The Progressive in Jane Austen’s Works: Subject-Types

Yoko Bando

The purpose of this paper is to investigate Austen’s use of the inanimate subjects of the progressive construction quantitatively and qualitatively. Her time of writing, before or around 1800, overlapped with the period when the progressive saw sudden growth. Strang (1982:439) points out that “something happened to the status of the construction around 1800 that made it not only more frequent but also more difficult for novelists to handle.”

I attempt to specify what made the progressive more difficult for novelists to employ by examining the inanimate subjects used in the construction chronologically in Austen’s six works. I will deal with the progressive in terms of 1) occurrences and frequency and 2) subject-types (animate or inanimate).

The investigation finds the increase in the numbers of its occurrences and frequency in the works written later. As for subject-types, the use of inanimate subjects with the progressive increases in the later works. I will show that the attribute or quality of the inanimate subjects changes with their expansion. Austen’s data reveal that change of the attribute of the inanimate subjects leads to the ambiguity whether ‘Ving’ is a participle or gerund.

1. Introduction

Jane Austen, who was born in 1775, created her works at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century, and is known for her fondness of the progressive.

The progressive, the ‘be + Ving’ construction, is one of the unique grammatical features in English, which dates back to the Old English period, but has fully developed and established itself in Modern English, especially in Late Modern English. In the years around 1800, the use of the progressive rapidly grew.

According to Strang (1982: 429), the rules for the use of the
progressive were established in the eighteenth century. She classifies "the pre-1600 period as one of unsystematic use, and the post-1700 period as one of systematic or grammatically-required use." She claims that the progressive has been doubling approximately every century since 1500, with a level-off in the eighteenth century, and a spurt at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Working on a corpus comprised of samples of narrative prose from the early eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, Strang identifies the time around 1800 as a 'critical period' of the progressive. Strang's view is supported by Hundt (2004), who claims that before or around 1800 the relative frequency of the progressive with agentive and nonagentive subjects began to change. The claim by Hundt is based on the findings from a corpus of various registers of texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

According to Denison (1998), the progressive was common in speech around 1800, but it was not fully accepted in the conventions of publishing. But Jane Austen, as Raybould (1957: 175-6) points out, did not hesitate to use the construction, though her contemporary female writers did not allow their characters over the age of eight years old, who were considered to be adults in those days, to use it. Raybould claims that Austen was undoubtedly fond of the progressive, though the formality and archaizing tendencies of the eighteenth-century English required canons of propriety and decorum in the name of elegance and delicacy. Austen was raised in the midst of the grammatical prescriptivism in English in the second half of the eighteenth century and she had a high standard of her own grammar (Phillipps: 1970).

Arnaud (1998) explains that the progressive was "looked down on as a feature of the English of Celtic areas, especially Ireland and Scotland," in the second half of the eighteenth century, and was viewed by educated people as a vulgar language most likely due to the close association with the dialects. He gives special remarks about Austen's fondness of the construction. He notes that one might have expected her not to use the progressive, considering its historical spread from Celtic
areas down towards the whole of England between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries explained by Mossé (1938), and her social background of clerical family circles in which she was raised in the southern part of England. Arnaud ascribes her taste for the progressive to some personal reasons.

Arnaud’s survey of private letters of famous writers for about a century dating from 1787 to 1880 reveals a clear correlation between two factors: gender and intimacy. The frequencies of the progressive are higher for women, and increase with the degree of intimacy. He notes that intimacy is connected both with sociological and psychological conditionings, so the use of the progressive is strongly related to speakers and situations, and is also affected by feelings and moods. It was a feature of conversational and colloquial usage.

Strang (1982:448-51) suggests that around 1800, novelists, including Austen, experimented with the use of the progressive, even though they may have experienced some difficulty in coming to terms with the powerful new resource. Strang states that they rapidly improved with practice. Raybould (1957: 176) asserts that Austen’s use of the progressive is an integral part of her artistic development and that she was a pioneer in the field of literary techniques on the use of the progressive.

