

# **The Progress of the English Progressive**

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## Abstract

This paper addresses the diachronic development of the periphrastic construction, *beon/wesan* + the participial ending *-ende* in Old English, into the progressive construction in Modern English. Even though there are two different hypotheses regarding the origins of the progressive – the *beon/wesan* + *-ende* construction and the locative construction with the verb *be* + the preposition *on* + the nominal ending *-ung*– it is suggested that both forms somehow merged giving way to the present day construction *be* + *-ing*. Some of the examples of the construction in Old English correspond to the present day usage of the progressive but not others and this is why it is suggested that the usage of the *beon* + *-ende* construction was still undeveloped. In Middle English, the ending *-ende* had different dialectal forms in different parts of Britain but finally the *-ing* form prevailed over the rest of the endings. New forms of the progressive developed in this period, leading finally to the grammaticalization<sup>1</sup> of the construction in Modern English where it stopped being a stylistic variant and began to have a verbal status. Some of the new progressive forms developed in Modern English, such as the progressive passive, were forbidden by the grammarians. Nevertheless, the use of the latter form increased among literary people who used the construction in private letters to friends and as they started gaining prestige, this form was no longer forbidden. In this paper the semantic development of the construction will also be treated, showing the differences and the shift in meaning between Old English and Present Day English.

Keywords: the progressive, *-ing*, progressive passive, meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> In this TFG, *grammaticalization* will be used to mean that a form has fully acquired the grammatical status in the language rather than just being a stylistic variant. The term will not be used to mean the process in which a lexical word loses its lexical meaning and starts to fulfill a more grammatical function.

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## 1. Introduction

The progressive in English can be defined as a verbal tense that indicates the continuity of an action. Besides, nowadays the progressive is defined in terms of the general linguistic concept of aspect, in this case the imperfective aspect, where the internal temporal structure of the situation is explicitly mentioned, and there is no implication of the situation being completed. Thus, there is a difference between ‘I crossed the river when you saw me’- refers to the whole action of crossing the river – and ‘I was crossing the river when you saw me’ which does not imply that the person completed the action of crossing the river and hence, it is imperfective.

The aim of this TFG is to look into the development and the use of the progressive verbal forms in English. It is outside the scope of this TFG to deal with other uses of –*ing* forms of verbs like gerunds as subjects or subject complements. In order to do so, I have divided this paper into three main sections corresponding to the different periods<sup>2</sup> in the history of the English language which are Old English (c. 449-1066), Middle English (1066-1476) and Modern English (1476- today). Regarding the Old English period, the verb *be* + the present participle ending –*ende* seems to have been used mainly in late Old English to express the progressive. However, some of the instances provided do not correspond to the present day usage of the progressive and in many cases it is not easy to specify which function or meaning is involved in the construction.

The second section dealing with the Middle English period shows how the participial ending –*ende* of Old English changed into the present day form –*ing*. Besides, the existing verb forms of Old English developed and new progressive forms appeared conveying also new meanings and functions and giving way to the expansion of the construction during Modern English.

Finally, I divide the third section into two different parts; the Early Modern English Period (1476-1776) and the Late Modern English period (1776- today). On the one hand, the former will emphasize on the importance of the process of grammaticalization of the progressive revealing that in this period the use of the progressive was still undetermined and, therefore, it is common to find a cross-over between the simple and the progressive. In addition, new progressive forms developed as well as new meanings and functions which can be found in present day English. On the other hand, the latter section shows that the usage of the progressive increased reasonably and that some of the most relevant changes on the usage of the progressive occurred in this period. One of the most important changes is the replacement of the passival form with the progressive passive, which is now so widely used.

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<sup>2</sup> The dates for the periods are from the *Cambridge History of the English Language*.

To conclude, I will make a summary focusing on the most relevant issues in the development of the progressive in the English language and at the same time I will set out my own conclusions.

## 2. The progressive in Old English (c. 449-1066)

### 2.1 Origins

The origins of the progressive have been quite a controversial issue during decades. Even though there are some scholars, like David Crystal (1995), who claim that the progressive form did not appear until the Middle English period; some others, like Denison (1993) demonstrate that there are specific usages of it in Old English. The Old English form of the progressive was created with the present participle form obtained with the ending *-ende* together with the verb *beon* or *wesan*. However, it is difficult to determine the function of *beon* + present participle in the verbal system of Old English. It is important not to confuse the present participle form with nouns ending in *-end(e)*, since not all of them were progressive anyway:

(1) *Se huntiēda cyning ...* (De la Cruz, Cañete, & Miranda 1995: 129)

In this example *huntiēda* means ‘hunter’ and not ‘hunting’, so the meaning of the sentence would be ‘the hunter king’. In many cases the *-ende* forms were not verbal but adjectival, and this can be detected by inserting an adverb before the *-ende* form:

(2) *hu gewitēde ða ðing sint ðe hie gietsiað*

‘how transitory those things are that they desire’ (Denison 1993: 373)

Modifiers like *hu* ‘how’, *swa* ‘so’, *to* ‘too’ before the word with the ending *-ende* suggest that the OE participle is adjectival and not verbal. However, there are some other modifiers that can modify both adjective and verbs such as *swipe* meaning ‘much, very’.

As Denison (1993) portrays in his book *English Historical syntax*, there are different theories concerning the origins of the Old English progressive. Some scholars such as Mossé or Raith believe that the construction in OE was directly influenced by

Latin while others as Nickel or Visser support that it was an autochthonous construction of OE. Nickel (1966 cited in Denison 1993: 399) distinguishes three different constructions as the originators of the progressive in the *beon* + *-ende* periphrasis: (a) predicative adjectives, (b) appositive participles and (c) agent nouns

Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the present English form *be* + *-ing* comes from the OE form *beon/wesan* + *-ende*. Some scholars believe that the Present English construction may come from the locative construction, developed in the late OE and ME period and created with the verbal noun *-ung*<sup>3</sup> as well as the locative preposition *on*:

(3) *He wæs on huntunge*

‘he was at hunting’ (De la Cruz, Cañete, & Miranda 1995: 131)

Even if both constructions (*beon* + *-ende* and *beon* + *on* + *-ung*) were dissimilar from each other, due to the evolution of the language they became equal in form. During the ME period the *-ing* form supplanted the OE participial suffix *-ende* even if the *-ing* form already existed in OE as a nominal feminine suffix. As far as the locative construction is concerned, Smith (2007) claims that the “steady phonological attrition of the prepositional element reduced it to an unstressed prefixal vowel, which was eventually lost by APHESIS”:

