

Revisiting the aspectual *BUSY* in (South African) English

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This paper investigates the so-called South African English *busy* progressive (for example, *I'm busy working*). Linguistic literature on South African English (SAfE) often states that this construction is a typical feature of this variety of English. The use and the frequency of this construction is mostly attributed to the influence of the Afrikaans [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction, as in *Ek is besig om te werk* ('I am working'). The aim of this paper is twofold: Firstly, it critically evaluates some of the claims that have been made about the so-called "SAfE busy progressive" and, secondly, it uses a corpus- and usage-based approach that employs a greater assortment of available corpus data from SAfE and other English varieties, as well as available information on the Afrikaans and Dutch progressives, to explore the possibility of new insights into the use of *busy* in English aspectual constructions.

Keywords: *busy*, progressive, South African English, Afrikaans, Dutch, aspect, imperfective

1. Introduction

It is often stated that the use of *busy* in combination with the present participle (i.e. the progressive form of the verb as shown in Example (1) below), is a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of South African English (SAfE) (compare Beeton and Dorner 1975: 39;¹ Branford 1980: 47; Lass and Wright 1986; Lass 1995: 104; Bowerman 2004: 473; Bekker 2012: 145).

1. I would like to express my gratitude to an anonymous reviewer for guiding me to a number of essential sources, including Beeton and Dorner (1975).

- (1) I'm busy preparing for next year's Absa Cape Epic mountain bike race.
(GloWbE-ZA)²

This construction is commonly referred to as SAfE's "busy progressive" (Siemund 2019: 616) and will hereafter be referred to as [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}].

Beeton and Dorner (1975: 39), Brandford (1980: 46), Lass and Wright (1986), and Brandford (1991) were some of the first scholars to bring this apparent SAfE construction to the attention of other linguists, and as early as 1996 the Dictionary of South African English (Mesthrie 2002: 246) described it as a typical feature of SAfE:

busy

Found in general English, but very common in South African English, influenced by Afrikaans *besig om te* (+ verb) expressing continuous action.

(DOSAE s.v. busy adj.)

The sources cited here discuss the construction as if it is widely accepted that it is primarily SAfE that utilises *busy* within the English progressive. Beeton and Dorner's (1975: 39) *A dictionary of English usage in South Africa*, the earliest available source that touches on this subject, appears to consider this usage a typical feature of SAfE.

busy

is followed by the pres p & not by the inf of the v, 'They were busy *eating*' + 'They were busy to *eat*' x prob Afk infl 'hulle was *besig om te eet*', 'they were *busy* eating'; 'they were *busy* talking' etc enjoys unusual frequency SAfE, possibly the result of Afk influence
(*A dictionary of English usage in South Africa* s.v. busy)

However, the underlying basis for this belief, which serves as the justification for regarding it as a distinctive feature of SAfE, remains unclear as the original source supporting this prevailing belief could not be identified from the examined sources. As a result, it can be inferred that this belief is widely held not only within the linguistic community, but also within the South African English language community.³

2. All English examples in the article, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the South African subcorpus (ZA) of the *Corpus of Global Web-Based English* (GloWbE).

3. A reviewer suggests that the assumption that this construction is a typical feature of South African English likely originated with lexicographers. They probably noticed a discrepancy in how this term was used compared to its recording in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) and other sources of Standard British English. This observation was then adopted by Lass and Wright (1986).

From the examined sources, it is also evident that the recognition of this construction as a prominent and distinctive feature of SAfE has led to several assumptions about its nature. Again, however, these assumptions have primarily been derived from citations in other sources discussing the topic or from observations based on a limited corpus of examples. I would like to highlight four of these assumptions:

Firstly, it is widely accepted that language contact with Afrikaans has significantly influenced the origin and use of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in SAfE. Several sources (cf. Branford 1980: 35; Bekker 2012: 145; DOSAE 1996) state that this construction was borrowed from the Afrikaans [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction, as in *besig om te werk* ('busy working'). However, Mesthrie (2002: 358), following Lass and Wright (1986), explains that the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction also occurs in other varieties of English where there is no language contact with Afrikaans. Therefore, it should not be considered exclusively a borrowed construction. Nonetheless, Mesthrie acknowledges that Afrikaans plays a significant role in shaping the specific use of the construction in SAfE. He suggests that the "influence of Afrikaans might be related to the frequency of the construction (L2 speakers may have contributed to the frequency of 'busy' in SAfE)" (Mesthrie 2002: 358).

Secondly, and in light of the statement above, it is often maintained that there is a strong similarity between the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction and the Afrikaans [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction. According to Lass and Wright (1986: 213), the two constructions are "parallel", since both progressive constructions can be collocated with verbs that indicate an activity that is not necessarily a "busy" activity (see examples in (2) below). Bekker (2012: 145) holds that the SAfE and Afrikaans constructions are "similar", but – unlike *busy* in the SAfE progressive – the *besig* in the Afrikaans progressive is "not redundant". He gives the following examples (Bekker 2012: 146):

- (2) a. I'm busy relaxing. (SAfE)
 b. Ek is besig om te ontspan. (Afrikaans)

However, it should be noted that these indicated similarities between the SAfE and Afrikaans *busy* constructions are primarily of a semantic or pragmatic nature, rather than based on structural similarities (i.e. at the form level). Nonetheless, some examples of the [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction pattern have also been observed in SAfE data. For instance, Beeton and Dorner (1975: 39) provided Example (3) and attributed it to the possible influence of Afrikaans on SAfE. Additionally, Mesthrie (1999: 67) found a few examples of this construction in his SAfE corpus (see Example (4)).

- (3) They were busy to eat.
- (4) A new programme was busy to develop.

He explains that these interlanguage forms are more common in the L2 writing of Afrikaans speakers. He regards these occurrences as translations by Afrikaans L2 writers when writing in English, which then result in a non-standard construction.

Thirdly, *busy* is chiefly labelled as an unnecessary or redundant progressive marker for [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}]. Mesthrie (2002: 346) states that, as per the DOSAE (1996), *busy* is “used redundantly in SAfE with an *-ing* form of certain verbs to indicate progressive, signifying ‘engaged in’ or equivalent”. Likewise, Bekker (2012: 145) explains that *busy* “is often used as a redundant ‘carrier’ of the progressive aspect”.

The fourth and final statement I want to highlight involves the grammatical status of *busy* – namely that, in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction, *busy* has grammaticalised from adjective to (semi-)auxiliary. According to Mesthrie (1999, 2002), the meaning of this adjective has bleached to such an extent that it is now used entirely as an auxiliary verb that expresses ongoing activity. He offers three motivations for this assertion: (1) it is unstressed, (2) it disallows the pause that is characteristic of a phrase like *busy, working in the garden* in older standard British English, and (3) it collocates with almost any subject that allows ordinary progressive aspect. It is not necessarily limited to busy activities.

Despite the increase in useful SAfE corpora (as well as corpora of other English varieties) and recent work on the progressive constructions in SAfE (for example Van Rooy 2006, 2014, 2020; Van Rooy and Kruger 2016; Piotrowska 2015) and Afrikaans (for example Breed 2012, 2016; Breed, Brisard, and Verhoeven 2017; Breed and Van Huyssteen 2014, 2015; Geleyn and Coleman 2014), the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction has not received a lot of attention in the linguistic literature of the past two decades.

With this article, I would like to place the use of *busy* in the English progressive back in the spotlight. The purpose of this article is to address two specific gaps in the existing literature:

Firstly, as previously mentioned, it is not clear on what basis the claims and statements regarding the unique usage of the construction in SAfE are founded, as they apparently do not originate from comprehensive corpus-based evidence. The increasing availability of corpora allows us to re-evaluate some of these claims about [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] from a usage-based perspective. Therefore, my first objective is to critically evaluate some of the claims that have been made about the

construction, with specific reference to the highlighted assumptions, and by using a corpus-based investigation.

Secondly, the most recent sources on this topic (such as Mesthrie 2002 and Bekker 2012) were published over a decade ago. Therefore, my second objective is to explore the potential for new insights into the use of *busy* in English aspectual constructions by employing a corpus-based approach. This approach will use a wider range of available corpus data from South African English and other English varieties, along with information on the Afrikaans construction [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}].

In order to address the gap, I am critically re-evaluating the claims made about the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction, and I have therefore reformulated them as research questions. Section 3 of the article is structured around answering the following questions:

- RQ1: is [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE? (Section 3.1)
- RQ2: can the origin and use of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in SAfE be attributed to language contact with Afrikaans? (Section 3.2)
- RQ3: is *busy* an unnecessary or redundant progressive marker in the SAfE progressive construction? (Section 3.3.)
- RQ4: is the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in SAfE similar to the Afrikaans and Dutch [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]? (Section 3.4)

In order to address the second gap, I consider the information obtained in Section 3, and I also include a section (Section 4) discussing the [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction. This progressive construction occurs in Afrikaans and Dutch, and, as already mentioned, Mesthrie (1999, 2002) found examples of this construction in his SAfE corpora. Hence, the current use or appearance of this construction in SAfE warrants a more detailed examination on the basis of recent English corpus data.

The last section of the article (Section 5) provides a summary of the observations made in this article regarding the use of *busy* in SAfE and English as a whole.

2. Methodology

The English corpora used in this study were selected from the corpora hosted on english-corpora.org (2023) – an online interface to the linguistic corpora created and maintained at Brigham Young University. This interface contains 16 of probably the most widely used English corpora currently available.

