

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

The English present progressive as a stance marker in film dialogue

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Abstract – Telecinematic discourse is a highly involved and emotionally loaded register (Quaglio 2009; Forchini 2012) in which stance and emotionality are conveyed via a variety of linguistic structures, including intensifiers (Tagliamonte, Roberts 2005; Baños 2013), expletives (Azzaro 2018; Bednarek 2019), vocatives (Formentelli 2014; Zago 2015) and emotionally charged lexical bundles (Freddi 2011; Bednarek 2012). The current study focuses on the present progressive in English film dialogue as an additional stance marker, especially when used in non-aspectual functions. Following Leech *et al.* (2009)'s model, different uses of the present progressive are investigated in a corpus of filmic speech, the *Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue*. After categorizing all the occurrences of present progressives in the corpus by their specific function (aspectual, futurate, stative, attitudinal), items are further classified based on their affiliative or disaffiliative stance. The focus is then narrowed down onto attitudinal, particularly interpretive, present progressives. The most common verbs used in interpretive patterns are singled out and analyzed in greater detail, by looking at the clusters or *n*-grams they appear in and drawing comparisons with spontaneous spoken language data. Findings show that interpretive present progressives are used extensively in film dialogue and often associate with a stance-marking, primarily disaffiliative function. The trend is especially evident in a set of verbs that appear in recurring patterns and *n*-grams throughout the corpus and act as privileged interpretive predicates. Data also suggest that multiple features cluster together to convey interpersonal meaning and display disalignment and conflict on screen.

Keywords: present progressive; film dialogue; interpersonal stance; disaffiliation; *n*-grams.

1. Introduction. Stance and emotionality in telecinematic dialogue

Recent research has underlined the highly involved and emotionally connoted nature of telecinematic dialogue (Quaglio 2009; Bubel 2011; Forchini 2012), an aspect that is linked to its twofold mimetic and diegetic role. While trying to reproduce real-life interactional exchanges, dialogues are used to display characters' interpersonal relations to one another and their attitudes towards the events that make up the storyline. In addition to typical emotionality markers such as intensifiers (Tagliamonte, Roberts 2005; Baños 2013), private verbs (Quaglio 2009; Forchini 2012), taboo language (Azzaro 2018; Bednarek 2019; Formentelli, Ghia 2021) and some categories of vocatives (Formentelli 2014; Zago 2015), other syntactic structures have been observed to fulfill a similar interpersonal function. Among them we can find direct interrogatives (Ghia 2014, 2019) and *n*-grams carrying positive or negative emotionality (Freddi 2011; Bednarek 2012, 2018) – which often occur within interrogative constructions and are built around recurring linguistic items, including first- and second-person pronouns, discourse markers, expletives and progressives. Even if they can signal both affiliation and disaffiliation among speakers, i.e. positive or negative interpersonal stance, most of these patterns appear in negatively connoted exchanges and are used to initiate or perpetuate conflict. Conflictuality is quite a

typifying trait of telecinematic dialogue since it serves as a primary plot developer by creating twists in the story and marking potential turning points (Pavesi 2011).

The current paper explores the use of another morphosyntactic trait in film dialogue as a marker of stance, i.e. the present progressive. This structure has been chosen for a number of reasons: first, the progressive covers a variety of functions in English, which also include non-aspectual ones that often convey stance (Ljung 1980) and appear to primarily characterize spoken or speech-based genres (Levin 2013, 2019; see ff. sections). Hence, the interest in seeing what happens in film dialogue as a specific oral register that plays a huge role in contemporary, media-dominated communication. As will be remarked, the spread of non-aspectual progressive functions has been often attributed to a colloquialization in language use (Leech *et al.* 2009), a phenomenon that has been in parallel documented for film dialogue (Zago 2016). Finally, present progressive verbs are part of many recurring clusters found in telecinematic speech, but to date no thorough exploration of this specific structure in on-screen discourse has been conducted. Moving from these premises, the study explores different uses of the present progressive in English film dialogue and their expression of interpersonal meaning in terms of affiliation and disaffiliation among interlocutors on screen. The focus is exclusively on present vs. other progressives since this tense-aspect combination is rooted in the immediate context of situation and may thus be a privileged *locus* for colloquiality and interpersonal meaning. The investigation is based on the *Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue*, a parallel and comparable corpus of English and Italian filmic speech, and draws on the classification of progressive functions into aspectual, futurate, stative and attitudinal (see Leech *et al.* 2009 and the following sections). Special attention is devoted to attitudinal present progressives, with a view to investigating their distribution in film dialogue, their association with positive or negative stance and their occurrence with specific verbs and within recurrent *n*-grams – also by drawing comparisons with spontaneous conversation.

In what follows, Section 2 will provide a brief overview of different uses of the present progressive in English, focusing on both its core and non-aspectual functions. Section 3 describes the study, starting from its research questions and moving to the methodology followed, while findings are illustrated in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the results in light of the main functions of audiovisual dialogue, and leads to the conclusions in Section 6 that frame the study within research on interpersonal meaning in telecinematic discourse.

2. The present progressive in English: Core and marginal uses

The present progressive in English is traditionally associated with the expression of an aspectual value, namely progressivity and iterativity, with reference to a present action. Structurally, it is constructed by combining a present-tense form of the verb *to be* with a gerund-participle (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 460; Huddleston, Pullum 2002, p. 162). From a functional point of view, the English present progressive conventionally expresses iteration, the continuity of an action or process or its temporariness, in line with the typical meaning facets associated with the progressive aspect (Biber *et al.* 1999; Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman 1999). More specifically, Huddleston and Pullum (2002, pp. 163-168) describe progressive aspectuality in terms of six core features: i) ongoing nature of a situation (example 1); ii) imperfective view of a situation – and its ‘framing’ role for a main event described in the proposition (Comrie 1976, example 2); iii) ‘mid-interval’ nature of a situation, i.e. lack of well-defined starting and end points (3); iv) durative view

of a situation (4); v) dynamic view of a situation (5); vi) limited duration of a situation (6).