1.1. Data and Method

I have examined the progressive in Austen’s six works, i.e. Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Northanger Abbey (1818), Mansfield Park (1814), Emma (1815), and Persuasion (1818). Henceforth each work will be abbreviated as SS, PP, NA, MP, E and P in the order mentioned in the preceding sentence. SS, PP and NA existed in some form by 1797 (her early works), and MP, E and P were written between 1811 and 1816 (her later works).

I have dealt with the progressive in Austen’s works in terms of: 1) occurrences and frequency; 2) subject-types. For the present study, I have used The Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen series reprinted in 1988.
I also have utilized the electronic texts of Austen’s works provided by Project Gutenberg (http://www.promo.net/pg) to make a thorough investigation.

In the present study, I have identified the present and past progressives, the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries (in finite verbal position), and the infinitival, ‘to be + Ving,’ participial, and gerundial, ‘being + Ving,’ progressives (in non-finite verbal position).

I have excluded ‘Ving’ of adjectival and nominal force from my count. The ‘be going to + V’ construction, which is considered to be a part of the progressive and expresses the immediate future, is excluded as well. This construction was grammaticalized in the seventeenth century and is seen extensively in Austen’s texts. I do not count the present or past perfect progressive, i.e. the ‘have (has) / had been + Ving’ construction, either. The constructions were established before the eighteenth century.

2. Occurrences and Frequency

2.1. Occurrences

Table 1 below shows the overall count of the occurrences of the progressive in Austen’s works. In finite verbal position, the total number of the occurrences of the present and past progressives, and the progressive with modal auxiliaries is shown, while in non-finite verbal position, that of the occurrences of the progressive infinitive, progressive participle and progressive gerund is shown.

| Table 1: Occurrences of the progressive in finite and non-finite verbal positions |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                 | SS | PP | NA | MP | E  | P  |
| finite verbal position          | 144 | 235 | 124 | 436 | 462 | 233 |
|                                 | (91.7%) | (94.8%) | (89.2%) | (89.3%) | (90.1%) | (86.3%) |
| non-finite verbal position      | 13  | 13  | 15  | 52  | 51  | 37  |
|                                 | (8.3%) | (5.2%) | (10.8%) | (10.7%) | (9.9%) | (13.7%) |
| total occurrences               | 157 | 248 | 139 | 488 | 513 | 270 |
The Progressive in Jane Austen's Works: Subject-Types

As Table 1 shows, the total occurrences in the later three works more than double, compared with those in the early three. The occurrences of the progressive both in finite and non-finite verbal positions increase. Especially the number of progressives in non-finite verbal position grows sharply.

Table 2: Occurrences and proportion of the present and past progressives and the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>PP</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>MP</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progressive</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25.0%)</td>
<td>(26.8%)</td>
<td>(36.3%)</td>
<td>(15.6%)</td>
<td>(19.7%)</td>
<td>(18.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progressive</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(64.6%)</td>
<td>(64.3%)</td>
<td>(54.8%)</td>
<td>(72.9%)</td>
<td>(63.6%)</td>
<td>(66.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progressive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with modal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auxiliaries</td>
<td>(10.4%)</td>
<td>(8.9%)</td>
<td>(8.9%)</td>
<td>(11.5%)</td>
<td>(16.7%)</td>
<td>(15.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the occurrences and the proportion of the present and past progressives and the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries. As for the present progressive, the number of the occurrences does not change overall. In the later three works, the proportion of the present progressive to the total occurrences in finite verbal position shrinks to less than 20 percent. Looking at the past progressive, its proportion to the total number does not vary as much, hovering around 65 percent, though the instances themselves grow in the later novels. The remaining space is filled by the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries from about 9 percent, to some 15 percent. According to Strang (1982: 440), the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries is very rare in novels dating before the nineteenth century.

2.2. Frequency

Table 3 below shows the frequency of the progressive in each work,
that is, the total number of the progressive per 30,000 words, which is the rate used by Strang. As a whole, the frequencies in the later works increase about 200 percent both for those in finite verbal position (the present and past progressives, and the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries), and in finite and non-finite verbal positions combined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Frequency of the progressive per 30,000 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>finite verbal position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finite and non-finite verbal position combined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strang (1982: 437) notes that Austen’s frequent use of the progressive is worth noting compared with all her contemporary writers except for Maria Edgeworth, who wrote as an Irish writer creating an atmosphere of the region by using Irishisms.

