SUBJECTIFICATION AND THE ENGLISH PROGRESSIVE: THE HISTORY OF ALWAYS + PROGRESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

SVENJA KRANICH

Abstract

In this paper, I wish to present an account of the historical development of the subjective function of the progressive in combination with always-type adverbials (i.e. adverbials with a meaning similar to always). In present-day English, the combination is connected with negative speaker-attitude. The present paper aims to explain the development of this feature and to relate it to general insights about subjectification processes. It is structured as follows: after some introductory comments (section 1), a definition of subjectivity will be provided and a brief sketch of the subjective functions of the progressive today will be presented (section 2). The main part (section 3) will look at the semantic development of the combination of progressive + always-type adverbial, as well as at the development of such adverbials and of the progressive independently from one another. I shall then discuss the question in how far this development can be described as an instance of subjectification in (section 4). Finally, the conclusion summarises the most important results (section 5).

1. Introduction

There is a remarkable difference in present-day English (PDE) between the use of always-type adverbials (i.e. adverbials which have the meaning "always" or a very similar meaning - henceforth called ALWAYS) with a simple form of the verb and ALWAYS with a progressive, as noticeable in the following pair:

(1)

a. Paul always writes me letters.
b. Paul is always writing me letters.

It is clear that (1b) exhibits a higher degree of subjectivity than the corresponding sentence in the non-progressive in (1a), which is rather an objective report on a habit. The former sentence could be expected to be construed by a qualification of always, e.g. when he is on holiday. The latter example, on the other hand, would rather be uttered in a situation where the activity of Paul's letter writing is not at all pleasant to the speaker; maybe Paul is some kind of stalker. That is, the b) sentence is not only more subjective in that speaker attitude is expressed, but it very much favours, no further context supplied, an interpretation which could be paraphrased as "negative speaker-attitude towards proposition". In some cases, this could be seen as induced by world knowledge, (e.g. Paul is always complaining about my lifestyle), but the example above shows that the idea of negative speaker-attitude is not merely pragmatically inferred, but rather on its way to being sematicized, since [write letters to someone] is not per default a kind of activity that induces negative evaluations.

I would like to offer a possible "sematicisation" path of what I presume to have been a mere conversational implication first and which now would seem to be a generalised invited inference, i.e. a conventionalized inference, the default interpretation of the particular combination of progressive with ALWAYS.

Starting with the situation in Old English (OE), I will pursue the development of the combination until present-day times. Data from various corpora will be used for the sake of illustration. A proper quantitative corpus study of the historical development of the construction does not seem feasible, since the construction is not particularly common in earlier texts. Even today, one does not find many examples. Evidence for the construction was sought in various sources: for the OE period, the Dictionary of Old English (DOE) was mostly used, and for the Middle English (ME) period, the Middle English Dictionary (MED) served as the main source. Examples were searched for under the entries of the most common always-type adverbials. Furthermore, examples of the combination cited in studies of the progressive were collected. For the Modern English (MOD) period, data from ARCHER—2 (A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers 2) was used, which covers the time span 1600—1999. Finally, in order to take into account the most recent changes as well, data was collected on the internet, using the Google search engine.

2. Definitions

'Subjective progressive' is a term which would seem to warrant a definition. The way I use the terms 'subjective', 'subjectivity' and 'subjectification' here is in accordance with the definition in Traugott's work: a linguistic sign, be it a single lexical item or a construction as in our case, will be said to be subjective if its meaning is strongly "based in the speaker's [...] belief state/attitude toward the proposition" (Traugott 1990: 500). Another clarifying statement can be found in Lyons:

The term 'subjectivity' refers to the way in which natural languages, in their structure and in their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of himself and of his own attitudes and beliefs.

Lyons (1982: 102)

A possible way to test subjectivity in language might be that truth-conditions (whether formal or informal) cannot be formulated for that part of a proposition which is subjective. Thus, if we compare (1a) and (1b) we see that the proposition made by the speaker in both cases is basically that Paul habitually engages in the activity specified by the predicate. In (1b) in addition, the speaker's subjective attitude toward it is conveyed. Only that part of the meaning of the utterance which is identical with (1a) is testable as to its truth-conditions. The subjective disapproval of the speaker can only be believed or not believed.