(4) OE *beon* + PAP (present active participle)

Participial *-ende* replaced by *-ing*

(*standende* > *standing*)

Locative construction

Loss of locative element, *on* > *a* >  $\emptyset$

(*was on hontyng* > *was a hunting* > *was hunting*)

be + *-ing*

(Smith 2007: 206)

<sup>3</sup> The ending *-ung* began to vary with *-yng* during the Middle English period

## 2.2 The usage of the progressive in OE

In his book *English Historical Syntax* David Denison (1993) describes the usage of the progressive in Old English as irregular. He explains that in his data collection there are some literary works like *Orosius* in which the usage of the progressive construction is noticeably high, whereas, in the case of poetry the usage of the progressive seems to be infrequent<sup>4</sup>. Denison also provides some examples where the *be* + present participle is used in Old English:

(5) *Hit God sibþan longsumlice wrecende wæs, ærest on him*

It God afterwards for-a-long-time avenging was first on him

*Selfum & sibþan on his bearnum...*

Himself (Adam) and subsequently on his children....

‘God avenged it for a long time afterwards, first on him himself and subsequently on his children...’ (Denison 1993: 380)

(6) *þætte se consul wæs wenende þæt eall þæt folc wære gind*

So-that the consul was thinking that all the army was throughout

*þæt lond tobræd, & þiderweard farende wæs...*

The country scattered and to there- going was

‘so that the consul assumed wrongly that the army was all scattered throughout the country and he was heading there...’ (Denison 1993: 380)

(7) *Hit wæs þa swiþe oþþycende þam oprum consulum*

It was the very/greatly displeasing the other consuls (DAT)

‘Then it displeased the other consuls greatly’ (Denison 1993: 381)

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<sup>4</sup> This may be due to the fact that poetry was originally in English, whereas religious or history works were often translated from Latin which may have caused an increase in the use of the construction. See Table 1 below and the paragraph before it.



Some of these examples provided by Denison correspond to the Present English usage of the progressive, such as instance (6), but there are cases where the progressive form used in OE could not be used in PDE and conversely. Besides, the majority of the examples are from the late OE period. Smith (2007) claims that uses of the *beon + -ende* construction had the “progressive meaning when they indicated actions that are ongoing at a specific reference time” (Smith 2007: 215) as the following example shows:

(8) *Ic lufa mid Godes gefe ancilla dei*

I Lufa with God’s gift servant of-god

*Wes soecende and smeagende*

Be- 1sg.PAST seek- PRES.ACT.PART. and meditate- PRES.ACT.PART

*Ymb mine saulþearfe mid Ceolnoþes ærcebiscopes geðeahte*

On my soul’s need with Ceolnoþ’s archbishop’s advice

7 *þara hiona et Christes cirican*

And the community at Christ-GEN Church

‘I, Lufa, with God’s gift, was enquiring and deliberating about the good of my soul with the advice of Archbishop Ceolnoth and the community at Christ Church’ (Smith 2007: 217)

As reported by Smith the verb forms *seocende* and *smeagende* account on activities that happen during the time the subject, *ic*, was at the church, which was a point in the past.

According to Denison (1993) when the progressive form of a verb occurs in OE, it can be detected by the presence of verbal complements such as the direct object in the case of transitive verbs:

(9) *ac se æglæca ehtende wæs, deorc deaþscua, duguþe and geogope, seomade ond syrede*

‘but the monster, a dark death shadow, was persecuting old and young retainers; he remained and hovered in ambush’ (Lamont 2005)

Lamont (2005) maintains that in this example from *Beowulf*, lines 159-161, the direct object ‘*duguþe* and *geogope*’ (old and young retainers) confirms that the verb *ehtende* has a verb status in one of the very earliest forms of the progressive in English. Smith (2007) disagrees with Denison’s description of the meaning of the progressive, defending that in this case the verb *ehtende* represents an action that began and ended several times over an extended period rather than representing an action which is progressing at a specific point in the narration.

Thanks to the development of the OE progressive, Denison (1993) shows that it was possible to find present and past tense combinations of the verb *beon/wesan*, as well as infinitives after the modals *sceal* ‘shall’, *will* ‘will’ and *mæg* ‘may’:

(10) *he sceal beon cwylmigende mid deofle aa butan ende*

he shall be suffering with devil always without end

‘he shall be tortured along with the devil for ever and ever’ (Denison 1993: 383)

Moreover, in the case of close Latin translations into OE it was possible to insert an infinitive of the progressive if there was a VOSI (Verb, Object/Subject, Infinitive) construction:

(11) *Done seolfan riim wintra hiene hæbbende beon,*

That very number winters (GEN PL) him (ACC) having be (INF)

*He oft ær his monnum foresæde....*

He often earlier his men (DAT PL) predicted

Lat. *Quem se numerum annorum fuisse habiturum.... Suis praedicare solebat*

‘He had often predicted to his men that he would attain that very age’ (Denison 1993: 383)

Besides, Denison also affirms that in the OE period there was not any combination between the progressive form and the perfect or the passive but there was with the imperative:

(12) *Beo þu onbugende þinum wiðerwinnan hraðe*

Be you submitting your adversary (DAT) quickly

Lat. *Esto protinus consentiens aduersario tuo*

‘Agree with your adversary quickly’ (Denison 1993: 383)

Furthermore, Denison (1993) states that the usage of the progressive in OE was to translate perfect deponent verbs in Latin, which are passive in form but have an active meaning:

(13) *and hraðe þa gefremednesse ðære arfæstan bene wæs fylgende*

and quickly then/the fulfilment the pious prayer (GEN) was following.

Lat.....consecutus est . . .

