearly whether an action has taken place or not, or which allow the speaker to use either gerund or infinitive based on whether the complement action has achieved reality or not, tie in nicely with the generalizations made by Bolinger and the Kiparskys, both of whom refer specifically to cases similar to those given above. Three matrix verbs for which these considerations always hold are 'stop', 'forget', and 'remember'. 'Regret' follows this pattern too, except that gerund complements are sometimes used with 'regret' even though the action in the complement has not achieved reality (as in: 'I regret leaving so soon', meaning, 'I am about to leave'). However, it is always possible (out of context) to interpret sentences of the latter type as meaning that the action has indeed taken place. Therefore, and in spite of this last exception, the four verbs 'stop', 'forget', 'remember', and 'regret' were chosen as matrix verbs which, of all verbs in English, would best lend themselves to productive and inductively-based instruction in the use of gerunds and infinitives depending

on order of occurrence of action in matrix and complement verbs.

In teaching these verbs, exercises were developed patterned roughly on the lessons of Bill Gaskill, as reported in Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1980). The resulting CALL lessons had a sound pedagogical base and so should escape the criticism leveled against the pedagogically unsound software found all too often in this medium of instruction. In the following chapter, these lessons are described in detail.