The fact that the progressive can convey subjective meanings has long been established, cf. for example Onions (1904: 113) who states that the progressive can be used to "give an emotional colouring to the sentence, and express surprise, disgust, impatience, or the like." Particularly the subjective value of the combination with always-type adverbials is quite generally recognized. But there is more than this one use of the progressive in PDE which can be identified as subjective according to our definition. Apart from the usage exemplified above, subjective progressive + ALWAYS (type 1), we find progressives without ALWAYS which serve subjective functions (type 2) e.g.:

(2)

a. Paul hoped to get an invitation.
b. Paul was hoping to get an invitation.

The difference between (2a) and (2b) is not aspatial, rather (2b) has added subjective impact: the speaker may wish to imply that Paul's hopes was not all that well-founded. Furthermore, we find 'interpretative progressives' (type 3), a function first, it seems, recognized by Charleston (1955). A clear example of an interpretative progressive would be:
The History of ALWAYS + Progressive Constructions

I have looked at the question of the reliability of formal criteria in detail elsewhere, and have come to the same conclusion as Killie (2004) that they are not adequate for the distinction of subjective progressives. Rather, I find that subjective uses of the progressive can best be distinguished through the presence of other subjective expressions in the context (Kranich 2006), as subjective elements have a strong tendency to cluster (cf. Hübler 1998: 13). One can find illustrations of the features mentioned by Hübler (1998: 13) in the context of subjective expressions presented in the following, e.g. choice of lexical items with negative connotations (as in ex. 28, "pesky"), use of repetition (ex. 24), use of exclamations (ex. 17) and the use of metaphor (ex. 23, "bestowing the lamp of her life").

In order to get a clearer picture of the development of the subjective meaning of the combination of progressive + ALWAYS, it seems appropriate to consider all three possible candidates for the encoding of the subjective force – always-type adverbials, the progressive and the combination of both – and study their use in the history of English, starting with OE inscriptions and continuing up to PDE, thus taking into account also possible recent innovations.

3.1. The use of ALWAYS in the history of English

In Old English, the meaning ALWAYS was mostly rendered by on, afre, ealweor and other collocations with ealle as first element, and simile. We can see that all these adverbials have in common that they can either refer to something that is objectively always ongoing or to something that the speaker portrays as always ongoing, often hyperbolically, to express a certain attitude.

With regard to afre, an instance of an objective use can be seen in the following example:

(4) þeoh halige þynnys is an eðmhtig god afre unbegynnas un weacendos. (AEHom 22.20)

"The holy trinity is one almightig god forever without beginning and without end."

In the context of the contemporary belief system, this would be an objectively always lasting state. The following example, however, is already of a somewhat different quality:

(5) ic blædege drincten on eallan tidan afre lof on nehte minanæ benedicin domin omnæ tempore semper laus eius in cre mec (G afre, A Aa, BCDEFHJ forms of simile). (PsGk 33.3)

"I bless the lord at all times, the love for him be forever in my mouth."

Here, the meaning of afre could rather be rendered "at all times the speaker is concerned with at the time of utterance" rather than a fully objective meaning as in (4), which could be paraphrased as "at all times possible in the history of the world".

Combinations with ealle may show an even more clearly subjectively tinted meaning, as in the following example:

(6) hwæ stande ge her ealle dang idete? (ABH2u ealle, Li alien; cf. Mt. quid hic stat tota die ostfa). (Mt (WSCp) 20.6)

"why do you stand here all day silly."

This adverbial phrase, ealle dang, is of course no absolute always-equivalent, but it is relevant for our question: similar adverbials generally yield the observed negative
3.2. The use of the progressive in the history of English

Recently a "panchronic core meaning" of the progressive has been postulated:

The progressive implies situational/attitudinal immediacy and awareness [...]. Facet 1 of the progressive spectrum corresponds roughly to the traditional aspectual, "action-in-progress" category, which in many grammars is incorrectly taken to be the nuclear meaning (or function) of the progressive. Facet 2 [...] is as systematically inherent in the progressive as Facet 1, as part of essentially mental dynamic processes. (Rydén 1997: 421)

Facet 1 is "action-focused", "the essentially agential progressive", facet 2 "attitude focused", "the essentially attitudinal/analytical progressive". (Rydén 1997: 420)

It is by no means a new idea to claim that the progressive is the "situationally more aware" form: Thus, we find "heightened temporary relevance" claimed to be the basic meaning of the progressive already in Van Eek (1969: 584). One also finds the view that the progressive is the generally more subjective form and that its basic functions are to "convey the point of view of the speaker or of the grammatical subject of the sentence" and to express "emotionality, vividness and emphasis" (Storni 1964: 62).