‘and fulfilment of the pious prayer followed rapidly’ (Denison 1993: 382)

It is noticeable that the majority of the examples provided come from a religious or historical works. Smith (2007) claims that the *beon + -ende* construction was used in certain types of writing, particularly in those OE texts based on Latin models. In his work *The Development of the English Progressive* a table concerning the frequency of the OE *beon + -ende* in different texts is provided:

Genre	<i>beon + PAP</i> per 10,000 words
Letters	7.5
Laws, Documents	.77
Religion	13.9
Literature	1.5
History	20

Table 1. The occurrence of *beon + PAP* by genre in Old English. (Smith 2007: 213)

## 2.3 The Meaning of the Progressive in Old English

The fact that the progressive form appeared in OE where it cannot appear in Present English and vice versa is one reason for the disagreement among scholars regarding the function(s) and meaning(s) of the OE progressive. Núñez (2004) analyzed seven different meanings proposed for the OE *beon/wesan + -ende* construction which are shown below:

### 2.3.1 Duration

The first meaning she analyses is that of duration, as the example provided shows:

(14) *Old English Chronicle*, an. 855: *Atelwulf cyning ... ferde to Rome ... and tar wæs twelf monat wuniende, and ta him hamweard for*

*'Atelwulf king ... went to Rome ... and there was twelve months living and then he [himself] home travelled'* (Mustanoja 1960: 584 in Núñez 2004: 11)

This view was supported by several scholars like Strang (1970), who defends that the usage of *beon/wesan + present participle* is “in the first instance to show simultaneous activity having duration” (Strang 1970: 350).

Some other scholars point out that when the periphrasis appeared with temporal expressions or adverbials of time it expressed limited duration. According to Strang (1970) “the words *oð* or *oððæt* (until) signal the limit of duration/persistence” as the following example shows:

(15) *he þæs heriende and feohtende fiftiz tintra, oð he hæfde ealle Asiam on his zeþeald zenyd*

*'He harried and fought [kept on harrying and fighting] for fifty winters/years until he had compelled all Asia into his dominion'* (Strang 1970: 351)

### 2.3.2 Futurity

The second meaning the author mentions is the one of futurity in the *beon/wesan* + *-ende* construction. According to her, 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*<sup>5</sup> (Núñez 2004: 14)’.

This future form mainly occurred when verbs of motion appeared as in the next example:

(16) *Eac hi wæron cumende wið Westseaxene þeode to gefeohte*

‘Also they were coming against of West-Saxon people to the fight’ (Núñez 2004: 14)

Whenever the present tense of *beon/wesan* + *-ende* was modified or defined by adverbs like *lange* or *æfre*, mainly used to indicate duration, the meaning of futurity was also found. In this case, the adverbs themselves could trace the idea of futurity rather than the expanded form (Núñez 2004).

However, the author claims that even if there are examples that imply a future meaning in the *beon/wesan* + *-ende* periphrasis, it cannot be used “as a future equivalent” since they only had an inferred meaning of futurity.

### 2.3.3 Repetition and Habit

The third meaning proposed by Núñez is the one concerning repetition and habit. However, she claims that in OE both meanings were expressed by different adverbs such as *næfre*, *ær*, *eft*, *gelomlice* or *full*:

(17) *hwilum wæs on horse sittende, ac oft on his fotum gangende*

‘At times he mounted on horseback, oftener he went on foot’ (Núñez 2004: 16)

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<sup>5</sup> In *syndon sprecende*, *syndon* is a present tense form. In OE, present tense forms were used for present and future meaning.

### 2.3.4 The Emphatic Character

The emphatic character of the event is also mentioned by Núñez (2004) as a meaning of the construction, which according to her “expressed that an action or state was being intensified in character, and was very frequent in warfare descriptions” (Núñez 2004: 17):

(18) *Dæt Paulinus on Lindesege mægðe bodigende wæs Cristes geleafan*

‘That Paulinus in Lindsay province **preaching was** Christ’s faith’ (Núñez 2004: 17)

### 2.3.5 Ingressive/ Inchoative Function

The fifth function observed by Núñez is the ingressive or inchoative one:

(19) *Hwæt ða færllice comon fīf englas of heofonum, ridende on horsum mid gyldenum gerædum and twægen þara engla on twa healfe iudan feohtende wæron and hine eac bewerodon* (Núñez 2004: 17)

‘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 defended him’ (Núñez 2004: 18)

Núñez cites Ákerlund, who states that the verbal periphrasis *feohtende wæron*, would be better translated as ‘began to fight’ instead of ‘were fighting’. Moreover, she states that the inchoation is expressed through the context and not from the construction. She also clarifies that there are different manners to express inchoation in OE by means of combinations as *ginnan/ aginnan/ onginnan to* + infinitive, + *aginnan + -ende, fon/ onfon/ underfon to* + infinitive and *tacan to* + infinitive. In any case, Núñez doubts if this function existed in OE with the *beon/wesan + -ende* construction and claims that if it ever existed, it seems to have died.

### 2.3.6 The Terminate Function

One more function of the OE progressive is the terminate function, in which the action is seen as a whole and not as going on. The aim of this function was that of emphasizing the narration apart from expressing the feelings or emotions of the speaker.

(20) *ta gehaldan hiene ta apostole Petrus & Johannes, cwit seo boc, tat he up astode & ongunne hliapettan, & mid tam apostolum in tat temple eode & **aa** wæs gongende & hleapende & Dryghthen 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’ (Núñez 2004:19)

According to Núñez, in the example above the periphrasis presents the action as a whole in an emphatic manner but it does not imply that the action was in progress at the time of speaking.

### 2.3.7 Frame Time

The last function mentioned by Núñez is the one implying the notion of ‘frame-time’. This function may have its origins in the locative construction in which the participle form is used for an event at the time mentioned or implied in the sentence. This function mainly appeared in subordinate clauses when introduced by *as* and *when*:

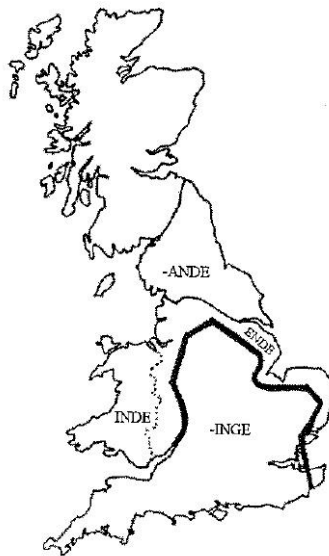
(21) *þæt eac Paulis se apostol wæs **reccende**, þa þa he cwæð*

‘That also Paulis the apostle was telling [teaching] when he said’ (Núñez 2004: 13)

## 3. The progressive in the Middle English period (1066- 1476)

Although some scholars like Baugh and Cable (1993) support that it was not common to find progressive form instances before the sixteenth century and insist that the ME progressive developed to some extent independently from OE occurrences, the Middle English period can be considered as an era where the progressive form

flourished. By the early ME period the usage of the progressive was only usual in the North, Kent and Worcestershire, by the fourteenth century it had expanded and it became common in central and east Midlands and finally in the fifteenth century it had reached the rest of the country. At the end of the Middle English period and beginning of Modern English there is an increase in the use of the progressive form. However, during Middle English the use of the progressive was more common in northern texts than in midland or southern texts. David Crystal (2003) asserts that the participle ending *-ing* had different dialectal forms in the ME period: *-and(e)* in Northern; *-end(e)* in some parts of the East Midlands; *-ind(e)* in some parts of the West Midlands; and *-ing(e)* elsewhere:



Map 1. Different dialectal forms of the participial ending in ME.

