

## Verb to be in Progressive Tense in American English\*

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### ABSTRACT

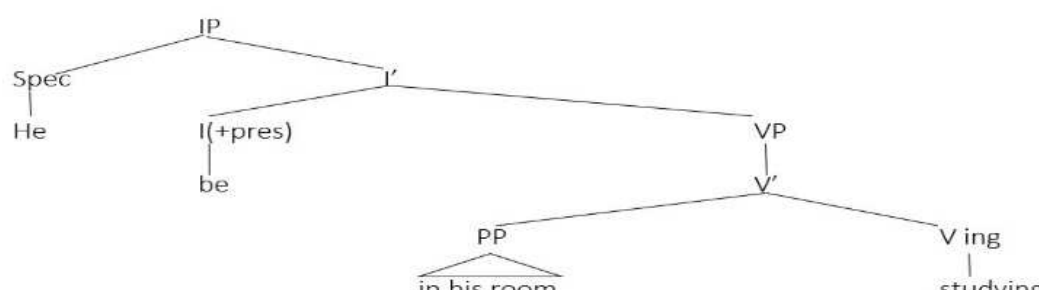
The purposes of this study were to threefold as follows: 1) to determine whether “be” is auxiliary verb in progressive or not in (1) He’s studying in his room and (2) He’s in his room studying. 2) To investigate whether “be” is finite or non-finite verb in progressive tense of American English in (1) He’s studying in his room and (2) He’s in his room studying. 3) To investigate whether “studying” is complement or present participle. The instrument used in this study was the grammar checklist designed by the researchers from extensive analysis of related literatures and consultation with experts. The researchers obtained the data by inquiring the seven American native speakers and analyzed the data by syntactic approach. This study met that “be” is auxiliary verb in progressive tense when American native speakers focuses on location. Then it could prove that “studying” is present participle in progressive tense; nevertheless, adverb of place was situated following “be”.

**Keywords :** 1. Auxiliary “be” 2. Present Participle 3. Progressive

## 1. Background and Problem Statement

It has widely known that Chomsky is a famous specialist linguist in syntax. He proposed the generative grammar theory. This theory cited that every sentence is constructed by humans for communication. It consists of two main structures. One is the deep structure (DS) and the other structure is the surface structure (SS). The Deep structure is originated from human mind or humans' thinking but it is not applied for using in the real communication. Whereas surface structure is transformed by transformational rule to communicate in actual situations, the grammatical functions of both structures are not be transformed.

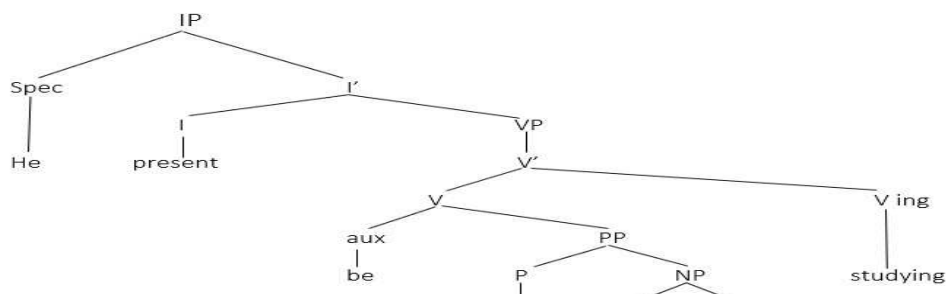
However, we notice that the progressive tense as cited in “Pearson Longman text book, Understanding and Using English Grammar 4<sup>th</sup>”. It explains that present progressive tense can use for expression of place. For example, (1) He's studying in his room. According to sentence (1), it has adverb of place “in his room” and its position follows a verb that its meaning focusing on the activities which he does. While “(2) He's in his room studying” focuses on location when American native speakers emphasize on location. They use sentence (2). According to mention above, present participle could be at the end position of the sentence. It observed that whenever native speakers aim at location, adverb of place is likely to be a complement of auxiliary “be” see figure 1. He's in his room studying.



**Figure 1** English Sentence Structure : He's in his room studying.

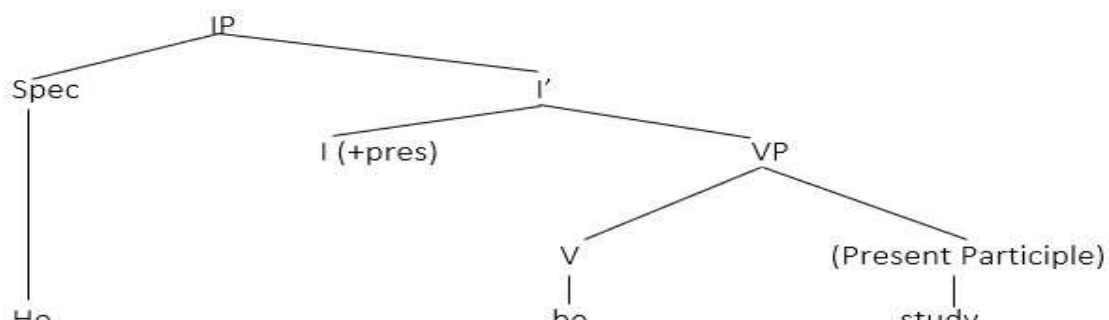
Notice that PP (in his room) or adverb of place could possibly be as a complement of “be” because present participle situated at final position of the

