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THE MODAL POTENTIAL IN THE ENGLISH PRESENT PROGRESSIVE

Abstract

Following Verhagen's suggestion that "one cannot be an optimal semanticist without also doing syntax and discourse analysis" (Verhagen 1995: 104), we attempt to analyse the English present progressive from the semantic point of view. First, we investigate the intertwined connection between tense and aspect. Then, after Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger (1982) we examine the structural and the phenomenological interpretations of events expressed in present tenses. We claim that present progressive is highly polysemous with a core meaning expressing the immediacy in temporal reality, a number of peripheral but stable senses and numerous "meaning potentials" (Norén and Linell 2007) which are substantiated only in specific contexts. Having established a general view of its meanings, we analyze unconventional uses of the present progressive i.e. its occurrence with verbs traditionally perceived as static. We suggest that modal meanings in such unconventional pairings of verb and aspect emerge as a result of a blending process (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 2003).

Keywords

Aspect; modality; conceptual blending; meaning potentials; semantics

1. Present simple and present progressive – introduction to the problem

By way of an introduction it is crucial to make a clear distinction between tense and aspect in general and present tense and progressive aspect in particular. For our further discussion we adopt a concise and elegant differentiation from Cruse (2000). Cruse claims that whereas tense locates an event in time (mostly but not exclusively with reference to the time of speaking), "aspect says nothing about

when the event occurred (except by implication), but either encodes a particular way of conceptualizing an event, or conveys information about the way the event unrolls through time” (Cruse 2000: 275). And it is this “particular way of conceptualizing an event” that we want to place special emphasis on.

First, however, let us characterize the most common usages of the English present progressive. According to Swan (1980: 496–497), it is used to express:

- a) actions and situations that are going on at the moment of speaking
- b) developing or changing situations
- c) temporary or incomplete situations
- d) future happenings
- e) sometimes for general situations (e.g. *You look lovely, when you're smiling*)
- f) for ‘background’ situations in present-tense narratives
- g) sometimes for repeated actions
- h) special use with *always*

All these uses create a network of interrelated senses, and in this respect we may state that the progressive aspect is a polysemous category with a number of stable meanings as well as their contextual modifications (“meaning potentials”). “Although tense and aspect are to be rigorously distinguished, it is sometimes the case that information that is conveyed in one language by the tense system, is conveyed in another by the aspectual system” (Cruse 2000:276). Thus, the core meaning is the one which can:

(...) indicate full and exact coincidence between the time of speaking and a representative part of an imperfectivized situation, the boundaries of which are implied in the background of the overall conception. (De Wit and Brisard 2014: 30)

There are several extensions to this prototype, two of which refer to the virtual uses of the present progressive (Langacker 1999b).

The Historical present progressive involves the internal, mental replay of an event that happened in the past, while the Futurate use of the present progressive invokes the current (mental) availability of an event that is expected to happen in the future (Langacker 2011). (De Wit and Brisard 2014: 32)

Whereas the historical present progressive adds dynamicity to the narrative, the futurate use may serve several functions. All of them are modal, in that they reflect the speaker’s attitude, certainty or knowledge about the events which are about to happen. The use of the progressive aspect as a means of expressing futurity conveys a great deal of certainty. It is not as strong as the use of the present simple, though. Consider:

Representing a situation as part of immediate reality while it is actually yet to occur indicates a high degree of certainty on the part of the speaker with regard to the future occurrence of this situation. Futurate uses of the simple present and the present progressive differ primarily in terms of the modal status they confer upon the future situation. [...] the simple present indicates that the future occurrence of a situation is regarded as inevitable, while a futurate progressive typically indicates a confident prediction (which is, by definition, liable to human fallacy and thus contingent). (De Wit and Brisard 2014: 36)

The progressive aspect may also be used to express the speaker's intentions or volition. Let us, however, introduce the simple aspect in order to compare and contrast the two. Swan characterises the simple aspect of the English present tense as follows:

The commonest use of the present simple tense is to refer to 'general time' – that is, to talk about actions and situations which happen repeatedly, or all the time, or at any time. (Swan 1980: 497)

Let us enumerate the meanings of the simple aspect:

- a) general time use (e.g. to talk about habits and routines).
- b) to talk about the future (after *if*, referring to programs, schedules or timetables)
- c) in stories and commentaries (e.g. sports commentaries)

Present simple and present progressive are similar in that:

Both constructions incorporate the present tense as an essential component, and thus in both cases the grounding relation is one of epistemic immediacy. That is, the simple present as well as the present progressive are used to designate situations that the speaker considers to be real at the time of speaking. (De Wit and Brisard 2009: 3)

On the other hand, the difference between the simple and the progressive aspect may be summarized as follows:

