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Some Developments in the Semantics of the English Progressive from Old English to Early Modern English

Paloma Núñez Pertejo

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Some Developments in the Semantics of the English
Progressive from Old English to Early Modern English

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide a descriptive account of the development of the semantics of English *be + -ing* from Old English (henceforth OE) to early Modern English (henceforth eModE). Questions such as whether it is possible to ascribe one single meaning to the cluster or whether the modern English (henceforth ModE) function(s) can be traced back to OE will be dealt with in this study. In this respect, examples from OE, Middle English (ME) and eModE will be analyzed and discussed to illustrate the use of the progressive in such periods. Moreover, the combination of *be + -ing and time adverbials will also be described in this paper, since the study of the interrelation between*

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the two has proved very fruitful in the analysis of the semantics of the English progressive.

1. Introduction

The semantics of the progressive has been —and still is— the object of much controversy. Recent and not so recent research has tried to answer a number of questions on this topic, such as whether it is possible to ascribe one single function to *be + -ing* or whether the cluster expresses more than one unitary meaning. As a general rule, there is little or no agreement on the specific functions or meanings conveyed by the progressive in ModE, nor for that matter, in earlier periods of the history of English. However, in Visser's opinion, *be + -ing* combinations show one function applicable to OE, ME and ModE examples (1963-1973: §1806), which partly coincides with Hirtle & Bégin's idea that every use of the progressive can be explained in terms of one, single, unitary meaning (1990: 9). As we shall see in the following sections, the idea of 'monosemy' that these authors propose does not account for all the different meanings and functions that seem to be present in any combination of *be + -ing*.

One of the things that should be borne in mind when dealing with the OE and ME ancestors of the Present-day English (henceforth PE) progressive is the fact that they did not have

obligatory uses, i.e. they were optional constructions which could apparently be used indiscriminately, or were at least prompted by stylistic, rather than properly grammatical, demands. They have thus been sometimes considered to be stylistic variants of the simple forms (cf. Nehls 1988: 180). On the other hand, however, these periphrastic combinations have also been said to have developed uses and meanings of their own, which differentiated them from the corresponding simple forms.

In spite of the numerous studies devoted to the semantics of the progressive both in PE and earlier stages of the language, no research on its evolution from OE into eModE has so far been carried out. This is precisely the main purpose of this paper.

Likewise, the role of adverbials, especially time adverbials, will also be examined in this study, since they seem to be of special interest in the expression of certain meanings. So important is the relationship between the progressive and this kind of adverbial that Crystal (1966) speaks of "adverbial specification" or "modification" to refer to it. His conclusion is that the presence of adverbials in combination with verb phrases is really important and decisive in order to understand the complexity of the English verbal system (ibid., 24 ff). For

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this reason, the combination of *be + -ing* and time adverbials will be analyzed and discussed in the following sections.

2. The semantics of the progressive in OE and ME

2.1. Introduction

Neither OE *beon/wesan + -ende* nor ME *be + -ing* had "obligatory uses" (Nehls 1988: 180), and it is almost generally agreed that the modern functions of the progressive were not properly developed before eModE. The OE and the ME periphrases constituted, in many cases, mere variants of the simple form, as illustrated in examples (1) and (2) respectively:

(1) Ælfric, *Catholic Homilies* I, 154: se mona deþ ægþer, ge *wycxþ* ge *wanaþ*; healfum monþe he *biþ weaxende*, healfum he *biþ wanigende*
'The moon does both, he both *waxes* and *wanes*: half of the month he *is waxing*, half *is waning*' (cf. Mustanoja 1960: 585). **(note 1)**

(2) Caxton, *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, 129, 12: The sayd kynge Alymodes *is* alwaye *kepynge* his siege before her cyte of Tourmaday, & *wasteth* & *distroyeth* al the contrey about, ... (cf. Åkerlund 1911: 36).

Thus, for many scholars (cf., among others, Nickel 1966: 267), the choice of simple forms or expanded forms **(note 2)** in OE and ME was a question of stylistic variation, i.e. they could be

used indiscriminately without any, or with very slight change in meaning. However, there is also the opinion that the periphrasis had a semantic function of its own (cf. Mitchell 1976: 484) and that "there were clear tendencies toward the use of the 'expanded' form in functions which were later to become exclusively restricted to it" (Berndt 1989: 152).

