

[This a draft version of an article which appeared in 1999 in *Leuvense Bijdragen* 88(3-4), pp. 289-304. This version may contain some errors that have been corrected in the published article. What is corrected here but not in the published version, though, is the section numbering.]

*Keep and keep on compared**

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1. A problematic pair

Linking form with meaning, and hence formal differences with semantic ones, arguably makes up the very essence of linguistic investigation. In the following pairs, for example, the a- and the b-sentences are slightly different in form. Linguists have to be able to tell – and preferably also explain – the difference in meaning between them. (The sentences are taken from the English, French and Dutch language respectively.)

- (1a) *He remembered doing it*
(1b) *He remembered to do it*
(Wierzbicka 1988: 23)
- (2a) *C'est bon, le vin*
(Wine is good)
(2b) *Il est bon, le vin*
(The wine is good)
(Hawkins et al. 1996: 54)
- (3a) *Ineke schonk Jan een borrel in*
(Irene poured John a drink)
(3b) *Ineke schonk voor Jan een borrel in*
(Irene poured a drink for John)
(Kirsner 1985: 251)

“Difference in form entails difference in meaning” can be heard as the credo of many a grammarian (cf. Van der Horst 1995). It not only reflects the ‘Humboldtian’ belief that there is a perfect one-to-one relation between forms and meanings in language, but it also serves as a basic research hypothesis.

Therefore, asking what difference in meaning there might be between the aspectual verbs *keep* and *keep on* is by no means a more futile issue than the distinction between, say, the gerund and the infinitive. However, for all the research that has been done into the English language, including its aspectual system, this question has hardly been addressed, let alone been answered conclusively.

Our verb pair *keep/keep on* constitutes a serious threat to the belief in the isomorphic principle of language. English Reference grammars often put *on* between brackets after *keep* in example sentences, which gives the impression that this particle is merely an optional element. English dictionaries too seem to treat *keep* and *keep on* as

* I thank Susan Reed for the stimulating discussions on the topic and Renaat Declerck for his thoughtful comment on an earlier version of this article. Most of the ideas in it were presented at the *Lentetaaldag* of the Belgian Circle of Linguistics in Leuven, May 8th 1999, and I am grateful for my audience’s critical attention.

pure synonyms. Cobuild's *English Dictionary* (1995), for example, does this very explicitly:

If you **keep** doing something, you do it repeatedly or continue to do it. (...) *I keep forgetting it's December... I turned back after a while, but he kept walking...* (...) **Keep on** means the same as **keep**. *Did he give up or keep on trying?... My wife keeps on saying I work too hard.*
(Cobuild 1995; my underlining—B. C.)

2. *On* for emphasis?

Somewhat surprisingly, there is another volume in the Cobuild series, *English usage* (1992), which does mention a difference in use:

For emphasis, you can use **keep on** instead of 'keep'
(Cobuild 1992: 342)

It is true that the particle *on* is often used to emphasise the durative nature of some situation, as in

- (4) So the morning keeps dragging on and on and on.
(Cobuild corpus)

A difference in emphasis seems intuitively right and incontestable: if *keep* itself expresses durativity or repetitiveness of a situation, we can only expect an added *on* to stress this aspectual meaning. However, this account leaves a couple of problems unsolved.

To begin with, there are other ways to achieve emphasis than just adding *on*. If we start from the sentence *She kept singing*, we can think of at least two emphatic variants:

- (5a) She *just* kept singing.
(5b) She kept singing *and singing*.

Assuming that *on* does indeed add 'emphasis', in what way, then, could its effect be distinguished from *just* in (5a) or the repetition of the *-ing* form in (5b)? On further consideration, the label 'emphatic' appears to be imprecise and impracticable (cf. Goddard 1998: 166).

Secondly, when we look at actual discourse, invoking a difference in emphasis between *keep* and *keep on* is often unwarranted. In the following stretches of authentic language use, the two verbs occur alternately, but it is not possible to say that the one is less emphatic than the other (the italics have been added—B. C.):

- (4) He is the type who will *keep on* learning, *keep* picking things up
(Cobuild corpus)

- (5) “I just *kept* fighting,” said Rubin, who saved nine match points against Novotna in Paris. It reached the stage where I *kept on* saying ‘one more game and it will be over’. But the match just *kept on* going and going. I told myself to *keep* fighting and that’s what I did. ...”
(Cobuild corpus)

We must conclude that “emphasis” is irrelevant to the distinction between *keep* and *keep on*. If in some cases *keep* does sound weaker than *keep on*, this follows from a more important difference.

