

***Be + -ing* in Letters: Comparison of Usages between John Winthrop (1588-1649) and His Male Descendants**

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1. Introduction

The present study discusses Esquire John Winthrop's (JW; 1588-1649) usage of *be + -ing* in his letters by comparing it with the usage of his male descendants to the fifth generation.¹

'The progressive aspect', having the *be + -ing* form, can be defined as 'a happening IN PROGRESS at a given time' (Quirk et al. 1985: 197). According to these authors, this progressive meaning can be divided into three components, although not all of them need be present in a clause: DURATION, LIMITED duration, and NOT NECESSARILY COMPLETE. The meanings of verbs of state like *live*—hereinafter called 'state verbs'—in *be + -ing* are differently interpreted. That is, the idea of TEMPORARINESS (1) arises from the meaning added by either of the first two components, which is distinguishable from the permanency expressed by the simple present in (2) (Quirk et al. 1985: 198-9).

(1) *We are living* in the country. [temporary residence]

(2) *We live* in the country. [permanent residence]

(Quirk et al. 1985: 199)

The expression *are living* occurs three times in JW's letters. The verb's meaning, however, is not 'to dwell' but 'to be alive' as in (3), whose situation at the moment is modified by the adverb *yet* '[i]mplying continuance from a previous time up to and at the present (or some stated) time' (*OED* s.v. *yet*, adv. II. 2. a.).

(3) I praise the good Lord, though we see much mortality, sickness, and trouble, yet (such is his mercy) myself and children, with most of my family, ***are yet***

¹ JW was lord of the manor at Groton and acting as attorney before he departed for New England on 29 March 1630 as Governor of the Massachusetts-Bay Company. For a biography of JW and his descendants, see Robert C. Winthrop (RCW; 1864, 1895), Mayo (1948), and Bremer (2003).

living, and in health, and enjoy prosperity enough, if the affliction of our brethren did not hold under the comfort of it. (JW to his wife Margaret; 9 September 1630; RCW 1895)²

JW wrote this letter to his wife Margaret two months after they lost their second son Henry, who had landed at Salem several days later than JW in 1630.³ Under the critical circumstances of their life in the wilderness, ‘to be alive’ must have been one of their important concerns.

Of the semantic functions of *be* + *-ing* in Early Modern English (1500-c.1700), Rissanen (1999: 221) mentions that ‘[t]he present progressive is uncommon with verbs indicating state; it may emphasise the temporary character of the state, or call the attention to the more actional features of the verb’. Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 51) suggests that the polysemy of the *be* + *-ing* form ‘may be resolved by taking into account some other factors’, including the use of adverbials, the meaning of the verb itself, and their combination in a larger context.

In what context does JW use *be* + *-ing*? What meaning may be indicated by its combination with particular words or elements? Can any similar usages be observed in his descendants’ letters? These questions are explored by focusing on JW’s uses of *be* + *-ing* with emphatic elements, state verbs, and future time adverbials. In the next section, I will explain my corpus data. This will be followed by the analysis results and discussion in Section 3. Section 4 will present concluding remarks.

2. My corpus data

2.1. Corpus of the Winthrop family correspondence (CWC)

The Winthrop family often exchanged letters with not only each other but also their friends and neighbours to obtain the latest news on their health issues, supplies of living necessities, business matters, and the local safety

² All the italics and boldfaces in the examples below are by the author of the present study unless otherwise stated. References with brackets are shown in the following sequence: an abbreviation of the letter writer, his addressee, the written or endorsed date, an abbreviation of the editor’s name—Robert C. Winthrop (RCW for short) and the editors of the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS)—and the year of publication of the source.

³ Henry departed England together with JW but drowned in a swamp at Salem on 2 July 1630 (Mayo 1948: 60-1). His natural mother was Mary Forth (1583-1615).

situation. The letters also discussed other topics such as requests for military assistance, accounts and reports of political issues such as the borders between territories, and declarations of resignation from a position. Petitions and wills were also included.

My corpus of the Winthrop family correspondence (CWC) was compiled based on texts edited by the MHS (1878, 1882, 1889, 1892, 1943, 1947) and RCW (1864, 1895). It is composed of a total of 788 letters written between 1620 and 1776 consisting of approximately 324,000 words by JW and his male descendants up to the fifth generation, counting JW himself. Letters addressed to family members account for 62%, letters to other members account for 26%, and official (or formal) letters addressed to institutions such as government offices, to attorneys, and so on, account for 12%.

Table 1 below shows the breakdown by writer: JW himself, JW's seven sons (JW Jr., Henry, Forth, Stephen, Adam, Deane, and Samuel), his two grandsons (Fitz John Winthrop and Wait Still Winthrop), his great-grandson (John Winthrop, Fellow of the Royal Society), and his great-great-grandson (John Winthrop, the Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy). Draft letters that were not actually sent are also included.⁴ Because the numbers of words by writers are uneven, normalised frequencies per 10,000 words are applied for comparison.

