

## ALWAYS-progressives in early American English

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### Abstract

One of the contexts of expansion of progressive forms in Late Modern English (along with others that were later equally, or even more, successful; see e.g. FITZMAURICE 2004; SMITTERBERG 2005; NESSELHAUF 2007) is the habitual – iterative context, in which the form co-occurs with *always* and other markers of iterativity or continuity such as *constantly*, *every day*, etc., and often convey expressive pragmatic values such as irritation, impatience, and the like. This context is nowadays quite common, although it stands in contrast with the “progressive” core meaning. The precise conditions for its spread and constraints on its occurrence, however, are still debated (e.g. KILLIE 2004, KRANICH 2007, 2008), and not much has been ascertained about its distribution.

It is known that American English shows a higher number of contexts in which *be + Ving* forms are used than British English, and that the ratio of the frequency increase of this construction is also higher in Atlantic Englishes as well as in other ‘transplanted’ varieties. The same can be said about the specific verbs that accept the construction, as these, too, seem to be in greater number in other L1 varieties than in Standard British English (see e.g. COLLINS 2008). Whether this has any connection with the ‘subjective’ progressive referred to in the previous paragraph, however, still remains to be ascertained.

The present paper will therefore explore early American English texts spanning over the century 1810-1909 (from the *Corpus Of Historical American English*) for occurrences of this construction, trying to verify the hypothesis that this is one of the main loci of extension of the subjective uses of the *-ing* finite form in Late Modern English, and that it is therefore crucial in order to account for the present remarkable frequency of the latter in transatlantic varieties. Comparison with the 20<sup>th</sup>-century part of the *COHA* will also be provided and discussed.

**Key words** – aspect, progressive, pragmatics, American English, adverbs.

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### 1. Aspectual forms and varieties of English: a pragmatic perspective

The so-called ‘extension of the progressive’ to stative verbs and other contexts is reported as one of the potential *varioversals* of English, i.e. features to be found widely across most varieties of English as a second language (WINFORD 2009; KORTMANN and SZMEREZANY 2004; FILPPULA, KLEMOLA and PAULASTO 2009: 247-251)<sup>1</sup>. The long-standing myth of the incompatibility of the ‘progressive’ form with stative Vs or cognitive Vs has already been partly redressed by the results of corpus studies such as

<sup>1</sup> Partly related to this are the results concerning English as a Lingua Franca and Learner English in general (see e.g. RANTA [2006], RÖMER [2005]); on the comparison between L1 and L2 aspect acquisition see ROCCA (2002), HOUSEN (2002); see also evidence from traders’ varieties in Canada (GOLD 2009). The whole study of aspectual systems in pidgins and creoles is a related area that is also undergoing intensive study.

KILLIE (2008: 81)<sup>2</sup>, which indicate an occurrence of the form with Vs like *live* or *wish* already in Middle English, but the proportion of these uses has been reported to be higher in varieties other than British English for contemporary language. Recent studies on the ongoing process of extension of the use of *-ing* verb forms in different L1 varieties of English (e.g. COLLINS 2008) point out that that the pace of this process, as well as the contexts in which it applies, is not the same through different varieties. This increasing frequency is more visible in speech than in writing, with a ratio of 70% to 30%. Although Australian and New Zealand English show the highest figures among L1 Englishes, US English shows higher percentages of occurrence of the form with verbs of communication, existence, and mental activity than British English (COLLINS 2008: 238). According to the same study, US English scored higher than other L1 varieties in uses of the progressive that have a pragmatic value of stance ('attitudinal' uses) or a politeness value (COLLINS 2008: 241).

Other types of BE + V-*ing* forms, for instance the progressive passive, which started to replace the previous passival form in the eighteenth century (SMITTERBERG 2005: 123-133), have been studied by HUNDT (2004b); they show different frequencies in corpora representing L1 and L2 varieties, with the difference between the two types of varieties not showing statistical significance, although some details of text-type, medium, and construction-internal variation do differ across varieties to a certain extent. The overall frequency of passives out of the total number of progressives, however, shows a significantly higher figure for Indian English<sup>3</sup> and Singapore English; MAIR and HUNDT (1995), as well as HUNDT (1998: 303) offer the hypothesis that this may be due to pragmatic reasons, due to the higher degree of depersonalisation and indirectness that the construction allows.