To address the questions raised in Section 3, I employed a corpus of World Englishes known as *The Global Web-based English Corpus (GloWbE)*. This corpus consists of roughly 1.9 billion words of text sourced from twenty different countries, making it a valuable resource for comparing diverse English variations (Davies 2013). Additionally, this corpus incorporates a sub-corpus specifically dedicated to South African English, which encompasses approximately 45 million words.

For my investigation of the $[\text{BUSY}_{\text{PROG}} \text{X}_{\text{COMP}} \text{V}_{\text{INF}}]$ construction, I also incorporated other corpora from english-corpora.org, including both synchronic and diachronic corpora. For my synchronic investigation, a number of corpora of contemporary English from the corpus platform were investigated, namely the *Wikipedia corpus* of 1.9 billion words (Davies 2015), the *Coronavirus Corpus* of 1.5 billion words (Davies 2019), the *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)* of 1 billion words (Davies 2008), and the *Corpus of Online Registers of English (CORE)* of 50 million words (Davies 2016). For my diachronic investigation, the *Corpus of Historical American English (COHA)* of 475 million words (Davies 2010), and the *Corpus of Early English Books Online (EEBO)* of 755 million words were used (Davies 2017).

Since the method of corpus investigations conducted for each section differs and depends on the specific question to be answered, I won't discuss the specific corpus investigation methods I employed for each section here. Instead, at the beginning of each section, I will indicate the (sub-)corpora I used and describe how I proceeded to answer the questions.

3. The $[\text{BUSY V -ing}_{\text{PROG}}]$ construction

This section of the article specifically focuses on the use of *busy* with the existing English progressive, i.e. the present participle form of the verb, also known as the "SAfE *busy* progressive".

3.1 Is $[\text{BUSY V -ing}_{\text{PROG}}]$ a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE?

It has already been mentioned that the use of *busy* with the English progressive form is often described as a typical feature of SAfE (compare again Branford 1980:46; Lass and Wright 1986; Lass 1995:104; DOSAE 1996; Bowerman 2004:473; Bekker 2012:145; Siemund 2019:616). However, it would appear that these sources do not base this inference on comparative corpus data between dif-

ferent varieties of English, but on observations of limited SAfE language data, quotations from other linguistic sources, and dictionary citations. To confirm that this construction is a typical feature of SAfE, data from comprehensive corpora of different English varieties should be extracted and compared.

Two aspects, in particular, can be decisive here: (i) the frequency of the construction in different varieties of English, as some sources (e.g. Beeton and Dorner 1975: 39; DOSAE 1996), imply that this construction has a high frequency in SAfE; and (ii) the verb types with which the construction collocates in different varieties of English, as sources like Mesthrie (2002) and Lass and Wright (1986) suggest specialised uses of this construction in SAfE.

3.1.1 The frequency of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in SAfE and other English varieties

If this construction is indeed a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE, we would obviously expect it to occur mainly in this variety, and not (frequently) in other varieties of English. In light of this, the first aspect that was considered was the different frequencies of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in the different sub-corpora of the GloWbE corpus.⁴

Concordances were generated for each language variety in the GloWbE corpus using the search phrase *busy *ing*. This choice was made because a search using only *busy* had a good recall, but the results were overly extensive, rendering it impractical to achieve the desired precision (see Table 1). Given the aim of increased recall with a manageable number of false positives (or loss of precision) to allow for manual review, and considering that the *-ing* form of the verb combined with *busy* consistently serves as the invariant factor in this construction, I opted to employ *busy *ing* to identify all potential instances of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in the various GloWbE sub-corpora.

While the results of this search did yield a substantial number of irrelevant cases (as shown in Table 1), it was still manageable enough to manually review the search results and remove the irrelevant instances. The complete results of the *busy *ing* search in the GloWbE corpus on the English-corpora.org platform were therefore manually extracted and organised at the sentence level, and saved in raw-text form using standard IDE software. In this step, sentences that did not exemplify the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction, such as those containing noun phrases like *busy morning* and *busy shopping day* or idiomatic constructions of a different type such as [*too* [busy V-ing] *to*] or [*so* [busy V-ing] *that*] were excluded

4. I will use the abbreviations used in the GloWbE corpus to refer to the different subcorpora or examples from the different subcorpora of English.

from the final concordances. These revised concordances were used to observe the usage of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in different varieties of English.

Table 1. Frequency results of *busy* and *busy *ing* search phrases

GloWbE sub-corpora	Frequency (FREQ) of <i>busy</i>	FREQ of <i>busy *ing</i>	FREQ of [BUSY V-ing _{PROG}]
United States (US)	17556	4663	1352
Canada (CA)	8222	1568	541
Great Britain (GB)	22305	4786	2461
Ireland (IE)	6166	1129	356
Australia (AU)	9143	1839	560
New Zealand (NZ)	5004	1057	366
India (IN)	5516	1473	696
Sri Lanka (LK)	1953	468	179
Pakistan (PK)	2727	725	300
Bangladesh (BD)	2115	424	181
Singapore (SG)	3193	668	271
Malaysia (MY)	3163	766	345
Philippines (PH)	2759	539	270
Hong Kong (HK)	2616	417	167
South Africa (ZA)	2975	815	454
Nigeria (NG)	2602	1049	862
Ghana (GH)	1782	470	196
Kenya (KE)	2755	876	357
Tanzania (TZ)	2397	597	265
Jamaica (JM)	3477	537	224
Total	108426	24866	10375

The findings are presented in Table 2, which displays the sub-corpus size (in words), and the raw and relative frequencies⁵ of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction. Examples from each of the sub-corpora are also provided. The results are visualised⁶ in Figure 1.

5. All relative frequencies in this article are calculated and presented per million words.
6. Figure 1 includes the total relative frequencies of *busy* in each GloWbE sub-corpus, since it can serve as an indication of the extent to which the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction has grammaticalised in the different varieties, as measured by the difference in relative frequencies between the total use of *busy* and its grammaticalised use (compare Bybee et al. 1994: 4–5).

Table 2. Frequency of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in the GloWbE sub-corpora

Sub-corpora	Sub-corpus size (words)	Raw freq [BUSY V-ing _{PROG}]	Rel freq (per mil words): [BUSY V-ing _{PROG}]	Corpus example
NG	42 646 098	862	20,21	<i>He was busy working on the site of his father's building project</i>
ZA	45 364 498	454	9,96	<i>We are busy trying to wind up a deceased estate for my gran.</i>
KE	41 069 085	357	8,69	<i>I was always busy making something.</i>
MY	42 420 168	345	8,13	<i>People were busy preparing the pre-breakfast.</i>
TZ	35 169 042	265	7,54	<i>we are busy fighting our accent to learn Python</i>
IN	96 430 888	696	7,22	<i>The little bead-seller was busy playing kabbadi with another tourist</i>
SG	42 974 705	271	6,31	<i>My mom was busy taking care of my nephew</i>
PH	43 250 093	270	6,24	<i>People are also busy writing down their wishlist while some are busy buying gifts already.</i>
GB	387 615 074	2416	6,23	<i>Apple the pig was busy eating fallen leaves so we left her to it.</i>
PK	51 367 152	300	5,84	<i>Bharti was busy giving final touch to her white dress in Gurmeet's room</i>
JM	39 663 666	224	5,65	<i>He is currently busy promoting his latest single titled Little Love Story</i>
GH	38 768 231	196	5,06	<i>we do not want our heart to be busy thinking about people who have hurt us</i>
BD	39 658 255	181	4,56	<i>I'm busy shooting for a non-fiction show on television.</i>
NZ	81 390 476	366	4,50	<i>NASA scientists were busy having the rover test its driving capability</i>
HK	40 450 291	167	4,13	<i>I was busy watching Rachel from SClub!</i>
CA	134 765 381	541	4,01	<i>I have been busy helping my clients with some amazing low rate financing.</i>
LK	46 583 115	179	3,84	<i>I was busy getting dinner ready.</i>
AU	148 208 169	560	3,78	<i>I am now busy planning my new projects using the books I bought from you.</i>
IE	101 029 231	356	3,52	<i>the glands are busy fighting an infection.</i>
US	386 809 355	1352	3,50	<i>it happened because I was busy worrying about bullshit metrics.</i>
TOTAL	1 885 632 973	10 375	5,50	

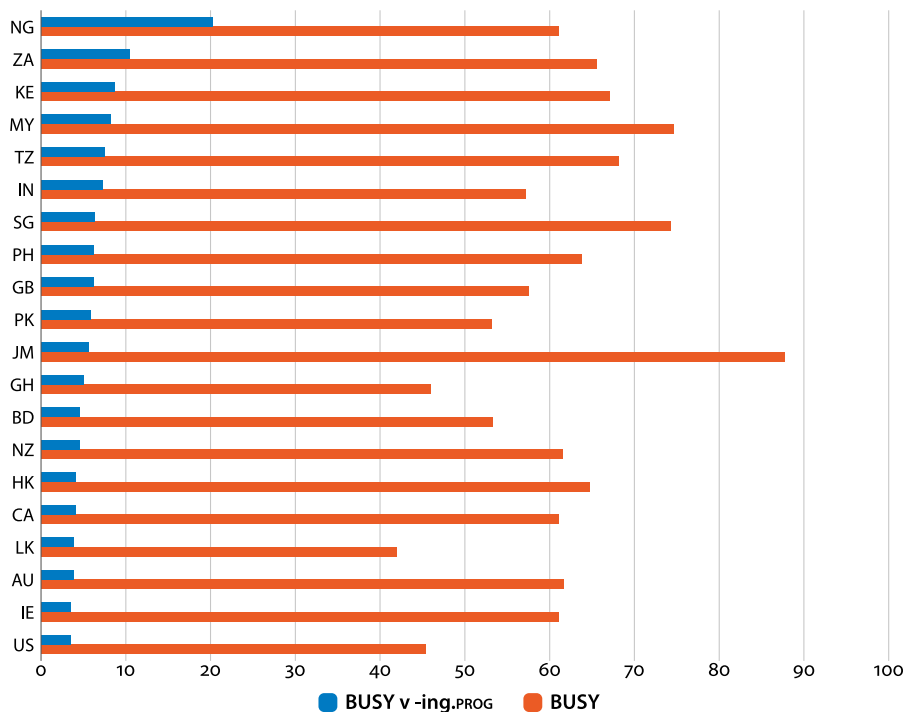


Figure 1. Relative frequencies of BUSY and [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in the GloWbE sub-corpora

From this table and figure, a few interesting observations can be made. Firstly, and most importantly, numerous examples of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction were found in all twenty varieties of English in the GloWbE corpus. It is thus evident that the usage of this construction is not exclusive to SAfE.

