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**The development of the English BE + V-ende/N-ing
periphrasis: from emphatic to progressive marker?¹**

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the grammaticalization of the BE + *V-ende/V-ing* periphrasis as a progressive marker. On the basis of quantitative data, it is claimed that the periphrasis started out as an emphatic alternative to the simple tenses. Its length, unusualness and optionality made it well suited as an emphatic marker. In the Early Modern English period (c. 1500–1700), the periphrasis was reinterpreted as an emphatic progressive marker. The prototypical – so-called focalized – use of the construction gradually became obligatory (from the 19th century onwards). This caused the focalized use of the periphrasis to lose its emphasis, while the so-called durative use of the construction has remained optional and emphatic to this day, like the subjective uses of the periphrasis.

The paper also explores the question of influence from Latin on the periphrasis in the Old English period (i.e. up to c. 1100), concluding that any such influence is likely to have consisted in a reinforcing effect.

1 AIMS AND ORGANIZATION

The present study discusses the development of the BE + V-*ende/V-ing* periphrasis, which I take to be the ancestor of the Present-day English PROGRESSIVE.² On the basis of quantitative data, I argue that the periphrasis was originally an emphatic alternative to the simple tenses. With time the construction was reinterpreted as an emphatic progressive marker, with subsequent loss of emphasis in those contexts in which the construction became obligatory. The grammaticalization of the periphrasis as (primarily) a progressive marker probably started in the Early Modern English period (c. 1500–1700). From the Late Modern period onwards (c. 1700 till today) other optional, uses have developed, viz. the so-called subjective uses of the construction. However, the present paper focuses on the GRAMMATICALIZATION of the periphrasis as a PROGRESSIVE MARKER, touching only briefly on the development of subjective uses.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 is devoted to terminological and methodological issues, while section 3 presents the data. As the article seeks to investigate the original meaning of the periphrasis, most of the examples come from Old English. In section 4 I provide an analysis of the development of the progressive based on the data and some hypotheses about the development of progressive markers. Finally, the main points are summarized in section 5.

2 TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

The term progressive is a semantic label. A progressive marker marks a dynamic (nonstative) situation as being in progress at reference time (Comrie 1976: 35). However,

² The participial suffix changed from *-ende* (with variants) to *-ing* (with variants) during the Middle English period.

in many historical studies of the BE + V-*ende/V-ing* periphrasis, the term is not restricted to progressive meaning, but refers to the construction as such, regardless of meaning. This practice is unfortunate given that, as will be shown below, the BE + V-*ende/V-ing* periphrasis did not function as a progressive in earlier English. In the present study, progressive is a semantic label, while the formal category is referred to more neutrally as ‘the periphrasis’ or ‘the construction’.

Bertinetto et al. (2000) and Bertinetto (2000) distinguish between two types of progressive constructions, viz. DURATIVE PROGRESSIVES and FOCALIZED PROGRESSIVES. Durative progressives are progressives that are ‘evaluated relative to a larger interval of time’, while focalized progressives are ‘those expressing the notion of an event viewed as going on at a single point in time’, referred to as the ‘focalization point’ (Bertinetto et al. 2000:527). Examples are provided in (1) and (2), respectively.

(1) [Yesterday, during my sleep], Ann *was playing* for two hours all by herself. (from Bertinetto 2000: 571)

(2) When John came, Ann *was still working*. (from Bertinetto, 2000:564–5)

What both durative and focalized progressives have in common is that they represent a situation as UNBOUNDED. Declerck (1991, with further reference to Comrie 1976), provides the following discussion of the notion of BOUNDEDNESS in relation to progressive forms:

A progressive verb form refers to an internal portion of the situation, without making explicit reference to its beginning or end. A nonprogressive verb form, in contrast, represents a situation as ‘complete’, i.e. it ‘presents the totality of the

situation referred to ... without reference to its internal temporal constituency: the whole of the situation is presented as a single unanalysable whole, with beginning, middle, and end rolled into one; no attempt is made to divide this situation up into the various individual phases that make up the action (Comrie 1976: 3)'. (Declerck 1991: 122, note 6; see also Smith 1997: 25, 35–7, 98, 102)

As should be clear from the examples in (1) and (2) above, the present-day periphrasis has both durative and focalized uses. Studies of the English periphrasis do not normally distinguish between the two types, but I will do so in this study as the distinction is relevant to the grammaticalization of the periphrasis as a progressive marker. Grammaticalization may involve obligatorification in the sense that the grammaticalizing construction becomes increasingly obligatory during the process (see e.g., Lehmann 2002: 124 and Heine & Kuteva 2007: 34). This has happened also to the progressive uses of the English periphrasis; however, it is clearly only the focalized use of the construction which has become obligatory, not the durative one (hence the sentence in 1 is grammatical also with a non-progressive form).

The bounded: unbounded distinction does not only separate between progressive and non-progressive forms, but also – more widely – between IMPERFECTIVE and PERFECTIVE forms. Progressivity is just one subclass of imperfective meaning. As one aim of the present paper is to discuss whether the periphrasis may originally have been an imperfective marker, which at some stage developed into a progressive marker (cf. section 4.1), we need to look briefly at what characterizes imperfective markers. A classification of imperfective – and perfective – meanings is provided by Binnick (1991):

Perfective	Imperfective
Non-progressive	Progressive
Semelfactive	Iterative
Punctuative	Habitual
Dynamic	Static
Transitory	Permanent

Table 1: Oppositional values of the imperfective and perfective aspects (Binnick 1991: 154)

As can be seen, imperfectives typically cover a whole range of meanings, progressive meaning being only one. As regards iterative and habitual situations, these both involve repetition, but while habitual meaning implies that the repeated activity takes place over an extended time period, iterative meaning does not. Iterative meanings can be paraphrased ‘to go on doing’ (Binnick 1991: 204).

We have seen that both durative and focalized progressives portray the situation as unbounded. The same goes for another common historical use of the periphrasis which will be discussed in this study – the so-called *STATIC USES*. These involve static, i.e. non-dynamic situations. According to Comrie (1976: 12–13), dynamic situations require a continuous input of energy to be maintained, while static situations require input of energy *not* to be maintained, as in *He sits on the sofa*. The stative uses in this study correspond to Binnick’s ‘static’ and ‘permanent’ meanings. As we will see below, the corpus also contains uses of the periphrasis that appear to be perfective.

