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# Beyond aspect: will be -ing and shall be -ing

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1 **Beyond aspect: *will be -ing* and *shall be -ing***<sup>1</sup>

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8 This article discusses the synchronic status and diachronic development of *will be -ing*  
9 and *shall be -ing* (as in *I'll be leaving at noon*).<sup>2</sup> Although available since at least Middle  
10 English, the constructions did not establish a significant foothold in standard English until  
11 the twentieth century. Both types are also more prevalent in British English (BrE) than  
12 American English (AmE).

13 We argue that in present-day usage *will/shall be -ing* are aspectually underspecified:  
14 instances that clearly construe a situation as future-in-progress are in the minority.  
15 Similarly, although volition-neutrality has been identified as a key feature of *will/shall be*  
16 *-ing*, it is important to take account of other, generally richer meanings and associations,  
17 notably 'future-as-matter-of-course' (Leech 2004), 'already-decided future' (Huddleston  
18 & Pullum et al. 2002) and non-agentivity. Like volition-neutrality, these characteristics  
19 appear to be relevant not only in contemporary use, but also in their historical expansion.  
20 We show that the construction has evolved from progressive aspect towards more  
21 subjectivised evidential meaning.

22 1 Introduction

23 *Will be -ing* and *shall be -ing* are among the least discussed expressions in English to  
24 refer to the future. The few studies that address these constructions tend to focus on  
25 synchronic usage, primarily their alleged status as exceptional uses of the progressive  
26 (see e.g. Leech 2004; Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002; Williams 2002). On their  
27 diachronic development, we find a few brief remarks on the timing of the historical  
28 emergence of *will be -ing* and *shall be -ing*. According to Mustanoja (1960: 591) and  
29 Strang (1970: 208), both patterns have been attested since at least Middle English,  
30 while Visser (1963–73: 2412) dates them even earlier. The only attempt we are aware  
31 of to hypothesise *how* these constructions emerged is a short section in Samuels (1972).

<sup>1</sup> For comments on earlier versions of this article, we would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, as well as Cristiano Broccias, Mark Davies, Sebastian Hoffmann, Geoffrey Leech, Patricia Ronan and audiences at the ESSE8 seminar on 'What future for the future tense in English?' (30 August 2006) and a research seminar at the University of Manchester (22 April 2008).

<sup>2</sup> In the present article, *'ll* is treated as the contraction of *will*. Historically, *'ll* probably derives from a weakened form of *will* (see Barber 1964: 134, and section 5.2.1).

32 We suggest that *will be -ing* and *shall be -ing* merit closer scrutiny. Firstly, the variant  
 33 with *will* is in fact encountered in a variety of discourse types in Present-Day English.  
 34 Following are some typical examples found in contemporary usage:

- 35 (1) This store *will be closing* in 5 minutes.  
 36 (A standard announcement in UK stores at around 5.25 pm).  
 37 (2) This train *will be calling* at Preston, Chorley, . . .  
 38 (automated announcement, Transpennine Express trains, UK, 2005-present).  
 39 (3) In a few hours' time President Bush *will be giving* his State of the Union Address.  
 40 (BBC Newsnight, 20/1/2004).  
 41 (4) *Will you be needing* the OHP? (asked of a speaker before giving a conference paper)  
 42 (5) Your car *will be waiting* for you when you arrive.  
 43 (6) *BCNU* (= Mobile phone texting abbreviation for 'Be seeing you')

44 Corpus data, moreover, confirm that in recent times there have been significant  
 45 frequency developments in standard English. *Will be -ing*, especially, has raised its  
 46 profile among future expressions during the last century. *Shall be -ing*, too, seems to  
 47 have grown in use at around the same time, though to a lesser extent.

48 Furthermore, we find that this is one part of the progressive paradigm where there  
 49 is clear regional divergence between standard BrE and standard AmE. *Will be -ing* is  
 50 markedly more popular in BrE. This could be one reason why it has not been commented  
 51 on much by American linguists.

52 The main area in which *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing* have been previously discussed—  
 53 and in which we would like to advance the debate — is that of meaning. It has been  
 54 argued that certain instances of these constructions are characterised by a meaning that  
 55 is not aspectual, or at least not progressive. Whereas (5) above is clearly progressive,  
 56 examples such as (1) and (2) would be deemed 'progressive in form but non-progressive  
 57 in meaning' by Wekker (1976: 116), as not indicating duration by Palmer (1990: 151),  
 58 as 'perfective' by Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 172) and as applying 'to a single  
 59 happening viewed in its entirety' by Leech (2004: 67). In other words, the prototypical  
 60 features of progressive aspectual meaning, or 'progressivity',<sup>3</sup> such as ongoingness  
 61 and duration are alleged to be absent.<sup>4</sup> A less popular view is that cases such as (1) and  
 62 (2) can still be construed as in progress, albeit in an extended sense (see Hirtle 1967  
 63 and Williams 2002).

64 It is sometimes contended that *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing* imply further meaning,  
 65 beyond the notion of aspect. According to Hirtle (1967) and Leech (2004), for instance,  
 66 the realisation of the future situation is construed as 'a matter of course', Huddleston &  
 67 Pullum et al. (2002) speak in terms of the future as 'already decided', whereas Samuels  
 68 (1972) and Gachelin (1997) deem it 'pure' or 'colourless' future (see also Declerck,  
 69 this issue). These accounts share a common thread: the idea that the future situation

<sup>3</sup> We borrow this term from Comrie (1976), to distinguish the meaning of the construction from its form.

<sup>4</sup> For some commentators (e.g. Adamczewski & Delmas 1982) cases such as this provide compelling evidence that 'progressive' is a misnomer for the *be + -ing* construction. It is because of this controversy, and potential confusability of form and function, that we refer to the constructions as *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing* rather than *will/shall + the progressive*.

70 ‘will come to pass without the interference or the volition of anyone concerned’ (Leech  
71 2004: 67). However, the characterisations involve subtle differences, which need to be  
72 elucidated and assessed against a body of authentic data.

73 Thus our article is concerned with the following questions:

- 74 (a) How frequent are *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing* in absolute terms, and in  
75 comparison to other constructions referring to the future? How frequent are  
76 they across different genres or text types? How do BrE and AmE compare in  
77 these respects?
- 78 (b) How can we characterise the synchronic meaning of *shall be -ing* and *will*  
79 *be -ing* in terms of aspect, and other implied meanings? Can we resolve  
80 the apparent anomaly of two aspectual values (namely, progressive and non-  
81 progressive) expressed by a single construction?
- 82 (c) What selectional preferences and constraints are there on the two  
83 constructions, in terms of, for example, subject selection, choice of lexical  
84 verb, and combinability with the passive?
- 85 (d) What, if anything, is the connection between the meanings, in synchronic and  
86 diachronic terms?
- 87 (e) What evidence do we have regarding the historical spread in use of *will/shall*  
88 *be -ing*?

89 Our study is corpus-based, embracing a range of corpora and privately collected  
90 examples from the twentieth century and earlier. Due to a paucity of examples before  
91 1900, our comments on historical developments are necessarily speculative.

92 Although other modal auxiliaries can combine with *be -ing* to refer to future situations  
93 (e.g. *She may be leaving tomorrow*), we do not focus on these constructions. Nor, for  
94 reasons of space, do we discuss the related *be going to + be -ing* form. These patterns  
95 are, however, implicitly dealt with in some general remarks we make about the effect  
96 of combining modals with *be -ing*.

## 97 2 Data and methodology

98 Our analyses are both qualitative and quantitative. Most of the synchronic discussion  
99 is based on qualitative analysis of privately collected examples and corpus data. For  
100 the historical part, we focus on two primary sets of corpus data:

- 101 (a) The ARCHER corpus, version 3.1, consisting of 1.7 million words of English  
102 from 1650 (the end of the early modern period) to 1990, sampled in fifty-year  
103 subperiods (cf. Biber et al. 1994). ARCHER contains a variety of written  
104 and spoken (or speech-like) genres: journals, letters, fiction, news reportage,  
105 medicine, science, drama and sermons. BrE is included in all subperiods, and  
106 AmE for 1750–99, 1850–99 and 1950–90 only.
- 107 (b) The ‘Brown family’ of corpora: a set of matching one-million-word corpora  
108 of written BrE and AmE sampling the years 1961 (the LOB and Brown

109 corpora) and 1991/92 (the F-LOB and Frown corpora), with a recently  
 110 added corpus of BrE sampling texts from 1931 ( $\pm$ three years: the B-LOB  
 111 corpus). Each corpus is modelled on the design of the original Brown corpus  
 112 (Francis 1965), containing four broad genre categories: Press, General prose,  
 113 Learned/Academic and Fiction.

114 Evidence of contemporary usage is also drawn from the 100-million-word British  
 115 National Corpus (BNC), which samples BrE predominantly from the 1980s and early  
 116 1990s, and a variety of privately collected examples.

117 To retrieve occurrences of *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing*, we used the CQP software  
 118 (Christ 1994) on grammatically tagged versions of the corpora.<sup>5</sup> With its advanced  
 119 query syntax, CQP allows the specification of variable patterns between the modal, *be*  
 120 and *-ing*, such as noun phrases, negatives and adverbials:

121 (7) *Will the master be having* his too, m'am? (B-LOB P16)

122 (8) ... we regret that she *will not be personally appearing* in Richard II.  
 123 (ARCHER 1952whit.f8b)

124 All the examples retrieved were hand-edited to remove false positives.<sup>6</sup>

125 In quantifying use of *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing*, our main method has been to  
 126 normalise their absolute frequencies to a text span of one million words, to facilitate  
 127 comparisons across genres and corpora of different sizes. In addition, to confirm the  
 128 growth of *will be -ing* in recent BrE, we have assessed its frequency relative to that of  
 129 other expressions of future time, notably *will* + bare infinitive, *shall* + bare infinitive,  
 130 *be going to* and the futurate use of the present progressive. All changes have been  
 131 measured for statistical significance, using the Log Likelihood test.