On the other hand, we find opinions that claim that OE and ME expanded forms differed to a large extent from the modern periphrases (cf. Berndt 1989: 151). That there are differences between the use of the cluster in OE and ME and the use of the cluster in ModE is illustrated by the following example, in which *beon/wesan + -ende* cannot be rendered by means of *be + -ing*, which seems to confirm that the two forms are not identical:

> (3) *Orosius* 8.14: of Danai þære ie, seo *is irnende* of norþdæle
> 'From Danai that river which *is running* (= which *runs*) from northern-part.'
> (cf. Traugott 1972: 90)

Despite the fact that the periphrasis did not have obligatory uses of its own in OE and ME, there are certain meanings that can be attributed to the construction, even in the OE period. We shall discuss some of them, illustrating their use with relevant examples from both periods.

2.2. The meanings of OE *beon/wesan* + *-ende* **and ME** *be* + *-ing*

One of the meanings that has traditionally been associated with the progressive, even from the very beginning, is that of duration. Both Mossé (1938: i, §§210 ff) and Mustanoja (1960: 584-585) claim that *beon/wesan* + *-ende expressed duration, as can be seen in (4) below:*

(4) *Old English Chronicle*, an. 855: Æþelwulf cyning ... ferde to Rome ... and þær *wæs* twelf monaþ *wuniende*, and þa him hamweard for
'Æþelwulf king ... went to Rome ... and there *was* twelve months *living* and   then he [himself] home travelled' (cf. Mustanoja 1960: 584).

Duration was also expressed by *be* + *-ing* in ME, especially when the periphrasis was found in combination with different adverbs or adverbial phrases such as *ay*, *always*, *ever*, *evermore*, *all (the) day*, *all the time*, *all the while, etc.:*

(5) *Chaucer, Canterbury Tales*, Prologue, 89: Embrouded was he, as it were a mede/ Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede. *Singinge* he *was*, or *floytynge*, **al the day** (cf. Åkerlund 1911: 40).

Other scholars, however, consider that duration was not yet fully developed in Ælfric's time (cf. Braaten 1967: 170), for

simple forms could express duration at that time and expand-
ed forms were used to denote perfectivity. For this reason,
Jespersen feels that the notion of duration has to be reformu-
lated (1909-1949: IV, 178). In connection with this, Elsness
uses the term "general duration" to describe the kind of dura-
tion expressed by OE *beon/wesan* + *-ende* as opposed to
the limited duration that the cluster expresses in ModE (1994:
7). **(note 3)**

According to other scholars, however, the periphrasis already
expressed limited duration in OE, especially in combination
with certain temporal expressions or adverbials of time. Words
such as *oð* or *oððæt (='until')* contributed to signal the limit of
duration or persistence, as in (6):

> (6) *he þæs heriende* and *feohtende* fifti3 þintra, **oð** *he hæfde ealle
> Asiam on his 3eþeald 3enyd*
> 'He *harried* and *fought [kept on harrying* and *fighting]* for fifty
> winters/years   ***until*** *he had compelled all Asia into his domin-
> ion*' (cf. Strang 1970: 351).

If limited duration was present in OE *beon/wesan* + *-ende*,
it should have constituted quite an original use, at least in
this period. Nevertheless, there seems to exist agreement on
the fact that the periphrasis expressed duration above other
things (cf. Curme 1913: 172; Mossé 1938: i, §281; Strang

1970: 350). In other words, what seemed to be characteristic of OE expanded forms was "the tendency to insist on durative aspect to a degree that today may appear inordinate" (Hatcher 1951: 260, fn. 21). For this reason, then, cases in which duration was not present were very rare in OE.

Combinations of OE *beon/wesan* + *-ende* and ME *be* + *-ing* have also been argued to provide a kind of frame of reference for some other activity. This notion of 'frame-time' has been discussed by Jespersen (1909-1949: IV, 178-180). The origins of this particular use can be found in prepositional constructions of the type *he is on hunting*, in which the hunt-ing constitutes a kind of frame round something else but is not completed at the time mentioned or implied in the sentence; the hunting is supposed to last longer than some other fact. (7) and (8) illustrate the use of this function in OE and ME, especially in subordinate clauses introduced by *as* and *when*:

(7) Gregory's *Dialogues,* p. 327: þæt eac Paulis se apostol *wæs reccende*, þa þa he cwæð
'That also Paulis the apostle *was telling* [*teaching*] when he said' (cf. Scheffer 1975: 180).