3. A different sort of meaning

Keep on can be used in a way *keep* cannot be used. It can occur on its own, that is, without any sort of complementing *-ing* form. In other words, *keep on* may *but need not* be followed by another verb, as is exemplified by the English jocular phrase

- (8) Keep on keeping on!

The first occurrence of *keep on* is followed by an *-ing* form, which happens to be the *-ing* form of *keep on*. The second occurrence is used independently: it is not followed by yet another *-ing* form. The verb *keep* cannot be used in this latter way:

- (9) I think after the initial check’s been made it’s important to *keep on* (**keep*) and maintain a check on it
(ICE-GB: S2A-064-048; italics mine—B. C.)
- (10) She sits down again in the total dark and asks me to please *keep on* (**keep*) and so I do.
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)

This difference in use, I believe, reveals a difference in meaning. More specifically, *keep* and *keep on* have a different *sort* of meaning. *Keep on* has a full, lexical sort of meaning (something like ‘persevere, carry on, not give up, continue’), which enables it to be used on its own. *Keep on* does not rely on another verb form to be meaningful. By contrast, *keep* has an incomplete sort of meaning, so that it must be completed with something else.

My assumption is that *keep on* retains much of its independent character when it is followed by an *-ing* form. This means that the predicate in *She kept on winning* is not a seamless, indivisible whole. In technical terms, it is not a single verb phrase. Rather, it is a combination of two relatively independent verb phrases: *kept on* + *winning*. In *She kept winning*, by contrast, the predicate is to be analysed more plausibly as a single verb phrase.

Although this assumption is hard to prove, there is some synchronic and diachronic corroboration available.

First of all, it can be shown that *on* belongs to *keep* and not to the following *-ing* form. The acceptability of both (11a) and (11b) could lead one to think, though, that *on* belongs as much to the *-ing* form as to *kept*:

- (11a) She kept on walking.
(11b) She kept walking on.

However, in many cases, *on* cannot occur after the verb in the *-ing* form. Compare:

- (12a) She kept on winning.
(12b) *She kept winning on.

(13a) People keep on marrying.
(13b) *People keep marrying on.

(14a) He kept on recovering.
(14b) *He kept recovering on.

Therefore, the only correct way to analyse the sequence *kept on winning* is isolating *kept on* from the *-ing* form:

- (12c) She {kept on} {winning}.

In *She kept winning*, there is no similar syntactic reason to break up the predicate. On the contrary, since *kept* itself is quite meaningless (**She kept ???*), it seems more justified to take the two verb forms (*kept + winning*) together and treat them as a syntactic unit:

- (12d) She {kept winning}.

Secondly, there is some additional diachronic support for the assumption that *keep on Verb-ing* is a combination of two VPs while *keep Verb-ing* forms only one VP: the latter pattern is older than the former. Although the OED has some early attestations of *keep on + -ing* form going back to 1699, 1753 and 1793, such combinations are not frequent until the second half of the nineteenth century. It is not implausible, then, that *keep on* has largely retained its status as an independent verb when combined with an *-ing* form. There has not been much time for *keep on Verb-ing* to freeze up into a single grammatical pattern. It is still felt as consisting of two separate entities. The combination of *keep* and an *-ing* form, on the other hand, is already frequent from the last part of the seventeenth century onwards. Visser even quotes a middle English “forerunner” from 1391:

- (15) kep bydding ay, and lyf clenly.
(Visser 1973: 1898)
(Always keep praying, and live a clean life.)

In the course of the centuries, *keep* may well have grammaticalized into an auxiliary of the following verb in *-ing*, with which it makes up one VP.

