Incipient and intimate

The progressive aspect

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11.1   Introduction

On 10 September 1793, 18-year-old William Clift wrote to his older sister Elizabeth from London, where he was training as an apprentice:

> as I expected Mrs Hunter to go to Cornwall every day I defer'd writing as I had not the Cash to pay the postage for I have been taking in some novels that are publishing in weekly numbers at sixpence each I quite forgot to save any money to pay the postage. I have been saving every farthing I have been able to scrape together since Christmas last […] [1]   (William Clift, 1793; CLIFT, 77)

The youngest son of a Cornish miller, William Clift (1775–1849) was apprenticed to the surgeon and anatomist John Hunter in 1792, and after Hunter's death he became the first Conservator of the Hunterian Museum of anatomical specimens in London in 1799 (Austin ed. 1991: 1). During the final years of the eighteenth century, Clift was a young and ambitious social riser, working his way in London to the professional ranks. He also represents in many ways a typical user of the progressive (or the *be+ing* construction) in the CEEC Extension: he is a letter-writer with lower-rank background who corresponds with a close family member at the end of the century. William Clift and his sister Elizabeth Clift (1757–1818), the recipient of William's letters in the corpus, are exceptionally frequent users of the progressive which is generally characterised as an oral-like, informal feature. On the other hand, William's use of the progressive passival (*novels that are publishing*) illustrates that prolific though he is and therefore certainly an innovator, he is not innovative in terms of syntax; the progressive passive (*novels that are being published*), one of the few grammatical innovations of the Late Modern period, does not appear in William's letters at all. In fact, the progressive passive occurs in the CEEC

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1.   The novels that William Clift had purchased included Henry Fielding's *Tom Jone*s and *Joseph Andrews*, Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Tobias Smollett's *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (Austin ed. 1991: 77).

Extension only once. According to Anderwald (2012: 30), the nineteenth-century development of the passive and its complete takeover from the passival results from the increase of the progressive itself, and Pratt & Denison (2000) document the progressive passive in the late eighteenth-century Southey-Coleridge circle as 'radical experimentation'. The passive form did not yet have a place in the general world of eighteenth-century letter-writing. Even though the progressive was in many ways a mature construction in this period, it underwent more substantial change in terms of frequency and function during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

This chapter examines large-scale sociolinguistic variation of the progressive in eighteenth-century letters, with focus on gender, social rank, and register (here understood as the relationship between the correspondents). The influence of gender in use of the progressive has been previously discussed in for example Arnaud (1998, 2002), Fitzmaurice (2004), Smitterberg (2002) and Kranich (2010), and that of gender, social rank, and register in my own small study of eighteenth-century letters (Sairio 2009), but social parameters surrounding the use of the progressive in Late Modern English have not been systematically examined in large historical data.

The progressive takes the following tenses in the eighteenth century:

– Present progressive: 'I am now rambling from Place to Place'

(John Gay, 1719; GAY, 36)

– Past progressive: 'A tall lazy villain was bestriding his poor beast'

(Ignatius Sancho, 1777?; SANCHO, 102)

– Present perfect progressive: 'I have been a hunting with Mr Varny'

(Lady Sarah Lennox, 1762; LENNOX, I, 127)

– Past perfect progressive: 'Just the night before God took her from me, she had been discoursing with one of our sisters'

(Winifred Thimelby, 1680?; TIXALL, 102)

– Future progressive with a modal: 'When summer approaches I shall be inventing Schemes for that purpose'

(Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1759?; MONTAGU, III, 196)

In terms of tense and both literal and figurative contexts of use, the Late Modern English progressive was already a mature construction, but still infrequently used. However, quantifying this feature is not unproblematic. It is difficult to evaluate whether the number of all verb phrases remains diachronically stable, whether the proportion of progressives actually increases with regard to all possible variants, and what circumstances enable the progressive to be used: in other words, normalised frequencies need to be interpreted with healthy caution (Smitterberg 2005, Aarts, Close & Wallis 2010: 154–155; see also Section 5.3 on researching linguistic forms that lack a variable). Kranich (2010: 13) points out that the frequency of progressives per verb phrase would provide a more exact measurement than normalising the absolute frequencies of the progressive, and Smitterberg (2005) has

tagged the *Corpus of Nineteenth-Century English* (CONCE) in order to investigate the progressive in relation to the non-progressive VPs. CEECE is not tagged, so this study relies on normalised frequencies and the method used by Säily & Suomela (2009) which examines whether significant sociolinguistic variation actually appears; see also Vartiainen, Säily & Hakala (2013) for an application of the beanplot method in the analysis of pronoun frequencies in the CEEC.

The chapter is outlined as follows. Section 11.2 provides an introduction and an overview of the progressive and its previous historical research. Section 11.3 presents the results of the corpus analysis. In Section 11.4 the influence of gender is examined, Section 11.5 considers the influence of social rank, and Section 11.6 the influence of register. Section 11.7 examines the outliers, and Section 11.8 concludes the findings. I do not provide semantic analysis of the progressive or an account of its morphosyntactic variation, amply discussed in Hundt (2004), Smitterberg (2005) and Kranich (2010).

11.2 The progressive in Late Modern English

The origins of the progressive are not entirely clear. It has been argued to be a native development in English (Visser 1963–1973), to have developed under Latin influence (Mossé 1938), or to have resulted from Celtic contacts (e.g. Braaten 1967; in Hickey 2012: 501–502). The equivalent of *be+ing* was used already in Old English. The progressive is found in all Celtic languages, and Celtic constructions in fact precede the English *be+ing* usage; the extensive use of the progressive in some regional varieties may thus be linked to Celtic influence and the frequent use of the progressive in Celtic Englishes (Filppula & Klemola 2012: 1688, 1691–1694; see also Filppula 2003). During the Late Modern period the progressive increased considerably, a development which has continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Beal 2004, Hundt 2004, Núñez-Pertejo 2004, Strang 1982, Denison 1993, Rissanen 1999, Aarts, Close & Wallis 2010, Kranich 2010, Anderwald 2012, and Mair 2006). Due to this expanding use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries both in terms of frequency and function, we have categorized the eighteenth-century progressive as belonging to the early stages of change.