During late Old English and the early Middle English there was confusion between the inflectional endings of the present participle, infinitive and verbal noun. Meanwhile the verbal noun began to develop verbal properties and started to have the ability to take a noun phrase as its direct object, apart from being modified by adverbs that normally modify only verbs (Fischer 1992).

Moreover, Fischer (1992) suggests that the OE constructions *he wæs huntende* and *he wæs on huntunge* suffered phonological changes in Middle English and became very similar, as in *he was huntynge* and *he was on /an /in/ a huntynge*. By ME the OE *-ende* was absorbed by the *-ung* and *-ing* endings, which then merged together into *-yng /-ing* with the *-yng* being later dropped.



### 3.1 The Development of the Existing Verb Forms

Some of the verb forms that existed in OE survive during ME as is the case of the adjectival present participle form, which shows that *sittyngest* is an adjective and not a verb:

(22) *Me wolde thynke how that the worthiest Of knyghtod....*

‘Me (OBL) would seem how that the worthiest of knighthood...’

*Were sittyngest for hire*

‘Would-be most- suitable for her’ (Denison 1993: 373)

Additionally, the number of progressive verbs increased during the ME period and it was possible to find the progressive form in three different times (past, present and future):

(23) *thou shalt be hauynge power on ten citees*

‘You shall be having power in ten cities’

(24) *As I was wryghtyng pis bylle*

‘As I was writing this note’

(Denison 1993: 375)

In the case of BE + preposition + *Ving*, it was not common to find instances with the preposition *on* as it was the case in OE. The only instance with the preposition *on* that could be found in ME was the idiomatic expression BE *on hunting*. Although the preposition *at* was sometimes used, as in *at wenyng* ‘in expectation’, the most relevant preposition during the ME period was *in*:

(25) *While this gode was in gederyng the grettes among,*

‘While this wealth was in gathering the persons-of-rank among

*Antenor to the temple trayturlly yode.*

‘Antenor to the temple treacherously went’

‘While this wealth was being collected among the nobility, Antenor treacherously went to the temple’ (Denison 1993: 388)

The usage of *in* might be influence of the French construction *en chantant* ‘in/while singing’ according to Visser (1963 in Denison 1993: 388).

### 3.2 New progressive forms in Middle English

#### 3.2.1 The infinitive progressive ‘to be doing’

The paradigm of the progressive BEON/WESAN spread during the ME period and at the beginning the *to* infinitive began to appear occasionally together with the progressive *be*:

(26) *EAhte þinges nomeliche*                      *leaðieð*

‘Eight things in particular /especially urge

*Us to wakien*        ... &        *beo wurchinde.*

Us to be-watchful... and be working’

‘Eight things in particular urge us to be watchful ... and working’ (Denison 1993: 384)

#### 3.2.2 The perfect progressive *be* ‘has been doing’

The first instance of the perfect progressive *be* has been found in Middle English:

(27) *if þi*    *parischen*    *In sin lang* ***has ligand bene***

If your parishioner in sin long has lying been

‘If your parishioner has long been lying in sin’ (Denison 1993: 384)

#### 3.2.3 The modal perfect progressive

Some scholars like Mustanoja (cited in Denison 1993: 384) defend that the usage of the progressive form after modal verbs like SHALL or WILL appeared for the first

time in ME. However, as example (10) indicates it also happened during the OE period. Thereupon the usage of modal verbs with the progressive form, the sequence modal + perfect + progressive appears as Denison (1993) shows in the following instance:

(28) *for þai trowed þat he schuld hafe bene hingand apon þat crosse*

‘For they believed that he should have been hanging on that cross

*As lang as þat crosse myght last.*

As long as that cross might last.’ (Denison 1993: 384)

### 3.2.4 *Ving* + *of* + NP

In the late ME period there are some instances where the *-ing* form of a transitive verb is followed by an *of* noun phrase:

(29) *þe zomen of Schordych, þat þere were in amending of here berseles*

The yeomen of Shoreditch that there were in repairing of their archery-butts

‘The yeomen of Shoreditch who were repairing their archery targets there’

(Denison 1993: 388)

### 3.2.5 Passival *Be* + *Ving*

Also known as passive progressive, this form has an active form with passive meaning. Although some scholars date the usage of the passive progressive forms in the OE period, it seems that the early Middle English examples are the ones that are more convincing:

(30) *hym thought som treason was ymagenyng*

Him (OBL) thought some treason was being-dreamt-up (Denison 1993: 390)

## 3.3 The Meaning of the Progressive in Middle English

Certain meanings of the progressive that occurred during the OE period were also repeated in the ME period as is the case of duration, futurity, repetition and habit and

frame time. All of them were formulated by the be + *-ing* construction in ME period, however there are some meanings that have used other resources to accompany the construction.

### 3.3.1 Duration

When the meaning expressed duration, in the majority of the cases, the construction was accompanied by adverbs or adverbial phrases as *ay*, *always*, *ever*, *evermore*, *all (the) day*, *all the time*, *all the while*...:

(31) *Embrouded was he, as it were a mede / Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede. Singinge he was, or floytynge, **al the day**.* (Alkerlund 1911: 40 in Núñez 2004: 11)

### 3.3.2 Repetition

Repetition in ME also used adverbs such as *continually* or *often* apart from auxiliaries *will* and *would*. However, Núñez (2004) argues that in ME the idea of repetition might be revealed thanks to the context and not through the be + *-ing* construction:

(32) *Comunly she **wyl** neuer blye, but euer **be brennyng** yn here synne* (Núñez 2004: 16)

(33) *And þat alle manere of melody of musyk and of mynstralsy, þat moght be shewed with mowthe or hand, war **continuely** þre-in sownand.* (Núñez 2004: 16)

### 3.3.3 The Egressive and the Subjective Duration

According to Núñez (2004) there were two functions that developed during the ME period. The first, named as *egressive*, indicated motion out of a period of action

(34) *þai war all **concludiŋg*** (Núñez 2004: 20)

whereas the second involving modals with the be + *-ing* construction indicated subjective duration that could be found in hypotheses:

(35) *if Crist were dwelling here in erþe, men moste ben trauayllynge.* (Núñez 2004: 20)

#### **4. The progressive in Modern English (1476-today)**

##### **4.1 The usage of the progressive in Early Modern English (1476-1776)**

In his work titled *On the progression of the progressive in early Modern English* Elsness describes this period as an “important period in the development of the progressive construction as it is known in present-day English.” (Elsness 1994: 10). It was in Early Modern English when the grammaticalization of the progressive began, leaving behind the status of an expression of style. Lammont (2005) asserts that the major tendency grammaticalizing the progressive was visible in the eighteenth century.