The corpus yielded a total of 377 instances of *be* + *-ing*,⁵ whose normalised frequency per 10,000 words is 11.62. Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 173, Table 13), based on the Helsinki Corpus (HC), shows that the use of *be* + *-ing* in the genre LETTERS peaked at 8.42 per 10,000 words in the third period, 1640-1710.⁶ The writers in CWC seem to use *be* + *-ing* forms more often than the writers in the HC.

JW, however, uses *be* + *-ing* the least (5.63 per 10,000 words) among the men above, excluding his sons Forth and Deane, whose letters do not contain the form. JW's son JW Jr. and grandsons Fitz and Wait use the form more frequently than JW. Interestingly, a preference for this form

⁴ I excluded duplicated letters among the selected editions and unreadable pages because of missing portions or a lack of righthand words.

⁵ I checked variants of *-ing* in CWC and found only *-inge* occurrences here.

⁶ Núñez-Pertejo's (2004b: 173) normalised frequency is shown per 100,000 words (84.16). The Early Modern English section of the HC is divided into three sub-periods: 1500-1570, 1570-1640, and 1640-1710.

does not always indicate the same tendency even in the same generation. Wait uses the form more often (16.98) than his elder brother Fitz (10.04), as shown in Table 1, and this difference is greater than that between Fitz and JW. Therefore, I have investigated individual usages without aggregating their occurrences by generations. I will indicate JW's descendants using the abbreviations in Table 1 or by their relation with JW (e.g. his son John) to differentiate them from JW.

Table 1. Breakdown of CWC and frequencies of *be + -ing*

Gen.	Writers	Born-Died	Years written	No of letters	No of words	<i>be + -ing</i> (Raw Frq)	<i>be + -ing</i> (/10,000)
1st	JW	1588-1649	1620-1649	147	58,620	33	5.63
2nd	JW Jr.	1606-1676	1627-1676	113	58,510	56	9.57
	Henry	1608-1630	1623-1630	4	1,610	1	6.21
	Forth	1609-1630	1622-1630	10	3,200	0	0.00
	Stephen	1619-1658	1645-1657	11	5,350	11	20.56
	Adam	1620-1652	1642-1652	8	2,690	2	7.43
	Deane	1623-1704	1648-1662	4	680	0	0.00
	Samuel	1627-c.1674	1646-1673	24	10,080	7	6.94
3rd	Fitz JW	1638-1707	1660-1707	175	64,730	65	10.04
	Wait	1642-1717	1671-1717	267	101,270	172	16.98
4th	JW FRS	1681-1747	1706-1726	20	13,550	17	12.55
5th	Prof. JW	1714-1779	1775-1776	5	4,020	13	32.34
Total				788	324,310	377	11.62

2.2. Combination patterns

I first extracted clauses containing verbs ending in *-ing* using a concordancer⁷ and manually excluded unambiguously irrelevant cases: a noun modified by an adjective as in (4) (*OED* s.v. *going over*, *going-over*, 1.), noun modifiers as in (5) (*OED* s.v. *coming*, ppl. a.), and an adverb modifying an adjective as in (6) (*OED* s.v. *exceeding*, ppl. a. and adv.). In confusing cases having the same predicative form—the present participle of a transitive verb plus an object or a participial adjective plus a noun—as in (7), I checked the *OED* (s.v. *labouring*, ppl. a. 1. for this case) and excluded modifiers based on the context.

⁷ Anthony, Laurence. 2018. *AntConc* (Version 3.5.7). Tokyo: Waseda University. <<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/>> (Accessed 26 September 2018).

- (4) there *is good going over* Patuxet River at the wares one mile about Staffords, (Wait to JW FRS; 1 August 1711; MHS 1892)
- (5) that one Coll. Kirke, who was Gouver^{nr} of Tangere, *is coming Gou'* there, with 6 or 7 frygatts & 5,000 men; (Fitz JW to James Fitch; 28 January 1684[-5]; MHS 1882)⁸
- (6) These afflictions we have met with need discourage none, for the country *is exceeding good*, and the climate very like our own (JW to his son JW Jr.; 23 July 1630; RCW 1895)
- (7) also as for poorer sort of people, if they *be labouring men* or good trades, they may be set on worke profitably (JW Jr. to no name; 19 September 1660; MHS 1882)

Next, I classified the 377 extracted instances into the combination patterns below: *am/are/is* (pres.) as in (3) above, *was/were* (past) as in (8), perfective *have* (perf.) as in (9), *will/shall/may/should/could/might/must* (modal) as in (10), *to*-infinitive + *be/have been* as in (11), non-finite *being* as in (12), and *be*-subjunctive (subj.) as in (13).⁹

- (8) As I *was writing* this, Richard came in and told me the dogs had killed an old wolf this morning (JW to his son JW Jr.; 6 November 1634; RCW 1895)
- (9) This yeare some went vp to a place, w^{ch} was not a full dales journey frō the sea, where there had beene some kind of minerall discovered by one who *had beene digging* vpon an other occasion (JW Jr. to Sir Robert Moray; no date 1671; MHS 1882)
- (10) But what *shall be wanting* now may be supplied hereafter. (JW to William Bradford; 20 May 1637; RCW 1895)

⁸ Years of letters in the MHS's editions are shown in old and new styles of the calendar. The year 1684 is based on the old style, in which the first day of the year is Easter.

