This monograph addresses the grammaticalization of the British English progressive construction, focusing on the Modern period, from the 17th up to the 20th century. On the basis of a remarkably detailed study of the British ARCHER-2 corpus, the author gives an overview of the various functions the construction has had (and sometimes still has) and the linguistic contexts with which it is typically associated. The use of the progressive in those centuries not covered in ARCHER, viz. the Old and Middle English period, is dealt with by means of a thorough discussion of the existing literature on the subject. Kranich thus presents a full length, diachronic and amply quantified study on the grammaticalization of the English progressive throughout the centuries and manages, by this wealth of data, to offer an original contribution to the already vast field of studies on the construction. The book is well written and clearly structured and the data and previous analyses presented are extremely cautiously handled (as is reflected, for instance, in the many footnotes). Therefore, I strongly recommend anyone studying the English progressive to consult this work. This being said, I also have some points of criticism, which I will address after having summarized the content of the book chapter by chapter with some minor comments.

Apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion, the book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical and methodological prerequisites which the rest of the study hinges upon. This relatively short chapter is representative for the book as a whole in that it shows the author’s familiarity with the existing literature – in this case, on grammaticalization – and the scrutiny she maintains in her discussions, yet at the same time it illustrates that in-depth theoretical considerations do not seem to constitute the main focus of this book. The chapter starts with some considerations on grammaticalization and subjectification and the difference between the two. It is, among other things, pointed out that there is a difference between primary and secondary grammaticalization (roughly, from lexical to grammatical and from grammatical
and that the latter does not go hand in hand with subjectification, but rather with “objectification”, a point which is elaborated in Chapter 8. Furthermore, Chapter 2 discusses methodological issues such as the chosen corpus and the way the targets (i.e., progressive constructions) in this corpus are retrieved and analyzed.

Chapters 3 and 4 are meant to frame the corpus study that is presented in the rest of the book, by dealing with, respectively, the progressive’s present-day semantics and its Old and Middle English properties, as described in the literature. Many of the discussions presented in Chapter 3, on the contemporary functions of the progressive, show the opposing opinions of different scholars and thus raise research questions that guide the corpus analysis presented in Chapters 6 through 8 (and that are indeed systematically dealt with in these chapters). The chapter is divided in three parts: the progressive as a marker of progressive aspect, its association with particular situational properties and its subjective uses. Apparently, most definitions of the progressive focus on its aspectual meaning. The author therefore devotes considerable space to a definition of aspect, the differences between grammatical and lexical aspect and whether or not the (English) progressive can be regarded as a marker of general imperfective aspect. A discussion of the relevant literature on aspect brings the author to the conclusion that the most workable definition of progressive aspect is that of Klein (1994), who claims that the configuration of the construction (like that of any imperfective marker) has the topic time included in the time of the situation (which is thus viewed unboundedly). In order to distinguish progressives from general imperfectives, the author adds that a progressive situation is also by definition [+dynamic]. Kranich further discusses specific aspectual meaning types – such as ‘Aktuelles Präsens’ (‘What’s happening right now?’) and the use of the progressive to frame other situations – and the so-called ‘imperfective paradox’ (i.e., the use of the progressive with telic predicates such that these are ‘de-telicized’). The second part of Chapter 3 is devoted to properties progressive situations: (limited) duration, dynamic/stative, agentivity and overt and covert situations. (Limited) duration, which is sometimes argued to be a meaning of the progressive, is here treated as associated with (or a requirement of) the construction. The corpus research study has to point out how important this association is and has been throughout the centuries. On purely theoretical grounds (i.e., by pointing out a number of differences in meaning), the author excludes an analysis of the progressive as a stativizing construction. She does accept the possibility of the progressive turning stative situations into dynamic ones. Then, the oft-noted relationship between the progressive and agentivity is treated, after which the author goes on to present the various opinions as to whether the English progressive is typically associated with overt situations (those situations perceived by the five senses) or with closed
ones (which are not immediately perceivable). In the third part of Chapter 3, the subjective uses of the progressive, expressing the speaker’s attitude or emotion, are dealt with. They are split up in three types: the subjective progressive with adverbials such as *always* (typically expressing irritation in present-day English), the subjective progressive without such adverbials, and the so-called ‘interpretative’ progressive (Ljung 1980) – the use of the progressive to reinterpret a particular situation. Given the large number of different semantic analyses proposed in the literature, a natural question that comes up at the end of Chapter 3 is: does the progressive allow a uniform semantic analysis? In view of the variety of uses of the construction, the author supposes that it does not. Aspectual and subjective uses, it seems, exist alongside, without there being a clear semantic link between them. This, according to Kranich, reflects the diachronic evolution of the progressive in English, which has had these core meanings from Old English onwards.