The latter view is perhaps more surprising, since it is claimed to explain the use of the progressive in Modern English, where a number of examples can be found to show that the progressive does not generally give a more subjective or a more vivid expression to a fact, if one compares the following examples:

(12) Paul is kicking a ball.
(13) Paul runs, Paul aims, Paul kicks the ball — go!!!

If the progressive was indeed generally preferred for emphasis or "heightened relevance", or in order to give expression to the speaker's high "situational awareness", one would expect it to occur rather in excited comments to a football match, as mimicked in example (13), than in a banal description of what's going on in one's own backyard garden (which could be a possible context for example 12). Generally, however, it is in fact the simple form that is preferred in contexts of soccer commentaries (cf. Schaeffer 1975: 114-124).

It is clear that it is very difficult to postulate a core meaning for the progressive, and totally impossible, to my mind, to find a "panchronic core meaning", but there is still some truth in Rydén's proposition, which is that from the beginning on, the progressive has had two basic facets of meaning, which I would paraphrase as:

1. aspectual (imperfective/progressive/time—lame) and
2. subjective (attitudinal/evaluating/emphatic).

The first type of meaning, the objective meaning, has undergone more changes than the subjective type of meaning. While in PDE, the progressive in aspectual use refers, generally speaking, to dynamic situations viewed as in progress at topic time, in OE, the form was rather used for imperfective situations in general, be they dynamic or static. These situations could be of limited or unlimited duration. The following example may illustrate the use of the progressive to refer to an imperfective situation:
Svenja Kranich

126

(14) on eallæ þæ on his idbende warren on coroon; (Boethius, 39/31 fT)16
“on all that were living on earth in his time”

In other OE examples, the use of the progressive rather seems to be motivated by a wish for greater descriptivity, e.g. to highlight the particularly dramatic moments in a narrative, as in the following example taken from Hübner (1998: 82):

(15) þæ aetterwædan sammings þe foran une monige heapan sweartæ lega, þæ warren up ærigende sceo aew of mileum sæle, 7 aft waron fallende 7 gewihtende in ðone iæcan sæoð (Beede’s Ecclesiastical History, 426, 13-16)
“there suddenly appeared before us many masses of black flames, which were rising up as out of a great pit, and were falling back again and returning into the pit.”
(example from Hübner 1998: 82, translation based on Hübner, slightly modified).

In this extract, which describes a miracle, the aspektual nature of the events is rather playful: first the masses of black flames appear, then they rise up, then they fall and then they retire into the pit. The motivation for using the progressive here seems to be, as Hübner (1998: 82) justly points out, the emotional engagement of the speaker (writer), a desire to lay emphasis on these events.17

While Hübner (1998: 86-89) sees the subjective meaning as the main one of the progressive in OE, Niccol (1966: 302) rather sees the aspektual function as the dominant one of the progressive already in OE. It seems to me that one cannot really speak of a “function” of the progressive in OE yet, since the form still appears to be in free variation with the simple form in a majority of contexts. What one can say is that the progressive seems to be chosen when either attention should be drawn to the aspektual view taken on the situation, as in (14), or when a certain subjective attitude is expressed or a particular emphasis attached to an event, as in (15).18

In ME, the progressive is used in a way not essentially different from OE: it has not acquired fixed functions yet, but commonly occurs with reference to imperfective situations and to situations that the speaker is emotionally involved in, that he wants to put special emphasis on. Of course, both motivations may be present simultaneously, as in the following example:

(16) To alle ðæ halhen þæ hier on lieu wæt hibren, and nu mid uæ laerne gode wæmende bried (Vices and Virtues, p. 21, 1. 12, example taken from Schaeffer 1975: 219)
“To all the saints who were born here in this place, and are now living with our lord God”

Much can be said about the development of the functions of the progressive in the Modern period, but what is essential for the present discussion is that its grammatical function becomes more and more predominant. In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the progressive evolves increasingly into a marker of dynamic situations in progress at topic time. The use of the progressive with rates declines together with the use for general imperfective situations with limited duration, general truths and unlimited habits. Instead, the progressive function proper (“situation x is in progress at topic time”) grammaticalizes, and thus it is generally activities of limited duration which occur in the progressive.