(8) *Canterbury Tales*, V: ... ***As*** Canacee *was pleyyng in hir walk, / Ther sat a faucon over hire heed ful hye, ... (cf. Fischer 1992: 254).*

The element of incompletion is also present in those cases which illustrate the 'frame-time' theory. Similarly, strong similarities have been found between simultaneity and the frame-time element, to such an extent that the former has been classified as a simple variation of the latter, and not as a separate meaning itself. In neither case, however, can simultaneity or frame-time be considered the basic meanings of the periphrasis in OE or ME.

Futurity has also been attested in combinations of OE beon/ wesan + -ende and ME be + *-ing*. At the beginning, the periphrasis was the only way available in OE to account for the Latin future participle, so that a form such as *dicturi* was rendered by means of *syndon sprecende* (='we are going to discuss next'). The expanded form was also used to render Latin *esse + -urus*, as in *hæbbende seondon* (='habitura sint'), or *gongende wæs (='erat exiturus'). This future use of the expanded form in OE and ME was especially frequent with verbs of motion:*

(9) *Bede* 135, 674: Eac hi *wæron cumende* wið Westseaxene þeode to gefeohte

'Also they *were coming* against of West-Saxon people to the fight' (cf. van der Gaaf 1930: 211).

(10) *Towneley Plays*, 174.292: youre knyghtys *ar comand* (cf. van der Gaaf 1930: 212).

The meaning of futurity was also found when the present tense of *beon/wesan + -ende* was modified or defined by adverbs such as *lange* or *æfre*, which were used to denote length of time. In such cases, it has been claimed that the idea of futurity could be derived from the presence of those adverbs and not from the expanded form itself.

What seems obvious is that there are differences between the OE and ME expanded form expressing futurity and the equivalent expression in ModE. Thus, in the former case, the future action or situation is thought of as taking place without the will of the speaker, as if it were something pre-ordained or predestined, which would explain the fact that many translators rendered this use of the periphrasis by means of *is (was) to + infinitive:*

> (11) *Ælfred, Bede* 346, 28: on æfenne neahte þe he of worulde *gongende wæs*
> *'On the evening of the night on which he was to depart* from the world' (cf. Visser 1963-1973: §1830).

However, and despite the fact that there are examples in the OE period in which a meaning of futurity can be attested, *beon/wesan + -ende* periphrases did not serve "as a 'future-equivalent'"; they only had "an implied under-meaning of futurity" (Åkerlund 1911: 25).

Other meanings associated with OE *beon/wesan* + *-ende* and ME *be* + *-ing* include repetition and habit, although it has been claimed that, in OE, both meanings were conveyed by the use of certain adverbials such as *næfre*, *ær*, *eft*, *gelomlice* or *full oft:*

> (12) *Blicking Homilies* 362.19: **hwilum** *wæs* on horse *sittende*, **ac oftor** on his fotum *gangende*
> '**At times** he *mounted* on horseback, **oftener** he *went* on foot' (cf. Mossé 1938: i, §233).

Repetition was also conveyed by the expanded form in ME, especially by means of the auxiliaries *will* and *would*, or by means of adverbs such as *continually* or *often, although it has been argued that this idea was indicated through the context and not by means of the periphrastic combination:*

> (13) *Handlyng Synne Harl*. MS 1701; Bodl. 415, l. 1733: Comunly she **wyl** neuer blynne, but euer *be brennyng* yn here synne (cf. Scheffer 1975: 222).
>
> (14) Richard Rolle, *The Pricke of Conscience*, l. 8913: And þat alle manere of melody of musyk and of mynstralsy, þat moght be schewed with mowthe or hand, *war* **continuely** þare-in *sownand* (cf. Scheffer 1975: 222)*.*

Apart from these general functions, which were shared by OE and ME expanded forms, there are others which have been claimed to be more specific of one period or the other. Thus,

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Fehr (1918: 82ff) has attributed an intensive character to the expanded form in OE. This function -also called emphatic- expressed that an action or state was being intensi-

fied in character, and was very frequent in warfare descriptions. This so-called intensive function has been occasionally attested in OE periphrastic imperatives, mainly for emphatic purposes. (15) below exemplifies this use of the cluster in OE:

> (15) *Bede* 12.21 XIII: Ðæt Paulinus on Lindesege mægðe *bodigende wæs* Cristes geleafan 'That Paulinus in Lindsay province *preaching was* Christ's faith' (cf. Mitchell 1976: 490).