As one main aim of the present article is to explore the increased progressivity of the periphrasis, all uses which are compatible with a progressive meaning have been classified as such. This need not in all cases have been the intended meaning, but the relevant classification strategy has the advantage of revealing the potential for

reinterpretation, i.e. the proportion of potential ‘bridging contexts’ (cf. the discussion in section 3.1)

Adverbial collocates have been an important diagnostic in the classification process. Durative and focalized progressives differ with respect to what adverbial collocates they take (cf. Freckmann 1995 and Bertinetto 2000). Some examples of durative adverbials are found in (1). Others are e.g., *since early this morning*, *until midnight*, *during the uprising*, *from ten to twelve*, etc. Focalized progressives may occur within a so-called frame construction, as in (2). They may also collocate with adverbials such as *at the moment*, *now*, *still*, etc. Periphrases collocating with adverbials like *generally*, *permanently* etc. have been classified as stative, while periphrases co-occurring with adverbials denoting sequence (e.g., *subsequently*, *afterwards*, etc.) have mostly been analysed as perfective. While time adverbials have been a useful tool in the classification process, a considerable proportion of the corpus examples do not involve a time adverbial at all. In such cases the context has often been all-important: examples which were compatible with a progressive (‘activity in progress at reference time’) reading have been classified as such; examples which seemed to refer to a permanent situation have been classified as stative, while examples which were most naturally understood as bounded have been classified as perfective.³

³ Bertinetto et al. (2000) also suggest a few other, less useful diagnostics for determining the function of progressives. For example, durative progressives are more likely than focalized progressives to occur with the perfect. However, perfect progressives are highly infrequent in the periods under study, and this diagnostic has therefore not been of much help.

3 THE DATA

3.1 Progressive-like uses of the periphrasis

The data of this study are taken from the *Helsinki Corpus of English Texts: Diachronic Part*. Table 2 below shows the distribution of uses which are compatible with a durative and focalized interpretation. The figures are given in absolute frequencies, percentages (in parentheses), and frequencies per 10,000 words.

Period	Durative	Focalized	Other	Total
OE	37 (15%) 0.9	71 (28%) 1.7	144 (57%) 3.5	252/6.1
ME	8 (9%) 0.1	17 (19%) 0.3	63 (72%) 1.0	88/1.4
EModE	13 (7%) 0.2	111 (61%) 2.0	57 (32%) 1.0	181/3.3
Total	58	199	264	521

Table 2: Functions of the periphrasis in the Helsinki Corpus

The data have been tested using chi-square, and the differences are statistically significant at the 99 % confidence level or higher, including all conditions except the distribution of durative vs. focalized uses between Old and Middle English.⁴ As shown in table 2, forty-three percent of the Old English periphrases allow a progressive reading, two thirds of these being compatible with a focalized reading. The sentences in (3)–(6) below provide examples of what from a present-day perspective look like durative progressives (examples 3 and 4) and focalized progressives (examples 5 and 6).

⁴ As the Middle English data may not be representative (see the discussion below), I have tested not only the data set as a whole, but also the Old English vs. the Early Modern English data.

- (3) þa þæt þa Porsenna gehierde he ðæt setl
 when that then Porsenna heard he that siege
 & ðæt gewin mid ealle forlet, þe he
 and that battle with all left which he
 ær þreo winter **dreogende** **wæs**
 already three winters fighting was

‘When Porsenna heard that, he gave up the siege and the battle against everybody, which he **had been fighting** (had fought) for three winters already.’ (Ælfred’s Orosius; HCO2)

- (4) & hie alle on þone Cyning **wærun** **feohtende**
 and they all against that king were fighting
 oð þæt hie hine ofslægenne hæfdon
 until they him slain had

‘And they **were** all **fighting** (fought) against the king until they had slain him.’ (Chronicle ms A early; HCO2)

- (5) Mid þi þe he þas þingc **wæs** **sprecende** to him
 while he these things was speaking to him
 silfum þa færinga geseah he sumne fiscere gan
 self then suddenly saw he some fisherman go

‘While he **was saying** these things to himself, he suddenly saw a fisherman leave.’ (The Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*; HCO3)

(6)	&	eode	on	ærne	merien	in to	ðam
	and	went	in	early	morning	into	the
	getelde,	&	efne	ða	wæs	growende	Aarones
	tabernacle	and	precisely	then	was	growing	Aron's
	gyrd	on	blostmum	&	on	leafum	on
	rod	into	flowers	and	into	leaves	in
	hnutbeames	wisan					
	nut tree's	manner					

‘And in the early morning he went into the tabernacle, and precisely then Aron’s rod **was growing** into flowers and leaves in the manner of a nut tree.’

(The Old Testament; HCO3)

Examples such as those in (3)–(6) have frequently been cited as evidence that there is continuity in the development of the periphrasis from Old English to the present day. However, there clearly is no identity between the Old and Present-day English periphrases. The proportion of possible progressive uses of the periphrasis in Old English simply is not large enough to legitimate the view that the construction was first and foremost a progressive marker at this stage. Sentences such as those in (3)–(6) above may at some stage, though probably not in the Old English period, have provided a ‘bridging context’ (Evans & Wilkins 1998: 5, Heine 2002: 84) or ‘critical context’ (Diewald 2002) in the grammaticalization of the periphrasis as a progressive marker. Bridging contexts are potentially ambiguous between a source meaning and a possible target meaning. They invite inferences or implicatures and are therefore crucial in the type of semantic change under discussion here. In grammaticalization processes such bridging contexts increasingly develop into ‘switch contexts’ (Heine 2002: 85) or ‘isolating contexts’ (Diewald 2002), i.e. contexts in which the source meaning is ruled out while the target meaning provides the only possible interpretation (Heine 2002: 85).

Grammaticalization normally involves an increase in frequency (see e.g., Hopper & Traugott 2003: 129–30). Hence, if the periphrasis started to become grammaticalized as a progressive marker in Old English, one would expect a steady increase in progressive-like uses of the periphrasis from Old English onwards. As shown in table 2, there is instead a decrease in such uses between Old and Middle English, both in absolute and relative terms. In Killie (2008) I showed that the Middle English data of the Helsinki corpus may not yield representative results in regard to the function of the periphrasis because there are rather few occurrences and an over-representation of a few writers. I therefore analysed an additional corpus of six Middle English texts (see the bibliography for details). Of 103 uses of the periphrasis in that corpus, fifty percent were found to be compatible with a progressive reading. If the data in the additional corpus are representative, the proportion of progressive-like uses of the periphrasis was considerably higher in written Middle English than the data in table 2 would seem to indicate. The large proportion of uses which are *not* compatible with a progressive reading nevertheless suggests that the progressive function of the periphrasis had not yet grammaticalized in the Middle English period.⁵ In Early Modern English there is a sharp increase in uses which lend themselves to a progressive interpretation, the proportion going up to sixty-eight percent. This suggests that the construction was shifting towards an increasingly progressive meaning. The increase seems first and foremost to have taken place in the focalized use of the construction. There is still considerable variation in the use of the

⁵ As regards the Old English data, almost one fourth of these are from the *Orosius*. One might therefore suspect that the Old English data are skewed as well. However, this is not the case as the *Orosius* data show a very similar semantic distribution as the rest of the Old English data.

periphrasis in Early Modern English, but one finds long passages such as the one in (7) below, where the distribution of ‘progressive’ and ‘non-progressive’ forms very much resembles Present-day English usage.