⁹ All forms and variants of *have*, *be*, and modal auxiliaries have been checked and included in my data.

- (11) as I can no more but let thee know that I have a desire still *to be writing* to thee (JW to his wife Margaret; 24 November 1629; RCW 1864)
- (12) and *being* now *contriveing* to make some improvement on the said land (Fitz JW to the Earl of Bellomont; 18 September 1700; MHS 1882)
- (13) and to hir brother if he yet *be living*. (JW Jr. to Fitz JW; 12 September 1658; MHS 1882)

Table 2 below shows the distribution of the combination patterns and proportions of present-tense *be* + *-ing* by the writers. The combination with perfective *have*, non-finite *being*, and *be*-subjunctive does not appear in JW's letters but does occur in letters by his grandsons Fitz and Wait. Everyone except JW's sons Henry, Forth, and Deane uses the *be* + *-ing* form most frequently in present-tense clauses. Additionally, JW is the second most frequent user of present-tense *be* + *-ing* (70%).

Table 2. Raw frequencies by combination patterns and proportions of pres.

Gen.	Writers	pres.	past	perf.	modal	<i>to be</i>	<i>being</i>	subj.	Total	Pres (%)
1st	JW	23	1	0	5	4	0	0	33	70%
2nd	JW Jr.	37	12	2	3	0	0	2	56	66%
	Henry	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	-
	Forth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
	Stephen	6	4	0	1	0	0	0	11	55%
	Adam	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	50%
	Deane	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
	Samuel	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	7	86%
3rd	Fitz JW	38	10	3	10	2	1	1	65	58%
	Wait	104	39	9	9	8	1	2	172	60%
4th	JW FRS	8	7	0	1	1	0	0	17	47%
5th	Prof. JW	7	4	1	0	1	0	0	13	54%
	Total	230	78	16	30	16	2	5	377	61%

3. Analysis and discussion

3.1. Emphatic use

Petré (2017: 232) explains that from Middle English onwards adverbial backgrounding clauses containing *be* + *-ing* increased primarily in

past-tense narrative contexts, but the lack of an explicit topic time would cause the *be + -ing* form to be interpreted as stative, and only after its semanticisation, it becomes possible for the form to express ‘ongoingness’ independently in present-tense main clauses. According to him, prior to the semanticisation, this semantic shift may have originated from individual speakers’ extravagance.¹⁰ JW used past-tense *be + -ing* only once in a temporal adverbial clause in (8) above, while he used 65% of his present-tense *be + -ing* instances in main clauses.¹¹ JW’s use of *be + -ing* appears with an implicit topic time in a present-tense main clause.

The first instance of *be + -ing* in CWC appears in a letter written in 1622 by JW who informs his brother-in-law Thomas Fones of his wife’s ongoing recovery in (14).¹² The modal *shall* and the parenthesis *I trust* in the sentence coordinated by & (*and*) indicate JW’s view of his wife’s health condition.

- (14) My wife *is sitting up* againe, & I trust shalbe restored to hir former health in due tyme. (JW to his brother-in-law Thomas Fones; 29 January 1621[-2]; RCW 1864)

Judging from the adverb *again* and the context, the form of *is sitting up* seems to indicate JW’s hope that the situation of ‘sitting up’ will continue in the future. According to Leech (2004: 20 note), along with the ‘temporary’ meaning, *be + -ing* indicates that the situation is ‘actually in progress now’, but this situation is not necessarily true. An ‘event verb’ in *be + -ing* stretches its time-span psychologically, compared to the incident described by simple present (see Leech 2004: 19). Although Leech (2004) refers to Present-Day English (PDE), *is sitting up* seems to express a longer time than its simple present form ‘sits up’.

Petré (2017: 248) argues based on an examination of ten seventeenth-century born authors’ materials that the temporal meaning of

¹⁰ ‘Extravagance’ is described as ‘i.e. the desire to talk in such a way that one is noticed’ in the abstract of Petré (2017).

¹¹ Among 23 present-tense *be + -ing* instances of JW, I counted clauses coordinated by *and*, *but*, and *yet* as main clauses.