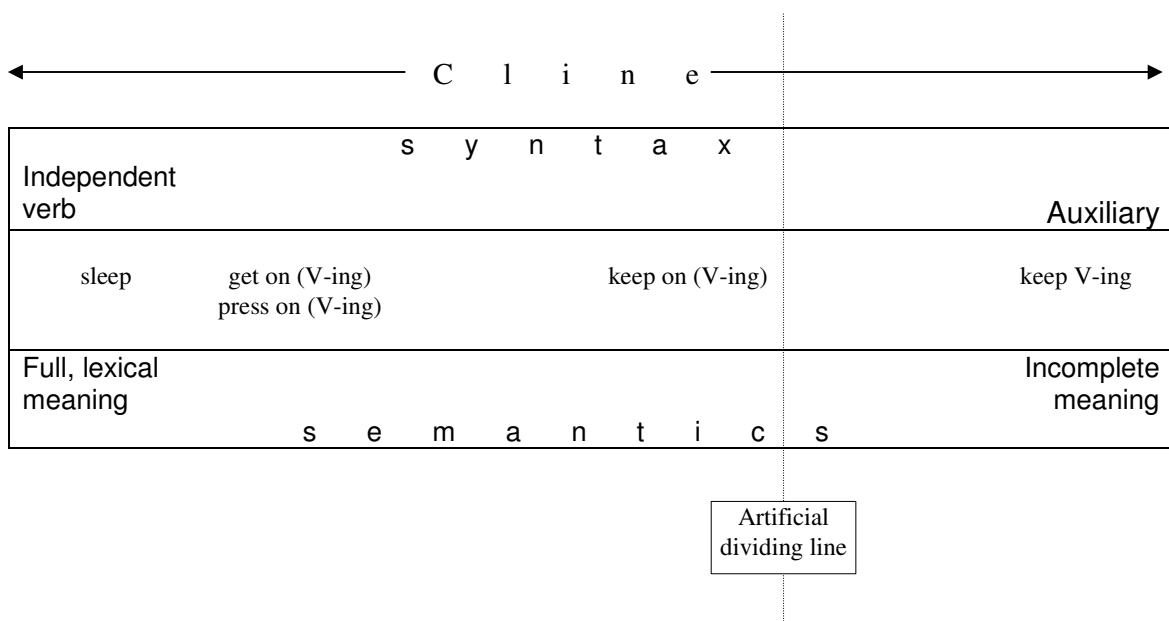
4. Auxiliary cline

The Oxford English Dictionary gives the following information in the entry of *keep on*:

(intr.) To continue or persist in a course or action; to go on with something. Now freq. with pres. pple.
(OED 1989: VIII, 374; my underlining—B. C.)

The additional grammatical note is an understatement, since in almost all occurrences of *keep on*, one will find an elaborating verb in *-ing* now. This indicates that *keep on* may be on its way to being auxiliarized as well, even if it is still quite happy without the addition of another verb.

We could set out a scale of semantic and syntactic independence, with completely independent verbs at one end, and true auxiliaries at the other:



This schema wants to make clear that fullness of meaning and syntactic autonomy are a matter of degree. The line between auxiliaries and independent verbs has to be drawn somewhere, but it should be kept in mind that this line is really an artificial one. The aspectual verb *keep* is represented as an auxiliary, unlike *keep on*, which is (still) more like an autonomous verb. *Keep on*, for its part, is conceptually less self-sufficient than, for example, *sleep*, and therefore often elaborated by an *-ing* form too.

The phrasal verbs *get on* and *press on* resemble *keep on* in many respects. Like *keep on*, they both have an autonomous meaning. As Cobuild's *English Dictionary* says,

If you **get on** with something, you continue with something that you have started doing or you start something that you were about to do. *Jane got on with her work... Let's get on.*
(Cobuild 1995)

If you **press on** (...), you continue with a task or activity in a determined way, and do not allow any problems or difficulties to delay you. *Organizers of the strike are determined to press on.*
(Cobuild 1995)

The example sentences in the entries clearly show that *get on* and *press on* are perfectly fit to be used independently, that is, without another verb. Despite their status of full lexical verb, though, they can occasionally be found with a following verb in *-ing*:

- (16) what they want to do is to be left alone to get on with their job to get on *building* their business up and not to be tied up with red tape
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)
- (17) I mean we just get on *smashing*.
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)
- (18) Ah well, I shall press on *smiling* with the usual blind optimism!
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)

What we have in these examples is an *-ing* form merely *specifying* or *elaborating* the full, lexical meaning of *get on* and *press on*. These verbs, even when combined with a verb in *-ing*, still have the same meaning as described in the dictionary definitions above. The grammatical bond between *get on* or *press on* and the following *-ing* form is very loose—no linguist would analyse *get on* or *press on* as an auxiliary.