Strang (1970) claims that in the first part of the eighteenth century the progressive appeared in subordinate clauses and during the second half of the century it was also possible to see progressive forms in main clauses. It was because of the increase of the progressive form in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the construction obtained grammatical constituency (Strang 1970, Denison 1998). Besides, Denison (1998) asserts that in the eighteenth century the progressive was not yet entirely admitted in the conventions of publishing even though it was not rare in common speech.

##### **4.1.1 Cross-over between the simple and the progressive tense**

At the beginning of the Early Modern English period the use of the progressive is still unclear. For this reason, the cross-over between the simple tense and the progressive became commonplace. Shakespeare’s plays are a good source of evidence that show that simple verb forms are used in contexts in which Present Day English would use the progressive:

(36) *What do you read, my Lord?* (Hamlet II.ii in Rissanen 1999: 216)

PDE: *What are you reading, my Lord?*

Nevertheless, there were also instances where the progressive form appeared with actions now covered by the present simple form:

(37) *She is always **seeing** Apparitions, and **hearing** Death-Watches.*<sup>6</sup> (Rissanen 1992 in Lamont 2005)

PDE: *She always **sees** Apparitions and **hears** Death-Watches.*

This confusion does not disappear until the beginning of the twentieth century. Some clear examples are given by the English Romantic poet John Keats:

(38) *Now I will return to Fanny- **it rains*** (Keats 1818: 75 in Lamont 2005)

In example (38) the present simple form is used instead of the progressive which would be more suitable in PDE. Nonetheless, it was also common to find progressive forms where in PDE the simple form is used:

(39) *What I should have lent you ere this if I could have got it, **was belonging** to poor Tom.* (Keats 1819: 110 in Lamont 2005)

In (39) it can be seen how Keats uses a stative verb in the progressive form instead of the present simple used in PDE. The progressive form in stative verbs was, in fact, a new form developed in Modern English, but this form will be discussed later on.

#### 4.1.2 Development of the progressive forms

According to Rissanen (1999), the dominant progressive tense forms in Early Modern English were the present and the past, even if the construction could also appear in other tenses together with modal auxiliaries and in non-finite constructions:

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<sup>6</sup> The progressive form in Present Day English is also used to express annoying habit as will be explained in 3.1.4.7.

(40) *This Creature... so impudent, that it **will be intruding itself** in every ones company.*

(Rissanen 1999: 217)

(41) *boeth the ploughes **muste styll be dounge**, as mooste necessarye for man.*

(Rissanen 1999: 217)

(42) ***Let's be going** with all my heart.* (Rissanen 1999: 218)

#### 4.1.2.1 The Passival

In Early Modern English the active progressive was used to express the passive (*The house is building* ‘being built’). According to Rissanen “There is, in fact, little risk of confusion between the active and passive meaning (the transitive or the intransitive use), as the subject is normally animate in the former case and inanimate in the latter.” (Rissanen 1999: 218):

(43) *nothing understanding of the banquet that **was preparing** for him after sopper.*

(Rissanen 1999: 218)

(44) *Your gowne and things **are a making**, but will not be done against whittsunday.*

(Rissanen 1999: 218)

Even though forms of the type *the house is building* are not formally passive constructions (there is not BE + past participle), the subject NP is the argument which would be subject in a true passive and object in a normal active which called *the passival* by Visser (1963-73 in Denison 1993: 389). The progressive passive, however, was grammaticalized during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Late Modern English.

#### 4.1.2.2 Being + Ving

Denison (1993) maintains that the syntagm *being* + *Ving* should occur when a finite progressive becomes into a gerundial or present participial construction as in:

(45) ...*I being now making my new door into the entry*,... (1660 Pepys in Denison 1993: 394)

(46) *Nancy did not make her Appearance being dressing*. (1679 Woodforde in Denison 1993: 394)

Although the *being* + *Ving* construction was relevant from the mid sixteenth century to the early nineteenth, modern grammars hold that the usage of that construction is impossible in Present-day English. Denison (1993) shows some pairs where sentence (a) shows a finite clause with a verb that in sentence (b) is altered to an *-ing* turning it into a non-finite clause:

(47) (a) Jim teaches / taught five new courses.

(b) Teaching five new courses makes it easier.

(48) (a) Jim has / had taught these courses before.

(b) Having taught these courses before makes it easier.

(49) (a) Jim has / had been teaching these courses for some time.

(b) Having been teaching these courses for some time makes it easier.

(50) (a) Jim is/was teaching five new courses.

(b) \*Being teaching five new courses makes it easier.

(Denison 1993: 394)

The paradigm in (50) should be correct in the Modern English period, in Present Day English, however, a new gap has opened up (Denison 1993: 394).

### 4.1.3 Meaning of the progressive in Early Modern English

#### 4.1.3.1 Duration

Some of the meanings of *be* + *-ing* commented in the OE and ME periods can also be found in the eModE period. Duration is one of the functions that also appears in this period not only with verbs denoting existence and motion, but also in clauses introduced by *when*, *while* and *as*:



(51) *Syr it happenyd onis that as my wife **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 &... (Núñez 2004: 22)*

According to Núñez (2004), it is important to point out that there has been a shift in the type of duration expressed by *be + -ing* from OE to PE. As it is pointed out in examples (14) and (15) the OE construction expressed both unlimited and limited duration, which appears to be characteristic of ModE progressives too:

(52) *And first we cam to Torrens Cedron, which in somer tyme ys Drye, And in winter, and specially in lente, it ys mervelows **flowyng** with rage of water that comyth with violence thorow the vale of Josophat. (Núñez 2004: 22)*

The progressive form in (52) differs from the PDE usage, where the simple form would be used. Núñez (2004) alleges that in eModE verbs, such as the one in (52), “showed a preference for the progressive because their continuative or imperfective nature lent itself better to the expression of duration” (Núñez 2004: 23). Hence, it can be said that this usage of the progressive in eModE was similar to the usage in OE and ME.