¹² According to Robert C. Winthrop (1864: 288n), JW used an old style for a calendar in which Easter was the first day of the year. Therefore, the letter was written in 1622 based on the new (present-day) calendar system.

‘ongoingness’ may not have developed directly from its stative meaning but rather may have been motivated by an in-between stage where the *be + -ing* construction is used to put an ‘emphasis’ on the situation in the present tense. Petré (2017: 230) bases this on his assumption that ‘[BE Ving] is expected to occur more commonly (than is the SIMPLE PRESENT) in conjunction with other markers of emphasis’.¹³

In order to examine this hypothesis, I extracted present-tense *be + -ing* instances whose alternative simple present forms occur in each writer’s letters. Out of a total of 74 verb types of present-tense *be + -ing*, only the 36 verb types emphasised in Table 3 have their corresponding simple present in CWC.¹⁴ The number of types for simple present is indicated in (). JW uses only five verb types (*come, go, haste, live, and want*) in both forms. There are no examples of simple presents for Stephen and Adam. Therefore, they will be excluded from the survey in this section.

¹³ Petré’s (2017) survey is restricted to present-tense main clauses from his corpus (27,735,424 words). He judges the correlation between the emphatic use and *be + -ing* based on the proportions of the presence/absence patterns of emphatic elements in minimal semantic pairs of *be + -ing* and the simple present, up to 100. See Petré (2017: 233-7) for details.

¹⁴ I included all variants of the verbs, but excluded formally distinct present subjunctives: verb forms that lack the endings *-st* for *thou* and *-s* for third single subjects. I also excluded examples of discernible imperative forms (e.g. *send word; I pray prepare money*).

Table 3. Verb types in present-tense *be* + *-ing* and simple present

Writers	Verb types (modernised spellings) & no. of occurrences indicated in []	No. of types
JW	<i>go</i> [4]; behold, <i>live</i> , prepare [3 each]; <i>come</i> , <i>haste</i> , recover, remove, ride, sit, solicit, speak, turn, <i>want</i> [1 each]	14 (5)
JW Jr.	<i>write</i> [4]; <i>go</i> [3]; advise, endeavour, meditate, prepare, <i>wait</i> [2 each]; add, <i>attend</i> , behold, belong, demand, get, <i>haste</i> , <i>live</i> , <i>make</i> , <i>owe</i> , <i>pass</i> , <i>present</i> , <i>put</i> , read, <i>return</i> , set, <i>suppose</i> , <i>think</i> , <i>want</i> , war [1 each]	27 (15)
Stephen	<i>go</i> [3]; march, discourse, fly [1 each]	4 (0)
Adam	stir [1]	1 (0)
Samuel	<i>come</i> , consent, endeavour, gather, <i>go</i> , try [1 each]	6 (2)
Fitz JW	<i>send</i> , <i>take</i> [6 each]; <i>owe</i> [4]; <i>go</i> , hasten, sit, <i>wait</i> [2 each]; enter, fortify, gather, <i>make</i> , <i>mourn</i> , <i>move</i> , pass, prepare, raise, range, <i>relate</i> , <i>set</i> , <i>tell</i> , <i>want</i> [1 each]	21 (12)
Wait	<i>go</i> [44]; <i>come</i> [9]; <i>get</i> [6]; <i>fit</i> [4]; <i>owe</i> , <i>send</i> , <i>sit</i> [3 each]; <i>build</i> , <i>contrive</i> , <i>make</i> , prepare, <i>think</i> [2 each]; blow, design, <i>dispose</i> , <i>expect</i> , finish, <i>labour</i> , <i>leave</i> , <i>live</i> , <i>look</i> , maintain, meditate, move, <i>proceed</i> , <i>put</i> , <i>return</i> , <i>sell</i> , <i>serve</i> , <i>set</i> , stir, strive, <i>want</i> , <i>write</i> [1 each]	34 (25)
JW FRS	<i>go</i> [2]; appertain, build, <i>come</i> , <i>get</i> , <i>send</i> , stir [1 each]	7 (4)
Prof. JW	act, attempt, carry, <i>come</i> , <i>expect</i> , throw, wait [1 each]	7 (2)

For emphatic markers, I relied on Petré's (2017: 239-40) indices: the clause containing both or either of deixis and an adverb whose topic time indicates 'now' such as *this*, *here*, *now*, *just*, *still*, *yet*, etc. I also counted clauses containing the following elements: an object of the verb fronted in the clause (e.g. *An other thing I make bold to mention*: JW Jr to Sir Robert Moray; 27 January 1664[-5]; MHS 1882), a verbal construct preceded by an exclamation mark (e.g. *amen! The things wrote for are putting up at Grose*: Wait to JW FRS; 11 February 1716[-7]; MHS 1892), and an exclamation mark (e.g. *when I want it!*: JW to Margaret; 3 October 1623;

RCW 1864).¹⁵ In the emphatic use, I included clauses containing the following adverbs: *absolutely*, *all*, *exceedingly*, *extremely*, *fully*, *greatly*, *heartily*, *much*, *well*, *wholly*, *so*, and *very*.¹⁶ Examples (15) show the presence of emphatic elements, while examples (16) show the absence of the elements.