(7) I was amazed at all this, and did not know whether he was crazed, or had come to me on design to involve me in a concealing of treason. So I went to Lloyd, and sent him to the secretary's office with an account of that discourse of Tonge's, since I would not be guilty of misprision of treason. He found at the office that Tonge **was making discoveries** there, of which they made no other account but that he intended to get himself to be made a dean. I told this next morning to Littleton and Powle, and they looked on it as a design of Danby's, to be laid before the next session, thereby to dispose them to keep up a greater force, since the papists **were plotting** against the king's life. This would put an end to all jealousies of the king, now the papists **were conspriring** against his life. But lord Halifax, when I told him of it, had another apprehension of it. He said, considering the suspicions all had of the duke's religion, he believed every discovery of that sort would raise a flame which the court would not be able to manage. (Burnet's *History of my own time*, HCE3)

Both Smith (2007) and Kranich (2008) provide quantitative data supporting the view that the grammaticalization of the periphrasis as a progressive marker took place in Early Modern English. Both studies have used the same classification strategy as the one applied in the present study, i.e. to classify as progressive all uses which are compatible with a progressive reading, so the results of the three studies should be comparable. Neither Smith (2007) nor Kranich (2008) distinguishes between durative and focalized

progressives, so those studies cannot be used to trace possible shifts in the relative proportion of the two types of progressive, but both studies inform us about the grammaticalization of progressivity in English. Smith (2007) maps the frequency of progressive and other imperfective uses of the periphrasis in a corpus covering the period 1150–1710. As shown in table 3, he finds that there is a dramatic rise in the use of the periphrasis with progressive meaning in the Early Modern period, both in terms of sheer frequency and in terms of relative proportions.⁶

Year	Progressive uses	Other imperfective uses
1150–1250	0.3	1.5
1250–1350	0	0
1350–1420	1.8	1.8
1420–1500	1.0	0.75
1500–1570	6.9	2.3

Table 3: Frequency of progressive and other imperfective uses of the periphrasis per 50 000 words in Middle and early Modern English (adapted from Smith 2007: 216)

Kranich (2008) provides data mapping the development of the periphrasis as a progressive marker. Her data, which are taken from the ARCHER corpus, are given in table 4 below. (Here 17th/1 refers to the first half of the 17th century and 17th/2 to the second half, etc.)

⁶ According to Smith (2007: 216, footnote 11), the slight rise in the frequencies of 'other imperfective uses' in the Early Modern material is caused by two fixed phrases that recur in conservative law texts.

17 th /1	17 th /2	18 th /1	18 th /2	19 th /1	19 th /2	20 th /1	20 th /2	Total
14	80	118	168	253	447	592	675	2347
(67%)	(80%)	(83%)	(94%)	(92%)	(90%)	(89%)	(86%)	(88%)

Table 4: Progressive-like uses of the periphrasis 1600–2000 (adapted from Kranich 2008: 249)

As can be seen, there is a close match between the proportion of progressive-like uses in Kranich’s material from the first half of the 17th century and the Early Modern English figures in table 2. Kranich finds that there is a sharp increase in the proportion of progressive-like uses between the first and second half of the 17th century, suggesting that the construction became increasingly grammaticalized in the 18th century (cf. also Strang 1982: 429 and Arnaud 1998: 141). Nehls (1988: 186) finds that the use of the periphrasis ‘had become largely the rule’ in progressive contexts by the end of the 18th century. In addition to his own data, Nehls finds support for his claim in Louis Brittain’s *Rudiments of English Grammar* from 1778, which states that the periphrasis is used in progressive function at the time. Since (prescriptive) grammarians are traditionally hesitant to ‘admit’ that a new feature has entered the language, there is reason to assume that the grammaticalization of the periphrasis as a progressive had taken place well before the publication of Brittain’s grammar. The late 18th century is also the time when new forms, such as the passive progressive and progressive *be*, started to occur (Denison 1993: 394–

5, 440–3; Denison 2000; Pratt & Denison 2000: 412–15). This suggests that the periphrasis was becoming increasingly integrated into the verbal paradigm, or ‘paradigmatized’ (cf. Lehmann 2002: 120–121), which is a typical sign of increased grammaticalization. According to Kranich (2008: 327), the progressive became obligatory in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (cf. also Smitterberg 2005: 244). Nehls (1988: 183, 188) dates this stage to the mid-19th century.

Interestingly, the figures in table 4 show a small decrease in the proportion of progressive-like uses from the latter half of the 19th century. This drop is first and foremost caused by a corresponding rise in the so-called ‘interpretative progressive’ (Kranich 2008: 306–307), which was grammaticalizing at the time (cf. also Smitterberg 2005: 231).

3.2 Uses of the periphrasis which are incompatible with a progressive reading

We have now seen that the periphrasis has become increasingly progressive from the Early Modern period onwards. What we have not looked at so far are those uses which are not compatible with a progressive reading. As shown in table 2, 144, or fifty-seven percent, of the Old English uses of the periphrasis have been classified as ‘other’. A closer study of the ‘other’ category revealed that there is a preponderance of two specific types of uses, viz. stative and perfective uses.

As mentioned above, stative uses of the periphrasis do not involve dynamic situations at all. They refer to facts or unchanging relations such as belonging, feelings, eternal truths.⁷ Some examples from Old English are given in (8) and (9) below.

⁷ Nehls (1974: 126) refers to such uses as ‘Statische Aussagen’.

- (8) & ymbutan þone weall is se mæsta dic
 and around that wall is the greatest ditch
 on þæm **is iernende** se ungefoglecesta stream
 in which is running the most enormous river

‘and around that wall is the greatest ditch, in which the most enormous river
runs.’ (Alfred’s Orosius; HCO2)

- (9) On Egypta lande ne cymð næfre nan winter,
 in Egypt’s land not comes never no winter
 ne renscuras, ac on middan urum wintra **beoð**
 nor rain showers but in middle of-our winter are
 heore feldas mid wyrtrum **blowende**, & heora orcyrdas
 their fields with plants flourishing and their orchards
 mid æpplum afyllede
 with apples filled

‘In Egypt’s land the winter never comes, nor do rain showers, but in the
 middle of our winter, their fields **flourish** with plants/herbs and their
 orchards are filled with apples.’ (Ælfric’s De temporibus anni, HCO3)

The proportion of stative uses from Old to Early Modern English is shown in table
 5 below.

	Durative	Focalized	Stative	Perfective	Other	Total
OE	37(15%)	71 (28%)	55 (22%)	53 (21%)	36 (14%)	252
ME	8 (9%)	17 (19%)	49 (56%)	3 (3%)	11 (13%)	88
EModE	13 (7%)	111 (61%)	34 (19%)	4 (2%)	19 (10%)	181
Total	58	213	124	60	66	521

*Table 5: Functions of the progressive in the Helsinki Corpus, more fine-grained
 analysis*

The data in table 5 show that the proportion of stative uses is fairly large in all
 periods under study. In the Old English corpus, about one fifth of the periphrases are of
 this type. In the Middle English corpus 56 percent of the uses are stative, while the

corresponding figure in Killie's additional 2008 corpus was 42 percent. Even in the Early Modern English corpus approximately one fifth of the examples are stative, and this in spite of the fact that the proportion of progressive-like uses increases sharply.

