

Habitual BE in American English*

Ian Hollenbaugh

Washington University in St. Louis

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. As is common in spoken and written English, stative predicates such as the one in the sentence *I am lazy* (i.e., I am characterized as a lazy person) can be made eventive by the addition of *being*, thus *I am being lazy* (i.e., I am acting lazy but may or may not be characterized as a lazy person). For many native speakers of American dialects other than AAE, however, the habitual equivalent of such sentences may be expressed by what appears to be an uninflected BE, thus *I be 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 get spelled out as *am/are/is*, despite being marked for person, as is clear in the third-person singular: *Ian be's 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.

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” themselves 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, to the extent 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 usage of the type (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, that it is not the same as the

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habitual *be* found in AAE, and that its occurrence 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 North America.

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 function, suggests that we are dealing with distinct lexical items—a matter more fully treated in Section 4 below.¹

The past-tense of *be*'s is *be'd* (or *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. (25b) below), again produced by a child (around Christmastime) 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). 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 simple 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, predictable environments. 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 ‘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.

1. Note, however, that the second instance of *(i)s*—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* is employed to avoid ambiguity, which does not arise in a clause dependent on a clause which itself contains a verb with habitual meaning. Where there is no potential for ambiguity, the default form *(i)s* is used, as here.

- (5) a. A: *How do you get people to like you?* B: I just **be** (#am) myselffriendly/confident.
 b. A: *How does Mary get people to like her?* B: She just **be's** (#is) herselffriendly/confident.

In (6), the form *be's* is preferred when the intended meaning is habitual, asserting that the subject regularly behaves in a dramatic fashion but is not necessarily 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

(6a) is thus a habituated “version” of the particular, stage-level event *Ian is being dramatic*.² When the simple copula *is* is used, as in (6b), the meaning is strictly ambiguous between individual- and stage-level states. It most readily has an attributive sense, namely that Ian is a dramatic person (individual-level state), but it may also be interpreted as stage-level, roughly equivalent to *Ian is being dramatic*, especially if an adverbial phrase like *right now* is added (*Ian is dramatic right now*). (6b) does not strictly require that Ian actually exhibit dramatic behavior on any particular occasion, only that the speaker judges him to be dramatic. 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 interpretations.

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 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 description of the data (§2). I then compare this habitual usage of BE with the well documented habitual BE found in AAE (§3). Next, I sketch lexical/morphophonological (§4), semantic (§5), and syntactic (§6) analyses of the phenomenon. In Section 7 I discuss the interaction of adverbs of volition with the *is being* and *be's* constructions. Finally, I offer conclusions and directions for further research in Section 8.

2 Data and description

Be's is licensed only in a very restricted corner of the grammar, namely when a stage-level predicate, often derived from an individual-level state, is habituated. In other words, it is the habitual “version” of a stative predicate that has been converted into an event. This may be thought of, intuitively at least, along the lines shown in (7).

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

However, the use of *be's* is not generally available for intrinsically stage-level predicates, such as BE DRUNK, BE SLEEPY, OR BE ANGRY, as shown in (8). This distribution exactly matches that of the *is being* construction. I will refer to the verb of these non-copular *be's/ is being* constructions as “substantive BE.”

- (8) a. **Ian **be's** drunk/sleepy/angry.* STAGE LEVEL

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

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|---|------------------|
| b. <i>Ian be's smart/romantic/cute.</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |
| c. * <i>Ian is being drunk/sleepy/angry.</i> | STAGE LEVEL |
| d. <i>Ian is being smart/romantic/cute.</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |

Instead of BE, intrinsically stage-level predicates may use GET when habituated or progressivized, as in (9).

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| (9) a. <i>Ian gets drunk/sleepy/angry.</i> | STAGE LEVEL, HABITUAL-INCHOATIVE |
| b. <i>Ian is getting drunk/sleepy/angry.</i> | STAGE LEVEL, PROGRESSIVE-INCHOATIVE |

Nonetheless, some intrinsically stage-level states are compatible with substantive BE, such as (10). These tend to exclude use with GET (**Ian is getting/gets on his best behavior*).

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|---|-------------------------|
| (10) <i>Ian is being/be's on his best behavior for the supervisor.</i> | STAGE LEVEL, VOLITIONAL |
|---|-------------------------|

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

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|---|-------------|
| (11) a. * <i>Ian be's tall/attractive/undefined/organic/a teacher.</i> | HABITUAL |
| b. * <i>Ian is being tall/attractive/undefined/organic/a teacher.</i> | 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 present evidence later on (§6) that a predicate's compatibility with *being* and *be's* depends on the volitionality of the predicate in question.

Habitual *be's* is not particularly remarkable when compared to non-state verbs of English, which also use the simple present tense to signify a habitual action in a matrix clause (12a), while the progressive construction ordinarily refers to a single event that is currently underway (12b).