At the same time, the use of the progressive to express subjective shades of meaning declines. While subjective progressives in the first half of the 17th century constitute almost 30% of all progressives, in the second half of the 18th century, they make up only about 5%. Thus, the grammatical, aspektual function of the progressive becomes the dominant one. However, subjective uses of the progressive do still occur. We can see them clearly only in examples where the aspektual nature of the situation would not necessitate the use of a progressive, as in the following:

(17) This letter is so feeble and dull that I must put the copy on it. Forgive me, dear love.
I am longing to hear from you. And, Ah! my dear Hogany, I am for ever Your Wif...
(archer1900-49:br/1917/mama.x9.95)

We could thus see that the progressive on its own, just as the always-type adverbials, also expresses subjective meanings independently, not only in the combination with ALWAYS, and that this has been the case from the OE period onwards. However, contrary to the always-type adverbials, the progressive has undergone changes in this area: while in OE and ME, the choice of the progressive seems to be quite commonly motivated by a wish for greater descriptivity and emphasis (cf. also Mustoonga 1966: 59, Nute et al. 2004: 85, 90), in MOD this use declines sharply. In the course of the Modern period, the main reason for using a progressive becomes progressive aspectual of the situation, i.e. a view of the situation expressed by the predicate as progressing at topic time. Once this function is fully grammaticalized and the use of the progressive in certain contexts has become obligatory, one must note that the progressive can only be invested with subjective meaning in such contexts where the speaker is still free to choose whether or not to use a progressive (as in ex. 17, where I long to hear from you would have been equally acceptable).

In view of this, the overall low frequency of subjective uses of the progressive in Modern English, one may already say that of the three hypotheses mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, hypothesis 2 (i.e. that the progressive alone should be responsible for the subjective meaning commonly observable in the combination progressive + ALWAYS) can be considered unlikely.

3.3. The use of progressive + ALWAYS in the history of English

Recall that the always-type adverbials can refer to both objective concepts such as “at all times possible” or “at all times that” (“whenever, then y”) and subjective concepts such as “at all times speaker is concerned with at time of utterance”, often being used as a kind of intensifier. In OE, the combination with a progressive was not problematic either way: since the progressive often referred to imperfective situations with unlimited duration, indeed commonly to states (cf. e.g. Nehls 1974: 128), it could be combined with adverbs or adverb phrases denoting objective concepts of ALWAYS, as in the following example:

(18) þæs godeðundrys ne osanna mefre, ac leo waes afræ wynigende on ðrymynse on soðe amysse a han ende. (AEH 1 H, 1004000 [161])
“God has never begun, but he was always living in truth and true oneness forever without end.”

But subjective combinations could also occur, since the more subjective meaning of ALWAYS clearly combined well with the use of the progressive for greater vividness, for emphasis as in the following example:
The History of ALWAYS + Progressive Constructions

The combination has a subjective meaning here as well, but the attitude the speaker expresses with the help of the combination is positive, not negative: he wishes to praise the behaviour of the subject. Quite contrary to the next example:

(24) I thought of how many were always complaining and complaining [...] of the hardships, the miseries, and the misfortunes of their lot. (archeri1800.49-bre1623-mo:15.59)

The repetition of the verb here serves well to further stress the irritation the speaker wishes to express in regard to the behaviour referred to. Examples of other ALWAYS-type adverbials with similar negative speaker-attitude can be seen in the following:

(25) Carol has been blustering all day because the says the pavements are still rockin' as if we were aboard ship. I am a stern master to her and give no sympathy to these plaints. (archeri1950.99-bre1663:whit:9.90)

(26) ...with perfumes of sandalwood and greenery and the floating fumes of joss sticks, and in order to make one's way to mosques and market-places one leaps from rut to rut and from stone to stone as if one were crossing a river (which most of the time one is), and one's neck is continually mashed by donkeys, mules, and camels. (archeri1950.99-bre1650:macl:9.86)

One should remark that there are also still examples in ModE where the combination of progressive and ALWAYS may have an objective meaning, as in the following:

(27) But if the largeness of the branches be so adapted [...] then the heat of the liquor generated by attrition would be constantly increasing in its progress (archeri1700-49-bre1735:mar:2.25)