While research on the forms and frequency of progressives is advancing especially in a typological perspective, particularly within the WAVE project (KORTMANN and LUNKENHEIMER 2011, 2013), investigations that concentrate on the pragmatic values of aspectual forms across varieties of English are also on the increase, inspired by the recent development of variational pragmatics (SCHNEIDER 2010, 2012). For instance, DAVYDOVA (2011) investigates several uses of the perfect tenses in some varieties of English (L1-, L2- and Foreign-Language varieties, including register/style variation within each variety). The present paper aims at offering some insight into a fragment of the history of the spread of subjective progressives in American English, hoping to contribute thus to the development of such studies.

## 2. The *-ing* form and subjectivity: historical review

Late Modern English is the period of most visible rapid expansion of the BE + V-*ing* construction, with corpus studies showing an impressive extension to more and more contexts within a few decades (FITZMAURICE 2004; NESSELHAUF 2007; SMITTERBERG

<sup>2</sup> In ZIEGELER'S (2006: 29) words, when studying the English progressive one faces «a barrage of sometimes speculative assumptions dating back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century».

<sup>3</sup> It partly belongs to the stereotypes of Indian English that sentences like *I am understanding you* are highly frequent (DAVYDOVA 2011: 37), also in the 'extended NOW' function that is conveyed by the present perfect in British English, as in *I am knowing him for two years* (DAVYDOVA 2011: 176), but this has proved to be typical only of 'acrolectal' varieties rather than of less educated varieties of Indian English, thus discouraging the view that it could be due to influence from the L1 or hypercorrection. See also ROGERS (2002), BALASUBRAMANIAN (2009). For similar considerations on African English see e.g. SEY (1973: 32-35).

2008), although this is only a more rapid phase within a longer process starting earlier and continuing to this date. The form, which starts to appear with relevant frequency in Late Middle English<sup>4</sup>, is found in increasing numbers of texts and contexts throughout Early Modern English, when it acquires some of its most important modern values; Present-Day English texts also show the form to be on the increase in several further contexts (WHERRITY and GRANATH 2008), although there is still a greater frequency in corpora of spoken English than in writing (COLLINS 2008).

The increase in subjective values in the use of the progressive have been variously investigated, particularly to determine possible restrictions on its occurrence. CURME (1913) is the first to point out that the «modal force» of progressives is one of their main meanings, but modern linguistics has provided much more detailed evidence. For instance, KILLIE (2004) provides results that contradict WRIGHT'S (1994, 1995) previous predictions on the contexts that would favour this use. In her study, based on the database of *Early English Prose Fiction* (British prose from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), Killie discusses in turn various related properties, for instance the alleged tendency to occur mostly in main clauses, because of the fact that the level of subjectivity and the amount of foregrounded information is higher/more frequent in main clauses; this prediction is not borne out by Killie's corpus study, as subjective information is absolutely not restricted to main clauses. A similar disconfirmation holds for the predictions that subjective progressive should occur mostly in the present tense, and that they should correlate with first- and second-person subjects – Killie shows that third-person subjective progressives are in fact the most frequent, since subjective progressives very often express sympathy or criticism. The most important result of that study is however the contradiction of the assumption that subjective progressives should occur mostly with 'private' (i.e. 'cognitive') verbs – activity verbs are in fact the most frequent in this context, in Killie's diachronic study. These and other properties are rediscussed and partly confirmed in SMITTERBERG (2005), which uses the CONCE Corpus and concentrates on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A recent study employing the ARCHER corpus (KRANICH 2013) further points out that several uses can show functional layering, i.e. the aspectual reading does not exclude the co-presence of the subjective and attitudinal readings of the form; Kranich further argues that this co-presence can be assumed to have existed also in previous stages of the language, especially since purely aspectual readings do not seem to have been typical of the form's predecessors in Old English and early Middle English. This means that this type of progressive inevitably retains some elusive aspects.

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to uses that directly anticipate the modern ones; the intricate question of the origins and development of the form, and of its Old English precursors, is not one that is dealt with in the present paper. See below for some results pointing to an early development of subjective meanings. These were however on a different scale from the Modern English situation, for which an actual pragmaticization of the form has been claimed (e.g. by SMITH 2007: 230).

### 3. Habitual subjective progressives and ALWAYS-progressives<sup>5</sup> across time and space

The use of an expanded form BE + pres. participle to indicate insistence or persistence (and negative subjective reactions to it) is indicated for Old English already by MOSSÉ (1938: I, 98-99) but as sporadic and not systematic (see also TRAUGOTT 1992: 189). The presence of the type in ME is also emphasised by the same authors as well as SCHEFFER (1975: 220-221). More recently, KRANICH (2008) notices the presence of several types that appear similar to modern ones (including the ALWAYS-type), but questions their semantic and pragmatic values.

