A contrastive analysis of the present progressive in French and English[1]

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In this study, we address the semantics of the present progressive constructions in French and English by looking into their present-day uses and their diachronic evolution. Corpus data show that both constructions are frequently used in contemporary English and French to stress the atypical nature of situations. This suggests that these constructions share an epistemic core meaning, which we define as 'contingency in immediate reality'. However, in terms of concrete usage types which elaborate this meaning in context, the two progressive constructions differ significantly: the French progressive occurs in fewer types of context than its English counterpart and it is, overall, less frequently used and not obligatory (e.g., for referring to present-time events, as in English). We argue that these differences can be systematically related to the different diachronic evolutions that have shaped the present-tense paradigms – more specifically, the respective aspectual values of the simple present-tense markers – in both languages.

Keywords: present progressive, simple present, English, French, aspect

1. Introduction

This study addresses the semantics of the French present progressive in comparison with its English counterpart. It is well-known that the French *être en train de* + V-inf construction, like many other European progressives, is less grammaticalized than the frequently used English *be* + V-*ing* form, but the descriptive details of and the reasons for these differences are hardly ever dealt with (for notable exceptions, cf. Bertinetto 2000, Lachaux 2005 and Author 1 & Author 2 2013). In order to look into these issues more thoroughly, we have conducted a study of the present-tense uses of the progressive in various corpora of spoken

French (*Elicop*[2], *CFPP2000*[3] and *CLAPI*[4]). The different uses of the French progressive form have systematically been compared to those of the English present progressive, as attested by Author 1 & Author 3 (forthcoming) in the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, Part 1 (SBC; Du Bois et al. 2000). This comparison shows, among other things, that the English present progressive is more frequently (and, in some contexts, obligatorily) used and occurs in a broader range of contexts than its French counterpart (cf. Author 1 & Author 2 2013). At the same time, the two constructions turn out to share quite a few usage types as well. In fact, the uses of the French present progressive appear to constitute a proper subpart of those of the English present progressive. The main goal of this paper is to account for these hitherto unexplained observations. We will argue, more specifically, that the French and the English present progressive share the same core meaning in that they both indicate 'epistemic contingency in current reality' (Author 1 & Author 2 2013) and that the present-day differences in use between the two constructions are due to the different diachronic evolutions that have shaped the present-tense paradigms in the two languages under consideration.

In Section 2, we will summarize the most important results from the corpus work presented in Author 1 & Author 3 (forthcoming) and Author 1 & Author 2 (2013). This includes an overview of the various uses, temporal and modal, of the English and the French present progressive. A comparative analysis of these corpus data will be presented in Section 3. Section 3.1 is devoted to the modal uses and the modal core meaning of the present progressive in both French and English. In Section 3.2, then, we tackle the differences in use between the two constructions. In Section 3.2.1, we outline the different diachronic pathways of the English and French progressives and we address the relevance of these different histories for the distribution and use of the simple and the progressive constructions in the present-tense paradigms of the two languages, thereby also introducing evidence from diachronic evolutions in the tense and aspect systems of other Germanic and Romance languages (especially, but not solely, Dutch and Spanish). It will be argued, more specifically, that, under influence of the heavily grammaticalized progressive, the simple present in English has become a *perfective* present tense, with a fairly restricted set of usage types, while the French simple present is aspectually ambiguous. Next, in Section 3.2.2, we explain why the French present progressive hardly ever expresses duration or iteration and resists a futurate interpretation. In Section 4, finally, we submit our conclusions.

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[2] Cf. http://bach.arts.kuleuven.be/elicop/. [07-09-2011]
[3] Cf. http://ed268.univ-paris3.fr/syled/ressources/Corpus-Parole-Paris-PIII/. [07-09-2011]
[4] Cf. http://clapi.univ-lyon2.fr/. [07-09-2011]

Before we embark on our study, however, we need to explain why we are only focusing on the *present* progressive, thus excluding past-tense progressive uses from our analysis. We have, in fact, various reasons for doing so. First, as we will show in Section 3, there is a strong link between the use of the present progressive and the properties of the speech event, especially in English. That is, we will argue that the progressive is indispensable in English to align dynamic situations (i.e., events) with the time of speaking, while there is no such strong requirement in the past. For French, an indication of the differentiation/specialization between the present and the past progressive comes from Lebas-Fraczak (2010), who shows that some previous accounts of the semantics of *être en train de* + V-inf hold for the present but not for the past, as these two domains involve different modal interpretations. Data from other languages (cf., e.g., Güldemann 2003 on (mostly) Bantu languages) equally show that the notable association of the progressive with modal connotations appears to be particularly relevant for the present domain, rather than for the past. These observations indicate, in our view, that the semantics of the present and past progressive constructions need to be studied separately. This does not entail, however, that evolutions in the past-tense paradigm have never been of any influence for the present-tense constructions under consideration. For instance, we will argue in Section 3.2.1.1 that the aspectual ambiguity of the simple past, which is characteristic of English (in contrast with Dutch and German) may have enhanced the grammaticalization of the progressive, first in the past and then extending to the present. The French progressive, on the other hand, enters in competition with another, much more highly grammaticalized aspectual construction in the past paradigm, i.e., the *imparfait* − a competition that has undoubtedly influenced the evolution of the present progressive as well (cf. Section 3.2.1.2).

2. Usage types of the English and the French present progressive

In this section, we summarize the results of the corpus studies on the use of the English and the French present progressive, presented in, respectively, Author 1 & Author 3 (forthcoming) and Author 1 & Author 2 (2013). In the SBC (part 1), consisting of 50,000 words, a total of 339 examples of *be* + V-*ing* have been collected, while in the French corpora, together containing approximately 2 million words, only 191 examples of *être en train de* + V-inf could be counted, which boils down to merely 4.78 occurrences per 50,000 words. This clearly indicates that speakers of English much more frequently use the present progressive than speakers of French.

Table 1 lists the various usage types arrived at and their frequencies in both languages. Each of the attested examples has been categorized as instantiating a particular usage type on the basis of (i) contextual cues, such as adverbs, which elaborate meaning elements present in the configuration of the progressive, and (ii) the difference in meaning, according to native speakers, generated by replacing the progressive with a simple present, as we will illustrate in the relevant contexts below.

Table 1: Usage types and frequencies of the English and the French present progressive[5]

| | English | | French | |
	Absolute number	Percentage	Absolute numbers	Percentage
Current ongoingness	93	27,43	113	59,16
Historical present	71	20,94	12	6,28
Temporary Validity	23	6,78	10	5,24
Duration	16	4,72	1	0,52
Incompletion	2	0,59	17	8,90
Futurate	46	13,57	0	0
Iteration	17	5,01	2	1,05
Habitual	43	12,68	18	9,42
Interpretative	28	8,26	18	9,42
Total	339	100	191	100

In the remainder of this section, we will first discuss the aspecto-temporal uses of the present progressive in French and English, i.e., those uses in which the construction is used to refer to events that are going on at the time of speaking. Then we turn to the modal usage types and modal connotations that often accompany the use of the present progressive in both French and English. With these uses, aspecto-temporal meanings of current ongoingness are highly downplayed, if present at all. As we will show in Section 3.1, such modal meanings reflect the present progressive's core semantics (instantiated in any of its uses in the two languages), which we will define as 'epistemic contingency in immediate reality' (in line with Author 1 & Author 2 2013 and Author 1 & Author 3 forthcoming).

Table 1 shows that the English present progressive examples are more evenly spread across the range of possible usage types than instances of its French counterpart, which is most often used to express Current Ongoingness. Yet in English, too, Current Ongoingness

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[5] Tables 1 and 2 have been adopted (with some minor changes) from Author 1 & Author 2 (forthcoming). Names of usage types have been capitalized.

constitutes, on the whole, the most prototypical (i.e., most frequently occurring) category of use of the present progressive. In the examples belonging to this category, the progressive is used to zoom in on a dynamic situation that is going on at the time of speaking, without any further specifications, like, for instance, suggesting (unusual) duration (cf. also Bertinetto 2000: 565) – see examples (1) and (2) for illustrations:

(1) *So I stopped the car and they said: "What **are** you **doing**?" I said: "Oh, I gotta tighten this wire here."* (SBC007)

(2) *Je **suis en train de chercher** le nom mais je l'retrouve plus*. (cfpp2000)
    'I'm looking for the name but I can't find it anymore.'