Some examples of stative uses from the latter part of Early Modern English are given in (10) and (11) below. These involve highly stative predicates and illustrate that even though the periphrasis was grammaticalizing in Early Modern English, it was still in some respects different from its Present-day English counterpart.

(10) money I brought along with me: and I will gladly satisfy you in any thing. Some of it **is** yet **remaining** in my hands, for uses: and I question not but you are well contented I should have something laying by mee against necessity. (Diaries and letters of Philip Henry, HCE3)

(11) There is not any of the batcholders in this country **are inclineing** to marry this yeare that I heare of. (Diaries and letters of Philip Henry, HCE3)

The fourth column of table 5 shows that perfective uses make up as much as one fifth of the Old English corpus sentences. Examples are given in (12) and (13).

- (12) þa somninga se min latteow gestod & butan
 then suddenly this my guide stood and without
 eldenne **wæs** eft his gong **cerrende:** & mec
 hesitate was back his path turning and me
 eft lædde ðy selfan wæge, ðe wit ær
 back led the same way that we-two earlier
 coman
 came

‘Then suddenly my guide stood still and then, without hesitating, he **turned** around and led me along the same road that the two of us had come earlier.’

(Bede’s *Ecclasiastical history*; HCO2)

- (13) sona **wæs** se Godes wer **acsiende** þa broðra
 soon was the God’s man asking the brothers
 & thus cwæð: hwær æton ge?
 and thus spoke where ate you

‘Immediately God’s man **asked** the brothers, saying: ‘Where did you eat?’

(Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, MS C, HCO4)

Like focalized and durative uses, perfective uses involve dynamic situations, but unlike focalized and durative uses, they are not naturally interpreted as unbounded. Perfective uses often occur within a sequence of verb forms where the neighbouring verb forms are simple forms with a perfective meaning. From a present-day viewpoint, it would be more ‘natural’ to use a simple verb also where the periphrasis has been used. The function of the periphrasis here is probably to draw attention to one specific verb phrase, making it stand out from the surrounding context.

While perfective uses of the periphrasis are quite frequent in the Old English corpus, they are as good as non-existent in the Middle and Early Modern English corpora.

Similarly, in Killie (2008) I found only three examples of such uses in my additional Middle English corpus. Smith (2007) excludes perfective uses from his Middle and Early Modern English data because of their very low frequency (2007: 218). These facts suggest that the use of the construction with perfective predicates was particular to Old English.

I have argued that progressivity was not yet encoded as the main meaning component of the periphrasis in Middle English. This claim was based on the observation that a substantial proportion of the Middle English data is incompatible with a progressive reading, and that many of these are compatible with a stative reading. The hypothesis that the use of the periphrasis was at this stage determined by personal preference and not by grammatical rules is further strengthened by the high degree of inter-speaker variation at this stage. Table 6 below presents the data in my additional 2008 corpus at text level. Here it emerges that in some texts progressive-like uses clearly predominate, while in other texts they hardly occur at all.⁸

⁸ Engl. Conq. = The English Conquest of Ireland (1100s); Mandeville = The buke of John Mandeuill (1300s); Alphabet = The Alphabet of Tales (1400s); Engl. Chron. = An English chronicle (1471); Lyf Noble = The Lyf of the noble and Crysten prynce, Charles the Grete (1485); and Aymon = The right plesaunt and goodly historie of the foure sonnes of Aymon (1489). For details, see the list of references.

	Durative	Focalized	Stative	Other	Total
Engl. Conq.	2	9	2	—	13
Mandeville	1	2	32	2	37
Alphabet	—	13	1	3	17
Engl. Chron.	—	3	4	—	7
Lyf Noble	—	—	3	1	4
Aymon	1	20	1	3	25
Total	4 (4%)	47 (46%)	43 (42%)	9 (9%)	103

Table 6: The use of the periphrasis in six Middle English texts (adapted from Killie 2008: 83)

The data in tables 2 and 5 clearly show that the Old English periphrasis is far from being semantically identical to the Modern English one; instead, the construction has clearly gone through some major semantic changes since Old English times. There has been a major rise in progressive uses, with an accompanying drop in stative and perfective uses.⁹ In what follows I will try to provide a coherent explanation of these shifts.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BE + V-ENDE/V-ING PERIPHRAISIS

4.1 Imperfective > progressive?

During the last few decades, it has been shown that progressive and imperfective constructions tend to evolve along specific paths. Specifically, imperfective markers often develop into progressive markers and vice versa (Dahl 1985: 93). Of these two

⁹ In addition, the last few centuries have seen the rise of subjective uses of the periphrasis such as tentative uses of the progressive, the interpretative progressive, the subjective *always* progressive and the foregrounded progressive (Couper-Kuhlen 1995, Killie 2004, Smitherberg 2005, Kranich 2008). However, as noted above, these developments will not be researched in this paper.

shifts, the shift from progressive to imperfective is most common (Bybee & Dahl 1989: 56f; Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 141–2; Heine 1994: 279f; Bertinetto et al. 2000: 540); however, the construction under study here could not have undergone such a development given that the Old English periphrasis was not a progressive while the present-day construction is. The question, then, is whether the data just presented is compatible with the development imperfective to progressive from the English periphrasis.

It has been claimed that there is ‘an association’ between imperfectivity and the English periphrasis from the earliest records (Wischer 2006: 177; Smith 2007: 211, footnote 5).¹⁰ This association is perhaps not surprising given the large proportion of Old English uses which are compatible with imperfective meaning. However, the proportion is hardly large enough to warrant the claim that the Old English periphrasis was an imperfective construction. In the corpus of the present study, sixty-five percent of the Old English corpus examples are compatible either with a progressive or a stative reading and thus also with an imperfective reading (cf. Table 5). A second problem for the imperfective hypothesis is that there are so many uses in Old English which appear to be perfective rather than imperfective (twenty-one percent in the present study). A third problem is the fact that imperfective markers normally have habitual and iterative uses. According to Scheffer (1975: 211), the Old English periphrasis does not seem to have had such uses. Scheffer’s claim is supported by the corpus data of the present study. Habitual and iterative uses are in fact so infrequent in the data that they have been put in the ‘other’ category in table 5. Finally, as noted by Kranich, ‘if a form truly *expresses*

¹⁰ This association is, according to Wischer (2006: 177), the reason why the periphrasis was not used in combination with the perfective prefixes *ge-*, *a-*, *for-*, *be-*, and *of-*.

imperfective aspect, the typologically expected situation in the language should be one where there is an obligatory contrast between imperfective and perfective aspect... This is clearly not the case of the OE/ME progressive' (2008: 128–9, cf. also p. 160).