However, the existence of the so-called intensive function in examples such as (15) above has been denied, among others, by Mitchell (1976: 491).

Other functions which have been associated with the cluster from the beginning are, for example, the ingressive function, also known as inchoative, as in (16) below:

> (16) *ÆLS* XXV, 490: Hwæt ða færlice comon fif englas of heofonum, ridende on horsum mid gyldenum gerædum and twægen þæra engla on twa healfe iudan *feohtende wæron* and hine eac bewerodon (cf. Åkerlund 1911: 29).
>
> 'Lo! then wonderfully came five angels from heaven, riding on horses with golden apparel, and twain of the angels on both

sides of Judas *were fighting*, and eke de-fended him' (transla-
tion quoted from W. Skeat's *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, volume II,
page 99. *Early English Text Society.* Oxford: Oxford University
Press).

In Åkerlund's opinion, however, the verbal periphrasis feoht-
ende wæron should be translated as 'began to fight' or 'start-
ed fighting', rather than the more likely 'were fighting' (1911:
29). It has been argued, however, that the inchoative meaning
is derived from the context and not from the periphrasis itself,
and also that there existed different ways to express incho-
ation at that time, such as the combinations *ginnan/aginnan/
onginnan to* + infinitive, *aginnan + -ende*, *fon/onfon/underfon
to* + infinitive and *tacan to* + infinitive, among others. Anyhow,
the inchoative meaning found in combinations of *beon/wesan
+ -ende*, if there ever was such a meaning, seems to have
died with OE.

Another interesting use discussed by Goedsche (1932) is
the so-called terminate function of *beon/wesan + -ende*, in
which the action is seen as a whole, as in ModE 'I sorry you
doubt my statement. I *am telling* you the truth'. The action is
not seen as going on, but as a whole. In Goedsche's opinion
(1932: 469), this terminate use, overlooked by many scholars,
represents the cluster's oldest function (cf. also Curme 1931:
207). The purpose of the said function seems to have been

that of putting emphasis on the narration, to make it more lively, vivid and picturesque, and also to express the speaker's feelings or emotions, especially when in combination with adverbs meaning *always* or *ever*: **(note 4)**

> (17) King Alfred (390, 8) þa gehældan hiene þa apostole Petrus & Johannes, cwiþ seo boc, þæt he up astode & ongunne hliapettan, & mid þæm apostolum in þæt temple eode & ***aa wæs gongende*** & *hleaþende* & Dryghten *herigende*
> 'When the apostles Peter and John healed him, the book says that he stood up and began to leap, and went with the apostles into the temple and *was **ever** walking* and *leaping* and *praising God'* (cf. Goedsche 1932: 474).

The expanded form in (17) does not convey a progressive meaning, i.e. the periphrasis does not indicate that the action is or was going on at the time of speaking, but presents the action as a whole in a vivid, emphatic manner. In spite of the fact that duration and progression have become increasingly associated with *be + -ing*, the terminate force or function seems to have been preserved in time, thus often being found with the periphrasis in different examples, especially in connection with emphasis and with the expression of feelings.

Some other functions were specific of the ME period and, for this reason, could not be found in OE. One of them involved the so-called eggressive function, which indicated "movement

out of a phase of activity", as in *þai war all concluding* (c. 1400), while another one involved the use of modals with expanded forms to indicate subjective duration, seen in, for example, hypotheses (*if Crist were dwelling here in erþe, men moste ben trauayllynge*). Both functions are said to have developed between the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century (cf. Strang 1970: 208).

In the light of the previous discussion, it cannot be denied that OE and ME expanded forms fulfilled a stylistic function, i.e. they were used as mere stylistic devices and not as grammatical markers showing aspect. As Mitchell puts it, it may be a futile task "to look for full and unambiguous verbal value even in late Old English" (1985: §686). It is true that we can find the seeds of modern progressives in the OE pattern *beon/wesan + -ende*, but this pattern was just an indication of what it was to become later, its modern functions not yet being properly developed. Despite the apparent continuity of the expanded form from OE and ME to PE, the similarity of its use has been, perhaps, exaggerated. Stylistic tendencies are, of course, to be found, but we should insist on the fact that they were just tendencies which had yet to be grammaticalized.