Compared to *get on* and *press on*, *keep on* is used much more often in combination with an *-ing* form than on its own. Therefore, *keep on* is situated further right on the auxiliarity cline than *get on* and *press on*. But unlike the aspectual auxiliary *keep*, it *can* be used independently.

To sum up, it could be said that *keep* and *keep on* have a different semantico-syntactic status: *keep* is an auxiliary, *keep on* is more of an independent verb. If we accept this, we have to accept the following as well: *keep Verb-ing* constitutes one VP, whereas *keep on Verb-ing* is a combination of two VPs. This distinction is reflected in some minute grammatical differences, which we will deal with in the following paragraphs.

5. Keep (on) not Verb-ing

In a monograph devoted to the English verb, Palmer states that

... instead of:

He keeps not answering

we might expect ...:

He keeps on not answering.

(Palmer 1965: 159)

Palmer gives no reason for this “lexical restriction”. I think that an explanation can be found in the fact that *keep* has grammaticalized into an auxiliary. Such a change typically brings about syntactic limitations. Let us take a well-known example to illustrate this: *be going to*. This modal (or future tense) auxiliary displays a stronger formal fixation than the verb of movement from which it has developed. Compare:

- (19a) We’re going there to get three points.
 (19b) We’re going to get three points in the next home match.

In (19a), *going* is still used in its literal movement sense. Its bond with the *to*-phrase, expressing purpose, is relatively loose. That is why the adverbial *there* is allowed in between. In (19b), where *going* is a purely grammatical element (no longer expressing movement), there is no question that an element would be inserted between *going* and *to*. The pattern has become too fixed. Similarly, *keep Verb-ing* is a closely-knit grammatical unit, and it is because of this, I assume, that it does not license intervening elements.

In fact, an intervening *not* forces *keep* and the *-ing* form to come apart, just as *on* was seen to pull up a bracket barrier between the two verbs. Only, the barrier is not between *keep not* and the *-ing* form this time, but between *keep* and *not Verb-ing*. Indeed, *not* belongs to the verb in *-ing*, and not to *keep* (in which case, of course, we would say *don’t keep* instead of *keep not*):

- (20) She {keeps} {not talking} = she keeps being silent
 ≠ she stops talking (= she doesn’t keep talking)

So, using *not* after *keep* results in the single VP falling apart into two VPs. This is a disfavoured syntactic configuration for *keep*, which is too dependent to become grammatically isolated. *Keep on*, however, does not bear as strong a syntactic relation to the following *-ing* form as *keep* does, so that a following verb in *-ing* can be modified more easily.

“More easily” is a necessary addition to the preceding sentence, since various small constituents, including *not*, are sometimes observed to slip between *keep* and the *ing*-form as well:

- (21) the student keeps not doing as well as he or she should do.
 (Cobuild corpus; my underlining—B. C.)
- (22) After allowing them 25 minutes to keep vainly trying, the race had to be declared void.
 (Cobuild corpus; my underlining—B. C.)
- (23) I keep sort of hearing it mentioned
 (Cobuild corpus; my underlining—B. C.)
- (24) the addict knows no other way, doesn't *believe* she can achieve happiness and solve her problems on her own, so she keeps compulsively going back to that quick-fix – or another one.
 (Cobuild corpus; my underlining—B. C.)

- (25) Britain doesn't have the political weight in international terms to do anything other than keep “quietly plugging away”, as one foreign office official put it.
(Co-build corpus; my underlining—B. C.)

This does not alter the fact, though, that *not* is more happily used after *keep on* than after *keep*. I am confident that, for the reasons given, most native speakers will agree with the following judgements:

- (26a) ?I kept not trusting anybody for a long time after that.
(26b) I kept on not trusting anybody for a long time after that.

