Habitual BE in American English

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This paper examines an obscure use of the verb BE in English, which under certain circumstances may be inflected as *be's* to indicate the habituation of a predicate (type *If she just be's (??is) herself, she'll do fine in the debate*). After a description of the data, I show that this construction differs in its distribution from the habitual BE familiar from African American English, making it unlikely to be a borrowing. I then give an account of the semantics and syntax of habitual *be's* as distinct from the simple copula, observing that habitual *be's* is restricted to just those predicates compatible with the progressive *is being* construction and that both constructions must have a stage-level interpretation and an agentive subject.

1. Introduction

It is well known that African American English (AAE) has a use of the verb BE that indicates habitual action (Green 2000), as in *Bruce be singing*, which "means that Bruce actually sings (usually sings) on particular occasions" (ibid.:3). Yet there is a similar usage of BE in at least some American dialects of English other than AAE (including my own), which has not been widely discussed in the literature. Commonly in spoken and written English stative predicates such as the one in the sentence *I <u>am</u> lazy* (i.e., I am characterized as a lazy person) can be made eventive by the addition of *being*, thus *I <u>am being</u> lazy* (i.e., I am acting lazy but may or may not be characterized as a lazy person). But for many native speakers of American dialects other than AAE the habitual equivalent of such sentences may be expressed by what appears to be an uninflected BE, thus *I <u>be</u> lazy (from time to time)* (i.e., I act lazy on an indefinite number of occasions but may or may not be characterized as a lazy person). Remarkably, this BE does not surface as *am*/*are*/*is*, despite showing person and number agreement, as is clear in the third-person singular: *Ian <u>be's</u> lazy (sometimes)*. Note that its inflection as *be's* sets it apart, morphologically, from the habitual *be* found in AAE. It has other important distributional differences from the AAE construction as well, described in detail in Section 3 below.

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This construction has been noticed by Payne (2010, 2013: 30–2), confirming its existence in an online corpus study. Though regularly habitual in a main clause, it may be non-habitual in certain dependent contexts. Payne (2013: 31–2) provides the minimal pair in (1). Both of these sentences have essentially the same interpretation and may be produced on different occasions by the same speaker. Often, in fact, a speaker will produce — or half produce — a sentence like (1a), then quickly "correct" themself to a sentence of the type (1b), which is considered standard. However, as Payne (2013: 32) notes, "[(1b)] doesn't capture the sense of volitionality and activity that is nicely expressed in [(1a)]"— an intuition which I share, so much so that I find (1b) to be just barely grammatical.

(1) a. *If she just **be's** herself, she'll do fine in the debate.*
b. *If she just **is** herself, she'll do fine in the debate.*

As a shorthand for all persons and numbers, I will refer to the construction of the type in (1a) as "the *be's* construction" (or simply "*be's*"). Unlike the habitual BE in AAE, the application of *be's* among speakers who have it appears to be quite marginal. Further, its occurrence is not clearly characteristic of any particular dialect or dialect group, but rather seems to exist to varying degrees in the grammars of speakers from diverse backgrounds. However, non-American English speakers tend to find a sentence like (1a) ungrammatical (*), while Americans are more likely to view it as acceptable, if non-standard, or else questionable without being altogether ungrammatical (?). For this reason, I will refer to the (non- AAE) varieties of English that have this usage of BE simply as "Non-standard American English" (NSAE). This term is meant to acknowledge that the habitual use of BE is not part of the prescribed grammar of what might be called "standard" American English, and that it is not the same as the habitual BE found in AAE but is widespread across American dialects. However, the usage and frequency of application of this construction may vary even within speech communities or across utterances of individual speakers. Native-speaker judgments throughout this paper are my own and those of my colleagues who share this feature, who belong to a variety of age groups, backgrounds, and regions of upbringing within the United States. All numbered examples in this paper are NSAE unless otherwise noted.

Habitual *be's* may be particularly prominent among children (Payne 2013: 30–1), albeit of a fairly advanced age. The utterance in (2) was produced by a 12-year-old in casual conversation. According to Payne (2013: 31), "The context was the behavior of one of her friends who attended a birthday party."

(2) "He**'s** not silly; he just **be's** silly when he's around girls."

The contrast between *(i)s* and *be's* in (2), both in form and in function, suggests that we are dealing with distinct lexical items — a matter treated in Section 4 below.[1]

The past-tense of *be's* is *be'd* (*beed* in Payne 2013), though it appears to be largely restricted to the speech of children (ibid.:32). Like *be's*, *be'd* is eventive in meaning. Unlike *be's*, however, *be'd* is more readily used in non-habitual contexts and may refer to a single event in the past, as shown in (3). This is essentially the same behavior we see in other simple present and preterite pairs in English (e.g., *walks* regularly only has a habitual interpretation (at least in matrix clauses), whereas *walked* may be habitual or refer to a single event).

(3) "I gave the monitor to her while she '**be'd** the doctor,' using the monitor to poke around my feet." (ex. from Payne 2013: 32)

The utterance in (3) was produced by an adult quoting a child who had been pretending to be a doctor. Nonetheless, both *be's* and (less often) *be'd* are occasionally produced by native speakers of all ages (including my dissertation adviser, born in 1948).

This past-tense usage appears to be more readily accessible with *do*-support, as seen in (4a) (and cf. (29b) below), again produced by a child (around Christmas time) but in keeping with my own grammaticality judgments. The grammaticality of the corresponding declarative sentence without *do*-support (not produced by the child) in (4b) is perhaps more questionable, though no more so than that found in (3) above. In any case, the speaker seems to be avoiding saying *Were you naughty or nice this year?* because the predicate generalizes about a series of voluntary *actions* (instances of behaving naughty or nice) rather than a state of being: in other words, 'Did you act/behave naughty or nice (most often) this year?'

(4) a. "**Did** you **be** naughty or nice this year?"
b. (?)*I **be'd** nice this year.*

At minimum, we can say that habitual *be's* is prone to surface in place of the standard *is* in certain definable contexts. Often its use is "optional," but sometimes it verges on obligatory, as shown in (5) and (6). In (5), the forms *be* and *be's* are preferred to the copula or other possible alternatives in order to convey the sense

1. But note that the second instance of *(i)s* in (2) — in the temporal clause dependent on the clause containing *be's* — is realized as *(i)s* despite being habitual. The rules governing the production of habitual *be's* vs. *(i)s* are discussed further below, but essentially *be's* requires an agentive subject, which is available for the predicate BE SILLY (an action the child can willfully engage in) but lacking for the predicate BE AROUND GIRLS (a circumstance the child simply finds himself in). Cf. (20) below.

'act(s) like'. Using the copula (*are*/*is*) in such cases would undesirably assign an attribute to the subject when what is in question is how the subject behaves or ought to behave in order to achieve some outcome.

(5) a. A: *How do you get people to like you?* B: *I just* ***be*** *(#am) myself/friendly/confident.*
b. A: *How does Stephanie get people to like her?* B: *She just* ***be's*** *(#is) herself/friendly/confident.*

(6) shows that the form *be's* is preferred when the intended meaning is habitual, asserting that the subject tends to behave in a dramatic fashion, but making no claims about whether or not he is a dramatic person.