In sum, the data presented here seem incompatible with the idea that the Old English periphrasis was an imperfective marker, which subsequently developed into a progressive marker. Before we explore other possible scenarios, we will address the question of Latin influence on the Old English periphrasis. Given that the perfective uses are confined to the Old English corpus, it is possible that such uses may have been the result of influence from Latin. It is essential to settle this question before we can determine what exactly the meaning of the Old English periphrasis may have been.

4.2 Latin influence and the meaning of the periphrasis in Old English

As is well known, the majority of the extant Old English texts are translations from Latin. It has been claimed that the syntax in such manuscripts is heavily influenced by the source language (Blatt 1957, Sørensen 1957). This claim also concerns the use of the periphrasis, which is much more frequent in translations from Latin than in native Old English texts. According to Mossé, scribes encountered the following translation problem:

Under each Latin word, under each form, one was to render the corresponding Old English word or form. The aim was not to create a coherent or readable text, but to render as exactly as possible a Latin original by using the methods taught by the master. This was an unequal battle since Latin is the richest of the two languages: it possesses verbal forms, passive

and deponent, which Old English did not have. (Mossé 1938: 55, my translation)

Mossé argues that the solution was to translate different kinds of Latin periphrastic forms by way of the Old English periphrasis (1938: 55; cf. also Jespersen 1909–1949: vol IV, 165–6 and Smith 2007). The Old English periphrasis therefore came to be a calque of all types of Latin periphrastic deponent verb phrases as well as other periphrastic verb phrases. It was, among other things, used to translate its structural equivalent, the *esse* + present participle construction. The Latin construction is in turn said to be a calque of a parallel construction in Greek (Mossé 1938 : 15–16). The Greek construction almost exclusively occurred in the New Testament, but here it was frequent, and the alleged influence from the Greek onto the Latin construction is said to have come via the translations of the Greek New Testament (Mossé 1938 : 10–16; Amenta 2003). According to Mossé (1938 : 13), the Greek periphrasis was *duratif* ‘durative’. Mossé’s durativity concept is comprehensive and seems to correspond more or less to the concept of imperfectivity. It subsumes concepts such as *l’actualité* ‘present relevance’, *la simultanéité* ‘simultaneity’ and *la durée limitée* ‘limited duration’, which apparently correspond to focalized and durative uses in the present study; *la permanence* ‘permanence’ and *la durée indéterminée* ‘indeterminate duration’, which correspond to stative uses in the present study; and *la répétition* ‘repetition’, which corresponds to habitual and iterative uses (Mossé 1938: 78–94). As we have seen, the Old English periphrasis expressed all of these meanings, except habitual and iterative ones. Why habitual and iterative uses of the Latin periphrasis are rarely translated by the Old English periphrasis is unclear, but one possibility is that the Latin periphrasis was as a rule

translated by the Old English periphrasis only in those cases where there was semantic equivalence. But here we should note that habitual and iterative uses may have been peripheral also in Latin. Mossé provides no statistics showing the relative frequencies of the various meanings of the Latin construction.

A Latin periphrastic construction may in many cases have promoted the use of the Old English periphrasis. It is nevertheless likely that the Old English periphrasis did have its own, independent meaning. One argument comes from grammaticalization **theory**. The grammaticalization of a construction must be accompanied by a semantic reinterpretation. If a new construction cannot be assigned a meaning, at least a very general one, it is unlikely to become grammaticalized in the first place. Also other facts point to an independent existence for the Old English periphrasis. Firstly, the periphrasis does occur (albeit infrequently) in original texts. Secondly, in Smith's words (2007: 211), the periphrasis is 'not an obligatory reflex for any Latin construction in Old English writing'. Thirdly, it is *not* only Latin periphrastic verb phrases which are translated by the Old English periphrasis; also Latin simple tenses are (Nickel 1966: 391–2). In the *Orosius*, which dates back to the late 9th century, the periphrasis is used 53 times to translate a simple tense in Latin, and it is used 105 times where there is no periphrastic equivalent in Latin (Mossé 1938: 66). In *Historia Ecclesiastica*, simple tenses of deponent verbs are translated by the periphrasis in as many as one quarter of the cases, i.e. about fifty times (Scheffer 1975: 162),¹¹ and in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, a simple past tense is translated by the periphrasis thirty times (Mossé 1938: 59). Such facts are hard to

¹¹ Smith (2007: 211) maintains that this is because the periphrasis had "a growing association with deponency more generally", although "such a relationship never obtains categorical status in Old English".

reconcile with the idea that the use of the Old English periphrasis was solely motivated by structural similarity with a Latin construction. Structural similarity may well have played a role, but the use of the construction must have been licensed by some semantic component in the Old English periphrasis itself. The question, then, is what this meaning component consisted in. Mossé (1938) argues that this semantic component was precisely durativity, noting that in the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, thirty instances of a simple imperfect (and six of a pluperfect) are translated by the periphrasis when the meaning is durative (1938: 59). The *Lindisfarne Gospels* are from the late 7th or early 8th centuries, so it is quite an early text. Mossé goes on to discuss which durative use represents the original Old English use of the periphrasis. He maintains that of his various durative uses, the *durée limitée* is native to English:

This use is one of the most original uses that Old English has developed. It expresses that an activity went on until a specific point in time or until some other activity has put an end to it or interrupted it. It is therefore with *op*, *opþæt* that one encounters this construction. One should note, in the following examples, that *it is independent of Latin influence...* and it is above all found in texts or in sections of texts which are not translated, and in the era of Ælfred (especially in Orosius). (Mossé 1938 : 86; my translation, emphasis added)

The idea that limited duration is at least one of the original meanings of the Old English periphrasis is supported by the use of the construction in the various versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Although it is, according to Scheffer, not possible to find texts with no Latin influence at all (1975: 143), the Chronicles (along with the Law

Codes and the Charters) are said to show ‘comparatively little Latin influence’ (1975: 143). One might therefore expect the uses of the periphrasis in this text to be fairly representative of Old English usage at this stage. Interestingly, Scheffer finds that ‘[i]t is pretty clear that in 23 out of 26 cases the periphrasis is used to denote restricted duration’ (1975: 146).