6. Be keeping (on) Verb-ing

Ever since Ross' 1972 article on “doubl-ing”, the constraint against adjacent *-ing* forms has been widely discussed by a host of grammarians. Without an attempt to be complete, I can mention Milsark (1972), Berman (1973), Emonds (1973), Pullum (1974), Bolinger (1979), Halliday (1980), McCawley (1988: 306-8), Wierzbicka (1988: 89-93), Dixon (1991: 67-8), Pullum & Zwicky (1991) and Westney (1992). “It is generally claimed”, reports Westney, “that *keeping -ing*, but not *keeping on -ing*, can cause violation” (1992: 495).

I will not mingle in the debate too fiercely, but I do want to remark on Bolinger's theory according to which “the problem is basically phonological” (1979: 56): successive *-ings* sound too “jingling”. With an intervening word, the jingling repetition is less conspicuous, which would account for the higher acceptability of *keeping on Verb-ing*.

Successions of two or more *-ings*, however, abound in speech and writing:

- (27) sing-ing; bring-ing; ming-ling (word-internal repetition);
a working meeting;
probing phrasing; no tearing feeling in her insides;
listening to the plumbing whining in the walls; the driving drumming of Ralph Salmins;
the risk of the fighting spreading beyond the borders;
techniques for studying ongoing processing (tripl-ing);
he has injured a hamstring during training (tripl-ing);
half the French divisions were affected, with few of the remaining being anything near reliable. (tripl-ing);
the Labor Government and the Affairs minister know what they're doing regarding improving the living standard of Aborigines (tripl-ing, or even quadrupl-ing)

Even if it might appear somewhat unfair to use word-internal repetition of *-ings* as counter-evidence, the abundance of word-external doubl-ing and tripl-ing undeniably proves that the constraint against strings of multiple *-ings* cannot be purely phonological in nature.

Dixon (1991: 67) suggests that there exists “a proscription on successive verbs being in *-ing* form *within* a VP” only. This proposal is consonant with my claim that *keep on Verb-ing* is made up of two verb phrases. Dixon's “rule” and my claim taken together predict that *keep on Verb-ing* falls out of the scope of the doubl-ing constraint.

Bolinger (1979: 56) too, besides, recognises the possibility that “the restriction is eased by (...) grammatical boundaries”, for instance by an invisible VP barrier between two *-ings*.

How can we *explain* that two successive *-ing* forms are acceptable if they belong to two different VPs but not if they are part of one and the same VP? Just why Dixon’s “rule” is the way it is, remains unclear. Remember, however, that *keep Verb-ing* was treated as one VP because of the strong auxiliary character of *keep*, and that auxiliaries are known to be morphologically defective. For example, a loss of the possibility to be used as a present participle has been noted for Dutch auxiliaries:

Tot ver in de 19de eeuw konden nog alle (?) hulpwerkwoorden gebruikt worden als tegenwoordig deelwoord. Thans is dit alleen nog mogelijk in zeer formele taal (*--alles gezegd hebbende; --niets meer aan de orde zijnde*) en in vaste uitdrukkingen (*--goed kunnende koken*)... Het is mogelijk dat de afname van het gebruik van hulpwerkwoorden als tegenwoordig haar feitelijke oorzaak niet vindt in de hulpwerkwoorden-cline maar in de algemenere afname van het gebruik van tegenwoordige deelwoorden, maar dan moeten we toch vaststellen dat om de een of andere reden de hulpwerkwoorden daar veel vatbaarder voor zijn dan de zelfstandige werkwoorden.

‘Well into the 19th century, all (?) auxiliaries could be used as present participle. Now this is only possible in very formal language (*--having said everything; --nothing being left under discussion*) and in fixed expressions (*--being able to cook well*)... It is possible that the reduction of the use of auxiliaries as present participles is not actually caused by the auxiliary-cline but by a more general reduction of the use of present participles, but even then we have to note that, for some reason or another, auxiliaries are much more susceptible to this than independent verbs.’

(Van der Horst 1999)

Similarly, I think, the impossibility of *keep* to occur in the progressive form could be seen as a natural result of its auxiliaryity. Semantically, *keep* normally plays a subordinate role, even if syntactically it remains head of the verb phrase. But along with its loss in semantic richness, a loss in inflectional possibilities is inevitable.