In our view, the basic semantic difference between the simple present and the present progressive, which is relevant for all their uses, resides in the consolidated status of an immediately real situation, or the absence of such a status. More particularly, the simple present indicates that a situation constitutes a structural part of the speaker's conception of immediate reality: its current reality is to be expected and predicted. The present progressive, on the other hand, construes a situation (real though it may be) as a contingent part of the immediate reality, i.e., its presence or actualization is not seen as

necessary and could not particularly have been expected or predicted at the time of speaking. (De Wit and Brisard: 2014: 19)

2. Methodological framework

Having outlined the general characteristics of the present progressive, let us concentrate on its meanings. The relative (perspective-dependant) and subjective (expressing speaker's intentions and volition) meanings clearly point to the importance of context in meaning selection. It is crucial, then, to introduce the pragmatic aspect to our analysis. For this reason, we adopt Norén and Linell's (2007) concept of "meaning potentials" to account for the flexible nature of the analysed constructions. We claim, that although there are certain core and stable meanings inherent to the present progressive, as enumerated by e.g. Swan, others are highly underspecified and can only be substantiated in a certain linguistic context and pragmatic environment. Regardless of the stable core meanings, "lexical meanings often change diachronically, and synchronic studies of conversation show that a dynamic sense-making of utterances takes place in local situated contexts" (Norén and Linell 2007: 387). Thus, after Norén and Linell, we claim that every lexical item as well as grammatical construction carries certain "meaning potentials" which enable it to be pragmatically enriched and modified according to the speaker's needs. Thus, semantics has to be "sensitive" to contextual influences (as opposed to context-insensitive traditional approach as represented by e.g. Cappelen and Lepore 2005). We claim that meaning creation is a dynamic process and meanings emerge in different shapes in certain conversational situations. Meaning potential, then, is defined as "the set of properties which together with contextual factors, including features of the linguistic co-text as well as various situational conditions, make possible all the usages and interpretations of the word or construction that language users find reasonably correct, or plainly reasonable in the actual situations of use" (Norén and Linell 2007: 389). For the sake of our analysis we couple this usage-based, dialogical and emergentist approach to semantics with Fauconnier and Turner's (2002, 2003) conceptual integration theory. What conceptual integration contributes to our analysis is the explanation of the emergent quality of meanings and the "multiplicity of potential meanings" (Fauconnier and Turner 2003: 64) that can appear on blending two or more elements. Combining tense with aspect may lead to the appearance of meanings unaccounted for in the dictionaries; meanings heavily reliant on the context and situational demands. We claim that present progressive has the potential to express modality not only in its futurate use but also in reference to present situations.

3. Verb and aspect

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) divide all the verbs into four types i.e. verbs expressing: activity, accomplishment, achievement, and state. Activities,

accomplishments, and achievements all involve change of state. Activity verbs are durative and describe an ongoing action. They each have an undefined beginning and end point. Accomplishment verbs, on the other hand, share with activity verbs their durativity but each has a well-defined end point, when the particular action described in the verb phrase is – or is not – completed. Achievement verbs also each have a well-defined end point; however, they have no duration. They are punctual. Stative verbs do not involve change. They depict a stable situation that is assumed to last more or less indefinitely. (Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman 1999: 119–120)

All four types can occur in present progressive, with different meanings emphasised. With activity verbs, it is the duration of the activity. With accomplishments, “the progressive focuses on progress toward a particular aim”, with achievements, because of their punctual nature, the progressive adds the meaning of iteration. State verbs were traditionally regarded as incompatible with the progressive aspect. There is a number meanings, however, which can be achieved on combining a state verb with the progressive aspect. In order to account for this synergistic effect, we offer conceptual integration analysis of verb and aspect to be presented in the following part of the paper.

Langacker makes a more general distinction into two verbal classes: the dynamic and the stative:

Langacker (2001: 255–258) divides the English verbs into two basic aspectual classes: dynamic verbs (called ‘perfective’ by Langacker; watch, learn, sing) and stative verbs (called ‘imperfectives’; know, need, want). This is done on the basis of their grammatical behavior in the present-tense paradigm. Dynamic verbs involve situations that are construed as bounded within the so-called immediate temporal scope. Situations designated by stative verbs, on the other hand, are construed as internally homogeneous and unbounded within the immediate temporal scope. This means that stative processes are constant through time: the process persists indefinitely beyond the immediate scope and remains qualitatively identical. (De Wit and Brisard 2009: 8)

Langacker illustrates perfective and imperfective verbs using the diagram:

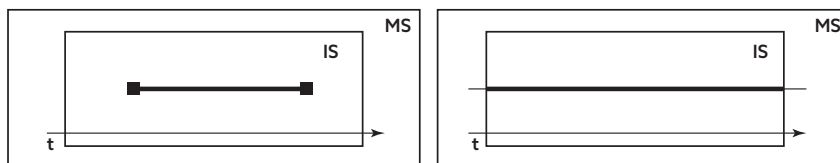


Figure 1. Diagrammatical representation of perfective (left) and imperfective (right) verb (Langacker 2001: 6, modified)

In both parts of the diagram *t* stands for time and marks the arrow. IS is the Immediate Scope of predication “that portion of the maximal scope that is immediately relevant for a given linguistic purpose” (De Wit and Brisard 2009: 8) and “always contains the profile” (Langacker 1987: 118). MS is the Maximal Scope, i.e. “overall conceptual content invoked by an expression” (De Wit and Brisard 2009: 8).