For some Early Modern English examples of the type BE *always a-V-ing* with «emotional colouring» see NUÑEZ PERTEJO (1996: 113-114). For the eighteenth century, FITZMAURICE (2004: 153-158) notes several examples of different verb-types employed in subjective and intersubjective progressives, often in contexts emphasising iteration, e.g. with satirical intention (and with emphatic adverbs like *perpetually* as opposed to *always*); SMITTERBERG (2005: 210-218) offers the same type of comment.

The peculiarity of the habitual progressive with *always* in Present-Day British English is highlighted by WESTNEY (1977), who does not pass any comments as to its geographical distribution; its relative rarity is testified e.g. in KRANICH (2013: 20). A number of other features are however highlighted, for instance the fact that the verbal vs. adjectival value of the *-ing* form is not always univocally identifiable, that the common core meaning seems to be «heightened temporary relevance» (following VAN EEK 1969), as opposed to continuation or repetition alone<sup>6</sup>, and that the pragmatic expressive value is not necessarily always negative, but can also be neutral or positive. The same kind of result is stressed by KILLIE (2004: 35-37). However, SMITTERBERG (2005: 210) reports the type with adverbs to have mostly «negative evaluation» as their core value (see also RÖMER 2005: 99-100). LEECH (1971: 33-34) and SCHEFFER (1975: 90-91) quote various earlier references pointing to the most common values of the form as being «annoyance, irritation, impatience, indignation, surprise, intensity, weariness at repetition» (see also KRANICH 2013: 17). A specific study (KRANICH 2007) argues in fact for a semanticization of the expression of a negative attitude through this construction, since this interpretation appeared in that study to be the default one for *always*-progressives. The author herself notices some Late Modern English cases of objective/neutral *always*-progressives, but claims that the construction becomes rarer and rarer in Present-Day English.

Variation in the form of the BE + V-*ing* and in the verb types the construction enters in different varieties of English is reviewed e.g. in GACHELIN (1997: 35), where the ubiquitousness of ‘emotional’ values is emphasised. As to formal variation, not only concerning habituals, it must be remarked that the *-and* termination is still found in Scotland, while *a-* prefixation appears (as a residue of a former prepositional construction) in parts of southern England and southern Wales, as well as in the Appalachian region, while in some creole and pidgin Englishes the auxiliary used is

<sup>5</sup> With the use of these capitals, as in the overall title of the article, I refer to all adverbs that behave similarly in co-occurrence with the progressive, in the same way as capitalised verbs, e.g. BE, refer to all the forms of that verb.

<sup>6</sup> For an argument in favour of a durative meaning as the predominant one in such cases see HATCHER (1951: 260).

STAY rather than BE (GACHELIN 1997: 35-37). Habitual aspect can be signalled through *-ing* forms in Wales, «especially where bilingualism is more recent» (GACHELIN 1997: 39), and especially for transient states; in some so-called New Englishes it is used with iterative meaning even without time adverbials, as is reported for Indian English and for some Celtic varieties (e.g. PITKANEN 2003: 113-115 on Welsh English and FIEB 2003 for Hiberno-English). New Zealand English is analysed by HUNDT (1998: 76), who mentions ALWAYS-contexts as cases in which all V types can take progressive forms. A different conjugation of BE, or a combination of DO+BE are used with V-*ing* for habituals in Hiberno-English (HICKEY 2012b: 95-96). According to GACHELIN (1997: 40-44), this ubiquitousness could herald the fact that the *-ing* form may become in the future just a verbal marker, detached from any specific reference to tense, aspect or *Aktionsart*. Already LJUNG (1980) quoted «observed behaviour» and «interpretation» as possible decisive factors in the expansion of the progressive forms to habituals or statives, with an emphasis on the ‘experiencer’ status of the speaker, and thus on subjectivity, with the concurring general sense of ‘dynamic situation’ (see also OTA, n.d., on American English). A use of the present progressive for a durative habitual (realised in Standard British English through a present perfect) is recorded for Late Modern Hiberno-English as well as for Newfoundland English (CHILDS and VAN HERK 2010) and for Singapore English (DAVYDOVA 2011: 242-244). For African Englishes, studies based on the *eWAVE* (KORTMANN and LUNKENHEIMER 2011) inventory of features report the extension of the progressive to stative Verbs and to habitual contexts for West Africa (Nigeria), East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania), South Africa (some varieties in South Africa<sup>7</sup>, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Ghana, Cameroon) (BRATO and HUBER 2012: 270-271), and Nigeria (especially for subjective progressives in Nigerian English see GUT and FUCHS (2013). SHARMA and DEO (2009) found the habitual value to be the most common ‘extension’ of the progressive in Indian English (with Verbs like HAVE and KNOW), contrary to Singapore English and to South African English, where the most frequent meaning seems to be durative (SHARMA 2012: 216-217)<sup>8</sup>. MINOW (2010) also claims that the continuous or «persistence» aspectual notion inherent in habitual progressives is widely reported in Black South African English.