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|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| (12) a. <i>Ian smokes.</i> | HABITUAL/GENERIC |
| b. <i>Ian is smoking.</i> | 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 (13a) and (13b). When not overtly expressed ((13a)–(13c)) or supplied by the discourse (13d), the restrictive event may be understood pragmatically ((13e)–(13f)). So, (13e) and (13f) say that Ian behaves in a dramatic manner *on particular occasions* not overtly specified in the sentence or immediate discourse context. Thus, in Green's (2000:11–13) terms, predicates with *be's* represent habitual events rather than generic ones (see §3 below).

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|---|------------|
| (13) a. <i>John Wayne (always) be's a man in the face of danger.</i> | OVERT |
| b. <i>Ian be's nice (only) when he wants something.</i> | OVERT |
| c. <i>I hate it <u>when(ever)</u> Ian be's dramatic.</i> | OVERT |
| d. A: <i>What does Ian do when he wants something?</i> B: <i>He be's nice to me.</i> | DISCOURSE |
| e. <i>I hate that/how Ian be's (so) dramatic.</i> | PRAGMATICS |
| f. <i>Ian (always) be's/is always being (so) dramatic.</i> | 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.

- (14) a. *John Wayne would (always) be a man/(always) be'd a man in the face of danger*
 (?was (always)/#used to be).
 b. *Ian 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)*.

Substantive BE (aside from *be*'s) is necessarily eventive but only optionally/contextually habitual (cf. the *is being* examples above).

- (15) *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).

- (16) 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 some TV show.*

In a small clause dependent on a verb of perception, eventivized individual-level states must have an overt BE ((17a)–(17b)). Intrinsically stage-level states typically do not have *be* in such a context ((17c)–(17e)), unless they consist of a predicate over which the subject has (volitional) agency (17f).

- (17) a. **I saw a man dramatic.* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL, STATIVE
 b. *I saw a man be(ing) dramatic.* INDIVIDUAL LEVEL, EVENTIVIZED
 c. *I saw Ian (*be(ing)) naked/drunk/angry.* STAGE LEVEL
 d. *I saw Ian (*be) sit(ing)/smoke(ing) in his car.* STAGE LEVEL
 e. *I saw Ian (*be) in a bad mood/at his worst/best.* STAGE LEVEL
 f. *I saw Ian be(ing) on his best/worst behavior.* STAGE LEVEL

Intuitively, the subject of habitual *be*'s, like that of *is being*, is an agent (i.e., BE here is treated like an unergative intransitive verb). Note the near synonymy of sentences with BE and ACT in (18). I provide semantic and syntactic support for this intuition later on.

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|------|----|---|-------------|
| (18) | a. | <i>Ian be's weird/rude/arrogant/pedantic sometimes</i> | HABITUAL |
| | b. | <i>Ian acts weird/rude/arrogant/?pedantic sometimes.</i> | HABITUAL |
| | c. | <i>Ian is being weird/rude/arrogant/pedantic</i> | PROGRESSIVE |
| | d. | <i>Ian is acting weird/rude/arrogant/?pedantic.</i> | PROGRESSIVE |

As (18) shows, substantive BE is often (if not always) able to be substituted with ACT (sometimes with GET, see (19)). Since substantive BE typically demands a volitional agent (Payne 2013:32), when there is no agent the copula is preferred even in habitual sentences with expressed temporal restriction, as shown by (19b) in contrast to (19a).

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|------|----|--|----------|
| (19) | a. | <i>My cat be's/gets/?is (extra) cute when it wants food/attention</i> | HABITUAL |
| | b. | <i>My cat is/?gets/*be's (extra) cute after a bath.</i> | HABITUAL |

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 analysis on the observations and findings of Green (2000).

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, the construction with substantive BE lacks the generic reading (cf. *ibid.*:10), as shown in (20).

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|------|----|--|---------------------|
| (20) | a. | <i>Ian smokes and/when he drinks beer.</i> | GENERIC OR HABITUAL |
| | b. | <i>Ian is happy/dramatic/in the garden.</i> | GENERIC OR HABITUAL |
| | c. | <i>Mice are/*be squeaky.</i> | GENERIC |
| | d. | <i>Ian be's dramatic.</i> | HABITUAL |
| | e. | <i>This car goes/can go 120mph (#sometimes).</i> | GENERIC |

Unlike AAE, where *be* can be used for stage-level or individual-level states (Green 2000:20), in NSAE *be's* is not, as a rule, licensed with intrinsically stage-level states (i.e., “transitory properties”), as shown in (21).³ This is true even under the habitual interpretation. Note that this matches the distribution of the progressive *is being*.