A perfective process is bounded within the immediate temporal scope. An imperfective process is a constant situation persisting indefinitely through time. However, only that portion which falls within the immediate temporal scope constitutes the processual profile, because an expression’s profile is by definition confined to the onstage region. [...] The immediate scope is the general locus of attention, in this case the span of time being attended to. Hence the profiling of an imperfective process usually involves a kind of sampling, where only a portion of an ongoing situation is selected for examination. (Langacker 2001: 5)

Langacker (1987: 255–256) mentions two main properties of imperfective verbs. The first one is that they can be used in present simple with no additional interpretations (whereas perfective verbs in present simple must be interpreted as e.g. habituals). The second criterion is that imperfectives cannot occur in the progressive construction, because, for instance:

Be is itself an imperfective verb, and the progressive construction overall has the effect of imperfectivizing what would otherwise be a perfective expression. Adding *be... -ing* to imperfectives would therefore be superfluous, and it is understandable that the evolving conventions of English have not pursued this redundant path. (Langacker 1987: 256)

Sensible and convincing as this argumentation may be, there are many cases in which imperfectivizing an imperfective verb is motivated and not redundant. Langacker (1987: 255–256) provides such examples himself, by contrasting:

- (1) J.P. resembles his father.
- (2) J.P. is resembling his father more and more every day.

Present simple implies a stable situation with an unchanging degree of similarity between the two, whereas present progressive suggests a change, here a gradual increase in the similarity.

- (3) An empty moat surrounds the dilapidated castle.
- (4) The SWAT team is surrounding the dilapidated castle.

Present simple describes a stable configuration, whereas present progressive describes a dynamic activity.

This is in line with Cruse's observation about the fact that "verbs often encode aspectual information as part of their meaning" (Cruse 2000: 278). As a result imposing the progressive on e.g. stative verbs is heavily marked. This imposition of an apparently incongruous aspect on the verb may lead to creating additional value of the whole construction. Consider the examples in which Cruse shows emergent modal meanings:

(5) I assume you will do it.

(6) I am assuming you will do it.

Here the second sentence (6) expresses speaker's diminished certainty towards a proposition.

(7) I hear a noise.

(8) I'm hearing a noise.

In the second sentence (8) "the feature appears as doubt of evidence of one's senses, admission of the possibility of hallucination" (Cruse 2000: 279)

Taylor (2002) draws an interesting analogy between the perfective/imperfective and count/mass division. He claims that perfective verbs, just like count nouns are clearly designated (in time and space respectively), bounded, and have an internal structure. Imperfective verbs, on the other hand, share many features with mass nouns, i.e. they are indefinitely extendable and internally homogeneous (Taylor 2002: 397).

Croft (2012) introduces a very insightful and useful concept of "aspectual potential" of verbs and links it with the problem of construal. He defines aspect, after Comrie (1976) as "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" and treats this definition as a starting point for more detailed discussions on aspect. "Aspectual potential" of verbs refers to their inherent meaning as opposed to the contextual one. This inherent potential makes certain verbs more suitable in certain contexts. In other words, verbs' semantic value enforces a certain construal on them, e.g. the meaning of the verb *to give* enforces a ditransitive scenario with three participants, but it is not restrictive as to the aspect type. The verb *to sneeze* however, used in the progressive aspect requires an iterative interpretation, as it refers to a bounded and punctual action. (*He was sneezing for half an hour.*) Stative verbs avoid the progressive, unless any of the special meanings (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999) is intended or, as we claim, unless there is a need to express modality. Aspectual potential may also, and this bears special interest to our paper, cause a certain clash of expectations,

when e.g. stative verbs are used in unorthodox ways, i.e. in the progressive aspect. This marked usage constitutes flouting an orthodox maxim, and as a result, calls for a special interpretation.