#### 4. Case study: *always*-progressives in the COHA

The *occurrence* of the progressive with iteration adverbials to indicate a habitual action<sup>9</sup>, and the possible status of this co-occurrence with reference to *Aktionsart* or aspectual perspectives, is already remarked on by traditional grammatical works at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, often with widely differing interpretations (see brief discussion in HATCHER 1951: 256-259). The frequency of ALWAYS-progressive types, and their subjective (not necessarily negative) value in Present-Day American English is exemplified in several contributions, e.g. GRANATH and WHERRITY (2013), who give examples from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). However, insight into the present spread and typology of habitual subjective progressive can be

<sup>7</sup> For Black South African English see VAN ROOY (2008), MINOW (2010: 138-145).

<sup>8</sup> Notice however BAO (2005: 249-250) who claims that there are hardly any stative progressive in the Singaporean ICE corpus.

<sup>9</sup> There is in fact a difference between iterative and habitual, which can have an impact on the pragmatic analysis of these forms (WILLIAMS 2002: 61). For the purposes of this paper, these notions will be subsumed under the label ‘habitual’, and only ad-hoc distinctions will be drawn.

gained through looking at Late Modern American English; a number of dialect influences can be traced in the birth of American English (*pace* the ‘Law of Swamping’; LASS 1990), including those from Celtic varieties, which could offer evidence to explain the present frequency of this form in Atlantic varieties (HICKEY 2012a: 6). Although scholars vary in their measurements of the incidence of the progressive in American English in general, there are some recent results that point to a relative high frequency, particularly in relation to subjective progressives (e.g. RANTA 2006: 100).

The sample used for the present study is the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA). The corpus is made up of about 400 million words of written American English from the 1810s to the 2000s. The sample is multi-genre, although fictional language figures prominently in all periods, and the proportion of poetry is quite limited throughout. The rest of the sample is made up of non-fictional prose (the proportion of fiction varying between 48% and 54% for every decade), at various levels of popularisation, i.e. scientific and technical prose as well as newspapers and magazines. It must be said, however, that news texts (i.e. tokens of a more ‘immediate’, and possibly more colloquial style; GRANATH and WHERRITY 2013) are not included in the samples for the first five decades (i.e. 1810 – 1860); also, the category of Magazines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could represent a relatively more formal or anyway different register than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the last decades<sup>10</sup>.

#### 4.1. Different constructions with high frequency adverbs

It should be kept in mind that, as already mentioned, in American English a higher increase in the use of progressives was found in general, in contrast to British English. Could the co-occurrence with ALWAYS-adverbs, as indicative of a subjective value of the BE+V-*ing* form, be connected to this increase? The first step in this case study was therefore to investigate the presence of the co-occurrence in the COHA in overall terms. A general search yielded over 700,000 cases of BE + V-*ing* forms in the corpus, as compared to about 9,000 of BE + *always* + V-*ing* cases. This goes hand in hand with results for both Present-Day British English (KRANICH 2013) and Late Modern British English (FITZMAURICE 2004: 157; SMITTERBERG 2005) The main constructions in which the -*ing* form was found in co-occurrence with *always* are not necessarily cases of ‘progressive’ forms – in other words, aspectual values are not necessarily always salient. Furthermore, it can be useful to distinguish between different orderings of the elements, as this can be significant as well. Frequency adverbs such as *always* tend to be placed in relatively fixed positions as related to the verb, and given the tendency to distribute information in predictable ways within the clause, particularly in languages with a fixed word-order, different positions of the adverb can signal different shades of meaning, especially from a pragmatic perspective. This tallies with recent findings in Present-Day British English (e.g. KRANICH 2007) that indicate that subjective meanings of the progressive are related to constructions, not ‘just’ individual verbs. Therefore, the different constructions were sampled in order to verify not only their relative frequency, but also the different subjective values that may be related to different orderings of the elements. The quantitative results are as in Table 1

<sup>10</sup> While it is obvious that the discourse conventions and the sociopragmatic features of all genres and text-types change over time, the rate of change, as well as the direction and orientation of this change, may differ quite widely.

Table 1. Frequency of different constructions involving *always* and progressive forms in the *COHA*.