- (1) Ongoing situation: She *is* currently *working* at a law firm.
- (2) Imperfectivity: When I got back home, my husband *was cooking* dinner.
- (3) Mid-interval: They *were building* a bridge.
- (4) Durative situation: They *were arguing* all through the meal. (Huddleston, Pullum 2002, p. 166)
- (5) Dynamicity: He *is making* fewer and fewer mistakes (Huddleston, Pullum 2002, p. 167)
- (6) Limited duration: She *is having* her hair cut.

Over time, the progressive in English has increased across different registers and varieties (Kranich 2010; Aarts *et al.* 2010). While it tended to be more frequent in American English, its frequency has now risen in British English alike, and is especially high in contexts of oral communication or speech-based genres (Leech *et al.* 2009; Levin 2013; Freund 2016). One of the reasons can be the spread of non-core functions that have no clear aspectual value to more contexts and registers (Aarts *et al.* 2010; Elsness 1994; Killie 2006; Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 125). Such uses apply to more verb categories, including for example stative verbs, regardless of verb semantics (Quirk *et al.* 1985).

Several studies have focused on non-aspectual uses of the progressive in English, which mostly involve futurate expression, use with stative verbs and the general denotation of non-progressive situations or processes. In these contexts, the progressive acquires a meaning of intentionality, emphasis and emotionality, politeness and downtoning, or an overall attitudinal value (Mindt 2000; Römer 2005, p. 58; Levin 2019). In their analysis of grammatical change in contemporary English, Leech *et al.* (2009, pp. 129-134) divide non-aspectual uses of the present progressive into futurate function, use with stative verbs and attitudinal or expressive uses. The latter include not only more typical expressive uses with *always* (and *always*-type adverbs), but also interpretive (or interpretative) uses, as already posited in Ljung (1980).

When used with futurate value, the present progressive indicates intentionality and points to future time, with “no evidence to suggest that the speaker views the actualization phase of an event as being (literally) under way at the time of utterance” (Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 132; Huddleston, Pullum 2002). An example is (7) below, where the adverbial *tomorrow* disambiguates the future reference of the verb:

- (7) She’s *having* her operation tomorrow. (Huddleston, Pullum 2002, 171)

Even though progressive marking is not compatible with the category of stative verbs, several instances can be found where non-dynamic verbs are used in the present progressive. Here, reference is often made to temporary states and stative predicates are reinterpreted as dynamic ones in a given context and within a limited – and immediate – time span (Comrie 1976; Römer 2005). In such situations, a higher degree of agency is implied than in the prototypical and unmarked non-progressive counterpart (De Wit and Brisard 2014; De Wit *et al.* 2018, p. 59). Leech *et al.* (2009, pp. 129-130) group the stative verbs most frequently occurring in the present progressive into four types: perception and sensation verbs (example 8); cognition and emotion verbs (example 9); verbs referring to having and being (example 10); stance verbs (example 11).

- (8) I’m *feeling* a bit down today.
- (9) I’m *thinking* we could leave early.
- (10) He’s *being* silly.
- (11) We *are living* at a difficult time.

Attitudinal uses of the present progressive involve the “subjective expression of the speaker/writer’s attitude or evaluation of the situation” (Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 131). The authors distinguish between an “expressive use with *always* and similar adverbials” and an interpretive function. Expressive progressives¹ share a hyperbolic function aimed at “[conveying] an attitudinal nuance”, most often negative (Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 134). In addition to *always*, *constantly*, *continually* and *forever* are examples of adverbials appearing in this pattern (see (12) below; Römer 2005; Kranich 2010; Levin 2019). However, cases with no adverbial premodification are also documented (Kranich 2010, p. 217 ff.).

(12) You’re always *asking* for money. I sometimes wonder where it all goes! (Römer 2005, p. 234)

Interpretive progressives offer an interpretation of a proposition or state of affairs. In such cases, the present progressive is used to explain and evaluate a situation or statement which can be explicitly mentioned, as in (13) and (14), or implied, as in (15) (Ljung 1980; Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 134):

(13) When Paul Gascoigne says he will not be happy until he stops playing football, he *is talking* rot. (Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 134)

(14) If John says that, he’s *lying*. (Huddleston, Pullum 2002, p. 165)

(15) You’re *kidding*! (Leech *et al.* 2009, p. 134)

As the authors remark, the interpretation often refers to a habitual or persisting situation, as evident in (13) and (14). These uses of the present progressive in English can be used to display emotions (mostly surprise or negative stance), atypicality (with respect to usual or common and appropriate behavior), unexpectedness and unpredictability (Römer 2005; De Wit, Brisard 2009, 2014).

2.1. Non-aspectual present progressive uses: Hypotheses on their development

Research on the progressive in English has underlined its diachronic growth, its grammaticalization and its development of more, non-aspectual meanings (Kranich 2010; Aarts *et al.* 2010). The increase in progressive use over time seems to be related to its association with new functions, as well as contact between English varieties where such uses developed earlier and other varieties of the language (e.g. US and later British English; Smith 2005, p. 2; Nesselhauf 2007; Aarts *et al.* 2010; Freund 2016).