But such objective meanings of the combination occur more and more rarely, as the grammaticalisation of the progressive function proceeds. In the course of the ModE period, the progressive becomes more and more associated with the function to express progressive aspect, as pointed out in 3.2. The combination with ALWAYS-type adverbials in an objective meaning is thus less and less frequently possible since there are very few dynamic situations which can objectively be described as being in progress at topic time and yet still, also objectively, be said to continue at all times. This has been pointed out by Ljung:

[I]t is part of our knowledge of the world that events progress [...] [and that] this progression from beginning to end does not take very long. Because of this, it is natural to associate all dynamic constructions with temporariness. However, it is also part of our knowledge that the progression from beginning to end may sometimes take very long, and it is not inconceivable that there are events which go on for ever. (Ljung 1980: 28)

The statement that such situations are merely "not inconceivable" also implies, however, that they are not particularly often encountered. Dynamic progressive situations are thus, on the basis of world knowledge, rather closely associated with limited duration. We thus have a sort of clash when progressive and ALWAYS are combined: the progressive points to limited duration, the adverbial indicates the contrary. We know that when clashes of this kind occur, pragmatic meanings need to be evoked to make sense of an utterance. This is not

(20) God is always fasting (Vices and Virtues, p. 137, l. 17, example taken from Scheffer 1975: 219).

"God is always fasting".

Shortly following this passage, we find the subjective meaning of the combination illustrated, in the first use with positive, in the second use with negative speaker attitude:

(21) For Can be gode mans is nihit and daig heinbanka hu he muge gode iowemen, and him bett hurren; alwa is dyes bewivesiene mans nihit and daig heinbanka hu he muge fallen [his] ungaris bell mid swete metes and drenches. "For the good man is thinking night and day how he may please God and obey Him best. So is this deceived man thinking night and day how he may fill his unhappy belly with sweet meats and drinks." (Vices and Virtues, p. 137, l. 31-35, translation by Holthausen)

Another illustration of subjective uses of the combination can be found in the following example from Chaucer:

(22) She is fals; and ever laughinge with oon eye, and that other weeping. (Chaucer, Book of the Duchess 633–634, 1 example taken from Godschke 1932: 474).

In Middle English, the progressive, as we know, was still mainly a stylistic device, having greater descriptivie force than the simple form. In (21) and (22), the reasons for use of the progressive can be seen in a wish for greater descriptivie and as a desire to express one's attitude to the situation expressed by the predicate. Use for the expression of negative speaker-attitude can be observed, as in the second use in (21) and in (22), but it is not the default case in ME, nor yet in early ModE, as the next example illustrates:

(23) bestowing so well the Lampes of her life, as she was ever casting forth some light or other to ilarge the Prospect of her inner house. (archeri1600.49-bre1640:brat:67.11)
difficult in this particular combination, since another, more subjective meaning of ALWAYS is readily available, i.e. "at all times the speaker is particularly concerned with". This is not a new use of the always-type adverbials, as evident from the OE and ME examples, which demonstrate the capacity of ALWAYS to be used subjectively, nor is it a new effect of the combination of ALWAYS + progressive. Rather, the subjective force of ALWAYS is now more explicit when combined with the progressive, since it is not likely to have its objective meaning, as the progressive has become related to activities of limited duration progressing at reference time during early ModE times.

The next most recent step in the development is one of further specialisation, which can be taken as evidence of a further step toward semanticallyisation of the combination. We have noted that in PDE, the default interpretation of ALWAYS + progressive is not simply any kind of subjective speaker attitude, but a very specific one: if we heard or read with no further context the sentence in example (6b) Paul is always writing me letters, we would interpret it as an expression of a negative speaker attitude toward the content of the proposition, although the phrase offers no further clues which would justify this interpretation, quite to the contrary, since getting letters is normally thought of as rather nice (cf. also the simple form in example (1a), where no such interpretation follows).