Construction	1810 - 1909	1910 - 2000	Total tokens
<i>always</i> BE V- <i>ing</i>	151/31	382/26	533/57 <sup>11</sup>
BE <i>always</i> V- <i>ing</i>	2578	5938	8516
BE V- <i>ing always</i>	18/11	22/16	40/27

When normalised according to ratio no total word numbers, the raises are not of astonishing proportions, but nevertheless significant. On the contrary, the difference in frequency between the constructions is considerable. One striking result is that BE *always* V-*ing* shows relatively homogenous numbers of tokens throughout the twentieth century, except for the last two decades, seeming to indicate a sudden increase. The sharp rise in absolute numbers for these two decades may be due to the fact that speech-oriented genres such as movie scripts figure more prominently in the sample, if we go with the hypothesis that the general increase in progressives is connected to ‘colloquialization’ of written English, and therefore that text-types more closely related to speech should show a higher proportion of speech-related forms (see e.g. SZMERECSANYI 2009: 24-25). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which directly concerns us here, there is a relatively steady increase from 5.93 per million words in 1810-1819 to 23.63 in 1900-1909, with spikes in the 1830s and 1860s and a slight decrease in the 1890s. There are also relatively high rises in decades 1900-1910, which may be also related to the fact that movie scripts were first introduced in the sample for these two decades. Interpretation of the examples is also not always easy, as already remarked for British English corpus studies by LEECH et al. (2009: 136), who noticed the pervasive ambiguity and the difficulty of establishing one predominant ‘meaning’ for many examples. The relation between components of the utterance, in addition to other considerations, is emphasised by GRANATH and WHERRITY (2013). For all the constructions analysed, quantitative factors can be obscured by the fact that several of the first subsection tokens are from a single source, i.e. *Three Lives* by Gertrude Stein, published in 1909 – this work presents idiosyncrasies that imbalance the sample<sup>12</sup>.

The ordering with a final adverb is very rare, and usually expresses either repetition or continuous increment, so it does seem relatively attitude-neutral. A few cases do occur with Vs of saying and thinking, for instance (1), where the attitude expressed is, if anything, positive (this example was included in spite of BE occurring in a non-finite form precisely because of its antiquity and relevance in semantic-pragmatic terms). The most striking examples from the Late Modern English part of the sample come from *Three Lives*; for instance, notice the hyper-expressed incrementative in (2).

<sup>11</sup> Again, a simple search was not sufficient, since it is not possible to pre-select occurrences of finite BE; the second figure in each cell refers to the latter cases. It can be seen that they predominate in the adverb-final pattern, but not in the adverb-initial one, which can be considered a subcase of the default BE + adv + V-*ing* string.

<sup>12</sup> On the ‘weight’ of authorial individual preferences in assessing *COHA* statistics see GRANATH and WHERRITY (2013). The interesting thing about this particular case is that the protagonists and many other characters in this book are speakers of specific varieties, either African American or German. The overuse of progressives is particularly well attested in German learners; see e.g. RÖMER (2005), DAVYDOVA (2011).

(1) *She seemed to **be thinking always** and directly of matters in hand, of things to be done, and subjects under discussion, as much as if she were an impersonal being.* (*Pink and White Tyranny. A Society Novel*, 1871)

(2) *He was **beginning always** more and more to like her. But he did not seem to himself to know very much about her.* (*Three Lives Stories of The Good Anna, Melanctha and The Gentle Lena*, 1909)

The construction with *always* before BE is very peripheral quantitatively, but does appear, and shows an increase that stays within the sample proportions; in this case, the incidence of *Three Lives* is decisive, as the text is responsible for half of the occurrences in the first subsample, i.e. 15. Again, this pattern seems to show a predominance of attitudinal neutrality, indicating iteration or continuity. Among the examples that show peculiarity in Late Modern English are (3), (4), (5).

(3) *Now she knew she must **always be remembering** the days that for them would come no more. She found herself reviewing even her former visits to Up-Hill. In them also change had begun.* (*The Squire of Sandal-Side A Pastoral Romance*, 1886)

(4) *"I told you so!" cried angry Jo; "It always is **a-raining!**" Then hid her face in dire despair, Lamenting and complaining.* (*When life is young*, 1894)

(5) *She'll never be able to see anything clearly but that one thing. She'll **always be forgetting** the main issue.* (*The Convert*, 1907)

Only the latter two seem to have a negative overtone, but (3-5) occur with verbs that do not usually take the progressive form in their contextual meaning, and (4) shows an instance of the old prefixed *-ing* form that is dialectal and outdated in American English today. Also notice that the examples are all quite late, there are none so striking from the earlier parts of the sample.