Biber *et al.* (1999)’s grammar shows data from the Longman Spoken and Written English corpus (LSWE) on the distribution of the present progressive across different registers – including news, fiction and spontaneous conversation. The authors highlight how the progressive is especially common in the American English variety. Leech *et al.* (2009) compare different corpora of British and American English (the LOB and F-LOB corpora for British English and the Brown and Frown corpora for American English), and mostly focus on written English data. They show a spread of the progressive in both varieties, especially observable in the more recent time spans (see also Freund 2016). Two studies that specifically center on the spoken register are Römer (2005), who explores the use and functions of progressive verbs in spoken British English, and Aarts *et al.* (2010),

¹ For brevity, we will refer to this use as simply ‘expressive’.

who observe the increase in English progressives in the *Diachronic Corpus of present-day spoken English*. These studies indicate that non-aspectual uses of the English progressive appear to prevail in colloquial language and speech (Huddleston, Pullum 2002; Levin 2019) – and may later spread to other registers and to the written medium.²

Narrowing the scope to the English present progressive, many are the possible reasons for its spread and development of new uses. Leech *et al.* (2009) hypothesize a trend in colloquialization, which is evident in the increase of typically spoken English structures in conversation and later in other registers (e.g. news and fiction). Another possibility is the frequent pairing of semantic change with a process of subjectification, where meanings develop from their grounding “in the external described situation” to “meanings based in the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive) described situation” (Traugott 1989, pp. 34-35; Diewald 2011). According to this view, meanings would tend over time to become more strictly linked to speakers’ subjective universes and attitudes towards given propositions. Subjectification can in itself be associated with orality and colloquialization, since the expression of stance, attitudes and interpersonal meaning is a typifying trait of spoken genres – especially spontaneous ones – as opposed to the greater objectivity that characterizes written language.

3. Exploring the use of the present progressive in film dialogue

In the literature, the development of non-aspectual uses of English present progressives is thus often attributed to two main, interrelated phenomena: increasing colloquialization and subjectification, or the expression of stance and interpersonal meaning in language exchanges. Both factors primarily characterize the oral medium, especially spontaneous conversation, which by definition associates with a colloquial register and the communication of speakers’ stance. Among oral genres, the dialogue from films and TV-series has also been attributed a high degree of colloquiality and interpersonal involvement, due to its strong mimetic drive (Quaglio 2009; Forchini 2012; Zago 2016). Telecinematic dialogue classifies as a hybrid oral variety, positioning itself between spoken and written use. On the one hand, it has a scripted nature and is an instance of fictional orality, prefabricated to sound quite natural to its audience while at the same time serving narrative purposes. On the other hand, telecinematic dialogue shows plenty of colloquial traits, which are especially evident in recent productions and appear to be increasing over time (Zago 2016). Among the typically spoken phenomena found in filmic speech, studies have focused on formulaic conversational routines and lexical bundles (e.g. Freddi 2011; Bonsignori, Bruti 2014; Bednarek 2012; Zanotti 2014), discourse markers (Forchini 2010), address terms (Formentelli 2014; Zago 2015), conversational questions (Ghia 2014; Zago 2016), interjections, and general interactional patterns such as tags (Zago 2016). Generally speaking, telecinematic dialogue follows a similar turn-based structure to spontaneous exchanges (Rodríguez Martín, Moreno Jaén 2009) and shows numerous interpersonal traits, due to its highly involved and emotionally charged nature

² Along a Cognitive Grammar perspective, De Wit and Brisard (2014) carried out a corpus-based study of progressives in the *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English* (DuBois *et al.* 2000). The authors ascribe all the different uses of the present progressive in English to an original core meaning of “epistemic contingency in the speaker’s immediate reality” (De Wit, Brisard 2014, p. 49). Due to the different perspective adopted in the paper and its different intent, the study will not be thoroughly described here.

(Bubel 2008; Quaglio 2009; Forchini 2012; Zago 2016). The high emotional load of telecinematic discourse is also evident from most frequent lexical bundles and *n*-grams, which often fulfill interpersonal functions through the use of explicit stance markers (e.g. intensifiers and expletives) or morphosyntactic patterns with a clear affiliative or disaffiliative value (e.g. interrogative chunks; Freddi 2011; Bednarek 2012, 2018; Ghia 2014). Frequent within such *n*-grams are also verbs in the present progressive form (especially *do*, *go* and *tell*).

Moving from these grounds, and with a view to further exploring the expression of interpersonal meaning in telecinematic discourse, the current study investigates the use of core and non-aspectual present progressives in British and American film dialogue. Three main research questions (RQs) are formulated, starting from a general overview of the functions of present progressives in the corpus and later narrowing down the focus onto attitudinal uses:

- RQ1: Which uses of the present progressive are documented in film dialogue? What is their distribution?
- RQ2: What are the main interpersonal functions (i.e. affiliative or disaffiliative) of attitudinal present progressives with respect to aspectual and other present progressive forms?
- RQ3: Which verbs are mainly used with attitudinal functions? Which *n*-grams do they appear in?

The analysis was carried out on a section of the *Pavia Corpus of Film Dialogue* (henceforth, PCFD), a parallel and comparable corpus of film dialogue consisting of approximately 950,000 tokens. The sample used for analysis includes the original dialogue transcripts of 24 British and American films released between 1995 and 2009 for a total of about 260,000 tokens (for more details, see Pavesi 2019 and <https://studiumanistici.unipv.it/?pagina=p&titolo=pcfd>). Additional comparisons are drawn with the conversational section of the British National Corpus and the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English. More details on the procedure and the identification of present progressive functions are provided in what follows.