Smitterberg (2005: 67) concludes on the basis of nineteenth-century genre divergence that "the progressive is an oral rather than a literal feature, as the construction is decidedly more common in popular than in specialized genres". Kranich (2010) provides a thorough account of the functions and developments of the progressive in various genres. Her survey of ARCHER-2 indicates that the progressive was particularly favoured in drama, private letters, and fiction, "which are much more concerned with what is or was going on at a specific moment in time" (2010: 106). The nineteenth-century progressive occurs most often in letters,

a genre where it also increases over time (Smitterberg 2002). The increase of the progressive can be regarded as grammaticalisation, but Kranich (2010) points out that this increase does not extend across all linguistic contexts as hypothesized by Strang (1982); instead, the progressive continued to be used mostly in the present or past tense. In ARCHER-2, the seventeenth and eighteenth-century increase in the aspectual function has resulted in an overall increase, and Kranich (2010: 252) suggests that between 1650 and 1800 "the grammatical function crystallizes". In the late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century, "the more clearly grammatical status of the construction leads to its extension across the verbal paradigm", including the progressive passive (Kranich 2010: 252). The focus of this study is thus on a period when the progressive was starting to be a rich and mature feature, but it was not a part of the verb repertoire to the extent that it is today.

In Late Modern English, the progressive was used predominantly in an aspectual or objective function (Kranich 2010: 168–169, see also Wright 1994, Killie 2004, and Sairio 2009: 186 for the *Bluestocking Corpus*). Aspectual or objective progressives refer to factual, physical, and dynamically advancing events and are relatively time-dependent. The subjective progressive, on the other hand, represents more figurative expressions of belief or attitude (see Kranich 2008, Fitzmaurice 2004). Example (11.1) includes one objective and two subjective progressives:

(11.1)   But here I am writing nonsense when I should be thanking you seriously for Your £100 & sending you security. Voila Donc! here it is.

(William Mason, 1771; GRAY, 1182)

The objective construction *I am writing* informs of a factual event in motion, and the modal construction *I should be thanking & sending you security* has a more figurative, attitudinal meaning. In Example (11.2), Sir William Jones describes his philological pursuits in Calcutta:

(11.2)   I read and write Sanscrit with ease, and speak it fluently to the Brahmans, who consider me as a Pandit; but I am now only gathering flowers: the fruit of my Indian studies will be a complete Digest of Law, which a number of Pandits employed, at my instance, by the Government, are now compiling

(William Jones, 1788; JONES, II, 813)

I am now only gathering flowers is a figurative present-tense progressive with a first-person subject and an adverbial, and it illustrates emotive state. The second progressive (*which a number of Pandits … are now compiling*) has an aspectual function and it informs of events currently in motion.

Contemporary metacommentary of the progressive shows that seventeenth and eighteenth-century grammarians understood it quite poorly (Wright 1994: 471),

but their comments were mild and generally positive, which extends to the nineteenth century as well (Anderwald 2012). Anderwald (2012: 36) suggests that the positive evaluations of the progressive in nineteenth-century grammars ("*Propriety*, *harmony* and *precision*, *force*, *emphasis* and *nicety*") reflects the "very slow character of this linguistic change" – it appears that contemporaries did not perceive this development as a change in progress, and this lack of awareness explains the unusually positive evaluations of a changing feature. Lenience and neutrality did not extend to the new passive construction (*the house is being built*), but the most vocal protests regarding the "moral deficiency" of the passive progressive did not take place until the nineteenth century, and they are thus beyond the scope of this study (Anderwald 2012: 36; see also Rissanen 1999: 218; Beal 2004: 78, 81; Visser 1973: 2013–2023).

The short-lived progressive passival developed in the seventeenth century (Denison 1998). It is an active construction used to express passive meaning (Kranich 2010: 116), and examples in the CEEC Extension include the following:

(11.3)   But yᵉ sight best pleased me was yᵉ cartoons by Raphael, wᶜʰ are far beyond all yᵉ paintings I ever saw. **They** are brought from yᵉ Tower and hung up ther, and **are copying for my Lord Sunderland**.

<div align="right">(Charles Hatton, 1697; Hatton 2, 229)</div>

(11.4)   **Grand preperations are making for Prince of Oranges Wedding**, which they say will be the 10ᵗʰ of this Month, it should have been sooner, but that he was taken ill at the Dutch chappel,   (David Garrick, 1733; Garrick, I, 8)

Beal (2004: 80) points out that Samuel Johnson disapproved of the progressive passival and offered as an alternative the construction prefixed by *a*:

> The grammar is now printing, brass is forging … in my opinion a vitious expression probably corrupted from a phrase more pure but now somewhat obsolete: a printing, a forging …   (quoted in Beal 2004: 80)

The *a*-prefixed progressive was already old-fashioned and in decline in the course of the eighteenth century. In CONCE, the progressive passive takes over from the passival form in the course of the nineteenth century, although both are extremely rare (Smitterberg 2005: 128). Arnaud's corpus of late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century private letters (reanalysed by Smitterberg 2005) does not contain passive progressives before 1800 (Smitterberg 2005: 129), and in the CEEC Extension the only instance of the new progressive passive is from 1780:

(11.5)   If they can but drive them to give him the Marines, **which it seems are being kept *in peto* for Sr Hugh**, it will be doing 2 right things at once.

<div align="right">(Lady Sarah Lennox, 1780; Lennox, I, 302)</div>

Used by an aristocratic woman in a letter to a close friend towards the end of the century, this single incident echoes Smitterberg's (2005) and Hundt's (2004) suggestion that the passive form emerged initially in informal contexts, such as private letters and diaries.