(6) a. *I hate that Ian* ***be's****(/?is) dramatic.* HABITUAL, STAGE LEVEL
b. *I hate that Ian* ***is*** *(#be's) dramatic.* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OR STAGE LEVEL

The embedded clause in (6a) thus expresses the habituation of the particular stage-level event *Ian is being dramatic*. It quantifies over a set of occasions, such that on any given occasion the sentence *Ian is being dramatic* would hold true. The claim in (6a) is that Ian occasionally or regularly engages in dramatic behavior. Whether or not Ian is himself dramatic is not asserted. When the simple copula *is* is used, as in (6b), the meaning is strictly ambiguous between individual- and stage-level states.[2] It most readily has a characterizing sense, namely that Ian is a dramatic person (individual-level state), but it may also be interpreted as stage level, especially if an adverbial phrase like *right now* is added. The sentence *Ian is dramatic right now* is similar to but distinct from *Ian is being dramatic right now*. Both are stage level, but in the first sentence, containing the simple copula, the property DRAMATIC is attributed to the subject (however temporarily); it is a claim about Ian. In the second sentence, with *is being*, this property is attributed instead to the *actions* of the subject; it is a claim about Ian's behavior. (6b) does not strictly require that Ian actually exhibit dramatic behavior on any particular occasion. Though some speakers may use the form *is* to convey the habitual meaning as well (6a), when the form *be's* is used it can only have the habitual interpretation (e.g., one cannot say **I hate that Ian be's dramatic right now*). The *be's* construction is thus a useful way for speakers to disambiguate the habitual and non-habitual meanings.

The goal of this paper is to examine the *be's* construction in detail, providing a description of its usage and enumerating the ways in which it differs from the

2. On the individual level/stage level contrast, see, e.g., Carlson 1977, Kratzer 1995, inter alios. Essentially, individual-level states are intrinsic properties of individuals, such as BE TALL or BE RED, while stage-level states are transitory properties of the type BE ANGRY or BE SLEEPY.

habitual BE construction familiar from AAE. I then provide an analysis of the data that accounts for the observed distribution of the *be's* construction. This is closely linked to the distribution of the more common *is being* construction, such that the analysis put forth here necessarily accounts for the production of *is/was being* versus the simple copula *is/was*, in order to account for the production of *be's/be'd*.

The structure of this paper is as follows: I begin with a general description of the data (§2). I then compare the habitual usage of BE with the well documented habitual BE found in AAE (§3). Next, I provide lexical/morphosyntactic (§4), semantic (§5), and syntactic (§6) analyses of the phenomenon. Lastly (§7), I offer conclusions and directions for further research.

2. Data and description

Be's is licensed only in a very restricted corner of the grammar, typically to express the habituation of a stage-level predicate derived from an individual-level state with the construction *is being*. In other words, the *be's* construction is the habitual "version" of the *is being* construction. This may be thought of, intuitively at least, along the lines shown in (7).

(7) *is silly* ⇒ *is being silly* ⇒ *be's silly*

However, *be's* is not generally available for use with intrinsically stage-level states, such as BE DRUNK, BE SLEEPY, or BE ANGRY, as shown in (8). This distribution exactly matches that of the *is being* construction, shown in (9). I will refer to the verb of these non-copular *be's/is being* constructions as "substantive BE," to distinguish it from the copula.

(8) a. **Ian* ***be's*** *drunk/sleepy/angry.* INTRINSICALLY STAGE LEVEL
b. *Ian* ***be's*** *smart/romantic/cute.* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ⇒ STAGE LEVEL

(9) a. **Ian* ***is being*** *drunk/sleepy/angry.* INTRINSICALLY STAGE LEVEL
b. *Ian* ***is being*** *smart/romantic/cute.* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ⇒ STAGE LEVEL

Instead of BE, intrinsically stage-level predicates may use GET (in the sense 'become') when habituated or progressivized, as in (10).

(10) a. *Ian* ***gets*** *drunk/sleepy/angry.* HABITUAL-INCHOATIVE
b. *Ian* ***is getting*** *drunk/sleepy/angry.* PROGRESSIVE-INCHOATIVE

Yet some intrinsically stage-level states *are* compatible with substantive BE, as in (11). These tend to exclude use with GET (**Ian is getting/gets on his best behavior*).

(11) *Ian **is being/be's on his best behavior** for the supervisor.*
INTRINSICALLY STAGE LEVEL

On the other hand, not all individual-level states can be habituated. The ones that cannot are exactly those that cannot be progressivized, shown in (12).

(12) a. **Ian **be's** tall/handsome/undefined/organic/a teacher/middle class.*
HABITUAL
b. **Ian **is being** tall/handsome/undefined/organic/a teacher/middle class.*
PROGRESSIVE

It may be said, then, that if a state (whether stage or individual level) can be treated as a stage-level event with the progressive *is being* construction, it can also be habituated with the *be's* construction in the dialects that have it. I will argue later on (§6) that a predicate's compatibility with *is being* and *be's* depends on the extent to which the property it describes can be engaged in as a behavior or carried out as an action.

Substantive BE is not particularly remarkable when compared to non-stative verbs of English, which also use the simple present tense to signify a habitual action in a matrix clause (13a), while the progressive construction typically refers to a single event that is currently underway (13b).

(13) a. *Ian **smokes**.* (cf. *Ian be's reckless.*) HABITUAL
b. *Ian **is smoking**.* (cf. *Ian is being reckless.*) PROGRESSIVE

Habitual *be's* requires a restrictive temporal clause or some equivalent expression of an event on which the main predicate is contingent, whether expressed overtly or supplied pragmatically. This temporal contingency is often expressed by a restrictive *when*-clause or prepositional phrase, as in (14a) and (14b). When not overtly expressed ((14a)–(14c)) or supplied by the discourse (14d), the restrictive event may be understood pragmatically ((14e)–(14f)). So, (14e) and (14f) say that Ian behaves in a dramatic manner *on particular occasions* not overtly specified in the sentence or immediate discourse context. They cannot mean that Ian is a dramatic person in general, irrespective of his behaviors on particular occasions. Thus, in Green's (2000: 11–13) terms, predicates with *be's* represent habitual events rather than generic ones (see §3 below).[3]

(14) a. *John Wayne (always) **be's a man** <u>in the face of danger</u>.* OVERT
b. *My cat **be's nice** <u>(only) when he wants something</u>.* OVERT
c. *I hate it <u>when(ever)</u> Ian **be's dramatic**.* OVERT

3. In this respect *be's* differs from other eventive verbs of the type in (13a) above, which may have a (non-habitual) generic reading, as discussed in Section 3 below.

d. A: *What does your cat do when he wants something?*
B: *He* ***be's nice*** *to me.* DISCOURSE
e. *I hate that/how Ian* ***be's (so) dramatic.*** PRAGMATICS
f. *Ian (always)* ***be's/is always being (so) dramatic.*** PRAGMATICS

Because this *be's* regularly expresses habituality, the past corresponding to it is often not *be'd* but *would be* (optionally *was*), whose use is likewise contingent on the co-occurrence of some restrictive event, expressed or implied. Habitual *be'd* is, however, occasionally met with. Like *be's* in the present, *would be* or *be'd* signal habitual past events rather than generic ones.

(15) a. *John Wayne* ***would (always) be a man/(always) be'd a man*** *in the face of danger* (?was (always)/#used to be).
b. *My cat* ***would (always) be/?be'd nice*** *to me when he wanted something.*
c. *I hated it when(ever) Ian* ***would be/?be'd dramatic.***
d. A: *What did she do to get people to like her?* B: *She* ***would (just) be/was (just)/(just) be'd*** *friendly.*
e. *I remember that/how Ian* ***would be/?be'd annoying.***

With *would be/be'd* may be contrasted the construction *used to be*, which is compatible with individual-level states (*Ian used to be tall in middle school*), whereas *would be* and *be'd* are not (**Ian would (always) be tall/(always) be'd tall in middle school*). In addition, *used to* does not require any temporal restriction, unlike habitual *would*, as can be seen in the contrast between *Ian used to ride the bus to school* (with no further comment) vs. *Ian would ride the bus to school whenever his parents couldn't drive him* (this sentence feels incomplete without the underlined portion, whether stated or supplied pragmatically).