Freund (2016) upholds a distinction between the “grammatical” and “lexical” aspect. She states that the first one is subjective, as it depends on the speaker’s choice and personal perspective of the event described. The lexical aspect, in turn, is related to the inherent semantic properties of the verb in question. Apart from expressing the core aspectual functions, she says, “the progressive can also be used to express a wide range of emotions and attitudes” form intensifying the emotion, to hedging a statement in order for it to sound more polite and tentative. She claims that “[t]he subjective or non-aspectual functions (...) are sometimes considered to be problematic, as they do not fit easily with the progressive’s core meanings of temporariness or incompleteness.” (Freund 2016: 52)

Indeed, this problem has been noted before, by e.g. Wherrity and Granath (2014). They address it making a distinction between the basic meanings of the sign and the messages that the speaker actually wants to express. Basic meanings are underspecified and imprecise in order to be more flexible and work in different contexts. They “serve as prompts or cues which guide hearers in the construction of messages”. Messages, in turn, are considered to be the hearers’ interpretations of the speakers’ communicative intentions. In this way, they have the best of both worlds, i.e. they preserve the neat classification of meanings with the core meaning (“process in time”) which serves as the prototype as well as the conceptual variability which, effectively, accounts for the use of any verb in every possible aspect. Peripheral meanings are regarded as contextual variables, and “these include both *aspectual* messages such as ongoingness, progressivity, temporary state, change of state, duration, and incompleteness, as well as *subjective* messages such as annoyance, approval/disapproval, irritation, and disbelief, etc.” (Wherrity and Granath 2014: 11).

Finally, Kranich (2010) provides a typology of the subjective senses of the progressive and divides them into “subjective progressives with *always*”, “subjective progressives without *always*” and what she calls “interpretative progressives”.

Let us now provide a deeper insight into various contextual interpretations of present progressive.

4. Present simple and present progressive – structural vs phenomenal interpretations of situations

Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger (1982) offer a division of what the progressive marker expresses into two semantic domains, one that is aspectual in a strict sense, and one that deals with a more abstract notion of “metaphysical status”. The division finds its reflection in that of phenomenal vs. structural interpretations of a situation. It is, therefore, the perspective or even the speaker’s attitude

towards a situation which determines the use of the present tense in either simple or progressive aspect. Consider (Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger 1982: 81):

(9) The engine isn't smoking anymore.

(10) The engine doesn't smoke anymore.

They suggest that the first sentence (9) is uttered by someone directly experiencing the situation i.e. it describes the situation phenomenologically. It is a comment based on the visual evidence, "an observation, rather than a claim about its being repaired" (Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger 1982: 81). The sentence in (10), though, can be uttered by a mechanic claiming that the engine is actually repaired. Such a statement can be made even without the engine running. Thus, it implies some type of a permanent, structural change in the engine itself, whereas the first one is about a temporary, probably accidental change due to external factors, such as the temperature of the engine, etc. We observe a similar relation in the following:

(11) This law raises the price of oil by 10c a gallon.

(12) This law is rising the price of oil by 10c a gallon.

The point of the law in sentence (11) is to raise the price of oil, it is what was written into the law, and it is its structural property. The second sentence (12) refers to the "observable consequences of the law, leaving quite open whether the price hike was its original intended result" (Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger 1982: 82). We find an echo of this understanding of the semantics of aspects in Langacker. Consider the following examples (Langacker 1999a: 94):

(13) This machine lacks a control lever.

(14) This machine is lacking a control lever.

Whereas the conventional and unmarked use of the present simple in (13) merely states the fact, suggesting that the lack of lever is in the machine's design, the example in (14) guides us into another interpretation. The semantic value provided by the progressive aspect extends the expected reference to the temporariness of the situation by encouraging the negotiation of meaning between the speaker and the hearer (Langacker 2007). In Langacker's (1999a: 94) parlance, an example such as (14) "intimates a contingent situation finding the machine in need of repair." Similarly:

(15) This road winds through the mountains

(16) This road is winding through the mountains.

The example in (15) represents a typical use of present simple and describes a static situation which is unlikely to change overnight. It may be used while describing a map or planning a trip to the mountains. The use of the progressive in (16) does not change the situation itself but rather the perspective from which the situation is viewed: it is more subjective in that it places us in the “conceptualizer’s shoes”. The winding of the road is not temporary or short-lived, but the conceptualizer’s experience or perception of it is. It is related to the sequential scanning (Langacker 2008) done by the conceptualizer while e.g. travelling, rather than the holistic perception of a scenery or a road map. Also, the notion of change is inscribed into the progressive meaning, as “what constitutes the *road* in this situation is limited to whatever segment of it falls within the current scope of predication, and this segment changes from one instant to the next” (Langacker 1987: 257).