Secondly, SAfE did not have the highest frequency in the results. Instead, the frequency of this construction in Nigerian English (NigE) significantly⁷ surpasses its frequency in all other varieties of English. If frequency is considered the primary criterion for determining a construction as a typical feature of a specific English variety, then the use of *busy* in the English progressive can be considered more characteristic of NigE than of SAfE.

7. I used log likelihood on the UCREL Significance Test System (Hardie 2023) to test for significance in the frequency differences. The [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] occurs significantly more in NigE than in SAfE ($G^2 = 155.07$, $p < 0.0001$).

Thirdly, SAfE exhibits a significantly⁸ higher frequency of this construction compared to 18 other varieties in the corpus. However, it is worth noting that the construction also occurs significantly⁹ more frequently in British English (BrE) than, for example, American English (AmE). Using the significance of frequency differences as the sole criterion to determine whether it is a feature of a specific variety may therefore not be entirely sensible. Instead, it would be more meaningful to consider the frequency differences as indicators of the degree of grammaticalisation that has occurred in each variety, in line with Meshtrie's (1999, 2002) proposition that this use of *busy* in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] is a (semi-) auxiliary use.

In these terms, it becomes apparent that *busy* shows a significant level of grammaticalisation in SAfE. Overall, it appears that the construction is more grammaticalised in the African English varieties while exhibiting less grammaticalisation in inner circle varieties (see Kachru 1985) such as AmE, Canadian English (CanE), Hiberno English (HibE), and Australian English (AusE). Among the inner circle varieties, BrE demonstrates the highest degree of grammaticalisation for *busy*, displaying more auxiliated uses. This finding correlates to a certain extent with Meshtrie's (2002: 357) finding that "*busy* is busy being grammaticalised not only in SAE but in BrE and AmE too." However, of all the varieties investigated, *busy* in AmE is the least grammaticalised with the lowest frequency of auxiliary uses.

The frequency of this construction in a corpus of comparable English data does therefore not support the statement that [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] is a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE, as this construction is also frequent and typical in other African varieties of English, as well as in some other varieties.

3.1.2 The main verb collocations of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}]

According to Meshtrie (1999, 2002), the meaning of *busy* has undergone substantial bleaching in SAfE.

SAE is more advanced in respect of the bleaching of *busy* than other varieties as far as colloquial usage is concerned. This is evident from the decline of *so/very/ever busy+V+-ing* constructions compared to British usage; and from the stylistically unmarked use of *busy* with *dying, being born*, etc. (Meshtrie 2002: 358)

8. The [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] occurs significantly more in SAfE than in Kenyan English (KenE) ($G_2 = 6.45$, $p < 0.01$), and we can therefore infer that the frequency differences between SAfE and the other 17 varieties are also significant.

9. $G_2 = 302.36$, $p < 0.0001$

Furthermore, Lass and Wright (1986: 213) state that, in SAcE, the collocation of *busy* with a present participle also

[indicates] progressive activity or occupation that is not necessarily a ‘busy’ activity. In SAcE (as in Afk) for instance, one may be described as being busy waiting, thinking, wondering, quite appropriately. This suggests that *busy* functions simply as a progressive marker, without the restriction that the lexical verb denoting the activity be overtly busy.

In addition, Bowerman (2004: 473) states that the construction “is frequently used with non-active (or non-busy) and seemingly anomalous verbal complements” (compare his examples in (5)). Siemund (2019: 12) refers to the use of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] together with static (or non-busy) events as the “extended use” of the progressive construction.

- (5) a. I’m busy relaxing. ‘I am relaxing.’
- b. I was busy losing my house. ‘I was losing my house.’

If the SAcE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction has evolved to a progressive construction that more easily combines with other predicate types (specifically stative, non-busy or non-durative events) than the same construction in other English varieties, I expect to see this type of verbs in a SAcE verb collocation list of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}].

Hence, another aspect examined in this comparative corpus study was the main verbs commonly associated with this construction in SAcE and other English varieties.

In Stefanowitsch and Gries (2003) and Gries and Stefanowitsch (2004a, 2004b), the collostructional analysis method was introduced, which utilises a statistical approach to evaluate the strength of association between a construction and its associated lexical items. Collostructional analysis encompasses three techniques: (i) collexeme analysis, which focuses on a specific construction slot within a particular construction; (ii) distinctive collexeme analysis, which examines a specific slot in two or more similar constructions, and (iii) covarying collexeme analysis, which investigates the interaction between two slots in a specific construction (Gilquin 2010: 195).

In this study, I used Gries’ (2022) R-script (Rstudio Team 2022; ver. 2022.12.0.353) to conduct collexeme analyses of the main verb collocations of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in three varieties of English: SAcE, BrE, and NigE. BrE was chosen for three reasons. Firstly, it has the strongest historical ties to SAcE. Secondly, there may still be frequent language contact between BrE and SAcE speakers due to media exposure and existing and historical relations between the speakers of these varieties. Thirdly, it is one of the varieties investi-

gated in Mesthrie's (1999, 2002) research on the use of *busy* in the English progressive. On the other hand, NigE was included as it exhibits the highest frequency of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction (as indicated in 3.1.1), and NigE speakers may not necessarily have regular contact with SAfE speakers. I compiled verb lists from the concordances compiled in Section 3.1.1 for this analysis.

The collexeme analyses allowed me to identify the main verbs or main verb types that exhibit prototypical collocation tendencies with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction across the three varieties of English under investigation. It is important to note that this analysis, unlike a distinctive collexeme analysis, cannot be used to compare the preferred collocates of different varieties (i.e. which verbs are more likely to collocate with which variety?). This is due to the use of different concordances for each variation of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction. Furthermore, this analysis, unlike a distinctive collexeme analysis, does not reveal which verbs tend to collocate more with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction as opposed to the [V-ing_{PROG}] construction, as separate concordances for each variation of the [V-ing_{PROG}] construction are required. Since this article's primary focus is not a direct comparison between the two possible progressive constructions, this aspect is not further explored in the study and is reserved for future research.

By comparing the main verb collocations of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction across these three English varieties, we can gain a clearer understanding of whether SAfE employs this construction in a significantly distinct manner compared to other varieties of English. Table 3 provides a summary of the 50 most significant verb collocations in the three examined Englishes.

Table 3. 50 most significant verb collocations of [BUSY V-ing_{ppROG}] in SAFE, BrE and NigE

SAFE				BrE				NigE			
WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in ZA	Likelihood ratio	WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in GB	Likelihood ratio	WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in GB	Likelihood ratio
1 DOING	35	16557	334.70	DOING	180	155590	1566.06	DOING	46	19415	373.73
2 TRYING	15	9685	133.15	WORKING	155	145758	1320.76	MAKING	43	16278	358.45
3 WORKING	16	15254	129.68	TRYING	97	108790	789.97	WORKING	41	12662	358.23
4 PREPARING	10	1215	121.87	MAKING	87	146569	637.90	CHASING	22	499	305.40
5 WRITING	12	6265	111.48	PREPARING	50	8436	594.77	FIGHTING	25	3210	261.45
6 BUILDING	11	8182	94.40	HAVING	74	195135	476.64	STEALING	16	1260	182.65
7 MAKING	12	15960	89.18	WRITING	55	68075	436.11	TRYING	22	9546	176.72
8 PLANNING	9	5406	81.01	GETTING	56	139959	366.17	PLAYING	14	6091	112.22
9 PACKING	6	387	80.60	BUILDING	39	63074	288.27	LOOTING	9	722	102.32
10 DYING	6	1198	67.11	PUTTING	33	35433	270.65	TALKING	13	7997	95.26
11 GETTING	9	13212	65.04	CREATING	28	30273	229.20	PREPARING	9	1106	94.69
12 DIGGING	4	340	51.51	LOOKING	39	138710	227.67	WRITING	11	5446	85.30
13 READING	6	5812	48.25	PROMOTING	21	9467	208.40	CALLING	10	3552	84.12
14 FIGHTING	5	2706	45.98	PLANNING	25	38079	187.60	BUILDING	11	7667	77.85
15 RIPPING	3	100	44.19	BEING	46	451160	178.60	KILLING	9	3723	72.97
16 COMPILING	3	134	42.45	SETTING	21	28795	161.93	DEFENDING	7	1041	70.97
17 PROMOTING	4	1417	40.15	FILMING	15	5256	156.35	BUYING	8	2489	69.38
18 COOKING	4	1717	38.62	DEVELOPING	20	28980	152.02	SHARING	8	2511	69.24
19 TESTING	4	1928	37.69	FIGHTING	19	23464	150.43	LOOKING	11	11476	69.10
20 ORGANIZING	3	304	37.58	TWEETING	12	2222	140.32	COLLECTING	6	679	64.08
21 NEGOTIATING	3	492	34.70	DESIGNING	13	4407	136.35	TELLING	8	3650	63.30
22 CONDUCTING	3	546	34.08	TAKING	23	105736	122.58	WASTING	6	813	61.93
23 PUTTING	4	3101	33.91	TOURING	11	4288	112.30	TAKING	9	9248	56.78