Strang goes on to discuss style, or a certain way an author writes. She explains that “as the [progressive] construction establishes itself it will reach a level of frequency so high that variations must be considered purely stylistic, i.e. dependent on the way the novelist is writing a particular novel, and not at all on the historical development of the language” (1982: 432). She asserts that this level is reached at the rate of 80 to 100 per 30,000 words, and she calls it the maturity of the progressive. She states that this stage is reached by the mid-nineteenth century as far as what is roughly labeled “standard literary English” is concerned (1982: 432).

In the light of Strang’s hypothesis of the maturity of the progressive, it can be said that the frequencies in Austen’s later works (90.3, 94.0, and 95.8) are outstanding. (My data exclude the ‘be going to + V’ construction, the present and past perfect progressives, i.e. the ‘have (has) had been +V ing’ constructions, while Strang includes these constructions.)
Arnaud (1998: 134), surveying the progressive in the letters of famous writers in the nineteenth century, notes that “the two champions of the progressive are Thackeray and Mrs. Gaskell.” The frequency of the progressive in the former is about 104 per 30,000 words, while that in the latter is about 108, including the progressives that I have excluded. Thackeray was born in 1811 and wrote novels toward the middle of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Gaskell, born in 1810, wrote about the same time.

Strang’s maturity level reached in novels and Arnaud’s culmination in letters overlap in time, and both took place in the middle of the nineteenth century. From this, one can say that Austen’s use of the progressive is pioneering. Phillipps (1970: 111) calls it idiosyncratic use.

3. Subject-types

Types of the subject of the progressive, animate or inanimate, are discussed in this section. The data of the subject-types of the progressive in Austen’s works are shown in Table 4 below. Only the subjects of the progressive in finite clauses, or the subjects of the present and past progressives and the progressive combined with modal auxiliaries are surveyed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Subject-types of the progressive in finite verbal position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animate subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inanimate subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of inanimate subjects changes from work to work. But the general tendency is that the proportions in the earlier three works are lower than those in the later three works. There may be two factors for this difference: 1) the ongoing change in the subject-types of the progressive in the period; 2) Austen’s own development of the usage.
Strang's (1982: 443-45) corpus of novels from 1726 to 1760 includes no inanimate subjects among the 199 instances of the progressive. Further explanation goes that the progressive should be generally confined to use with subjects which are either human or capable of activity, and with verbs of action. The rule of subject-selection is observed with great strictness in the eighteenth century except with the use in the 'passival,' which is treated below.

From her further survey of inanimate subjects in novels up to the year 1818, Strang identifies the period around 1800 as a 'critical period' concerning the use of the progressive. Austen's earlier works, *SS, PP* and *NA*, existed in some form by 1798, and the later works, *MP, E* and *P*, were written between 1811 and 1816. The times of their creation coincide with what Strang calls the 'critical period'.

### 3.1. Inanimate subjects in the earlier works

#### 3.1.1. Inanimate subjects in *SS* and *NA*

Of the earlier three works, *SS* is most likely to have been written earliest. In the book, there are 16 occurrences of the 'inanimate subject + be + Ving' construction:

1. *as the clouds were then dispersing ....* (*SS*, 63)
2. *without claiming a share in what was passing.* (*SS*, 121)
3. *tell at what coachmaker's the new carriage was building.* ...
   (*SS*, 215)
4. *'It will only be sending Betty by the coach....'* (*SS*, 153)  
   (italicized mine)

The constructions from (1) to (3) are the progressive, while that in (4) is not. The phrase in (4) which has 'Ving' as the head has nominal force, considering the context.

As far as the grammar of the 'be + Ving' type syntagma in *SS* is concerned, Austen seems to have distinguished the progressive from
the type of construction in (4), in which ‘Ving’ functions as the head with nominal force. For the latter type, pronouns such as this, that or it are used as the subject. Demonstrative pronouns can be substituted by relative pronoun which in Austen’s data. As inanimate subjects of the progressive, Austen uses relative pronouns, but not pronouns such as this, that or it. SS contains 4 constructions with ‘Ving’ of nominal force, and the remaining 12 constructions are the progressive.