3.1. Procedure: Identifying and investigating present progressive functions

Following Leech *et al.* (2009)'s categories, different present progressive functions were identified, ranging from core uses (aspectual uses of the present progressive denoting ongoing and iterated actions) to non-aspectual ones. The latter include futurate, stative, expressive and interpretive uses. Futurate present progressives were identified in the corpus thanks to the presence of a clear future reference in the utterance or as evident from the co(n)text. Stative present progressives involved the progressive marking of stative predicates. Expressive present progressives carried an emphatic and hyperbolic meaning and mainly occurred with frequency and time adverbials (e.g. *always*, *forever*, *constantly*, *all the time*). Lastly, interpretive present progressives were classified based on the presence of an explicit explanation or evaluation marker (i.e. reporting and cognition verbs) or on their being linked to an inferable judgment by the speaker.³ Overlapping

³ As remarked in Leech *et al.* (2009, p. 136; see also Kranich 2010), the identification of interpretive uses of the English progressive is a complex task and ambiguous cases may be found. However, we tried to stick consistently to our criteria throughout the analysis (form: presence of an evaluation marker; meaning:

cases were identified, where stative progressives were concurrently used with an interpretive meaning. In such cases, the token was counted as an instance of both uses. The following excerpt from the corpus (example 16) shows instances of different uses of the present progressive in the same dialogue exchange. The dialogue is taken from the film *Ocean's Eleven*, by director Steven Soderbergh. In the opening line, Rusty, who is planning to rob a casino with his friend Danny, is suggesting they recruit twins Virgil and Turk as their drivers. The scene then moves to Salt Lake City, where the twins live and where they are shown playing with cars and bickering.

(16)

RUSTY: Mhm. They're both in Salt Lake City, six months off the job. I got the sense (a) they're *having* trouble (INTERPRETIVE) filling the hours.

TURK: (b) *Waiting*, sweetheart, just (c) *waiting*. (ASPECTUAL)

VIRGIL: Good. Go.

T.: (d) *Waiting* for you. (ASPECTUAL)

V.: Why you are?

T.: Go, little girl. You're like a little girl!

V.: Relax.

T.: (e) *I'm doing* (EXPRESSIVE) this all day ... don't make... I'm gonna get out of the car and I'm gonna drop you like third-period French, okay? Stop talking... go.

(*Ocean's Eleven*, S. Soderbergh, 2001, USA)

The interpretive nature of the present progressive form in (16.a) is explicitly signaled by the cognition verb *I got the sense* found in the main clause. (16.b), (16.c) and (16.d) are aspectual progressive uses denoting the continuity of the action, while the expressive function – and complaining value – in (16.e) is confirmed by the adverbial *all day* following the lexical verb.

In response to RQ1, present progressive functions were first identified and computed in the PCFD. The following phase of analysis involved a more detailed observation of attitudinal functions, i.e. interpretive and expressive uses. To address RQ2, the main interpersonal functions expressed by attitudinal present progressives were classified (affiliative or disaffiliative as opposed to neutral stance) and their distribution was compared to other progressive types. RQ3 was finally addressed, by investigating which verbs were mainly used with attitudinal functions in the corpus and which *n*-grams or word clusters they typically appeared in. The ten most frequent verbs found in interpretive present progressives were isolated and compared with spontaneous spoken language use. Due to the absence of a comprehensive corpus of spoken British and American English, separate analyses were conducted for British and US films, basing the grouping on the prevailing English variety used in dialogues. The two subsamples consist of nine British English films (PCFD_BrE, 101,055 tokens) and fifteen US English films (PCFD_AmE, 162,357 tokens). The conversational section of the British National Corpus (BNC_conv, approximately 4,000,000 words)⁴ and the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCS_AmE, DuBois et al. 2000, approximately 249,000 words) were used as reference corpora for British and American English respectively. All data on present progressive use are presented in the following sections.

presence of a judgment and evaluative meaning; non compatibility with other progressive functions, with the exception of stative verbs used interpretively).

⁴ BNC data have been extracted from the British National Corpus Online service, managed by Oxford University Computing Services on behalf of the BNC Consortium. All rights in the texts cited are reserved (<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/cpr.xml?ID=reference>).

4. Present progressives in the corpus: Functions

In the PCFD sample, 2,106 present progressives (i.e. 800 occurrences per 100,000, words) are recorded, and outnumber those found in the conversational section of the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus, i.e. about 500 present progressives every 100,000 words (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 462). When looking at present progressive functions, the distribution is as follows (Table 1):

Present progressive function	Raw occurrences	Normalized frequency per 100,000 words	Percentage out of total present progressives in the corpus
Aspectual	843	320	40%
Futurate	416	158	20%
Stative	229	87	11%
Interpretive	594	226	28%
Expressive	53	20	3%

Table 1
Distribution of present progressive functions in the PCFD.⁵

As evident from Table 1, aspectual uses of the present progressive prevail in the film corpus (843 occurrences, i.e. 40% of all present progressives). Among non-aspectual categories, interpretive uses dominate as the second largest group (594 tokens, i.e. 28%), and are followed by futurate present progressives (416, 20%). Stative and expressive uses occur in lower percentages (229 tokens, 11% and 53 tokens, 3% respectively).

Although most present progressives in the corpus fulfill a typical aspectual function, attitudinal values, especially interpretive, account for a considerable number of occurrences. Attitudinal uses are also most clearly associated with the expression of stance: all instances of expressive present progressives voice either a positive or a negative attitude towards the interlocutor (100%) – with a prevalence for negative stance and disaffiliation in 85% of occurrences. 59% of interpretive progressives in the corpus also signal either affiliation or disaffiliation (47% are disaffiliative). Stative present progressives similarly express stance in several occurrences (55%), mostly affiliative (39%). Aspectual and futurate present progressives appear only marginally within emotionally charged exchanges that show clear interpersonal alignment: 23% of aspectual present progressives and 22% of futurate progressives (Figure 1 shows the distribution of affiliative and disaffiliative progressive types per 100,000 words).

⁵ As mentioned in Section 3.1., stative present progressives overlapped with other functions in the corpus, as they were occasionally used with an interpretive meaning. In such cases, the token was counted as an instance of both uses.