Table 3. (continued)

SAFE				BrE				NIGe			
WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in ZA	Likelihood ratio	WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in GB	Likelihood ratio	WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in GB	Likelihood ratio
24 WATCHING	4	3164	33.75	ORGANISING	11	4538	111.05	GETTING	9	11575	52.81
25 NAILING	2	25	33.28	RAISING	13	11802	110.84	ATTENDING	5	1007	47.66
26 SETTING	4	3377	33.23	PLAYING	19	77579	105.62	HAVING	9	15908	47.22
27 TAKING	5	11513	31.63	CHATTING	10	3440	104.58	WATCHING	6	2836	47.03
28 CHECKING	3	873	31.28	SELLING	14	25822	99.68	PATRONISING	3	53	43.02
29 CLEANING	3	1032	30.28	WATCHING	15	37447	97.84	PRAYING	5	1737	42.24
30 FEEDING	3	1403	28.44	REHEARSING	7	611	92.31	ADMIRING	3	70	41.39
31 SAVING	3	1645	27.49	TALKING	16	60685	91.23	PERFECTING	3	74	41.07
32 SWEATING	2	146	26.35	RUNNING	16	64382	89.38	CARVING	3	100	39.29
33 REBUILDING	2	246	24.27	SAVING	11	13398	87.36	READING	6	5889	38.37
34 CONVERTING	2	250	24.21	RECORDING	11	14449	85.71	SLAPPING	3	126	37.92
35 TELLING	3	2941	24.02	COOKING	10	9479	84.39	SPENDING	5	2789	37.55
36 MATING	2	281	23.74	PRODUCING	10	12228	79.33	LOBBYING	3	155	36.69
37 HARVESTING	2	285	23.69	INVESTIGATING	8	5431	72.82	CURSING	3	163	36.40
38 INSTALLING	2	320	23.23	COLLECTING	8	5677	72.11	DISTRIBUTING	3	232	34.30
39 CHANGING	3	3455	23.06	CRAFTING	6	943	72.10	PLANNING	5	3954	34.10
40 EDUCATING	2	365	22.70	KEEPING	11	30810	69.24	STASHING	2	10	33.46
41 CHATTING	2	410	22.24	TEARING	6	1610	65.71	ATTACKING	4	1674	32.31
42 CREATING	3	4074	22.08	BEAVERING	4	91	63.37	SENDING	4	1720	32.10
43 WASHING	2	688	20.18	CHANGING	10	30089	61.53	MARKING	3	351	31.83
44 DEFENDING	2	726	19.96	TELLING	10	32015	60.31	EATING	4	1885	31.37
45 EXPANDING	2	745	19.86	FILLING	7	6429	59.50	RUNNING	5	5222	31.35
46 CONTROLLING	2	776	19.70	SIGNING	8	12631	59.40	COUNTING	3	462	30.19

Table 3. (continued)

SAFE				BrE				NIGe			
WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in ZA	Likelihood ratio	WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in GB	Likelihood ratio	WORD	Frequency in constructions	Frequency in GB	Likelihood ratio
47 EXPLORING	2	848	19.34	SORTING	6	2796	59.11	RIDING	3	493	29.80
48 DELIVERING	2	850	19.33	DREAMING	6	2817	59.02	ACQUIRING	3	503	29.68
49 INVESTIGATING	2	873	19.23	JUGGLING	5	902	58.71	HELPING	4	2373	29.54
50 COMPETING	2	998	18.70	NEGOTIATING	6	3189	57.53	THINKING	5	6817	28.74

The analysis of SAfE revealed that 78 verbs in the concordance display significant collocational strength with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction. Of these, 77 verbs exhibit a likelihood ratio greater than 6.63, indicating that the likelihood of co-occurrence by chance in this construction is less than 1 per cent.

In BrE, 316 verbs exhibit significant collocational strength with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction. Among these, 310 verbs in the concordance have a likelihood ratio greater than 6.63, while only 6 out of the 316 verbs have a likelihood ratio of 3.84. This indicates that the likelihood of co-occurrence by chance in this construction is less than 5 per cent.

Out of the 129 verbs listed in the NigE dataset that demonstrate significant collocational strength with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}], 128 main verbs in the NigE concordance exhibit a likelihood ratio greater than 6.63, and only one verb shows a significant likelihood ratio of less than 6.63 (but still greater than 3.84).

Upon initial examination, several noteworthy observations can be made. Firstly, there is a strong similarity among the top twenty verb collocations in all three concordances. The verbs *doing*, *trying*, *working*, *preparing*, *writing*, *making*, and *building* appear among the strongest collocations in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] constructions in all three varieties of English.

A second noteworthy observation is that this construction clearly favours transitivity, as evident from the number of transitive and ambitransitive¹⁰ verbs appearing in all three lists. Among the top 50 verbs in SAfE, only six verbs are prototypically categorised as intransitive verbs (*working*, *dying*, *sweating*, *mating*, *chatting*, and *competing*). Additionally, in one of the examples, the intransitive verb *sweating* is used transitively¹¹ (see Example (6)).

- (6) While Leon's **busy sweating buckets** and shooting brains in Tall Oaks, Chris's opening level involves storming (ZA, transitive use, own emphasis)

Similar observations can be made for BrE and NigE. The former variety's top 50 verb list contains only five verbs that are prototypically categorised as intransitive verbs (*working*, *looking*, *talking*, *running* and *beaver*). The verb *running* is used both transitively and intransitively in the corpus (see Examples (7) and (8)).

10. An ambitransitive verb is a verb that can function both as a transitive verb and an intransitive verb, depending on how it is used in a sentence. In other words, an ambitransitive verb can take an object in a transitive construction or can be used without an object in an intransitive construction (see Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000: 148).

11. A reviewer pointed out that this intransitive verb is not used transitively in any regular sense of the word but is instead used metaphorically to intensify an adverbial relationship rather than an object-like one. This is, of course, true, but the fact that this construction is used intransitively to unlock this metaphorical meaning while still incorporating *busy* makes it an interesting example to highlight.

- (7) I said fine, because I was busy running the demonstration. (GB, transitive use)
- (8) I would have taken a photo of mine, but I was too busy running through the streets of Dusseldorf like my trousers were on fire (GB, intransitive use)

The top 50 list of NigE includes only six prototypical intransitive verbs (*working, talking, looking, praying, running* and *thinking*). In this concordance, we also find examples of where these verbs are used transitively (see Examples (9) and (10)).

- (9) some peeps are busy talking nonsense. (NG, transitive use)
- (10) And the poor wife z busy running her oral cavity on twitter. (NG, transitive use)

The preference for verbs that involve or suggest a direct object in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction is evident across all three varieties analysed.

It is possible that this notable frequency difference between transitive and intransitive verbs could provide an initial indication of a potential specialised use of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction (an aspect to be further explored in Section 3.3). However, it is intriguing to note that we observe a similar trend in the Dutch BUSY progressive construction, where the construction appears to predominantly collocate with transitive verbs (compare Breed, Brisard, and Verhoeven 2017: 352). This suggests the possibility that there may be something in the semantics of BUSY that implies a progressive action in which the subject (someone or something) is engaged in carrying out some specific task or action, and thus involving an object. According to Breed et al. (2017: 352), the original meaning of *bezig* might still be present in many instances when the construction is also used to express progressive meaning in Dutch, which might very well be the case with *busy* in the English progressive.

An additional observation applicable to all three language varieties is that the vast majority of verbs appearing in the top 50 list for the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction can be categorised as verbs signifying dynamic predicates.¹² This is consistent with the fact that progressive constructions are typically used with dynamic and durative predicates, such as activities and accomplishments. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that most of the frequently used verbs with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction can be classified as busy events that are in progress or ongoing. The only exceptions are the two potentially stative verbs, *being* and *having*, which also feature in Table 2.

12. This section primarily focuses on the types of verbs that collocate with [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}]. While this section does touch upon some of the predicate contexts in which the verbs occur, it is not the main focus of this section to examine the complete predicates in which the construction appears. However, Section 3.4.2 will address this aspect in more detail.

In BrE, both *being* and *having* rank among the top 50 strongest main verb collocations, with *being* appearing 46 times (Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) 178.60) and *having* 74 times (LLR 476.64). In NigE, only *having* appears on the list of 50 strongest verb collocations (appearing 9 times with a LLR 47.22). *Being* does not exhibit significant collocation strength with [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in NigE. SAE displays only three instances of *being* and two instances of *having* in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction, and although both qualify as a significant verb collocation (LLR 3.97 and LLR 4.27 respectively), they do not make the top 50 verb collocations list.