The next section presents the findings of sociolinguistic variation of the progressive in CEECE.

11.3   Diachronic developments in CEECE

In eighteenth-century letters, the progressive is a low-frequency item (1,741 tokens in total), and it increases moderately throughout the period from 4.45 to 10.88 (/10,000). Table 11.1 shows its distribution in 20-year time periods, and Figure 11.1 illustrates its development in terms of normalised frequencies. Figure 11.2 shows how many percent of the words in each person's letters are progressives per twenty-year period.[2] I have examined present- and past-tense progressives as two separate categories due to their high frequency in the data; perfect-tense progressives and modal usage have been grouped together into the so-called 'complex' tense.

Table 11.1 Frequencies of the progressive (N and /10,000)

1680–1699	1700–1719	1720–1739	1740–1759	1760–1779	1780–1800
158 4.45	166 5.94	141 6.61	227 6.09	311 7.98	738 10.88

In Figure 11.2, each thin horizontal line represents the normalised frequency of progressives in one person's letters, while the thick horizontal line indicates the median of the normalised frequencies (see Chapter 5). These median frequencies indicate that there is a drop in the tokens between 1720 and 1760. The decrease between 1700–1719 and 1720–1739 is not significant, but the increase between 1760–1779 and 1780–1800 is. The slight mid-century gap is shown also in Figure 11.1, but the earlier gap which the beanplots reveal in the period 1720–1739 disappears when the figures are normalised as a pooled average per period. The mid-century gap seems to result from a temporary drop in present tense progressives (Figure 11.4). But the progressive is clearly on the increase, given that its higher frequencies in 1780–1800 appear both in normalised figures and the beanplots. Moreover, the Wilcoxon rank-sum test indicates that the difference between the last two periods is statistically significant. The final period also stands out according to the permutation testing method.

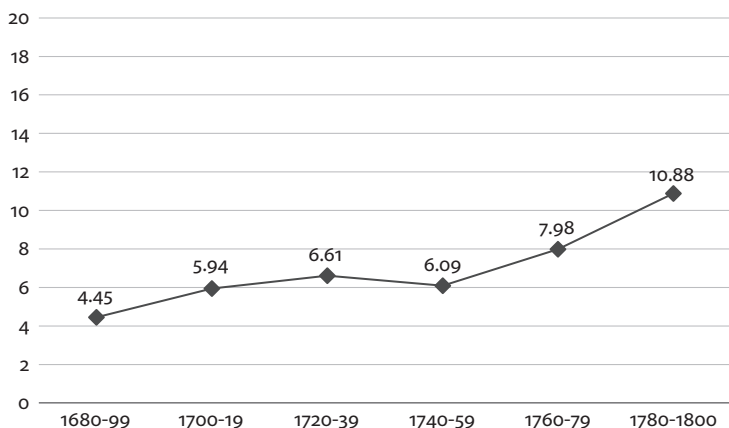2.   Beanplot and cucumiform figures generously provided by Tanja Säily.

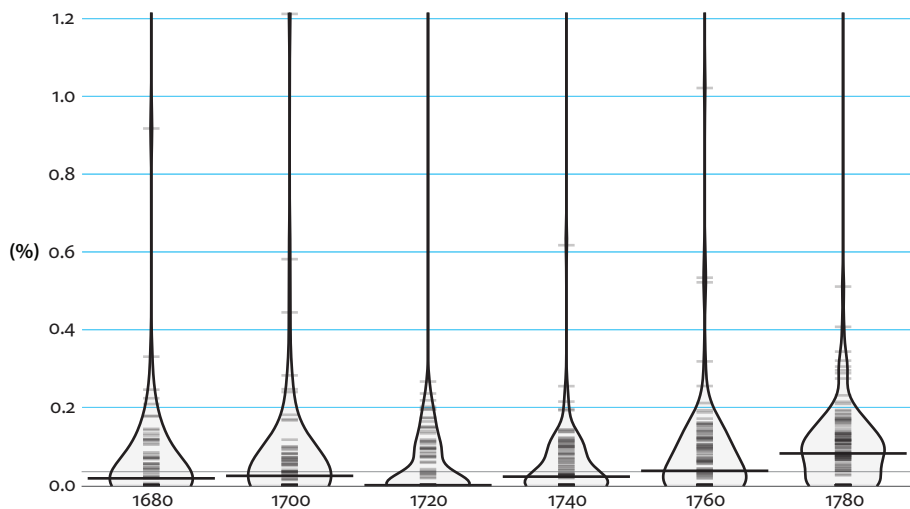**Figure 11.1** Normalised frequencies of the progressive /10,000 words

Figure 11.2 Beanplotting the progressive: percentages per individuals and time periods

The 1680–1719 period in CEECE shows lower frequencies compared to ARCHER (Hundt 2004) and the seventeenth-century letters in the *Helsinki Corpus* (Núñez-Pertejo 2004) (Figure 11.3). The informal context of private letter-writing would seem to predict higher figures, but this does not take place. The *Bluestocking Corpus*, a small letter corpus which consists of private correspondence within a social network (Sairio 2009), contains a higher frequency of the progressive than CEECE, but the difference evens out at the end of the century.
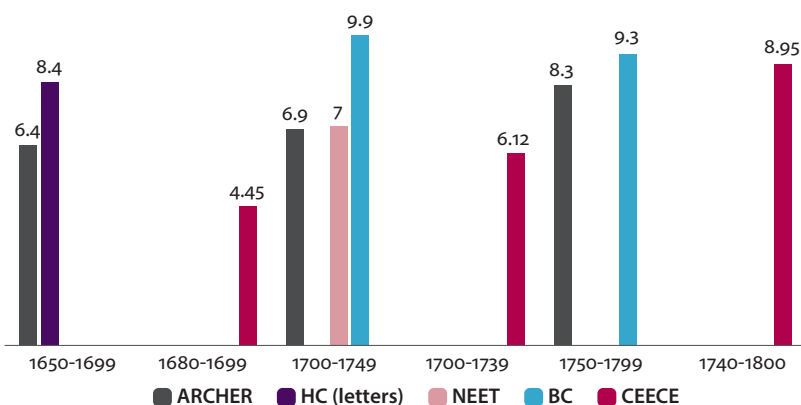
Figure 11.3 Normalised frequencies of the Late Modern progressive: CEECE and previous studies (Hundt 2004, Núñez-Pertejo 2004, Sairio 2009)