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|------|----|--|---------------------|
| (21) | a. | <i>I am/*be happy (when I get what I want).</i> | GENERIC OR HABITUAL |
| | b. | <i>*I am being happy.</i> | PROGRESSIVE |
| | c. | <i>I am/get/*be scared of other people.</i> | GENERIC OR HABITUAL |
| | d. | <i>*I am being scared of other people.</i> | 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 uttered only if their copular equivalents (*is drunk*,

3. Though neither are stage-level states necessarily incompatible with substantive BE, as seen in (10) above. The grammaticality depends rather on whether the action is volitional or not, as discussed in Section 6 below.

is happy) are in fact false. Such cases of pretending are not restricted to stage-level states but may also apply to individual-level states, as in the case of *be's the doctor* (cf. (3) above). Note that *be's the doctor* or *is being the doctor* typically apply only to cases in which *is the doctor* is false, as when a child is pretending to be a doctor. In general, substantive BE has a sense of pretending when used with a predicate over which the subject would not otherwise have (consensual) agency, whether a stage-level or individual-level state. We will return to this point later on.

NSAE differs from AAE also in that the habitual BE in NSAE cannot take a VP complement, only an AP, DP, or PP. This is exactly the distribution of predicates of the *is being* construction, as shown in (22).⁴

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|------|----|---|-------------|
| (22) | a. | <i>*Ian be's smoking when his parents are out of town.</i> | HABITUAL |
| | b. | <i>Ian be's affectionate/a friend/on his best behavior when he wants something.</i> | HABITUAL |
| | c. | <i>*Ian is being smoking.</i> | PROGRESSIVE |
| | d. | <i>Ian is being affectionate/a friend/on his best behavior.</i> | PROGRESSIVE |

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 (23), unless some restrictive clause is added explicitly indicating that the action is habitual, as in (23b) and (23f), where the *when*-clause is required if the sentence is to be at all grammatical (if still somewhat odd, hence the question mark).

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|------|----|---|----------------------|
| (23) | a. | <i>Dogs are good.</i> | GENERIC, INDEFINITE |
| | b. | <i>?Dogs be good *(when they want something).</i> | HABITUAL, INDEFINITE |
| | c. | <i>My dog be's good/a good boy when he wants something.</i> | HABITUAL, DEFINITE |
| | d. | <i>A final exam is scary.</i> | GENERIC, INDEFINITE |
| | e. | <i>*A final exam be's scary.</i> | HABITUAL, INDEFINITE |
| | f. | <i>?A dog be's good *(when it wants something).</i> | HABITUAL, INDEFINITE |

In AAE, aspectual BE can have a “generic 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 (ibid.:23). This kind of coercion is unavailable in NSAE, as shown in (24).

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|------|---|------------------|
| (24) | <i>Some of them are/*be big and some of them are/*be small.</i> | GENERIC/ITERATED |
|------|---|------------------|

Overall, the distributional differences between the habitual BE found in AAE and that found in NSAE make it unlikely that the usage was borrowed from AAE to NSAE directly (cf. Payne 2010:19, 2013:31).⁵

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

4. Where AAE has the construction with 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. To the latter sentence compare AAE *This printer be printing a hundred pages a minute* discussed by Green (2000:4).

5. 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>).

will not quite work for NSAE as is, without further comment. The main issue is that substantive BE cannot ordinarily be used for simple 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 BEs,” such as Spanish, Irish, and Scottish Gaelic (Ramchand 1996, Green 2000:5–6). In these languages, substantive BE can be used for stage-level or individual-level states,⁶ while the copula is reserved for individual-level states alone.⁷ By contrast, in NSAE, the copula 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, 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 from a combination of various proposals in the semantic and syntactic literature in order to arrive at an adequate analysis (e.g., Kratzer 1995, Stowell 2007).

4 Lexical and morphological contrast

The copula has been analyzed as a separate lexical item from what is here called substantive BE (Becker 2004, Green 2000; though Arche (2006:84–5) rejects this, cf. §6 below). I will refer to these as BE₁ and BE₂ respectively. Evidence includes (25), involving negation and showing that the two differ both syntactically and semantically.

- (25) BE under negation and with *do*-support (standard English)
- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| a. Why aren't you my friend? | RAISING TO T, GENERIC |
| b. Why don't you be my friend? | <i>do</i> -SUPPORT, INCHOATIVE |

With *do*-support, BE₁ is impossible, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the passive in this position, as in (26).

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

Thus, while BE₁ has special syntactic properties, BE₂ 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 (BE₁) is typically spelled out with the familiar inflected forms *am, is, are, was, were*, while the substantive (BE₂) is typically spelled out as *be*, as in (25b) above, with a participial form *being*, and *be's* in the third-person singular of the habitual construction. Paradigmatically speaking, BE₂ is a regular weak verb (Payne 2013:31) with a simple present form *be, be's* and a preterite *be'd*. I present the complete paradigms of BE₁ and BE₂ in Table 1.

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, as they do not presuppose that Ian is dramatic in general, only that he currently or occasionally behaves that way.