### 132 3 General observations on frequency

#### 133 3.1 Will be -ing in BrE and AmE

134 According to ARCHER, despite being available for several centuries, *will be -ing* did  
 135 not significantly expand in use in BrE and AmE until the twentieth century (table 1).

136 By contrast, overall use of the progressive construction in ARCHER accelerated  
 137 significantly in each century from 1700 onwards, according to figures in Hundt (2004:  
 138 69; cf. table A1). Similarly, in a corpus of nineteenth-century BrE, Smitherberg (2005)  
 139 finds a substantial increase in frequency of the progressive construction as a whole, but  
 140 a low and declining frequency of *will be -ing* (2005: 136).

<sup>5</sup> Grammatical tagging was carried out automatically with the CLAWS4 software: see Garside & Smith (1997).

<sup>6</sup> The searches run on ARCHER also took account of variant spellings within the patterns *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing*, e.g. *'ll*, *uwill*, *vil*, *vvil*, *vwill*, *wil*, *wille*, *will't*, *will't*, using a list of spelling variants in EModE compiled by Dawn Archer. However, no examples containing variants other than *'ll* were found. The recall of our query is likely to be diminished slightly by its failure to pick up examples containing embedded phrases and clauses; a fabricated example would be *John will, for the rest of the time he is staying with us, be going to bed early*.

Table 1. *Will be -ing in BrE and AmE, 1650–1990: ARCHER data*

Period	BrE		AmE <sup>a</sup>	
	Frequency	Pmw <sup>b</sup>	Frequency	Pmw
1650–99	4	22	No data	
1700–49	1	6	No data	
1750–99	0	0	1	6
1800–49	4	22	No data	
1850–99	1	6	0	0
1900–49	6	34	No data	
1950–90	16	90	10	56
Overall	32	26	11	21

<sup>a</sup>ARCHER currently has AmE data for the periods 1750–99, 1850–99 and 1950–90 only

<sup>b</sup>‘pmw’ indicates frequency per million words

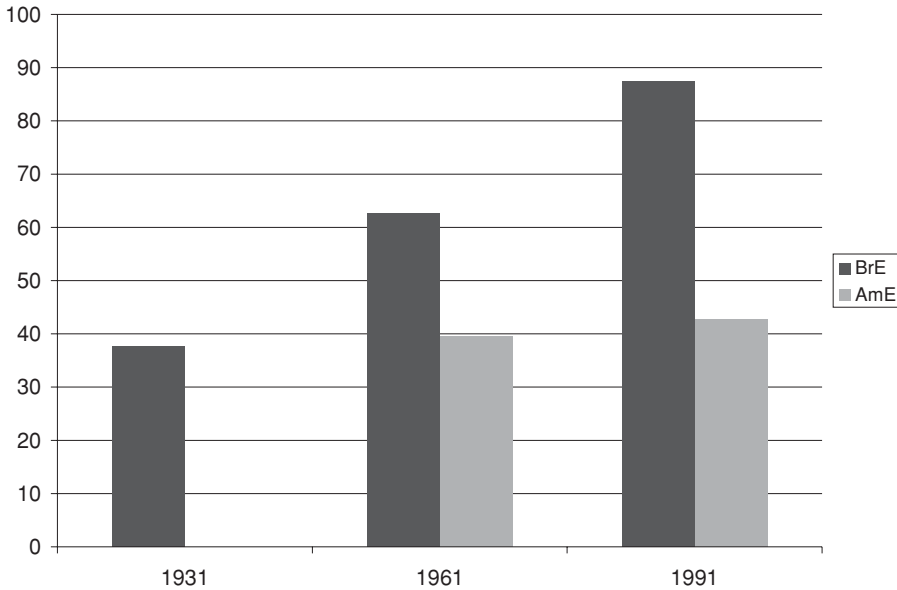


Figure 1. *Will be -ing* in twentieth-century written BrE and AmE (Brown family corpora): frequencies pmw (raw figures in table A2)<sup>7</sup>

141 That the expansion of the construction is a comparatively recent development  
 142 is further supported by the Brown family corpora of twentieth-century English  
 143 (figure 1).

<sup>7</sup> Compilation of a comparable corpus of AmE c.1931 is underway, but not yet available for general research use.

Table 2. Shall be *-ing* in *British English, 1650–1990: ARCHER data*

Period	BrE		AmE	
	Frequency	Pmw	Frequency	Pmw
1650–99	1	6	No data	
1700–49	1	6	No data	
1750–99	0	0	0	0
1800–49	0	0	No data	
1850–99	1	6	0	
1900–49	2	11	No data	
1950–90	3	17	1	6
Overall	8	6	1	2

144 The latter dataset also highlights, more clearly than ARCHER, a significant level  
 145 of regional divergence between AmE and BrE, which appears to widen as the century  
 146 progresses. While use of the progressive overall continues to increase in both varieties  
 147 (cf. Mair and Hundt, 1995; Smith, 2002), the growth of *will be -ing* is significant in  
 148 BrE only. We discuss the question of contact in the spread of *will be -ing* in 5.2.2.

### 149 3.2 Shall be *-ing* in *BrE and AmE*

150 *Shall be -ing*, in contrast, never seems to have enjoyed much popularity. From its sparse  
 151 appearances in ARCHER, it is just about possible to discern a slight growth in BrE: one  
 152 occurrence per century, until the twentieth century, in which there are five occurrences  
 153 (table 2). This nevertheless represents a small fraction of the frequency of *will be -ing*.  
 154 In the AmE portion of ARCHER, a single occurrence of *shall be -ing* is found, in the  
 155 second half of the twentieth century.

156 A similarly sporadic usage rate is found in the Brown family of one-million-word  
 157 corpora. At just one, seven and five occurrences respectively in 1931, 1961 and 1991,  
 158 *shall be -ing* in BrE seems to have reached its peak. In AmE the frequency again trails  
 159 some way behind: *shall be -ing* appears once in 1961, and likewise in 1991.

### 160 3.3 Shall/will be *-ing* and other future time constructions in BrE: a brief 161 quantitative comparison

162 We now consider the frequency of *shall/will be -ing* relative to other expressions of  
 163 future time: *will* + bare infinitive, *shall* + bare infinitive, *be going to* (e.g. *I'm going to*  
 164 *leave*), *be to* (e.g. *I am to leave at 4*), the futurate use of the present progressive (e.g.  
 165 *I'm leaving at 4*).<sup>8</sup> The survey here is mainly limited to late twentieth-century BrE  
 166 (see table 3).

<sup>8</sup> For lack of space we have not analysed the so-called 'futurate' use of the simple present (e.g. *The train leaves tomorrow*).

Table 3. *Constructions referring to the future in corpora of recent BrE: raw and proportional frequencies in the LOB and F-LOB corpora*

construction	LOB (1961)		F-LOB (1991)		change in proportion
	raw frequency	proportion of future expressions surveyed	raw frequency	proportion of future expressions surveyed	
<i>will be -ing</i>	63	1.7%	89	2.6%	** +53.3%
<i>shall be -ing</i>	7	0.2%	5	0.1%	−21.6%
<i>will</i> + bare infin.	2756	75.6%	2631	79.6%	+5.3%
<i>shall</i> + bare infin.	355	9.9%	200	6.2%	** −38.2%
<i>be going to</i>	174	4.8%	163	5.0%	+2.7%
<i>be to</i>	252	7.0%	187	5.8%	* −18.6%
futurate progressive	61	1.7%	52	1.6%	−6.5%
Total	3692	100.0%	3398	100.0%	** −8.6%

Note: For *be going to*, *be to* and the futurate use of *be -ing*, only present tense cases were counted. Counts for the futurate *be -ing* involve a higher margin of error than the other constructions, due to indeterminate readings – see below.

167 The only construction significantly increasing in relation to the others is *will be -ing*.  
 168 In fiction, for example, *will be -ing* is buoyant in comparison to a general decline of the  
 169 combined set of constructions. Meanwhile, figures for the **futurate use** of the present  
 170 **progressive** are somewhat complicated by cases of indeterminate temporal reference  
 171 (e.g. *Timotei ... is introducing a Facial Scrub to its skin care range*, F-LOB E34);  
 172 see Mair & Hundt (1995: 116) and Leech et al. (2009: 132–3), for discussion. Such  
 173 cases are fairly evenly balanced at around 60–90 instances in each corpus. Even so,  
 174 there is no evidence that the futurate use has increased. This is a notable difference  
 175 from the clear growth of the futurate progressive in BrE across the last two centuries,  
 176 as reported by Nesselhauf (2007 and this issue), again using ARCHER.

177 Meanwhile two other competitors, *shall* + bare infinitive and *be to*, have fared  
 178 distinctly worse; both have become increasingly confined to formal style (see Leech  
 179 et al. 2009: 80–1, 108), and *shall* + bare infinitive is now almost exclusively used with  
 180 first-person subjects. It is probable that *shall be -ing* has been prevented from sharing  
 181 in the success of *will be -ing* through the demise of *shall* in general.

182 *Be going to* is one construction we might expect to have increased in use (see e.g.  
 183 Krug 2000; Heine et al. 1991; Hopper & Traugott 2003). However, as noted in Mair  
 184 (1997) and Leech et al. (2009: 108), as far as written BrE is concerned, its gains are  
 185 limited to the Press genres in LOB and F-LOB; in the parallel 1960s–90s corpora  
 186 of AmE (Brown and Frown), *be going to* has risen dramatically in frequency, and  
 187 across a wide range of genres. Similarly in two small corpora of *spoken* British  
 188 English, Leech (2003) finds that the construction has expanded. No instances of



189 *be going to* in construction with *be -ing* were found in any of the Brown family  
190 corpora.<sup>9</sup>

191 There are some intriguing tendencies, which can be surveyed only briefly here. For  
192 example, the spread of *will be -ing* does not appear to have had much impact on the  
193 frequency of *will + bare infinitive*. *Will + bare infinitive* still dwarfs all other future-  
194 referring expressions. Its frequency in the genres where *will be -ing* is strongest –  
195 namely the press, especially news reportage and editorials – has even increased by  
196 nearly 10 per cent in BrE (see Smith 2005: 268). In part this can probably be attributed  
197 to a fairly consistent propensity in newspaper writing to refer to forthcoming events,  
198 not just situations in the present and the recent past: in both LOB and F-LOB the total  
199 number of future-referring expressions is around 4,500 pmw, well above each corpus  
200 average.