On the basis of the above discussion, it is tempting to conclude that the original meaning of the periphrasis in English was limited/restricted duration, i.e. that the construction was originally a durative progressive, in the taxonomy of the present study. However, in addition to periphrases expressing *durée limitée*, Mossé discusses another use of the periphrasis which he also claims existed in Old English independently of Latin, viz. uses with *valeur descriptive* ‘descriptive value’ (1938: 85–6). Mossé, like several others who use the term, makes no attempt at defining it, so we are left to infer the meaning of the term from his examples. The uses in question are said to be either descriptive or both descriptive and durative at the same time. Most of them look like focalized and perfective uses. Some examples are provided below (where the glosses are mine, while the modern translations are provided by Mossé). The examples in (14) and (15) below look like focalized uses. Here we find focalizing adverbials such as ‘now again on this day’ and ‘just then’, which give us a ‘situation in progress’ reading.¹²

¹² Some would object to classifying the use in (15) as progressive since progressivity normally involves a dynamic/nonstative verb and situation (Comrie 1976: 37), while sitting is not a very dynamic activity. It is, however, difficult to fit such uses into any other category. It is a characteristic also of Present-day English that it allows the progressive form with so-called ‘stance verbs’ like *sit*, *stand*, *hang*, *lie*, and *live*, which refer to situations that do not require new input of energy to be maintained (cf. Comrie 1976: 37).

- (14) nu eft on þisse deie þurh þes
 now again on this day through of-the
 halie gastes to-cume weren alle ispechen agein
 Holy Ghost's coming were all languages again
 inumen and isome forðon þet cristes apostlas **weren**
 received and united because Christ's apostles were
specende mid alle spechen
 speaking with all languages

‘now again on this day, through the coming of the Holy Ghost, all languages were again and concordantly received, for Christ’s apostles **were speaking** in all tongues.’ (Lambeth Homilies 93, cf. Ælfric, Homilies I.368; Mossé 1938: 86)

- (15) se cyning ða Cyrus on ðam sefoðan dæge
 the king then Cyrus on the seventh day
 eode dreorig to ðæra Leona seaðe, and innbeseah,
 went sad to the lions’ pit and looked in
 and efne ða Daniel **sittende** **wæs** gesundful on
 and just then Daniel sitting was unhurt in
 middan þam leonoum
 middle of-the lions

‘then on the seventh day king Cyrus went sad to the lions’ pit, and looked in, and just then Daniel **was sitting** unhurt in the midst of the lions.’ (Ælfric, *Homilies* I.572; Mossé 1938: 85)

An example of a perfective-like use is given in (16). The relevant example has a very strong sequential/punctuative character. The extract in (17) may be an example of a stative use. Another possibility is that the participle is adjectival, meaning ‘full of wonder/in a state of wonder’. If this is the case, the relevant example is not an instance of the periphrasis at all, but represents what many scholars see as the main source of the periphrasis, viz. adjectival participles (see e.g. Sweet 1891–1898: vol. 2, 96).

- (16) mon geseah swelce hit wære an gylden
 man saw as if it were a golden
 hring on heofonum brædre þonne sunne; and
 ring in skies broader than sun and
wæs from þæm heofone **bradiende** niþer oþ
 was from the sky reaching downwards until
 þa eorþan, and **wæs** eft **farende** wið
 the earth and was then going towards
 þæs heofones
 the sky

‘And people saw that it was as if there were a golden ring in the sky, broader than the sun. It **reached** from the sky and down to the earth, and then it **went** up to the sky again.’ (Alfred’s *Orosius* 234.8; Mossé 1938: 85)

- (17) and þa þa hi þæt gewrit ræddon hi
 and when they that writing read they
 ealle **wundrigende wæron** and god ælmihtigne anon mode
 all wondering were and God Almighty in one mind
 wuldredon
 glorified

‘and when they had read that writing, they were all wondering, and with one mind praised and magnified God Almighty.’ (Aelfric, *Lives of Saints* 23.775; Mossé 1938: 85)

‘Descriptive’ uses are said to be frequent in independent Old English writing (Mossé 1938: 85). Thus, the use of the periphrasis with perfective predicates, as illustrated in (16), may have been a normal feature of Old English and not simply the result of a mindless calquing of periphrastic Latin constructions.

To conclude, it seems unlikely that the Old English periphrasis did not have an independent meaning, but was simply a calque of all kinds of Latin periphrastic constructions. A more plausible hypothesis is that the construction developed as a more

emphatic alternative to the simple tenses and was used to highlight specific episodes or facts. This may explain why it is often difficult to discern any difference in ‘meaning’ between the periphrasis and the non-periphrastic verb forms at this stage, as has been noted by many (see e.g., Mossé 1938 : 68). In fact, Mossé himself argues later in his monograph that the Old English periphrasis may have an expressive function, or a *valeur affective: l’insistance* ‘affective value: insistence’. This affective or expressive value is said to derive from the length of the construction:

One should note that the periphrastic form lends itself well to expressive use simply because it is a periphrasis. Indeed, to express in two words, *(he) was feohtende*, what one would normally express in one, *(he) feaht*, is to insist, to dwell for a fraction of a second longer on an idea, to put it in relief. In this way the quantitative here serves as the vehicle of the qualitative, which is a fundamental principle of expressivity in language. In emphasizing a process, Old English uses the periphrastic form, and here we have more evidence of the skill with which the resources of this new form are put to use. (Mossé 1938: 99, my translation; for a similar view, cf. Hübler 1998 chapter 4)

In addition to its length, the low frequency and optionality of the construction would have given it a marked character, which made it well suited as an emphatic marker. The marked value of the construction would have made it a less natural choice for speakers of Old English when producing texts in their native language. In translations from Latin, however, the periphrasis represented a handy device in translating the many periphrastic constructions referred to above. Its non-specific meaning allowed such a

general use. The Old English periphrasis was thus reinforced through contact with Latin. However, syntactic constructions are only in exceptional cases borrowed from another language (see e.g., Thomason & Kaufman 1988), so the relevant reinforcement probably consisted in an increase in frequency, as has been suggested by Scheffer (1975):

In the field of syntax phrases and turns of speech that are utterly foreign to a language are not easily adopted from another, in contrast to what happens in the domain of vocabulary. But phrases and constructions that occur to a lesser extent in one language may derive new strength from analogical constructions in other languages. It seems reasonable to assume that there existed a progressive in Old English, which was as it were given a new lease of vigorous life when English writers became acquainted with Latin texts. (Scheffer 1975: 132; cf. also the discussion in Smith 2007: 213–14)

Such contact-based reinforcement is well attested. Jendraschek (2006: 160) notes that most of the contact-induced changes discussed by him ‘deal with indigenous material whose functional domain or discourse frequency has been expanded’ (cf. the discussion in Killie 2012). According to Heine & Kuteva (2003: 562), a peripheral or low-frequency construction may become activated by a similar construction in a contact language so that it gains in frequency, eventually emerging as a full-fledged grammatical category. At this point it is interesting to note that most Germanic languages at some point experimented with a BE + present participle periphrasis (see the discussion in Mossé 1938: 21–52 and Poppe 2003: 10–12). It has been claimed that also the periphrases in these other languages are calques of Latin periphrases (and of Greek ones, in the case of Gothic)

(Mossé 1938: 31). However, the fact that a periphrasis occurs in older texts from so many Germanic languages more likely suggests that all these languages had a weakly grammaticalized periphrasis, which was reinforced through contact with Latin and Greek. In fact, it has been argued that even Sanskrit had a periphrasis (cf. Kranich 2008: 95), so the construction may be very old. The puzzle is why the periphrasis became a full-fledged grammatical category only in English.¹³ The explanation may be that in English it was further reinforced by a number of language-internal developments, notably the coalescence of *-ende* and *-ing*, the merger of the BE + *-ing* periphrasis and the progressive *be on hunting*/verbal noun construction (which was clearly progressive in meaning), and possibly also other developments involving *-ing* forms, such as the development of the gerund and of adverbial participial clauses (converb clauses) (see e.g., Killie 2006 and 2007 and Killie & Swan 2009: 358–9 and the discussion below). Contact with Celtic and French, which had imperfective and progressive constructions, respectively, may also have been important (cf. Mittendorf & Poppe 2000, Poppe 2002, Wischer 2006: 181–4, Killie 2012).