If it is correct that *be's* surfaces to avoid ambiguity, we should expect that, in the case of other lexical items that lack this kind of ambiguity, no special form is available. This can be seen in the case of HAVE, which does not have a form **have's* under any circumstances, as shown in (27).

6. E.g., stage-level *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’.

7. E.g., *María es medico* ‘María is a doctor’; *Las flores son bonitas* ‘The flowers are beautiful’.

Table 1: Paradigms of BE₁ (copula) and BE₂ (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	<i>is</i>	<i>does</i> be
interrogative	is...?	does... be...?
imperative	—	be!
subjunctive	be	be
progressive	(is) being (PSV)	(is) being
participle/gerund	being	being
tenseless/small clause	∅	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

- (27) 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.*

Though, 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 BE₁ and BE₂ may 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 BE₁ and BE₂ 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 to their syntactic complementary distribution, so there is no motivation to distinguish lexical HAVE from the auxiliary by producing a form like **have's*.

5 Semantics

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, provided 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 (28), 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).

- (28) *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. 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.

(29) 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 either be introducing the presupposition that a situation exists and is a ‘the statue being in the garden’ event (29a), or the presupposition that the statue exists and one of its properties is that it is in the garden (29b).

(29) *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.
 $\exists s[\lambda e[\text{‘in the garden’}(e)]](s)$

b. INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL PREDICATE

There is some individual x that has a particular property.
 $\exists x: x=\text{the statue } [\lambda y[\exists e[\text{‘in the garden’}(y, e)]]](x)$

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. 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 volitionality of the subject.

6 Syntactic analysis

Arche (2006:84–5, 135) rejects the “two copulas hypothesis” and proposes that the subject of “dynamic copular clauses” may originate in Spec-PP, then raise to Spec-AP, thereby deriving both the inner aspect and the relation of the property to another individual (type *be cruel to someone*). It is true that often (but by no means always) the BE₂ constructions involve adjectives that (without BE₂) may take PP arguments (cf. (31) below), and Arche’s (2006) analysis is attractive in that it makes predictions about which predicates should be capable of having stage-level interpretations.

However, such an approach cannot account for all the English data involving BE₂, since the presence of a PP complement neither necessarily induces the use of BE₂ (30a) nor entails volitionality of the subject (30c).

- | | | | |
|------|----|--|--------------------------|
| (30) | a. | <i>Ian is hurtful to his mother.</i> | ±VOLITIONAL, COPULAR |
| | b. | <i>Ian is being hurtful to his mother.</i> | +VOLITIONAL, SUBSTANTIVE |
| | c. | <i>Cigarettes are harmful to humans.</i> | –VOLITIONAL, COPULAR |

d. **This cigarette is being harmful to me.*

–VOLITIONAL, SUBSTANTIVE

It is only the presence of BE₂ (and not the complement AP or PP) that forces the subject to be agentive and the action volitional (30b). The sentence is ungrammatical otherwise, as seen in (30d). Accordingly, the source of the volitionality of the subject cannot be the complement itself; rather, the complement selected for by BE₂ must be of the correct sort—one that is conducive to the volitionality it requires of its subject.

In the case of AP complements, BE₂ having a complement “of the correct sort” typically means mental property (MP) adjectives (on which see Stowell 1991), such as STUPID, CUNNING, MEAN, NICE, FARSIGHTED, GENEROUS, IMPRUDENT, etc. MPs 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). 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.), as shown in (31). Note that the “human argument in question must be understood as the agent of the action-denoting argument” (ibid.).

- (31) a. *Ian was clever to think of that.*
b. *It was clever of Ian to think of that.*

Physical properties and adjectives of reputation or social status lack this feature, as shown in (32) (examples adapted from Stowell 1991). Such adjectives are not typically compatible with BE₂, because their non-volitional nature clashes with the requirement of BE₂ for volitional action (but see cases of coercion in (37) and (38) below).

- (32) a. **It was tall of Ian to touch the ceiling.*
b. **It was handsome of Ian to seduce his neighbor.*

It is not clear, however, whether *all* MPs are compatible with BE₂. For instance, the MP adjective SKILLFUL (on which see Stowell 1991) seems odd when used in a sentence like ?*Ian is being skillful*. Substituting an adjective of similar meaning but with a more clearly volitional character, however, renders the sentence unproblematic: *Ian is being crafty*. This is probably because SKILLFUL is more readily understood as a passive quality that, once attained, may hold true indefinitely (compare EDUCATED), whereas 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 BE₂, such as adjectives derived from psych verbs (cf. Stowell 1991), as in *Ian is being annoying* (cf. *It was annoying of Ian to act that way*). Yet by no means are all such adjectives compatible with BE₂, as is clear from examples like **Ian is being surprising* (despite the acceptability of *It was surprising of Ian to act that way*). Here again, even for adjectives belonging to the same semantic class, compatibility with BE₂ seems to depend on volitionality. In the case of *is being annoying* the subject is doing certain actions of his own will that annoy the speaker (or some other relevant individual). By contrast, in the case of *is being surprising* the surprise rests solely on the speaker’s assessment of the subject’s actions. Saying that someone’s actions are surprising does not typically mean that the person has done something *deliberately* surprising. For instance, if Ian jumped out to surprise someone on their birthday one would not say **Ian is being surprising*. Yet one could say *Ian is being annoying* if Ian were knowingly engaging in some obnoxious behavior. For this reason, one can say *Ian is being annoying on purpose*, whereas it is difficult to get meaning out of **Ian is being surprising on purpose*. Of course, many other members of this class pattern with ANNOYING, such as DEPRESSING (*Ian is being depressing (on purpose)*), AMUSING, and so on.