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3. The semantics of *be + -ing* in the eModE period

The preceding sections have shown the main functions of the expanded form in OE and ME. This section will concentrate on the semantics of the progressive in eModE, illustrating its use with different examples taken from this period, which will contribute to a better understanding of the history of the periphrasis. That the eModE progressive is different from the PE progressive is shown by the fact that both simple forms and expanded forms could be used indiscriminately in certain contexts (cf. the famous examples by Shakespeare, *What do you read my Lord?*, Polonius asks in *Hamlet*, while Achilles, in turn, asks *What are you reading?* in *Troilus and Cressida*). Therefore, vacillation in the use or non-use of *be + -ing can be taken as an indication of the stylistic function of the progressive still at this time. In spite of this, Shakespeare's use of expanded forms seems very modern, as can be seen in the following combinations:*

(18) *Measure for Measure*, IV, 3, 49 f.: Friar not; I *have been drinking* hard all night... (cf. Nehls 1988: 182).

(19) *The Taming of the Shrew*, III, 2, 206 f.: The door is open, sir, there lies your way; You *may be jogging while your boots are green; ... (cf. Nehls 1988: 182).*

Many of the meanings of be + -ing in OE and ME, such as duration, can also be found in eModE, especially with verbs denoting existence, but also with verbs implying some kind of motion, and in clauses introduced by *when*, *while* and *as*:

> (20) E1 1526 *Merry Tales*, Sample 2, P28: Syr it happenyd onis that **as** my wyfe *was making* a chese vppon a fryday I wold haue sayed whether it had ben salt or fresh and toke a lytyll of the whey in my hand & ... **(note 5)**

It should be pointed out, however, that there has been a change in the type of duration conveyed by *be + -ing* from OE to PE. As shown in example (3) above, OE *beon/wesan + -ende* was mainly used to express unlimited or general duration. According to some scholars, the OE periphrasis also expressed limited duration, which seems to be characteristic of ModE progressives. In the eModE period, the cluster was still used to express both types of durative meaning, limited and unlimited, and this is why examples (21) and (22) below clearly deviate from modern usage, for the simple form -*flows*, *grows-seems* preferable in both cases:

> (21) *E1 1517 Torkington English Travel*, Sample 1, P27: And fyrst we cam to Torrens Cedron, which in somer tyme ys Drye, And in wynter, and specially in lente, it *ys* mervelous *flowyng* with rage of watir that comyth with Grett violence thorow the vale of Josophat.

(22) E1 1517 Torkington *English Travel*, Sample 2, P61: In all thes for sayd yles *ys growing wondyr myche licores, tyme, Sage, ffyggs, Oryges, Pomgarnetts, smale Reysyns, which we call Reyse of Corans...*

In eModE, verbs such as those above showed a preference for the progressive because their continuative or imperfective nature lent itself better to the expression of duration. In PE, however, these verbs are usually found in the non-progressive when they refer to durative, unending situations *(the Thames* **flows** *past London*), although it is possible to find them in the progressive when they refer to something temporary, with a limited duration in time *(the river* **is flowing** *very fast today*). Thus, it seems that the eModE progressive was still close to OE and ME usage, at least as far as the expression of duration is concerned, an opinion which is held, among others, by Elsness: "the Old English construction [and also the periphrasis in ME and eModE] often expressed a general durative meaning rather than the limited duration characteristic of the present-day progressive" (1994: 7)

Another meaning shared by the progressive in eModE is that of frame-time, which, as we have mentioned, apparently derives from the prepositional type *be in/on/a hunting*, i.e. *be* + preposition + verbal noun in *-ing, since the main idea ex-*

pressed by these prepositional patterns is 'to be engaged in' or 'to be in the process of':

(23) *E2 1615 Markham Countrey Contentments*, Sample 2, P108: the Milke-mayd whilst she *is in milking* shal do nothing rashly or sodainly about the Cowe, which may affright or amase her, but as she came gently so withall gentlenes she shall depart.

It seems obvious that *is in milking* in (23) above refers to a process and conveys the idea of being engaged. There are many cases of eModE *be + -ing* in which this notion is present as well, especially in clauses introduced by *as* and *while, as was the case in OE and ME:*

(24) E3 1676 Walton *The Compleat Angler*, Sample 2, P298: But still ***as*** you *are fishing* chaw a little white or brown bread in your mouth, and cast it into the pond about the place where your Flote swims.