In CEECE, the present tense is the most common context for the progressive (Figure 11.4). The other tenses appear in modest, very slowly increasing numbers.
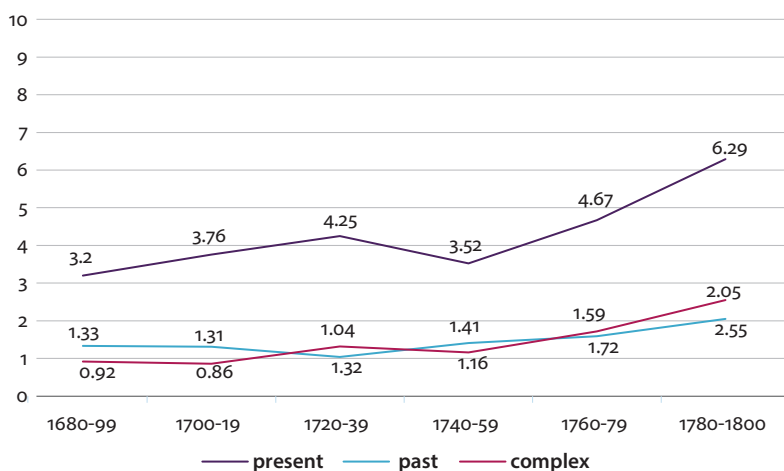

Figure 11.4 Diachronical developments in tense

The mid-century drop in present-tense progressives seems to explain the overall decrease that takes place during that period (Figures 11.1 and 11.2). Sociolinguistic analysis in Section 11.5 suggests that this decrease results from a temporary drop in material by lower-ranking writers. The following sections present the results for gender, social rank, and register variation.

11.4 Gender

Previous research on gender variation in the history of progressive suggests that this construction does not display consistent trends in time. Men seem to be more prone to use the subjective progressive in early eighteenth-century letters (Fitzmaurice 2004), whereas in nineteenth-century letters progressives are more frequent in women's letters (Smitterberg 2005: 79–82; Arnaud 1998) and in the eighteenth-century Bluestocking letters gender is not a relevant variable (Sairio 2009). Kranich (2010: 105–106) suggests that the subject matter of the letters could explain the variation, and that emotional involvement might lead to higher frequencies of *be+ing*. In CEECE, clear gender-related patterns do not emerge. Normalised frequencies suggest that men use the progressive more than women up until the end of the eighteenth century (Figure 11.5, Table 11.2), which is in line with Fitzmaurice's (2004) findings on the subjective progressive. The beanplot in Figure 11.6 shows that men lead women in every time period, but this result is not statistically significant, and women's letters simply do not provide enough material for statistical analysis until the end of century.
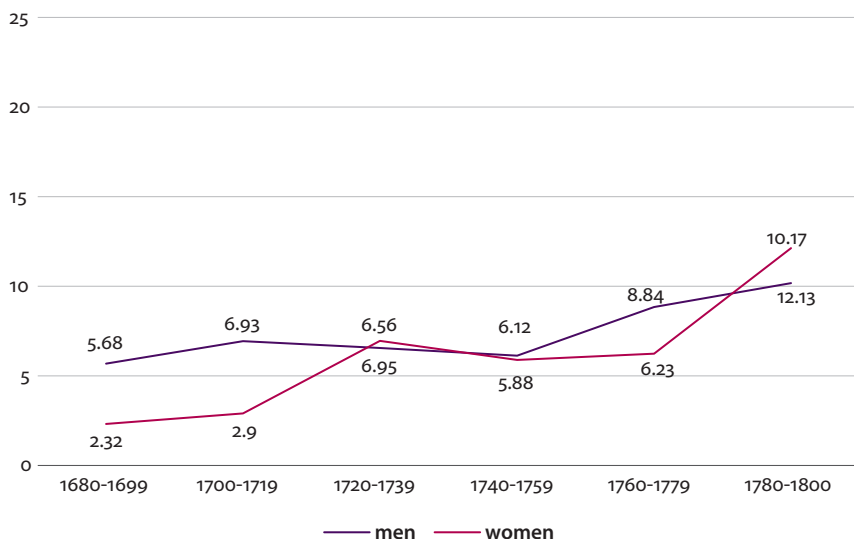

Figure 11.5 Gender variation in 20-year time periods

Table 11.2 The progressive and gender variation (N and /10,000 words)