In English, the use of the progressive is *obligatory* in such contexts, while in French it is optional (and sometimes even unnatural or impossible).[6] For instance, replacing the progressive by a simple form would be downright ungrammatical in (1), but perfectly possible in (2), in which case the only difference in meaning would be that a simple-present tense construal of the same event (*je cherche le nom*) does *not necessarily* imply that the denoted mental activity is actually taking place at the time of speaking (it could, for instance, also be a habit on the part of the subject).

The other aspecto-temporal usage types of the progressives in the two languages may be regarded as more specific instantiations of the category Current Ongoingness: they involve events that are ongoing at the time of speaking, but extend or elaborate this meaning by slightly changing it or adding something to it. For instance, in English in particular, the present progressive may also be used to refer to (actually) past events that are construed as occurring in the present – cf. (3) for an illustration of such a Historical Present use:

(3) *Two weeks ago I'**m watching** TV, and David Horowitz is going to have this former car radio thief on?* (SBC006)

In French, too, examples of Historical Present uses of the present progressive can be attested, although they seem to occur more rarely than their English counterparts:

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[6] Do-Hurinville (2007: 8) points out, for instance, that *être en train de* + V-inf does not normally combine with *en ce moment* ('at this moment').

(4) *Alors voilà, c'est l' histoire d' un homme euh qui a tué une poule d'eau et qui **est en train de** la **déplumer** et alors il avait pas le droit et malheureusement pour lui il y a le garde champêtre qui arrive...* (Elicop)

'Well, then, this is the story of a man who has killed a hen and who is plucking it and so he didn't have the right and unfortunately for him the village policeman arrives…'

Both the English and French present progressive may be used as well to refer to temporarily valid events, as in (5) and (6):

(5) *So they**'re** kind of **suffering** that... from that this year. Not having that on there.* (SBC006)

(6) *On a travaillé pour le le temple protestant de Monaco. On on **est en train de faire** des vitraux pour euh Caen [...] je vais faire des vitraux prochainement à la Madeleine à à Saint-Maxime à la Sainte Beaume dans le Var.* (Elicop)

'We've been working on the the protestant temple of Monaco. [At present] we we're making stained glass for Caen […] soon I'm going to make stained glass for the church of the Madeleine in Saint-Maxime in the Sainte Baume mountains in the Var.'

Given the explicit indications of temporariness (*this year* in (5) and the reference to preceding and following events in (6)), using the simple present in these example would sound less natural. Note, further, that (5), like quite a few other examples featuring a progressive (cf. Table 2 below), involves a sense of tentativeness, as indicated by the presence of *kind of*.

Next, in French as well as in English, events may be explicitly presented as incomplete, as in (7) and (8):

(7) *[...] Non, pas encore. Ah oui, euh, quand ils vont avoir fini la couverture là, euh… Ils **sont en train de** me **finir** l'autre chantier, alors les plombiers vont s'en aller de là-bas.* (Elicop)

'[…] No, not yet. Oh, yes, when they're going to have the covering finished there, uhm… They are clearing the other construction site, so the plumbers will go from there.'

(8) *So now Fletcher**'s starting** to realize what's going on.* (SBC006)

It is easier to identify instances of the category of Incompletion in French than in English. This is due to the fact that, in English, every telic verb is as a rule given a progressive construal and thus by definition presented as incomplete. On the other hand, *être en train de* + V-inf is, in some examples (such as (7)), more clearly employed only for the expression of incompletion, since its use is not grammatically obligatory (cf. Author 1 & Author 2 2013 for a more elaborate discussion).[7]

Events in the progressive may also be interpreted as having (prolonged) duration. According to Bertinetto (2000), the French progressive can never express duration, and it has never done so either, in contrast with other European progressives which have all gone through a durative stage. Our corpus data show that such durative uses of *être en train de* + V-inf are indeed very restricted but not completely excluded, as we have been able to find one example:

(9) *Ça fait un an que je **suis en train de faire** un truc qui est INCROYABLE. Je sais pas si tu te rends compte.* (Clapi)

'For a year I've been doing this INCREDIBLE thing. I don't know if you realize.'

This and other examples of the type '*ça/cela fait* [noun phrase indicating a particular duration] *que…*' found on the internet, can take *être en train de* + V-inf and thus undermine Bertinetto's (2000) claim. Yet it should be noted that these durative uses always involve prolonged situations that are often in a way surprising or sometimes even irritating to the speaker. If (9) featured a simple present rather than a progressive, such a subjective connotation would be less conspicuously present, if at all. In English, too, durative uses, which are more commonly attested, often feature a sense of surprise or irritation, as in (10):

(10)   RICKIE: *And then the whole time under here, he'd just look. I mean, he looked so hard that it was, like, burning.* […]
REBECCA: *So then, and then, he sort of pulled the paper aside, and he's still **staring** at you?* (SBC008)

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[7] The category Incompletion is the only category whose meaning is rather intertwined with the actional semantics of the verbs involved. All the other categories (both in French and in English) do not exhibit any preference for a specific type of lexical aspect, according to our corpus analyses. There are, for instance, no indications that, say, Current Ongoingness is more often attested with activity predicates than with accomplishments in comparison with other categories.

A striking difference between the French and the English progressive is the fact that the former does not sanction a futurate interpretation, while this is quite natural in English, as in (11):

(11)   *A: Rosenblum **is coming** back though, isn't he?*
         B: I don't know what he's gonna do. (SBC006)

These futurate uses of *be* + V-*ing* are especially attested in contexts in which the speaker is quite confident, yet not fully certain, about the future occurrence of the denoted event (because, for instance, it has been arranged in the present).

Iterative and habitual interpretations involve the repetition of an event either rapidly and within a single, short time span (Iteration, cf. (12) and (13)) or within a larger time span (Habitual, cf. (14) and (15)). These uses also turn out to be much more common in English than in French – iterative uses, in particular, are very rare in French. Note that habitual uses of the present progressive often feature a sense of atypicality, surprise or irritation, in English as well as in French:

(12)   […] *Cause their hips **are beating** up against you, you know. Like that* [slapping], *fast.* (SBC002)

(13)   *Le petit garçon euh… saute pour le* [son chien]*… pour le chercher toujours euh il est toujours **en train de** l'appeler et euh i' va enfin il va à la forêt.* (Clapi)
         'The little boy is jumping, looking for him [his dog] still uhm he's still calling him and finally he goes to the forest.'

(14)   *Everywhere we've been, in the past several years, everybody's **talking** about how, the weather just isn't normal.* (SBC003)

(15)   *Dès qu'ils ont une place apparemment ils **sont en train d'mettre** des des immeubles de bureaux. J'sais pas si vous avez remarqué.* (CFPP 2000)
         'As soon as they have space apparently they're putting in office buildings. I don't know if you've noticed.'

In both French and English, the progressive may in addition be used to "re-interpret" a situation (cf. Ljung 1980 for an in-depth discussion of these so-called interpretative uses). Such uses typically involve contexts in which the speaker reformulates a previously

mentioned reference to an event or refers to an event the (underlying) meaning of which she does not consider straightforward to interpret, as in (16) and (17):

(16)   [In a discussion between a professor and his students about the discourse of civil rights activist Jesse Jackson:] *He's smart, he talks about minorities. But he's really **talking** about African Americans.* (SBC012)

(17)   *A: Le quartier a des tas de liens, ne serait-c' que par l'école et les paroisses, hein*
B: Absolument, c'est vrai
*A: Ce que vous **êtes en train de dire** c'est qu'il y a une présence catholique forte encore.* (CFPP2000)
'A: In the neighborhood there are a lot of bonds, if only through school and the parishes, aren't there.
B: Absolutely, that's true
A: What you're saying is that there's still a strong catholic presence.'

In example (16), the speaker is reporting on a habitual action of the subject (Jesse Jackson) and there are no aspecto-temporal differences between the first reference (rendered in the simple present) and the second one (given a present-progressive construal). In the French example in (17), too, the present progressive is used to reformulate an observation, rather than to indicate ongoingness in the present. In cases such as these, the construction is purely called upon to make the event stand out and to emphasize its actual nature, i.e., it is used for modal (epistemic) rather than for aspecto-temporal reasons (cf. the presence of the adverb *really* in (16)).