#### 4.2. High frequency adverbs and individual verbs

4.2.1. *Activity vs non-activity verbs: a sample investigation.* The next step was to concentrate on the far more frequent pattern BE + *always* + V-*ing* and look at some Verbs that were considered particularly 'sensitive' or that are traditionally seen as 'resistant' to the progressive in Standard British English. Although studies like KRANICH (2007), SHARMA and DEO (2009) and GRANATH and WHERRITY (fc.) make it clear that whole constructions have a greater impact on the subjectivity of the progressive than individual verb meanings, this is still a major factor in the perception of most speakers and in grammar studies and formal instruction contexts, and was therefore also investigated here. These Verbs were chosen among those that are held to show relatively low frequency of occurrence of the *-ing* form in general, or to show such occurrence only with specific meanings (see e.g. SCHEFFER 1975: 65-76; see also the useful recapping of several classifications of types of verbs in relation to their occurrence in the progressive in MINOW 2010: 129-136), in order to check their frequency in co-

occurrence with *always*:<sup>13</sup> HAVE, THINK, WANT, SEE, KNOW, FEEL, FORGET and NEED. The main Verb BE was also selected as indicative of the so-called temporary or ‘interpreted’ states, as in *He’s always being a nuisance/She’s always being a darling*. The verbs were chosen according to their relative frequency of occurrence in the progressive form in the sample, and are listed in the order of such frequency in Tables 2 and 3. As can be seen from Table 2, the raw figures of these cases are rather low, and represent a minimal subset of the sample. In order to get some insight into the increases in frequency of the co-occurrence, the sample was further broken down into two chronological subsets, i.e. 1810-1900 and 1910-2000; the results in rough figures are presented in Table 2; it must be said that these figures only refer to finite Auxiliary BE, although strings like *She appeared to be always bringing it* or *She had always been trying very hard* were considered for meaning and subjectivity.

In order to investigate the different behaviour of different verb types, a ‘control group’ of verbs was selected among verbs of activity proper, or verbs that prototypically ‘go’ with the progressive, to check whether there was a difference in the increase rate. This ‘control group’ was made up of the following verbs: DO, MAKE, MOVE, PLAY, FIGHT, BRING, EAT and PUSH. Figures are given in Table 3; a rather sharp increase in absolute numbers was found here too, indicating that the rise in the 20<sup>th</sup> century does not specifically concern non-activity verbs, but is a more generalised phenomenon.

There is a ‘snowball effect’ visible in the statistics of the most frequent verbs, with a consistent increase in the frequency of *-ing* in combination with *always* as we move from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century; with the other verbs, the parallel with ‘non-adverbial progressives’ is not so visible; in fact, the more we look towards the end of the frequency scale, the less we see a visible pattern. Although the 20<sup>th</sup> century does show a general increase, this is scattered, and does not follow a curve that correlates directly with the frequency of the construction with that particular verb. This may well be an effect of the corpus construction, but still it may be indicative of the fact that the increase in the frequency of the progressive may not be proceeding in the same way throughout verb types and different constructions.

In all cases, the increase across the two centuries may look dramatic, but if we take into account the different number of words in the corpus, the effect is reduced. If we recall that the proportion, in terms of absolute word numbers, between the two sub-periods is roughly 1: 1.5, it can be noticed that the increase in *always* + V-*ing* combinations is more than that in several cases. In particular, the increase tends to be higher in the ‘middle frequency’ group both in activity verbs and in ‘cognitive’ verbs, and highest in the low-frequency verbs, to indicate a possibly significant influence of factors that go beyond the general «progression of the progressive» (ELSNESS 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Co-occurrence with frequency adverbs (normally those indicating high frequency) is considered a reliable indicator – see OTA (n.d.) on Present-Day American English; others are *constantly* and incrementative *more and more*. A comparison is also drawn here between *always* and other adverbs, see below section 4.2.2.

Table 2. Frequency of finite BE + *always* V-ing in some selected non-activity verbs in the COHA.

Verb	1810-1909	1910-2000	Total tokens
BE	27/5	1366/5	163/10
HAVE	22/5	69/25	91/30 <sup>14</sup>
THINK	61	113	174
WANT	24	49	73
SEE	10	17	27
KNOW	1	-	1
FEEL	3 <sup>15</sup>	6	10
FORGET	8	27	35
NEED	3	17	20

Table 3. Frequency of finite BE + *always* V-ing in some selected activity verbs in the COHA.