201 In summary, the recent (late twentieth-century) growth of *will be -ing* seems to be  
202 confirmed by the fact that most of the future-time constructions it competes with have  
203 either declined in use or shown growth in a few registers only.

#### 204 3.4 Will/shall be -ing across genres in BrE

205 In ARCHER, *will be -ing* and *shall be -ing* both mainly occur in speech-based or  
206 speech-like genres. In e.g. Drama, Letters and the dialogue parts of Fiction, *will be*  
207 *-ing* registers 9, 17 and 3 occurrences respectively (51, 55 and 36 pmw). Among  
208 information-oriented genres, there is one attestation in News, and none in either Science  
209 or Medicine. ARCHER thus gives the impression that the rather restricted register  
210 spread is consistent across the periods sampled, and applies to both constructions.<sup>10</sup>  
211 With the twentieth-century Brown family corpora, however, *will be -ing* presents a  
212 more complex pattern of register variation and change (see figure 2).<sup>11</sup> In 1931, Fiction  
213 ranks highest in frequency. By the 1960s, Fiction has been overtaken by Press, and  
214 by the 1990s it is matched by General Prose.<sup>12</sup> Not unexpectedly, the construction is  
215 consistently infrequent in Learned (i.e. academic) writing: there is rarely call in this  
216 text type for predictions and discussion of future situations.

217 The lack of increase of *will be -ing* in Fiction may seem at odds with the general  
218 expansion of the construction. However, part of the explanation for this is that in  
219 fictional dialogue, where nearly all cases are found, the frequency of references to the

<sup>9</sup> This rarity is confirmed in the BNC, with c.3 instances pmw overall, and c.17 pmw in spoken texts. The Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) at [www.americancorpus.org](http://www.americancorpus.org), COCA shows consistently higher rates in AmE from 1990–2009, averaging c.76 pmw in spoken texts.

<sup>10</sup> Smitherberg's study (2005: 136) of nineteenth-century English finds an even more restricted register spread. In his corpus, the only genre with significant usage of the constructions is Letters, where the overall rate equates to 100 pmw for *will be -ing* and 150 for *shall be -ing*.

<sup>11</sup> Instances of *shall be -ing* are too few to discuss diachronic genre developments.

<sup>12</sup> Consistent with ARCHER's Science and Medicine genres, the Learned writing category of the Brown family is the least accommodating to *will be -ing*, with one, four and five cases respectively across the three sampling dates.

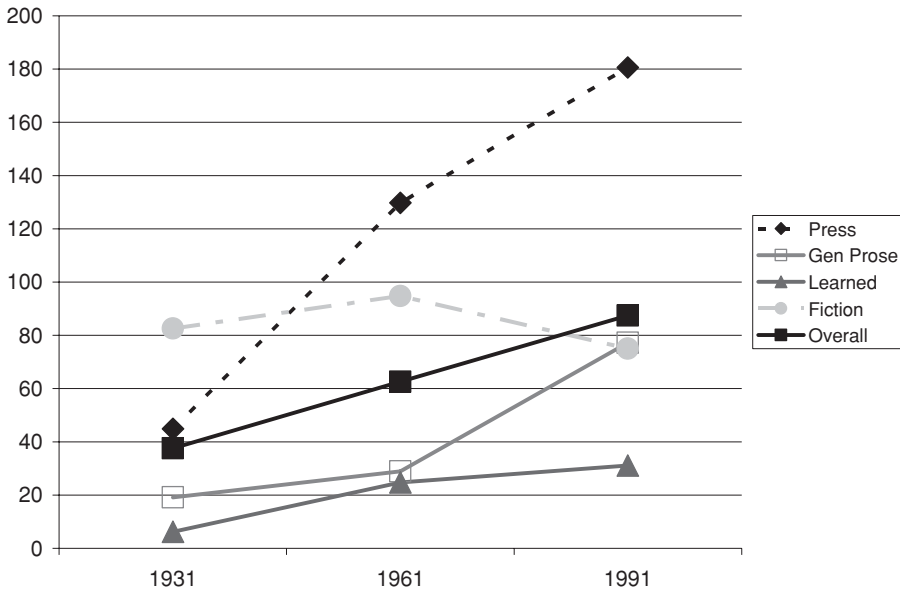


Figure 2. Genre distribution of *will be -ing* in twentieth-century written BrE: frequencies pmw in B-LOB, LOB and F-LOB

220 future reduced across the century. In analysing future expressions for table 3, we found  
 221 that their total frequency in BrE Fiction declined by 26 per cent.

222 We conclude our general frequency overview by considering the distribution of  
 223 *will/shall be -ing* in the contemporary genres of the BNC (see tables A3 and A4).  
 224 Three of the main findings are that:

- 225 (a) Five of the top ten genres using *will be -ing* are news-related – including  
 226 newspapers as well as news broadcast on television and radio.
- 227 (b) Neither construction can be considered especially conversational, or typically  
 228 ‘oral’, in character: conversation is of only middle-ranking frequency among  
 229 the genres where *will be -ing* occurs, and near the bottom of those using *shall*  
 230 *be -ing*. This is in stark contrast to conversation’s high rank in the overall  
 231 distribution of the progressive (see e.g. Biber et al. 1999: 462; Leech et al.  
 232 2009: 125).
- 233 (c) *Shall be -ing* is associated most strongly with formal genres, such as  
 234 parliamentary debates, professional letters and formal meetings.

235 The preponderance in BNC news media supports the findings from the Brown family  
 236 corpora above. It seems at least partly explainable by the frequent need in news reporting  
 237 to refer to forthcoming, pre-planned events, as in (9). In broadcast news this frequently  
 238 extends to scheduling arrangements about the news programme itself, as in (10).

- 239 (9) Vicki *will be trying* to repeat her double 1991 success in the junior and senior open  
 240 women's 200 m individual medley. (BNC K4T 1327, *Northern Echo*, sports news)  
 241 (10) In a moment we *'ll be speaking* to him about his son's plight, but first we go over to  
 242 Switzerland where our reporter, John Marshall, has been following the story.  
 243 (BNC KRM 884, Broadcast news: Central TV)

#### 244 4 Temporal, aspectual and other implied meanings in Present-Day English

245 We turn now to the meanings of *will/shall be -ing* in contemporary English. We consider  
 246 aspectual interpretation, and a closely related set of concepts: volition-neutrality,  
 247 predetermination and matter-of-courseness. Our discussion questions the discreteness  
 248 of the different uses of *will/shall be -ing*, and argues further that non-agentivity is an  
 249 additional feature. Where appropriate we compare *will/shall be -ing* to other future-time  
 250 constructions.

##### 251 4.1 Aspect: Type 1 vs Type 2

252 Where *will/shall be -ing* have been commented on previously, the main distinction made  
 253 is usually between a 'normal' use that indicates progressivity (henceforth Type 1), as in  
 254 (11), and another use, as in (12), that is considered somewhat eccentric in that it does  
 255 not imply progressivity (henceforth Type 2):

- 256 (11) When we get there, they *'ll probably still be having* lunch.  
 257 (Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 171)  
 258 (12) *Will* you be *going* to the shops this afternoon?  
 259 (Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 171)

260 Either the latter use is regarded as an exception to the principle that *be -ing* conveys  
 261 progressivity,<sup>13</sup> or it is accounted for by loosening the notion of progressivity.<sup>14</sup> Type 1  
 262 or 'future progressive' (Palmer 1979: 153) use does not normally attract further  
 263 comment.

264 The problem with the first of these approaches is that it makes no attempt to account  
 265 for the use of the *be -ing* form in Type 1 and Type 2 in a unified way. It seems incongruous  
 266 to have two contrasting aspectual values represented in a single construction. The  
 267 problem with the second approach is that it extends the notion of progressivity to the  
 268 arrangement or decision that underlies prediction. Although we fully agree that Type 2  
 269 is based on some sort of arrangement, we would question whether this arrangement  
 270 should be considered as being in progress in the future, since it has already been made  
 271 in the past.

272 Most previous approaches pose two further problems. Firstly, Type 2 is in fact the  
 273 more frequent in discourse, and our analysis of twentieth-century corpora suggests  
 274 that it is becoming more common still: see table 4. Type 1 is compatible with

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Wekker (1976), Palmer (1979: 133, 1990), Declerck et al. (2006: 344), Quirk et al. (1985: 210), Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 171–2) and Leech (2004: 67).

<sup>14</sup> See Hirtle (1967) and Williams (2002: 52).

Table 4. *Functions of will be -ing: frequencies in twentieth-century BrE (Brown family corpora)*

	B-LOB (1931)	LOB (1961)	FLOB (1991)
Type 1: clear	11	7	4
Type 2: clear	15	26	45
Present epistemic: clear	2	3	4
Unclear	10	28	36
Total	38	64	89

275 progressivity if a temporal adverbial or the contextual environment provides a frame  
276 for the ongoingness interpretation.

277 Our analysis of the respective types in twentieth-century corpus data, based on  
278 aspectual criteria, shows Type 2 to be the most frequent. In this respect Type 2 is not  
279 an eccentric use, which leads us to dispute Samuels' (1972: 57) claim that Type 1 is  
280 the primary function overall. Moreover, the Brown family corpora show that across the  
281 twentieth century this use increased. A second problem is that the level of indeterminacy  
282 between the two aspectual types is so high that we must question whether they are in  
283 fact discrete categories. Consider example (13), where, without any time specifier (such  
284 as *during the race*), the aspectual value of *I'll be competing* is difficult to determine:

285 (13) If Honda do provide me with a factory machine, *I'll be competing* on a par with the  
286 top riders in the world. (FLOB A41, reportage)

287 Our corpus analysis indicates that as many as 20–40 per cent of examples cannot be  
288 classified discretely according to aspect. We discuss further areas of overlap between  
289 the respective types in section 4.3.2.