(15) a. albeit I **am now cominge** towards thee, (JW to his wife Margaret; 18 April 1622; RCW 1864)

b. **This** bearer **comes** suddenly upon me, (JW to his son JW Jr.; 7 March 1623[-4]; RCW 1864)

(16) a. I **am going** to Westminster, & must heere breake off. (JW to his wife Margaret; 15 May 1629[-30]; RCW 1864)

b. I purpose to redeeme this loss before I **go** hence, and to write to divers of my friends. (JW to his wife Margaret; 14 March 1629[-30]; RCW 1864)

A total of 161 instances out of 230 of present-tense *be* + *-ing* had alternative simple present (962 instances) in CWC. To examine whether *be* + *-ing* occurs more often in emphatic contexts, the relative ratios of the number of clauses with and without the emphatic elements were compared in each form of *be* + *-ing* and simple present in Figure 1.¹⁷

JW most frequently uses the emphatic elements in clauses with *be* + *-ing* compared to simple present clauses. The relative ratio (60%) of JW's emphatic use of *be* + *-ing* is higher than the ratio (14%) of the simple present. This gap (46%) is wider than those of his son John (34%) and grandsons Fitz (22%) and Wait (24%).

¹⁵ These indices were taken from Petr  (2017: 240). Among the instances of present-tense *be* + *-ing* having alternative simple present forms in CWC, there is only one instance with one of these indices, as in Wait's letter to JW FRS, on 11 February 1707, as above.

¹⁶ I extracted these adverbs that function as a booster in Early Modern English from Peters (1994).

¹⁷ Out of a total of the 161 present-tense *be* + *-ing* instances, a total of 56 instances appear with emphatic elements, while out of a total of the 962 simple-present instances, a total of 94 instances appear with emphatic elements.

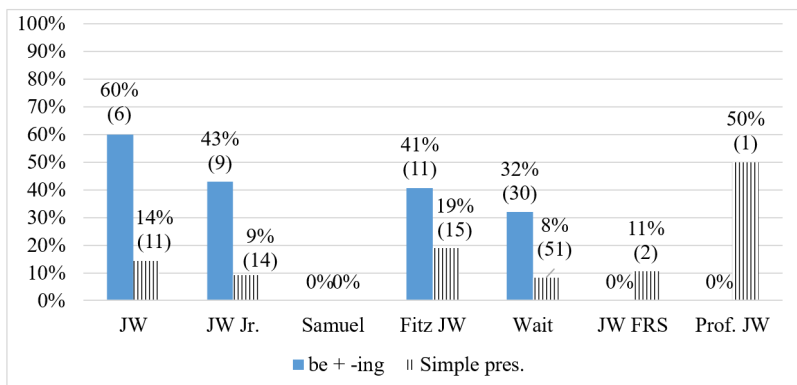


Figure 1. Relative ratio (%) of the number of clauses containing emphatic elements

Although the number of frequencies in Figure 1 may not be enough for any definite conclusion on the correlation between the *be + -ing* form and the emphatic use, the co-occurrence with emphatic elements in *be + -ing* is higher than in simple present up to the third generation's letters, and JW FRS (fourth generation) and Prof. JW (fifth generation) use *be + -ing* without emphatic elements. JW's emphatic use, however, appears in restricted patterns: *be living* with *still* or *yet* three times, and in *be going*, *be coming*, and *be hasting* with *now* once each.

3.2. State verbs

Leech (2004: 23) mentions that 'the progressive aspect' of *be + -ing* varies in its effect depending on the type of meaning conveyed by 'event verbs' and 'state verbs' in PDE. Rissanen (1999: 221-2) considers the use of *be + adv. + -ing* in *if they be then liuing* as a progressive in Early Modern English whose subjective/emotive force may be a possible factor for its use in contexts, while Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 146) points out that both interpretations of verbal and adjectival uses are plausible because the judgement of more 'actional' than 'stative' is difficult within the context.¹⁸

¹⁸ Núñez-Pertejo refers to the same instance as Rissanen extracts from the HC: '(185) whiche at the time of Araignment of the Parties so accused (if they *be then liuing*) shall be brought in Person before the said Partie accused. ([HC] Throckmorton 68 Cii)' quoted in Rissanen (1999: 222). Emphasis in the original.

Such confusion as discussed in Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 143-9) involves intransitive verbs such as *live*, *behold*, *owe*, and *want*. A predicative use of these participial adjectives would be another cause of this confusion.