Remarkably, this gap in the paradigm of *keep Verb-ing* only concerns the form *keeping* as part of the progressive construction. As a gerund, *keeping* grammatically combines with another *-ing* form. So, in (28) the ungrammaticality arises from *keeping* being used in the progressive. In (29) *keeping* is a complement of *mind*, which takes the gerund. In (30) and (31), *keeping* occurs as a gerund after a preposition. In (32) too, *keeping* is a gerund, this time after the conjunction *than*.

(28) *He was keeping singing songs
(Bolinger 1979: 41)

(29) I didn’t really mind him keeping singing songs.

(30) I don’t like the idea of that man keeping singing songs.

(31) If nothing else, you have to admire Aslan’s sheer guts and determination for keeping going in the face of adversity.
(Cobuild corpus)

- (32) Perhaps UK could do this rather than keeping changing the names and having new, newer and newer initiatives.
(Cobuild corpus)

As with the prohibition against *keep not Verb-ing*, we should not look upon the doubling constraint against *keep Verb-ing* appearing in the progressive as a completely watertight rule. In the Cobuild corpus, I came across the following (spoken) example:

- (33) why am I keeping going over these things
(Cobuild corpus)

Also, I have not been able to find an authentic example with *keep on Verb-ing* in the progressive. Emonds (1973: 40) even disputes the acceptability of such sentences:

- (34) *She is keeping on knitting sweatshirts
(Emonds 1973: 40)

Perhaps, *keep on* too has already auxiliarized to such an extent that it becomes harder and harder to employ it with its full range of inflections.

Still, most grammarians consider the sequence *(be) keeping on Verb-ing* better than *(be) keeping Verb-ing*. The reason is not phonological, as I hope to have shown, but lies in the fact that *keep on* is (still) more independent than *keep*, and has therefore more morphological possibilities.

7. Keep (on) painting the picture

Brinton (1988: 87) mentions the following difference in grammaticality:

- (35a) *I kept painting the picture
(35b) I kept on painting the picture

One might disagree with this judgement and say, for example, that (35a) is fine if it is to mean that the same picture was reproduced over and over again. In any case, unless (35a) receives a far-fetched serial reading, it is probably not acceptable, while (35b) is perfect under the accomplishment reading of one single event (painting the picture). In other words, *keep* cannot normally combine with a durative situation tending towards a natural end-point, whereas *keep on* can.

The reason for this, according to Brinton (1988: 88), who follows Freed (1979: 91-2), is that *keep* “does not presuppose the prior occurrence of the situation”, which she thinks *keep on* does. *He kept on singing* indeed presupposes that the subject referent has already started singing earlier. This remains so after negating the sentence, a standard test for presuppositions (Fillmore 1971: 380, Declerck 1991: 4): *He didn't keep on singing* does not affect this presupposition – the subject referent's earlier singing is still presupposed.

However, the same goes for *He kept singing*: this sentence too seems to presuppose the prior singing of the subject referent. Negating this sentence does not

cancel the presupposition either: *He didn't keep singing* still presupposes that the subject referent started singing earlier. Conversely, there are some authentic sentences with *keep on* in which “prior initiation” is incompatible with contextual elements or with sound reasoning:

- (36) *Afterwards* he kept on saying that it was me who'd agreed to do it
(Collin Dexter, *The Daughters of Cain*; italics mine—B. C.)
- (37) he was a bit disappointed the first season, but *from then on* he has just kept on improving
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)
- (38) the man raised both hands to his mouth and kept on blowing at them
(Gutenberg corpus)

Of course, one could still save the idea of prior initiation in these sentences if *keep on* is analysed as having an added inchoative aspect of meaning: “begin and go on”. I think, however, that one would then confuse inherent meaning with ad hoc interpretation. Consequently, another explanation than “prior initiation of the situation” must be sought to account for the possibility of *keep on* to occur with accomplishments.