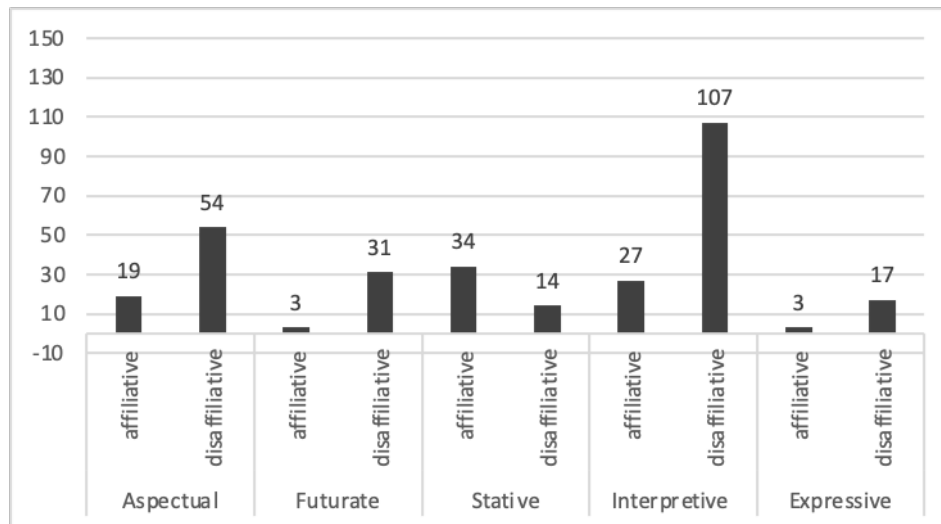


Figure 1

Affiliative and disaffiliative uses of different present progressive categories in the PCFD (normalized per 100,000 words).

Aspectual uses appear to prevail with prototypically dynamic verbs (examples (17) and (18)). As observed above, only a minority of these present progressives appear in emotionally charged exchanges – most of which are disaffiliative (17%, 54 per 100,000 words).

- (17) Why *are you whispering*?
 (18) What're you *doing*? We're still *moving*.

Futurate present progressives are common in the corpus, and were mostly identified based on their co-occurrence with an explicit future reference in the utterance (examples 19 and 20):

- (19) Do you remember that, er, Miss Scott is also keen to talk about her next project which *is*, um, *shooting* later in the summer.
 (20) And then he said he's *leaving* as soon as the sun comes up.

In (19) and (20), *later in the summer* and *as soon as the sun comes up* are clear future references which disambiguate the futurate role of the present progressive verbs in the utterances. Out of all occurrences, 22% convey stance. Most of these uses express disaffiliation and disagreement with the interlocutor, by often voicing a contrast (examples 21, 22, 23). In fewer cases, they display alignment and affiliation through an ironical or affective connotation (24). When used with a pragmatic function, futurate present progressives have often a deontic and imperative value and express orders (24) or prohibitions (23). They are either self-directed, showing commitment and acting as resolutions (21 and 22), or other-directed, indicating an obligation to be fulfilled in the immediate future (23 and 24).

- (21) I *ain't going* back in there.
 (22) I'm *not going* to jail!
 (23) You're not fucking *having* it, Ryan!
 (24) Enough about football. Come on, you're *dancing* with me!

The deontic use of futurate progressives developed from a predictive meaning⁶ and from the description “of a future [and mostly negative] state of affairs as actualizing”, thus asserting the occurrence of a future event and viewing it “as already being determined” (De Wit, Brisard 2014, p. 37). Hence, the resulting order or prohibition is rather strong. In categorization terms, the boundary between aspectual and futurate deontic use is subtle, as the future moment being referred to is often a very immediate one, almost coincident to the time of speaking.

Stative progressives are especially common in the corpus with perception (25) and cognition (26) verbs, to emphasize a remark. Many of them mark stance (55%), especially affiliative, unlike all other present progressive categories. In the corpus, this is common with perception verbs as in example (25).

(25) How you *feeling*?

(26) Yeah? See... yeah? Because I just wanna make sure that I'm *understanding* what I'm reading.

Interpretive present progressives in the corpus show a primarily disaffiliative function, as they often appear in conflictual sequences such as in (27), (28) and (29). The sequences mostly express accusations, criticism or complaints (the contextual cue ((*nervously*)) from the corpus facilitates the interpretation in 29).

(27) JAMAL: You said my skills extend farther than the basketball court. “Farther” relates to distance. “Further” is a definition of degree. You should have said “further”.

PROF CRAWFORD: *Are you challenging* me, Mr Wallace?

(28) Here's what I know: your deadline was twenty minutes ago, so you're *either fishing* for a story or you're *trying* to get out of writing a retraction. In either case, I wish you the best of luck.

(29) ((*nervously*)) Lydia! What *are you talking about*? She followed me.

In fewer cases, interpretive present progressives are used with an affiliative function. Contrary to disaffiliative language, affiliative sequences signal interpersonal proximity and agreement between interlocutors. In the corpus, this use is documented when speakers, while expressing their opinion, use a present progressive form to seek alignment with the interlocutor (example 30) or make ironical remarks (examples 31 and 32):

(30) ROXANNE: Ain't your mum been round, looking after you?

PAUL: She came round Sunday, after mass.

[...]

ROXANNE: She should have a word with my mum. I bet she's *missing* you, though.

(31) MILES: Okay, so you're *telling* me you were not a lady's man.

ARTHUR: Never. I married very young.

(32) SANDRA: Mhm. I should go before your parents come home and see us like this.

LEONARD: *Are you kidding*? They'd be happy. Probably picking out baby names.

Expressive progressives are used to a much lower extent in the PCFD, but are exclusively characteristic of emotionally loaded sequences. In most occurrences, they mark disaffiliation and express annoyance at a given state of affairs. In such cases, the verbs are often accompanied by adverbials stressing on the repetitiveness of the situation (*always* in example 33) and making clear the complaining nature of the utterance (33 and 34):

⁶ The future/prediction > imperative path is generally common in the development of imperative forms (Bybee *et al.* 1994, pp. 273-274).