Another class of subject control adjectives is the so-called “*eager-class*” (Stowell 1991), as in *Ian is eager to try that*. While EAGER itself feels odd with BE₂ (?*Ian is being eager*), other members of this class, such as RELUCTANT, are more acceptable (*Ian is being reluctant*). As with the other classes, the difference seems to be a matter of volitionality: being reluctant is something that one does deliberately (indeed, it is in some sense an act of deliberation), whereas being eager is typically something one experiences or does not experience on any given occasion irrespective of their own will or actions.

A final class of APs worth mentioning here includes adjectives like OBVIOUS and HELPFUL (on which see Stowell 1991): *Ian is being obvious (in his affections)*; *Ian is being helpful* (cf. *It was obvious/helpful of Ian to do that*). Yet, once again, it is only when the subject can be understood to be deliberately *doing* something that the sentence is grammatical. Thus, adjectives like CHARACTERISTIC or TYPICAL are predictably incompatible with BE₂ (**Ian was being characteristic/typical*), despite their ability to take a similar kind of action-denoting argument without BE₂ (*It was characteristic/typical of Ian to do that*).

One curiosity of predicates containing APs is the fact that, when BE₂ is used with adjectives that otherwise may take an action-denoting argument (i.e., those belonging to the various classes described above), the action-denoting argument characteristic of such adjectives is no longer available, as shown in (33b), though one may add a similar kind of information in a dependent clause or perhaps with a non-infinitival PP (33c). Sentences of the type seen in (31b) above, repeated in (33d), are ungrammatical with BE₂ whether they have the action-denoting argument or not (33e).

- (33) a. *Ian was clever to think of that.*
 b. *Ian was being clever *to think of that.*
 c. *Ian was being clever when he thought of that / ?in thinking of that.*
 d. *It was clever of Ian to think of that.*
 e. **It was being clever of Ian (to think of that).*

As Stowell (1991) points out, the action-denoting argument, when present, renders an MP predicate stage level (i.e., eventive) rather than individual level. Thus, (33a) is temporally bounded, while *Ian was clever* need not be. Seeing as BE₂ and the action-denoting arguments of MPs are in complementary distribution, it would appear that BE₂, when used, does similar sort of “work” as the action-denoting argument, in the sense that it renders the predicate a temporally bounded stage-level event.⁸ Yet the two types of sentences have an important difference.

Stowell (1991) observes that the action-denoting argument of MP adjectives is truly optional, in the sense that when such an argument is not overtly expressed, one need not be implicitly understood (e.g., *Ian was clever* need not imply *Ian was clever to do something*). It is telling, then, that the use of BE₂ is grammatical only when the action-denoting argument is absent, since where it is not there the action-denoting argument cannot be the source of the temporal boundedness of the predicate. Once again, the presence of BE₂ in such sentences appears to be a sufficient condition on its own for rendering the predicate eventive (stage level), even if it is not a necessary condition, seeing as the action-denoting argument accomplishes a similar effect.

Yet, while the sentences *Ian was being clever* and *Ian was clever to think of that* have in common that they are both temporally bounded stage-level events, and both require their subject to be sentient (human), only the former (with BE₂) refers to a volitional action with an agentive subject (i.e., Ian is asserted to be *doing* something clever, rather than being called clever for doing something).

8. BE₂ is not, however, incompatible with overt expression of a goal (e.g., *Ian was being kind to me*), even though the action-denoting argument of MPs cannot co-occur with goals overtly, as observed by Stowell (1991): **Ian was kind (enough) to me to fix my car*. In this respect, then, the behavior of the action-denoting arguments of MP adjectives differs from the behavior of BE₂ with these adjectives.

The conclusion, again, must be that it is BE₂ that contributes this volitional-agentive meaning, and not the type of adjective complement or its action-denoting argument *per se*. The strong correlation between the verb BE₂ and adjectives that may take an action-denoting argument I attribute to a selectional property of BE₂, which needs a complement compatible with its volitionality requirement.