This brings us to the following central observation: the French and English examples often carry subjective notions of surprise and irritation (cf., e.g., examples (9), (10), (14) and (15)), tentativeness (cf. (5)) and intensification (cf. (12)) (cf. the frequencies in Table 2 below). In some cases, conveying such a subjective meaning appears to be the main, if not only, reason for using the progressive instead of the simple form (i.e., there is no aspecto-temporal reason for doing so). Examples (18) and (19), for instance, involve habitual situations and it would, therefore, be grammatically correct to use a simple present in both the English and the French sentence, yet this would sound pragmatically anomalous. In (18), the speaker presents the situation in a more intensified manner (cf. the presence of *really really*), while (19) features a sense of irritation (as is also reflected in the use of *ce* 'it' rather than *ils* 'they' in subject position). Apparently, subjective expressions such as these typically elicit the use of the

present progressive rather than the simple present, which would present the denoted situations in a more 'neutral' fashion.

(18) *I always have somebody that really knows what they're doing for the horses that I'm really really **using***. (SBC001)

(19) *En ce moment, hein, à notre époque beaucoup les cadres les fils de bourgeois qui font les […] hein c'**est** tout le temps **en train de** voyager ces gens-là hein.* (Clapi)
"At the moment, huh, these days a lot the executives the sons of bourgeois that do the […] huh they'**re** [lit. it's] **travelling** all the time those people huh."

In many other uses, aspecto-temporal and modal motivations for using the progressive seem to go hand in hand. In (20), for instance, the use of the present progressive is grammatically obligatory as the denoted situation is ongoing in the present, but it also naturally ties in with the atypical nature of the situation:

(20) *And it's a killer on your back cause you'**re standing** like this.* (SBC002)

Since aspecto-temporal motivations for using the progressive are almost always present in the background (especially in English, in which the use of *be* + V-*ing* is obligatory with dynamic situations in the present), we do not regard 'surprise', 'tentativeness', 'irritation' and 'intensification' as purely modal (in the sense of 'non-aspecto-temporal') *usage types* (such as the Interpretative use), but rather as subjective expressions that typically collocate with aspecto-temporal uses of the present progressive (since they, as we will demonstrate in Section 3.1, reflect the construction's core meaning of 'contingency in immediate reality'). Table 2 lists the number of examples that feature a sense of surprise, tentativeness, irritation or intensification in both English and French (note that these examples have already been classified as instantiating a particular usage type in Table 1).

Table 2: Modal expressions in English and French

	English		French	
	Absolute number	**Percentage (total of 339)**	**Absolute number**	**Percentage (total of 191)**
Surprise	62	18,29	14	7,33
Tentativeness	11	3,24	17	8,90
Irritation	36	10,62	14	7,33
Intensification	50	14,75	37	19,37

The results of the corpus studies summarized here yield a number of interesting results, which in turn give rise to the research questions that will be dealt with in Section 3:

(i)   The French as well as the English present progressive relatively frequently involve modal connotations, which would not be present if the simple present were used instead.[8] How do these tie in with the aspecto-temporal uses of the progressive constructions and with their core semantics, more generally? These questions will be discussed in Section 3.1, in which we argue that the present progressive in both French and English expresses 'epistemic contingency in immediate reality' at the most basic level of analysis (Author 1 & Author 2 2013).

(ii)   The English present progressive can express a broader variety of aspecto-temporal meanings than its French counterpart, which is more or less limited to expressing 'pure' Current Ongoingness (although even in that context, its use is not obligatory). For most other categories[9], the use of *être en train de* + V-inf is quite and sometimes even heavily (cf. Duration and Iteration) restricted, and future-time reference is excluded with this construction. In other words, the usage types of the French present progressive constitute a subpart of those of the English present progressive. The use of the latter construction is, moreover, much more entrenched: not only because it is grammatically obligatory with dynamic verbs, but also in view of its frequency of occurrence (as we have noted at the beginning of this section). Our findings thus confirm those of Lachaux (2005), whose study of English texts and their French translations shows that, in a great many cases, the English progressive cannot be translated by means of its French equivalent (i.e., *être en train de* + V-inf). These weak functional limitations, the high frequency, and obligatorification of *be* + V-*ing* can be regarded as indicative of its high degree of grammaticalization. While these observations are not surprising as such (since the English progressive is known for its notable degree of grammaticalization), they do bring up a couple of questions that have thus far not been tackled in any comprehensive analysis:

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[8] For English, this opposition between the simple present and the present progressive can of course only be made apparent in those contexts in which the use of the simple present would be grammatical in the first place, such as (14), (16) and (18).

[9] The category of Incompletion is not typical in this respect, in that, as we explained in Section 2, it is easier to identify instances of it in French than in English.

a. Why is the English present progressive more grammaticalized than the French one? As we will see in Sections 3.2.1, there are various historical explanations for this high degree of grammaticalization of *be* + V-*ing* (Section 3.2.1.1) and for the comparatively low degree of grammaticalization of its French counterpart (Section 3.2.1.2). In this section on diachrony, we will also integrate a discussion on the (evolution of the) aspectual semantics of the English and French simple present constructions. Assuming that the communicative need for expressing progressive aspect is equal in the two languages (Mortier 2008: 5-6), we may predict that this function is partially fulfilled by another construction in French. In Section 3.2.1.2, we will show that this other construction is the French simple present tense, which can express imperfective (as well as perfective) aspect. It is thus distinct from the English simple present, which has, under influence of the independently developing present progressive, specialized into solely marking perfective aspect (Section 3.2.1.1).

b. Why do some meaning categories in particular resist expression by means of the progressive in French, while they quite naturally occur with the progressive in English? To account for the restrictions on durative and iterative uses in French, we will again refer to diachronic differences between the English and the French progressive periphrases. That is, as will be demonstrated in Section 3.2.2, the more dynamic origin of *être en train de* + V-inf lends itself less naturally to relatively static interpretations of prolonged duration and iteration than the locative origin of *be* + V-*ing*. The absence of futurate readings for the present progressive in French, on the other hand, will be related to the comparatively wide array of possible uses of the aspectually ambiguous simple present, which consequently constitutes the default and only dedicated present-tense construction to be used in future-time contexts, as opposed to its more restricted (i.e., solely perfective) equivalent in English. As we will indicate, a futurate use of the present *progressive*, commonly attested as it may be in English, actually turns out to be fairly exceptional from a cross-linguistic perspective.

3. Semantic analysis of *être en train de* + V-inf, compared to *be* + V-*ing*: Synchrony and diachrony

3.1. Modal core meaning of the two present-progressive constructions

Many analyses of the semantics of the English progressive focus on purely aspecto-temporal notions: it has been argued to express temporariness (Mindt 2000), duration (Palmer 1989), limited duration (Quirk et al. 1985; Leech 2004), imperfectivity (Declerck, Reed & Capelle 2006), progressiveness (i.e., ongoingness at a particular reference point) (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 162; Tharaud 2008), temporal framing (Jespersen 1931) and incompletion (Palmer 1989; Leech 2004). Yet we have seen that the progressive appears in a number of 'idiosyncratic' contexts too (Comrie 1976: 38), in which there does not seem to be any aspecto-temporal motivation for introducing the construction: it can be used to refer to future situations (often arranged in the present), to "re-interpret" a situation and to express some 'emotional' evaluation (irritation, tentativeness…). Especially the latter two functions are often neglected in standard analyses of the core meaning of the English progressive – notable exceptions are Adamczewski (1978), Ljung (1980), Wright (1994), Rydén (1997), Williams (2002) and Tharaud (2008). Even though some of these authors try to provide unified accounts of the various uses of the English progressive, these are not entirely satisfactory since certain usage types are either neglected (Rydén 1997, for instance, explicitly disregards the futurate use of the progressive in his analysis) or excluded from the semantics of the construction proper (because, for instance, they are argued to be derived from the context rather than from the meaning of the progressive, cf. e.g. Tharaud 2008). In other cases (notably Adamczewski 1978 and Williams 2002), the suggested accounts (comprehensive though they may be) do not succeed in proposing one basic semantic schema that *systematically* covers and links all of the attested usage types (see Author 1 & Author 3 forthcoming for further discussion).