To consider the distinction more in detail, we need to look at the historical development of the gerund. Historically, the gerund has been behaving in two ways: 1) the nominal gerund as in (the) reading of the book; 2) the verbal gerund as in reading the book. The nominal gerund originated in Old English, and began to coexist with the verbal gerund in the fourteenth century. The verbal behaviour of the gerund was becoming dominant over its nominal behaviour, at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century (Suematu 2004: 137-8). Denison describes the nominal functions of the verbal gerund, i.e. it can be a subject, object, or prepositional object in some higher clauses, by giving examples except the function of complement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Denison 1998: 268-72).

In the corpus of Austen’s ‘be + Ving’ type syntagma, I speculate that the verbal gerund, like the example (4), is an early example to be used as a complement after copula be. The usage seems to be always with pronoun subjects such as this, that, it or which (relative pronoun). This type of gerundial construction, ‘This, That, or It + be + Ving’ bears formal resemblance to the progressive.

Now coming back to the progressive in SS, out of 12 progressives that have inanimate subjects, 6 have relative pronouns as their subjects. The others mostly involve subjects of the ‘determiner (the) + noun’ type. Five of the six relative pronouns are followed by the lexical verbs, pass and go on, which have identical meaning and are used in set phrases like every thing that was passing and what was going on. Strang (1982: 445) notes that “at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries pronouns
have formed a transition to the use of the (progressive) construction with inanimate subjects.” Austen’s use of relative pronouns as the inanimate subjects of the progressive fits Strang’s view. In SS, only relative pronouns, not other types of pronouns, are used.

The progressive in (3) is the covert passive or ‘passival’, in which the surface subject is inanimate or at least nonagentive and the deep subject would have been human if expressed (Denison: 1998: 149, Strang: 1982: 443).

In NA, there are 13 instances of the progressive with inanimate subjects. They are mostly ‘determiner + noun’ type subjects, such as her heart, my eyes, and her fire, two cases of the relative pronoun what, and two abstract nouns, society and appearances. The two cases out of 13 are the ‘passival.’

In summary, inanimate subjects of the progressive in SS and NA are: 1) relative pronouns; 2) the ‘determiner + noun’ type subject, which composes a majority of inanimate subjects; 3) abstract nouns.

3.1.2. Inanimate subjects in PP

In PP, there are 26 instances of the progressive with inanimate subjects and most of them are relative pronouns and the ‘determiner + noun’ type subject. Noteworthy is the introduction of the pronoun it as the subject of the progressive, for instance:

(5) In describing to her all the grandeur of Lady Catherine and her mansion, with occasional digressions in praise of his own humble abode, and the improvements it was receiving, he was happily employed …. (PP, 75) (italicized mine)

(6) ‘for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out, ....’ (PP, 174) (italicized mine)

In (6), the subject of the progressive, ‘to retaliate’, is extraposed by introducing the dummy subject it. The referent of the pronoun it is to
retaliate.

With the introduction of the inanimate pronoun subject it in the progressive, ambiguity arises from the formal resemblance between the progressive and the 'This, That or It + be + Ving' construction. However, the construe of Ving is clear in examples like (5) and (6).

3.2. Inanimate subjects in the later works

There are 73 instances of the progressive with inanimate subjects in MP, 71 in E, and 29 in P (cf. Table 4). Not only are the numbers larger than those in the earlier works, but also in general, inanimate subjects themselves seem to have become very different from those seen in the earlier works. As for the qualitative change, I would like to suggest that the pronoun it mediated the process.