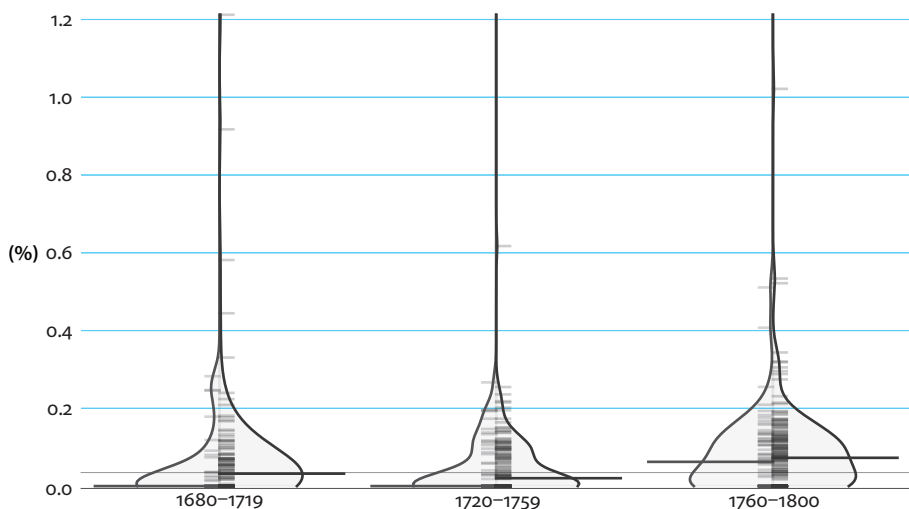| Gender	1680–1699	1700–1719	1720–1739	1740–1759	1760–1779	1780–1800
Men	152 5.68	141 6.93	104 6.56	211 6.12	152 8.84	415 10.17
Women	6 2.32	25 2.9	37 6.95	53 5.88	34 6.23	323 12.13

Figure 11.6 Beanplotted gender variation in forty-year spans
(women writers, left / male writers, right)

Women's lead at the end of the century, though statistically insignificant, seems to anticipate the nineteenth-century gender variation; perhaps gender becomes a relevant variable only in the course of the following century, when the change is more strongly under way. Smitterberg (2005: 86) interprets his findings via Labov's (2001: 292–293) hypothesis which links gender, norms, and innovation together, so that the nineteenth-century increase of the progressive can be viewed as innovation and change from below given how it may be considered to advance on the non-progressive constructions. Women's use of the progressive in that period could therefore correspond with Labov's hypothesis of women as linguistic innovators. However, in the eighteenth century the progressive does not yield this type of socially meaningful findings.

As gender variation is not statistically significant, a more fine-grained analysis of gender and tense is unnecessary (see, however, Table 11.3 in the Appendix for the numbers). Suffice it to say that women begin to catch up from 1720 onward in present-tense usage, and they take the lead at the end of the century.

11.5   Social rank

The impact of social rank is more substantial than gender. The progressive is very common in the letters of lower-ranking writers, and professionals stand out from the other ranks as high users (Figure 11.7). Permutation testing shows that the overuse by professionals is statistically significant in the case of the 'complex' progressive (i.e. perfect tense and modal usage combined).
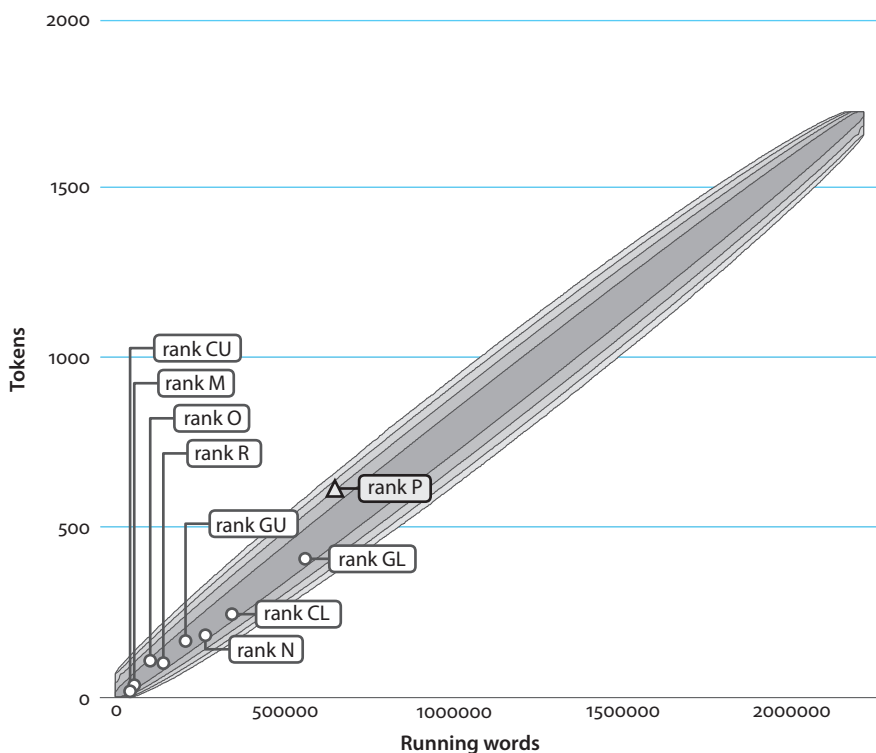
Figure 11.7 Social rank and the progressive. (CL = clergy lower, CU = clergy upper, GL = gentry lower, GU = gentry upper, M = merchant, N = nobility, O = other, P = professional, R = royalty)

The variable of social status seems to shed light on the early and mid-century gap observed in Table 11.1 and Figure 11.2. Perhaps it also offers some explanation regarding women's infrequent use of the progressive in the beginning of this period. Lower-ranking writers are underrepresented in this early section of CEECE; there are no progressives by lower rank writers in the dip period of 1740–59, which is explained by the temporary decrease of material in those decades. And while the period of 1680–99 provides a wider range of letters by women in terms of rank than 1700–19, neither period contains letters by women of the lowest ranks.