Outside the *be's* construction, substantive BE is necessarily eventive but only optionally or contextually habitual, as in (16).

(16) *I saw Ian* ***be nice*** *to his friend* (i.e., once or regularly). EVENTIVE

In its non-habitual uses, the past tense of substantive BE is *be'd* (unambiguously eventive) or *was* (ambiguously stative or eventive).

(17) a. A: *What did you do on your meditation retreat?*
B: *We (just)* ***be'd****(/?were/?kept/#got/#would be) quiet for 10 days.*
b. [Jokingly, after a successful exam:] *I* ***be'd(/#was) smart!*** (≈ 'I did a smart thing').
c. A: *How did you get those people to like you?*
B: *I (just)* ***be'd****(/?was/#got) friendly/myself.*
d. [Trying to stay productive:] *I* ***be'd/was good*** *all day but then I binged an entire season of my favorite TV show.*

In a small clause dependent on a verb of perception, eventivized individual-level states must have an overt BE ((18a)–(18b)). Intrinsically stage-level states typically do not have BE in such a context ((18c)–(18d)), unless they consist of a predicate over which the subject has agency (18e).

(18) a. **I saw a man **dramatic**.* INDIVIDUAL OR STAGE LEVEL
b. *I saw a man **be(ing) dramatic**.* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ⇒ STAGE LEVEL
c. *I saw Ian **(*be(ing)) naked/drunk/angry**.* INTRINSICALLY STAGE LEVEL
d. *I saw Ian **(*be(ing)) in a bad mood/at his worst/best**.* INTRINSICALLY STAGE LEVEL
e. *I saw Ian **(be(ing)) on his best behavior**.* INTRINSICALLY STAGE LEVEL, AGENTIVE

Intuitively, the subject of habitual *be's*, like that of *is being*, is an agent (i.e., the predicate is treated like an unergative intransitive verb). I provide semantic and syntactic support for this intuition later on (§6). For now, it is enough to observe the near synonymy of sentences with BE and ACT in (19). As (19) shows, substantive BE is typically able to be substituted with ACT in a similar meaning, both verbs having agentive subjects. The copula cannot be substituted with ACT in this way (cf. (20) and (21) below).

(19) a. *Ian **be's weird/rude/arrogant/pedantic** sometimes* HABITUAL
b. *Ian **acts weird/rude/arrogant/?pedantic** sometimes.* HABITUAL
c. *Ian **is being weird/rude/arrogant/pedantic**.* PROGRESSIVE
d. *Ian **is acting weird/rude/arrogant/?pedantic**.* PROGRESSIVE

Because substantive BE demands an agentive subject (cf. Payne 2013: 32), when there is no agent the copula is preferred even in habitual sentences with expressed temporal restriction, as shown by (20b) in contrast to (20a) (cf. (2) and n.1 above). Note here that where *be's* is licit, so are *acts* and *gets* (but cf. (10)–(11) above). The progressive of substantive BE has a similar distribution, as shown by (21a) in comparison to (21b).

(20) a. *My cat **be's/acts/gets/?is (extra) cute** when it wants food/attention.* HABITUAL
b. *My cat **is/looks/?gets/#acts/#be's (extra) cute** after a bath.* HABITUAL

(21) a. *My cat **is being/is acting/*is (extra) cute** because it wants food/attention.* PROGRESSIVE
b. *My cat **is/is looking/#is acting/#is being (extra) cute** since it had a bath.* PROGRESSIVE

3. Comparison to "aspectual" BE in AAE

The habitual use of BE in NSAE resembles "aspectual" BE in AAE in certain key respects but is nevertheless markedly different in its distribution and range of application. I base my comparison on the observations and analysis of Green (2000). All numbered examples in this section are NSAE; they are all labeled as such so as to avoid any confusion about which English is being referred to.

In both AAE and NSAE, the simple present tense is ambiguous between habitual interpretations and generic (or "capacity") interpretations. By Green's (2000) definitions, a habitual interpretation refers to an eventuality that holds true at regular or semi-regular intervals and is actually instantiated on particular occasions (e.g., *Ian sings* can be taken to mean that Ian is a singer or someone who tends to sing). The generic interpretation, on the other hand, assigns a characteristic attribute to the subject but does not require that the event be instantiated in the real world at any particular time (e.g., *This machine kills fascists*, written on Woody Guthrie's guitar). Unlike the simple present tense of other verbs, the *be's* construction lacks the generic reading (cf. ibid.:10 and see n.3 above), as shown in (23) in comparison to (22).

(22) (N)SAE

a. *Ian **smokes** and he **drinks beer** (in general/sometimes).* GENERIC OR HABITUAL

b. *Ian **smokes** when he drinks beer.* HABITUAL

c. *This car **goes/can go** 120mph (#sometimes).* GENERIC (CAPACITY)

d. *Mice **squeak**.* GENERIC

(23) NSAE

a. *Ian **is reckless** (in general/sometimes).* GENERIC OR HABITUAL

b. *Ian **be's reckless** (when he drinks).* HABITUAL

c. *This car **is/#be's fast**.* GENERIC (CAPACITY)

d. *Mice **are/*be squeaky**.* GENERIC

Unlike AAE, where *be* can be used for stage-level or individual-level states (Green 2000:20), in NSAE *be's* is not generally used with intrinsically stage-level states ("transitory properties"), as discussed in Section 2 above and further demonstrated in (24).[4] This is true even under the habitual interpretation. Note that this matches the distribution of the progressive *is being*.

4. Though stage-level states are not altogether incompatible with substantive BE, as seen in (11) above. The grammaticality depends rather on whether the predicate may be represented as an (agentive) action or not, as discussed in Section 6 below.

(24) NSAE
a. *I **am/*be happy** (when I get what I want).* GENERIC OR HABITUAL
b. **I **am being happy**.* PROGRESSIVE
c. *I **am/get/*be scared** of other people (in general/sometimes).* GENERIC OR HABITUAL
d. **I **am being scared** of other people.* PROGRESSIVE

Exceptional are sentences in which substantive BE coerces a sense of *pretending* to be such-and-such (cf. Green 2000:16), as in *Ian is being drunk* (i.e., acting as if drunk) or *Ian be's (i.e., acts) happy so the kids won't know about the divorce*. These may be felicitously uttered only if their copular equivalents (*is drunk*, *is happy*) are in fact false. Such cases of pretending are not restricted to intrinsically stage-level states but may also apply to those derived from individual-level states, as in the case of *be's the doctor* or *is being the doctor*, which typically apply only to cases in which *is the doctor* is false, as when a child is pretending to be a doctor as part of a game (cf. (3) above). In general, substantive BE in (N)SAE has a sense of pretending when used with a predicate over which the subject would not otherwise have agency, whether a stage-level or individual-level state. We will return to this point later on (§6 below).