In CWC, *be living*, *be beholding*, *be owing*, and *be wanting* account for approximately 12% of a total of 377 instances.¹⁹ In the empirical examination of the emphatic use in Section 3.1 above, all five present-tense *be living* instances co-occur with the adverbs *yet* or *still*, and their verbal meaning is always ‘to be alive’. The *be* + *-ing* form seems to function to emphasise the state ‘to be alive at the moment’, which may be related to the ‘subjective/emotive’ force, as explained in Rissanen (1999: 221).

Be living occurs for the first time in JW’s letter dated 9 September 1630 in (3), and next in his letter dated 29 November in the same year as in (17). Both letters are addressed to JW’s wife Margaret. JW uses *be living* in the context of praising God for JW’s survival at the moment although facing an adverse situation.

- (17) Thou shalt understand by this, how it is with us since I wrote last, (for this [is] the third or fourth letter I have written to thee since I came hither,) that thou mayest see the goodness of the Lord towards me, that, when so many have died, and many yet languish, ***myself and my children are yet living and in health***. Yet I have lost twelve of my family, viz. Waters and his wife, and two of his children: Mr. Gager and his man: Smith of Buxall and his wife and two children: the wife of Taylor of Haverill and their child: ***my son H***. (JW to his wife Margaret; 29 November 1630; RCW 1895)

In one of JW’s letters written earlier than these, the simple present *yet I live* appears in (18). Here JW expresses the loss of his son by short and repeated phrases referring to Henry with an interjection *ah* and exclamation marks. The event of the loss seems to be conveyed more strongly than the fact that JW is still alive.

¹⁹ I included these borderline cases in my statistics and analysis. A total of 45 instances of *be* + *beholding* (6), *owing* (11), *living* (8), and *wanting* (20) occur in CWC. When these are excluded, the normalised frequency of *be* + *-ing* per 10,000 words is reduced to 10.24, which is still higher than the 8.42 per 10,000 words of the genre LETTERS in 1640-1710 of the HC in Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 173).

(18) I am so overpressed with business, as I have no time for these or other mine own private occasions. I only write now, that thou mayest know, that *yet I live* and am mindful of thee in all my affairs. The larger discourse of all things thou shalt receive from my brother Downing, which I must send by some of the last ships. We have met with many sad and discomfortable things, as thou shalt hear after; and the Lord's hand hath been heavy upon myself in some very near to me. *My son Henry! my son Henry! ah, poor child!* (JW to his wife Margaret; 16 July 1630; RCW 1895)

Seven years later, when JW answered to his friend William Bradford, JW informed him of two Indian sachems who had survived a war in (19). JW wrote this information based on the reports of plural 'captains', which proves that *are living* was not being observed by JW personally at the moment of his writing. Compared to the simple present *live*, *are living* might have been a convenient way of expression for JW when he was in a situation that may change. At the same time, the adverb *still* seems to emphasise the danger of the situation.

(19) The Captains report we have slain thirteen Sachems, but Sasacus & Mononotto *are* still *living*. (JW to William Bradford; 28 July 1637; RCW 1895)

The situation that the people being discussed are alive 'at the present moment', whether true or not, is indicated by the adverbs *still* or *yet* in CWC. JW's pattern (present-tense *be* + adv. + *living*) occurs once each in the letters written by son John and grandson Wait, 31 years and 67 years later, respectively, than JW's last example. In example (20), JW Jr. advises to Fitz JW, a son of JW Jr., as to whether Fitz should stay or return.

(20) You are much ingaged to them [your friends] for their love to you, let your deportment be answerable in due respect and gratitude, and present my respects and thanks to them all where you are at present, or shall have opportunity to see or write to any of them, such of your vncles and aunts as *are yet living*, and other kindred and friends, whether in England or Scotland (I

know not where you are at present). [...] Heere hath beene a tyme of much sicknesse and mortality especially in those plantations beyond Newhaven toward the Duch and Long Iland; [...] but lately at Boston divers *have died*, many very sick. (JW Jr. to Fitz JW; 12 September 1658; MHS 1882)

JW Jr. may have used *are yet living* to emphasise the situation because the contrasting situation ('have died') is described. Wait (another of JW Jr.'s sons) used *Mr Willis is yet living* in an answer letter to his cousin Samuel Reade who wrote to Wait about some payment—*There are two bonds due from Mr Samuel Willis, who is willing to pay ye mony (either him selfe or executors, for I know not whether hee bee living)*.

The other three *be living* instances of JW's son John are combined with a modal auxiliary *may*, *be*-subjunctive, and past-tense *be*, but none of these uses occur in JW's letter.

