

A Cognitive Grammar View on the Be+V-ing Construction

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This study demonstrates how Langacker's (1991: 209-211) cognitive grammar view of the Be+V-ing construction can help us better understand the basic core meaning of the construction as well as the basic contrast between the construction with an *always*-type adverbial (the *always*+Be+V-ing hereafter) and its simple counterpart diachronically as well as synchronically.

Kranich (2010: 217) assumes that the *always*+Be+V-ing developed to express by default a negative speaker attitude in the 20th century, because temporariness signified by the Be+V-ing conflicts with and continuity implied by the adverb. However, why the conflict should arise and lead to a negative meaning is not entirely clear. Besides, nearly half of the *always*+Be+V-ing is used in a non-negative sense. Moreover, already in the 18th century, the periphrasis was used in a negative sense as often as it is now. Over 250 examples of the *always*+Be+V-ing in the 18th century texts that I have found evidence it. Most of them had been left unexplored, though the century is a critical period in investigating the construction.

Langacker (1991: 209) analyzes that the "internal perspective" on which the construction takes the participialized situation is a product of integrating **BE** functioning as the profile determinant and the head of the composite structure with the **V-ing**. It should effect the conceptualizer **being existent** in the midst of (i.e., experiencing the portion of) **the participialized situation**. As the construction profiles internality (inside-ness) rather than temporariness, the participialized situation can be of any span, as long as an internal phase of it is perceivable. As the inside portion, captured through the perspective, is shorter than the whole, it can most likely be connected to the clearer, more focalized and vivid imageries. What triggers emotional coloring would, then, not necessarily be the conflict, but rather the close link between the clearer picture and emotional involvement (c.f. Kensinger: 2007).

Langacker's cognitive grammar can powerfully account diverse phenomena of the construction most comprehensively with just one adjustment that is to accept aspect-neutrality of the periphrasis. As Killie's (2014) diachronic study shows, stative verbs also have always been taking the construction. More than 250 examples of the Be+V-ing construction with a stative verb from the 18th century texts support this. The participialized situation, whether stative or not, has an internal phase. Langacker (1991: 262-266) notes that the simple present, including habituals, generally receives a stative construal. While *He walks home* is a habitual, *He's walking home* can denote an internal phase of either a dynamic situation or a habitual. If *Beavers always build dams* predicates a habitual, so does *Beavers are always building dams*. It designates a metaphysical situation inductively derived from the conceptualizer's actual individual perception of the situation ongoing whenever an occasion of assessment occurs to the speaker, whether the speaker may or may not find the animals' behavior annoying. The difference between *I love it*, *I'm loving it* and *I'm always loving it* can also be described in a parallel manner.

Furthermore, Langacker's (1991: 26) insightful idea of profile shifting can relate the V-ing in the construction not only to the gerundive V-ing but also to a diachronic fact that the form largely functioned as an abstract noun in OE (Irwin: 1967). An early variant of the construction comprising BE and {at/ in/ on}+V-ing also suggests its adequacy. Thanks to his conceptual tool devised in his theoretical framework, we can see that the periphrases with or without *always* have had consistent properties throughout history.

References

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