The case of DP or PP complements is less straightforward than for APs, insofar as DPs and PPs lack a readily defined semantic class of the MP type that would allow for making clear-cut generalizations about which ones are compatible with BE₂ and which are not. Still, what seems to unite all predicates compatible with BE₂ is the notion of volitionality of the subject. In most cases, the nominal counterparts of MP adjectives can be used with BE₂, as shown in (34a)–(34b). 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 BE₂. The same also holds for members of certain other classes of adjectives discussed above, as in (34c)—(34e). In some cases, the adjective and noun may only share a semantic similarity, rather than being directly cognate, as in (34c).

- (34) a. *Ian is being friendly.* ⇒ *Ian is being a friend.*
 b. *Ian is being childish.* ⇒ *Ian is being a child.*
 c. *Ian is being annoying.* ⇒ *Ian is being a nuisance/pest/?an annoyance.*
 d. *Ian is being helpful.* ⇒ *Ian is being a (huge) help/(good) helper.*
 e. *Ian is being grumpy/grouchy.* ⇒ *Ian is being a grump/grouch.*

Across syntactic categories, as it happens, temporary states tend to be especially conducive to having experiencer subjects (e.g., BE HUNGRY, BE ANGRY, BE IN THE GARDEN), and so are not typically compatible with BE₂. That said, there are also many individual-level states that are not well suited to a volitional agent, as noted above (e.g., BE TALL, BE ATTRACTIVE, BE A DOCTOR). Yet those states of either sort that *are* conducive to having a volitional agent subject may form predicates with BE₂. This is shown in (35), where the predicates that have volitional subjects in (35a)–(35d), whether stage or individual level, are compatible with BE₂. On the other hand, (36a)–(36d), which are non-volitional, can only have the copula. That this generalization holds across syntactic categories is shown by the fact that APs, PPs, and DPs are compatible with BE₂ just in case the predicate to which they belong can be understood as having a volitional subject.

- (35) a. *Ian is (being)/be's on his best behavior for the supervisor.*⁹ PP, STAGE-LEVEL, VOLITIONAL
 b. *Ian is (being)/be's reluctant.* AP, STAGE-LEVEL, VOLITIONAL
 c. *Ian is (being)/be's dramatic about this.* AP, INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL, VOLITIONAL
 d. *Ian is (being/be's) a friend.* DP, INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL, VOLITIONAL
 (36) a. *Ian is (*being/*be's) in a good/bad mood.* PP, STAGE-LEVEL, NON-VOLITIONAL
 b. *Ian is (*being/*be's) angry/tired of pizza.*¹⁰ AP, STAGE-LEVEL, NON-VOLITIONAL
 c. *Ian is (*being/*be's) tall.* AP, INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL, NON-VOLITIONAL
 d. *Ian is (*being/*be's) a doctor.* DP, INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL, NON-VOLITIONAL

Further, even those permanent states that are typically ill suited to BE₂ may be coerced into its use under the right circumstances, in which case the subject will be understood as a volitional agent. (37) is from an online message board in which a woman describes how men have reacted violently to her height.

9. Contrast *Ian is (*being/*be's) at his best/worst*, where the PP is not volitional and so is incompatible with BE₂. See similarly (36a).

10. Note that certain adjectives of emotion are grammatical with BE₂ when they involve volitional actions. So, while **is being angry/furious* is ungrammatical, *Ian is being pissy/grumpy* is fine. This is because to be pissy or grumpy is to engage in a particular kind of *behavior* that the subject could in principle decide not to engage in (cf. (34e) above).

- (37) “I’ve often had abuse from men who seem affronted by my physique, as if I’m being tall AT them somehow.”¹¹

Accordingly, adding *on purpose* to stage-level states increases their acceptability with BE₂.¹²

- (38) a. ?*Ian is being angry/drunk/confused on purpose.*

We would not expect the kind of coercion effects seen in (37) and (38) (nor the coerced pretending meaning of the *is being the doctor* type) if the volitionality of sentences with BE₂ had its source from anywhere but the BE₂ itself. I assume, then, that BE₂ assigns a theta role of AGENT in its specifier position, and that this agent must be sentient and have volition.

This assumption is somewhat complicated by the felicitous usage of *is acting/acts* in sentences where *is being/be’s* is illicit, as shown in (39). Here, ACT, whose subject is agentive, is seen to be compatible with stage-level states with which BE₂ cannot regularly occur.

- (39) *Ian is acting/acts drunk. (*is being/*be’s)* STAGE LEVEL

Yet ACT does not, in fact, require volitionality. With stage-level states, it can mean either ‘pretend to be X’ or ‘exhibit signs of being X’, where X is a property of some sort, as shown in (40). By contrast, BE₂ cannot be used to express the meaning in (40b).