#### 290 4.2 *The role of be -ing*

291 How can we explain the frequent absence of progressivity in *will/shall be -ing*?  
292 Before moving on to the specific meaning of *will/shall be -ing*, we need to clarify  
293 the contribution of *be -ing* to the construction.

294 Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 162–71) provide a generally convincing attempt  
295 to unify different uses of *be -ing*, but treat *will be -ing* (in its Type 2 function) and the  
296 futurate use of the present as 'non-aspectual uses' of *be -ing* (2002: 171–2). One may  
297 wonder why progressive aspectuality should be disallowed by future time reference.  
298 Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 171–2) briefly state that these non-aspectual uses  
299 both involve future time reference, but do not elaborate. No mention is made either  
300 of *shall* and other modals which similarly may convey non-progressive meaning in  
301 combination with *be -ing*, or of the epistemic use (see section 4.3.3), which does not  
302 involve future time reference. On the other hand, in their general discussion of the  
303 meaning of *be -ing*, Huddleston & Pullum et al. (2002: 165) rightly draw attention to

304 an ‘interpretive’ (or ‘interpretative’; see Ljung 1980) use, i.e. where a clause with *be*  
 305 *-ing* refers back to a given situation in order to elucidate its nature. Their example (14)  
 306 is from a past time context, but it is equally applicable in the future; cf. (15):

- 307 (14) When I said the ‘boss’, I *was referring* to you.  
 308 (Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 165)  
 309 (15) If all goes well there may be more ventures of this kind. Tennis teams perhaps.  
 310 Athletics in the summer . . . The upshot of this is that you all carry a heavy  
 311 responsibility. I want you to look on yourselves as ambassadors. You *will be*  
 312 *representing* your country – Strathdonald School . . . .  
 313 (W. Boyd, *School Ties*, p. 95)

314 We would question Huddleston & Pullum et al.’s claim that such examples have  
 315 progressive aspectuality by virtue of the speaker taking an internal, metaphorically  
 316 extended, view of the situation. The explanatory function of *will be representing* in  
 317 (15), for instance, arguably derives from its reidentifying, and implicitly elucidating,  
 318 the predication <you – carry a heavy responsibility> and the role of ambassador  
 319 mentioned in the preceding utterance. At the same time, *will be -ing* identifies the  
 320 temporal reference point with the future adverbial *in the summer*.

321 This is one illustration of the dual function of *be -ing*, a fact which can be traced  
 322 back to its component parts. The *be -ing* form ‘consists of the auxiliary *be* + the *-ing*  
 323 participle of a verb’ (Quirk et al. 1985: 151). *Be* indicates that the situation referred  
 324 to is identified both temporally and subjectively, because it is always related to some  
 325 viewpoint (see Larreya 1999). With the *-ing* participle this situation is presented as  
 326 already in existence, but with no reference made to the right-hand temporal boundary  
 327 of the situation (see Bouscaren et al. 1993: 28). As such, *be -ing* signals that the  
 328 utterance is connected with some specific situation that is viewed from a subjective  
 329 perspective. As pointed out by Larreya (1999: 140–3), the concept of identification  
 330 allows the interpretive use of the *be -ing* form to be integrated into the realm of aspect,  
 331 rather than treated as an exceptional case. The following example, quoted by Larreya  
 332 (1999: 141), illustrates the interpretive use:

- 333 (16) When thousands of protestors began a march outside East Berlin’s state television . . .  
 334 they had no idea they *were starting* one of the biggest demonstrations in European  
 335 history. (Adamczewski & Gabilan 1996: 59)

336 The implication of the situation referred to in the preceding clause is here considered  
 337 by the speaker. In retrospect, the speaker is able to draw the implication of this event  
 338 and to interpret its meaning. In this example, as in (15), the event is first referred to  
 339 and then identified. Referential construction and identification take place in stages. The  
 340 interpretive meaning arises from the need to re-identify the situation that appears in  
 341 the preceding clause. However, Larreya (1999: 141) notes that reference to a situation  
 342 and its identification may coincide:

- 343 (17) It *was pouring* with rain, so Tim and Elinor stayed on in Hackney after lunch listening  
 344 to a hair-raising Otello . . . (quoted by Larreya 1999: 141)

345 The event is here viewed as in progress at some specific time in the past. In addition,  
 346 this type of standard use of the *be -ing* form is related to the speaker's point of view.  
 347 As Mettouchi (1997: 199–200) suggests, the state of affairs referred to by the *be -ing*  
 348 form may well not be in accordance with the subject's intention. In (17), for instance,  
 349 Tim and Elinor's original intention was probably to go out, and *be -ing* indicates that  
 350 the situation runs counter to the subject's intention.

351 Drawing upon Larreya (1999) and Mettouchi (1997), we propose to consider this  
 352 subjective dimension as an intrinsic feature of the *be -ing* aspect and to dissociate it  
 353 from the concept of progressivity.

### 354 4.3 *Pure future, predetermination and matter-of-courseness*

#### 355 4.3.1 *Volition-neutrality and non-agentivity*

356 One explanation that has been proposed for the emergence of *will/shall be -ing* is that  
 357 it allows speakers to avoid volitional overtones when referring to the future. Although  
 358 we consider the meaning to be richer than this (see section 4.3.2), it is undoubtedly a  
 359 prominent feature.

360 As has been previously observed (e.g. by Coates 1983; Palmer 1979: 119, 133–  
 361 4, 2003: 16), when modals combine with *be -ing*, they generally lose the tendency  
 362 to convey root modality.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the function of the modals is either epistemic  
 363 (conveying judgements about situations in present time), or a predictive future time  
 364 reference.

365 Like *shall + bare infinitive*, *shall + be -ing* cannot be used epistemically, and it thus  
 366 has a narrower range of application than *will be -ing*. Combined with *be -ing*, *will*  
 367 and *shall* express neither volition nor obligation respectively. The modals take on a  
 368 seemingly 'pure' predictive meaning, which seems to confirm our view that the relation  
 369 between the speaker and the predication as a whole takes precedence over the relation  
 370 between the grammatical subject and the verb. We would argue that *be -ing* combined  
 371 with *will/shall* also has an effect on agentivity. Firstly, we compare *will be -ing* with  
 372 *be -ing* and then with *will + be + passive past participle*. Contrast the following pair of  
 373 examples:

- 374 (18) a. I don't listen to you when you *are being morbid*.  
 375 (T. Williams, quoted by Mettouchi 1997: 192)  
 376 b. ?? You 'll *be being morbid*.

377 In (18)a), as pointed out by Mettouchi, the non-progressive present would also be  
 378 possible, with no implication for the duration of the situation. The temporal clause *when*  
 379 *you are being morbid* is just as temporary as *when you are morbid*. Mettouchi correctly  
 380 states that the main difference between the progressive and the non-progressive form is  
 381 one of agentivity. With the non-progressive form, the situation is stative and the subject

<sup>15</sup> There are occasional exceptions to this, such as the following with root or deontic interpretation: *You should be resting old boy* (FLOB P16, fiction).

382 is characterised by the predication. With *be -ing*, the subject is presented as an agent  
 383 involved in an activity (actively behaving in a morbid way). In addition, this pattern  
 384 further implies a negative or reproachful attitude by the speaker. In the case of *will/shall*  
 385 *be -ing*, however, such a recategorisation of the stative verb into an activity verb is not  
 386 possible, as exemplified in (18b).<sup>16</sup> Our hypothesis is that, combined with *will* and  
 387 *shall*, the *be -ing* form loses its potential to be interpreted agentively. The subject cannot  
 388 be perceived as a volitional agent, which accounts for the unacceptability of (18b).  
 389 Moreover, it is questionable whether the verb refers to an activity in (19), since the  
 390 inanimate subject cannot have a volitional role:

391 (19) With few exceptions, your car *will be waiting* for you at dockside, airport, railroad  
 392 station or hotel when you arrive . . . (Brown E36)

393 The speaker refers to a typical case, relying on knowledge of car rental companies to  
 394 make a prediction (it is standard practice for customers to have a car waiting for them  
 395 where they arrive). With modals, the *be -ing* form signals that the predication is based  
 396 on the speaker's representation, i.e. on his/her knowledge of a predetermined situation,  
 397 but not on the agentive role of the grammatical subject, in contrast to modals + bare  
 398 infinitive. Contrast the following pairs of examples:

- (20) a. He can't drive    b. He can't be driving  
 (21) a. He won't drive    b. He won't be driving

399 In (20a) and (21a), it is the subject's ability or volition that is negated. In (20b) and  
 400 (21b) the speaker's judgement takes precedence over the subject's agentive role.

401 It follows from this that the difference between situation types is blurred by *will/shall*  
 402 *be -ing*, which might explain why this construction may occur with almost any verb  
 403 type as long as no active role is assigned to the grammatical subject: for example,  
 404 punctual verbs (see (22)) – with the notable exception of *be* (see (18b)) – and stative  
 405 verbs:

- 406 (22) He was speaking in shorthand in a sense and made it very clear that Scottish  
 407 circumstances would be taken fully into account, and that I (sic) *will be reaching*  
 408 a decision in due course. (BNC K5L 1550)  
 409 (23) Not surprisingly Antrim *will be relying* on the same side that finished that day.  
 410 (BNC HJ3 2045)  
 411 (24) In fact I don't think I *will be requiring* your services at all. (BNC HTU 2099)

412 However, in the case of the passive, *will be -ing* is extremely restricted. In the nearly  
 413 100 million words of the BNC, just five examples were found of *will be being* + past

<sup>16</sup> As a simple prediction of a future event, (18b) is not acceptable. If this utterance is transformed into an evaluative statement, the combination of *be* with *will be -ing* becomes possible, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer: 'I don't want to join you for coffee because you'll *be being morbid* again.' In such a case however, the focus is not on the agentive role of the subject in a future situation, but rather on the (causal) link established by the speaker between two states of affairs. The aspectual adverb *again* takes on a modal meaning by indicating that the repetition of the subject's behaviour is evaluated negatively by the speaker. Evaluation is expressed in a similar way when *will be -ing* co-occurs with *next*. See section 4.3.2 below.