Furthermore, upon closer examination, it seems that none of the SAE examples with *having* can be categorised as stative predicates. In one of the two examples, *busy having* is used together with the abstract noun *fun* as a direct object, which suggests an activity involving several dynamic actions (see Example (11)).¹³ The other example is likely an instance of a dependent clause introduced by a gerund beginning immediately after *busy*, and should not be considered relevant (Example 12). Additionally, only one instance of *busy being* in the SAE results can be classified as a stative predicate, namely Example (13). The other two Examples (14) and (15) are both examples of the passive voice constructions describing a gradual process that is being performed or experienced and should be interpreted as dynamic predicates.

- (11) others out there are in need of homes and are dying while they are busy having fun. (ZA)
- (12) And then there was a fallow period while Chris and I were busy having gotten back to our day jobs... (ZA)
- (13) often busy being and doing something extremely clever (ZA)
- (14) some lower cost systems that are busy being finalised for registration (ZA)
- (15) He who is not busy being born... Is busy dying. (ZA)

For NigE, only *busy having* was identified as a significant potentially stative verb collocation within the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction. Similar dynamic results to *busy having* were found in this variety's concordance (see (16) and (17)), but

13. A reviewer observed that there is some similarity here in the exceptional use of the progressive with temporary states to signal that the state is very strongly temporary and bound to end soon.

worth noting is that stative predicates of this collocation are also present (see (18) and (19)).¹⁴

- (16) know you're going to be busy having the time of your life (NG)
- (17) Seven to ten year olds were just busy having fun and dancing as usual to music that's inappropriate for children. (NG)
- (18) he would have been still busy having speaking engagements. (NG)
- (19) Busy having up to 20 girlfriends or boyfriends at once (NG)

In contrast, in BrE, there are indeed numerous examples of the *busy being* and *busy having* constructions in stative predicates (as shown in the examples below). All of these instances appear to align well with the subjective use of the progressive, such as carrying a sense of irony (Examples (20) and (21)) or expressing value judgments on the appropriateness of the behavior (22) and (23), for instance. This use of the progressive is not surprising, as we know from the literature that stative verbs are quite often used with the progressive form in various languages to convey certain subjective meanings (see e.g. De Wit, Patard, and Brisard 2013; De Wit and Brisard 2014), such as disapproval or irritation (Quirk et al. 1985:199), unbelief (Williams 2002:28–9), and extravagance (De Wit, Peter, and Brisard 2020). Ljung (1980:77) refers to this use of the progressive as the “interpretative” use.

- (20) I've been busy being fantastic (GB)
- (21) Chances are I'm just busy having cancer, or busy having fun (GB)
- (22) Everyone is so busy being nosey into other people's relationships it annoys me! (GB)
- (23) Oh sorry you leave them alone most of the time... too busy having a career (GB)

In conclusion, the investigation into the main verb collocations of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in SAcE, BrE, and NigE reveals that *busy* is not more bleached in SAcE compared to the other varieties. The analysis of top verb collocations demonstrates a strong overlap across all three varieties, with verbs like *doing*, *trying*, *working*, *preparing*, *writing*, *making*, and *building* being prominently featured. The construction exhibits a preference for verbs that involve a direct object and a prevalence of verbs signifying dynamic predicates in all three

14. A reviewer noted that these uses are indeed quite innovative in comparison to most other uses, and match the extended use of the progressive in NigE quite well (see Gut and Fuchs 2013).

varieties. However, it is noteworthy that stative predicates with *being* and *having* are more prevalent in BrE, indicating a higher degree of bleaching in BrE compared to SAfE. Therefore, the findings do not support the claim that *busy* collocates with non-active or non-busy predicates; instead, with regards to verb collocations, they suggest that the use of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction with this type of predicates is more typical of BrE than SAfE.

Based on the analysis of main verb collocations with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in a corpus of three English varieties, it can be concluded that this construction is not a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE. The findings do not support the claim that [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] exhibits distinct patterns or preferences in SAfE compared to the other English varieties. Therefore, the main verbs associated¹⁵ with this construction do not provide evidence for its significant usage in SAfE. In fact, they challenge previous claims about the uniqueness of SAfE in this regard.

3.2 Can [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] be attributed to language contact with Afrikaans?

While some sources (such as Branford 1980: 35; DOSAE 1996; Bekker 2012: 145) argue that the presence of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in SAfE is influenced by language contact with Afrikaans, not all sources are in agreement. Lass and Wright (1986), for example, advocate for the predominance of endogenous factors over contact, and Mesthrie (2002: 358) states that direct influence from Afrikaans can be dismissed, given that the construction is found in other varieties of English as well, where no contact with Afrikaans exist.

Based on the extensive corpus data from twenty varieties of English, specifically the findings presented in Section 3.1.1., it can be confidently concluded that the presence of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in SAfE cannot be attributed to language contact with Afrikaans. Its consistent occurrence across all sub-corpora of the GloWbE corpus supports the research of scholars like Mesthrie (1999, 2002) and Lass and Wright (1986), who have noted its usage in contemporary English.

15. A reviewer suggested the potential inclusion of other verb types, such as mental verbs, non-durative verbs, aspectual verbs, and the possibility of non-agentive verbs in the analysis of main verb collocations. The reviewer posits that the features of these verb types might be even more important or central than transitivity. While I agree that these perspectives may offer insights into the specific features of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction, a comprehensive examination of them would necessitate a more detailed analysis that extends beyond the primary focus of this article. Therefore, these suggestions have been duly noted for potential exploration in future research, as they indeed present intriguing possibilities.

Hence, it is evident that the origin and usage of this construction extend beyond the influence of Afrikaans. This observation is further reinforced by its prevalence in English varieties where there is no contact with Afrikaans.

However, although Lass and Wright (1986) and Mesthrie (1999, 2002) do not attribute the presence of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction solely to language contact with Afrikaans, they do hold that it may have influenced the specific ways in which this construction is used in SAfE, as evident from the following quotes:

The busy construction thus becomes established in SAfE through contact with Afk. Yet rather than adopt a directly translated construction, viz. busy to V as in *‘Janet was busy to knit a jersey for John’, because the system has the internal resources available for this, specifically through a busy + (overtly) progressive construction, the only feature ultimately borrowed from the contact – L2 Afrikaans system – is a functional one. This is the semantic feature which does not restrict the lexical verb to an activity verb. (Lass and Wright 1986: 218–219)

The influence of Afrikaans might thus pertain to the quantitative aspects of the construction (L2 speakers might have added to the frequency of busy); rather than to qualitative changes in the construction. (Mesthrie 2002: 358)

Both sources base these conclusions on the premise that in SAfE, the construction collocates with non-busy activities or stative predicates. However, the collexeme analysis of the main verbs that collocate with [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in three English varieties (specifically SAfE, NigE, and BrE), as presented in Section 3.1.2, suggests that we cannot conclude that language contact with Afrikaans influences the usage patterns of this construction in SAfE. This is because the possibility of collocating the construction with non-busy predicates is not significantly observed in SAfE. In fact, non-busy verb collocates are observed more in BrE than in SAfE. Furthermore, based on the collexeme analysis of the construction’s main verb collocations in SAfE, BrE and NigE, there are no other clear or obvious collocational preference differences between the three varieties.

3.3 Is *busy* an unnecessary or redundant progressive marker in the SAfE progressive construction?

A further statement that I would like to critically evaluate is the claim that *busy* is a redundant progressive marker in the SAfE progressive construction (cf. DOSAE 1996; Mesthrie 2002: 346; Bekker 2012: 145).

It is important to note that a construction or word can only be deemed redundant if it does not add any specific meaning to the construction, or if the omission of the word will make no difference to the meaning of the construction. Hence, it

is necessary to determine whether *busy* contributes to the progressive meaning of the construction or if it potentially conveys any other distinct meaning that is not expressed by the existing [V-ing_{PROG}] construction.

In Section 3.1.2, an analysis was conducted to examine a list of all main verb collocations with [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}], aiming to make inferences regarding the predicates that collocate with the construction in the different varieties of English. While some contexts in which the verbs occur were considered in the discussion of Section 3.1.2, I will now delve into a more fine-grained investigation of the precise contexts in which *busy* is used. This will help determine whether *busy* may have a specific function within the construction, or if it can indeed be considered redundant. My focus in this section will be limited to the results in SAfE, and consequently, I will examine all 454 instances of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] in the ZA sub-corpus.

The chosen method for investigating the specific usage patterns of *busy* in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction should be suitable for examining its distinct semantic properties within that construction. Specifically, an inductive, usage-based approach should be employed to facilitate the identification and description of the semantic properties uniquely associated with *busy* in this construction.

For this reason, I employed a method similar to the one used by Van Rooy (2014). Van Rooy's study on the use of the progressive in Outer Circle English varieties had two main aims: firstly, to identify cases where stative verbs combine with the progressive aspect, and secondly, to categorise the verb semantics in the progressive construction more generally. I will follow a similar approach to try and determine whether *busy* serves a unique or specified function within the construction.