Hence, using a present tense either entails that the speaker is currently experiencing a situation (via perception or internal awareness) or that she regards this situation as constitutive of her world (and thus always true). In both cases, the situation is construed as epistemically immediate to the speaker at the time of speaking: mentally, it can be grasped immediately, either by accessing the current contents of our perceptual awareness or by retrieving it from the stock of structural knowledge we have about the world. (De Wit and Brisard 2014: 19)

The choice of the progressive aspect, even with the verbs which are usually unwilling to adopt it, may stress the temporariness and changeability of the situation. Also, it is related to the conceptualizer’s perspective and presents a different construal. In other words, those two sentences “structure the same objective scene by means of alternative images, particularly in regard to scale and scope of predication” (Langacker 1987: 257). Moreover, we claim that an unconventional use may signal the shift in the verb’s semantic profile, or open up new interpretations. Consider:

(17) The book consists of three chapters.

(18) The book is consisting of three chapters.

Whereas the first sentence (17) merely describes the structure of the book, the interpretation of the sentence in (18) is not so clear and can be shaped by the context of use to a great extent. In other words, one of its “meaning potentials” is substantiated in a certain way in this particular context. Thus, when uttered by someone writing the book, it may refer to its current length. Apparently, more than three chapters are planned, but at the present moment only three of them are ready. It may also be uttered by someone observing a child tearing up page after

page. The book used to consist of more than three chapters, but at the moment just three of them are left intact.

Interestingly, this “temporal” interpretation may be disrupted if we take the speaker’s emotional attitude into account. Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger provide another pair of examples:

- (19) The statute of Tom Paine now stands at the corner of Kirkland and College, but everybody expects the new Administration to move it.
- (20) The statute of Tom Paine is standing at the corner of Kirkland and College, and nobody thinks the deadlocked City Council will ever find a proper place for it.

Apparently, with the use of the simple aspect in example (19), the speaker manifests their acceptance as to the location of the statue, even though it may be subject to some change in the future. In the latter example, the use of the progressive i.e. the weaker form suggests, that the speaker is unhappy with the location of the statute or thinks that it “has *not* been determined by the proper procedures” (Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger 1982).

Let us now elaborate on another usage of the progressive aspect, namely that with the verb *be*. To quote Swan again:

You can say *I’m being careful* or *You’re being annoying*, but not **I’m being happy* or **She’s being tired*. We use the progressive tenses of *be* (*I’m being*, etc), to talk about people’s activity and behaviour, but not about states of mind and feelings. (...) Compare:
I’m being careful. (just now), *I’m a careful person*. (always) (Swan 1980: 96)

Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger (1982) suggest the same structural vs. phenomenal distinction for a proper interpretation of such examples. The simple aspect refers to the structural, descriptive account of a person’s character. The progressive aspect describes behaviour, mostly unusual for a person we know, or stranger’s behaviour that we witness and cannot judge as typical of them or not.

What is more, the “notions of surprise, atypicality or unexpectedness, irritation or indignation and tentativeness” (De Wit and Brisard 2009: 12) are linked to the progressive aspect under certain circumstances.

There is a special use of the present progressive with *always*, *constantly*, *continually*, and *forever* to talk about things that often happen unexpectedly or annoyingly (Swan 1980: 497). Consider:

- (21) I always meet Henry in the Red Lion.
- (22) I’m always meeting Henry in the Red Lion.

The first sentence (21) states the fact. The Red Lion is our regular meeting place. The use of the progressive aspect in (22) suggests accidental nature of the situation. We do not arrange those meetings, but in any case we bump into each other there a lot. It does not necessarily imply any tone of irritation or criticism, but rather the somehow surprising accidentality of the repeated situation. On the other hand (Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger 1982: 86):

(23) Old Lily always feeds the pigeons in the park.

(24) Old Lily is always feeding the pigeons in the park.

This use of the progressive aspect does not imply any accidentality. Old Lily's actions are deliberate. There is a sense of criticism present in this usage. On the basis of the evidence (i.e. old Lily's repeated actions) the speaker can draw enough conclusions to characterise her and be justified in using the simple aspect. The simple aspect describes her habitual behaviour and hence it is the description of the structure of reality. Using the weaker option i.e. the progressive aspect instead suggests that "the speaker finds such behaviour distasteful, and hence we may reasonably infer that a sense of mild reproof (perhaps unconscious) is involved" (Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger 1982: 86).

5. Data

We emphasize the modal reading of the English present progressive illustrating our analysis with linguistic data from the Internet. We find the Internet discourse in general and social communicators, discussion fora, and comments sections in particular, exceptionally useful. There are some types of discourse which are more conducive to language change than others. Spoken language is more liberal and open to experimentation, as opposed to rather stable written texts. Yet, the language of Internet social networking sites, discussion fora, and comments sections seems to be even more adequate for exchanging personal information, which, in turn, calls for a multiplication of tools used to express subjectivity. It is fast-paced enough to accelerate language evolution (the quality is shares with speech). It is interactional and dialogical to a great extent, which opens the possibility for the intersubjective meaning manipulation between the speakers (a feature which is missing in traditional written texts). And at the same time the data coming from the Internet is permanent and reliable enough to be used in a linguistic study. For the purpose of our investigation we extract internet data using UkWaC web-derived (more than two-billion-word) corpus, which limits the scope to the .uk domain and maximises the chances of selecting only British English native speakers' responses. In order to maintain this paper within certain length, we focus on the unconventional uses of a single verb *to want* in present progressive. From among the examples found in the corpus we manually extract

those, whose meanings cannot be obviously classified under any of the special core meanings enumerated in the sections above, and where we suspect some modal quality to emerge.