The usage of the pronoun subject it with the progressive in the later works is somewhat different from what we saw in the examples (5) and (6). The antecedent can be a clause or a phrase as in:

(7) 'if he get his daughter away, it will be destroying the chief hold.'  
(MP, 457)

(8) 'you will not object to my reading the charade to him. It will be giving him so much pleasure!'  (E, 77)

In (7), the antecedent is the preceding clause, which is within the same sentence. In (8), the antecedent is in the preceding sentence. Therefore, the introduction of the use of the pronoun it means that anything, i.e. a notion, an idea, an event or whatever can be the subject of the progressive. I claim that the use of the pronoun subject it drastically changes the attribute or quality of inanimate subjects of the progressive. 'Determiner + noun' type subjects which are a majority in the earlier works are still used in the later works, but their proportion is not so big compared with that in the earlier works. In the later works, 'adjectival + noun' type subjects increase in number. Adjectivals in this case include
optional determiners, adjectives and adjectival phrases or clauses. Various types of inanimate subject of the progressive are shown:

(9) all her former habitual dread of her uncle was returning.\ldots (MP, 176)

(10) reflecting to what the indulgence of his idle vanity was tending \ldots. (MP, 114-5)

(11) Harriet's habits of dependence and imitation were bringing her up too \ldots. (E, 88)

(12) and the part, which he was persuaded Emma had taken in the affair, was provoking him exceedingly. (E, 66)

(13) and the really good feelings by which she was almost purely governed, were rapidly restoring her to all the little she had lost in Edmund's favour. (MP, 147)

(14) the possibility of Mr. and Miss Crawford's having applied to her uncle and obtained his permission, was giving her ease. (MP, 437)

(15) But now, another occupation and solicitude of mind was beginning to be added to these. (P, 9)

Phrases made up of gerunds or progressive infinitives can be the subjects of the progressive as in:

(16) Harriet's staying away so long was beginning to make her uneasy. (E, 67)

(17) just at that time to be giving her such an indulgence, was exciting even painful gratitude. (MP, 322)

There is another usage of the pronoun it introduced in the progressive in the later works. The impersonal construction denoting weather, time or ambience is used as in:
(18) It was beginning to look brighter.... (MP, 206)
(19) 'By that time, it was beginning to hold up....' (E, 179)
(20) It was growing late, and Miss Bates became anxious to get home.... (E, 230)

Here, I point out another significant fact about the use of the inanimate subjects in the progressive. In the later works, the inanimate subjects can be used figuratively:

(21) every other heart was suggesting, 'What will become of us?' (MP, 175)
(22) though his own sparkling eyes at the moment were speaking a very different conviction. (E, 189)
(23) and every day was giving her fresh reason for thinking so. (E, 481)
(24) Pilfering was housebreaking to Mr. Woodhouse's fears. (E, 483)

As shown so far in this section, there has been a quantitative and qualitative change of the inanimate subjects of the progressive. I would like to suggest that the change has produced greater ambiguity that was caused by the coexistence of the 'passival' and the 'This, That or It + be + Ving' constructions so far mentioned. The three constructions have the same form, 'be + Ving' and inanimate subjects in common. In the sections below, the 'passival' and the 'This, That, or It + be + Ving' constructions are discussed.

3.2. The 'passival'

The 'passival' is the passive progressive as in 'The house is building.' It has an inanimate and nonagentive subject, and is identical to the progressive in its surface form. It is associated with a human deep subject. According to Mossé (1938:section 234), the 'passival' began to
rise in frequency in the sixteenth century, culminated in the eighteenth century, and began to decline in the nineteenth century. Verbs of certain semantic groups denoting 'to make', 'to build', 'to prepare', etc. tended to be used in the 'passival.'

In six of Austen's works, there are 17 instances of the 'passival' in finite verbal position. Verbs used in the construction are: act, blind, bring, build, carry, clear, display, endure, form, give, make, offer, play and plot. Several of the examples are as follows:

(25) every thing was rapidly clearing away, to give proper space. (E, 229)
(26) The younger boy, ... put in his claim to any thing good that might be giving away. (P, 79)
(27) where the conference was eagerly carrying on.... (MP, 145)
(28) how much might at that moment, and at a little distance, be enduring by the feelings⋯. (E, 451)
(29) repeated attentions were offering to another woman⋯. (E, 397)

The distribution of the 'passival' and the numbers of inanimate subjects of the progressive in each work are shown in Table 5.

| Table 5: Instances of the 'passival' and the number of inanimate subjects of the progressive |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| passival                                      | 2             | 0              | 2              | 4              | 7              | 2              |
| inanimate subjects                            | 12            | 26             | 13             | 73             | 71             | 29             |