NSAE differs from AAE also in that the habitual BE in NSAE cannot take a VP complement (type AAE *Bruce be singing*), only an AP, DP, or PP complement, as shown in (25). This is exactly the distribution of predicates of the *is being* construction in NSAE, as shown in (26).[5]

(25) NSAE
a. **Ian **be's smoking** when his parents are out of town.* HABITUAL
b. *Ian **be's affectionate/a friend/on his best behavior** when he wants something.* HABITUAL

(26) (N)SAE
a. **Ian **is being smoking**.* PROGRESSIVE
b. *Ian **is being affectionate/a friend/on his best behavior**.* PROGRESSIVE

5. Where AAE has the construction with aspectual BE + present participle to unambiguously signal a habitual event, other varieties of English may use the progressive construction with the (inflected) copula in habitual contexts. Unlike the simple present, such progressives cannot be generic in interpretation, only habitual. Thus, *This printer prints a hundred pages a minute* may be taken as a generalization about the printer's capabilities regardless of whether or not the printer has ever actually done so, whereas *This printer is always printing a hundred pages a minute* requires the event to have actually been instantiated on particular occasions and cannot be interpreted as a generalization about the printer's capabilities. The latter sentence is thus similar in meaning to the AAE sentence *This printer be printing a hundred pages a minute*, discussed by Green (2000:4).

Though in AAE *be* can be used with with bare plurals and indefinite subjects, as in *Mice be squeaking* (Green 2000: 1), habitual *be's* in NSAE generally cannot (**Mice be squeaky*), as shown in (27), unless some restrictive clause is added explicitly indicating that the action is habitual rather than generic, as in (27b) and (27f), where the *when*-clause is required if the sentence is to be at all grammatical (if still somewhat odd, hence the question mark).

(27) NSAE

a. *Dogs **are** good.* GENERIC, INDEFINITE
b. *?Dogs **be** good *(when they want something).* HABITUAL, INDEFINITE
c. *My dog **be's** good/a good boy when he wants something.* HABITUAL, DEFINITE
d. *A final exam **is** scary.* GENERIC, INDEFINITE
e. **A final exam **be's** scary.* HABITUAL, INDEFINITE
f. *?A dog **be's** good *(when it wants something).* HABITUAL, INDEFINITE

In AAE, aspectual BE can have a reading "in which there is a universal interpretation of the bare plural" (Green 2000: 22). Here, BE serves to coerce an iterated reading of the individual-level state that refers to "situations of encountering" the entity referred to (Green 2000: 23). This kind of coercion is unavailable in NSAE, as shown in (28).

(28) NSAE

*Some dogs **are/*be big** and some of them **are/*be small**.* ITERATED GENERICITY

Overall, the distributional differences between the habitual BE found in AAE and that found in NSAE make it unlikely that the NSAE usage is a result of direct borrowing from AAE (cf. Payne 2010: 19, 2013: 31).[6]

As will be seen, I will essentially adopt Green's (2000) semantic/pragmatic analysis of aspectual BE in AAE for substantive BE in NSAE. However, due to the differences observed here, this analysis will not quite work for NSAE as is, without further comment. The main issue is that substantive BE cannot generally be used for intrinsically stage-level states in NSAE, as it can in AAE. This differs not only from AAE but also from other languages often cited as having two words BE (the copula and the "substantive"), such as Spanish, Irish, and Scottish Gaelic (cf. Ramchand 1996, Green 2000: 5–6). In these languages, substantive BE can be used for stage-level or individual-level states,[7] while the copula is reserved for

6. This is to be distinguished from the frequent *imitation* of the AAE construction by non-AAE speakers, which typically involves parroting entire phrases, as in the popular expression *It (really do) be like that sometimes* — a phrase that has acquired "meme" status (https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/it-really-do-be-like-that-sometimes).

individual-level states alone.[8] By contrast, in NSAE, it is the copula that can be used for stage- or individual-level states, while substantive BE tends not to be used with intrinsically stage-level states like BE DRUNK, BE SCARED, or BE NAKED. Therefore, no analysis of habitual BE devised for these other languages will readily apply to NSAE, nor fully account for the data presented above. Instead, I will draw on various proposals in the semantic and syntactic literature in order to arrive at (or at least approach) an adequate analysis.

4. Distinguishing substantive BE from the copula

The copula has been analyzed as a separate lexical item from what is here called substantive BE (Becker 2004, Green 2000).[9] I will refer to these as BE_1 and BE_2 respectively (BE_2 = "substantive BE".) Evidence for this lexical division includes (29), involving negation and showing that the two differ both syntactically and semantically, even in Standard American English (SAE).

(29) SAE

a. *Why **aren't** you my friend?* NO *do*-SUPPORT, GENERIC

b. *Why **don't** you **be** my friend?* *do*-SUPPORT, INCHOATIVE

With *do*-support, BE_1 is impossible, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the passive in this position, as in (30).

(30) **Why don't you **be ridiculed?*** PASSIVE

Thus, while BE_1 has special syntactic properties, BE_2 behaves like an ordinary verb (cf. *Why don't you run?*). I therefore follow prior research in assuming that there are two lexical items BE. The copula (BE_1) is typically spelled out with the familiar inflected forms *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, while the substantive (BE_2) is typically spelled out as *be*, as in (29b) above, with a participial form *being*, and *be's* in the

7. E.g., stage-level in Spanish *Ian está enojado* 'Ian is angry (at the moment)', *Este postre está muy rico* 'This dessert is (i.e., tastes) delicious'; individual-level *El correo está en la esquina* 'The post office is on the corner' (latter two exx. Green 2000: 6).

8. E.g., Spanish *María es medico* 'María is a doctor'; *Las flores son bonitas* 'The flowers are beautiful' (exx. Green 2000: 6).

9. Arche (2006: 83 ff.) rejects this, deriving the observed differences syntactically rather than lexically. Though I find her analysis attractive, it is designed to explain "dynamic copular clauses" of the type *Ian was cruel/kind to his mother*, with the subject originating in the specifier of the "relational PP" complement, and it is not clear how it can be generalized to adjectives that do not take such complements.

third-person singular of the habitual construction. Paradigmatically speaking, BE$_2$ is a regular weak verb (Payne 2013: 31) with a simple present form *be('s)* and a preterite *be'd* (compare *walk*, *walks*, *walked*), taking *do*-support in questions (cf. *Why don't you walk?*). However, the paradigm of BE$_1$ does include some *be* forms as well, thus formally overlapping with the paradigm of BE$_2$ in certain places. To make this explicit, I present the complete paradigms of BE$_1$ and BE$_2$ in Table 1.

Table 1. Paradigms of BE$_1$ (copula) and BE$_2$ (substantive) in NSAE

	BE$_1$	**BE$_2$**
present	is, am, are ([±GEN])	be's, be ([±HAB])
past	was, were	be'd / would be
NEG	isn't	doesn't be
emphatic	*is*	*does* be
interrogative	is…?	does… be…?
imperative/prohibitive	—	(don't) be…!
subjunctive	be	be
progressive	(is) being (PASSIVE)	(is) being (ACTIVE)
participle/gerund	being	being
tenseless/small clause	Ø	be, being
infinitive	(to) be	(to) be (being)
past participle	been	been being
future	will/gonna be	gonna be/will be (being)
modal	would/could/etc. be	would/could/etc. be being

Though NSAE speakers often express apprehension about producing *be's*, or will "correct" themselves after doing so, *be's* seems to surface despite the speaker's hesitation, as a sort of compromise between form and function. When the speaker wishes to express an eventive meaning unambiguously, for which the copula is sometimes insufficient or misleading, the form *be's* may be used instead. For example, *I hate that Ian* ***is dramatic*** lacks a readily accessible stage-level interpretation and would ordinarily be taken to mean that Ian is a dramatic person. On the other hand, *I hate that Ian* ***is being*** *dramatic (right now)* and its habitual counterpart *I hate that Ian* ***be's*** *dramatic (so often)* have a palpably stage-level meaning and do not imply that Ian is dramatic in general, only that he currently or occasionally behaves in a dramatic manner.

