

# Progressive verb forms in Scottish Standard English: A questionnaire-based approach

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The use of progressive verb forms with stative verbs (e.g. *liking*, *wanting*, *understanding*, *thinking*, *doubting*) is a common feature of many varieties of English world-wide (cf. Kortmann & Lunkenheimer 2013). There is ample evidence in the literature that *be V-ing* constructions with stative verbs are also frequent in Scottish varieties of English (along the entire Scots-English continuum; cf. McArthur 1979). For example, Miller (2008: 307) comments on such patterns in Scots, which he views as symptoms of change in progress; further discussions are found in Aitken (1979: 105), Millar (2007: 75) and Beal (1997: 372–373). Smith (2012: 23) classifies the use of *be + V-ing* to stative verbs as a widespread ‘covert Scotticism’ likely to be used in Scottish Standard English (SSE), and it is also identified as a promising object of investigation by Schützler, Gut & Fuchs (2017).

In our paper, we specifically target raters’ intuitions concerning the use of progressive forms with stative verbs in the standard language, i.e. SSE, using the *Bamberg Questionnaire for Lexical and Morpho-Syntactic Variation in English* (Krug & Sell 2013). This has been used in research on several varieties of English (e.g. Krug, Schützler & Werner 2016) and contains a large number of lexical and grammatical items. We will in this paper concentrate on questionnaire results for the following three:

- (1) I’m really liking this film.
- (2) Are you understanding my point?
- (3) What are you wanting?

Informants were asked to rate on a six-point Likert scale (the extreme poles being “no-one” and “everyone”) the likelihood of the three items to be used in semi-formal writing and in colloquial speech. The former context was tested by presenting participants with written stimuli, and the latter by presenting twice each of the sentences as audio stimuli spoken by a native speaker. The data for our study are taken from 78 questionnaires representing SSE usage; for comparative purposes, we investigate 32 questionnaires completed by speakers of Southern Standard British English (SSBE) and 52 questionnaires completed by speakers of American English (AmE). This results in a total of  $n = 972$  items across the three target sentences and two modes of production. For the quantitative analysis, we treat the Likert-scale as continuous, converting responses into values on a scale of 0–5 (cf. Wray & Bloomer 2012: Ch. 13; Agresti & Finlay 2009: 40). The data are subsequently analysed using a linear mixed-effects regression model with VARIETY, MODE and GENDER as fixed effects and RATER as a random effect.

We find in our data that (i) in SSE all three verbs indeed receive higher ratings than in both AmE and SSBE, that (ii) the gradation in terms of usage ratings found in SSBE (*liking* > *understanding* > *wanting*), as well as the strong dispreference for *want* progressives in SSBE and AmE, are largely absent from SSE, that (iii) gender patterns (e.g. Labov 2001) indicate a norm proscribing against *be V-ing* with stative verbs in (written) SSBE but not so much in the other two varieties, and that (iv) the expected quasi-stylistic differences between speech and writing are also less pronounced in SSE and AmE. We complement our findings with corpus data from ICE-GB, ICE-USA and ICE-SCO (see Schützler, Gut & Fuchs 2017) to reflect on usage-based (particularly constructional) approaches to dialect variation (e.g. Mukherjee and Gries 2009).

In our paper we thus confirm the special status of *be V-ing* constructions in SSE, provide more detailed insights into lexical and socio-stylistic factors that have an effect on their

variation, and show that, with regard to this particular feature, the two British varieties of SSE and SSBE are most remote from each other.

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