Based on the discussion presented in 3.1.1. and 3.1.2., as well as the highlighted semantic characteristics of *busy* in the SAfE progressive found in the literature mentioned earlier, this section's inductive investigation will focus on the following two aspects, namely (i) the specific semantic properties of the predicate in which the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction occurs, with particular emphasis on the aktionsart and transitivity, and (ii) the semantic role of the subject.

3.3.1 Aktionsart and transitivity

Aktionsart can be described as the inherent semantic properties of a situation or predicate (compare Vendler 1957; Comrie 1976; Tatevosov 2002; Lyons 1977; Bach 1986). Based on three inherent properties, namely stativity, duration, and telicity, five distinct types of situations or predicates can be distinguished: states (i.e. static, durative, and atelic situations, such as *I know Afrikaans*), activities (i.e. dynamic, durative, and atelic situations, such as *I walk in the garden*),

accomplishments (i.e. dynamic, durative, and telic situations, such as *She completed the marathon in record time*), achievements (i.e. dynamic, non-durative, and telic situations, such as *The glass door shatters into pieces*), and semelfactives (i.e. dynamic, non-durative, and atelic situations, such as *He gave a loud cough*).

An investigation into the aktionsart of the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] predicates is warranted. As already indicated in 3.1.2, there is a perception that the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction easily and frequently occurs with non-busy situations, including states. Furthermore, it is also relevant to examine whether factors such as telicity or duration play a role in the selection of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction over the existing English [V-ing_{PROG}] construction. This investigation may provide insights into the semantics of *busy* when used in this construction.

The results of an investigation into the aktionsart of the 454 occurrences in the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] are presented in Table 4. Corpus examples are also provided.

Table 4. The aktionsart of all SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] predicates

Aktionsart	Frequency	Example
States	1	
Activities	423	<i>You're also busy working with your physical body.</i>
Accomplishments	30	<i>If you are busy dying I am pretty sure one would notice?</i>
Achievements	0	
Semelfactive	0	
Total	454	

The results correlate strongly with what was found in the collexeme analysis of main verb collocates presented in Section 3.1.2, namely that the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in SAfE does not readily combine with stative predicates, since only one example (see again Example (22)) was found in the concordance. In addition to the lack of stative predicates, no non-durative examples (i.e. achievements or semelfactives) were found in the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] concordance. By far, most of the examples (approximately 93 per cent of the examples) were categorised as activities (i.e. dynamic, durative, and atelic), while only

about 7 per cent were categorised as accomplishments¹⁶ (i.e. dynamic, durative, and telic).

However, in many (if not most) cases, it was not an obvious choice to categorise an example as atelic (i.e. as an activity) or as telic (i.e. as an accomplishment). The reason for this is that it was not always clear whether the situation inherently included a point of termination within the perspective of the predicate. In many instances, it instinctively seemed that the usage of *busy* with the English progressive form added an additional grammatical-aspectual perspective to the predicate, which disregarded the termination point of the situation type and then rather presented it as an atelic event. Consider the following two contrastive examples for comparison, with (24a) taken from the corpus:

- (24) a. Okay guys last night I was busy washing the dishes (ZA)
 b. Okay guys last night I was washing the dishes (ZA, adapted)

The examples provided above involve the same predicate, namely *to wash the dishes*. In my opinion, the predicate in 24b can be classified as telic, as it expresses a situation that will reach completion once the dishes are cleaned, with the termination point included within the grammatical perspective taken on the predicate. However, in (24a), a shift in focus occurs by taking an imperfective viewpoint on the situation that highlight one of the phases of the process the subject is involved in, specifically the ongoing act of washing the dishes. It seems as though the completion, resolution, or termination of the situation does not form part of the perspective conveyed by the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction.

The possibility that the addition of *busy* brings about a shift in focus to one of the phases of the event is even clearer in Example (25) below. The addition of *busy* in this sentence makes it very clear that the processing of the application by the subject (*they*) is still underway.

- (25) and they would always tell her that they were busy processing the application and waiting for a certain response from Pretoria.

During the categorisation of the action types in the various [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] examples, I encountered several instances where the use of *busy* with the progressive form introduced this ambiguity. Situations that I would typically classify as telic events were instinctively labelled as activities. It is worth noting that some of

16. A reviewer highlighted that certain verbs listed in Table 3 are usually categorised as achievements, falling into the dynamic, non-durational, and telic category. These verbs include *dying*, *ripping*, and *nailing*. However, I have chosen to categorise these verbs as accomplishments, as all these verbs appear in the progressive *-ing* form and the inclusion of *busy* further encourages a durative interpretation.

the situations marked as telic in Table 4 could therefore potentially be categorised as activities as well.

From this investigation into the aktionsart of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] predicates, it appears that *busy* signifies that the presented situation is (i) dynamic, (ii) durative, and, derived from the atelic nature of the additional perspective, (iii) ongoing. This finding strongly correlates with Mesthrie's statement that *busy* in this construction has bleached to such an extent that it is now used entirely as an auxiliary verb that expresses ongoing activity.

In 3.1.2, it was shown that most verbs in the collocation list of the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction are transitive, but the detailed examination of the different contexts in which these predicates occurred was not pursued in that section. Given that the main objective of this section is to investigate the specific semantic properties of *busy* within the construction and its interaction with the predicate, I also explored whether transitivity is indeed one of the key semantic features associated with this construction.

The results, as depicted in Table 5, confirm the findings of the collexeme analysis conducted in 3.1.2, namely that the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction tends to favour transitive verbs and includes a direct object in the predicate. While it does not appear that the use of *busy* adds a meaning of transitivity to the construction, it does seem to be attracted to predicates that involve a direct object.

Table 5. Transitivity of all SAFE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] predicates

Transitivity	Frequency	Example
Transitive (predicate with direct object in the predicate)	382	<i>we were busy putting together a phenomenal Swimwear section</i>
Ambitransitive (predicate with implied object)	30	<i>They had killed themselves a young Kudu and were busy feeding.</i>
Intransitive	42	<i>We were busy swimming when Ashley and Ricky Adams got into trouble</i>
Total	454	

3.3.2 Semantic roles of the subject

Mesthrie (1999, 2002) states that another effective method for the analysis of the distribution of *busy* is to study the semantic roles performed by its subjects. These are closely related to the predicate types examined in 3.3.1, which further enhances our understanding of the semantic characteristics of *busy*. Mesthrie (2002: 351–352) specifically highlights that “[AGENT is] the typical role of NP

subjects that take *busy* in international English” and provides several illustrative examples from his data (see Examples (26) to (33)).

- (26) Two young men were busy kicking in the display windows of a large departmental store when an AA patrolman appeared on the scene.
- (27) He was busy calling the union boys a hypocritical elite and a lot of other names.
- (28) Merino ewes with lambs (or busy lambing)...

But according to him, *busy* also permits PATIENT subjects in both active and passive sentences. He provides sentences (29) and (32) as examples of active sentences, and Examples (30), (31) and (33) as examples of passive sentences from his SaFe data.

- (29) You're busy losing weight!
- (30) The woman was very bad indeed... wrecked and racked on the golden vine, sodden beyond sensibility and busy dying.
- (31) Brand new home, busy being completed, comprising three bedrooms, lounge, diningroom...
- (32) At that time my children were busy being born.
- (33) The Cohens were busy being divorced in court

Since the semantic role of the subject may also play a role in the semantics of [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}], I also investigated the semantic roles of the subjects in the SaFe [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] constructions during my inductive analysis. This was done by categorising them based on subjects that are agentive and subjects that are non-agentive. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Semantic roles of the subjects of all SaFe [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] predicates

Semantic role of subject	Frequency	Example
Agentive subject	429	<i>I was busy watching soccer</i>
Non-agentive subject	25	<i>You're busy drifting toward the water fall</i>
Total	454	

The findings in this concordance are similar to those of Mesthrie (1999, 2002), namely that the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction shows a very strong preference to agentive subjects.

The strong collocation of agentive subjects with the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction is a clear indication that the use of *busy* in the progressive construction suggests the active involvement of the subject in the situation. In nearly all the provided data examples with agentive subjects, *busy* appears to serve the function of emphasising the subject's intense involvement or deliberate performance, as illustrated by the examples below (34)–(36).

(34) The government is continuously busy promoting our interests and products (ZA)

(35) field workers are currently busy conducting interviews (ZA)

(36) the City of Johannesburg is currently busy optimising their bus services (ZA)

However, in the example sentences where the subject takes on a non-agentive role, *busy* appears to serve another distinct function. In these cases, its purpose is not to emphasise or indicate the active involvement of the subject, but rather to highlight or convey the enduring, lengthy, or ongoing nature of the situation.¹⁷ This is illustrated by the following example sentences (37)–(38).

(37) we imagine there must have been some cheese busy maturing (ZA)

(38) One might have to raise a rebellious child busy losing his way. (ZA)

Both meaning functions highlighted here, namely emphasising the subject's actual involvement in the situation and indicating the ongoing duration of the situation, strongly correlate with the denotative meaning of the adjective *busy*:

busy

Constantly or habitually occupied; always active or employed; having a great deal to do. Of things: constantly active or in motion. (OED, s.v. *busy* adj.)

These two meanings are more specific than simply focusing on the progressiveness of the situation. Therefore, based on the semantic roles of the subjects of the predicates in which the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction occurs, it cannot be stated that the use of *busy* within the progressive construction is redundant. It is not merely a progressive marker but rather adds additional meaning within the construction.