414 participle. That each of the five occurs in a different genre, two in spoken and three  
 415 in written data, suggests that it is not genre per se, but probably more general stylistic  
 416 considerations, that restrict the currency of the pattern.

417 (25) This can, in fact, be the most productive teaching time, because the children will be  
 418 involved in very real problems and their skills *will be being* rigorously *tested*.  
 419 (BNC EV4 1437, academic social science)

420 The *be -ing* form is taken to introduce a viewpoint specification which overrides  
 421 the situation type because aspect here is intrinsically linked to the speaker's mental  
 422 representation of a future situation.

#### 423 4.3.2 Predetermination and 'matter-of-course' use

424 Leech's (2004: 67) notion 'future as a matter of course' and Huddleston & Pullum et al.'s  
 425 (2002: 172) 'already decided future' are closely related, and both relevant to *will/shall*  
 426 *be -ing*. They involve the speaker's knowledge about the situation that is predicted. As  
 427 such, the prediction is represented as predetermined, and the label 'colourless' future  
 428 (Samuels 1972) seems inappropriate. The use of *will/shall be -ing* is often said to be  
 429 more tactful than *will/shall* + bare infinitive, because it implies that future events will  
 430 happen as a matter of course – in the natural course of events – and not as a result of  
 431 the speaker's, or anyone else's, involvement (see e.g. Quirk et al. 1985: 217). However,  
 432 neutrality may be feigned in a subtle way in order for the speaker to better manipulate  
 433 the addressee: the future event is presented as incontestable, and as having been settled  
 434 prior to the time of utterance:

435 (26) After they had gone, there was an awkward little silence, then Stephen said gently: 'I  
 436 hope everything went as well as you expected, Jo?'  
 437 'Oh yes! Better, really. We *shall be going* to London at the end of this month ...  
 438 We've been offered a very good engagement, you see.' (LOB P05)

439 The speaker merely reports what has been planned in accordance with the engagement.  
 440 Only *shall/will* + bare infinitive unambiguously refers to a decision that is being made  
 441 at the time of utterance.

442 Our contention is that with *will/shall be -ing* a predetermined situation is implied  
 443 in utterances both of Type 1 and Type 2 aspect. In (27), we have a situation that is  
 444 construed as future in progress, but also interpretable as 'already decided':

445 (27) He gave the address of the destination to him.  
 446 'Axel *will be waiting* for you,' he said to her in a whisper. 'He'll take you to the boat.  
 447 I'll be there shortly after six.' (W. Boyd, *The Blue Afternoon*, p. 281)

448 In (27), although there is no temporal clause, *Axel will be waiting for you* implicitly  
 449 refers to *when you get there*. This implicit future reference point provides a temporal  
 450 frame relative to which the situation is viewed as in progress. And yet, this situation  
 451 is also part of a schedule that has already been planned at the time of utterance. But  
 452 the concept of predetermination may also be construed in a more abstract way, since



453 the effect of adding *be -ing* is to convey the speaker's judgement based on his/her  
454 knowledge, rather than on some plan:

455 (28) I regret to now inform you that we *will be terminating* all our contracts with you as  
456 of Monday 22nd of July 1991. (ICE-GB W1B-028 #46:4)

457 The decision to terminate the contracts is presented as independent of the situation  
458 of utterance, i.e. neither the speaker nor the addressee is supposed to be in any way  
459 responsible for it. This decision is also assumed to be in accordance with some norm,  
460 even if the speaker expresses conventional regret. If *will* + bare infinitive had been used,  
461 this decision would have been felt to convey the speaker's intention and might have  
462 been considered arbitrary or debatable. With *be -ing*, however, the preconstruction of  
463 the predication leaves no room for negotiation, which allows the speaker to impose  
464 disputable decisions on the addressee without having to justify them. On the one hand,  
465 the addressee is spared the trouble of an unpleasant explanation, which may sound  
466 polite. On the other, the addressee may be manipulated into accepting a decision that  
467 is not as normal as it is presented to be. The use of *will be -ing* here amounts to an  
468 understatement.

469 Most linguists have shown the effect of *be -ing* on modals without paying attention  
470 to its effect on the speaker–hearer relationship. Palmer (1979: 133–4) rightly notes that  
471 with *will/shall be -ing*, ‘the speaker does not want the agreement of his audience’, but  
472 the implication of this has not been investigated so far. We propose that the *will/shall be*  
473 *-ing* construction is not only a volition-disclaimer, but also a responsibility-disclaimer.  
474 As a volition-disclaimer, it has an effect on the relation between the grammatical subject  
475 and the verb, as stated earlier. As a responsibility-disclaimer, it has an effect on the  
476 relation between the speaker and his/her utterance, and consequently on the speaker's  
477 modal attitude towards the hearer.

478 To a certain extent, *will be -ing* may be considered to serve an evidential function.  
479 There seems to exist typological evidence of a formal parallel between the category  
480 of evidentiality and progressive aspect. In many languages, for example Modern  
481 Western Armenian, the evidential is derived from the perfect. Donabédian (2001:  
482 436–7) observes that the Western Armenian progressive frequently co-occurs with  
483 the evidential, and argues that the progressive functions as ‘the non-completed modal  
484 counterpart of the perfect’. In English, the increase in use of *be going to* – especially in  
485 AmE – and of *will be -ing* – in BrE – suggests that these constructions are developing  
486 along two separate but parallel evidential paths. It is striking that the meaning of *be*  
487 *going to* and *will be -ing* encapsulates the three distinguishing features of evidentials –  
488 namely inference from situational evidence in the case of *be going to*, and epistemic  
489 inference, report or surprise in the case of *will be -ing*.<sup>17</sup> This may well account for  
490 the richness and apparently paradoxical meaning of *will be -ing*: it is used in reaction  
491 to directly perceived evidence as well as in pseudo-neutral quotative statements. In

<sup>17</sup> Inference, report and surprise are defined by Guentchéva (1996: 16) as typical of evidentiality. For a specific study of the evidential meaning of *will be -ing* and *be going to*, see Celle and Lansari (2009).

492 the quotative function, a parallel may be drawn between *will be -ing* and other modal  
 493 devices. Modal adverbs (such as *reportedly*) or passive phrases (such as *is reported*  
 494 *to, is scheduled to*) likewise imply that the speaker is not responsible for what has  
 495 been scheduled or said. In this way, the speaker may disclaim responsibility for past  
 496 or present events. Symmetrically, *will be -ing* signals that the speaker is not taking  
 497 responsibility for future events:

- 498 (29) He *will be taking part* in an international conference on the space project which will  
 499 meet on January 30 in London. (LOB A03, Press reportage)  
 500 (30) The former White House intern reportedly signed an agreement on Friday with St.  
 501 Martin's Press for a book about her affair with President Clinton ... The book  
 502 is scheduled to be published in February, the Post said, citing a source familiar with  
 503 the negotiations. (CNN online)  
 504 (31) A recent New Scientist article reported that within five years most Western  
 505 countries *will be issuing* their citizens with a machine-readable passport that  
 506 will carry with it the threat of global surveillance of innocent travellers.  
 507 (www.lexutor.ca/concordancers/concord\_e.html)

508 In these examples, the speaker dissociates himself/herself from the source of  
 509 information, which is made explicit in (31) with the introductory clause 'a recent New  
 510 Scientist article reported'. This implies that the future situation will actualise as part  
 511 of some plan arranged independently of the speaker, who disclaims responsibility for  
 512 this arrangement. In these examples, the speaker aims to construct a future referential  
 513 situation, even if he/she presents him/herself as not directly involved. However, the  
 514 speaker may adopt a different stance when faced with a referential situation or a  
 515 statement that runs counter to his/her norm.

- 516 (32) 'A garment, you little thief. Mamzer! I'm sorry for your father. Some heir he's got!  
 517 Some Kaddish! Ham and pork you *'ll be eating*, before his body is in the grave.'  
 518 (S. Bellow, *Herzog*, p. 131)  
 519 (33) 'So you mean you haven't read them?' she says, sticking determinedly to the subject  
 520 of the documents. 'You *'ll be telling* me in a minute you haven't had time.' 'Of course  
 521 I've read them.' (J. Le Carré, *The Constant Gardener*, p. 58)

522 The speaker considers the implications of the facts he/she is faced with. The meaning  
 523 could be glossed as 'If things carry on this way, I predict that this is what will  
 524 happen next' (see Leech 2004: 69). The speaker does not want this situation to  
 525 actualise and his/her prediction aims at warning the hearer against the negative and  
 526 inevitable consequences of his/her behaviour, should no change occur. The speaker's  
 527 prediction is therefore to be understood as an evaluative judgement about actual  
 528 surprising or abnormal facts. At the same time, the speaker also intends to influence  
 529 the hearer's attitude. In other words, a pragmatic relation is restored in an indirect way,  
 530 by means of a negative evaluative judgement.

531 Thus the impression of neutrality is in fact created by the stance that the speaker  
 532 adopts vis-à-vis the hearer. Because the speaker does not commit himself/herself to  
 533 the prediction that is made, his/her prediction may, in some cases, sound neutral. But  
 534 his/her evaluative role may also be marked, as in the last two examples.

535 Once again, the dual function of the *be -ing* form gives insight into this apparent  
 536 paradox. As we have seen, the *be -ing* form combined with modals allows the speaker to  
 537 identify a situation from his/her vantage point. Therefore, it should come as no surprise  
 538 that the current state of affairs is interpreted in a negative or hyperbolic way. This kind  
 539 of overstatement is only expressed with *will be -ing*, as opposed to *shall be -ing*. *Shall*  
 540 *be -ing* is found in predictive statements where future actualisation is envisaged by the  
 541 speaker, but not in epistemic or evaluative judgements.