The French progressive has understandably attracted less attention than its more frequently used English counterpart, yet there are some interesting analyses of its core semantics. Do-Hurinville (2007), for instance, suggests 'dynamism' as the diachronic core meaning of the French progressive, i.e., the meaning that has always been part of the semantics of the progressive as well as of its component parts. As we will argue in Section 3.2.2, this dynamic component in the progressive's semantics has substantially influenced its evolution and present-day semantics. Some other analyses of the core value of the French progressive, viz. those of Franckel (1989) and Lachaux (2005), explicitly include the modal expressions associated with the construction's use. The main point of these proposals – which are to be

situated within the enunciativist tradition, which focuses on the pragmatic, 'inter-speaker' functions of grammatical devices – is that the progressive marks a situation as 'standing out', i.e., as divergent with respect to what is expected, in a very broad sense (cf. '*mise en relief*', Lachaux 2005). Franckel (1989: 78) offers the following example, which nicely illustrates that the present progressive more naturally refers to atypical events (21a) than to situations that are expected to occur (21b):

(21)　　　a. *Il **est en train de lire** de travers.*
　　　　　'He is reading the wrong way.'
　　　　　b. ? *Il **est en train de bien** lire.*
　　　　　'He is reading well.'

Leeman (2012) further elaborates on Franckel's (1989) analysis, suggesting that the meaning of discrepancy (typically involving a negative evaluation) is compositionally derived from the meaning of the preposition *en* and the verb *traîner* ('to pull, drag').

These accounts of the semantics French progressive tie in closely with the semantic analysis of the French and English present progressive put forward in Author 1 & Author 2 (2013), who claim that, in both languages, the present progressive has a modal (epistemic) meaning at the core of its semantics. It is argued to indicate, more specifically, that a situation has a 'contingent' status within the speaker's conception of present (immediate) reality. This means that, even if an event is actually ('really') happening at the time of speaking, the fact that it is happening 'now' and how it manifests itself could not have been predicted or expected (cf. also Author 1 & Author 3 forthcoming). In other words, the event is not construed as part of the *structural* world knowledge of the speaker (Goldsmith & Woisetschlaeger 1982; Brisard 2002), i.e., it is phenomenal (observable as (if) developing before the conceptualizer's eyes). Example (21) constitutes a good illustration of this opposition between structural and phenomenal situations in French: (21a) represents a phenomenal, contingent situation, whereas (21b) involves a situation that constitutes a more structural part of the speaker's reality (since the subject is presumably expected to know how to read). An English example of the structural/phenomenal opposition is suggested in Goldsmith & Woisetschlaeger (1982: 81):

(22)　　　a. *The engine **isn't smoking** anymore.*
　　　　　b. *The engine **doesn't smoke** anymore.*

As Goldsmith & Woisetschlaeger (1982: 81) point out, it would be distinctly odd to utter sentence (22b) in a context in which the speaker was not expecting the engine to be repaired. In such more phenomenal circumstances, the use of (22a), which merely describes what is happening, is much more appropriate. Conversely, if the speaker does expect the engine to have stopped smoking (because, for instance, she is confident that she has repaired it), (22b) does appear appropriate. The use of the simple present then reflects that, in the normal course of events, i.e., given a certain knowledge of the *structure* of the world, the engine indeed does not smoke anymore after it has been repaired. The meaning of contingency characteristic of the present progressive naturally gives rise to connotations of surprise, intensification, tentativeness and irritation, which, therefore, frequently accompany the use of the present progressive, and to the interpretative meanings, as these refer to situations that are regarded as exceptional (and thus not straightforward to interpret, offending etc.).

If this modal analysis in terms of contingency in immediate reality is valid for all the uses of the progressive (in French and in English), then one might wonder how it applies to the apparently purely aspecto-temporal uses with no such additional modal connotations. The answer, Author 1 & Author 3 (forthcoming) argue, resides in the backgrounded nature of the boundaries of an event that is imperfectivized by means of the progressive. The following figures, adopted from Langacker (2001: 259-260), illustrate how this works. First, the progressive, as an imperfective marker, creates an internal perspective (an aspectual immediate scope, IS_A; morphologically marked by *–ing* in English and by *en train de* in French) on a dynamic situation, which is by definition bounded in time (events always have "some limit" (Langacker 1987: 261-262)) and, often, heterogeneous. This progressive configuration is illustrated in Figure 1.
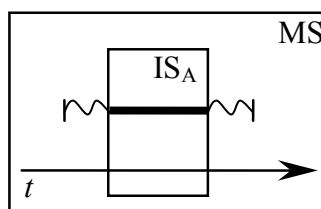

Figure 1: Internal perspective imposed by the progressive[10]

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[10] For ease of representation, we will refrain from explicitly indicating the prototypical heterogeneity of events in the subsequent figures.

As a result of this internal viewpoint, the boundaries of the event are backgrounded, i.e., they are put in the configuration's maximal scope (MS).[11] At the same time, that part of the situation that is within the progressive's scope (IS_A) has been homogenized, moving the focus away from its evolution towards a final boundary and concentrating on its mere development or passing in time. Such imperfectivized dynamic situations, as well as states, are contractible (Langacker 2001) or – in interval-semantic terms – they have the "subinterval property" (Bennett and Partee 1978). This means that any random segment of the situation is representative of the situation in its entirety – a property that is not shared by perfectively viewed dynamic situations. By virtue of this characteristic, states and imperfectivized events can be fully verified at the time of speaking, and they are therefore, unlike perfectively viewed events, compatible with the present tense, which implies full and exact coincidence between the event and the time of speaking (Langacker 1991) (in Section 3.2.1, we will propose a more elaborate analysis of the interaction between the present tense and types of lexical and grammatical aspect). This alignment of an event with the time of speaking is depicted in Figure 2, in which a second scope, that of the present tense (the speech event is indicated by the squiggly line and the temporal scope is indicated by IS_T), is superimposed over the first immediate scope. This represents the fact that the speaker denotes, by using a present tense, that part of the situation that overlaps with her description of it.
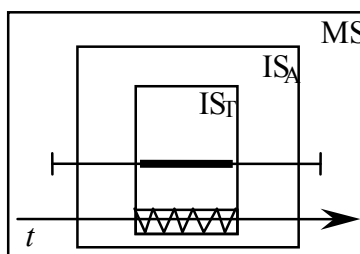

Figure 2: Configuration of the present progressive (in French and English)

Given this definition of the present progressive, we can assume that, in each of its uses, backgrounded boundaries are by necessity implied (even with states; cf. Footnote 11) (cf. also Leeman (2012) on the boundaries imposed by *être en train de* + V-inf). The presence of these boundaries, together with the progressive's internal (i.e., imperfective) perspective, directly reflects the meaning of epistemic contingency – that is, the temporal configuration depicted in

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[11] When stative verbs are given a progressive construal, these boundaries are *created* – i.e., the denoted states are coerced into something more dynamic (and temporary).

Figure 2 results in a less than complete view offered on the situation and thus in less than certain knowledge on its further development and possible culmination.[12]

3.2. Grammaticalization of *être en train de* +V-inf, compared to *be* + V-*ing*

3.2.1. Different histories, different aspectual values

In the previous section, we have postulated an important semantic parallel between the French and the English present progressive, i.e., they share the same basic, crucially modal meaning (as is reflected in their frequent association with modal connotations related to the meaning of contingency). Despite this parallelism at a schematic, more abstract level, the constructions differ at a more specific level, i.e., in actual usage: even though they both prototypically refer to currently ongoing events, the French present progressive is used less frequently, it is not grammatically obligatory with dynamic verbs and semantically less differentiated. The explanation for these differences resides, in our view, in the different diachronic evolutions that have shaped the present-tense paradigms in the two languages at hand.

3.2.1.1. History of the present progressive and the simple present in English

Let us start with the diachrony of *be* + V-*ing* and its ancestor, *beon/wesan* + V-*ende*.[13] Given the remarkable degree of grammaticalization of the English progressive from a cross-linguistic perspective (cf., e.g., Comrie 1976: 32), quite a few studies have been devoted to its diachronic development in order to shed more light on this aspect. The most relevant comprehensive descriptions, on which we are basing our diachronic analysis, are found in Scheffer (1975), Wright (1994), Ziegeler (1999), Núñez-Pertejo (2004) and Kranich (2010).

Old English inherited from Proto-Germanic an aspectual system that is reminiscent of a type of aspect-marking which is also attested in present-day Slavic languages: often, imperfective verbs (i.e., verbs with an atelic, durative or stative, meaning) were turned into perfective (i.e., telic) verbs by means of prefixing, notably by *ge-*, but also by, for instance, *a-*,

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[12] Cf. Dowty's (1979) analysis of the interaction between telic events and the progressive (known as the "imperfective paradox").