- (33) She's always bloody *mixing* my stuff in with yours.
 (34) Why not do it? Because yesterday I walked out of the joint after losing four years of my life, and you're *cold-decking* teen beat cover boys.

Overall, many present progressives in the corpus have an interpersonal function, which is most evident with attitudinal uses, where progressive marking loses its aspectual role and is charged with a pragmatic load, often used to display relationships among the interlocutors. With the exception of stative progressives, all other progressive types are mainly disaffiliative when they express stance.

4.1. A focus on attitudinal uses: Frequent verbs

After the exploration of present progressive functions in the corpus, RQ3 delves more deeply into attitudinal uses. A wide range of verbs appear in interpretive uses in the PCFD, including primarily telling verbs (e.g. *talking, saying, asking, telling, insinuating, mentioning, arguing*); teasing verbs (*kidding, joking, shitting, messing with, fucking with*); change of state verbs (*going, getting, making* in their change of state use); verbs expressing feelings and emotions (*letting down, feeling, reacting, killing* [as in *this is killing me*], *bothering* and the set *going/driving crazy, freaking out, flipping out*). *Trying* generally dominates as an isolated verb in an interpretive present progressive role (see below). More rarely, cognition and mental verbs (e.g. *guessing, expecting, trusting, counting on, sorting out*) and verbs with an inherently aggressive connotation (*challenging, threatening, insinuating, deluding oneself, lying, laughing at*) are used in interpretive progressives.

The picture is more varied for expressive verbs. Fewer expressive present progressives are attested in the corpus and involve several different verbs. Since they express mainly disaffiliative stance, verbs often have a negative connotation (e.g. *complaining, harping on, condemning, hurting, raping, messing*), but are seen to occur in isolation and show no consistent behavior. Given the absence of any systematic patterns with expressives, further analyses were mainly carried out on interpretive present progressives.

In an attempt to single out medium-specific trends, the most frequent interpretive verbs in the corpus were isolated and compared with spontaneous spoken language data. The analyses were conducted separately for British and US English films, based on the prevailing variety in dialogues, and with a view to a comparison with BNC_Conv and SBCS_AmE. Table 2 shows the ten most frequent verbs found in the British and American English subsamples (normalized frequency per 100,000 words and percentage out of all interpretive progressives in each sample).

The verbs account together for 51% (PCFD_BrE) and 59% (PCFD_AmE) of all interpretive progressives in each corpus sample. *Try, talk* and *say* are the most common verbs found in interpretive present progressives in both varieties, mostly in a disaffiliative function. Other common verbs in both British and American English films are *do, kid, take* (often as part of set collocations, e.g. *taking the piss, taking advantage*), *ask* and *tell*. The verbs occur in slightly different distribution in the two subsamples, with *kidding* being considerably more frequent in US English films – due to the primacy of the verb in the American English variety. In each subsample, all interpretive uses of the ten verbs were computed and compared with other progressive uses, and against data from BNC and SBCS AmE. Chi-square statistics were performed on the data to search for significant differences between trends in film dialogue and spontaneous conversation.

PCFD_BrE				PCFD_AmE			
verb	raw occurrences	normalized occurrences (per 100,000 words)	percentage out of all interpretive progressives in the subsample	verb	raw occurrences	normalized occurrences (per 100,000 words)	percentage out of all interpretive progressives in the subsample
trying	21	21	10%	trying	40	25	11%
talking	18	18	8%	talking	33	20	9%
saying	14	14	7%	saying	33	20	9%
doing	12	12	6%	kidding	29	18	8%
taking	9	9	4%	telling	22	4	6%
kidding	9	9	4%	doing	21	13	6%
going on	7	7	3%	asking	10	6	3%
asking	7	7	3%	taking	8	5	2%
going	7	7	3%	making	8	5	2%
telling	6	6	3%	getting	8	5	2%

Table 2

Ten most common verbs used in interpretive present progressives in the two corpus subsamples.

Table 3 illustrates the percentage of interpretive uses for each verb out of all its occurrences in the present progressive in the two subsamples and in the two reference corpora, in addition to chi-square and *p* values (asterisks mark significant *p* values at <.05). Queries in BNC_Conv were performed on the strings AM/'M/ARE/'RE/IS/'S V_ING, ARE YOU V_ING, I'M NOT V_ING (due to its much larger size, only the first 100 occurrences of every form were extracted from BNC_Conv).

	PCFD_BrE	BNC_Conv	chi-square	<i>p</i>		PCFD_AmE	SBCS_AmE	chi-square	<i>p</i>
trying	67.7	47.55	4.64	*.031	trying	88.88	42.10	23.546	*.00001
talking	75	32.92	17.56	*.000028	talking	53.22	46.03	0.647	.421
saying	73.68	59.27	1.575	.209	saying	94.28	68.18	8.224	*.0041
doing	12.12	15.53	0.768	.381	kidding	100	100	-	-
taking	39.13	18.95	5.228	*.022	telling	84.61	55.55	3.202	.073
kidding	100	100	-	-	doing	12.57	22.58	5.088	*.024
going on	17.07	33.77	3.701	.087	asking	71.43	40	1.564	.211
asking	77.77	51.85	2.1	.147	taking	28.57	30	0.014	.905
going	7.95	6.83	0.023	.928	making	38.10	22.22	0.591	.442
telling	66.66	52.03	0.73	.393	getting	21.05	23.73	0.094	.759

Table 3

Percentage of interpretive progressives out of all present progressive forms for each verb in PCFD_BrE vs. BNC_Conv and PCFD_AmE vs. SBCS_AmE and chi-square statistics (ten most frequent interpretive present progressive verbs per variety).

