**Conservative pressure on the progressive: the passival**

This talk discusses the internal reorganization of the progressive construction in Early Modern English (ca. 1500-1700), with special attention for the so-called 'passival', which was active in form but passive in meaning (*the house was building* 'the house was being built'). I will argue that, while the passival was on the increase in Early Modern English, it 'needed' to disappear in order to make further progress of the progressive possible. As such, it may be seen as a 'false turn' in a grammaticalization process that was eventually resolved by resourceful language users.

While the progressive construction started to increase its scope in the late Middle English period (e.g., Kranich 2010), its grammaticalization was completed only with the introduction of the progressive passive (*the house was being build*) in the late eighteenth century (Hundt 2004: 101). This introduction has been characterized as coming 'out of the blue' rather late (Anderwald 2016: 201–202). I will argue that its lateness is due to the passival being the more natural development out of the more nominal origins of the progressive, which originated in part as a prepositional gerundial construction of the type *he was on hunting*. While the preposition gradually eroded, the original nominal characteristics still shimmer through when in Early Modern English the verb's object was occasionally expressed by *of* NP (e.g. *He was killing of this man* instead of *he was killing this man*) instead of as a direct object. More generally, nominalizations typically do not formally differentiate agent and patient (cf. the famous Latin example *amor matris* where the mother could be both subject or object of the love). In that respect, the passival is a natural functional expansion of the gerundial origin of the progressive. However, as the progressive became more and more verbal, the inclusion of ever more animate and inanimate contexts created competition within the progressive construction, with the passival blocking progress in two different domains. Passivals with human agents, which were occasionally attested, as in (1), had difficulty gaining ground because of obvious confusion with active progressives.

(1)     *The Place where they say the Virgin Mary Prayed for St. Stephen, while he was Stoning.*
         'The place where they say the Virgin Mary prayed for St. Stephen, while he was being stoned.' (Nathaniel Crouch 1672. EMMA)

Second, active progressives with inanimate subjects remained virtually restricted to intransitives and passivals.

Data for the analysis come from the analysis of 15 prolific authors from the EMMA corpus (Petré et al. 2019), collectively constituting a corpus of more than 20 million words. While the unstable nature of the passival has been hinted at in earlier work (e.g., Hundt 2004), the EMMA corpus allows for a more fine-grained and also individual-level analysis. Such an analysis shows that the functional block of the passival is a consistent cognitive reality across most (but not all) authors. However, where this cognitive dissonance within the progressive construction remained inconspicuous in early generations, it came more and more to the fore in later generations as the passival became more prevalent, eventually leading to its demise in favour of the progressive passive, in spite of the latter's semi-artificial introduction by professional writers.

**References**

Anderwald, Lieselotte 2016. *Language between Description and Prescription: Verb Categories in Nineteenth-century Grammars of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kranich, Svenja. 2010. The progressive in Modern English: A corpus-based study of grammaticalization and related changes. *The Progressive in Modern English*. Leiden: Brill.

Hundt, Marianne 2004. The passival and the progressive passive – a case study of layering in the English aspect and voice systems. In Hans Lindquist and Christian Mair (eds.), *Corpus Approaches to Grammaticalisation in English*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, pp. 79–117.

Petré, Peter, Lynn Anthonissen, Sara Budts, Enrique Manjavacas, Emma-Louise Silva, William Standing and Odile A.O. Strik 2019. Early Modern Multiloquent Authors (EMMA): Designing a large-scale corpus of individuals' languages. *ICAME journal* 43: 83–122.