This brings us to Chapter 4, in which the formal and semantic properties of the progressive in Old and Middle English are tackled. First, Kranich puts forward ‘beon/wesan + V-(i)ende’, rather than the prepositional pattern ‘beon/wesan + on/in/a + V-ing’, as the most likely ancestor of the present-day progressive, noting that the prepositional pattern was less frequent and continued to be strongly tied to locative meanings. Two brief sections are then devoted to the most plausible triggers for the development of the progressive. A language-internal explanation focuses on grammaticalization, while an explanation based on language contact (which does not exclude the language-internal explanation, or vice versa) points to Celtic influence. The bulk of the fourth chapter then deals with the functions of the Old and Middle English progressive marker. It is shown that, judging from the literature, the aspectual meaning of the progressive was not as entrenched yet as it is nowadays and that the main function of the construction used to be highlighting in narrative contexts or expressing duration. Use of the progressive was, moreover, optional and establishing one core function is, given its variability of meaning, impossible, according to the author.

Chapters 5 through 8, then, are devoted to the frequency, the typical contexts, the functions and the grammaticalization of the Modern English progressive, as attested in the ARCHER corpus. Although a rise in frequency is not regarded as a necessary component of grammaticalization, the increase in frequency in the period under consideration is so remarkable that it merits a separate chapter. Thus, in Chapter 5, Kranich gives an overview of the frequencies from the year 1500 to 2000, relating this to factors such as genre and sociolinguistic variables. The structure of the discussions in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 6, is always more or less the same: first the findings in the literature are discussed, then it is verified whether
these findings are correct by means of the corpus study. Possible motivations for the increase in use of the progressive are presented, but the author does not clearly point out which of these is most likely. A final section considers the few occurrences of the prepositional construction of the type *to be a-hunting*. Sometimes this construction is said to have caused the significant increase in the use of the progressive by merging with the Middle English progressive, but this seems highly unlikely as only ten examples have been counted. The properties of these ten examples (the contexts in which they occur, their function) have been analyzed in the other chapters, but given their low frequency, I will not come back to this.

Chapter 6 systematically deals with the linguistic contexts in which the progressive occurs and has spread in Modern English. A progressive passive has emerged (replacing the passival), and the progressive occurs across tenses, with perfect and modal auxiliaries, in different clause types, in various genres, with different types of adverb, and involving different types of lexical aspect (‘situation type’). It is shown that, as already noted in other studies, there is paradigmatic extension (in that the progressive is used in contexts where it was not used before, i.e., the passival), but the progressive appears not to have become more frequent in ‘unusual’ combinations, such as with the perfect. In fact, it has only become more entrenched in its prototypical past- and, especially, present-tense usage. The corpus study further indicates, among other things, that there is a slight increase in the use of the progressive with stative verbs – a use that, although common in Old English, had decreased towards the end of the Middle English period.

Chapter 7, on the functions of the progressive in Modern English, is structured along the lines of Chapter 3. First the aspectual uses are discussed, which have clearly become predominant compared to the progressive’s subjective uses, as the corpus results show (although, of course, the fact that no spoken data are available might have influenced these findings, as subjective uses are probably more common in spoken than in written contexts). The prototypical aspectual functions are ‘Aktuelles Präsens’ and the time-frame use, but these uses turn out to have become relatively less entrenched in the last two centuries, which indicates the extension of the use of the progressive for less typical functions, such as the expression of temporary habits or of near-future events. This near-future use of the progressive, as well as its use with the perfect and with future *will/shall* are treated as derived aspectual uses. Historical presents are not dealt with in this section and examples of the futurate use of the present progressive show that, in my view, the future events are not really temporally, but rather epistemically near. Yet, again, these sections on the core and derived aspectual meanings of the Modern English progressive are rich in data and the conclusions, though maybe not always
new, are convincing. In the second part of Chapter 7, Kranich deals with the use of the progressive in relation to situational properties. Analysis of the ARCHER data shows that the progressive in contemporary English is, as expected, associated with situations of limited, rather than unlimited, duration and with agentivity, rather than with non-agentivity (although an increase in non-agentive subjects has also been attested in the 19th century). Situations in the progressive are (construed as) dynamic and somewhat more often overt. In the final part of this chapter on the progressive’s functions in Modern English covers its subjective uses. First, the author seeks for clear criteria to distinguish these subjective uses from aspectual ones. Thorough investigation points out that formal criteria, proposed in other studies, cannot be relied on to make such a distinction, and so she proposes that only contextual clues can offer a solution. Uses that are both aspectual and subjective are classified as aspectual. Subjective type 1 (with *always*-type adverbials) and subjective type 2 progressives (without such adverbials) exhibit a relative decrease in frequency, while interpretative progressives have become much more frequent in the past centuries, thus contributing significantly to the overall rise of the progressive.