#### 4.1.3.2 Frame Time

The meaning of frame time, which derives from the *be + preposition + verbal noun* in *-ing*, also appears in the eModE period. In this case Núñez assumes that the main function of these prepositional patterns is ‘to be engaged in’ or ‘to be in the process of’:

(53) *the Milke-mayd whilst she **is in milking** shal do nothing rashly or sodainly about the Cowe, which may afright or amase her, but as she came gently so withal gentleness she shall depart. (Núñez 2004: 24)*

In this case it is clearly shown how *is in milking* refers to a process. Núñez (2004) also affirms that there are some cases where the *be + -ing* construction also covers that notion, especially when the clauses are introduced by *as* and *while*:

(54) *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.* (Núñez 2004: 24)

#### 4.1.3.3 Futurity

Another recurrent meaning in the eModE period was the one of futurity. This meaning was especially found with verbs of going and coming. According to Núñez (2004), the idea of futurity together with verbs of motion emerged during the eModE period, and spread to verbs other than motion. She also mentions that the idea of futurity comes from the combination *be + -ing + adverbial* instead of the periphrasis itself:

(55) *I am going presently to your mother, whoe **is going to morrow morning** to the Bathe.* (Núñez 2004: 25)

If example (55) is considered, it can be maintained that the presence of an adverbial makes the idea of futurity much clearer; otherwise, the sentence would be ambiguous between present and future (Núñez 2004: 25).

The present progressive and the construction *shall / will + be + -ing* on their own, can also refer to future time in Early Modern English. The present progressive occurs with verbs of motion in the majority of the cases, whenever the action is organized in advance as in the following example written by Shakespeare (Visser 1830 in Rissanen 1999: 223):

(56) *To-morrow...Don Alphonso With other Gentlemen of good esteeme, **Are iournying** to salute the Emperour.* (Rissanen 1999: 223)

This is, in fact, what differentiates OE and ME usage of the futurity from eModE, since in the case of OE and ME the future action happened without the will of the speaker. In the case of eModE, on the other hand, the action is already planned.

#### 4.1.3.4 Imperfectivity

In eModE the progressive form also implies the meaning of imperfectivity or incompleteness. In this case, the construction refers to incomplete actions that may be completed in the near future and convey dynamism, whereas simple forms may express perfectivity or completion (Núñez 2004):

(57) *Of a time appointed the king dined at Windsor, in the chapel yard at Cardinall Wolsey's, at the same time when he **was building that admirable worke** of his tome:...* (Núñez 2004: 27)

Paying attention to example (57) Núñez asserts that apart from incompleteness and dynamism it also implies duration (2004: 27):

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*.

#### 4.1.3.5 Intensive Function

The so-called intensive or emphatic function already commented on for the OE period is also repeated during eModE describing the intensity of the action when *be + -ing* is preceded by a modal verb, when a progressive imperative present appears or by means of the past perfect:

(58) *What deuil need he **be groping** so depe, in goodwife Chats hes nest.*

(59) *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**.*

(60) *Home to my father, who could discern that I **had been drinking**, which he did never see or hear of before;...*

(Núñez 2004: 28)

Nevertheless, Núñez claims that the intensity of the action is augmented when the be + *-ing* construction goes together with certain adverbials such as *certainly*, *often*, *quite*, *far*, etc.

#### 4.1.3.6 Actuality or Actual Present

Núñez (2004) provides another meaning present in eModE, that is, the one of actuality or actual present which appears in dialogues making reference to situations that occur in the moment of speaking:

(61) *Noble Sebastian, Thou let'st thy fortune sleepe: die rather: wink'st Whiles thou **art waking*** (Núñez 2004: 29)

The idea of actuality, according to Núñez, can also appear in the past especially in relative clauses, and adverbs such as *then* or *just* can help to reinforce the idea:

(62) *After dinner I went to wait on his Majesty againe, **who was pulling** on his bootes in the Towne-hall* (Núñez 2004: 29)

#### 4.1.3.7 Subjective Meaning

Some of the meanings such as duration, dynamism and imperfectivity show a neutral use of the progressive. Besides, in eModE the expanded form can also express a subjective or emotive feeling (Núñez 2004):

(63) *Yea, on the hollye day, the can not fynde in their hertes to come to the Temple, to the bluffed communion, they **must be working** at home* (Núñez 2004: 30)

According to Núñez, the usage of *must be working* instead of *must work* in (63) suggests a subjective meaning conveying indignation and disapproval rather than stating a fact.

This author also shows that subjective feelings could also be expressed through the combination of *be* + *-ing* together with adverbs such as *always* as the following example shows:

(64) *These fools and knaves are always impudently crowd-ing next to princes*  
(Núñez 2004: 31)

It is possible, however, that the expanded form depends on verbs conveying affection or feelings of any kind. This augments the subjective idea of the progressive:

(65) *Tho's its near 11 at night, and I fear the post is going, I cannot forbear to send you a piece of news, odd and unusual* (Núñez 2004: 31)

It is noticeable that some of the examples above correspond to the PDE usage of the progressive. Nevertheless, there are also dissimilarities between the eModE and the PDE cluster, which in view of Núñez correspond to the non-completion of the grammaticalization process in eModE. Rissanen asserts that the progressive “can be regarded as a grammaticalized aspectual indicator in the verbal system by 1700” (Rissanen 1999: 216); however, its use, as can be seen in the previous examples, was still undetermined.

#### **4.2 The usage of the progressive in Late Modern English (1776- today)**

The Late Modern English was a crucial period for the development of the progressive. The usage of the construction duplicated from 1500 and although it had a slowdown in the eighteenth century, it increased again in the nineteenth century. Regarding the process of grammaticalization, Denison (1998) asserts that although the confusion concerning the use of the progressive remained in the early twentieth century, the process was mainly completed by the end of the nineteenth century. Some of the most relevant changes on the usage of the progressive also occurred in this period, as can be seen in the following sections.