#### 542 4.3.3 Epistemic use of *will be -ing*

543 Coates (1983: 180) points out that aspectual marking forces modals to be interpreted  
 544 epistemically. Tsangalidis (1999: 204-7) pushes further the implications of this  
 545 observation. He draws upon Blokh's (1994) analysis, which shows the tendency of the  
 546 *be -ing* form and the perfect infinitive to function modally 'under modal government'.

547 Consequently, the combination *will be -ing* is 'underspecified for Tense', as  
 548 Tsangalidis (1999: 213) notes. The prevailing meaning is one of prediction about a  
 549 situation that may be present as well as future. In any case, temporal adverbials or  
 550 information from the context are needed to assign temporal reference to the verb  
 551 phrase. In (27), for example, a future temporal locator is inferred from the context,  
 552 allowing *Axel will be waiting for you* to be construed as referring to an implicit *when*  
 553 *you get there*. Similarly in (19), future time reference is made possible by the temporal  
 554 clause. However, if a temporal adverbial such as *now* or *by now* is present, the reference  
 555 is to the time of utterance:

556 (34) 'Should we disturb her?' 'I think not,' he replies. 'She *will be sleeping* by now.'

557 (A. Brookner, *Family and Friends*, p. 176)

558 (35) He is aware that the inhabitants of the bungalows are watching him curiously out of  
 559 their windows. He knows that back at Wren House Muriel *will be heaving* herself to  
 560 her feet with a loud sigh and *asking* if anyone wants anything else before she puts her  
 561 weary bones to bed. (A. Brookner, *Family and Friends*, p. 110)

562 The *be -ing* form provides the link between the state of affairs that the speaker intends to  
 563 explain and his/her mental representation.<sup>18</sup> In (34), the *be -ing* form marks a relation of  
 564 temporal coincidence between the situation referred to by the verb *sleep* and the current  
 565 state of affairs. The situation is viewed as ongoing and is simultaneously identified by  
 566 the speaker as the reason why *she* should not be disturbed. Similarly in (35), *will be*  
 567 *heaving herself to her feet* marks temporal coincidence with the time of utterance and  
 568 with the situation *are watching*.

569 In (34) and (35), the speaker aims to construct a referential situation but does not  
 570 have direct access to it, hence it is a case of epistemic modality. This kind of epistemic  
 571 usage is typically found with third-person subjects. In (34) and (35), the speaker's

<sup>18</sup> With *shall* + bare infinitive, prediction is guaranteed by the speech-act and expresses future time reference. With *will*, however, the speaker adjusts to a situation by basing his prediction on his knowledge of the dispositions and characteristic features of the grammatical subject. This explains why *will* + bare infinitive, unlike *shall*, has epistemic as well as predictability uses (such as *oil will float on water*; see Huddleston 1995: 424). In both cases, the focus is not on future actualisation, but on the speaker's knowledge of characteristic features.

572 spatial location is different from that of the grammatical subject. The role of the *be -ing*  
 573 form is to establish temporal coincidence with the time of utterance. In the following  
 574 examples, *will be -ing* also conveys epistemic meaning. However, the function of *be*  
 575 *-ing* is not only to identify the situations temporally:

- 576 (36) In the drawing-room, Hal glances unobtrusively at his watch, computing some  
 577 timetable of his own. ‘Yes,’ says Sofka, who has followed his glance. ‘You *will*  
 578 *be wanting* to get back.’ (A. Brookner, *Family and Friends*, p. 118)  
 579 (37) Mrs Batley’s response to this was to say quietly: ‘You *’ll be wanting* a wash; will you  
 580 come up?’ (LOB P21)

581 These are second-person utterances directly indexed to the situation of utterance. In  
 582 combination with *want*, *will be -ing* conveys a modal meaning. In (36), *will be -ing*  
 583 signals that Sofka is seeking to interpret Hal’s glancing at his watch in an attempt to  
 584 understand his current state of mind. Hal’s glance is subjectively identified as meaning ‘you  
 585 want to get back’. *Will be -ing* serves a similar function in (37). Mrs Batley is attempting  
 586 to interpret Linda’s state of mind by conforming to traditional standards of hospitality.

587 In both (36) and (37) the speaker is commenting on a referential situation. It is in this  
 588 case that *will be -ing* takes on an interpretive meaning. By contrast, in (34) and (35),  
 589 the speaker is attempting to establish facts in order to construct a referential situation.  
 590 Here *will be -ing* marks temporal coincidence and the situation is viewed as in progress  
 591 at the time of utterance.

## 592 5 Historical development

### 593 5.1 Internal factors: possible paths of development

594 Although *shall be -ing* and *will be -ing* have both been in use since at least Middle  
 595 English (Mustanoja 1960: 591; Strang 1970: 208) and possibly earlier (Visser 1963–  
 596 73: 2412), we have no dating as to the emergence of the respective uses. Probably, as  
 597 Samuels (1972: 57) argues, the earliest uses were aspectual, i.e. representing situations  
 598 as future-in-progress. Most of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century examples in  
 599 ARCHER (BrE) are of Type 1 aspectual interpretation, (38), and there are no clear cases  
 600 of Type 2 until the nineteenth century (39), which is in fact from an Irish dialect speaker:

- 601 (38) Our Men have brought in several little Prizes, and *will be catching up* some or other  
 602 daily. (ARCHER 1665inte.n2b)  
 603 (39) ‘... I want to know from you when you *’ll be goin’* to your uncle’s, at Mullaghmore.’  
 604 (1847carl.f5b)

605 Unfortunately, the sampling frame of ARCHER is too recent, and cases of *shall/will*  
 606 *be -ing* too infrequent, to enable a detailed understanding of their functional evolution.<sup>19</sup>  
 607 However, in the case of *will be -ing* in BrE, there is enough material to discern possible  
 608 evolutionary developments.

<sup>19</sup> For example, it is interesting that of the ARCHER cases of *will be -ing* before the twentieth century, three of the nine in BrE and the one case in AmE are in the protasis of a conditional sentence.

609 (a) *Contextual reinterpretation of volition-neutrality*

610 Samuels (1972) treats future-in-progress (our Type 1) as the original aspectual  
 611 meaning of *shall/will be -ing*, and says that volition-neutrality was a feature of  
 612 meaning incidentally associated with it. Volition-neutrality, he argues, later transferred  
 613 to an ‘actualising’ function of *will/shall be -ing*: ‘especially when it is used with  
 614 non-durative verbs, it focusses more attention on the action of the lexical verb (*be*)  
 615 *leaving* and less on the auxiliaries *shall/will*’ (1972: 57). The transfer of meaning  
 616 was motivated by the tendency among other constructions referring to the future (e.g.  
 617 *I shall leave, I will leave, I’ll leave, I’m going to leave*) to convey ‘some degree of  
 618 modal nuance’ (1972: 57). He adds: ‘It [*will/shall be -ing*] is therefore becoming more  
 619 and more used as a colourless future without overtones of intention, wish, irritation  
 620 and the like, and irrespective of whether the context demands a marked aspectual form’  
 621 (1972: 57).

622 With some qualifications Samuel’s account seems plausible: it integrates the  
 623 evolution of the aspectual meaning with the volitional-neutral component of meaning.  
 624 In contemporary terminology we might express the generalisation of volition-neutrality  
 625 as a case of ‘context-induced reinterpretation’ (Heine et al. 1991; Heine 2003) or  
 626 ‘pragmatic strengthening’ (Hopper & Traugott 2003), i.e. a feature that was originally  
 627 only conversationally implicated becomes routinised as a feature of the construction as  
 628 a whole. Together with the partial loss of aspectual specificity (through the emergence  
 629 of Type 2), this would have resulted in the meaning shift of *shall/will be -ing*.

630 The historical data in ARCHER show mixed support for Samuels’ arguments. On  
 631 the one hand, all occurrences of *will be -ing* in ARCHER up to 1900 are in second-  
 632 and third-person contexts: according to Aijmer (1985), cited in Traugott & Dasher  
 633 (2002: 223), it is in such environments that a reported intention is most likely to be  
 634 reinterpreted as a non-volitional prediction; see (40).<sup>20</sup>

635 (40) Her cully then desires her to leave it off, and tells her that she might live better and  
 636 more at ease in her private lodgings, telling her that if she will do so, he *will not be*  
 637 *wanting* to contribute handsomely to her maintenance. (1673kirk.f2b fiction)

638 On the other hand, in most cases it is difficult to say whether the motivation for using  
 639 *will be -ing* is to disclaim volition. It is frequently unclear whether the utterance would  
 640 be interpreted as volitional if *will* + bare infinitive had been used instead:

641 (41) Our Men have brought in several little Prizes, and *will be catching up* some or other  
 642 daily. (1665inte.n2b news)

643 (42) If you have a handsome wife, every smooth-faced coxcomb *will be combing* and  
 644 *cocking* at her. (1680otwa.d2b drama)

645 Further, Samuels’ view that the expressive value of *shall/will be -ing* is limited to that of  
 646 colourless future overlooks the notion of predetermination/matter-of-courseness which,  
 647 as argued in section 4.3.2, is another important characteristic of the constructions. This

<sup>20</sup> Aijmer’s (1985) study is of *will*, and argues that predictive uses spread from second and third person to first person.

648 feature is arguably detectable in early cases such as (42) above, where the speaker  
649 seems to construe the predicted event as normal and expected.

650 *(b) Spread by analogy with the futurate use of the present*

651 Another possible factor in the development of the aspectual meaning, as well as  
652 the notion of predetermination, is extension by analogy with the futurate use of the  
653 progressive (e.g. *John is leaving tomorrow.*). Numerous synchronic discussions of the  
654 progressive have claimed that the notion ‘situation in progress’ can be extended to  
655 cover the futurate use (cf. Hirtle 1967; Declerck 1991; Miyahara 1996; and Williams  
656 2002). Declerck (1991), for example, claims the ‘temporal perspective is shifted,  
657 i.e. ... the situation is represented as if it were lying in the present rather than in  
658 the post-present sector’ (1991: 67).<sup>21</sup> In Williams’ (2002) account, the mechanism  
659 seems more metonymic: by virtue of a part of the situation (e.g. the planning phase)  
660 being under way, the entire situation is represented as in progress.