- (40) *Ian is acting drunk/tired.*
 a. ‘Ian is pretending to be drunk/tired’. VOLITIONAL
 b. ‘Ian is exhibiting signs of being drunk/tired’. NON-VOLITIONAL

I thus regard both ACT and BE₂ as having agentive subjects but differing in the kinds of complements they may select for, with BE₂ requiring a complement that is compatible with volitionality and ACT lacking this requirement. In other words, while ACT requires only an agentive subject, BE₂ additionally requires that its subject be volitional (contrast *The car is acting funny* vs. **The car is being funny* vs. *Ian is being funny*). For this reason, a sentence like *Ian is being drunk/tired*—insofar as it has any meaning—can only mean ‘Ian is pretending to be drunk/tired’, not ‘Ian is exhibiting signs of being drunk/tired’.

BE₂ cannot readily combine with stage-level states like ANGRY or DRUNK, nor individual-level states like TALL, because these are all things that one *experiences*. Similarly, one can do cute or sexy things (hence *is being/be’s cute/sexxy*) but one either is or is not attractive/handsome/beautiful (**is being/be’s attractive/etc.*). So, too, one can be being a friend to someone by doing a set of particular volitional actions, or one can be being a child about something, but one cannot be being a teacher (or any other occupation) because this is a general property that a person has or lacks irrespective of their volitional actions at any given time (in contrast to predicates like *is teaching* or *teaches*). A friend, on the other hand, may be behaving like a friend in one moment but be behaving like a jerk in the next moment, and so *is being a friend* is meaningful as a volitional action. As discussed above, only in contexts of pretending can one felicitously utter a sentence of the type *Ian is being the teacher* (i.e., acting as if he were), where the predicate BE THE TEACHER is in fact false.

Interestingly, stage-level predicates that are incompatible with *be’s* or *is being* may nonetheless be compatible with BE₂ in grammatical situations other than habitual or progressive. Crucially, however, it is precisely in those contexts in which one can (still) voluntarily *do* something about the unfolding

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

12. Similarly, the inclusion of an adverbial *all* in sentences like *He’s being all angry* tends to improve their acceptability considerably. Such sentences invariably involve some deliberate action on the part of the subject.

of some eventuality that BE₂ is licensed (cf. (25b) above for a similar example with an individual-level predicate).

- (41) a. *Don't be angry (any longer/tomorrow)*
 b. *Don't be drunk (tomorrow/*any longer)*
 c. **Don't be ridiculed (any longer/tomorrow)*

In (41a), 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 point of utterance. In (41b), only the preventive reading ‘don’t get drunk at some future time’ is possible, since, when already drunk, one has no 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 (41c), the passive is used, which regularly consists of the copula and a VP complement (e.g., *You aren't ridiculed*). When BE₂ is used in place of the copula, the sentence is ungrammatical. This is because BE₂ cannot take a VP complement and a passive sentence cannot have a volitional subject. So, here also the use of BE₂ is meaningful only insofar as the subject has deliberate agency over the realization or not of the predicate.

I see no theory-external reason, then, not to suppose that the subject of BE₂ is base generated in the specifier position of the VP headed by BE₂. I therefore claim the following.

- All predicates at least optionally have a “Kratzerian” event variable *s* (Kratzer 1995). Whether this is realized and interpreted as eventive depends on the predicate type and the syntax of the rest of the clause/sentence.¹³
- The head BE₂ assigns an agent theta role as its external argument, which must be volitional. It selects for a complement that is compatible with this volitionality.
- All predicates with BE₂ obligatorily contain a “Kratzerian” event variable *s*, as with all other eventive verbs.
- *Is being/Be's* never has to be used, but it is licensed just in case the predicate is compatible with volitionality.¹⁴

Some additional evidence in favor of this treatment comes from small clauses, where the linear order is compatible with a subject projection in Spec-VP when BE₂ is used. That this is the same BE as the one found in *be's* and *is being* is clear from the ungrammaticality of (43c), which contains an intrinsically stage-level predicate that is non-volitional (i.e., precisely the circumstances under which BE₂ is predicted to be ungrammatical).

- | | | | |
|------|----|---|------------------|
| (42) | a. | <i>Ian made/*saw Mary his friend.</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |
| | b. | <i>Ian made/*saw Mary crazy.</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |
| | c. | <i>Ian made/saw Mary angry.</i> | STAGE LEVEL |
| (43) | a. | <i>Ian made/saw Mary be his friend.</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |
| | b. | <i>Ian made/saw Mary be crazy.</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |
| | c. | <i>*Ian made/saw Mary be angry.</i> | STAGE LEVEL |

13. The “Kratzerian” event variable *s* is located “in the Specifier position of the highest VP-shell” (Stowell 2007:443) whenever the predicate is not (treated as) individual level.

14. In progressive passives like *is being ridiculed* I consider *is being* to be the progressivized copula (BE₁), not the BE₁ + the participle of BE₂ (cf. Table 1 above). Though this is homophonous with the *is being* found in active sentences, it plainly does not have a volitional subject (#*is being ridiculed on purpose*).