In the earlier works, in which the number of inanimate subjects of the progressive is not so large, it would have been less difficult to distinguish the progressive with inanimate subjects from the 'passival.' In the eighteenth century, the progressive largely had animate subjects, and the progressive with inanimate subjects would naturally be
interpreted as the passive progressive. Because of this rule of subject selection, the progressive could be used to denote both active and passive meanings with the identical form of ‘be + Ving.’ Denison notes that there was little real danger of ambiguity at least until about 1800 (1998: 149). My data from Austen’s earlier works written in 1795-98, fits this view.

However, in the later works, in which the number of inanimate subjects of the progressive is large, it is more difficult to tell whether the progressive is passive or not. Denison gives two reasons for the decline of the ‘passival’ (1998: 150). One is that it presumably began to carry a greater risk of ambiguity, as the progressive began to have more and more inanimate subjects. The second is that the new progressive passive, the ‘be + being + p.p.’ construction, began to be more and more acceptable. Denison further notes that Austen is virtually the last person of letters that regularly used the ‘passival’ (1998: 155).

3.3 The ‘This, That or It + be + Ving’ type of construction

The type of construction treated here is not the progressive but gerundial, and yet has formal resemblance to the progressive. Be used in the construction is a copula. The phrase starting with Ving has a nominal function and works as a subjective complement. The subject of the sentence is mostly this, that or it, and sometimes which, the relative pronoun. The antecedents of the pronouns are mostly anaphoric in context.

I have found that this construction had crucial influence on the development of the progressive, although no previous studies have discussed this construction with the exception of Denison (1998), who treats only the ‘be + being’ type as in:

(30) I ought to have paid my respects to her if possible. It was being very deficient. (E, 280)
(31) Nay, my sweetest Catherine, this is being quite absurd! (NA, 144)
According to him, some studies consider examples like (30) and (31) to be a kind of the progressive. Denison claims that the verb *be* is a copula linking an inanimate pronoun subject to a gerundial phrase. The relevant examples from my investigation support his claim. I would like to extend this view to cover verbs other than the verb *be*.

There are two reasons for this. One is that the usage of 'be + being' is the same as 'be + Ving (which involves verbs other than be),' in that the antecedents of the pronouns are mostly anaphoric in context. The other is that in *SS* and *NA*, where Austen did not use the inanimate pronoun subject *it* in the progressive, the 'This, That, or It + be + Ving' construction occurs with various types of verbs. The construction occurs all through the six works with various types of verbs. In (37), the construction is combined with modal auxiliaries:

(32) Elizabeth thought this was going prettey far.... (*PP*, 248)
(33) ‘I could have spoken to Miss Tilney myself. This is only doing it in a ruder way....’ (*NA*, 101)
(34) ‘I have no idea of being so overstrained! It is fishing for compliments.’ (*NA*, 144)
(35) ‘However, she will not find her grandmama at all deafer than she was two years ago; which is saying a great deal at my mother’s time of life....’ (*E*, 158)
(36) ‘This is breaking a head and giving a plaister truly!’ (*P*, 127)
(37) ‘I feel quite stupid. It must be sitting up so late last night.’ (*MP*, 283)

This type of construction is different from the progressive. Because of the formal resemblance which stems from the fact that the two constructions contain the ‘be + Ving’ syntagma, it is not easy to distinguish them especially in *MP* and *E*, i.e., ‘Ving’ is ambiguous between a participle and gerund.
The Progressive in Jane Austen's Works: Subject-Types

In *SS*, *PP* and *NA*, it is almost safe to say that the distinction between the two types of constructions is kept clear. In earlier works, the number of the pronoun subject including relative pronoun is small and used to make certain set phrases such as *what was going on*, *what was passing*, *every thing that was passing*, or in the examples of (5) and (6).