In the final chapter before the conclusion, Chapter 8, the author evaluates the theoretical implications the results of her corpus study have for grammaticalization and subjectification. She discusses which of the assumptions on grammaticalization have not proven valid and which have. Contrary to what has sometimes been claimed, there is no indication that grammaticalization goes hand in hand with a more balanced distribution across genres and contexts: the progressive has even become more entrenched in those contexts in which it already was frequent. Paradigmatic extension, on the other hand, does constitute a sign of grammaticalization. Related to this is the obligatorification of the progressive in some contexts, which probably occurred in the late 18th and early 19th century, and which also indicates its fully grammaticalized status. In this same period in which the aspectual function becomes so important, the subjective uses of the progressive consequently decrease in frequency. Only later, when the grammatical function of the progressive has been firmly established, there is again room for more subjective (interpretative) uses. These observations bring the author to hypothesize that secondary grammaticalization is linked to ‘objectification’ rather than subjectification.

All in all, as already mentioned before, this book offers a thorough diachronic overview of the English progressive in all its aspects. Only on very few occasions could discussions on particular topics be found incomplete. In Chapter 3, for instance, the author does not address the French enunciativist approaches to the semantics of the English progressive (cf.
Adamczewski 1978, his adherents and his critics), even though these offer interesting perspectives (which to my knowledge cannot be found in other analyses) on whether or not one basic meaning can single-handedly account for the variety of uses of the progressive. Another, more important point missing is a clear definition of the distinction between stative and dynamic verbs. Some verbs that are treated as stative in this book (especially verbs of stance) would, in view of their compatibility with the progressive, be treated as dynamic in other studies. Although I realize this compatibility argument runs the risk of being circular, the author does not come up with another clear-cut criterion to define states. Michaelis (2004: 11), who is also quoted in the book, notes that verbs of stance (which she classifies as homogenous activities), just like other dynamic verbs, differ from statives in that they require at least some conception of the points of inception and termination of the situation they profile (how else would one distinguish, for instance, between sleeping, nodding off for a second and being comatose or dead?). Such an epistemological criterion could offer a way out.

Notwithstanding these minor remarks, the book is notably rich in detail and no issue seems to be forgotten. Yet, since some of these issues have already been studied thoroughly before, the author sometimes does not do more than confirm by data what has been claimed previously, also on the basis of data (in Chapter 6, for instance, this happens quite often). By no means do I want to discard these descriptions as unnecessary, but analytical profundity would have been a welcome complement. However, really in-depth theoretical considerations are, in my view, lacking in this book. The proposed theoretical framework is that of grammaticalization, but one might wonder whether this can rightfully be regarded as a theoretical framework. Grammaticalization describes and predicts the path of evolution of the progressive, but it does not explain why the progressive in English has grammaticalized to such an extent (much more so than in other Germanic languages) and why various meanings (subjective and aspectual) should have become associated with a single periphrastic construction. The first question is briefly touched upon in Section 4.1, in which language-external and language-internal explanations are proposed for the upcoming progressive construction in Old English. Contact with Celtic, in which the progressive had already grammaticalized, together with a language-internal process of grammaticalization are said to have triggered the rise of the English progressive. Yet identifying the trigger is not the same as accounting for the ongoing paradigmatic spread and the increase in frequency, notably in the 18th and 19th century. One might wonder, moreover, whether grammaticalization an sich can explain such original development, spread and rise in frequency in the first place. What, then, is the driving force behind the process of grammaticalization itself? Explaining this of course involves looking into
the use of the simple present, which has become more restricted throughout the centuries. A hypothesis put forward by Nuñez-Pertejo (2004: 67) is that it is the gradual disappearance of the Old English prefixesystem (still to be found in German and Dutch) that has created the need for a new way of expressing aspect. Thus the English progressive has become much more grammaticalized than its equivalents in other Germanic languages. Consideration of hypotheses such as this might, in my view, have completed Kranich’s study in interesting ways, although, of course, a proper corpus study of the use of the simple present lies outside the scope of the book. In order to answer the second question (on the variety of seemingly unrelated uses), the author also harks back to grammaticalization: from early onwards the progressive could express both aspectual and subjective meanings – the latter especially for intensification in narrative contexts (via iconicity). The fact that the two are also found (in varying distribution) in the Modern period and that a single occurrence of the progressive might be both subjectively and aspectually motivated can thus be regarded as a (synchronic) reflection of the various functions the progressive has had. She does not explain, however, what the semantic connection may be between the two main types of use. Yet this link between subjective expressions and progressive aspect (in the present in particular) is also noted in other languages (Güldeman 2003), which might point to a more systematic association.¹ Addressing issues such as these could also enhance the degree of cognitive plausibility of the study. Even though the book explicitly claims to strive at such cognitive foundation (cf. p.73), there are no indications that cognition has actually been taken into consideration (which does not mean, of course, that the diachronic pathways described do not make sense from a cognitive point of view).


¹ In relation to this, it is interesting to point out that preliminary evidence from French shows that the author is probably mistaken in claiming that “the emergence of the interpretative function is probably best understood as a fully language-specific development” (p. 247): être + en train de also occurs in interpretative uses similar to those of the English progressive (De Wit & Patard: 2011).