661 It seems more difficult to extend progressivity to the Type 2 use of *will/shall be*  
662 *-ing* (although see Williams 2002: 95–8). ‘Situation in progress’ would need to be  
663 conceptualised very schematically, since the use of *will/shall* ordinarily (as in Type 1)  
664 locates the orientation time of the situation in the future, not the present.

665 In several respects the putative developments outlined in (a) and (b) are consistent  
666 with grammaticalisation:

- 667 – That one meaning (progressivity) has been demoted, while others (volition-  
668 neutrality, matter-of-courseness, etc.) have been promoted by pragmatic  
669 strengthening. To the extent that the future situation cannot literally be in  
670 progress, but is based on the speaker’s viewpoint and expectations, the newer  
671 meanings can be seen as reflecting increasing subjectification in the sense of  
672 Traugott (1989, 1995). That is, over time the function of the construction has  
673 become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective reasoning processes.
- 674 – There is ‘layering’ (Hopper 1991) in that the original aspectual meaning in  
675 Type 1 has survived and co-exists, albeit as a minority use, with Type 2.
- 676 – The functional generalisation of the construction makes its meaning overall  
677 more indeterminate. This is again supported in ARCHER, and also in our  
678 twentieth-century corpus data (see Table 1 above).

679 A more problematic question is how to relate the constructions to the grammaticalisa-  
680 tion ‘paths’ posited by language typologists. Each construction is a merger of a modal  
681 and a progressive construction, whereas typologists’ proposed paths of change typically  
682 involve single constructions. According to Dahl (1985: 93, 2000: 10–11) and Bybee  
683 et al. (1994: 141), across the world’s languages the normal grammaticalisation path of  
684 progressive constructions is to develop into the superordinate category of imperfective;  
685 that is, incorporating habitual and stative meaning, in addition to progressivity. If

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also Hirtle (1967: 95): ‘The preparation stage may involve merely an engagement, yet the event may nevertheless be felt to be already started.’

686 examples like *I'll be leaving tomorrow at 8 p.m.* are construed perfectly (as claimed  
 687 by e.g. Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 172 and Leech 2004: 67) then it would seem  
 688 that the semantic shift in English *will be -ing* is a counterexample to the normal path. We  
 689 argued earlier, however, that the constructions have become underspecified for aspect  
 690 (see section 4.1), and they are increasingly compatible with stative verbs (section 4.3.1);  
 691 this could then be taken as tending towards imperfectivity, as predicted in the path.

692 Concerning the development of modals such as *will* into futures, Bybee et al. (1994:  
 693 256) propose a path from desire to prediction:

694 (43) desire > willingness > intention > prediction

695 While (43) fits well with *will* + bare infinitive, our historical data do not allow us to  
 696 check whether it also applies specifically to *will/shall be -ing*.

## 697 5.2 Social-stylistic factors

### 698 5.2.1 Decline of prescriptive *will/shall* rule

699 Given that *will/shall be -ing* have been available for several centuries, we might ask  
 700 why they did not significantly spread in standard BrE and AmE until the twentieth  
 701 century. One factor may be the continuing influence in the standard varieties of the  
 702 prescriptive rule for *shall/will*.

703 This rule has been expressed in various ways, but in its most influential form it  
 704 could be summarised as follows: (i) in first person, *shall* expresses a volition-neutral  
 705 prediction, whereas *will* expresses volitional meaning such as determination, insistence,  
 706 threats, promises, etc.; (ii) in the second and third persons, *will* expresses a volition-  
 707 neutral prediction, and *shall* has a volitional function (see e.g. Fenning 1771).

708 The rule seems only to be seriously undermined towards the end of the nineteenth  
 709 and start of the twentieth centuries (Denison 1998: 167-8; Smith 1996: 142). It is  
 710 generally acknowledged that as the rule broke down, *shall* gave way increasingly to  
 711 *will* (including its weakened form *'ll*: see e.g. Barber 1964: 134).

712 The weakening of the rule would presumably have benefited *will be -ing*. Initially  
 713 restricted to second- and third-person subjects, during the twentieth century it gradually  
 714 generalised to select any grammatical subject – including first person, where in the  
 715 volition-neutral function, *shall* + bare infinitive was previously dominant: see figure 3.

716 In non-standard varieties it is more probable that the prescriptive rule on *shall/will*  
 717 was not observed: here presumably, *will be -ing* would have been free to spread much  
 718 earlier.

### 719 5.2.2 Change led by conversational norms

720 The early spread of *will be -ing* seems to show a typical sociolinguistic pattern of  
 721 change, in that examples from ARCHER and the B-LOB corpus suggest that it formerly  
 722 predominated in characteristically oral registers (see section 3.4 above).

723 But is the spread of *will be -ing* in later twentieth-century written language similarly  
 724 driven by adoption of patterns from informal speech? In the last decade a number

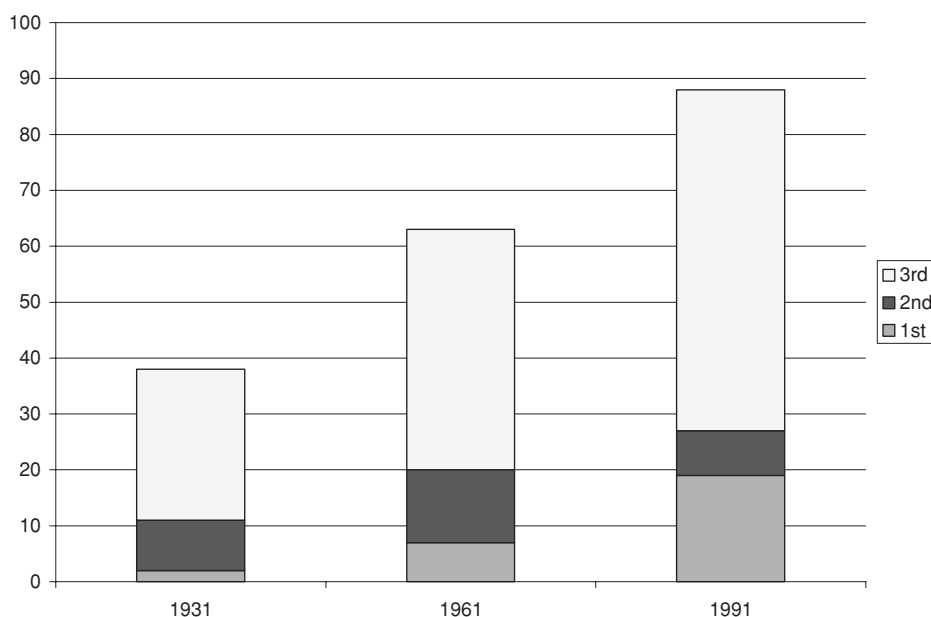


Figure 3. Subject selection with *will be -ing* in twentieth century written BrE: absolute frequencies in the Brown family of corpora

725 of publications have linked the rapid pace of change in standard written English  
 726 to increasing use of patterns characteristically associated with informal speech, e.g.  
 727 contractions (Hundt & Mair 1999); the *be going to* future (Mair 1997), and the present  
 728 progressive (Smith 2002). Similarly, features that are rare in informal speech, and  
 729 therefore negatively correlated with colloquial speech, have declined in written usage:  
 730 e.g. the passive (Seoane & Williams 2006), and the auxiliaries *shall* and *be to* (Leech  
 731 et al. 2009).<sup>22</sup> In the case of *will be -ing*, registers closer to the vernacular probably  
 732 provided a trigger for its broader diffusion in the early to mid twentieth century.

733 However, evidence from the BNC suggests that by the late twentieth century, the  
 734 continuing spread of *will be -ing* was *not* being driven by colloquial usage. The BNC  
 735 genres with the highest frequencies are news-related varieties, such as broadcast  
 736 news and press reportage, with typically more than 300 occurrences pmw; casual  
 737 conversation ranks well down the list of genres, with only 149 occurrences pmw.

## 738 6 Conclusion

739 Although *will be -ing* has been around for a considerable time, it started to gain a  
 740 significant foothold among future-time expressions in standard English only in the

<sup>22</sup> On the perception of *shall* as largely reflecting formal and conservative usage, see e.g. Trousdale (2003: 381) and Leech (2004: 58). In uses such as *Shall we go?*, *shall* seems neutral as to formality. On the future use of *be to*, McCarthy (1998: 105) reports a complete absence of occurrences in one million words of 'ordinary casual conversation' within the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE).



741 twentieth century. In an interesting case of regional divergence, our findings show that  
 742 much more modest gains have been made in AmE than in BrE.<sup>23</sup> In AmE *be going*  
 743 *to* has possibly played a bigger role in keeping *will be -ing* at bay. *Shall be -ing* has  
 744 not nearly prospered to the same extent, although again it appears to be used more  
 745 frequently in the twentieth century than previously. Possibly *shall be -ing* has been  
 746 adversely affected by a demise of *shall* in general, which tended to favour *will* (and its  
 747 reduced forms) as the force of the *shall/will* rule started to fade. *Will be -ing* may have  
 748 benefited in this process, since – like *shall* + bare infinitive – it has the characteristic  
 749 of prediction/volition-neutrality.

750 We lack a detailed historical record of the spread of the *shall/will be -ing* construction,  
 751 but ARCHER suggests that initially it followed a typical sociolinguistic pattern of  
 752 change, diffusing among spoken or speech-like, mainly informal, genres. In more recent  
 753 times it has spread to a much wider range of genres, such that it occurs less prolifically  
 754 in conversation than in comparatively formal genres, especially media-based ones such  
 755 as news reportage, professional letters and parliamentary debates.