If it is correct that *be's* is used to avoid ambiguity, we should expect that no special form is available to other lexical items that lack this kind of ambiguity. This

is borne out, as can be seen in the case of HAVE, which does not have a form **have's* under any circumstances, as shown in (31), even when habitual (31b) or habitual and agentive (31c), in contrast to *is being* ⇒ *be's* in (31a).

(31) a. *Ian* ***is being silly*** *(right now)* ⇒ *Ian* ***be's silly*** *when his friends are visiting.*
b. *Ian* ***is having a nightmare*** *(right now)* ⇒ *Ian* ***has (*have's) nightmares*** *when he watches scary movies.*
c. *Ian* ***is having a sandwich*** (= eating a sandwich) ⇒ *Ian* ***has (*have's) sandwiches*** *sometimes.*

Although, as with $BE_{1/2}$, there is both an auxiliary and a lexical HAVE, which might be thought to be ambiguous at least some of the time, HAVE differs from BE in that the two verbs HAVE show a syntactic complementary distribution: The auxiliary HAVE only takes VP complements, while lexical HAVE never does. By contrast, both BE_1 and BE_2 take non-VP complements, and so the latter is distinguishable from the former in habitual contexts only by means of the special form *be's*.

To summarize, while BE_1 and BE_2 may be homophonous in certain parts of their paradigms (see Table 1 above), I assume that the contrast between them is maintained where ambiguity of meaning is to be avoided, most especially to differentiate habitual events (type *be's funny*) from simple attributes (type *is funny*). Such ambiguity does not arise for the two verbs HAVE, due in part to their syntactic complementary distribution, which provides no motivation to distinguish lexical HAVE from the auxiliary by producing a form like **have's*.

5. Semantics of BE_2

For considerations of space, I will not go into the details of the semantic and pragmatic issues raised by habitual BE. Green's (2000) semantic/pragmatic analysis of aspectual BE in AAE is essentially sufficient to account for habitual BE in NSAE — that is, assuming that syntactic differences between the two dialects mediate to account for the far more limited range of application of habitual BE in NSAE (viz. its incompatibility with VP complements, etc.). This is shown in (32), where *e* is an event variable and *P* is a "predicate variable… used to capture the pragmatic restrictions that are not given in the sentence" (Green 2000: 11).

(32) *Ian be's silly.*
HAB_e [(P, e)] [be silly (Ian, e)]
Habitually, on pragmatically salient occasions, Ian is being silly.

Note that a distinction between habitual and non-habitual genericity is required by this analysis, despite Boneh and Doron's (2010: 361–2) rejection of it, because

such a distinction is morphologically encoded in NSAE and AAE (see §3 above). I do, however, assume Boneh and Doron's (2010) HAB operator as adjunct to VP.

Ramchand's (1996) treatment of substantive and copular BE in Scottish Gaelic is also relevant here. Her distinction between a "Davidsonian" event variable *e* (after Davidson 1967) and a "Kratzerian" event variable *s* (after Kratzer 1995) helps explain how syntactically derived stage-level states (type *is being/be's*) can have an "extra" event layer that is lacking in individual-level predicates.

(33) shows that in a stage-level predication "the most external variable (the one that the rest of the formula is 'about') is a general situational variable" *s*, whereas in an individual-level predication "the most external variable of the formula is one corresponding to a non-event individual" *x* (Ramchand 1996:177). She notes further (ibid.:178) that "the material inside the outer square brackets can be of two different types. In the stage-level case, it must represent a property of events, and in the individual-level case it must represent property of individuals." In other words, a sentence like *The statue is in the garden* could be introducing either the presupposition that a situation exists and is a 'the statue being in the garden' event (33a), or the presupposition that the statue exists and one of its properties is that it is in the garden (33b).

(33) *The statue is in the garden* currently (a) or permanently (b)

a. STAGE-LEVEL PREDICATE
There is some situation *s* that has the property of being an event of a particular kind.
∃s[λe['in the garden'(the statue, e)]](s)

b. INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL PREDICATE
There is some individual *x* that has a particular property.
∃x: x=the statue [λy[∃e['in the garden'(y, e)]]](x)

Thus, sentences with individual-level predication do not contain a "Kratzerian" event variable *s*, whereas their stage-level counterparts do. So a sentence like *Ian is silly* may have either interpretation depending on the context. On the other hand, the corresponding sentence with substantive BE — *Ian is being silly* — forces a stage-level interpretation and so necessarily contains a "Kratzerian" event variable *s*. I assume, then, that substantive BE introduces a "Kratzerian" event variable *s* in the structure.[10] However, as will be seen in the next section, this is not the whole story, as substantive BE imposes additional requirements beyond stage-level predication, namely that the subject be an (animate) agent.

10. The "Kratzerian" event variable *s* is located "in the Specifier position of the highest VP-shell" (Stowell 2007:443).

6. Syntax of BE_2

In this section I explore the kinds of complements that BE_2 can and cannot take. I suggest that what its grammatical complements all have in common is a compatibility with the agentive nature of BE_2. Predicates that cannot be interpreted as agentive are ungrammatical with BE_2.

Adjectival predicates that can serve as complements to BE_2 belong primarily to the class known as "mental property" (MP) adjectives (on which see Stowell 1991).[11] These include STUPID, CUNNING, FARSIGHTED, GENEROUS, IMPRUDENT, and so on. MP adjectives have in common that they "can be used as individual-level predicates in the sense of Carlson (1977), attributing an essential property to the mind or character of a sentient, typically human, individual" (Stowell 1991: 110). Uniquely among adjective classes, MPs can select "an action-denoting argument in addition to the sentient argument" (i.e., both arguments can be present *simultaneously*) (ibid.:111), as shown in (34).[12] Note that "the human argument in question must be understood as the agent of the action-denoting argument" (Stowell 1991: 112).

(34) a. *Ian was clever to think of that.*
b. *It was clever of Ian to think of that.*
c. *To think of that/Thinking of that was clever of Ian.*

The sentences in (34) are necessarily interpreted as stage level and fundamentally characterize an *action* rather than an individual. That is, the property (CLEVER) is predicated of the action-denoting argument (*to think of that*) rather than of the sentient argument (*Ian*). This suggests that the sentient MP argument (*Ian*) originates as the subject of the infinitival clause (*to think of that*), which is itself the external argument of the AP (i.e., its "action-denoting argument").[13]

These sentences differ from (35), in which the property is predicated of the subject without an action-denoting argument. While an action-denoting argument may be implicitly understood in the right context (e.g., *Ian was clever (to do that) last night*) — and indeed *must* be understood if the sentence is to have a stage-level interpretation — this is by no means required (Stowell 1991: 112). Where no such argument is stated or supplied by the context, the sentence has an

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11. Called in subsequent literature "evaluative adjectives" or "evaluative dispositional adjectives." I retain the older label here because this is the term used in Stowell 1991, the work most frequently referred to in this section.

12. The sentient MP argument may be suppressed in sentences like *That was clever!*, though it still must be understood implicitly (i.e., that was clever *of Ian*) (Stowell 1991: 112).

13. On the syntax of (34a) and (34b) see Stowell 1991: 122, 128.

individual-level interpretation, meaning that the subject is characterized as having the stated property irrespective of any particular occasion or occasions.