If the high frequencies of the periphrasis in Old English were the result of influence from Latinate, biblical writing conventions, then the lower incidence of the construction in Middle English may have a related explanation. Mossé (1938: 76) argues that the sharp fall in the use of the progressive towards the 13th century occurred because the Latin-

¹³ Smith (2007: 219) argues that the periphrasis survived also in Dutch, but that here it is optional, archaic, foreign, and used only in literary registers. It is probably disappearing from the language. The Dutch construction does not have a clearly defined semantic function and overlaps with other tense/aspect forms. Smith argues that the use of the periphrasis in Modern Dutch is parallel to the use of the periphrasis in Old and Middle English.

inspired style went out of fashion. By contrast, Nehls (1988: 180) claims that the drop occurred because the Old English literary traditions were replaced by the literary traditions of Latin and French after the Norman Conquest. Whatever happened, the reduced frequencies of the periphrasis are likely somehow to be related to a shift in writing conventions. What is more difficult to explain in such terms is the shift in meaning between Old and Middle English. Given that the use of the periphrasis in perfective verb phrases was autochthonous (though it, too, may have been reinforced through contact with Latin), the almost complete disappearance of such uses between Old and Middle English cannot be straightforwardly accounted for in terms of diminished – or increased – influence from Latin, but must be explained with reference to language-internal developments. Here we can only speculate about the reasons, but it seems likely that the shift must somehow be linked to the **durative** character of the present participle itself. What may have happened in Middle English is that the durative character of the participle became more pronounced, reserving the periphrasis for use with predicates that were compatible with imperfective meaning (cf. the discussion below). The trigger of this shift is uncertain, but reinforcement through contact with French is a possibility.

4.3 From emphatic marker to progressive marker?

The hypothesis that Old English *beon* + *V-ende* was an emphatic marker is not novel. Mustanoja (1960: 594) claims that the construction primarily served to ‘describe the action in a more graphic and forceful way’ and Braaten that it could be used ‘for dramatic effect’ (1967: 172). Scheffer (1975: 213) argues that its general function was to give a verb phrase emphasis, while it was the context which determined the exact

meaning.¹⁴ According to Wischer, the emphatic-marker hypothesis is supported by the fact that in the *Orosius*, the periphrasis frequently occurs with adverbs such as *swipe* ('very, greatly, strongly') and *longe* ('long'), or with superlatives of adjectives (2006: 176; cf. also Hübler 1998: chapter 4).

It is likely that the periphrasis first functioned mainly as an emphatic marker, which was used in a whole range of contexts, much like emphatic *do* in Present-day English.¹⁵ There is nothing in the evidence that contradicts this hypothesis. Indeed, the problem with the relevant hypothesis is rather that it cannot be either falsified or confirmed as an emphatic marker imposes very few restrictions on the accompanying verb or predicate. On the other hand, the analysis has the advantage of being compatible with all the Old English uses of the periphrasis, including the perfective ones.

The grammaticalization of the progressive as an aspectual marker is probably connected to the meaning of the present participle. The participle is known to be

¹⁴ Scheffer in fact argues that the periphrasis has a similar function in Present-day English (1975: 40–2). However, this analysis is problematic as it fails to explain why some uses of the periphrasis in Present-day English are obligatory, while others are not.

¹⁵ Interestingly, Nehls (1974: 170, 1988: 185) argues that emphatic *do* took over the emphatic functions of the periphrasis from the 17th century onwards. Thus, in (i) below, *doth differ* and *is differing* may simply represent two different ways of expressing emphasis, in a period where *do* was replacing the periphrastic form in the relevant function.

- (i) Lastly, whatever doth essentially differ from any thing, it cannot be said to be that from which it is understood to differ. Therefore that which **is** in its Nature **differing** from the chief Good, cannot be said to be the Good it self: which to think of God would be most impious and profane, since nothing can excel him in Goodness and Worth. (Preston, Richard Lord Viscount, Boethius, HCE3)

inherently durative (cf. e.g., Mossé 1938: 114). With time the emphatic nature of the construction became less pronounced while the durative component of the participle was strengthened. This laid the foundation for the reinterpretation of the construction as a progressive. Wischer (2006) explains the transition from emphatic to aspectual marker in the following way:

The next step, in which the whole construction acquires a grammatical meaning, namely to code the progressive aspect, lies again in the speaker–hearer interaction. The speaker uses this construction for emphatic reasons, or to catch the attention of the hearer, according to the speech act maxim of extravagance (cf. Haspelmath 1999).¹⁶

In the – frequent – contexts with durative verbs this focus on vividness, emphasis, or intensity implied a focus on duration as a conversational implicature. This was obviously the status of the expanded form in Old English, where the aspectual meaning was not yet conventionalized. It was basically a stylistic device... (2006: 177)

Hopper & Traugott (2003: 82) note that in the early stages of grammaticalization conversational implicatures frequently become ‘semanticized’, i.e. they become part of the semantic polysemies of a form. Dahl (1985: 11) argues that if a condition is fulfilled frequently when a certain category is used, ‘a stronger association may develop between the condition and the category in such a way that the condition comes to be understood as

¹⁶ Extravagance here refers to “speakers’ use of unusually explicit formulations in order to attract attention” (Haspelmath 1999: 1043).

an integral part of the meaning of the category'. Hopper & Traugott also emphasize the importance of frequency in the semanticization of conversational implicatures, noting that 'only standard inferences can plausibly be assumed to have a lasting impact on the meaning of an expression or to function cross-linguistically' (2003: 82). Emphasis on durativity is presumably an inference which is general enough to become semanticized during a grammaticalization process. The relevant inference may thus have led to a strengthening of the durative component of the periphrasis in Middle English, causing perfective uses of the periphrasis to disappear.

The analysis outlined here is compatible with the Old and Middle English data given that so many of the relevant uses are compatible with a durative meaning. Similar mechanisms probably lay behind the reinterpretation of the periphrasis as a focalized progressive. The reinterpretation may here have been based on the inherently durative meaning of the participle combined with an inclination among speakers to focus on events that are going on at the moment of speaking. This analysis is also compatible with the data given that a considerable proportion of the Early Modern uses of the periphrasis are compatible with a progressive reading.