sentence whenever the native speakers focus on location. Providing that we consider that PP or (in his room) is complement, it possibly concluded that “be” trend to be as a finite verb. It illustrated in figure 2.



**Figure 2** He’s in his room studying

We hypothesize that whenever PP (in his room) is complement, what the function of “-ing” is”. It could possibly be as an adjunct because “-ing” form is in the bar level. On the other hand, according to sentence (2) it may originate from two sentences which are combined together: “He’s studying in his room.” and “He’s in his room studying”. As shown in figure 3 and 4 respectively.



**Figure 3** He is studying.

As in figure 3, it illustrated that “be” could possibly as a finite verb and -ing form is a complement of “be”. In addition, PP (in his room) could be as a complement as shown in figure 4.

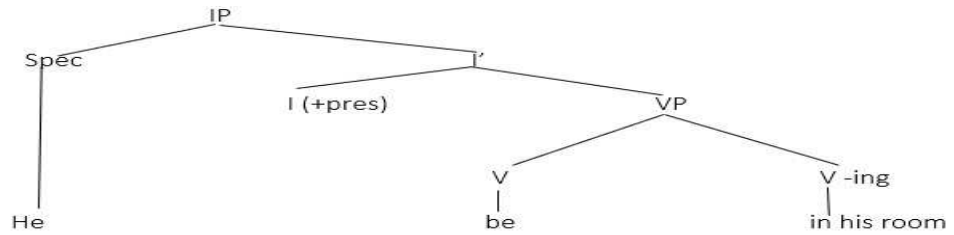


Figure 4 He is in his room.

According to figure 3 and 4, they could be combined together as shown in figure 5.

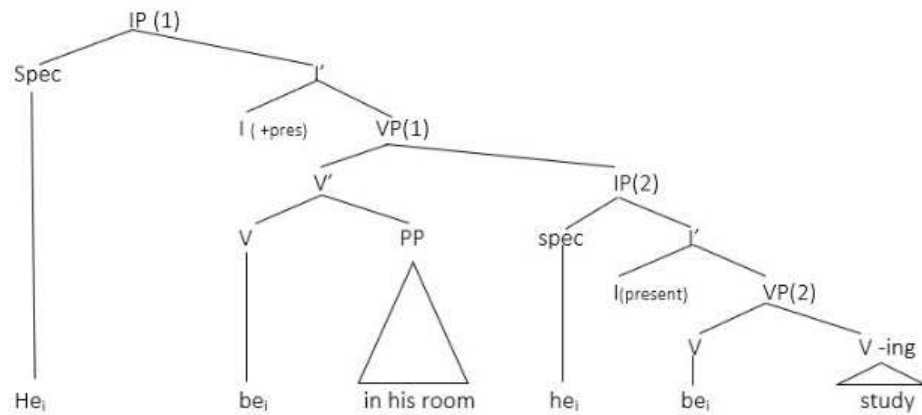


Figure 5 He's in his room studying.

According to figure 5, "he" in specifier and "be" under of IP (2) are able to share with specifier and VP in IP (1). As shown in figure 6.

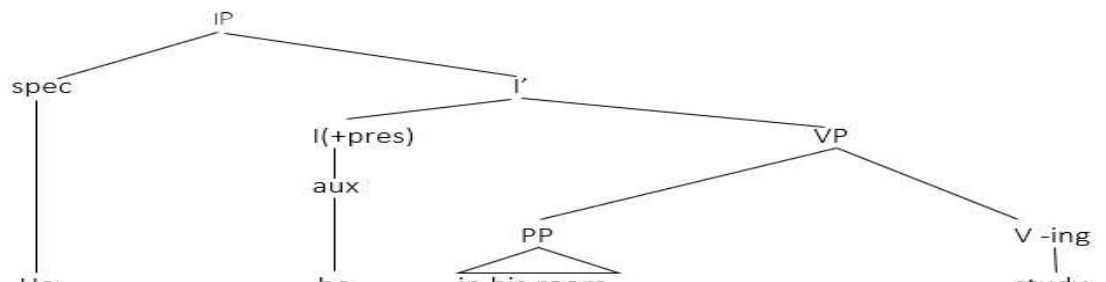


Figure 6 He's in his room studying.