[13] In some studies, it is the prepositional construction '*beon/wesan + in/on/a +* V-*ing*' that is identified as the modern progressive's ancestor, yet this prepositional pattern did not occur in progressive contexts before the 14th century. Therefore, we follow Ziegeler (1999), who suggests that it merged with the independently developing *beon/wesan* + V-*ende* construction and, consequently, considerably influenced the functional development of this construction in late Middle and Modern English.

be-, *on-* and *for-* (Núñez-Pertejo 2004: 66-67; Scheffer 1975: 171-178). [14] Consequently, the verbs that remained unmarked were commonly interpreted as being imperfective (typically atelic and durative). As explained in detail in Brinton (1988), this association between perfectivity and prefixed verbs and between imperfectivity and unmarked verbs was not a strict one (e.g., verbs without prefixes could also have a perfective meaning (Brinton 1988: 200)). Moreover, in many of their uses the literal (directional or locative) meaning of the prefixes was still transparent, which indicates that these derived verbal markers were not fully grammaticalized as general markers of perfective aspect in the Old English period. Yet, gradually, the literal meanings were bleached, giving way to the expression of aspectual meanings such as perfectivity (Brinton 1988). It is, therefore, safe to say that the Old English aspectual prefix system was relative productive.

In Old English, the progressive *beon/wesan* + V-*ende* construction already existed, but it appears to have been an unsystematically used stylistic device, rather than a genuine aspect marker. It was used for the expression of imperfectivity and duration (Scheffer 1975; cf. also Bertinetto, Ebert & de Groot 2000 on the durative meaning of the progressive in Old English), to frame another situation, but often also merely to foreground an event in narrative contexts (Núñez-Pertejo 2004: 90-91; Killie 2008; Kranich 2010: 87-88). Various studies (e.g., Scheffer 1975: 162; Núñez-Pertejo 2004: 65-66) indicate that it was most commonly associated with intransitive, durative action verbs and sometimes even with stative predicates, which seems to suggest that it functioned as a concord (or a type-selecting) construction, in the terms of Michaelis (2004; 2011). [15] That is, it typically selected particular verb types with which it was in accordance semantically and simply flagged their duration. In cases where it did occur with non-concordant verbs (non-durative perfective ones), coercion took place and these non-durative verbs were turned into durative ones (i.e., imperfectivized). [16]

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[14] In Slavic, perfective aspect is said to signalize the attainment of a final boundary, totality and/or temporal specificity in sequential relations, in contrast with imperfective aspect, which indicates that the situational boundaries, if any, are neglected (Gvozdanović 2012). Therefore, and given the analogy between Old English and (a type of) Slavic aspectual marking, we put (a)telicity and (im)perfectivity on a par for the purposes of our description of aspect in Old English. Yet we do so only in this context, since these aspectual concepts pertain to different levels of analysis and are distinct in (non-Slavic) languages in which perfective and imperfective aspect are *grammatically* expressed, rather than constituting some "grammaticalized lexical categories" (Dahl 1985: 89), as in Slavic.

[15] As Peter Petré (pers. comm.) points out, the stative verbs that allowed a progressive construal in Old English still often involve a component of dynamicity. For example, in *The flood flows into the Ocean*, an example translated from Old English (Kranich 2010: 86), the overall meaning of the sentence is stative, yet the flowing is in itself dynamic.

[16] Michaelis's (2004; 2011) analysis of concord constructions mainly focuses on constructions with a stative meaning that, at the same time, select stative verbs. Hence, we are slightly adapting her analysis by considering atelic duration (rather than pure stativity) as the crucial aspectual parameter that is shared by the construction and the selected verb type.

By the end of the Old English period, the synthetic way of aspect marking by means of prefixes gradually disappeared due to a number of (language-internal and -external) factors (cf. Brinton 1988: 189 for an overview) and, as a consequence, the formal distinction between perfective and imperfective verbs got lost. This evolution appears to have triggered the development of the elaborate system of phrasal verbs still present in contemporary English (cf., e.g., Denison 1985; Brinton 1988). Initially, however, the relevant phrasal particles (*up*, *out* etc.) only involved concrete spatial meanings (Brinton 1988: 215), thereby replicating the *original* function of the prefixes that had (all but) disappeared and not the type of general aspect marking that these had specialized into at a later stage. [17] McWhorter (2007: 70) further points out that those prefixes that had taken on a more grammatical (perfective) meaning, such as *be-*, *ge-* and *for-*, simply disappeared from the grammar without any substitution (in the form of a particle). In other words, by the 11th century, the English language was faced with an aspectual vacuum (Strang 1970: 351-352; Núñez-Pertejo 2004: 67), which would constitute an ideal context for the remarkable rise of the progressive in later stages.

Data from other Germanic languages provide additional evidence for this association between the loss of aspectual prefixes and the grammaticalization of the progressive. It should be noted that the Proto-Germanic aspectual prefix system was not only adopted into Old English, but also into the older varieties of other West-Germanic languages, such as Dutch and German. In these languages, however, the prefix system has never disappeared and has remained relatively productive (van Kemenade & Los 2003). *Ver-* (cognate of *for-*) and *be-*, for instance, are used to express that the object is fully affected, thus generating a transitive and perfective meaning. Examples of the aspectual use of *ver-* and *be-* in present-day Dutch include *spelen* / *verspelen* ('play' / 'forfeit'), *slapen* / *(zich) verslapen* ('sleep' / 'oversleep'), *ademen* / *beademen* ('breath' / 'breath air into') and *zorgen* / *bezorgen* ('take care of' / 'deliver'). Similar oppositions can be attested in German and Old English – cf., for instance, German *lassen* / *verlassen* and Old English *lætan* / *forlætean* as equivalents of Dutch *laten* / *verlaten* ('let' / 'abandon') (van Kemenade & Los 2003: 95). Derivational uses of the perfectivizing prefix *ge-* can also still be attested in contemporary standard Dutch – e.g., *denken* / *gedenken* ('think' / 'commemorate') – yet it does not seem to be as productive anymore as a perfectivizing device as it used to be in older varieties of Dutch (Van der Horst 2008: 215-217). Most likely this is because its main function nowadays is to mark the past

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[17] Nowadays, in many cases, the literal meaning of verbal particles has faded, making them more suited for the expression of aspectual values. Nevertheless, the system of phrasal verbs can still hardly be claimed to be as grammaticalized as other forms used for the expression of aspect in English, such as the perfect or the progressive constructions.

participle, used in, for instance, the perfect construction (which consists of *hebben* ('have') or *zijn* ('be') followed by a past participle, e.g., *Ik heb al ge-slapen* ('I have already slept')). Naturally, in this function of *ge-* its original perfective meaning still shines through and, notably, the formation of the past participle in English does not require prefixation. In sum, present-day Dutch (as well as German) can still, to a certain extent, rely on a system of prefixes to form imperfective/perfective word pairs. Given our hypothesis concerning the link between an aspectual vacuum and the rise of the progressive in English, we would expect that the progressive in Dutch and German is not as grammaticalized as it is in English. This expectation is indeed borne out, as is indicated by, for instance, Ebert (2000). In fact, the only Germanic language in which the progressive seems to have grammaticalized to (about) the same extent as the English progressive is Icelandic (Jóhannsdóttir 2011). Interestingly, and in line with our analysis, Icelandic is the only Germanic language beside English that has fully shed the system of Germanic verbal prefixes (McWhorter 2007: 71).[18]

In the Modern period, the progressive – which had, during the Middle English period, taken on the *be* + V-*ing* form – rose remarkably in frequency and underwent a paradigmatic expansion, occurring in contexts that were originally preserved for the simple present (such as the passive). Backgrounded contexts in the past appear to have constituted its main locus of grammaticalization (Petré 2012). The fact that Dutch and German do not seem to have felt the same need to mark past imperfective situations by means of the progressive might not only be due to their relatively productive prefix system, but also to the evolving perfect construction in these languages, which contributed to prevent the rise of an aspectual vacuum by taking up past perfective functions. In Dutch, the perfect had, by the 16th century, taken up a past perfective meaning, at the expense of the simple past, which only remained unchallenged in past imperfective contexts (Van der Horst 2008: 628). In German, this intrusion of the perfect into the past domain is even more pervasive, as the use of the simple past has become virtually restricted to past imperfective contexts under pressure of the perfect (Boogaart 1999: 156). The English perfect also rose in frequency throughout the ME period up until the 16th century, yet its rise was then leveled off until the 18th century, after which it even lost in frequency in American English (Bowie, Wallis & Aarts forthcoming). Importantly, the English present perfect never actually seems to have taken on past perfective meanings. Thus, the English simple past remained aspectually ambiguous throughout, rather than acquiring a

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[18] In his discussion of the aspectual prefix system in Icelandic, McWhorter (2007: 71) further specifies that the prefixes had actually already been abandoned in Old Norse, which means that they were lacking not only in Icelandic (and Faroese), but also in Mainland Scandinavian languages (Swedish, Norwegian and Danish), yet these languages later borrowed them again from Low German.