Futurity was also expressed by the progressive in eModE, especially when found with verbs of going and coming:

(25) E2 1623 Shakespeare *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Sample 2, P54.C2: *(Mist. Ford.)* But *is* my husband *comming?*

(26) E2 1620-1644 Knyvett *Letters*, Sample 1, P58: I *am going* this afternoon to ('Miss').

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The idea of futurity conveyed by verbs of motion apparently arose during the eModE period (cf. Åkerlund 1911: 99), and was later extended to verbs other than verbs of movement, although this was not at all frequent. In any case, it is difficult to draw the line between futurity and movement, since verbs such as *go* or *come* are not devoid of the idea of movement even when they express futurity at the same time. It has been argued that the idea of futurity does not come from the periphrasis, but from the combination *be* + -ing + adverbial. It is true that when an adverb is present, the idea of futurity becomes much clearer, since omission of the adverbial may result in ambiguity between a present or future interpretation:

> (27) E2 1620-1644 Knyvett *Letters*, Sample 1, P59: I am going presently to your mother, whoe *is going* **to morrowe morning** to the Bathe.

As well as the present progressive, other ways of expressing futurity were also available in eModE, namely combinations of *will/shall* + *be* + -*ing* **(note 6)** and *be going to + infinitive*:

> (28) E3 1671 Tillotson *Sermons*, Sample 3, PII: ii452: But if we will in good earnest apply our selves to the practice of Religion, and the obedience of God's Holy Laws, his Grace *will* never *be wanting* to us to so good a purpose.

(29) E3 1695 Anne Hatton *Letters*, Sample 4, PI, 214: Sir John Walter *is going to be marryed to my Lady Stoel, which will be very happy for him.*

It is worth commenting that there has also been a change in the way futurity was conveyed in eModE. As shown in section 2.1, example (11), in OE and ME the future action or situation is thought of taking place without the will of the speaker, whereas in the eModE period, the whole action is usually viewed as if it had been planned or arranged beforehand:

(30) Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* 1 3: To-morrow ... Don Alphonso With other Gentlemen of good esteeme, *Are iournying to salute the Emperor (cf. Rissanen 1999: 223).*

Imperfectivity or incompletion has also been associated with be + -ing from the beginning. Thus, in eModE, the cluster refers to actions or situations which are not complete but may be completed in the near future, in contrast with simple forms, which express perfectivity or completion. The meaning of imperfectivity seems to be in close connection with that of dynamism, since what is not complete has to be still in progress. Therefore, it is usually a hard task to separate the different meanings of the progressive because all or at least most of them seem to be closely interrelated and may be present in the same example at the same time. Let us see one example

in which imperfectivity or incompletion is expressed by the progressive:

> (31) E2 1608 Armin *A Nest of Ninnies*, Sample 2, P46: Of a time appointed the king dined at Windsor, in the chappel yard at Cardinall Wolsey's, at the same time when he *was building that admirable* worke of his tombe: ...

The action of building was not complete at the time of speaking (he was still in the process of building the tomb). The use of the periphrasis in (31) above implies more than one thing: as well as *incompletion* and *dynamism*, the cluster expresses that the action had some *duration* in time. Thus, it is not easy to decide which meaning is more primary or central, for they all seem to be included within the semantics of the progressive at the same level, as if they were different layers, so to speak, contributing to the final function (if there is one) of *be +-ing*.

In spite of the fact that the so-called intensive or emphatic function has been claimed to be specific of OE *beon/wesan + -ende*, there are some eModE examples which express the intensity of the action described, especially when *be + -ing* is preceded by a modal verb (32), when there is a progressive imperative present (33), or by means of the past perfect (34):

(32) E1 1575 Stevenson *Gammer Gurton Needle*, Sample 2, P65: (*Diccon*.) What deuil *nede* he *be groping* so depe, in goodwife Chats hes nest.

(33) E1 1530 Tyndale *Old Testament*, Sample 3, PXII, 1G: Why saydest thou that she was thy sister, and causedest me to take hyr to my wife? But now loo, there is the wife, take hir and *be walkynge*.