As discussed earlier, we are interested to study the sentence "he's in his room studying" might originate from whether structure as in figure 1, 2 or 6.

## 2. Research Objectives

- 2.1 To determine whether “be” is auxiliary verb in progressive tense.
- 2.2 To study whether “be” is as a finite verb or auxiliary verb in terms of progressive tense of American English.
- 2.3 To investigate whether “studying” is complement or present participle.

## 3. Research Benefits

- 3.1 To Know the determine whether “be” is auxiliary verb in progressive tense.
- 3.2 To Know study whether “be” is as a finite verb or auxiliary verb in terms of progressive tense of American English.
- 3.3 To Know investigate whether “studying” is complement or present participle.

## 4. Research Methodology

This topic consists of the content of data, research instrument, data collection and data analysis result.

### 4.1 The Content of Data

The content of data emphasizes only on “be” in terms of present progressive tense of American English. This studied structure is “he’s studying in his room” and “he’s in his room studying” which obtained from Understanding and Using English Grammar Fourth Edition of Pearson Longman text book that first published in 2009, USA.

The instrument of this study includes one grammar checklist as explanation below.

1) The grammar checklist is progressive tense of English. It consists of present, past and future aspect. It has totally 12 sentences and seven American native speakers were inquired.

2) Population: twenty American people who have been working at different places in Thailand.

3) Sample population: seven American native speakers were inquired and were selected by sampling.

### 4.2 Research Instrument

The instrument of this study is the grammar checklist.

4.2.1 The grammar checklist is progressive tense of English. It consists of present, past and future aspect. It has totally 12 sentences and seven American native speakers were inquired as shown below.

Grammar Checklist to inquire American Native Speakers							
Progressive Tense structures	ANS (1)	ANS (2)	ANS (3)	ANS (4)	ANS (5)	ANS (6)	NAS (7)
1. He's studying in his room.							
2. He's in his room studying.							
3. He's in his room not studying.							
4. He's in his room no studying.							
5. He'll be studying in his room.							
6. He'll be in his room studying.							
7. He'll be in his room not studying.							
8. He'll be in his room no studying.							
9. He was studying in his room.							
10. He was in his room studying.							
11. He was in his room not studying.							
12. He was in his room no studying.							

\*Ans means American Native Speaker

The twelve sentences are constructed by researchers and they were checked by professors before trying out with an explanation below.

Step 1: the constructed sentence (1), (5) and (9) in order to check whether these constructed sentences are acceptable sentence by American native speakers or not.

Step 2: the constructed sentences (2), (6) and (10) are designed to investigate whether these constructed sentences are acceptable when we emphasize on location in progressive tense in terms of all progressive aspects.

Step 3: the constructed sentences (3), (7) and (11) are designed to indicate that if sentence (3), (7) and (11) are accepted by American native speakers, it could possibly mean that “study” is finite verb. This sentence uses “not” to check the property of negation because “not” modifies a verb.

Step 4: the constructed sentences (4), (8) and (12) are designed to prove that if the three sentences are accepted by American native speakers, it indicates that “studying” is as a noun because the property of “no” is used for modifying noun or noun phrase.

#### 4.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis Result

The data collection and data analysis were divided into four steps according to the objectives of this study by inquiring from seven American native speakers (ANS)

**Table 1** Grammar Checklist

Grammar Checklist to inquire American Native Speakers							
Progressive Tense structures	ANS (1)	ANS (2)	ANS (3)	ANS (4)	ANS (5)	ANS (6)	NAS (7)
1. He's studying in his room.	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
2. He's in his room studying.	/	/	x	/	/	/	/
3. He's in his room not studying.	/	/	x	x	/	/	/
4. He's in his room no studying.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5. He'll be studying in his room.	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
6. He'll be in his room studying.	/	/	x	/	/	/	/
7. He'll be in his room not studying.	/	/	x	x	/	/	/
8. He'll be in his room no studying.	x	x	/	x	x	x	x
9. He was studying in his room.	/	/	x	/	/	/	/
10. He was in his room studying.	/	/	x	/	/	/	/
11. He was in his room not studying.	/	/	x	x	/	/	/
12. He was in his room no studying.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

\* / means acceptable by American native speaker and x means not acceptable by American native speakers

According to Grammar Checklist, it could be described step by step.

As in step 1: It found that (1), (5) and (9) are acceptable by mostly American native speakers.

As in step 2 : It found that (2), (6) and (10) are almost accepted by American native speakers.