(more) imperfective meaning, such that the progressive was free to grammaticalize in past imperfective contexts.

Our analysis of course does not *a priori* exclude that other factors may have influenced the continuing increase in grammaticalization of the English progressive beside the aspectual gap that had arisen in the Middle English period. One such factor is discussed by Petré (2012) and Los & Starren (forthcoming), who point to the general evolution of English from a bounded to an unbounded system. That is, whereas Old English (like present-day German and Dutch) typically appeared to indicate temporal bounding – for instance, by focusing on where and when something happened –, Modern English is argued to be more concerned with encoding temporal overlap, as indicated by, among other things, the frequent use of the progressive (cf. Los & Starren (forthcoming) for a more elaborate discussion of how the bounded/unbounded distinction is reflected in various linguistic phenomena in English, German and Dutch).

Thus, going from Old to Modern English, we witness an evolution from a synthetic aspectual system with perfective aspect as the marked member to a new analytic aspect system with formal marking of imperfectivity by means of *be* + V-*ing*. Crucially, we claim that the more the (independently developing) progressive became entrenched in the present-tense paradigm as a marker of imperfective aspect, the more the simple present got associated with perfective aspect (cf. also Smith 1997 on the perfective viewpoint entailed by the simple present in contemporary English). We contend that this evolution has had important consequences for the semantics of both the simple present and the present progressive. As opposed to imperfective aspect, which involves a less than full view on a situation, a perfective viewpoint implies a complete view on and, therefore, full knowledge of a situation. If we assume that the present tense indicates that a situation fully and exactly coincides with the time of speaking (Langacker 1991), then, by definition, a present perfective construal of a state or an event entails that a speaker has a full conception of the denoted situation at the time of speaking. That is, as depicted in Figure 3, the designated situation needs to be fully included in the temporal scope of the present tense (IS_T), as well as in the perfective aspectual scope (IS_A). Consequently, under the assumption that the English simple present entails a perfective viewpoint, IS_A and IS_T coincide in its semantic configuration.
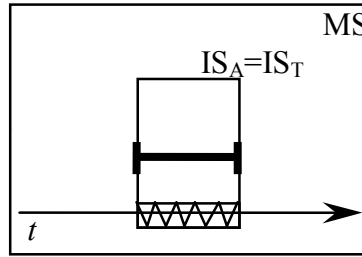
Figure 3: Simple present in English

With states, which are contractible, such full and exact coincidence with the time of speaking is unproblematic, since any segment of the state, including the part that coincides with the present, can stand for the state in its entirety (cf. Section 3.1). Along the same lines, habitual and generic situations – i.e., situations that are taken to be generally valid – can be contracted: any specific instantiation of the generalization is representative for the habit or generic truth in its entirety. Therefore, the use of the simple present for describing states (23), habits (24) and generic statements (25) is felicitous in English:

(23)   *Right now, he **is** ill, so you'd better come back later.*

(24)   *I **run** daily.*

(25)   *Cows **eat** grass.*

It is also possible to have a full present-time conceptualization of events in performative contexts, in sports commentaries or in other contexts in which events are typically perceived as having a very short duration (Vanden Wyngaerd 2005). In performative expressions, such as (26), the speech act and the reported event are even equated:

(26)   *I **promise** it won't happen again.*

However, in most other contexts, such a present perfective construal of dynamic situations is conceptually impossible. Unlike states, events are only contractible when they are effectively homogenized and construed as unbounded by means of an imperfectivizing device, such that their profile becomes just like that of states (cf. Section 3.1). As such, however, an event cannot be identified and perceived as a whole on the basis of a random portion of the event. This also holds for apparently homogeneous activities, such as sleeping: as pointed out by Michaelis (2004: 10-11), it takes more than one momentaneous sample to identify the difference between sleeping, nodding off for a second and being comatose. Therefore, in

order to have a present perfective view on an event, the entire situation, including its boundaries, needs to be aligned with the time of speaking. Yet typical events hardly ever have exactly the same brief duration of the speech event (durational problem) and, at the time of speaking, one does not usually have knowledge about an event actually reaching its final boundary, and so it cannot be fully identified (epistemic problem) (Langacker 2001). Hence, there appears to be an incompatibility problem between perfective aspect and present-time reference with dynamic verbs, cross-linguistically identified as the "present perfective paradox" by Malchukov (2009) (cf. also, e.g., Smith (1997:110-112) for a similar analysis of the incompatibility problem at hand). Consequently, the simple present tense can no longer be used to refer to events that are going on in the present:[19]

(27)   *I *drive/am driving my car, so I can't pick up my phone right now.*

As explained in Section 3.1, the progressive imperfectivizes dynamic situations and thus enables their alignment with the speech event. This is why, we believe, the use of the progressive is obligatory in English in contexts such as (27). It is not unlikely, therefore, that the perfective value of the simple present – gradually attained under influence of the grammaticalizing progressive – has, in turn, led to the eventual obligatorification of the present progressive with dynamic verbs around the end of the 19th century in English grammar. Remark that, in the course of the centuries, the *be* + V-*ing* periphrasis has apparently turned from a concord construction into a type-shifting construction (again in the terminology of Michaelis (2004; 2011)): by the end of the Modern period, its function has turned to giving a stative (i.e., unbounded and homogeneous) profile to an originally dynamic situation by means of imperfectivization.

3.2.1.2. History of the present progressive and the simple present in French

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[19] There are indications that such perfective value is relevant for all unmarked verbs in contemporary English, whether they appear in finite clauses (i.e., in the simple present) or as non-finite forms. For instance, English (as opposed to, e.g., French) has the option of marking an internal perspective on an event by means of the suffix -*ing* (cf. Figure 1) in (non-finite) "small clauses" (cf. a). In (b), its unmarked counterpart, the situation [cross the street] is conceived in its entirety:

       a.   *I saw him crossing the street.*
       b.   *I saw him cross the street.*

Note that the distinction between grammatical and lexical aspect (i.e., between perfectivity and dynamicity) is moot in these cases.

The French present progressive has clearly followed a different diachronic pathway (cf. Pusch 2003; Do-Hurinville 2007; Mortier 2008). Historical data indicate the availability in the past of a relatively wide array of progressive constructions (some of them already attested in Late Latin, cf. Bertinetto 2000: 562) that have all disappeared: '*être* ('be') + present participle', '*être après* ('be after') + infinitive', '*être à* ('be at') + infinitive' and '*aller* ('go') + gerund', which still exists, but only in very formal registers (Pusch 2003; Mortier 2008). Towards the middle of the 19th century *être en train de* + V-inf acquired its contemporary aspectual function, gradually replacing the alternative periphrases. Before that (from the 16th century onwards), it had a modal meaning, rather than an aspectual one: 'being in the (right) mood, in the (right) disposition to (doing something)' (as in *être en train de confidence* 'to feel confident', Do-Hurinville 2007: 33). Clearly, then, the French progressive has come about relatively late in time and has had less time to grammaticalize than the English one, which is, we hypothesize, due to the lack of a paradigmatic pressure of the type attested in English. At first sight, there seem to be indications of an aspectual gap in Middle French: the Latin aspectual prefix system, which was already decaying in Late Latin, had completely disappeared by the Middle French period (Buridant 2000: 354; Patard & De Mulder manuscript), while on the other hand the variety of periphrastic aspectual constructions that existed in Old French (some of which have been indicated above) never really grammaticalized (Buridant 2000: 354-361). Nevertheless older varieties of French have never really been faced with an aspectual vacuum, since there existed, from Middle French onwards, a strong aspectual opposition in the past, inflectionally marked by the opposition between the *imparfait* (the imperfect) and the *passé simple* (the past perfective). Significantly, the *imparfait* is typically used in backgrounded past-time contexts, thus already fulfilling the function that constituted the main locus of grammaticalization for the progressive in English (cf. Section 3.2.1.1). Therefore, we hypothesize that, even though the *imparfait* is only genuinely in competition with *être en train de* + V-inf in past contexts (Lebas-Fraczak 2010), there has been little language-internal motivation in French for the development of a progressive for the expression of imperfectivity.

