

# Corpus Meets Experiment. Extravagance in the Expansion History of Progressive [BE\_Ving]

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I combine methodologies from corpus linguistics with an experimental-like setup more affiliated to psycholinguistic research to examine the history of [BE *Ving*] in English. This approach allows us to gain more insight into cognitive motivations of non-temporal uses of aspectual constructions, and how these cognitive motivations may trigger change. One such cognitive motivation thought to be relevant in the early stages of grammaticalization is covered by the evasive concept of ‘extravagance’, the linguistic expression of a desire to be noticed (Haspelmath 1999).

While [BE *Ving*]’s function of encoding ongoingness had already been established for past tense adverbial clauses by late Middle English, its use in the present tense at this point remained essentially stative (Petré 2016). Only in Early Modern English did [BE *Ving*] extend its aspectual function to present tense main clauses. However, [BE *Ving*] remained in competition with the simple present in expressing ongoing situations, as seen from the equivalence of (1) and (2).

- (1) *For it is not my Superiours now that I **am speaking** of.* (Richard Baxter, 1681)
- (2) *But I now **speak** of the Reason of it as a Covenant in genere.* (Richard Baxter, 1673)

On the basis of the EMMA corpus (*Early Modern Multiloquent Authors*), I show that [BE *Ving*] in this novel use correlates with features that are assumed to reflect ‘extravagance’. Interestingly, two subsequent generations realize extravagance differently. In the first, extravagance seems to be a coercion effect of the still stative semantics of [BE *Ving*] into a contextually progressive reading. In the second, the extravagant effect seems to have semanticized (prior to its presumable wearing out in later stages).

## References

- Haspelmath, Martin. 1999. Why is grammaticalization irreversible? *Linguistics* 37: 1043-1068.
- Petré, Peter. 2016. Grammaticalization by changing co-text frequencies, or why [BE *Ving*] became the ‘progressive’. *English Language and Linguistics*. 20(1). 31-54.