(35) *Ian was clever.*

Given their inherent ability to take action-denoting arguments, and so to have a stage-level interpretation with a sentient, agentive subject, MP adjectives are regularly compatible with BE$_2$ (36), whose interpretation is always stage level and whose subject is always sentient and agentive.[14]

(36) a. *Ian is/was being clever.*
b. *Ian be's/be'd clever (when the occasion calls/called for it).*
c. *Be clever!*

Because a sentence like (34a) seems to entail that, at some point, (36a) was true, it might be supposed that the sentences in (36) are just the progressive, habitual, and imperative versions of (34a) but with the action-denoting argument suppressed. Yet, surprisingly, an attempt to add an action-denoting argument to these sentences results in ungrammaticality, as shown in (37).[15]

(37) a. *Ian is/was being clever *to think of that.*
b. *Ian be's/be'd clever *to think of that.*
c. *Be clever *to think of that!*

Sentences of the type in (34b) and (34c) are likewise incompatible with BE$_2$ (**It was being clever of Ian to think of that*, **To think of that/Thinking of that was being clever of Ian*).

So, while in both (34) and (36) the property (CLEVER) characterizes an action rather than an individual, thus yielding a stage-level interpretation, there is an important difference between the two. The sentences in (34) characterize some action (*to think of that*) as being of a particular type, namely clever. The agent of that action (*Ian)* may surface as the grammatical subject of the sentence (34a) or not ((34b)–(34c)), but the external argument of the adjective is an event rather than an individual, as discussed above. Sentences (36a)–(36b), on the other hand, do not assert that the action is clever, as the sentences in (34) do, but rather that Ian engages in an action matching this description. So, in contrast to (34), the

14. Sentences of the type *The river is being noisy today* or *My computer is being weird* may involve anthropomorphizing of inanimate things (cf. sentences like *My arthritis/car is acting up*), but it is unclear to me what the constraints on such sentences are. In most cases BE$_2$ cannot have an inanimate subject (e.g., **The weather is being nice today*).

15. It is, however, possible to add a similar kind of information in a dependent adverbial clause or, perhaps, with a PP adjunct: e.g., *Ian was being clever when he thought of that / ?in thinking of that.*

external argument of the matrix clauses in (36) is an individual, not an event. The sentences in (34) are thus about an *action* having a certain quality (viz. clever), whereas those in (36) are about an *individual* behaving in a certain way (viz. cleverly). While both (34) and (36) have a sentient argument, in (36) the sentient argument is the agent of the matrix predicate BE CLEVER; in (34) it is not. Accordingly, I take the sentences in (34) to contain the copula (BE_1), and those in (36) to contain the "substantive" verb BE_2.

The ungrammaticality of the sentences in (37) is understandable if we assume that BE_2 assigns an agent theta role as its external argument. In such cases, the subject of the matrix clause is base generated as the specifier of BE_2 and, therefore, cannot be understood as having raised out of an action-denoting infinitival clause. Moreover, the sentences in (34) cannot satisfy the requirement that the subject of BE_2 be an agent, because their external argument is an event rather than an individual (**To think of that was being clever of Ian*).[16]

Since BE_2 must always (a) form a stage-level predicate and (b) have a sentient, agentive subject, only those adjectives that are compatible with both of these requirements are predicted to be grammatical complements of BE_2. The class of adjectives that most closely matches this description are MP adjectives. Adjectives that fail the first requirement (i.e., they cannot be interpreted as stage level), such as physical properties and adjectives of reputation or social status are consistently incompatible with BE_2 (**Ian was being tall/short*).[17] Since these adjectives can only refer to states, not actions, they cannot take action-denoting arguments, as shown in (38) (examples adapted from Stowell 1991: 111).

(38) **It was tall of Ian to touch the ceiling.*

Adjectives that fail the second requirement (i.e., they cannot be made agentive, despite being stage level), such as DRUNK, HUNGRY, or ANGRY, are likewise ungrammatical as complements to BE_2 (**Ian was being drunk/hungry/angry*). Such adjectives, being inherently incompatible with agentivity, cannot take an action-denoting argument (39), since the subject of such an argument is necessarily agentive.

(39) a. **It was drunk of Ian to slur his speech.*
b. **It was angry of Ian to yell at his neighbor.*

16. Note that under a purely syntactic account, supposing only a single lexical item BE (along the lines of Arche 2006: 83 ff.), the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (37) is unexpected. I therefore maintain that there are two separate lexical items, as discussed in Section 4 above.

17. But see cases of coercion in (47) and (48) below.

MP adjectives are thus particularly well suited to being complements of BE$_2$, in contrast to other kinds of adjectives.

A subclass of MP adjectives includes those that can take "relational PP" complements (cf. Arche 2006: 83, 96 ff.), involving the relation of the property to another individual or group of individuals (considered as an "affected goal" by Stowell (1991: 128)), of the type *be excellent to each other*. Stowell (1991: 129) calls these "relational MP adjectives," which include CRUEL/KIND, MEAN/NICE, RUDE/POLITE, (UN)FRIENDLY, (IN)DECENT, GOOD/BAD, HURTFUL, GRACIOUS, GENEROUS, and so on. Like the other MP adjectives, these can also occur with an optional action-denoting argument. When a relational PP is used (40a), the interpretation is necessarily eventive (stage level), and an action-denoting argument must be implicitly understood (ibid.:129). Curiously, however, making both the relational PP and the action-denoting argument explicit results in ungrammaticality ((40b)–(40c)).[18]

(40) a. *Ian was rude to his mother.*
b. *Ian was rude (*to his mother) to say that.*
c. *It was rude of Ian (*to his mother) to say that.*

Like the other MPs, relational MPs are compatible with BE$_2$ (41a) which, again, cannot be combined with an action-denoting argument ((41c)–(41d)). Interestingly, BE$_2$ *can* co-occur with a relational PP complement (41b), whereas it is not possible to have a relational PP in combination with an action-denoting argument, as noticed above (cf. (40b)–(40c)).

(41) a. *Ian was being rude.*
b. *Ian was being rude to his mother.*
c. **Ian was being rude (to his mother) to say that.*
d. **It was being rude of Ian (to his mother) to say that.*

Yet it is not clear whether *all* MPs are compatible with BE$_2$. For instance, the MP adjective SKILLFUL (Stowell 1991: 110) seems odd when used in a sentence like ?*Ian is being skillful*. This is probably because SKILLFUL is most readily understood as a passive quality that, once attained, may hold true indefinitely (compare EDUCATED, LEARNED, TALENTED, and so on). As such, it fails the requirements stated above, in that it resists stage-level interpretation with an agentive subject. By contrast, other MP adjectives involving skill, such as CRAFTY or ELOQUENT, meet the stated requirements and so are compatible with BE$_2$ (e.g., *Ian is being crafty*). Note

18. For a possible explanation of the incompatibility of these two arguments see Stowell 1991: 128–30. Such sentences may be improved somewhat by adding certain modifiers to the predicate, as in *Ian was kind enough (?to me) to fix my car.*

that, unlike SKILLFUL, CRAFTY typically involves *doing* things in a particular way on particular occasions; one does not attain craftiness once and for all.

On the other hand, certain non-MP adjectives are compatible with BE_2, such as adjectives derived from psych verbs (cf. Stowell 1991:130–1). These include ANNOYING, SURPRISING, AMUSING, DEPRESSING, and so on. Like MP adjectives, these can take action-denoting arguments in sentences of the type in (42a), and they cannot take such arguments when BE_2 is used (42b). They differ from MP adjectives, however, in that sentences of the type in (42c) are ungrammatical with an action-denoting argument (contrast (34a) above).

(42) a. *It was annoying of Ian to act that way.*
b. *Ian was being annoying (*to act that way).*
c. *Ian was annoying (*to act that way).*

Various other adjectives can take action-denoting arguments, including OBVIOUS, CHARACTERISTIC, TYPICAL, USEFUL, HELPFUL, and so on (cf. Stowell 1991:130–1). These have properties similar to the "psych" class typified in (42) above. So, one can say *It was obvious of Ian to do that* but not **Ian was obvious to do that*. These are also generally acceptable with BE_2, as in *Ian was being obvious (in his affections), Ian was being typical/characteristic (of his gender)*, or *Ian was being helpful/useful*.