Importantly, with an AP complement BE₂ can be felicitously replaced by ACT (*Ian made/saw Mary act crazy*), whose subject can be safely assumed to be generated in Spec-VP.

And so the meaning imposed by BE₂ 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 volitional. Thus, the three-way difference between the predicates in (44) emerges.

- | | | |
|------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (44) | a. <i>Ian is funny (in general).</i> | INDIVIDUAL LEVEL |
| | b. <i>Ian is funny (tonight).</i> | STAGE LEVEL |
| | c. <i>Ian is being/be's funny.</i> | STAGE LEVEL, PROG/HAB, VOLITIONAL |

The first is individual level, lacking a Kratzerian event variable *s*; the second is stage level with a Kratzerian event variable *s*; the third is stage-level with a Kratzerian event variable *and* an obligatorily volitional-agentive subject. It is a property of the V-head BE₂ that selects for a complement of the right sort, meaning that the complement must be compatible with volitionality.

7 Adverbs of volition

It may be thought that, if BE₂ requires volition, then it should be incompatible with adverbs such as *unintentionally*, *accidentally*, *inadvertently*, *reluctantly*, *unwillingly*, and so on. In fact, BE₂ is not generally incompatible with such adverbs, as shown in (45).

- (45) a. *Ian is unintentionally being funny.*
 b. *Ian be's funny unintentionally.*

The grammaticality of (45) can be explained by the fact that *unintentionally* does not deny volition, *per se*, but intention. That is, it simply asserts that the subject does not wish his actions to be perceived as funny, or that he is unaware of their funniness. Yet the actions themselves remain volitional, and this volition is not targeted by the adverb. Compare the equally grammatical *Ian is acting funny unintentionally*, in which the subject can likewise be interpreted as agentive and volitional if he is doing things on purpose that he does not mean to be funny but that the speaker deems to be funny.

Such adverbs are even compatible with a highly volitional verb like VOLUNTEER, as in *Ian unintentionally volunteered* or even *Ian unwillingly volunteered*. The former sentence is felicitous in a situation where (for instance) the subject raised his hand to ask a question, but his voluntary action of hand raising was misinterpreted as being in response to someone's request for volunteers (a situation familiar from sitcoms, for example). The latter sentence presupposes that the subject, if he could have had his way, would not have volunteered, but that certain other considerations compelled him to do so anyway. In all cases, these adverbs do not target the subject's volition of doing particular actions, they only say that the *effects* of the subject's voluntary actions are contrary to his expectations or intentions.

The same seems to apply across the board with verbs that have agentive subjects. A sentence like *Ian was running unwillingly*, for instance, presupposes that he was running and would not typically be taken to mean that he was not in control of his limbs, but rather that there was some external motivation that led him to make the voluntary decision to run. The subject is in control of his behavior, and so his actions are strictly volitional, but the fact that the subject is engaging in these behaviors is not in accord with what he might prefer to be doing.

For this reason, predicates involving absent mindedness are grammatical with BE₂, since the actions of the subject are voluntary, even if their effects are not, as shown in (46).

- (46) a. *Ian is being/be's careless.*
 b. *Ian is being/be's absent minded.*

Sentences like these mean that Ian is (voluntarily) engaging in activities that are contrary to those that could be considered careful or attentive. Despite the fact that the subject most likely does not intend or know that his behavior is careless or absent minded, he is nonetheless in control of these behaviors. The sentences remain felicitous even if the subject believes he is being careful but is in fact being careless, provided that he is the one carrying out his actions of his own free will.

However, the adverb *involuntarily* does seem to target volition proper. The sentence *Ian involuntarily volunteered* is odd at best, as is *Ian is involuntarily running/studying* or *Ian is involuntarily being funny*. Insofar as such sentences are interpretable, they may have a coerced meaning such that the subject has lost control of his faculties and is engaging in a behavior over which he has no control, or that he is being physically forced to do these things by the action of another. Accordingly, under normal circumstances, this adverb is not felicitous with BE₂, since BE₂ requires a volitional subject. By contrast, non-volitional sentences like *Ian is involuntarily learning* or *Ian is involuntarily being committed to the hospital* are entirely felicitous.

8 Conclusion

In sum, there are two different lexical items BE in English (BE₁ and BE₂). The substantive BE requires a volitional, agentive subject. In NSAE, substantive BE (BE₂) has a habitual use. The distribution of habitual *be's* is consistent with that of BE₂ generally. Its range of application is predictable on this basis, such that grammaticality judgments are possible.

Though this analysis works for English, 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* (BE₁) and SER translating *being* (BE₂), the opposite of what we might expect. Likewise, in Sanskrit, the imperative of the copula, *edhi*, is used where English (as I have claimed) has BE₂. Finally, in Scottish Gaelic and AAE, substantive/aspectual BE is used in many places where (N)SAE 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 English data alone, and a more general account that applies cross-linguistically is, in my view, desirable.

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