6. Emergent meanings in “progressive statives”

Coupling a stative verb with the progressive aspect may lead to the emergence of novel, unconventional meanings, or “extra effects”. These “extra effects” are enumerated by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) as well as Gavis (1997) and Kesner Bland (1988). “Progressive statives” can express:

- a. intensify the emotion expressed by the verb (*I'm hating this assignment.*)
- b. indicate current behaviour as opposed to general description (*He's being rude.*)
- c. introduce change in states by focusing on differences in degree across time (*I'm understanding less and less about life, the older I get.*)
- d. show limited duration (*Are you understanding this?.*)
- e. emphasise conscious involvement (*What we are seeing is a red dwarf star.*)
- f. show vividness (*One night in the middle of the night, I'm hearing dripping.*)
- g. express politeness (*Are you liking it?.*)
- h. mitigate criticism (*I like the piano first notes, but I'm not liking it where the strings come in.*)
- g. avoid imposition (*I was just wanting to invite you to a gathering...*)

In conjunction with this consider the following diagram which represents the internal structure of the English present progressive:

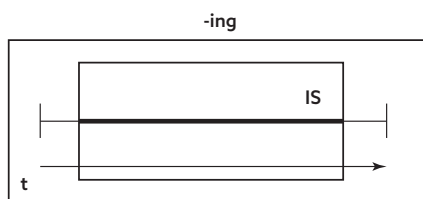


Figure 2. The process of imperfectivization

In Figure 2. *t* symbolizes time and IS is the immediate scope of the profiled *perfective process* (upper line), from which its endpoints are excluded by the imposition of IS (section in bold). Note that the conceptualization presented here is incompatible with the use of imperfective verbs: one can hardly imperfectivize a process which is imperfective already. And yet, this is exactly what happens in the case of stative (i.e. imperfective) verbs used in the progressive form: IS is imposed on the imperfective process. In other words:

By using the progressive, the dynamicity of the original state is increased (in that it, for instance, requires more effort or control to be maintained) and its limited duration is reflected in the presence of boundaries in the background. Hence, the stative situation is *recategorized* as a dynamic one (Michaelis 2004). At the same time, the progressive imperfectivizes the inner part of this derived dynamic situation (i.e., it turns it into a state within the immediate scope imposed by the -ing-form), so that it can be made to coincide with the ground. (De Wit and Brisard 2014: 26)

In what follows we shall account for this “anomaly” by combining Langacker’s approach to imperfectives with Norén and Linell’s idea of “meaning potentials” a conceptual integration theory model developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002, 2004).

Language relativism mentioned by Cruse (2000) in relation to different languages conveying different types of information either by tense or aspect marking, is crucial for understanding the emergent meaning of the English present progressive. The problem is more complex, as there exists a distinction between “aspect as a semantic phenomenon, and aspect markers in a particular language, which may have a variety of semantic functions. To make things even more complicated, a lexical verb may encode aspectual information as part of lexical meaning; this may affect the way the meaning of the verb interacts with the meanings of aspectual markers with which it is associated” (Cruse 2000: 275). In other words, the meaning of a given aspect may be conveyed in many different ways, and also a form mainly responsible for carrying an aspectual meaning may also have other interpretations.

We propose now the following diagram illustrating the processes which are occurring when the progressive aspect of the English present tense is joined with a stative verb.

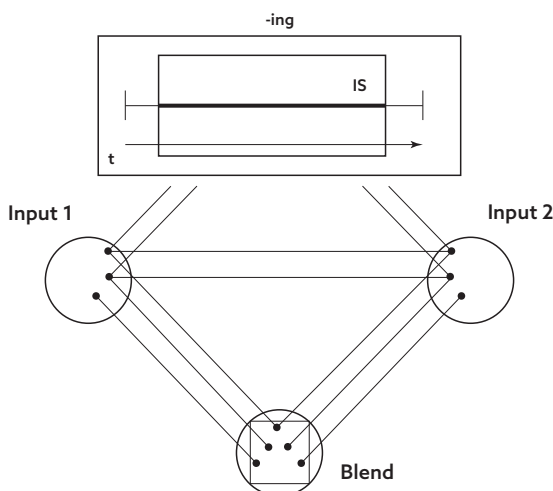


Figure 3. Progressive aspect providing a generic space in the conceptual blending model

Consider now the following example:

- (25) Okay, I'm wanting to write a book about my first two seasons as an #effzeh fan. Also want to write a Bundesliga season preview mag. BUSY!

