

Abstract

Periphrasticity across the board – a comparative look on periphrastic verbal structures in the domain of progressivity

Progressivity can be expressed by different linguistic means, be it lexical ones (such as adverbials; e.g. germ. *gerade* ‘just’), morphological ones (such as flecional endings in certain past tenses in Romance languages; e.g. fr. *parlait* ‘was talking’, it. *cantava* ‘was singing’) or morphosyntactic ones (such as periphrastic verbal structures; e.g. sp./cat./port. *estar* + ger., dut. *zitten te* + inf. [both ‘be V_{ing}’]). The periphrastic type, in particular, surfaces in a great variety of constructions (cf. also Bybee/Dahl 1989), although with differing degrees of frequency, complexity and grammaticalisation (cf. e.g. engl. *be* + ger. vs. germ. *dabei sein zu* + inf. vs. swed. *ligga och* + V_{conj.} [all ‘be V_{ing}’]).

In order to get a more fine-grained picture of the ‘typology of periphrasticity’ in the domain of progressivity, the present paper revisits 5 Germanic languages (English, German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian) and 5 Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese) as to their progressive markers. Data from Bertinetto/Ebert/de Groot (2000), Bertinetto (2000) and Ebert (2000) served as a basis for the analysis, combined with results from diverse corpuslinguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Katelhön 2016, Flecken 2011, Behrens/Flecken/Carroll 2013, Author et al. 2022). Broadly following the categories established by Bertinetto/Ebert/de Groot (2000), most Western Germanic and Romance languages show (more or less grammaticalised) instances of verbal complexes with copula verbs (e.g. engl. *be* + ger., sp./cat./port. *estar* + ger.), sometimes joined by a preposition (e.g. germ. *am/beim/im* + inf. + *sein* [lit. ‘be at/with/in’], it. *stare a* + inf. [lit. ‘be at’]). Another frequent construction type (especially in Romance languages) is that of motion verbs as auxiliaries (e.g. sp. *ir/venir/andar* + ger. [lit. ‘go/come/walk’], but also dut. *lopen te* + inf. [lit. ‘run to’]). As to the use of postural verbs, two types can be distinguished: (i) the auxiliary type (e.g. dut. *zitten/liggen/staan/hangen te* + inf. [lit. ‘sit/lie/stand/hang to’]); and (ii) the pseudo-coordinative type (e.g. norw. *sitter/ligger/står og* + V_{conj.} [lit. ‘sit/lie/stand and’]). For the Northern Germanic languages, furthermore, auxiliated structures with ‘hold on to’ are listed as progressive markers (e.g. swed. *hålla på att* + inf.). Apart from that, a couple of more complex periphrastic structures are attested (e.g. dut. *bezig zijn te* + inf. [lit. ‘be busy to’], fr. *être en train de* + inf. [lit. ‘be in the course to’]).

However, the status of the above-mentioned periphrastic structures in terms of usage and grammaticalisation appears highly variable, some of them being restricted to specific (syntactic or semantic) conditions, others to certain regional, social or stylistic contexts (cf. also e.g. Krause 2002, Van Pottelberge 2004, Behrens/Flecken/Carroll 2013, Author et al. 2022). An integrated model might situate English (which currently shows the most grammaticalised marker, *be* + ger.) in a kind of ‘linking position’ – on the one hand connecting to highly grammaticalised structures as found in many Romance languages (e.g. sp./cat./port. *estar* + ger.), on the other hand to preliminary stages of grammaticalisation as found in many Germanic languages (e.g. germ. *am/beim/im* + inf. + *sein*).

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(495 words; excl. examples and references)