Men who were not highly educated (that is, men who were apprenticed or had only gone through elementary and secondary education) use the progressive in significantly high frequencies (Figure 11.8). This would support the finding that the lower ranks overuse the progressive and that we are looking at change from below. However, when we consider the influence of rank in the last two decades (Table 11.4), singled out from the other time periods because of the overall higher *be+ing* tokens and word counts per rank, we find that at the end of the century the nobility and lower gentry writers use the progressive more or as often as lower rank writers (coded as Other).
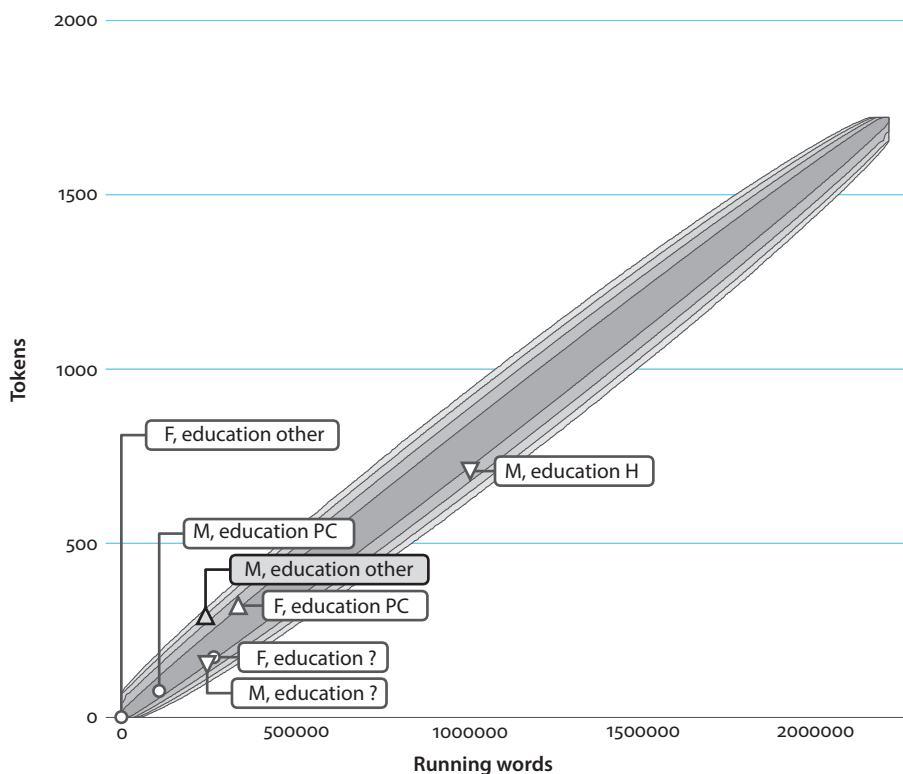
Figure 11.8 The progressive and education of the letter-writers. (F = Female, M = Male, PC = Private Classical education, H = Higher education, including Oxbridge and Inns of Court)

Table 11.4 The progressive and social rank, 1780–1800

Rank	N	/10,000	Word count
Royalty	79	6.61	119,491
Nobility	84	14.22	59,082
Gentry upper	18	4.54	18,077
Gentry lower	18	12.26	101,939
Clergy upper	0	0	1,729
Clergy lower	81	11.23	72,107
Professionals	283	11.43	247,491
Merchants	0	0	762
Other	68	12.65	53,773

To illustrate the use of the progressive in lower-ranking letters, in Example (11.6) Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780) gives a lively, in-the-moment eyewitness account about the Gordon Riots of June 1780, which he observed from his shop in London.

(11.6)   Lord George Gordon has this moment announced to my Lords the mob – that the act shall be repealed this evening: – Upon this, they gave a hundred cheers – took the horses from his hackney-coach – and rolled him full jollily away: – **They are huzzaing now ready to crack their throats**. *Huzzah*.

<div align="right">(Ignatius Sancho, 1780?; SANCHO, 232)</div>

The lower-rank letters are unevenly distributed in the corpus, and there is a lot of inter-decade variation in the tokens. Idiosyncratic preferences are highly visible, and individual writers have considerable influence in the overall results: for example, almost 40% of the progressives in the 1780–1800 Other category appear in Elizabeth Clift's letters (Table 11.4). When individuals have this much influence in the frequencies of a rare variable, the material inevitably leads towards micro-level sociolinguistic analysis.

Upper clergy writers in CEECE appear to be underusers of the progressive: their letters include a total of 35 tokens in the corpus. We can explore the hypothesis that upper clergymen's tendency to avoid the progressive may point to genre-internal variation. Kranich's (2010: 96–103) analysis of the distribution of the progressive across genres in ARCHER-2 and the analysis of Smitterberg (2005), Núñez-Pertejo (2004), Fitzmaurice (2004), Strang (1982) and Arnaud (1973) indicate that the progressive is an oral rather than a literate feature, seemingly preferred in more speech-based and colloquial written genres such as letters, drama, and fiction (Kranich 2010: 102). Eighteenth-century religious texts in ARCHER-2 contain only 17 progressives in all (Kranich 2010: 101). Religious texts are thus an atypical genre for the progressive, so it might follow that upper clergy letters are an unfavourable environment for the progressive to occur. For the lower clergy letters the hypothesis does not apply, as this material include letters by women whose fathers or husbands represent this rank.

The next section discusses the influence of register, which adds another important dimension to women's increasing use of the progressive.