Both the use for positive and negative evaluation are still found in my PDE corpus and both can be derived from the meaning of the combination of (subjective) ALWAYS + progressive: an activity is perceived as subjectively always ongoing either because it is felt to be annoying or because one is emotionally involved in it in a positive way. The former, however, is the more common case as in the following example:

(28) Willow to Buffy: you're always saving everyone. It's kinda pesky.
(vyn.net/boy/clip.php?clip=3739)

Even without the further context, which makes the negative speaker attitude explicit ("it's kinda pesky"), one would also assume that 'you're always saving everyone', without further context, was uttered by a speaker who wants to express his or her disapproval of this habit of the addressee. Apparently, the idea of negative speaker-attitude has evolved from a mere implied inference (INI) to a generalized implied inference (GII). It can still be overruled by context, as in:

(29) I'm always enjoying your work because you're constantly bringing something new to the plate. Keep it up. (to-deviantart.com)

The use of the combination to express positive speaker-attitude would, however, appear to be rare in PDE. This impression can be supported by an analysis of the examples retrieved from Google. 100 examples for combinations of progressive + always were retrieved and 100 for combinations of simple forms + always, in order to exclude the possibility that the semantic/pragmatic effects are really due to the adverb rather than the combination. The data clearly show that it is in fact the combination that strengthens subjective interpretation in general as well as, to a lesser degree, a negative attitude reading in particular.

| Table 1: Progressive + always vs. Simple Form + always (Google data) |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  | Subjective/positive | Subjective/negative | Subjective/pure emphasis | Subjective/total |
| present progressive simple present | 16 | 52 | 27 | 92 | 8 |
| 13 | 28 | 18 | 64 | 36 |

So clearly, the combination progressive + ALWAYS generally yields a subjective reading of the adverb, whereas the adverb on its own, with a simple form of the verb, is only read as subjective in 64% of the instances. (Percentages equal token numbers because the total number of instances considered is 100). Furthermore, the Google data make the hypothesis seem likely that the expression of a negative attitude toward the proposition is a generalized implied inference in PDE. Out of the 52 subjective progressives in the combination with always, 52 should be interpreted as rendering a negative speaker attitude (i.e. 56.5% of all subjective instances). Again, this is an effect of the combination, not of the adverb on its own: always + simple present only expresses negative speaker-attitude in 28 of 64 instances of the subjective uses (i.e. 43.75% of all subjective expressions with simple present and ALWAYS).

This development from INI to GII (which may lead to the next step, the grammaticalisation of the combination) would seem to lie in the fact that one subjectively perceives an activity as permanently ongoing most often if the activity is highly annoying, rather than when it is particularly pleasant.

4. The subjectification of progressive + ALWAYS

The development of subjective progressive + ALWAYS largely follows the pathway expectable from what we know about subjectification processes: it increasingly serves to express speaker-attitudes (cf. e.g. Traugott 1999: 806). Of course, the always-type adverbials and the progressive on their own, as well as the combination of both are used with subjective shades of meaning already from OE onwards. However, we can see that there is subjectification in that the use of the combination signals a subjective meaning more clearly since early ModE times. Today, we can see that the overwhelming majority of cases (92% of the Google examples), combinations of progressive + ALWAYS yield a subjective reading. Thus, the combination has clearly become more subjective over time, and can be regarded as a construction that speakers have at their disposition to express their subjective attitudes.

This subjectification process is intimately intertwined with the parallel grammaticalisation process the progressive has been undergoing. The subjectification of progressive + ALWAYS is reinforced by the grammaticalisation of the progressive as a marker of progressive aspect, since the progressive becomes more closely associated with limited duration, which makes the combination with objective ALWAYS less available. Thus the combination produces a subjective reading more regularly. On the whole, however, the ARCHER-2 data show that the use of progressives with subjective meanings goes down since early ModE times - the percentage of subjective progressives constantly decreases: 1600-1649: 29.2%; 1650-1699: 19.6%; 1700-1749: 13.5%; 1750-1799: 4.6% (Kranich 2009).

Therefore, if one talks of the semantic development of the progressive in general, one must say that it has undergone 'objectification', i.e. has become increasingly associated with objective meanings, since early ModE times. This decrease in subjective uses can even be
assumed to be typical of secondary grammaticalisation processes,33 as these quite often, as in
the case of the progressive, lead to a construction becoming obligatory in certain contexts.
In order for an element to be available for the expression of subjective meanings, the speaker has
to be able to choose whether or not to use it (cf. Himmel 1998). The grammaticalisation of the
progressive function in Modern English times thus generally leads to objectification in the use
of the progressive, although the particular combination of ALWAYS + progressive can be said
to have undergone subjunctification.

