A-verb-* we will go

1. enormous number of uses of English V category 4 (PRP, present participle, PRP/GER, gerund participle, -ing form, here Vcat4): one category, or two, or three, or twelve, or twenty?

2. distinct categories can have identical phonological realization: English V category 1 (BSE) and default variant of category 2 (PRS), for all verbs except be. But it’s not always clear when this is going on: is the V category in the subordinate clause of I insist that you be director a finite category distinct from (an intrinsically non-finite) category 1, or is this a use of category 1 (non-finite merely by default) in a (finite) embedded clause construction?

3. evidence (in Pullum & Zwicky 1999) that (inflectional) Vcat4 is unitary: (a) the -ing/-in’ alternation (Houston 1991); (b) synthetic compounds of the bicycle-touring variety (Kiparsky 1974), which are derived verbs that occur only in Vcat4, but occur in verbal, nominal, and adjectival uses of this category: Let’s go bicycle-touring; We were bicycle-touring all last month; Chris wants to keep on bicycle-touring; Your endless bicycle-touring across Europe annoys me; The bicycle-touring visitors made noise until nearly dawn.

4. supposing that Vcat4 is unitary, what distinguishes the many constructions in the “syntactic” section of the accompanying inventory? Possibilities: syntactic category of the Vcat4 item itself (e.g. N vs. V); syntactic category of the larger construction (e.g. NP vs. VP); syntactic function of the larger construction (e.g. Complement vs. Direct Object vs. Adverbial vs. Adjectival); single vs. multiple sets of conditions (as in the “nominal gerund” of your finishing dinner at noon - Pullum 1991, Malouf 2000, among many others)

5. single vs. multiple sets of conditions as direct vs. direct + invoked conditions; SOR examples like I believed Kim to be a spy, where Kim is Direct Object and to be a spy is Complement, but Kim and be a spy must also be licensed as Subject and Predicate (in relation to one another). Similarly, S14b examples like I saw Daddy kissing Santa Claus, where Daddy is Direct Object (Daddy was seen kissing Santa Claus) and kissing Santa Claus is Complement, but Daddy and kissing Santa Claus must also be licensed as Subject and Predicate. Such examples contrast with, e.g., S2c examples like I hate him kissing Santa Claus, where him kissing Santa Claus makes a (non-finite) clause Direct Object, with him as Subject and kissing Santa Claus as Predicate

6. the doubl-ing constraint (Ross 1972, some earlier items, many later ones) as a test for Complement (and also for VP):


(the first V might be any of quite a number of Vcat4 types, but the second V is much more restricted, since it must be head of a Complement VP to the first V)
7. dialectal U.S. *a-V-in’* forms (Wolfram and various collaborators, various dates) as a test for “verbal” constructions; some important background facts:
   a. the prefix picks out (only) Vcat4 words (*a-durin’ your lecture*)
   b. the prefix occurs only with the *-in’* version of Vcat4 (*They a-killed the bear*)
   c. the prefix is phonologically constrained: V must be consonant-initial (*a-eatin’*) and initially stressed (*a-considerin’*)
   d. prefixed and unprefixed versions do not differ semantically
   e. the prefix is never categorically present (though in a few constructions, like S18, it has very high frequency for some speakers)
   f. use of the prefix is declining in time
   g. use of the prefix is associated with vernacular speech and vividness/engagement

8. obviously “non-verbal” constructions: action nominals (S1), nominal gerunds with possessive subjects (S2c), prenominal modifiers (S4)

9. Wolfram’s preposition constraint (*We were impressed by a-seein’ the Ganges*): really a NP constraint, since VP Complements governed by prepositions (*refrain/keep from* and *take/get to* [S13c], *keep/stop from* and *set to* [S14c]) are quite happy with the prefix: *I can’t keep from a-chewin’ on this sandwich*; *Soon they got to a-watchin’ the moon*; *I kept them from a-chewin’ on that sandwich*; *We set Sandy to a-watchin’ the moon*.

10. *gonna* (Pullum 1997) is an instance of Vcat4, no matter how little it looks like it; *a-gonna* is an incredibly high-frequency item

11. gigantic number of verbal constructions, including many that at first glance might seem nominal (S21: *There’s no a-tellin’ what they might do*), adjectival (S5: *Two guys a-wearin’ ties came in*), or adverbial (S16: *We went a-lookin’ for fun*). Presumably these invoke a VP Complement in some other construction.