#### 4.2.1 Stative Verbs

Until the Late Modern English period it was rare to find progressive forms with stative verbs, but in IModE certain types of stative verbs begin to take progressive forms whenever they “mark a transient state or behaviour” (Denison 1998: 146):

- (66) a. *He **was living** then in Park Lane, in the house Lord Woolcom has now.* ( Wilde 1895)  
b. *Oh my dearest ones it's so wonderful here – I can't tell you how much **I'm loving** it.* (Bell 1917)  
c. *The old people **are behaving** themselves quite rational - playing bezique in the drawing room.* (Besier 1911)

(Denison 1998: 146)

Denison (1998) mentions Visser's material on verbs resistant to the progressive and according to Visser, verbs like LIVE or LOVE + inanimate object do not occur in the progressive form before the twentieth century. Denison however, provides some examples of resistant verbs, other than *live* or *love*, in their earliest progressive form:

- (67) a. *The tars **are wishing** for a lick, as they call it, at the Spanish galleons.* (Naval Chron. 1803)  
b. *Do not live as if I **was not existing**. Do not forget me* (Keats 1820)

(Denison 1998: 146)

##### 4.2.1.1 The verb BE

The verb BE is one of those stative verbs that began to take progressive form in IModE. In accordance with Denison (1998), the verb BE in progressive form can denote impermanence:

- (68) a. *He **is** malicious.*  
b. *He **is being** malicious.* (Denison 1998: 146)

Regardless of the few examples of progressive BE before this period, Denison (1998) asserts that the first informal instance recorded of the progressive was given by John Keats in 1819, where the progressive form of BE appears with a complementary adjective:

(69) *You will be glad to hear... how diligent I have been, and am being.* (Denison 1998: 146)

Not all cases in which the verb BE appears with the *-ing* form seem to exhibit the progressive verbal group *is / was being*:

(70) *It [V was] [NP being very deficient]* (Denison 1998: 147)

Instance (70) does not have the progressive meaning since the verb BE has the copulative function of linking an inanimate pronoun subject (It) to a gerundial phrase *being* + AP (Denison 1998: 147). Instead the true progressive of BE would be:

(71) *I [V was being] [AP very deficient]* (Denison 1998: 147)

The meaning of (71) would be that the speaker was conducting himself or herself in a manner he or she considers deficient. Lamont (2005) also proposes some other examples concerning the issue of progressive BE:

(72) \* *John is being a boy.*

In (72) there is a copulative relationship between ‘John’ and ‘a boy’, since according to Lamont (2005) the relationship is not something that “John can or cannot do”. Now let’s take a look at the other example proposed by Lamont:

(73) *John is being a man.*

Sentence (73) should be considered as an ambiguous sentence. On the one hand, if the speaker just wants to differentiate ‘John’ from a woman the form ‘is being’ would be unsuitable. On the other hand, Lamont (2005) asserts the following:

when the predicative referent (a man) takes on additional lexical meaning to communicate that John is conducting himself in a way that the speaker considers appropriate to a man, the verb “to be” becomes an activity in which John can either voluntarily engage, or refuse to undertake.

#### 4.2.1.2 The verb HAVE

The verb *have*, which in origin has a stative meaning of ‘possess’, also began to appear with the progressive form. In line with Denison (1998), it was rare to find the verb HAVE with a direct object before the nineteenth century and then it never appeared in the meaning ‘possess’:

- (74) a. *We **are now having** a spell of wind and rain.*  
b. *when I **was having** tea with my mater in Gattis*  
(Denison 1998: 148)

Denison (1998) claims that the usage of catenative HAVE was also prevented until the nineteenth century:

- (75) a. *observed that Grandcourt **was having klesmer presented** to him by some one unknown to her*  
b. *They **were having their portraits taken** by the photogenic process.*  
(Denison 1998: 148)

#### 4.2.2 The Progressive Passive form of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

According to Lamont (2005) a reason for the end of grammaticalization of the progressive in the nineteenth century could be that a more specific development of the progressive was grammaticalized at the same time: the progressive passive. The so called progressive passive was composed of three elements: a conjugated form of ‘to be’ as the main verb, the present participle of ‘to be’ to prove the continuity of the action and the past participle of the lexical verb to express the specific action resulting in sentences such as *he was being treated for his injuries at 6 o’clock* (Lamont 2005). Denison (1998) suggests that the development of the progressive form of ‘to be’ ((71) *I was being very deficient*) had been essential for the development of the passive form.



Even though the progressive passive was accepted in this period Visser (cited in Denison 1998: 150) claims that the passival form<sup>7</sup> increased during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even if in the eighteenth century grammarians tended to condemn the usage of the passival form, in the case of the nineteenth century, writers used it more freely. Nevertheless, the passival form started to decrease gradually and according to Denison (1998) there were two different reasons. The first reason has to do with the fact that its non-agentive and nonhuman subject began to carry a greater risk of ambiguity. The second, though, has to do with the acceptance of the progressive passive, which makes the passival form increasingly redundant.

During the nineteenth century however, grammarians put pressure on not using the progressive passive and hence, the passival construction was used omitting the explicit passive marking. Nevertheless, a second resource was also used which consisted in omitting the progressive marking as the following instance shows:

(76) *he found that the coach had sunk greatly on one side, though it **was still dragged** forward by the horses;* (Denison 1998: 151)

As Denison (1998) demonstrates in some cases it was difficult to avoid the usage of the progressive passive in certain sentences, as in the following one:

(77) *Polyxena at the moment of her sacrifice on the tomb of Achilles, as the bride that **was being married** to him at the moment of his death.* (Denison 1998: 151)

In the analysis made by Denison (1998), the examples provided of the progressive passive are all of a certain social network, mainly used by literary people in an informal atmosphere:

(78) *Never mind, 'tis only a flash, and you, like a fellow whose uttermost upper grinder [original emphasis] **is being torn out** by the roots by a mutton-fisted barber... will grin and endure it.* (Southey 1795 in Denison 1998: 152)

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<sup>7</sup> See 4.1.2.1.