However, while the presence of this formal opposition may account for the differences between French and English (which, as we saw in Section 3.2.1.1, lacked such an opposition, in contrast with Dutch and German, which have a more grammaticalized perfect construction), data from other Romance languages indicate that it is not sufficient as such to explain the late rise and relatively restricted occurrence of the progressive in French. In Spanish, for instance, the presence of a formally marked perfective/imperfective opposition in

the past has not prevented the development of a progressive that has clearly attained a more advanced stage of grammaticalization than *être en train de* + V-inf (Bertinetto 2000; Laca 2004). The Spanish progressive is canonically expressed by means of *estar* ('stay') + gerund (but alternative periphrases with verbs of movement occur as well, cf., e.g., Laca 2004), a form that has been taken over from Late Latin (Bertinetto 2000: 562-563) and that has thus been present in the language ever since, alongside dedicated constructions for the expression of perfective and imperfective aspect in the past. The reason why periphrastic constructions in older varieties of French, such as *être* + present participle, have not made their way into the tense and aspect system in the same vein seems to reside in the fact that, until the 19th century, prescriptivist grammarians and the influential French Academy argued (at times quite vigorously) against the use of periphrases such as *être en train de* + V-inf (Gougenheim 1971: 63-65). Such prescriptivism never seems to have been of any relevance for the use of the Spanish progressive constructions: first of all, standardization of the Spanish language has been primarily concerned with spelling, rather than with grammar (Penny 2000: 206), and secondly, influential prescriptivist grammars such as Nebrija's *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (1492) and Correas's *Arte de la lengua española castellana* (1625) do not explicitly condemn the use of *estar* + gerund. Nevertheless, the Spanish progressive has not grammaticalized to the same extent as its English counterpart – it is, for instance, not obligatorily used to refer to present-time events (Torres Cacoullos 2012). This may indicate that the presence of an inflectional opposition between the past perfective and the past imperfective has prevented a full-fledged grammaticalization of the (past as well as present) progressive not only in French, but also in Spanish.

In sum, due to the lack of language-internal pressure and the prescriptivist reluctance to use *être en train de* + V-inf, the present progressive in French is not as entrenched in the present-tense paradigm as its English counterpart and, conversely, the French simple present tense is still often used in imperfective contexts (i.e., it has never become historically associated with perfective aspect under influence of a developing progressive). In fact, we claim that the simple present in French is aspectually ambiguous, since it can express both a perfective viewpoint, whereby the speaker can conceptualize of a situation as a whole (as in (28)), and an imperfective viewpoint, in which case the speaker only conceives of an internal segment of a situation that is ongoing in the present (as in (29)).

(28)   *Je vous **déclare** maintenant mari et femme.*
          'I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.'

(29)   *En ce moment, je **me promène** dans le jardin.*

'At this moment, I am walking (*walk) through the garden.'

There are other indications that, unlike the *imparfait*, the French simple present is not restricted to imperfective contexts. Smith (1997: 77-81, 201-202) points out that tenses such as the French simple present – and other, what she calls, "aspectually vague" tenses – allow both perfective and imperfective interpretations in sentences containing a *when*-clause. The *imparfait*, on the other hand, is restricted to imperfective interpretations in such contexts. Consider, for instance, the examples in (30): when the present tense is used in the main clause, as in (30a) (adopted from Schaden 2011: 109), either a sequential (perfective) or an incidental (imperfective) reading can be given, while (30b), featuring an *imparfait* in the main clause, only allows for an incidental interpretation.

(30)   a.   *Quand Jean arrive, Marie **chante**.*
                (i) 'When John arrives, Marie sings (starts to sing).'
                (ii) 'When John arrives, Marie is singing.'
         b.   *Quand Jean est arrivé, Marie **chantait**.*
                'When John arrived, Marie was singing.'

While Smith maintains that "aspectually vague" tenses, such as the French simple present, involve a neutral viewpoint, i.e., they are said to be "neither perfective nor imperfective" (1997: 78), our conception of the French simple present as aspectually ambiguous entails that the construction is always given either a perfective reading or an imperfective one, depending on the context. This aspectual ambiguity can again be formalized by means of scope building. In its present perfective uses, the French simple present shares the semantic configuration for the English simple present, as depicted in Figure 3 (cf. Figure 4a). At the same time, though, the simple present in French can impose an imperfective scope (cf. Figure 4b), while for the English simple present this is, due to the historical reasons described in Section 3.2.1.1, impossible.[20]

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[20] There have been different hypotheses around to account for the difference between the English and the French simple present tense. Michaelis (2011), for instance, proposes an interesting analysis of the two constructions, claiming that they have a different *coercion potential*, in that the French simple present more easily turns (i.e., coerces) events into states (thus making them compatible with the present) than its English counterpart. However, it is not clear what could have caused this difference in coercion potential.
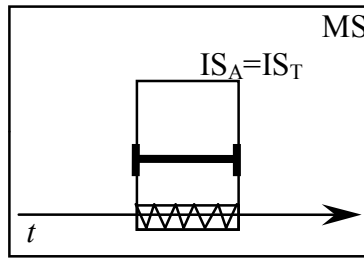
MS

$IS_A = IS_T$

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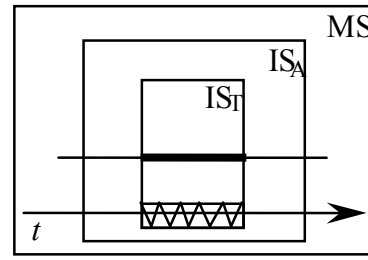*Figure 4a*: Simple present in French, perfective

Figure 4b: Simple present in French, imperfective

Observe that there is an important difference between the French and the English present progressive, on the one hand, and the imperfective use of the French simple present, on the other: the progressives also, by definition, conjure up boundaries in the expression's maximal scope (cf. Figure 2 and the subsequent explanation), while the simple present, which can go with stative verbs *without coercing them into dynamic ones*, does not do this. We hypothesize that such backgrounded boundaries are a necessary feature of progressive constructions in any language (given their default meaning of zooming in on events), but *not* of all imperfective constructions, like the French simple present in its imperfective uses (see also Laca 1998: 208-209). This semantic difference between the simple present and the present progressive in French is crucial to explain why, in certain (imperfective) contexts, speakers of French select *être en train de* + V-inf rather than the simple form, even though using the latter would be equally grammatical. That is, given its semantic configuration (i.e., its internal perspective on bounded situations), the present progressive explicitly presents situations as phenomenal, which contrasts with the more factual meaning of the simple form (cf. Section 3.1). This explains why *être en train de* + V-inf is preferred to the simple present in contexts that feature any of the subjective expressions typically associated with contingent events ('surprise', 'irritation', 'intensification' or 'tentativeness') – even if these are contexts, such as durative ones, that do not normally elicit the use of the progressive (cf. Section 2). Yet such modal notions need not always be (as conspicuously) present in order to use *être en train de* + V-inf: the conceptualizer may opt for a progressive construal for any event that she explicitly wants to present as non-structural, for instance, because there are no other contextual indications of the contingent nature of the event at hand.[21]

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[21] This may be the reason why, as noted by Do-Hurinville (2007: 8), the progressive is not normally used with an explicit indication of contingency such as *en ce moment* ('at this moment') (cf. Footnote 6).

3.2.2. Restriction on and exclusion of certain usage types

In Section 3.2.1, we have explained why the English progressive is more grammaticalized than its French counterpart and how this relates to the semantics of the simple present in both languages. In this section, we zoom in on some more specific implications of this attested difference in grammaticalization: why does the French present progressive hardly ever occur in durative and iterative contexts and not at all in futurate ones, while this is relatively common in English? We believe that there is no one answer to this question, but that the futurate use needs to be considered separately from the other two usage types. As we will explain in this section, durative and iterative readings are not readily associated with the original meaning of *être en train de* + V-inf, while the absence of a futurate interpretation can be related to the aspectual ambiguity of the simple present in French. The fact that the English present progressive does allow a futurate interpretation – a cross-linguistically rare phenomenon (cf. below) – is, in our view, a consequence of the perfective character of the English simple present.