The speaker is not busy because she merely has a desire to write a book, but because she is actually going to write it or even has already started writing it. This change in the semantic profile may be illustrated as follows:

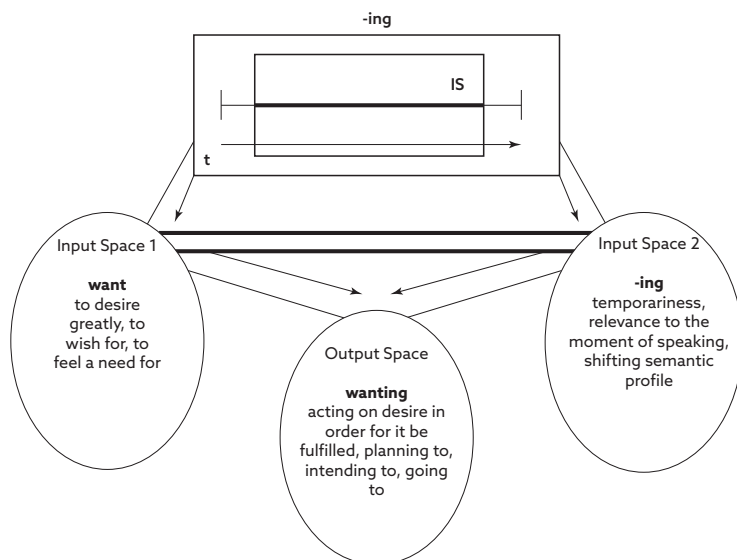


Figure 4. Unified model illustrating the use of the verb *want* in the progressive aspect

What this figure shows is an integrated view of the theories introduced above. We claim that by joining the two approaches we are able to account for “meaning potentials” of words and expressions in a more comprehensive way. Not only do we take into consideration meanings inherent to forms, but also those semantic components which emerge in the blending process and thus cannot be directly derived from either of the input spaces. The semantic information provided by the verb itself is supplemented by that of the progressive aspect. The process is subsumed under the model of imperfectivization in order to expose the unconventionality of such a use. Merging the content of Input Space 1 with the content of Input Space 2, namely the desire or wish for something with the relevance to the present moment and the immediate context in which the sentence occurred, we arrive at a more complex meaning which can represent the conceptualizer’s intentions to the greatest extent. In other words, such an analysis justifies interpreting *I’m wanting* not only as an expression of a desire, but actually planning to, going to or even acting on that desire. This interpretation is not fixed, but with the increased

frequency of use it may become established and accepted in language. Even isolated usages may spark a lasting change if found useful enough by the speakers. For a more detailed analysis and more examples including unconventional uses of verbs such as: *want*, *believe*, *understand*, and *remember*, see Pražmo 2016.

The corpus lists 99 examples with the phrase *I am wanting*. We limit our query only to this expression, as the study is only meant to be illustrative, rather than exhaustive. Here is a selection of items which exhibit certain modal colouring (e.g. decreased certainty on the part of the speaker or the shift towards intentionality similar to that present at the earlier stages of diachronic development of *to be going to* structure). For convenience and better visibility, we put *wanting* in bold together with any lexical elements which strengthen the impression of speaker's doubts and uncertainty towards the proposition as well as introduce the feeling of tentativeness. We claim that the presence of such expressions adds credibility to Goldsmith and Woisetschlaeger's idea of present progressive inviting a phenomenological interpretation of a situation.

- (26) hi i am **wanting** a guinea pig **but i have no** cage or hutch please reply if u have one for sale i am in yorkshire area but can not travel thanx
- (27) I am **wanting** to balance my intellectual capacities with my feelings and emotions and with communicating a sense of empathy to my readers
- (28) PS. sorry I don't get to post much or catch up, I am **wanting** to build relationships here, **but** rebecca is needing more attention too these days and, well Im sure you understand, **I do what I can**
- (29) I am **wanting** to change my storage heating to radiators **but do not have** a gas option.
- (30) I am **wanting** to find out if it is possible to buy one of these in the uk and if so the price and how I go about ordering one. I seem to be able to read all about it **but can't work out how to** get one!
- (31) I am **wanting** to offer you, the reader, a communication of my insight into the nature of educational, what is educational for me? And I am hoping to share that with you in a way which is comprehensible. But let me start by saying that in writing this paper I am wanting to open up to myself as well as to others the meaning that I am discovering in educational enquiry
- (32) The mower (4 stroke engine) was my fathers. I am **wanting** to overhaul it & **wondered if anyone can tell** me where to get spare parts from.
- (33) I am **wanting** to paint directly on the wood and not prime, **but I'm worried** I will like what I've painted and then it will fall apart