11.6   Register

Overall, correspondence between nuclear family members (FN in Figures 11.9 and 11.10) is the most common context for the progressive. This would confirm the associations of the progressive with "more spontaneous, unmonitored, colloquial" language use (Kranich 2010: 102). Family communication seems to be the most likely context for this dynamic, oral-like verb construction to occur.
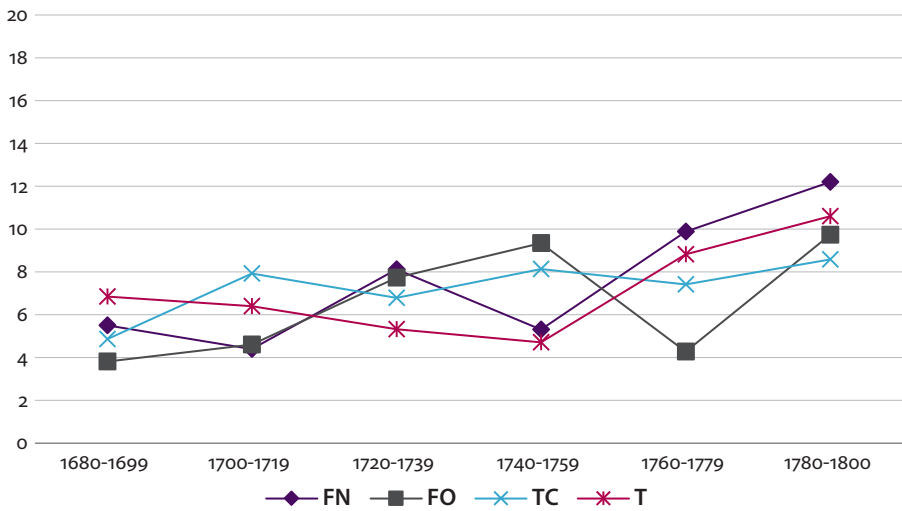
Figure 11.9 Diachronic register variation (/10,000 words). (FN = Family Nuclear, FO = Family Other, TC = Close Friends, T = Acquaintances)
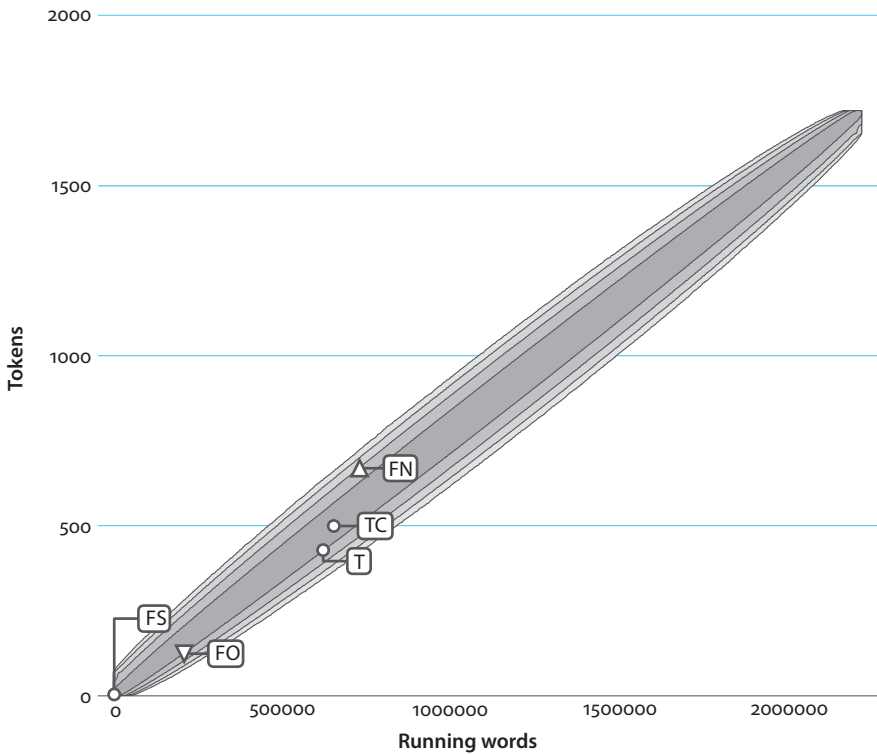

Figure 11.10 Register variation and the progressive

Close family correspondence becomes the most common register for the progressive after mid-eighteenth century: prior to the 1760s, register variation is less clear. The most intimate contacts (FN and TC) use progressive significantly more often than more distant writers (Wilcoxon rank-sum test, last 40-year period). The progressive rates for T writers remain consistently low, whereas in other registers this aspect slightly increases over time.

In Example (11.7), Lady Mary Montagu anticipates her daughter's response to the letter she is writing, which builds into an informal, conversational style:

(11.7) **I fancy you are now saying** – 'Tis a sad thing to grow old. What does my poor mama mean by troubling me with Criticisms on Books that no body but her selfe will ever read over? – You must alow something to my Solitude.

<div align="right">(Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 1752?; MONTAGU, III, 9)</div>

Towards the end of century, several sociolinguistic developments take place. Women begin to use the progressive more frequently, the construction increases particularly in the present tense, and lower-ranking writers (but also the nobility!) use the progressive in the highest frequencies. In the next section, we arrive at micro-level analysis of the individual letter-writers.

11.7 Outliers

William Clift, aged 17 to 24 when he wrote the letters in CEEC Extension, uses the progressive more than any other letter-writer in terms of normalised frequencies (Table 11.5). Also the permutation testing method places him as the highest user of the progressive (Table 11.6), and unlike the other outliers, William Clift uses the progressive in a multitude of tenses, not merely in present tense constructions. It is hardly a coincidence that out of 308 letter-writers in this corpus, the second person on the list of outliers is William's sister Elizabeth (1757–1818). These over-users of the progressive are nuclear family members, originally from Cornwall, with labourer roots (though William was upwardly mobile), and they write during the last decade of the eighteenth century to their siblings. In addition to family register,

Table 11.5 Outliers: highest frequencies of the progressive per tense

	Present	Past	Complex	N / 10,000
William Clift	21	25	21	67 / 23.12
Elizabeth Clift	19	6	1	26 / 18.26
Josiah Wedgwood	23	5	8	36 / 15.74
Mary Wollstonecraft	33	2	11	46 / 14.42
William Jones	31	5	5	41 / 12.36

Table 11.6 Outliers per tense: calculated with permutation testing*

Tense	Individual	Side	p-value	q-value
ing-complex	Jeremy Bentham	above	0.00298731	1.60119816
ing-past	William Clift	above	0.01589152	4.25892736
ing-complex	William Clift	above	0.01651846	2.95129818666667
ing	William Clift	above	0.01805818	2.41979612
ing-past	Thomas Gray	above	0.0387751	4.15669072
ing-present	M. Wollstonecraft	above	0.04754548	4.24739621333333

* While the results are not significant after false discovery rate control (see *q*-value), they are indicative of tendencies

their outlier status may also result from regional language patterns in Cornwall and the possible Celtic influence in the West Country region, and probably reflects shared linguistic patterns in the family.