The boundaries of events that are presented as having a prolonged duration are typically construed as highly non-salient (in that the end-point of the designated event is not envisaged). Moreover, examples instantiating the category Duration have a fairly homogeneous character: it is stressed that a particular activity persists, without any significant changes. This relative unboundedness and lack of change makes durative events in fact relatively state-like. As pointed out in Section 3.2.1.1, the Old English progressive typically expressed a durative (and even stative) meaning and consisted of a stative verb with a present participle. In line with Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca (1994: 131), we analyze this type of source construction as locative in nature ('to be somewhere, doing something'). This locative meaning became even more prevalent when the '*beon/wesan* + V-*ende*' construction merged with the locative prepositional construction '*beon/wesan + in/on/a* + V-*ing*' (cf. Footnote 11). Such locative expressions are commonly found to lie at the origin of progressive constructions – not only in large-scale cross-linguistic studies (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994: 128-129), but also in smaller comparative studies on, for instance, English and Romance languages (Bertinetto 2000: 601) – and they naturally give rise to a durative meaning: a particular situation persists for some time at one particular location.

On the other hand, 16th century *être en train de* meant 'being in the (right) mood, in the (right) disposition to (doing something)'. The noun *train* was originally used to refer to groups (e.g., herds of cattle), typically on the move. This original meaning was still reflected

in the collocation *être en train* (without *de*), which existed alongside *être en train de* in the 16th century and meant 'on the move, in action'. Thus, as pointed out by Do-Hurinville (2007), a sense of movement and dynamism has been central to the meaning of *être en train de* + V-inf and its component parts throughout the past centuries. We contend that this more dynamic (and cross-linguistically less attested) origin lent itself less readily to the unbounded and homogeneous interpretation associated with Duration than the more static origin of the English progressive. In other words, due to its relatively marginal origin, the French progressive has never been in the durative stage deemed to constitute a typical phase in the evolution of progressive constructions (Bertinetto 2000), thus distinguishing itself not only from the English, but also from the Italian and Spanish progressives, which do have locative origins. Along the same lines, we may hypothesize that the original meaning of motion and dynamism of (the components of) *être en train de* + V-inf is responsible for the restriction on iterative readings, which involve the persistent repetition of the same activity and, therefore, absence of change in the overall meaning of the relevant clause (even if the individual events that make up the iteration may themselves indicate a change of state). Again, such iterative readings seem more readily associated with locative meanings, which may explain why they have already been attested in a period as early as Middle English, as in *The king apun the land was gangand up and doun* 'the king was walking up and down upon the land' (Mustanoja 1960: 586).

The fact that futurate uses of the present progressive are quite common in English while they are never attested in French can be related to the aspectual specialization of the simple present in English, i.e., its basic perfectivity (Section 3.2.1.1), and, on the other hand, the aspectual ambiguity of the French simple present (Section 3.2.1.2). As observed by Dahl (2000), future-time reference is quite often achieved by means of present-tense marking in the languages of Europe. In many cases, this construal reflects the relatively high degree of certainty the speaker has with regard to the future occurrence of the situation at hand (since it is in fact presented as if it were happening in the present).[22] It is important to note, however, that such futurate present-tense uses are usually attested for the simple present only, and not for the present progressive (Dahl 2000). Yet, given our analysis of the English simple present as marking present perfectivity, all uses of the construction, including the futurate uses, ought to involve a full conceptualization (i.e., full knowledge) of the denoted situation at the time of

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[22] It has been claimed, though, that in some languages, such as German, the futurate present has actually evolved into the default expression of future time, in which case the presumed link with the present becomes highly backgrounded, if present at all – cf. Hilpert (2008: 169-179) for an elaborate discussion of the German futurate present.

speaking. In other words, a present perfective construal involves a high degree of certainty, which can only be achieved in a limited number of futurate contexts, such as (31):[23]

(31)   *The train to Madrid **leaves** at 5 pm.*

In (32), however, the presence of *probably* makes the use of the simple form sound quite awkward; the present progressive, on the other hand, seems to be much more appropriate:

(32)   a. *? I probably **leave** tomorrow.*
         b. *I'**m probably** leaving tomorrow.*

Apparently, the internal perspective imposed by the present progressive (and the less than full knowledge implied by such a viewpoint) renders the construction ideal to express that the speaker considers the future occurrence of the denoted event quite likely (since she uses a present tense), but not fully certain. In other words, we may hypothesize that the English present progressive is being used to refer to relatively predictable future situations as a consequence of the gradually attained perfective value of the simple present and the epistemic implications of this evolution. This may explain why the first futurate uses of *be* + V-*ing* have only been attested in the beginning of the Modern English period and why they have substantially risen in frequency in the past two centuries, after the progressive had become obligatory, i.e., after the simple present specialized into marking perfective aspect. Further corroboration of our analysis comes from Icelandic. Assuming that the Icelandic simple present has also become associated with perfectivity under pressure of the heavily grammaticalized Icelandic progressive (cf. Section 3.2.1.1), our hypothesis is that it should be possible to use the present progressive to refer to future events. Data from Jóhannsdóttir (2011: 17) show that this is indeed the case, and that Icelandic as well as English thus both deviate from the default situation in which a futurate present reading can only be achieved by means of the simple present.

In French, the simple present can be used in both perfective and imperfective contexts, i.e., it can imply full knowledge or less than full knowledge when it is used to refer to futurate situations. Therefore, speakers of French can use the simple present to refer to any future-time situation that has been arranged in the present, irrespective of how likely they consider its

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[23] See also Hilpert (2008: 178) on the relation between scheduled events and a perfective viewpoint.

actual future occurrence. That is, the simple form can naturally be used in contexts in which speakers of English are forced to use the progressive (or a dedicated future-tense marker, such as *will*), such as (32), the French equivalent of which is given in (33):[24]

(33)   *Je **pars** probablement demain.*

In other words, the present progressive is not being used to refer to future-time situations in French, simply because such a (quite noteworthy) departure from the prototypical meaning of Current Ongoingness is both undesirable and not necessary, given the aspectual ambiguity and consequently larger range of possible uses of the simple present.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a comparative study on the semantics of the present progressive constructions in French and English. We have shown, by means of corpus data, that the attested uses of *être en train de* + V-inf constitute a proper subpart of those of *be* + V-*ing*. The latter construction is, moreover, obligatorily used with dynamic verbs in present-time contexts and (partly because of that) it occurs much more frequently than its French counterpart. In other words, the French present progressive is less grammaticalized than its English counterpart. However, the two constructions are similar in that they both often occur in contexts that feature subjective expressions of surprise, irritation, intensification and tentativeness.

In Section 3, we have proposed an analysis to account for these observations. In Section 3.1, we have argued that the core meaning of the present progressive constructions in both French and English (probably just like that of progressive constructions in any other language) comprises the expression of epistemic contingency in immediate reality, which is immanent in the associated temporal configuration: zooming in on an ongoing bounded event. This contingent (or phenomenal) quality may be held responsible for the frequent occurrence of the aforementioned subjective connotations. In Section 3.2, we have discussed the different degrees of grammaticalization of the English and French present progressives (Section 3.2.1) and the associated differences in use between the two constructions (Section 3.2.2). Section

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[24] Speakers of French may also use *aller* ('go') + inf in contexts such as (33) (*Je vais probablement partir demain*), but the main point is that the simple present in French is appropriate as well in contexts such as these, unlike its English counterpart.

3.2.1 shows that language-internal evolutions, such as the loss of the Old English aspectual prefixsystem and the rising tendency in English to express unboundedness, have contributed to the grammaticalization of the English progressive from an originally locative construction to a full-fledged and (often) obligatorily used aspectual marker – an evolution which has in turn led to the specialization of the simple present tense as a marker of perfective aspect in the English present-tense paradigm. In the absence of language-internal triggers (for instance, in the form of an aspectual vacuum), the French present progressive has not become as entrenched in the present-tense paradigm as its English counterpart. Conversely, the French simple present is not as restricted in use; that is, it is aspectually ambiguous. These diachronic differences between the English and French present-tense constructions also lie at the heart of the differences in usage potential. We contend, first of all, that durative and iterative uses are very rare in French, because, unlike the locative source meaning of *be* + V-*ing*, the more dynamic origin of *être en train de* + V-inf does not straightforwardly lend itself to a durative or iterative interpretation. Secondly, the lack of futurate uses of *être en train de* + V-inf is most likely due to the fact that the aspectually ambiguous simple present can be used for arranged future situations, independent of how certain their future occurrence is considered to be. In English, the simple present can only refer to fixed future situations, and, therefore, the present progressive is called upon to indicate the *probable* future occurrence of a presently arranged situation.

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