(34) Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 94 r (6.): Home to my father, who could discern that I *had been drinking, which he did never see or hear of before; ... (cf. Bergeder 1914: 63).*

The intensity of the action described seems to be reinforced when the expanded form is accompanied by certain adverbials, such as *certainly*, *often*, *quite*, *far,* etc.:

(35) Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, 21 l (21.): This day dined Sir John Boys and some other gentlemen, formerly great Cavaliers, and among the rest one Mr. Norwood, for whom my Lord gave a convoy to carry him to the Brill, but he *is **certainly** going* to the King; for my Lord commanded me that I should not enter his name in my book (cf. Bergeder 1914: 62-63).

Another meaning expressed by the expanded form in eModE was actuality or actual present. This is why the cluster is frequently found in colloquial speech, apparently because this type of register "aims at the actual concreteness of expression and tends to give emphasis to the process of the actions spoken about" (Trnka 1930: 38):

(36) Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, II, 1, 228: *Ant*. Noble Sebastian, Thou let'st thy fortune sleepe: die rather: wink'st Whiles thou *art waking* (cf. Åkerlund 1911: 65).

Thus, this idea of actuality is present in dialogues referring to actions or situations taking place at the moment of speaking (example 36), but it may also be expressed in the past, especially in relative clauses, and may be reinforced through the presence of certain adverbs, such as *then* or *just:*

(37) John Evelyn, *Diary*, 487: after dinner I went to wait on his Majesty againe, **who** *was pulling* on his bootes in the Towne-hall (cf. Mossé 1938: ii, §309).

Some of the meanings discussed so far, such as duration, dynamism and imperfectivity, among others, show a neutral use of the progressive. In addition to this, eModE *be + -ing* can also denote some kind of subjective or emotive feeling which does not seem to be present in the simple forms. As Rydén points out,

the progressive implies situational/attitudinal immediacy and awareness ... , while non-progressive predications are 'frozen' or 'neutral' ... , in time or attitude. They are factual, informative, presentative rather than graphic, analytical or evaluative (1997: 421).

Let us consider the following example:

(38) Latimer, *Sermons*, 179: Yea, on the hollye day, the can not fynde in their hertes to come to the Temple, to the bleffed communion, they *must be working* at home (cf. Åkerlund 1911: 82).

The use of *must be working* instead of *must work* in example (38) expresses indignation and disapproval rather than simply stating a fact. This subjective or emotive use of the progressive can also be attested in the following example:

(39) Greene, *Looking Glass*, 138, 1: *Adam*. By my troth, Sir, I cry you mercy; your face is so changed that I had quite forgotten you: well, master devil, we *have tossed* over many a pot of ale together...
Adam. Faith, Sir, my old friend, and now good man devil, you know, you and I *have been tossing* many a good cup of ale (cf. van der Laan 1922: 10).

The use of an expanded present perfect -*have been tossing*- seems to be endowed with subjective connotations, i.e. Adam sounds much more affectionate in his second speech than in the first one, in which he uses the rather cold simple present perfect tense (*have tossed).* More examples in which the expanded form has been argued to express subjective feelings or emotions are offered by Bergeder (1914: 66-72) and Rissanen (1999: 221).

In other cases, the expanded form depends on verbs that denote affection or feelings of any kind, which reinforces the subjective or emotive use of the progressive:

> (40) *Hatton Correspondence*, II, 67: Tho' its near a 11 at night, and I **fear** the post *is going,* I cannot forbear to send you a peice of news, odd and unusuall (cf. Bergeder 1914: 72).

Likewise, subjective feelings and emotions could be expressed through the combination of *be + -ing* and certain adverbs, such as *always*, as in *you're **always** talking about the same thing*, in which the adverbial is used to denote irritation or annoyance, although the cluster can simply denote repetition: **(note 7)**

> (41) John Dryden, *Seb*, VII, 420: These fools and knaves *are* **always** impudently *crowd-ing* next to princes (cf. Söderlind 1951: 88).

Many of the functions and meanings discussed so far show a modern use of the progressive in eModE. However, the eModE expanded form was used in cases in which the progressive would not be used in PE, or at least, would seem rather questionable:

> (42) John Evelyn, *Diary*, II, p. 128: April 1st I went more exactly to see the momes of that incomparable Palace of Luxemburge in the Fauxbourgs St. Gemains, built by Mary de Medices and

> I thinke one of the most noble, entire and finish'd Piles that *is standing* in any Citty of the World, taking it with the Garden and all its accomplishments: ... (cf. Nehls 1988: 183).