17. A reviewer pointed out that this meaning is not typical of standard (native) English progressive but aligns with the extended usage found in Black South African (Van Rooy 2014) and Nigerian (Gut and Fuchs 2013) varieties.

3.4 Is the [BUSY V -ing_{PROG}] construction in South African English similar to the Afrikaans and Dutch [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]?

In tandem with the question posed in Section 3.2, it is often asserted that the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction is similar to the Afrikaans *busy* progressive construction. However, as mentioned, the noted similarities between these two constructions are primarily of a semantic or pragmatic nature, and no reference is being made to structural similarities. To determine whether the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction is similar to the Afrikaans *busy* progressives, it is necessary to also compare the form of these constructions in the different languages.

Identifying possible structural (i.e. form) similarities between the Afrikaans and SAfE BUSY progressives requires closer inspection of the Afrikaans (and the corresponding Dutch) progressive constructions. The past two decades have seen a number of publications discussing the progressive constructions of these two languages, which allowed for a relatively easy summarised constructional comparison (see Table 7). I based this summary primarily on Breed (2012, 2016), Breed, Brisard, and Verhoeven (2017), Breed and Van Huyssteen (2014, 2015), and Geleyn and Coleman (2014).

Two important features shared by the Dutch and Afrikaans BUSY progressive construction are (i) that the counterparts of *busy* (*besig* in Afrikaans and *bezig* in Dutch) are the only markers of progressivity in the construction, and (ii) that the main verb in all the possible variations of the construction takes the *te*-infinitive form. Progressive meaning is therefore not indicated by the main verb.

In contrast, progressive meaning in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] is indicated exclusively by the *-ing* form of the main verb. As argued in 3.3, the function of *busy* in this construction is not to add to the progressive meaning, but to specify other meanings, such as agentivity, duration, or ongoingness.

The Afrikaans BUSY progressive construction has only one form, namely BUSY (i.e. the Afrikaans adjective *besig*), directly followed by a complementiser, which is then followed by the main verb¹⁸ in the full infinitive form. The verb in the Afrikaans construction can be either transitive or intransitive, and it can be notated as [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INTR/TR.INF}].

18. It is possible in both Afrikaans and Dutch to place some constructions (such as a direct object construction or an adverbial) between the complementiser and the infinitive main verb, for example *Ek is besig om 'n appel te skil* 'I'm peeling an apple' or *Ek is besig om in die kombuis te eet*. This variation is indicated in the notations in Table 6 with ellipsis (...). Furthermore, in both Dutch and English a BUSY progressive construction with the preposition WITH can also occur, for example *bezig met werken* (Dutch) and *busy with filing the paperwork* (English). These variations are, however, not the focus of this comparison and are therefore not discussed in more detail.

Table 7. Comparison of the form of the Afrikaans, Dutch and English BUSY progressive constructions

	Afrikaans*	Dutch	English
[V _{TR/INTR} . -ing _{PROG}]			<i>I am writing a letter to my grandmother</i>
[BUSY _{CONT} V _{INTR/TR} -ing _{PROG}]			<i>He's busy looking the other way.</i>
[BUSY _{PROG} ... V _{INTR/TR.INF}]		<i>Een oude wereld is bezig te verdwijnen</i> 'An old world is in the process of disappearing.'	
[BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} ... V _{INTR.INF}]	<i>Die aarde is bezig om te verwarm.</i> 'Earth is warming up.'		
[BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} ... V _{TR.INF}]	<i>Hulle is bezig om die kerkie daar te restoureer</i> 'They are restoring the little church there.'	<i>Skaliens zijn ijverig bezig om de Lawarivier door hun goudkoorts onbevaarbaar te maken.</i> 'Miners are diligently working to make the Lawari River impassable due to their gold rush.'	

* Afrikaans examples are taken from the *VivA Corpus Portal* (2022), and the Dutch examples from *Corpus Hedendaags Nederlands* (2022). English examples are from the *GloWbE-ZA subcorpus*.

The Dutch progressive, on the other hand, shows more variation. The progressive marker *bezig* can be followed directly by a complementiser which is then followed by a transitive main verb (notated as [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{TR.INF}]), or *bezig* can be followed by a transitive or intransitive main verb without a complementiser (notated as [BUSY_{PROG} V_{INTR/TR.INF}])

Although BUSY is also found in the English progressive construction, the structural differences between the English, Afrikaans and Dutch BUSY progressive construction quite simply disprove claimed similarity.

4. [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]

It was previously mentioned that both Beeton and Dorner (1975) and Mesthrie (2002: 349) noted the occasional use of *busy* collocating with a complementiser and the infinitive form of the verb in SAfE. However, both sources regard these examples as nonstandard, and attribute them to the influence of Afrikaans.

In the previous section I stated that the origin and use of the SAfE [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction cannot be attributed to the influence of Afrikaans, and also that there is no constructional similarity between the English [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction and the Afrikaans (and Dutch) [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] constructions. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to find out whether the latter construction has in recent years managed to gain a foothold in SAfE due to language contact with Afrikaans. Therefore, I conducted a search for this [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction in the GloWbE corpus, not only in the SAfE sub-corpora but also in the other sub-corpora of GloWbE.

To accomplish this, concordances were generated from the relevant corpora (see 4.1 and 4.2 below) using the search phrase *busy to V* for the corpora of contemporary English, and *BUSY*¹⁹ for the corpora of historical English. Again, given the aim of increased recall with a manageable number of false positives (or loss of precision) to allow for manual review, and considering that the complementiser *to* always directly follows *busy*, and that the main verb always follows the complementiser in the English [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction, I chose to employ this search phrase to identify all potential instances of the construction in the various contemporary corpora under investigation. Furthermore, since there are too many historical spelling variations to consider for both *BUSY* and *TO*, and since the results were minimal enough to be manually reviewed, all results for the search string *BUSY* were thoroughly examined. Again, the results were manually extracted and organised at the sentence level in a raw text format. Sentences that were not clear examples of the [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction, such as examples of the constructions [*too busy to V*] and [*so busy to V that X*], were removed. These revised concordances were then used to draw conclusions regarding the usage of [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] in English. The results of this search are presented in Table 8.

19. To examine all diachronic spelling variations of *BUSY*, the online *OED* (2023) and *Middle English Compendium* (2023) were consulted. Based on this information, the following spelling variations of *BUSY* were used as search strings in the two diachronic corpora: beisi | beisse | besey | besi | besie | bessie | bessy | besy | besye | beusie | bisi | bisie | bisy | buisie | buissy | buisy | buisye | busi | busie | bussie | bussy | busy | busye | buysie | buysy.

Table 8. Frequency results of *busy* and *busy to V* search phrases

Corpora	FREQ of <i>busy</i>	FREQ of <i>busy to V</i>	FREQ of [BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} V _{INF}]
GloWbE	108 426	2349	143
CORE	3196	72	3
COCA	50 140	1326	44
Corona	60 680	630	80
Wikipedia	22 930	352	27
EEBO	18175	n/a	335
COHA	36 968	n/a	24

4.1 [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] in corpora of contemporary English

A search for *busy to V* in the various corpora of English-Corpora.org (2022) yielded some interesting results: The [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction is found in a number of current corpora, including those that do not include SArE²⁰ (compare Table 9).

Despite its very low frequency, the [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction is clearly present in contemporary English. While I acknowledge the limitations of deriving frequency-based conclusions from low occurrences, I present both the raw frequencies and the relative frequencies of the construction for the sake of completeness.

Furthermore, the search results from GloWbE (see Table 10) show that examples of the construction can be found in several English varieties. Though, again, the frequency is consistently low, it is clearly not indicative of a specific variety, and certainly not SArE.

20. Not all corpora on English-corpora.org have been included in this section’s investigation. For instance, the *NOW corpus* of 17.6 billion words yielded 9036 results for the search phrase *busy to V*, while the *iWeb corpus* of 14 billion words yielded 12,495 results. Due to the large number of results, it is not feasible to analyse each one for the purpose of this article. The objective of this section is not to determine the overall frequency of the [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}], but rather to demonstrate its widespread usage in different varieties of English. Therefore, only the five corpora indicated in Table 7 were considered. The results of these five corpora were manually reviewed to provide actual examples and their frequencies. A more comprehensive investigation of [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] can be conducted in future research.