In Table 11.5, we find also Sir William Jones (1746–1794), a notable philologist and member of the Supreme Court in Bengal, Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795), the founder of the Wedgwood pottery, and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), writer and women's rights advocate. In addition to William Clift's West Country background, it may be significant that he is the youngest of these people and also twenty years younger than his sister Elizabeth, who is the second youngest outlier. Generational differences may be at work. Wedgwood and Wollstonecraft use the present-tense progressive more than William Clift does, but Clift is more accustomed to using past and perfect progressives than they are and thus has a wider syntactic repertoire.

Table 11.5 includes the individuals whose letters contain the highest number of the progressive in normalised frequencies; Table 11.6 has been compiled using the permutation testing method of the individuals who provide sufficient data for quantifying outlier positions. This list is headed by the philosopher, jurist and social reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), who did not make the normalised list but shows up in Table 11.6 because of his significantly high use of the progressive in complex tense (i.e. present perfect, past perfect and modal usage denoting the future tense). Another letter-writer who frequently uses past tense progressives is eighteenth-century poet and scholar Thomas Gray (1716–1771), and Mary Wollstonecraft makes the list with her present-tense usage.

Table 11.7 presents a compilation of the outlier findings. The letters of the outliers are written between 1734 and 1800, mainly in the latter half of the century. The oldest (Grey) was born in 1716, and the youngest (William Clift) in 1775. Over half of the progressives in their letters appear in letters to close family members (FN 56%, Table 11.7). Four out of seven outliers represent the professional ranks. These

individuals personify the habitual users of the progressive in eighteenth-century private letters: most of them write during the latter part of the century, particularly the last decade, and represent the low and middling sorts, with William Jones and William Clift as notable social risers. The list includes both men and women, which is illustrative of the insignificant gender variation at the end of the century. Their geographical backgrounds vary, but London is a common denominator to nearly all of them. The Clifts hail from Cornwall, from where William Clift relocated to London; Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Grey were Londoners who spent some years in Oxford and Cambridge respectively; William Jones was a Londoner educated in Oxford, who travelled to India in 1783 and spent the rest of his life there. At the time Mary Wollstonecraft wrote these letters, she was living in London and in France. Josiah Wedgwood lived in Staffordshire in the West Midlands. The vibrant capital city thus makes an appearance in this study.

Table 11.7 Outliers: timeline, rank, and register

Years of activity	Rank
Grey: 1734–1767	Grey, Wedgwood, Wollstonecraft, WClift: Professional
Bentham: 1761–1800	EClift: Other
Jones: 1765–1793	Jones: Gentry Upper
Wedgwood: 1767–1793	Bentham: Gentry Lower
Wollstonecraft: 1780–1797	
WClift: 1792–1799	**Register: % and N**
EClift: 1794–1799	FN: 56% (148)
	TC: 24.2% (64)
	T: 19% (50)
	FO: 0.8% (2)

As a final comment, the progressive is present also in non-native written English in the eighteenth century. Joseph Emin (1726–1809), an Armenian soldier devoted to the cause of liberating his native country, was an adult learner of English who found friends and supporters among the British gentry and was sponsored as a cadet officer in the Royal Military Academy (Fisher 2004, Apcar ed. 1918). In 1757, he wrote to his friend Elizabeth Montagu from continental Europe:

(11.8)   **I am glad you have been amusing your dearself** seeing different Places I wish it may do you good and add to your Health; but I am sory to find you are so much discouraged for you shall not be my Queen if you don't have as great a Heart as your great Soul […]

> (Joseph Emin to Elizabeth Montagu, 1757, in Apcar ed. 1918: 84)

This informally tinged present-perfect progressive shows that an eighteenth-century L2 writer who had lived and worked in London for years had obtained the *be+ing* construction into his written language. The progressive aspect was thus part of the language repertoire of a non-native speaker.

11.8   Conclusion

In eighteenth-century letters, the progressive appears to be unobtrusive, slowly emerging language change in its early stages. In terms of syntactic forms and pragmatic functions it was already a relatively mature construction, but it simply was not yet used to the extent that it would come to be used. Increase over time was slow and perhaps boosted from the lower strata of society, but not unequivocally. The progressive appears most frequently in family correspondence, and this intimate and familiar context seems to explain why rank and gender alone do not account for the variation. The frequent progressive use by lower-ranking writers, such as the outliers William Clift and Elizabeth Clift, is probably influenced by the oral-like, informal characteristics of this construction, and in the Clifts' case their Cornwall background and connections to possible Celtic influence in the English progressive might be involved. Nevertheless, a close relationship between the writer and the recipient seems to be a key sociolinguistic element.

Future research of the progressive in CEECE should put to the test the hypothesis that women's more frequent use of the progressive may result from their more frequent use of the subjective progressive, while the aspectual progressives would not display a gender difference (Kranich 2010: 233–234). Sociolinguistic analysis of the functional developments of the progressive is yet to be carried out in CEECE.

Appendix

Table 11.3 Tense and gender: absolute and normalised figures (/10,000)

Present	1680–99	1700–19	1720–39	1740–59	1760–79	1780–1800
Men	90 3.36	86 4.22	68 4.29	98 3.45	152 5.21	211 5.17
Women	2	17 1.97	23 4.32	35 3.88	34 4.00	217 8.15

Past	1680–99	1700–19	1720–39	1740–59	1760–79	1780–1800
Men	36 1.35	31 1.52	15 0.95	43 1.51	51 5.21	86 2.11
Women	3	7 0.81	7 1.31	9 1.00	9 1.06	52 1.95

Complex	1680–99	1700–19	1720–39	1740–59	1760–79	1780–1800
Men	26 0.97	24 1.18	21 1.32	33 1.16	55 1.88	118 2.89
Women	1	1	7 1.31	9 1.00	10 1.18	54 2.03