First of all, we have been treating the verb *keep on* as a single whole, because it forms one semantic unit. At the same time, it is evident that *keep on* is made up of two words, the last of which can be readily perceived as identical to the particle in *drive on* or *sleep on*. The particle *on* combines with many verbs so as to yield a spatial or temporal progress reading. Importantly, *on* never gives rise to a repetitive or series reading (**they arrived on*). Therefore, probably, the presence of *on* in *keep on painting the picture* hampers a repetitive reading and promotes a progress interpretation. The use of *keep on* with accomplishment situations is very suited to focus on the prolongation of the part of the situation preceding the achievement of the end-point.

Secondly, there is a link with the claim that *keep on Verb-ing*, unlike *keep Verb-ing*, is made up of two VPs. Especially when the stress falls on *on*, it is clear that *keep on* constitutes an independent VP of its own, with the following *-ing* form merely indicating *what* is kept on. In that case, we can even use an oblique constituent for the *-ing* phrase without much difference in interpretation:

- (39) She kept ON painting the picture \cong She kept on with painting the picture

It is not possible to similarly “degrade” the *-ing* form after *keep* into a prepositional object. *Keep* is not to be syntactically and semantically detached from the *-ing* form which follows:

- (40) She kept singing songs \neq *She kept with singing songs

It is precisely its semantic and grammatical autonomy, I think, which causes *keep on* to remain so to speak indifferent to what follows. All four Vendlerian situation types can occur: activities (41), accomplishments (42), achievements (43) and states (44):

- (41) It may be, in addition, that it was necessary for Charles Dickens to keep on *working* in order to prove that his father was truly an “insolvent” person.
(ICE-GB:W2B-006-076; italics mine—B. C.)
- (42) A SIDS baby (...) may not be able to arouse and just keeps on *going into coma*.
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)
- (43) Yes and we kept on *bumping into the crew*
(Cobuild corpus; italics mine—B. C.)
- (44) I always s’posed people had to keep on *being married* once they’d begun, but Milty says no, there’s ways of stopping if you can’t agree.
(Gutenberg corpus; italics mine—B. C.)

If *keep*, by contrast, is combined with an accomplishment, there is a semantic clash within one VP: *keep* introduces a sense of steadiness, while the accomplishment (e.g. *paint the car, go into coma*) involves a transition from one state to another (from unpainted to painted, from conscious to unconscious). Constancy and change are hard to reconcile, unless the *-ing* phrase is construed as a *series* of changes. The iteration of transitions itself, then, can be kept constant. Hence, *she kept painting the car* is grammatical only under the interpretation of *repeatedly* painting the car. Repeatedly going into coma, however, is rather nonsensical, which accounts for the difficulty of replacing *keep on* in (42) with *keep*:

- (42’) ??A SIDS baby (...) may not be able to arouse and just keeps going into coma.

8. Summing up

In 95% or more of the cases, *keep Verb-ing* and *keep on Verb-ing* seem to be interchangeable: e.g. *they kept (on) singing*. This fact obscures an important difference in meaning between *keep* and *keep on*. They code the same aspectual meaning, but while *keep* is imbued with this meaning only by combining with an *-ing* form, *keep on* owes it to itself. In other words, *keep* and *keep on* have a different *sort* of meaning: a conceptually incomplete meaning versus a full, lexical meaning. On the syntactic level, this corresponds with auxiliary status versus independent verb status. *Keep Verb-ing* is a further grammaticalized pattern than *keep on Verb-ing*.

This different sort of meaning explains some distributional differences that have been mentioned in the linguistic literature. These are rephrased here rather tentatively:

1. With *not* before the *-ing* form, *keep on* is preferred. (cf. Palmer 1965: 159)
2. After a form of *be* for the progressive, *keep on* is preferred. (cf. Bolinger 1979: 41)
3. With accomplishment situations, *keep on* is preferred. (cf. Brinton 1988: 88)

Bolinger’s phonological explanation for the second distributional difference (*she is keeping singing* sounds too “jingling” without intervening *on*) has been proved false, just like Brinton’s account of the third difference, which was based on a wrongly-assumed presuppositional difference (*keep on* presupposes “prior initiation of the

situation”; *keep* does not). Instead, all three distributional differences have been shown to result from the different semantico-grammatical status of the two verbs under investigation. My explanation therefore seems to have the merit of being a uniform one. Moreover, it is in keeping with recent findings in grammaticalization research.

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