The example provided above was written by Robert Southey in a letter addressed to his school friend Grosvenor Bedford. Apart from Southey, Denison also cites some other writers as the early users of the progressive passive such as Coleridge, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, W. S. Landor and some others:

(79) *We were allowed two hours for dinner, and two more were wasted in the evening while the coach **was being changed**.* (Mary Shelley 1817 in Denison 1998: 153)

(80) *While the goats **are being milked**, and such other refreshments **are preparing** for us as the place affords.* (Landor 1829 in Denison 1998: 153)

The examples provided above, as I have already said, are all from a literary group where people would know each other. For this reason, Denison (1998) claims that the Southey/Coleridge circle was the one that initiated the development of the progressive passive and gave way to a linguistic change. Denison provides two hypotheses that would explain the usage of the progressive by literary groups:

- a. The data are a mere accident of sampling and of the subsequent status of the writers.
- b. The progressive passive was already a general if ‘unrespectable’ form, but was rarely written (except in private letters or trashy novels or newspapers?); it was seized on by the young iconoclasts of the Southey / Coleridge circle in a kind of radical experimentation.

(Denison 1998: 154)

In line with Denison, hypothesis (b) suggests that the construction disseminated from those literary circles and became acceptable in print when the writers gained prestige. On the other hand, Denison considers that hypothesis (a) is a ‘null hypothesis’ since it would ‘lose us our sociolinguistic perception into this vital syntactic development’ (Denison 1998: 154). It suggests is that the progressive passive was a linguistic construction used by more and more people and it cannot be concluded that the Southey/ Coleridge circle was the one that used most the progressive passive form.

Concerning the syntax of the progressive passive, Denison explains that the grammaticalization of the progressive was crucial for the progressive passive to occur. It would mean that the progressive BE changed from ‘being head of its phrase to a modifier of a lexical verb’ (Denison 1993: 441). Put simply, prior to 1770 and after the reanalysis<sup>8</sup> of the progressive, the progressive form of the main verb BE would then become an auxiliary. Therefore progressive passive forms such as *was being built* were now the progressive of BUILD rather than of passive BE. Denison (1993) supports that if the progressive form was normal in the eighteenth century, before the reanalysis, in sentences like *The house was being built* ‘was’ would be the main verb whereas ‘being built’ would be a resultative complement. It is true that the expression *being built* already existed in the eighteenth century but not with a durative meaning; instead, it had a resultative meaning and the VP did not express progressive passive meaning as can be seen in the following examples (Denison 1993):

(81) ...*thinking to see some cockfighting, but it **was just being done**; and therefore back again...* (Pepys 1667 in Denison 1993: 441)

(82) *I... immediately complied with the demand, though the little money I had **was very near being all exhausted**.* (Goldsmith 1776 in Denison 1993: 441)

Despite this, Denison (1993) claims that some early examples with *being Ved* may have a durative meaning. Due to the weirdness of sequences like *is being*, this kind of sentences resisted acting as predicatives to BE, an issue less apparent in *there-sentences*:

(83) ... *that Miss Jervois loves to sit up late, either reading, or **being read to**, by Anne;*  
(Richardson 1754 in Denison 199: 441)

(84) ***There is a good opera of Pugniani’s now being acted.*** (Mrs. Harris 1769 in Denison 1993: 441)

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<sup>8</sup> The reanalysis is mechanism involving language change which modifies underlying representations (semantic, syntactic, morphological) and brings out a rule change.

In the eighteenth century, the gap left in sentences like *the house was being built* could be filled, as reported by Denison (1993), with the passival. Even so, the passival would seem to be a normal progressive:

(85) a. *The house was building.*

b. *Jim was whispering.*

(Denison 1998: 156)

Therefore, it can be concluded that the BE + *Ving* construction could be interpreted as passive or active depending on the transitivity of the lexical verb and the potential agentiveness of the subject (Denison 1998: 156). However, Denison asserts that thanks to the reanalysis the progressive passive became possible, since the progressive was put in the lexical verb. Consequently, the passival (85a) was not useful to fill the gap and besides, it became anomalous since it was one auxiliary form covering both aspect and passive voice.

The usage of the progressive passive was also possible with a modal verb and/or perfect HAVE. However, Denison (1998) affirms that those kinds of constructions tended to appear mainly in artificial contexts of grammar and linguistic satire during the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century began to appear in common speech:

(86) *They [=reformers who object to the passival] must say therefore... the great Victoria bridge has been being built more than two years; when I reach London, the ship Leviathan will be being built; if my orders had been followed, the coat would have been being made yesterday; if the house had then been being built, the mortar would have been being mixed.* (Marsh 1860 in Denison 1993: 157)

#### 4.2.3 Clipped progressive

As Denison (1998) explains, it is possible to find progressive clauses without subject NP and BE. Visser (cited in Denison 1998: 160) explains that he did not find any IModE examples before 1922; however, he maintains that the absence of instances of clipped progressive during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was due to stylistic

avoidance in print. The clearest examples are provided by interrogatives where BE and/or subject NP is omitted:

(87) a. ORDEAL....*Where are they?*

NICHOLAS. *Running all over the hose- up stairs and down stairs, to and fro*  
(MacNally 1785 in Denison 1998: 159)

b. '*Getting tired?*'

'*Well, I'm not an atom bit sleepy,*' said Kezia. (K. Mansfield 1920 in Denison 1998: 160)

c. *The clothes are the very best. You buying for your wife?* (Gelber 1964 in Denison 1998: 160)

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has gone through the usage of the progressive in the different periods of the English language and has shown that its use in PDE is quite different from its use in OE, ME and eModE. In the OE period the function of *beon* + present participle was not clear since some of the instances provided correspond to the present day usage of the progressive but others do not. Occasionally when the verb in Old English appears together with *be* + *-ende*, it does not mean that the verb is always in its progressive form; instead, other resources to convey progressive meaning were used.

In Middle English the use of the progressive gained momentum and spread all over the country, having changed the ending from *-ende* to *-ing*. In this period, apart from increasing the meaning of the progressive, the existing forms developed and it was possible to find the progressive with verbs that it did not appear with in OE. This leads me to conclude that the progressive was an expanding form in Middle English, which gave way to its grammaticalization in Modern English. It was in this period when the progressive stopped being an expression of style and began to be seen as a verb form in its own right, developing the characteristics of the PDE usage of the progressive and enlarging the number of different forms where the progressive could occur.

After writing this paper I can conclude that there has been an explosion in the number of verbal forms and in the new uses of the progressive that have emerged through the history of English. Moreover, the usage of the construction became common in speech and due to that reason different functions appeared and evolved during history, that is why in PDE there are plenty of functions that cannot be found in OE. To sum up, this paper has presented the evolution of the progressive in the history of the English language and has demonstrated that the construction has experienced several changes involving various linguistic areas such as phonology, morphology or semantics.

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