(43) Sir Walter Raleigh, IV, 565: But in that the scriptures acknowledge that Gerar *was belonging to Zerah, ... (cf. Bergeder 1914: 36).*

As can be seen from the preceding examples, there are differences between the eModE progressive and the modern cluster, but, at the same time, there are similarities between the two, which may lead us to the general conclusion that the grammaticalization process of the English progressive was not far from being completed. Therefore, the progressive "can be regarded as a grammaticalised aspectual indicator in the verbal system by 1700" (Rissanen 1999: 216; cf. also Strang 1982: 429), although its use, as we have seen, is still unsettled.

4. Conclusions

The preceding sections have shown, among other things, that the use of the progressive in PE is quite different from its use in OE, ME and eModE. It has often been claimed that most of the meanings usually associated with modern *be + -ing* can be traced back to OE, but there is also the opinion that despite the apparent continuity in the use of expanded forms

from OE to PE, their similarity has been exaggerated. It is true that we can find the seeds of modern progressives in the OE period, but *beon/wesan +-ende* was just an indication of what the pattern was to become later in ME and eModE. It was during the latter period that expanded forms became more integrated within the verbal system, their functions being more clearly defined than they were in OE and ME, and their use becoming more and more consistent. Therefore, eModE can be considered to be a relevant period in the history of *be + -ing* because most of the functions that characterize the modern progressive were undoubtedly present in this period, and the periphrasis was used in many cases with the same value and with the same purposes as the modern cluster.

One of the main problems as regards the semantics of the progressive, whether today or in earlier periods, is that of assigning one single function to it. The analysis of some examples of *be + -ing* in different periods within the history of English has shown that it is impossible to ascribe one basic function to the progressive, as happens in ModE.

Moreover, in those cases in which more than one meaning seems to be present, it is very hard to decide which meaning is more primary or central. This is why I find it more convenient to speak of the different meanings of *be + -ing* as different

layers in combi-nation, layers that seem to be present at the same level in many cases.

It has often been argued that duration is the main idea expressed by *be + -ing*, but this idea is not always present in the periphrasis. What seems undeniable is that there has been a change in the type of duration conveyed by the progressive from OE to PE. Thus, the cluster could express both limited and unlimited duration in earlier stages of English, whereas the modern periphrasis is mainly used for the expression of limited duration. Likewise, the idea of futurity conveyed by *be + -ing* in eModE is different from the idea of futurity expressed by the periphrasis in OE and ME. In the former case, the action is usually viewed as if it had been planned beforehand, whereas in the latter case, the action or situation is thought of as taking place without the will of the speaker. In this respect, the future use of the expanded form in eModE seems to be quite close to modern usage, or at least closer than the 'future' use of the expanded form in OE and ME.

Throughout its history, *be + -ing* is frequently found in combination with time adverbials. The fact that the meaning expressed by the progressive may depend on the kind of adverbials that go with it and not only on the progressive *per se* has prompted the study of the interrelation between the two.

Therefore, *be + -ing* and time adverbials should not be treated as isolated items, independent of each other. The presence of time adverbials should be analyzed in combination with *be + -ing* for a better understanding of the complexity of the English verbal system (cf. Crystal 1966; Scheffer 1975).

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1. Additional examples of the co-occurrence of simple forms and expanded forms in parallel clauses or sentences in OE can be found in Mitchell (1976: 484-485).

2. The label *expanded tense* or *expanded form* seems adequate in diachronic accounts of *be + -ing*, especially because it is a neutral label, i.e. it carries no semantic connotations.

3. Both notions, general and limited duration, will be discussed in the section devoted to the semantics of the progressive in eModE.

4. The expression of emotions and feelings by means of *be + -ing* is considered to be quite recent, although several examples from different periods have been quoted to illustrate the idea that the cluster was used to express some kind of emotion, thus anticipating modern usage (cf. also Scheffer 1975: 211).

5. Most of the examples quoted from this period have been taken from the eModE section of the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic and Dialectal*, compiled by Matti Rissanen, Ossi Ihalainen and Merja Kytö (1991), University of Helsinki.

6. Combinations of *will/shall* + infinitive were less frequent in referring to the future in eModE than they are in PE.

7. One of the most frequent types of non-aspectual meaning is "the collocation of the progressive with an adverbial of the ALWAYS type ... , which is usually said to give the utterance a subjective/emotive flavour" (Smitterberg *et al.* 2000: 112).

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