The next example of state verbs is *be beholding to*, which Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 144-5) considers a participial adjective 'under obligation, indebted, beholden' (*OED* s.v. *beholding*, ppl. a. 1), whereas Rissanen (1999: 221) regards it as an example of 'the progressive'.²⁰ The *OED* indicates '[s]ense 1 evidently originated in an error for beholden'. In terms of the classification of *be* + *-ing* into parts of speech, Núñez-Pertejo (2004b) might be right because there is no intransitive use of *behold* in this meaning (see *OED* s.v. *behold*, v. 2).

Apart from the discussion of the verbal or adjectival nature of *beholding*, what is interesting in JW's usage is that all three of his instances of *be beholding* converge in the last paragraph of his letter to Margaret in (21). JW wrote this letter just before his departure for New England. In two instances, they are modified by the adverbials *exceedingly* and *very much*.

- (21) Our friends heer are all in health (blessed be God) & desire to be hearty comended to thee. I *am exceedingly beholdinge to* my good brother & sister D, I can fasten no recompence upon them for all the chardge my selfe & my company have putt them to. [...] Nowe I beseech the Lord & father of mercy

²⁰ Rissanen's example is from the same source as Núñez-Pertejo (2004b): '(188) (*T.I.*) The hapiest meeting that our soules could wish for Here's the Ring ready, I *am beholding* vnto your Fathers hast, h'as kept this howre' quoted in Núñez-Pertejo (2004b: 144). Emphasis in the original.

to blesse thee & all thy companye, my daughter W: Ma: Mat: Sam: Deane, & the little one unknowne, Tho: Am: & the rest: Tell Am: I ***am very much beholdinge to*** her brother, desire her to give him thanks for me: tell my n: Culproke I ***am beholdinge to*** his sonne in lawe for oysters he sent me, but could not see him to give him thanks. (JW to his wife Margaret; 10 March 1629[-30]; RCW 1864)²¹

There is no simple present *behold* nor *beholden* in JW's letters. Only son John follows his father JW's pattern (present-tense *be* + adv. + *beholding to*) in (22).

- (22) Mr. Cradock hath procured the 200^{li} to be continued till March, he is very ill, being not cured of a hurte w^{ch} he received in his scull in summer. Mr. Burrows sonne saith you owe him 4^{li} besides the 30^{li} 12^s for w^{ch} he had the bill. I have not yet rec^d mony for S^r Richards fraught: the rest is all paid. I ***am much beholding to*** Mr Kerby, he lent me 100^{li} freely till Christmas; I should otherwise beene much shortened, for the fraught. (JW Jr. to JW; 9 December 1630; RCW 1895)

Son Henry uses a combination with perfective *have*—***I have bene much behoulldinge to them*** [good friends]—in 1627, and son Stephen uses a combination with a modal auxiliary *shall*—& *hope I shall still bee behoulldinge to you for your advice*—in 1657.

In terms of the meaning of the verb, son John and grandsons Fitz and Wait use *be owing to* in place of *be beholding to* in equivalent contexts as in (23) and (24). There is no instance of *be owing (to)* in JW's letters. According to the *OED*, the participial adjective *owing* is related to the second meaning of verbal *owe*, which takes a dative object or preposition *to* (see *OED* s.v. *owing*, ppl. a. 1. and *owe*, v. II. 2. a.). Moreover, *owing to* in this meaning is '[a]lmost always used predicatively' (*OED*, s.v. *owing*, ppl. a.).

- (23) I am under great obligations for the hon^r of yo^r freindship & fauour in my attendance at Court in behalf of his Maj. Collony of Conecticot, whose

²¹ The written year 1629 should be 1630 because JW considered Easter as the first day of the year. See RCW (1864: 288n).

welfare & happy repose under the advantages of their constitution **is very much owing to** yo^r fauour & intrest. (Fitz JW to William Blathwait; 1 July 1698; MHS 1882)

- (24) I could procure some cotton of M^r Gibs, if that weare paid which **is** allready **owing to** him. (Wait to Fitz JW; 17 April 1671; MHS 1882)

JW uses *be* + *wanting* four times. JW's earliest use appears in *only thy company is wanting*, which is addressed to Margaret in 1622. JW's later usage is exclusively with modal auxiliaries as in (10) with the meaning 'to be lacking or missing' (*OED* s.v. *want*, v. 1. a.; *wanting*, pres. pp. and ppl. a. 1. a.). Son John and grandsons Fitz and Wait use *be wanting* in the same meaning but often in negative sentences.

In JW's 33 *be* + *-ing* instances, verbs of state meanings (*be beholding*, *be living*, *be wanting*, *be fitting*, *be pleasing*, and *be soliciting*) account for 39%, while motion verbs (*go*, *come*, *ride*, *remove*, and *turn*) account for 33%.²²

3.3. Future use

Verb meanings of going and coming may have developed their semantic function of futurity earlier than the other verb meanings (see Núñez-Pertejo 2004a: 24-5). Out of 230 present-tense *be* + *-ing* instances in CWC, frequently used verb types are *be going* and *be coming*.²³ Núñez-Pertejo (2004a: 25) mentions that the combination of *be* + *-ing* and an adverbial makes the idea of a future meaning clearer.