5. Conclusion

I have investigated the question how the subjective meaning of the PDE combination of
ALWAYS + progressive has come about, in particular whether its subjective force goes back
to the adverb, to the progressive or to the combination of the two. We could see that the two
features when occurring on their own have been used both objectively and subjectively since
OE, and that the same is true for the combination. However, since early ModE times, one can
say that the subjective force is brought out more by the combination of both.

This can be seen related to the grammaticalisation of the progressive function, for
which the 17th and 18th centuries would seem to constitute the decisive period. I understand
the meanin of the progressive to have had two facets since OE times, one aspectual, the other
subjective. Because of the grammaticalisation of the progressive function, the combination
with an always-type adverbial with objective meaning can be applied to less situations in the
real world, simply because there are few dynamic situations which are continuously in
progress. Thus, if the progressive is now combined with ALWAYS, the adverbial most often
needs to be understood as hyperbole. Since speakers tend to exaggerate the duration or
frequency of occurrence of situations rather more often when they are annoyed by them than
when they are delighted, one can easily see how the specification of the combination visible
in recent times, i.e. to express negative speaker attitude, has come about. The view that
emerges from a large-scale diachronic study is thus quite different from the assumptions
made by Wright (1994) based only on early ModE.

The development of the combination of progressive + ALWAYS can be seen as a
subjunctification process, i.e. a process which leads to a meaning becoming increasingly based
in speaker-attribute, while the development of the progressive on the whole rather leads to
objectification, as seems typical of secondary grammaticalisation.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful for all the helpful comments made by participants of SHES 5 in York (20-
21 May 2006) to the presentation of this paper. My particular thanks go to Elizabeth Cross
Traugott and Wim van der Wauf. I have further profited from stimulating suggestions by
other colleagues during discussions of ideas elaborated here, and would like to thank in
particular Klaus Dierz, Gabriele Dinwiddi, Ekehard König and Ilse Wiecher. I also wish to
thank Ellie Gehweiler for proofreading this paper. All shortcomings naturally remain my own.

Notes

1. The paper mainly uses examples from corpora as evidence. Where made-up examples are
used to illustrate a particular point, as here, they are all marked off by the use of the same
<em>paul</em>

2. It is interesting to note that Edmondson and House (1981: 153) have included a
progressive + always combination in the list of typical 'Complaints' in their international
grammar, based on a corpus of conversational spoken English. A 'complaint' is defined as
"a verbal communication whereby a speaker expresses his negative view of a past action
by the hearer" (Edmondson/House 1981: 144).

3. The general framework of semantic change used here in Traugott's and Dasher's 'Invited
Referencing Theory of Semantic Change, for a short description of which see Traugott and

4. For instance, only eight examples are to be found in the period 1500–1999 in the British
part of ARCHER–2, which comprises almost 200,000 words for this sub-section.

5. This is different from the use the terms are put to by Langacker, who mostly takes a
synchronic rather than diachronic approach. The way he uses the terms "subjective" and
"subjectivity" is to refer to a particular perspective. Maximal subjectivity, in his view, can
be observed when the subject remains "off-stage and implicit, inhering in the very process
of conception without being its target" (Langacker 1999: 149). A further difference
consists in the fact that for him only a particular entity is construed subjectively or
objectively, not an expression overall (Langacker 1999: 150). For the present analysis, it
is thus Traugott's definitions of the terms which are more useful.

6. For a good overview of the references to the subjective function of the progressive in
grammars and specialised treatments from Old onwards, cf. Storms (1964), whose own
analysis is, however, highly problematic, since it neglects the (basic) aspectual function
of the progressive, trying to reduce the opposition progressive vs. non-progressive to one of
subjectivity vs. objectivity, which clearly does not work.

7. The differentiation of three types of subjective progressives is also made by Smittenberg
(2005).

8. The term 'interpretative progressive', however, seems to go back to Büysens (1968), who
studies this use in 20th century English. This function seems rather more recent than the
one I shall discuss here, but one does already find at least four-runners of this use in the
17th century (Kranich 2006). Kullie (2006) has even found a small number of Old English
examples which also seem to express the speaker's subjective interpretation.