Most of the verbs mainly occur in interpretive present progressives in both film dialogue varieties, with the exception of *doing*, *going*, *going on* and *getting*, as well as *taking* in the American English sample. When used in the present progressive, *kid* has an exclusively interpretive meaning in both films and spontaneous spoken corpora, being part of the *n*-grams *Are you / You are / I'm (not) kidding* (see Section 4.2.). A significant difference between PCFD_BrE and BNC_Conv emerges for the verbs *trying*, *talking* and *taking*,

which are considerably more used with an interpretive function in film dialogue (with *take* being often part of idioms or set collocations, e.g. *take the piss*, *take responsibility*). In PCFD_AmE, interpretive uses of *trying* and *saying* are significantly more frequent than in spontaneous US conversation. Despite being often found in present progressive form, *do* and *go* rarely have an interpretive meaning. Significantly more interpretive uses of *doing* are attested in SBCS_AmE, where they are frequent in clusters like *I know what you're doing*, *I'm doing my best* and *I'm not doing it on purpose*. Table 4 shows instances of interpretive uses from the four samples.

PCFD_BrE	BNC_Conv	PCFD_AmE	SBCS_AmE
You're kidding ?	You kidding me or what?	Sy, you're fucking kidding me?	Are you kidding ?
Look, we're not trying to cause trouble	What are you trying to prove?	Bullshit! You're trying to make yourself feel less guilty about firing someone with three kids to feed.	Trying to make me feel guilty?
What are you talking about, drugs?	Cos he's talking stupid.	Jamal, that's what I'm talking about.	What are you talking about?
Right, right, I see what you're saying , Stuart, yeah.	Yeah but this time they're saying it's a suicide	That's what I'm saying , though.	That's not saying much
You know, all I'm asking for is a normal amount of perspective.	No one's asking you are they?	I'm not asking for some kind of prenuptial agreement here.	It's not like I w- I'm asking her, you know, let me... move back in or, you know
You're telling me.	Oh, you're telling me	But I'm telling you, find another place to do your film, I do not want you back in here.	I'm telling you
What do you think you're doing ?	I'm not doing it on purpose.	I can't believe you're doing this to me	I know what you're doing
Hope you're not taking advantage of her!	He's taking the piss out of me pulling a rack through.	You ask for too much, it means you're taking advantage.	I mean I kinda hate to feel like I'm taking ... charge
You don't know what's going on ? I'll tell you then.	I want to know what's going on , what they're playing at!	Can you believe what a big deal Flor is making this into?	I guess Scott's making some good bucks.
Now we are going somewhere.	You know I am going funny. ⁷	My point is once again you're getting it all wrong.	We really are getting stupid ⁸

Table 4

Instances of interpretive present progressives from the four samples (ten most frequent verbs in PCFD_BrE and PCFD_AmE).

4.2. Attitudinal n-grams with present progressive verbs

Common verbs used in attitudinal, particularly interpretive, present progressives occur in somewhat recurring *n*-grams in the PCFD. Two patterns are generalized to interpretive

⁷ Uses of *go* as a change of state verb are also included here.

⁸ Uses of *get* as a change of state verb are also included here.

present progressives and apply to different predicates, namely BE_PRESENT + NOT + V_ING and BE_PRESENT + JUST/ONLY + V_ING. These structures are mainly used to convey a negative evaluation or counter a statement or interpretation (by negation or focus narrowing), and express disaffiliative stance (35, 36, 37). Usually, they follow first- and second-person subject pronouns – which generally cooccur with 70% of all interpretive progressives in the sample. The whole PCFD sample shows 70 occurrences of the BE_PRESENT + NOT + V_ING pattern (27 occurrences per 100,000 words, 12% of all interpretive present progressives) and 35 occurrences of BE_PRESENT + JUST/ONLY + V_ING (13 occurrences per 100,000 words, 6% of all interpretive present progressives). 28 more interpretive present progressives (5%) contain other premodifiers, including intensifiers *really*, *fucking* and hedges *sort of / kind of*.

- (35) **I'm not rationalizing.**
 (36) **I'm just trying** to stop the state from killing him.
 (37) **I'm only kidding.**

Other *n*-grams are built around specific interpretive progressive verbs in both British and US films, and correspond to established formulae in conversation and film dialogue alike (Freddi 2011; Bednarek 2012). Table 5 illustrates the raw occurrences of some of these clusters with interpretive present progressive verbs – along with the percentage of interpretive progressive sequences they appear in and some occurrences in context.

<i>n</i> -gram	you're/are you kidding (me)?	what (the fuck) are you talking about?/it's X you're talking about	all/what I'm saying/I'm just saying	I'm telling you	what are you/you're trying	what's going on
Raw occurrences (with interpretive present progressive)	24	24	15	14	7	7
Percentage out of interpretive progressive patterns (entire sample)	4.04	4.04	2.53	2.36	1.18	1.18
Occurrence context	in Sy, are you kidding me?	What are you talking about? She followed me.	I mean, 'cos all I'm saying is it- it's not his character.	I'm telling you, that girl is a first-class bitch!	What are you trying to do, just rub it in my face, is it?	Roisin, my intention is to show you what's going on here and show you that that's my family.

Table 5
Examples of interpretive progressive *n*-grams in the PCFD.

As evident from Table 4, most of these *n*-grams convey stance and are part of disaffiliative sequences, initiating or displaying conflict with the interlocutor. Negative stance is at times

signaled by additional lexical or morphosyntactic traits in the chunk, including intensifiers (both expletives and mild intensifiers, e.g. *the fuck, the hell, on earth*), embedding in pragmatic, disaffiliative interrogatives or in cleft sentences and other focusing structures (*all/what I'm saying, all I'm asking*). These patterns often combine with interpretive present progressives, which occur with expletives in 10% of cases (61 tokens, 23 per 100,000 words), within direct questions and question tags in 29% of cases (171 tokens, 65 per 100,000 words) and within focusing structures in 6% of all occurrences (37 tokens, 14 per 100,000 words). In these contexts, the verb in the present progressive appears to contribute to the aggressive and conflictual connotation of the utterance.