JW uses an adverbial *this night* in a purpose *to*-infinitive clause in (25). *This night* refers to a future time, judging from the fact that JW's fleet actually sailed on that day (see RCW 1895: 7).²⁴ The time of the fleet's

²² I referred to motion verbs listed in 'Verbs of Motion' of Levin (1993: 263-70).

²³ The raw frequencies of *be going* and *be coming* are 59 and 13, respectively. These verbs occur first and second most frequently among all 377 *be* + *-ing* instances.

²⁴ Robert C. Winthrop writes as follows: 'The little fleet sailed from Southampton on the 22d, and from "the Cowes" on the 29th, of March, 1629-30; but they were soon compelled to come to an anchor again off Yarmouth, where the wind detained them for more than a week. On Thursday, the 8th of April, they weighed anchor again; and, on that day, the voyage may fairly be said to have commenced'.

preparation, however, can be interpreted as including ‘now’ (the moment of JW’s writing). The time-span seems to stretch to a future, and the preparation is not completed as of JW’s writing.

- (25) We are now come safe (I praise God) to the Cowes. The wind is now very fair, (God be praised,) and we *are preparing* to set sail *this night*. (JW to his son JW Jr.; 22 March 1629[-30]; RCW 1864)

The above ‘preparing’ situation is touched upon in another letter dated 28 March 1630, where JW writes of it as an event of ‘this week and more’ and continues to write of an ongoing event of the 28th by using *are preparing* as being of ‘this day’—*The wind hath been against us this week and more; but this day it is come fair to the north, so as we are preparing (by God’s assistance) to set sail in the morning*. JW’s famous *Journal* starts on the next day, 29 March 1630 (see Dunn et al. 1996: 1).

Leech (2004: 33) exemplifies ‘anticipated happenings’ with and without a future time adverbial in PDE. Two instances of *be + going* including (16a) above imply JW’s future plan contextually. Clearer cases appear in his grandson Wait’s letters with the following future time adverbials as in (26): *this spring, within an hour, this week, this afternoon, tomorrow, by the next ships, and next week*.

- (26) M^r Wharton tels me he has r^d a letter from France about some that *are coming this sprīg* to make rosin, (Wait to JW Jr.; 21 March 1670[-1]; MHS 1882)

An innovative use with a modal auxiliary *will* indicating a future event as a matter of course occurs also in Wait’s letters as in (27).²⁵

- (27) here is Foster *will be going this weeke or next* at farthest (Wait to Fitz JW; 12 June 1699; MHS 1882).

Another innovative use of *be going + to*-infinitive occurs only in the third generation in (28).

²⁵ Quirk et al. (1985: 210, 216-7) explain that there are two uses of this combination (*will/shall be + -ing*): ‘no special comment’ functioning as a temporal frame and ‘future as a matter of course’ without any volitional meaning.

(28) We *are going to carry* the children to Salem *this weeke or next*. (Wait to Fitz JW; 27 July 1687; MHS 1882)

3.4. *To-infinitive + be + -ing*

The use of *to*-infinitive as in (11) above is rare but occurs four times in JW's letters. Two instances of *to be + -ing* function as modifiers for a preceding noun, and the other two instances seem to function as a direction.²⁶ The *to be + -ing* form is used by the third generation (Fitz JW and Wait), but most of these cases appear as part of a verbal complement, that is, *intend to/think to/seem to + be + -ing*.

4. Concluding remarks

JW's 33 instances of *be + -ing* are combined with present- and past-tense *be*, modal auxiliaries *may*, *will*, and *shall*, and *to be* in my letter corpus. JW's use of *be + -ing* occurs more frequently with verbs having state meanings (39%) than those with motion meanings (33%). All of the state verbs in *be + -ing* including *be beholding* are semantically the same as the predicate use of the corresponding participial adjectives. Although the genre in the present study is restricted to letters, the empirical examination of present-tense *be + -ing* shows that this form is more favoured in emphatic contexts than in the simple present up to the third generation. JW's usage of *be + -ing* seems to indicate polysemy similar to the Present-Day English's progressive aspect: his first instance *is sitting up* appears together with the clause signalling his subjective view, and his uses of *be going* and *be preparing* seem to be a plausible IN PROGRESS contextually although clear topic time 'now' is not always shown. JW's instances of '*be going to + place*' indicate a future time or plan contextually. JW's third generation starts using more salient future time adverbials in *be + -ing* clauses. The variety of combination patterns gradually increases up to the third generation.

²⁶ Two instances of directional meaning occur in *but to be going and coming awhile and afterward to do as God shall offer occasion* (JW to JW Jr.; 7 April 1628; RCW 1864).

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