Somewhat different is the class of subject control adjectives, such as EAGER, RELUCTANT, and HESITANT (Stowell 1991:114, 130). These differ from the types mentioned so far in that their action-denoting argument is not optional (e.g., *Ian was eager to try that*). Even where the clausal complement "can sometimes be non-overt in elliptical usage" (ibid.:114), it must still be implicitly understood. So a sentence like *Ian is eager* is ungrammatical unless a complement like *to try that* is understood from the context (contrast (35) above). Similar to these, under the relevant reading, are NERVOUS, EXCITED, READY/PREPARED, HAPPY/GLAD (as in *happy/glad to help*), and the like. Further, "*eager*-class adjectives, unlike MP adjectives, never allow their controlling NPs to occur as genitive *of* -NPs" (ibid.:114), so sentences like **It was eager of Bill to try that* are ungrammatical. Intuitions vary as to whether (some of) the members of this class are compatible with BE_2. A sentence like ?*Ian is being eager* seems odd, yet if the adverb *too* is added it is entirely acceptable (*Ian is being too eager*).[19]

19. Other adjectives are similarly improved by adverbial modification, such as (UN)AVAILABLE, as in *Am I being too available?* or *Am I being available enough?* (acceptable if uttered in reference to the speaker's romantic life, for instance), whereas the unmodified ?*Am I being available?* is hard to make sense of.

As noted above, adjectives that refer to physical traits cannot in general be used with BE$_2$ (e.g., TALL, HANDSOME, BEAUTIFUL, PRETTY).[20] But those which may characterize behaviors in addition to purely physical traits are grammatical as complements of BE$_2$. Such is the case of CUTE or SEXY, as in *Ian is being cute/sexy* (i.e., doing cute/sexy things). Note that these adjectives may take an action-denoting argument in a sentence like *It was cute/sexy of Ian to do that* (though one cannot say **Ian was cute/sexy to do that*, in contrast to the MP adjectives). Similar are some adjectives that refer primarily to behaviors, such as AWKWARD (*Ian was being awkward*).[21]

There are additionally a number of adjectives that do not take action-denoting arguments but are nonetheless compatible with BE$_2$. An example is DIFFICULT, in the sense 'stubborn', as in *Ian was being difficult* (but note that one cannot say **It was difficult of Ian to act that way* or **Ian was difficult to act that way*). Other such adjectives include COMPLICATED, DISTANT, EASY, THOROUGH, CLEAR/EXPLICIT, TEMPERAMENTAL, TOUCHY, MOODY, SULKY, GRUMPY, GROUCHY, CRABBY, FUSSY, PISSY, and so on. It is to be noticed that adjectives like GRUMPY and GROUCHY are readily compatible with BE$_2$ while ANGRY or FURIOUS typically are not. This again may be attributed to the satisfaction or not of the two requirements stated above, that the predicate be interpretable as stage level with an agentive subject. The GRUMPY-type adjectives regularly have a sense of agency (similar to MP adjectives like RUDE) and are typically stage level (even when habitual). By contrast, the subject of ANGRY-type adjectives is typically understood as an experiencer. Note the difference in the meaning of GET in the sentences *Ian got angry* (i.e., the emotion of anger arose in Ian) vs. *Ian got crabby/fussy* (i.e., Ian started engaging in behavior indicative of his emotional state).

It is difficult to see how the compatibility or not of BE$_2$ with the various types of adjectives described above can be accounted for under a purely syntactic analysis (i.e., assuming only one word BE). It will clearly not do to suppose that the adjectives that are grammatical with *is being/be's* are all and only those which take

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20. Some of these adjectives can be made acceptable with BE$_2$ by adverbial modification, particularly with *just*. For instance, in reply to the question *What was he doing at the party that made everyone want to talk to him* one may say *He was just being handsome*. Similarly, with habitual *be's*, given a question like *How does she get so many followers on her social media?* one may say *She just be's pretty in her videos and people follow her*. This and other adverbs thus modify the predicate such that an agentive interpretation is accessible (contrast the ungrammatical **She is being pretty/beautiful today*, **She be's pretty/beautiful when her friends are over*).

21. But contrast adjectives that refer to uncontrollable behaviors, such as ANXIOUS (**Ian was being anxious*). A similar contrast is seen in the pair HURTFUL (agentive, *Ian was being hurtful*) vs. HARMFUL (typically non-agentive, **Ian was being harmful*).

an action-denoting argument, since some adjectives that take an action-denoting argument are ungrammatical (or dubiously grammatical) with *is being/be's* (e.g., SKILLFUL, EAGER, HAPPY), while some that do not take such an argument are perfectly grammatical with *is being/be's* (e.g., DIFFICULT, GRUMPY). Since, however, the analysis of this paper is essentially lexical and semantic in nature, rather than syntactic, the above data can be accounted for by assuming that a grammatical complement of BE_2 must be compatible with a stage-level interpretation and having a sentient, agentive subject. Provided that these two conditions are met, the adjective is predicted to be grammatical as a complement to BE_2. I attribute these requirements to the head BE_2 itself, which takes an agentive external argument and is itself an eventive verb (and so will always form a stage-level predicate).

This account extends also to DP or PP complements of BE_2, though these are somewhat less straightforward than APs, insofar as they lack a readily defined semantic class of the MP type that would allow for making clear-cut generalizations about which ones are compatible with BE_2 and which are not. Still, what seems to unite all predicates compatible with BE_2 is that they must be interpretable as stage level with an agentive subject.

In most cases, the nominal counterparts of MP adjectives can be used with BE_2, as shown in (43a)–(43c). Put another way, if the adjectival counterpart of a noun is an MP adjective, an (indefinite) DP containing that noun can usually serve as a complement to BE_2. The same also holds for members of certain other classes of adjectives discussed above, as in (43d)–(43f). In some cases, the adjective and noun may only share a semantic similarity, rather than being directly cognate, as in (43f). Where no one-word nominalization of a particular adjective exists, a generic term indicating the category to which the subject belongs (e.g., *one, person, guy*, etc.) can be used to form a DP with that adjective, as shown in (43g).

(43) a. *Ian is being friendly.* ⇒ *Ian is being a friend.*
b. *Ian is being childish.* ⇒ *Ian is being a child.*
c. *Ian is being mean.* ⇒ *Ian is being a meanie.*
d. *Ian is being helpful.* ⇒ *Ian is being a (huge) help/a (good) helper.*
e. *Ian is being grumpy/grouchy.* ⇒ *Ian is being a grump/a grouch.*
f. *Ian is being annoying.* ⇒ *Ian is being a nuisance/a pest/?an annoyance.*
g. *The children are being naughty.* ⇒ *They are being naughty children.*

Like APs, DPs and PPs that are not readily compatible with agentive subjects cannot regularly serve as complements to BE_2, whether individual level (e.g., AP: BE TALL, DP: BE A DOCTOR) or stage level (e.g., AP: BE HUNGRY, PP: BE IN THE GARDEN). This is shown in (44)–(45), where the predicates compatible with

agentivity are compatible with BE$_2$ (44). On the other hand, the sentences in (45), which are non-agentive, can only have the copula BE$_1$. Thus, across syntactic categories, a phrase can form a grammatical predicate with BE$_2$ just in case the resultant predicate can be understood as having a sentient, agentive subject.