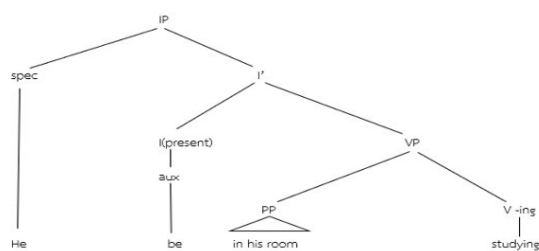
As in step 3 : It found that (3), (7) and (11) all are almost accepted by American native speakers.

As in step 4 : It found that (4), (8) and (12) could not be accepted by American native speakers.

## 5. Research Results

This section summarized the research finding: to determine whether “be” is auxiliary verb in progressive or not. According to the grammar checklist discussed above in Data analysis result, it indicated that sentence (1), (5) and (9) are all acceptable ;therefore, “be” is auxiliary verb and “studying” is present participle. It responds with theory of auxiliary verb. Then the sentence (2), (6) and (10) are acceptable. It means that speakers can situate “location” between auxiliary verb and present participle. The sentence (3), (7) and (11) are accepted. It met that “studying” is present participle and its function is complement of auxiliary “be” since I used “not” to check that “study” is finite verb. Nevertheless, sentence (4), (8) and (12) are not unaccepted. It may confirm that “studying” is not gerund as a noun but it is a complement of auxiliary “be”.

It could possibly response to the research question that “be” is still auxiliary verb in progressive tense even though it focuses on location. Therefore, it can be explained by tree diagram as mentioned in figure 1. as discussed in state of the problem in the topic of introduction.



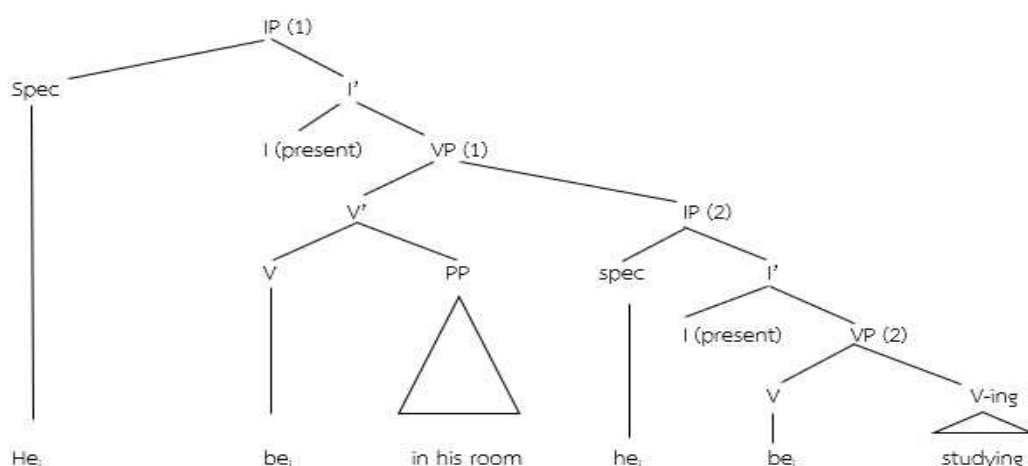
Refer to figure 1: He's in his room studying.



## 6. Discussion

This study found that “be” is auxiliary verb in the sentence. “He’s in his room studying”. Firstly, auxiliary “be” requires one argument “studying” whereas an adverb of location is between “be” and present participle, “studying”. Therefore, “studying” is a complement of auxiliary verb. When I used negation (not, no) to investigate the property of verb and noun respectively, it met “studying” is a present participle not as a noun phrase. On the other hand, if figure 1 is accepted, it showed that “in his room” is as an adjunct because sometimes it could be omitted.

As merging the sentences in figure 3 and 4 = 5 and 6 respectively mentioned in state of the problem, it said that “he’s in his room studying” it may originally come from two sentences: “He’s studying” and “he’s in his room” as shown in figure 15.



**Figure 7** Refer to discussion from two structures : He’s in his room and He’s studying.

It found that it is hardly possible to accept this hypothesis since “studying” is proved as a complement of auxiliary “be” and “in his room” can be omitted. Then, “be” was investigated by native speakers and it is auxiliary verb not finite verb. Furthermore, I use “not” and “no” to prove this hypothesize of result as well as it proved that “studying” is verb not as a noun.

This study concluded that “be” is auxiliary verb and “studying” is present participle in progressive structure in terms of location (adverb of place) in American English in present progressive tense.

## 7. Research Recommendations

### 7.1 Policy Recommendations

7.1.1 Should have the policy verb to be in progressive tense in American English.

### 7.2 Implementation Suggestions

7.2.1 Should have the determine whether “be” is auxiliary verb in progressive tense and always to practice verb to be in progressive tense in American English.

### 7.3 The suggestion for the further research

7.3.1 Should have to study the irregular verbs for verb to be in progressive tense in American English.

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