As mentioned above, the grammaticalization of progressivity as the main meaning component of the periphrasis may have been triggered – or at least further reinforced – by the merger of *-ende* and *-ing*. This merger may have caused the periphrasis to be influenced by the clearly focalized progressive *be on hunting* construction, which was reduced to *be a-hunting* in the Early Modern period (see e.g., Nehls 1988). According to Nehls (1988), *be a-hunting* was mostly used in speech, but found its way into colloquial literature in the 17th century. In the 17th and 18th centuries there was 'functional blending'

of *be a-hunting* and the periphrasis, in which the former exerted a decisive influence on the latter in restricting its meaning/function to the expression of an action in progress (1988: 184, cf. also Jespersen 1949: 169, Nehls 1974 and Pertejo 1996).¹⁷ Following this functional blending, it became ‘inadmissible’ to use the periphrasis with stative predicates, according to Nehls (1988: 185).

That grammatical markers are at first emphatic, losing in emphasis as they become increasingly grammaticalized, is a well-known phenomenon (see for example the discussion in Rostila 2006). In fact, a newly grammaticalized grammatical marker which alternates with an older marker is probably as a rule felt to be emphatic as long as the original construction remains the unmarked choice. Thus, in many languages with weakly grammaticalized, optional progressive constructions, the relevant constructions are used when the speaker wishes to underline that the event referred to is in progress. Norwegian progressive constructions are a case in point here. Norwegian does not have mandatory marking of progressive aspect, but the language has a number of optional progressive constructions. Thus, the Norwegian sentences in (18) below all mean ‘Are you

¹⁷ According to Smith (2007), prescriptive grammarians played an important role in this process, being “responsible for establishing progressive meaning’ in the periphrasis (2007: 225–6). This transfer of meaning came about because the relevant grammarians encouraged the dropping of the locative element in the *be on hunting* construction, which was what caused the two constructions to merge. The prescriptivists advised against using the locative element because it was seen as ‘redundant’. This view probably arose because the construction was compared with the *be + V-ing* periphrasis, which in this way functioned as some sort of formal model. The problem with this hypothesis is that Smith finds only a few grammarians who prescribed the dropping of the locative element in the *be on hunting* construction, and these grammarians wrote in the 18th century, while the grammaticalization of the periphrasis as a progressive marker started in the 16th century.

painting?’, but the progressive constructions in (18b–d), where progressivity is overtly marked, are clearly more emphatic than the default simple present in (18a), where progressivity must be inferred contextually as the sentence could also refer to a habit or hobby.

- (18) (a) Maler du?
 Paint(PRES:SG) you
 (b) Holder du på (med) å male?
 Hold(PRES:SG) you on (with) to paint
 (c) Driver du og maler?
 drive(PRES:SG) you and paint(PRES:SG)
 (d) E du i malinga? (dialectal)
 are you in painting-the

‘Are you painting?’

In Early Modern English, the periphrasis may increasingly have worked in a similar way as these Norwegian progressive constructions, marking progressive aspect in an emphatic way.¹⁸

The history of the periphrasis is thus characterized by increased obligatoriness with a concomitant loss of emphasis. However, it appears that the loss of emphasis first and foremost took place in focalized contexts. The emphatic character of the construction has never been entirely lost. Durative progressives, which are not obligatory, are probably still felt to be emphatic. In addition, subjective uses such as the tentative progressive, the interpretative progressive, the subjective *always* progressive and the foregrounded

¹⁸ Fitzmaurice (1998: 37) gives a similar type of analysis of Old English durative uses such as those in (3) and (4) above, arguing that “[t]he choice of the progressive appears to encapsulate several concerns’, viz. the ‘transparently aspectual’ and ‘emphatic focalisation’.

progressive are based on the emphatic component of the construction and remain emphatic to this day.

On the basis of the discussion above, I propose that the periphrasis has gone through the following development:

1. Old English (up till c. 1100): periphrasis = EMPHATIC MARKER, an emphatic alternative to the simple forms, used to emphasize all kinds of events but having a close association with durativity because of the durative character of the participle. Possible reinforcement from Latin and/or Celtic.
2. Middle English (c. 1100–1500): periphrasis = EMPHATIC MARKER, an emphatic alternative to the simple forms. The durative element of the participle becomes more prominent and the periphrasis is therefore increasingly used to emphasize durative events. Possible influence from French.
3. Early Modern English (c. 1500–1700): periphrasis = increasingly an optional and emphatic PROGRESSIVE MARKER, used to emphasize progressivity. Possible influence from other participial constructions and from the *be a-hunting* construction.
4. Late Modern English onwards (19th century onwards): periphrasis = PROGRESSIVE MARKER showing increased obligatoriness in its focalized

use with accompanying loss of emphasis in such contexts. Durative uses remain optional and emphatic, and new subjective uses develop, which are also optional and emphatic. Possible influence from other participial constructions.

It is likely that the periphrasis will continue to have both obligatory, non-emphatic and optional, emphatic uses. Such a development is probably not exclusive to progressive/aspectual markers, but may characterize the development of different types of grammatical markers. Periphrastic *do*, for example, has both a grammatically required use (as an operator) and an optional, emphatic use and may have gone through a rather similar development as the one sketched above.

The analysis provided here is at odds with Rydén's claim that the periphrasis has 'a panchronic, core meaning', viz. that of 'dynamic process' with one 'action-focussed' and one 'attitude-focussed' facet (cf. Rydén 10997: 421). Instead, the development of the attitude-focussed meaning is a fairly late development in the history of the periphrasis. Although the periphrasis was emphatic in its early stages, and remains so in some of its uses to this day, it was hardly attitude-focussed or subjective in the sense of expressing speaker perspective. As noted by Kranich (2008: 124), '[t]he uses in OE and ME are much less specific: the choice often rather has to do with narrative conventions, in the sense that the progressive is chosen to highlight the most dramatic events in a narrative... (Kranich 2008: 124)

5. SUMMARY

We have seen that Old English *beon/wesan +V-ende* was clearly not a progressive marker. The proportion of examples which are compatible with a progressive reading is simply too small for such an interpretation to make sense. The periphrasis may have originated as an emphatic alternative to the simple tenses, to develop into an emphatic progressive marker. The grammaticalization of the periphrasis as a progressive marker probably started in the Early Modern period. The construction then gradually lost its emphatic character in those contexts in which it was becoming obligatory, while the optional uses of the construction continued to be emphatic. The focalized use of the construction became obligatory in the 19th century. In the Late Modern period additional emphatic uses developed, viz. the so-called subjective uses.

The question of influence from Latin has also been explored, the conclusion being that any such influence is likely to have consisted in a reinforcing effect. Specifically, contact with Latin and the Latin written tradition led to an increase in frequency for the construction, but not in a change in meaning.

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