(44) a. *Ian* ***is (being)/be's on his best behavior*** *for the supervisor.*[22] PP, AGENTIVE
b. *Ian* ***is (being)/be's grumpy.*** AP, AGENTIVE
c. *Ian* ***is (being)/be's dramatic*** *about this.* AP, AGENTIVE
d. *Ian* ***is (being/be's) a friend.*** DP, AGENTIVE

(45) *Ian* ***is (*being/*be's) in a good/bad mood.*** PP, NON-AGENTIVE
Ian ***is (*being/*be's) angry/tired of pizza.*** AP, NON-AGENTIVE
Ian ***is (*being/*be's) tall.*** AP, NON-AGENTIVE
Ian ***is (*being/*be's) a doctor.*** DP, NON-AGENTIVE

It is a prediction of this account that BE$_2$ can be used wherever the predicate formed with an AP, DP, or PP complement is interpretable as agentive. There is thus no requirement that a phrase that is incompatible with BE$_2$ in one grammatical situation should necessarily be incompatible with BE$_2$ in all grammatical situations, provided that an agentive interpretation is available. It therefore readily accommodates certain grammatical or contextual situations which lend agentivity to predicates not otherwise interpretable as agentive. For instance, some stage-level states that are incompatible with *be's* or *is being* can be used with BE$_2$ in (negative) commands, as shown in (46). Crucially, however, it is precisely in those contexts in which one can (still) actively *do* something about the unfolding of an eventuality that BE$_2$ is licensed (cf. (29b) above for a similar example with a definite DP). Otherwise, there is a clash between the agentive verb BE$_2$ and a complement which cannot be interpreted as agentive, resulting in ungrammaticality.

(46) a. *Don't be angry (any longer/tomorrow)* AGENT
b. *Don't be drunk (tomorrow/*any longer)* AGENT/ *EXPERIENCER
c. **Don't be ridiculed (any longer/tomorrow)* *PATIENT

In (46a), the inhibitive meaning 'stop your anger (now)' is possible because it is conceivably within the person's power to get control over their emotions, starting from the moment of utterance. The person may not have chosen to become angry but they can, in principle, choose to take the actions necessary to stop being angry (or so the speaker supposes). In (46b), only the preventive reading 'don't get drunk at some future time' is possible, since, when already drunk, one has no

22. Contrast *Ian is (*being/*be's) at his best/worst.* Here the PP is not interpretable as agentive and so is incompatible with BE$_2$. See similarly (45a) below and cf. (18d)–(18e) above.

realistic control over their own drunkenness; it simply has to wear off over time. Thus, it would be anomalous if the intended meaning were #'stop being drunk'. However, when the meaning is such that the subject could voluntarily do something to avoid the undesirable outcome BE DRUNK, namely by not drinking on some future occasion, the sentence is felicitous (in the sense 'don't get drunk'). In (46c), the passive is used, which regularly consists of the copula (BE_1) and a VP complement (cf., e.g., *You aren't ridiculed*). When BE_2 is used in place of the copula (*don't be*), the sentence is ungrammatical. This is because BE_2 cannot take a VP complement, and a passive sentence cannot have an agentive subject. So, in (46) as elsewhere, the use of BE_2 is meaningful only insofar as the subject has (deliberate) agency over the realization or not of the predicate. Sentences of this type are therefore not exceptional.

Further, even individual-level states ordinarily ill-suited to BE_2 may be coerced into its use under the right circumstances. In such cases the subject will be understood as a sentient agent. (47) is from an online message board in which a woman describes how men have reacted violently to her height.

(47) "I've often had abuse from men who seem affronted by my physique, as if I'm being tall AT them somehow."[23]

Likewise, adding *on purpose* to intrinsically stage-level states that typically take experiencer subjects increases their acceptability with BE_2, as shown in (48).

(48) ?*Ian is being angry/tired/confused <u>on purpose.</u>*

A similar effect can be achieved by the inclusion of an adverbial *all* in sentences like *He's being all angry*, which has a meaning essentially like that of *He's being all grumpy/pissy*. Cf. similarly the use of the adverb *just* discussed in n.20 above. Such sentences invariably involve some deliberate action on the part of the subject and are thus consistent with my claims so far.

We would not expect these kinds of coercion effects (nor the coerced pretending meaning of the *is being the doctor* type (cf. (3) above)) if the agentivity requirement of sentences with BE_2 had any source other than BE_2 itself (contrast such sentences without BE_2: **as if I'm tall AT them somehow*, **Ian is tired/confused on purpose*). This data thus lends further support to the view that BE_2 requires its external argument to be a sentient agent.

I therefore conclude that BE_2 is an eventive verb (distinct from the copula) that requires an agentive external argument and thus only takes complements that

23. <https://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/am_i_being_unreasonable/4194023-Do-boyish-looking-girls-get-harrassed-less-than-other-women>.

are compatible with agentivity (whether intrinsically or under the right circumstances, as described above).

In summary, the semantic and syntactic claims of this and the preceding section are as follows:

- All predicates at least optionally have a "Kratzerian" event variable *s*. Whether this is realized and interpreted as eventive depends on the predicate type and the syntax of the rest of the clause/sentence.
- The verb BE$_2$ differs from the copula in that it does not take VP complements, and its subject does not originate in the complement phrase (AP, DP, or PP). Rather, BE$_2$ assigns an agent theta role as its external argument. It takes complements that are compatible with this agentivity.
- All predicates with BE$_2$ obligatorily contain a "Kratzerian" event variable *s*, exactly like other eventive verbs. They are accordingly always stage level.

And so the meaning contributed by BE$_2$ turns out to be more complicated than just adding an event layer to the syntax or "converting" an individual-level predicate to a stage-level one. It not only serves to eventivize a stative predicate but additionally requires that the action be agentive. Thus the three-way distinction between the predicates in (49) arises.

(49) a. *Ian is funny (in general).* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
b. *Ian is funny (tonight).* STAGE LEVEL
c. *Ian is being/be's funny.* STAGE LEVEL, PROG/HAB, AGENTIVE

(49a) is individual level, lacking a Kratzerian event variable *s*; (49b) is stage level with a Kratzerian event variable *s*; (49c) is stage level with a Kratzerian event variable *and* an obligatorily agentive subject. Again, it is a property of the head BE$_2$ that selects for a complement of the right sort, meaning that the complement must be compatible with agentivity in order for its combination with BE$_2$ to be grammatical.

7. Conclusion and further research

In sum, there are two different lexical items BE in English (BE$_1$ and BE$_2$). The substantive BE requires a sentient, agentive subject. In NSAE, substantive BE (BE$_2$) has a habitual use. The distribution of habitual *be's* is consistent with that of BE$_2$ generally. Its range of application is predictable on this basis, such that grammaticality judgments are possible.

Though the above analysis works for NSAE, other languages that have multiple words corresponding to English *be* show markedly different distributions. I leave open for future research how we are to account for these phenomena in a way that is cross-linguistically coherent. One problem is that in Spanish, for example, the translation of *Ian is being cruel to Peter* is *Ian está siendo cruel con Pedro* (Arche 2006: 64) — that is, with ESTAR translating *is* (BE_1) and SER translating *being* (BE_2), the opposite of what we might expect, given that SER is the copula in Spanish and BE_1 is the copula in English. Likewise, in Sanskrit, the imperative of the copula, *edhi*, is used where English (as I have claimed) has BE_2 (cf. Table 1 in §4 above). Finally, in Scottish Gaelic and AAE, substantive/aspectual BE is used where NSAE requires the copula (e.g., AAE *Ian be running* vs. (N)SAE *Ian is (often) running*). These facts are by no means predicted on the basis of the NSAE data alone, and a more general account that applies cross-linguistically is, in my view, desirable.

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