9. These differences make approaches which do not differentiate between the different
types of subjective progressive somewhat problematic (e.g. Wright 1994, 1995). Thus, while
Wright (1994) seems to focus rather on the interpretative progressive, if one goes by the
PDE examples she cites (Wright 1994: 469), the term 'modal progressive' she uses seems
to be intended to refer to subjective uses of the progressive in general (cf. Wright 1994:
468–470). This leads to very misleading statements such as "the modal progressive is
almost exclusively associated with Modern English", which is clearly wrong if 'modal
progressive' refers to any subjective use of the progressive. Obviously examples of
subjective uses of the progressive exist from OE onwards, as the examples in 3.2.
illustrate and as Fitzmaurice (formerly Wright) also finds herself in a later paper
(Fitzmaurice 1998, cf. also the following note).

10. In a later paper, however, Fitzmaurice investigates the use of the progressive in the
<em>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</em> and comes to the conclusion that already there it seems to be used
quite commonly for "subjective speaker-expression" (Fitzmaurice 1998: 44).
Combinations of subjective progressives with ALWAYS are, however, not treated in this later study.

11. The source of the Old English examples is the DOE, unless another reference is given.
12. Middle English examples are taken from the MED, unless another reference is given.
13. At least, the subjective use of the progressive in types 1 and 2 certainly goes back to OE and has been available ever since, although details have changed (such as the increasing negative connotation of progressive + ALWAYS). Interpretative progressives (type 3), on the other hand, would seem to have developed later, and certainly only gain in frequency in late Modern times.
14. The term 'topic time' is taken over from Klein (1994:3). The term refers to the time span for which the speaker makes a claim about the situation expressed by the VP (Klein 1994:3).
15. See Nickel (1960), who shows that the progressive already in OE appears to have had significant usage since it frequently occurred in imperfactive situations.
16. Example taken from Nickel (1960:254), who stresses that this use was not influenced by the Latin original.
17. One might argue that this kind of use of the progressive is not strictly speaking 'subjective' in Traugott's definition of the term, as it is not necessarily the speaker/writer's attitude to the proposition which triggers the use of the progressive here. The choice rather has to do with narrative conventions, in the sense that the progressive is chosen to highlight the most dramatic events in a narrative. These uses for greater expressivity and vivacity are nevertheless also classified as subjective in the present paper, since a different kind of choice is involved than in the aspecl of instances - a choice which is not so much dependent on the characteristics of the situation in the real world (or a particular perspective on it), but rather on an evaluation of the event, even if it is a conventionalized, rather than personal, evaluation.
18. Further examples of OE uses of the progressive for emphasis and as a marker of speaker-involvement can be found in Huber's (1998) analysis of the use in Bede's Ecclesiastical History and in Fitzmaurice's (1998) analysis of the use in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
19. These percentages were the result of my analysis of the ARCHER-2 data, details of which were presented in 14 ICEHL (Kranisch 2002:4). The paper will be published in the proceedings. More details on the subjective progressives in the 17th and 18th centuries and on the criteria used to distinguish them can be found there.
20. Thus, Killie's view that "[a] statement to the effect that somebody constantly does (or is doing) the same things must necessarily be a subjectively coloured statement" (Killie 1994:44) does not take into account that there are some activities one can objectively always be engaged in, such as (increase-grow), (become-better-warmer-more efficient etc.) (acquire more knowledge), (look for new employees), etc. For non-agentive subjects, this may occur even more easily, as in the example (27).
21. Google was accessed on May 13th and May 14th, 2006.
22. Since Google yields massive amounts of data for this kind of search, the first 100 acceptable examples (i.e. examples which seemed to originate from first language English speakers, and were not word for word repetitions of instances already considered) were taken into account. The instances stem from a wide variety of fields, from poetry to blogs, from women's magazines to science. Even distribution between grammatical persons was achieved by taking the first 25 for each personal pronoun. The search terms were thus I'm always, you're always, he's always etc., to get progressives + ALWAYS viz. I always, you always etc. for the simple tense. Anything that did not yield an appropriate verb form following the search terms was excluded. Only present tense incences were taken into consideration to assure a high degree of comparability.

23. The distinction between primary and secondary grammaticalization is made in Traugott (forth.), who assumes that it is only primary grammaticalization which is typically linked to subjectification, while secondary grammaticalization is not necessarily accompanied by it. I have suggested that more than that, secondary grammaticalization can even be assumed to typically lead to 'objectification' (Kranisch 2005).

Sources of Data


Primary text


References


Svenja Kranich
Universität Hamburg
SFB 538 Mehrsprachigkeit
K4-Cover-Translation
Max-Planck-Allee 60
D-22765 Hamburg
email: svenja.kranich@uni-hamburg.de