Verb	1810-1900	1910-2000	Total tokens
DO	82	131	213
MAKE	48	93	141
MOVE	9	28	37
PLAY	10	41	51
FIGHT	3	34	37
BRING	13	24	37
EAT	3	8	11
PUSH	4	15	19

It is interesting to observe that, although the numbers are quite low throughout, there is a quite clear divide between the top of the tables and the bottom part. The instances concerning the Vs in Table 2 show a predominance of clearly negative attitude – it must be added that WANT also occurs in the construction with the meaning “lack” or “miss” (but see (6-7) although the latter is later), and SEE mostly occurs with the meaning “imagine”, as in *He’s always seeing ghosts*. A peculiar case is FEEL which occurs in various constructions and mostly refers to the reporting of an experiencer’s perspective or interpretation (ŽEGARAC 1993: 212), not necessarily negative – contrast for instance (8) and (9), both PDE examples.

THINK is a relatively different case, the most common construction is with *of/about* + NP or *of* + V-ing, but there are also cases in which the Verb is followed by a zero-connected clause (10) and others in which the V seems to refer to the cognitive process in absolute terms (11). The overtones are by no means always negative, although the subjective element and the hyperbolic dimensions are always present.

(6) *I couldn't stand it there in Virginia. I was **always wanting** to go into the fight when I heard of a battle, so I thought it best to get out, ... (The Virginian, 1873)*

<sup>14</sup> The individual meanings need to be isolated manually, as the searching tools of the corpus do not allow this automatically. For HAVE, this refers to reinterpreted versions of the verb, as in *She’s always having a good time*, or *He’s always having to tell them*. The second figure in this row indicates more strictly possessive uses. For BE, the second figure indicates the type *He’s always being obstinate about it*. See below in the main text for further comments.

<sup>15</sup> All of these are from *Three Lives*, there is none in the 1800s.

(7) *To Randy the enthusiasms of the genial gentleman were a constant source of amazement. He was **always wanting the world** to be glad about something. Randy felt that at this moment any assumption of gladness would be a hollow mockery. (The Trumpeter Swan, 1920)*

(8) *I know you work awful hard down here, but it wasn't what you were born for. I'm **always feeling**, right inside me, right here" - - Carmencita's hand was laid on her breast -- "that you aren't going to stay here long... (How It Happened, 1914)*

(9) *Hard as a nut, Harry, and always will be. You were **always feeling** sorry for her. It was a wasted effort. (Follow the River, 1981)*

(10) *Melinda Glen, you are **always thinking** I am in tears. (The Escape, 1861)*

(11) *And then you would be **always thinking** in spite of yourself; the heart would be full of memories. (Unwritten History, Life amongst the Modocs, 1874)*

HAVE appears in the construction with several meanings, as in (12) vs. (13), and as mentioned there are some possessive uses, but it was found also as a semi-modal (14). The meanings can also be positive, and convey enthusiasm, as in (15). BE appears mostly in the passive; the stereotypical case with an adjective of the type in (16), which conveys mostly negative values (often through the implication that the behaviour reported is not authentic but affected) was found very rarely (second figure in Table 2), as it is possibly more typical of conversations than written texts. There are a couple of examples in which BE as main V indicates existence (17), the others are all passive constructions with more or less constant negative connotation, but also often indicating iteration and/or continuity (18).

(12) *Then Harry wrote, saying that he had caught one of his bad colds. We did not think much of it, for he **was always having** coughs. We heard no more for a week, ... (Scenes and Characters, 1855)*

(13) *"And you have no sports -- no games? You slave here the year round for a flich of bacon and a bit of linen?" "No, indeed, madam; it is not so! We **are always having** a treat! (In the Border Country, 1909)*

(14) *"Then you can cook for us. Mother **is always having** trouble with her kitchen," said Rachel, ... (In His Steps, 1896)*

(15) *"I have had an adventure." "You **are always having** adventures. You're the luckiest fellow alive." (Frank Merriwell's Chums, 1902)*

(16) *"Oh, nonsense!" said Lillie. "You take it too much to heart. You mustn't mind all these men say. They **are always being** desperate and tragic. (Pink and White Tyranny, A Society Novel, 1871)*

(17) *All this time Melanctha **was always being** every now and then with Jem Richards. (Three Lives, 1909)*

(18) *We say the world is old. In one sense, the real sense to every person, it is no older than the lives lived in it at any given time. If it is always passing away, it **is always being** renewed.* (*Little Journey in the World*, 1889)

As for the samples of verbs that can be considered prototypical activity verbs (Table 3), the less frequent ones have predominantly negative meanings, except PLAY that can be neutrally iterative in the meanings “play an instrument/a sport”, and MOVE, which can be found in descriptions (19). Occurrences of MAKE and DO are divided between positive and negative overtones, but can also be aspectual; compare for instance (20a-b) with (21a-b), and these in turn with (22).