Among expressive present progressives, a recurring pattern is BE_PRESENT + ALWAYS (or similar time adverbial) + V_ING (20 tokens, 8 per 100,000 words), which is seen as a distinctive trait of expressive progressives in general (Kranich 2010; Levin 2019; Sections 2. and 3.1.).

5. Discussion: The present progressive, stance and colloquiality in film dialogue

Verbs in the present progressive are extremely common in film dialogue and are even more pervasive than in spontaneous spoken language (Biber *et al.* 1999). Both aspectual and non-aspectual uses of the present progressive are found in the film corpus. Even if aspectual uses dominate, attitudinal, and especially interpretive progressives are very common, followed by futurate and stative ones. Among all forms, attitudinal present progressives are those that mostly associate with the expression of stance: all expressive progressives and most interpretive progressives make explicit the speaker's stance, which is in most cases negative and disaffiliative. Disaffiliative attitudinal progressives thus contribute to a considerable extent to the construction of conflictual frames, which so frequently typify fictional exchanges in film talk (Pavesi 2011). Stative progressives are the second largest category to engage in the marking of interpersonal stance, but they predominantly voice affiliation – especially when perception verbs are involved (e.g. *How are you feeling?*). Futurate and aspectual present progressives do not usually appear in emotionally loaded exchanges – but when they do, they convey negative stance. This is especially evident with deontic futurate progressives, which express resolutions and strong opposition to a previous remark or given state of affairs. Based on these data, present progressives therefore appear to act as additional stance markers in film dialogue, often combining with other disaffiliative traits such as expletives, pragmatic interrogatives and formulae carrying negative emotionality.

In the expression of (mostly negative) stance in telecinematic dialogue, some verbs are chosen as privileged attitudinal progressive predicates (e.g. *trying, kidding, talking, saying*). While in spontaneous conversation they occur in mainly aspectual present progressives (with the exception of *kidding* and *doing*), these same verbs are assigned a prevalingly interpretive role in film dialogue. Patterns and *n*-grams clustering around interpretive present progressives are also documented in the PCFD, often based on specific syntactic patterns (negative present progressives, BE_PRESENT + JUST/ONLY + V_ING, premodification of the present progressive verb) and most common interpretive predicates. All in all, quite a restricted set of verbs – and, more rarely, patterns – thus covers the majority of interpretive uses. These are in turn linked to identifiable categories based on verb semantics, including saying and negatively connoted verbs. The trend is not attested with expressive present progressives, which do not systematically associate with any

specific verbs. However, they often occur with time adverbials (e.g. *always*) that stress their complaining connotation. The association of given verbs with typically attitudinal functions is remarked in Römer (2005, p. 100), who argues that “the expression of criticism or of an emphatic meaning is not a general function of progressive forms but just a function of a select group of lexical items”. The trend seems to be even more marked with interpretive present progressives in film dialogue, as a function of the general formulaicity and high predictability of this genre (Taylor 2008; Pavesi 2016).

As was remarked in 2.1., the spread of non-aspectual present progressive functions in English has been attributed to both colloquialization and subjectification in language, two phenomena that mostly typify oral registers – including potentially telecinematic speech. The overrepresentation of present progressive verbs in film dialogue may be an additional index of the high colloquiality and emotional load characterizing fictional interactional exchanges on screen (see Kranich 2010; Levin 2019). Both aspects are motivated by the mimetic drive of telecinematic discourse, which aims to sound realistic to the audience and thus emulates spontaneous spoken usage, especially by relying on privileged markers of orality (Pavesi 2009). While serving mimetic purposes, emotionality in telecinematic dialogue is also diegetically driven, especially when expressing disaffiliation and conflict: this aspect can account not only for the spread of present progressives in film dialogue, but also for the pervasiveness of stance-marking (especially attitudinal) progressives and the primarily interpretive role of select predicates.

6. Conclusion

While sharing several features with spontaneous spoken discourse, telecinematic dialogue is a linguistic genre of its own, marked by privileged orality traits and a high degree of involvement or emotionality. Its high emotional load results from the use of other privileged structures, such as expletives, intensifiers, vocatives, pragmatic interrogatives and emotionally charged *n*-grams. Present progressive verbs, especially attitudinal ones, may be added to the list as additional stance markers in film dialogue. The expression of interpersonal meaning is more common with non-aspectual present progressives, which have lost their strictly durative and iterative meaning in favor of an attitudinal or emphatic connotation. In line with the frequent display of conflict on screen, most present progressives express negative stance or disaffiliation between interlocutors.

Among attitudinal uses, interpretive progressives often occur in syntactic patterns which correlate with specific disaffiliative functions, e.g. countering a previous statement or expressing a negative evaluation. They also combine preferentially with a limited set of verbs, which are privileged in the expression of mainly negative stance through interpretive present progressives. All in all, several patterns cluster together in the construction of affiliative and disaffiliative sequences in film dialogue, so that stance-marking verbs in the progressive may combine with expletives and intensifiers, and frequently occur within pragmatic interrogatives and recurring *n*-grams. Such sequences contribute to the realism of on-screen exchanges, while at the same time carrying the story forward.

Further investigations may be useful to gain deeper insights into the extent to which telecinematic dialogue mirrors current trends in real-life interactions, drawing comparisons with all present progressive functions in spontaneous conversation. Prospective studies may also extend the analysis to more recent film productions, to obtain a more comprehensive view of present progressive uses and their role in shaping characters' interpersonal universes.

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