In the later works, this is not the case. The construe of the 'be + Ving' syntagma (participle or gerund) is not clear. In increased ambiguity coming from their formal resemblance, the different constructions (i.e. the progressive and the gerundial constructions), which start with 'It + be + Ving' and are used with modal auxiliaries, coexist and merge in *MP* and *E*. The examples are as follows:

(38) 'I think a theatre ought not to be attempted. -- It would be taking liberties with my father's house in his absence....' (*MP*, 127)
(39) 'I have said nothing about it to any body. It would only be giving trouble and distress.' (*E*, 362)
(40) 'to assure her that the carriage would be at her service... for I thought it would be making her comfortable at once.' (*E*, 223)
(41) Now, it would be really having Frank in their neighbourhood. (*E*, 317)

From what I have mentioned in this section, I attempt to hypothesize that 'something that made the progressive more difficult for novelists around 1800' was the coexistence and mergence of the progressive and the gerundial constructions. While the verbal gerund was becoming dominant over the nominal gerund at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth century (Section 3.1.1), the relative frequency of animate and inanimate subjects of the progressive was changing, i.e., inanimate subjects were increasing. In the parallel shifts of the gerundial and progressive constructions, the construe of the 'Ving' may have become
ambiguous and the two constructions may have coalesced. Ziegeler (1999) points out that not only the form of Vings (gerund and participle) diachronically may have produced phonological confusion, but also must have some functional coalescence toward the same morphology and syntax. The evidences in MP and E support Ziegeler's view.

Interestingly and surprisingly, in P, which was written after MP and E, there is no syntagma of 'It + be + Ving,' except the cases of the impersonal 'It is + Ving' denoting weather or ambience. The construe of 'Ving' is not ambiguous.

In this section, the construction containing gerund has been discussed in comparison with the progressive used with pronoun subject. Phillipps (1970: 113) mentions the mergence of the progressive and the adjectival Ving, like disgusting, in Austen's works. The mergence I work at here is the phrases starting with Vings of participles and gerunds. Thus the situations concerning the syntagma of Ving seem to have been very delicate and subtle in English of Austen's days.

4. Conclusion

I have examined the progressive in Austen's works in terms of: 1) occurrences and frequencies and 2) subject-types.

Occurrences of the progressive both in finite and non-finite verbal positions increase in the later works. As for the frequency of the progressive per 30,000 words, the figures in the later works in both finite and non-finite verbal positions more than double. In the light of Strang's hypothesized maturity level, Austen's frequent use of the progressive is outstanding, and it can be said it is one of her stylistic features.

With respect to the subject-types (animate or inanimate subject) of the progressive, there have been quantitative and qualitative changes. The number of inanimate subjects of the progressive increases in the later works. The proportion of the inanimate subjects of the progressive in the later works accounts for some 15 percent of all the subjects of the progressive, compared with some 10 percent in the earlier works.
Strang's view that pronouns have formed a transition to the use of the progressive with inanimate subjects is supported by the evidence in Austen’s corpus. The attribute or quality of inanimate subjects of the progressive changes drastically in the later works. The use of pronouns, especially the pronoun *it*, is important, in that anything that is referred to by the pronoun, i.e. a notion, an idea, action, event or whatever, can be used as the subject of the progressive. As a result, the progressive with the inanimate pronoun subject seems to have merged with the ‘This, That or It + be + Ving’ construction, which has gerundial *Ving* as predicate. From the fact, I attempt to hypothesize that “something that made the progressive more difficult for novelists to handle” was coexistence and mergence of the ‘This, That or It + be + Ving’ construction and the progressive used with inanimate subjects.

Further the increase in the inanimate subjects of the progressive causes ambiguity coming from the formal resemblance to the ‘passival’ construction, or the ‘*The house is building*’ construction. The situations concerning the syntagma of *Ving* seem to have been very delicate and subtle in English of Austen’s days.

* I would like to express my sincere and deep gratitude to Professor Akinobu Tani for his encouragement. I am also very grateful to the three anonymous reviewers of *Studies in Modern English* for their helpful and insightful comments and suggestions on this paper.

REFERENCES

Bodelsen, C. A. (1936-7) “The Expanded Tenses in Modern English, an Attempt at an
Yoko Bando


— 20 —
The Progressive in Jane Austen's Works: Subject-Types


(Hyogo Prefectural Seiryo Senior High School)
[yoko.bando@gmail.com]
[Received September 15, 2007]