756 With respect to contemporary meanings, we have argued (with Huddleston &  
 757 Pullum et al. 2002) that in combination with a modal auxiliary, as well as in the  
 758 futurate use, *be -ing* does not primarily convey a sense of progressivity. In such cases,  
 759 the situation is viewed from a prospective or subjective viewpoint. This viewpoint  
 760 specification takes precedence over the relation between the grammatical subject  
 761 and the verb, which subjectivises aspect. The future-in-progress interpretation of  
 762 *shall/will be -ing* is still possible where the context or temporal adverbials, or both,  
 763 induce such an interpretation. However, in very many cases aspect is not a useful  
 764 discriminating feature. We would therefore suggest that Type 2 is underspecified for  
 765 aspect, rather than perfective (cf. Palmer 1990; Leech 2004; Huddleston & Pullum et al.  
 766 2002).

767 We accept the general view that there is no implication of volition or intention on  
 768 the part of the subject of *shall/will be -ing*. However, the construction cannot simply be  
 769 regarded as a ‘volition-disclaimer’, since it may be used where volition is not relevant.  
 770 Rather, prediction is based on some predetermined situation: some plan may have been  
 771 made independently of the speaker (see Palmer 1979: 134; Huddleston & Pullum et al.  
 772 2002), or, in a more abstract way, the speaker may conform to some norm (Leech 2004).  
 773 We argue that this feature has generalised across both aspectual types, again blurring  
 774 the boundary between them.

775 The speaker is bound to adopt different subjective attitudes to his/her utterance  
 776 depending on the type of discourse. Therefore, the epistemic and the ‘future as matter  
 777 of course’ meanings should not be regarded as entirely distinct, but rather as equally  
 778 available options provided by the predictive judgement. The combination of *will* with

<sup>23</sup> Shortly prior to submission of this paper, we found that the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) shows slightly increasing frequencies of *will be -ing* from the 1990s to the 2000s. In spoken texts, for example, average frequencies increase from 96 pmw (in 1990–99) to 102 pmw (2000–9). However, this masks a sudden decline from 2005–9. Clearly, further investigation of recent AmE is needed, taking into account future constructions as a whole.

779 *be -ing* extends the possibilities of temporal reference beyond the frame of the future  
780 by allowing the speaker to form an epistemic judgement about present situations. The  
781 selection of meaning then depends on the discourse type (e.g. direct vs reported speech)  
782 on the context, and on temporal adverbials. Crucially, the sense of ‘pure future’ seems  
783 to be an illusion created by evidentiality.

784 Our account of the functional mechanism of change draws on the short diachronic  
785 sketch outlined by Samuels (1972). An advantage of Samuels’ account is that it provides  
786 a motivation for the loss of aspectual specificity (progressivity) concomitantly with  
787 a general incorporation of volition-neutrality. Such a development is in accord with  
788 other accounts hypothesising that, over time, the meaning of grammatical constructions  
789 becomes increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective reasoning processes (cf. Traugott  
790 1989, 1995; Sweetser 1990). However, Samuels’ account does not address the richness  
791 of the meaning that *shall/will be -ing* gained: the notion of predetermination or ‘matter-  
792 of-courseness’ – not only volition-neutrality – seems to have been implied early on, and  
793 has generalised to all future uses of *will/shall be -ing*. Further, the future-in-progress  
794 meaning has become marginal, as the construction becomes prevailingly aspectually  
795 underspecified.

796 The matching corpus data on *shall/will be -ing* from ARCHER and the Brown  
797 family (see sections 3.1 and 3.2) do not point to contact effects of AmE on BrE. In  
798 BrE, the incidence of both constructions is not only higher but in the case of *will be*  
799 *-ing* has increased significantly faster. Clearly, the two varieties are capable of taking  
800 separate paths, even if they share a common trait of raising their use of the progressive  
801 construction as a whole.

802 One type of contact that merits closer investigation in the future is that from varieties  
803 within the British Isles. It has been claimed that in Middle English the progressive,  
804 including *shall/will be -ing*, was more frequent ‘in the north’, and from there spread  
805 to other regions (cf. Mustanoja 1960: 586; Strang 1970: 208; Fischer 1992: 251; and  
806 Mossé 1938: 35–6). It is perhaps a reflection of these origins that in recent (1990s)  
807 BrE, across the demographically sampled spoken part of the British National Corpus,  
808 the constructions consistently exhibit higher frequencies in the northern and western  
809 regions of the British Isles, and lower frequencies in the south-east (see tables A5 and  
810 A6). Such provisional findings clearly need further scrutiny, including comparison of  
811 the functions and uses of the construction in the respective regions, and incorporation  
812 of equivalently sampled diachronic corpora.

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985 Appendix 1. Queries run in CQP for retrieval of *shall/will be -ing* from the corpora

986 (a) Basic query:

987 [word='will|\`ll|wo'%c] [pos='AV0|ORD|XX0']{0,4} [pos='A.\*|D.\*']? [pos=  
 988 'PP.\*|PN.\*|N.\*']{0,2} [pos='AV0|ORD| XX0']{0,4} 'be'%c [pos='AV0|ORD|  
 989 XX0']{0,4} [word='.\*ing'%c]

990 (b) Query run on BNC, using BNCweb (CQP edition):

991 [word='will|\`ll|wo'%c] ([pos='AV0|ORD|XX0'] | <mw\_pos='AV0|ORD|XX0' >  
 992 [\* </mw\_pos>){0,4} [pos='A.\*|D.\*']? [pos='PP.\*|PN.\*|N.\*']{0,2} ([pos='AV0|  
 993 ORD|XX0'] | <mw\_pos='AV0|ORD|XX0' > [\* </mw\_pos>){0,4} 'be|bee'%c  
 994 ([pos='AV0|ORD|XX0'] | <mw\_pos='AV0|ORD|XX0' > [\* </mw\_pos>){0,4}  
 995 [word='being'%c]

996 Appendix 2. Additional tables

Table A1. *The progressive in BrE and AmE, 1650–1990: ARCHER data (based on Hundt 2004: 69)*

Genre	BrE		AmE	
	Frequency	Pmw	Frequency	Pmw
1650–99	105	640	no data	
1700–49	119	690	no data	
1750–99	145	830	130	790
1800–49	232	1010	no data	
1850–99	399	1960	364	1,920
1900–49	367	1730	no data	
1950–90	640	3300	585	3,010

Table A2. *Genre distribution of will be -ing in twentieth-century written BrE: raw and normalised frequencies in the Brown-family corpora*

Genre	B-LOB (1931)	LOB (1961)	F-LOB (1991)	Rate of change (1931 to 1991)
Press	8 (45)	23 (130)	32 (181)	*** +303%
Gen. Prose	8 (19)	12 (29)	32 (77)	*** +303%
Learned	1 (6)	4 (25)	5 (31)	+402%
Fiction	21 (83)	24 (95)	19 (75)	-9%
Overall	38 (38)	63 (63)	88 (87)	*** +133%

Notes:

a. Figures in parentheses represent raw frequencies.

b. In the rate of change column, \* indicates a probability of <.05,

\*\* indicates a probability of <.01, and \*\*\* indicates a probability of <.001

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Table A3. *Genre distribution of will be -ing in 1990s BrE: top ten genres, plus conversation, in the BNC (estimated frequencies)<sup>24</sup>*

Genre <sup>a</sup>	Raw frequency	Frequency pmw	Dispersion (across texts) <sup>b</sup>
S: broadcast:news	115	437	10/12
W: news script	498	399	31/32
W: letters: professional	26	390	3/11
W: newspapers: sports	368	356	9/9
W: newspapers: arts	81	336	11/15
W: nonacademic:technical	327	268	107/123
W: email	53	248	6/7
S: parliament	24	247	5/6
W: newspapers: other report	647	237	38/39
S: speeches: scripted	45	233	15/25
S: conversation:	630	149	120/153

<sup>a</sup>'S' signifies spoken genres and 'W' signifies written genres.

<sup>b</sup>Dispersion = the proportion of texts in the genre category that contain at least one instance of *will be -ing*.

<sup>24</sup> The query run in BNCweb to obtain an approximate count of progressives was:

```
(([pos='VB.*'] ([pos='AV0|ORD|XX0'] | <mw_pos='AV0|ORD|XX0'> [* </mw_pos>]{0,4} [word=
'.*ing|.in\'%c & word!='going|gon'%c & pos='.*V.*G.*']) | ([pos='VB.*'] ([pos='AV0|ORD|XX0']
| <mw_pos='AV0|ORD|XX0'> [* </mw_pos>]{0,4} [word='going|gon'%c & pos='.*V.*G.*']
[pos!='TOO']))
```

Table A4. *Genre distribution of shall be -ing in 1990s BrE: highest ranking genres, plus conversation, in the BNC*

Genre <sup>a</sup>	Raw frequency	Frequency pmw	Dispersion (across texts) <sup>b</sup>
W: letters: professional	5	75	3/11
W: Hansard	87	74	4/4
S: broadcast:discussion	48	63	6/53
W: letters: personal	2	38	2/6
S: parliament	2	21	2/6
S: meeting	28	20	21/132
S: conversation	24	6	17/153

<sup>a</sup>‘S’ signifies spoken genres and ‘W’ signifies written genres.

<sup>b</sup>Dispersion = the proportion of texts in the genre category that contain at least one instance of *will be -ing*.

Table A5. *Distribution of will be -ing based on region of the speaker: data from the conversational, demographically sampled part of the BNC*

Region	Raw frequency	Frequency Pmw	No. words sampled
South-East England	83	100	828,706
Midlands	94	124	772,459
South-West England	64	169	390,001
Northern England	111	189	588,814
Scotland	18	198	90,823
Wales	59	294	200,708
Ireland	31	207	149,772

Table A6. *Distribution of the progressive based on region of the speaker: estimated frequencies in the conversational, demographically sampled part of the BNC*

Region	Raw frequency	Frequency pmw	No. words sampled
South-East England	5,905	7,126	828,706
Midlands	5,129	6,639	772,459
South-West England	2,477	6,351	390,001
Northern England	4,582	7,782	588,814
Scotland	806	8,874	90,823
Wales	1,564	7,792	200,708
Ireland	1,405	9,381	149,772