(19) *Greenland is a vast unexplored continent, buried under one continuous and colossal mass of ice that **is always moving** seaward, a very small part of it in an easterly direction, and all the rest westward,...* (*The Student's Elements of Geology*, 1874)

(20) a. *while the floodgate afforded a pretty and picturesque fall of water, whose torrents **were always making** a pleasant murmur for the groves.* (*As Good a Comedy*, 1852)

b. *"This is your doing, my charming Mrs. Vernon -- you **are always doing** some good....* (*A Volume from the Life of Herbert Barclay*, 1833)

(21) a. *... and his parents could never get him to do any kind of labor. He **was always making** excuses.* (*The Myth of Hiawatha*, 1856)

b. *"Well, I never!" responded his help-mate; "you're **always doing** just so: troubling people. You never had no ambition, Titmouse;...* (*A New Home; Who'll Follow?*, 1839)

(22) *"We **are always making** a catalogue, and it will never be finished."* (*Atlantic Monthly*, 1876)

We can thus conclude that the Late Modern English section of the corpus shows a certain amount of functional layering, and that there is quite an incidence of positive, or at least non-negative, pragmatic functions, especially with activity Vs.

4.2.2. *Always vs. other adverbials.* The last step in this study was to look at the distribution of the progressive in co-occurrence with other high-frequency adverbials. The role of the adverb in conveying pragmatic overtones is crucial, as hyperbolic uses of *always* and similar adverbs can be traced back to Old English. When later this value was combined with the continuity expressed by the progressive, the modern effect of the construction arose (KRANICH 2007). SMITTERBERG (2005: 211-217) has investigated the co-occurrence with several adverbs in 19<sup>th</sup>-century British English using the CONCE corpus), adopting a wide definition of time adverbial that includes expressions like *the whole afternoon*, *almost all day long*, etc. These produced however very scant results, as the only adverbials that were found with any relevant frequency are *always*, *constantly*, *continually*, *perpetually*. The examples he found point to a relatively marginal but totally integrated construction, rooted in previous times. The majority of occurrences were found in letters, which suggests that the construction is more typical of personal genres. Letters are not present in the COHA, so a direct comparison of the results is not possible. However, based on the examples given in several publications, the adverb *forever* was also sampled in the construction, as it is attested with the same values in spoken American English.

The results of this further sampling (of the adverbs mentioned as more frequent by Smitterberg plus *forever*) are given in rough figures in Table 4, again distinguished into two subsections corresponding to the two centuries covered by the corpus.

Table 4. Rough figures of BE + high frequency adverb + V-ing in the COHA.

Combination	1810-1909	1910-2000	Total tokens
BE <i>always</i> V-ing	2578	5938	8516
BE + <i>constantly</i> + V-ing	1389	1360	2749
BE + <i>continually</i> + V-ing	912	406	1318
BE + <i>perpetually</i> + V-ing	912	458	1370
BE + <i>forever</i> V-ing	240	618	858

It can be seen that *perpetually* virtually disappears in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially if we recall that the 20<sup>th</sup>-century sample is larger in absolute word numbers. The same can be said about *continually*, where the decline is even more dramatic. These combinations can therefore be considered typical of Late Modern American English only. A decline is also visible in *constantly*, although not in the same proportion. The opposite applies to *forever*, which is present very marginally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and increases in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to show decline again in the second part. If we consider these hyperbolic uses more typical of spoken genres, this could be an effect of the composition of the corpus, but the results show in any case a low incidence of these combinations, as opposed to BE + *always* + V-ing, while at the same time confirming its being more typical of American English than of British English. A more detailed analysis of the individual tokens will be attempted in a different paper, while a few general conclusions are left to the next section.

## 5. Conclusions

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this survey study, a result which is particularly visible if we look at percentages per million words of the various combinations, is that the conveying of subjective values through the progressive + high frequency verb pattern is more and more entrusted to a single combination, i.e. with *always*, and in a fixed order. This would be consistent with KRANICH'S (2007) hypothesis about semanticisation, and would confirm that in Late Modern English there was a higher variability, which suggests that these pragmatic values were then still derived through conversational implicature, rather than ensuing by default as most salient interpretation of a fixed string. The variability in numbers and in attitudinal overtones expressed by the construction with different verbs also seems to point in this direction. Among the possible next steps in research are a more fine-grained analysis of layering, i.e. of the coexistence between different (aspectual and subjective) meanings, an exploration of other adverbial expressions that appear in this combination, and the surveying of other non-British varieties as more and more diachronic evidence becomes available.

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