- (34) I am **wanting** to request a change in this policy and **was wondering if anyone had any opinions on this**.
- (35) I am **wanting** to set up a nurse-led clinic for A.D/H.D. children in CAMHS. **Is there any literature about** the cost saving implications for such an initiative?
- (36) Approx 1kg per cake I am **wanting** to start making sugar flowers **but I need to know where** I can get information on what tools I need, and what is the best book I can get to start me off.
- (37) Hi, I am **wanting** to take over a pub that has just close down. An agency own the pub and I want to rent the lease **I dont know where to start**.
- (38) Hi there I am **wanting** to get into the child care career **but can not leave my job** at the moment so thinking about studying part time and then move into child care next year. **Can anybody help me by letting me know if** this course is any good or if it will be a waste of time.
- (39) At present I am **wanting** to go back to work in a few months **but do not know what to do about** child care. The cost of a nanny is prohibitive (partly because we live in London) and I am too nervous to put him in to nursery before he can tell us is he has a bleed.
- (40) I am **wanting** to improve the security on my fuel card purchases by specifying daily and weekly drawing limits for my drivers. **Can I do this?**
- (41) I am **wanting** to have my roof reslated with all new slates. The colour will differ from the ones I have at present, as my roof is over 100 years old. **However** I am a mid-terrace house, **and wondered if I need to** approach my neighbours for their permission, due to the different colours of tiles that will overlap their properties

What these examples show is the combination of a stative verb with a progressive aspect obtaining a very specific sense (making use of one of its latent “meaning potentials” through pragmatic enrichment in every context). We hypothesise that this emergent quality comes into being due to the process of conceptual integration as described above.

To sum up our discussion on the modality of the English present progressive and the semantic potential it exhibits, let us quote De Wit and Brisard again:

The presence of all these more or less modally colored connotations with the use of the present progressive in English suggests a constant meaning element (for at least some usage types) that may be held to motivate these,

directly or indirectly. Seeing this meaning as part and parcel of the progressive's core semantics, which we in fact characterize as being wholly modal in nature, in our eyes constitutes a more economical and in any case unified account of the progressive's polysemy: modal meanings are not treated as being in any way secondary or exceptional, and temporal meanings are first and foremost motivated by an epistemic schema, in line with Cognitive Grammar's general description of 'grounding predications'. (De Wit and Brisard 2009: 13)

Epistemic modal meanings of the English present progressive are thus inextricably intertwined with the remaining semantic nodes constituting the network of its senses.

7. Concluding remarks and prospects of further research

In this paper we attempt to account for the modal meaning potential found in the English present progressive. We provide a typology of meanings and organize them into radial categories with certain prominent nodes to which similar meanings belong. Then we show that some of the uses defy this classification and have to be analysed separately as pragmatically enriched "meaning potentials". We try to explain these unconventional uses and prove that they are motivated and used advisedly and consistently. They serve to indicate speaker's attitude towards an event being described and thus, can be said to possess some modal potential. We claim that this modality is neither inherent in the verb, nor in the aspect, but rather emerges in the context as a result of the process of conceptual integration. Conceptual integration thus proves very useful and versatile as a tool for explaining emergent meanings, even if the integration occurs across categories of different types (e.g. lexicon and syntax). We treat this piece of research as a pilot study which opens possibilities for explaining other 'anomalies' and unconventional uses of syntactic forms.

A natural step forward is to go beyond the synchronic perspective and investigate the diachronic behaviour of the structures studied. There seems to be a shift towards greater acceptance of uses of present progressive with stative verbs, traditionally deemed as unconventional or even ungrammatical. This may lead not only to the semantic shift and gradual conventionalisation of such uses in new contexts, but also to form modification. This has been already observed by Freund (2016) in the case of the disappearing prepositions following the verb *to think* used in the progressive. She quotes numerous examples in which the structure *I'm thinking* is followed directly by noun phrases etc. (*I'm thinking blanket, candles and a lazy evening*). The supposed meaning of this structure is that of visualising a future event with a hint of uncertainty (i.e. with some modal colouring). *I'm wanting*, in turn, seems to begin transition similar to that of *I'm going to*. The majority of the instances listed in the analysed corpus have a clearly intentional

meanings and could be replaced by *I'm going to* without any significant change of meaning. What seems to be lacking, is the final stage of evolution, i.e. acquiring the function of futurity marker. Investigating whether *I'm wanting to* has already started appearing in this capacity, remains beyond the scope of this paper, but presents an interesting challenge for further study.

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