Table 9. Frequencies of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$ in five corpora of contemporary English

Corpus	Corpus size in words	Raw freq of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$	Rel freq of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$	Example
GloWbE	1.9 billion	143	0,75	<i>These days she is busy to write an article on Google activities.</i>
CORE	50 million	3	0,06	<i>Kill the server process while the database is busy to simulate a power failure</i>
COCA	1 billion	44	0,04	<i>She is busy to develop a soft Indian image among Afghanis...</i>
Corona	1,5 billion	80	0,53	<i>Authority is busy to contain the spread now.</i>
Wikipedia	1.9 billion	27	0,14	<i>Rebecca was busy to star in her first TV Drama ever during...</i>

Table 10. $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$ in the different sub-corpora of GloWbE

Sub-corpora	Sub-corpus size (words)	Raw freq of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$	Rel freq of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$	Examples from the corpus
BD	39 658 255	25	0,63	<i>she said that the institution was busy to harass the opposition leaders and workers</i>
MY	42 420 168	19	0,45	<i>My family and I really enjoy chat-chit and I busy to take few photos around us!</i>
HK	40 450 291	10	0,25	<i>It enters into your computer when you are busy to download it.</i>
IN	96 430 888	18	0,19	<i>Throughout our lives we are busy to satisfy these traits, giving us fun and enjoyment.</i>
ZA	45 364 498	8	0,18	<i>GeoAxon is currently busy to create documentation</i>
PK	51 367 152	8	0,16	<i>That is because Apple is either very busy to add these questions in its diary</i>
JM	39 663 666	5	0,13	<i>In recent times, students are very busy to produce papers</i>
CA	134 765 381	13	0,10	<i>They that dig Mandragora be busy to beware of contrary winds while they dig,</i>
NG	42 646 098	4	0,09	<i>our trio is busy to deliver accurate pass</i>

Table 10. (continued)

Sub-corpora	Sub-corpus size (words)	Raw freq of [BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} V _{INF}]	Rel freq of [BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} V _{INF}]	Examples from the corpus
PH	43 250 093	4	0,09	<i>but I was busy to listen</i>
TZ	35 169 042	3	0,09	<i>They were busy to cause deislamisation.</i>
LK	46 583 115	3	0,06	<i>the LTTE was busy to create a plot against Muslims</i>
KE	41 069 085	2	0,05	<i>Kenyan's are busy to carry calculators</i>
AU	148 208 169	5	0,03	<i>I was very busy to spend my time with my family.</i>
GB	387 615 074	13	0,03	<i>the waiters were busy to serve one of the owners</i>
NZ	81 390 476	2	0,02	<i>People were already busy to retrieve injured people</i>
US	386 809 355	4	0,01	<i>Kill the server process while the database is busy to simulate a power failure</i>
IE	101 029 231	1	0,01	<i>people who are clinically and academically busy to apply for such positions</i>
GH	38 768 231	0	0,00	
SG	42 974 705	0	0,00	

More significantly, it suggests the existence of a genuine English *busy* progressive construction, structurally similar to the Dutch and Afrikaans BUSY progressives. To the best of my knowledge, an English [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction has not yet been identified by or included in studies of West Germanic progressives. To precisely determine the semantic similarities or differences between these three languages' cognate progressive constructions, more research with larger and comparative corpora is needed. This aspect is something I leave for future research.

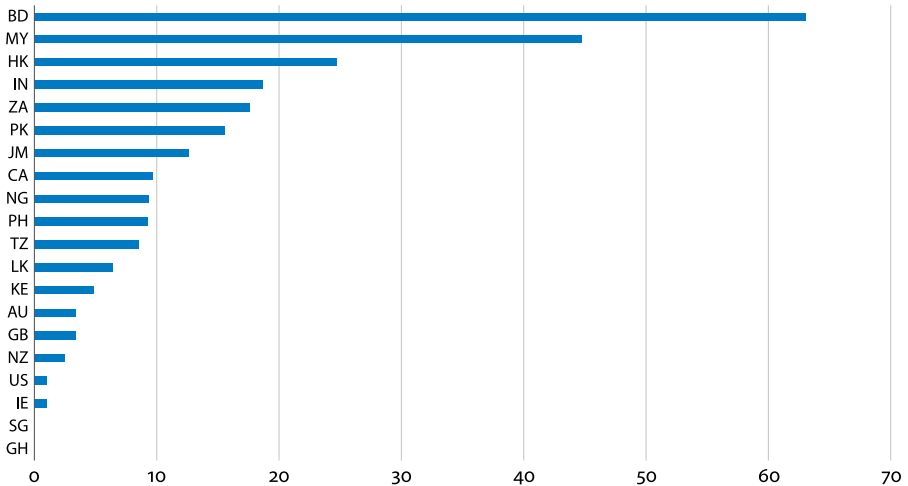


Figure 2. [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] in the different sub-corpora of GloWbE

4.2 [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] in corpora of historical English

When consulting historical corpora²¹ available on English-corpora.org (2022), we see that this construction was already in use as early as the 1400s (Table 11).

Table 11. Frequencies of [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] in historical corpora

Corpus	Sub-corpus size	Raw freq of [BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} V _{INF}]	Rel freq of [BUSY _{PROG} X _{COMP} V _{INF}]
EEBO	755 mil words	335	0,44
COHA	475 mil words	24	0,05

The findings of the corpus analysis are visualised in Figure 3 and Figure 4, depicting the publication dates of sources that contain instances of the [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction. Despite its infrequent occurrence, the construction can be traced back across centuries, with usage dating as far back as

21. Two historical corpora on English-corpora.org were used in this section, namely *The Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) and *Early English Books Online* (EEBO). COHA is the largest structured corpus of historical English and contains more than 475 million words of text from the 1820s–2010s from a variety of text types, such as fiction, magazines, and newspapers (Davies 2010). EEBO is a collection of texts created by the Text Creation Partnership and contains 755 million words in 25,368 texts from the 1470s to the 1690s (Davies 2017).

1474. This timeline²² provides evidence of the consistent, albeit marginal, use of the construction throughout different historical periods.

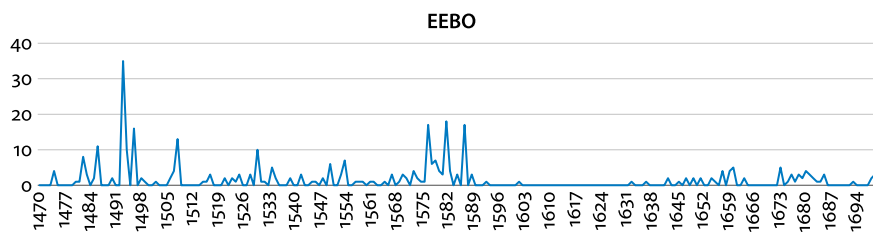


Figure 3. The raw frequencies of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$ in the EEBO corpus

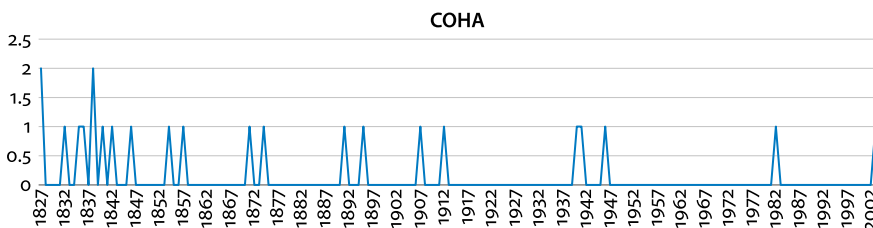


Figure 4. The raw frequencies of $[BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]$ in the COHA corpus

The following sentence examples were extracted from the EEBO and COHA corpora to demonstrate the persistent diachronic use of this construction.

- (39) ... he that whylom was busy to compyle this noble historie ... (EEBO 1534)
- (40) the same man in the third chapter at his third part is busy to let you know
under what figure of the heavens you are ... (EEBO, 1646)
- (41) ... the duke, who was busy to invent some charge to lay to the keeper...
(EEBO, 1700)
- (42) The nice and jealous sensibility of Harry Vernon was busy to produce this
determination (COHA, 1840)

Further research is needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these constructions and their contribution to the development of the progressive aspect in English.

22. Since the frequencies of this construction are so low, and since the purpose of this section is not to test the generality of the construction (but rather to demonstrate that the construction has been existing for a long time), the raw frequencies are presented here, and not the relative frequencies.

5. Conclusion

This paper had the dual aim of critically evaluating some of the claims that have been made about the so-called “busy progressive” in South African English, and to explore the possibility of new insights into the use of *busy* in English aspectual constructions. This was done by using a corpus-based approach, which looked at a greater variety of available corpus data from SAfE and other English varieties, as well as available information on Afrikaans and Dutch.

Four research questions were formulated, namely: (i) is [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE?; (ii) can [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] be attributed to language contact with Afrikaans?; (iii) is *busy* an unnecessary or redundant progressive marker in the SAfE progressive construction?; and (iv) is the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction in South African English similar to the Afrikaans and Dutch [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}]?

After a corpus investigation, some conclusions could be made regarding the use of this construction. Firstly, [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] is not a typical and prominent lexico-grammatical feature of SAfE, since it is not encountered more frequently in SAfE than in other Englishes and does not occur with predicate types that differ from those in other English varieties. Secondly, and in light of this, the phenomenon cannot be attributed to language contact with Afrikaans. Thirdly, *busy* is not an unnecessary or redundant progressive marker in the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] construction, as it carries meaningful implications regarding agentivity, duration, and ongoingness.

Finally, the [BUSY V-ing_{PROG}] is not similar to the Afrikaans and Dutch [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction; however, it seems that a [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction also occurs in most varieties of English. Nonetheless, more research is required to determine the specific way in which this cognate English construction compares to the Afrikaans and Dutch [BUSY_{PROG} X_{COMP} V_{INF}] construction.

This investigation underscores the power of corpus linguistics in providing more authentic, accurate, and widespread evidence compared to earlier studies that did not extensively utilise corpora. It demonstrates how a data-driven approach can shed light on linguistic phenomena, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of language variation and usage.

It is worth noting that this article primarily focused on the use of *busy* within the English progressive construction, without directly comparing it to the [V-ing_{PROG}] construction. A more nuanced analysis is required to address this gap, and it represents an avenue for future research. By exploring this aspect in more detail, we can gain deeper insights into how *busy* operates in the broader

context of English aspectual constructions. This research has laid the foundation for such exploration, and the results highlight the potential for further investigation in this field.

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