

I could just be sat here all day: A corpus-based study on recent changes in the use of pseudo-passives with SIT and STAND in British English dialects

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The present study focuses on the use of pseudo-passives with SIT and STAND in British English. These are equivalent in meaning to the standard form with the present progressive:

- (1) a. so then we **were** just **sat** here watching *I'm a Celebrity* [BNC2014 ST8H: 917]
b. and this dog **was** just **sitting** in this little champagne bucket [BNC2014 SAQD: 387]
- (2) a. this man **was stood** there with this chainsaw [BNC2014 SAQD: 659]
b. and he **was standing** next to me and he kept making conversation [BNC2014 SKPP: 332]

Originally a feature of Northern English dialects (Klemola 1999), earlier studies based on the spoken section of the BNC1994 have shown that it has spread to other areas in Britain (Klemola 1999), notably the Southwest. This spread is more advanced for pseudo-passives with SIT, which are also found in the Midlands and in London (Stange 2014; see also Kortmann/Szmrecsanyi 2004 and Rohdenburg/Schlüter 2009 for the distribution of pseudo-passives in British English dialects).

Drawing on spoken data from the BNC1994 (demographic subset, 5m words) and the BNC2014 (11m words), this paper traces the diachronic development of pseudo-passives with SIT and STAND and their standard counterpart in British English in the last twenty years. Potential changes considered in the analysis include the geographical distribution of BE *sat* and BE *stood* and their frequency of use. In addition, the data are coded for speaker information (age, gender, socio-economic status, dialect) to see whether their use can be associated with a particular group of speakers. The analyses are based on c. 2,250 occurrences, c. 600 of which constitute pseudo-passives with SIT and STAND. First results show that, for both male and female speakers, BE *stood* is increasing in frequency at the expense of BE *standing* in real time and in apparent time. BE *sat*, in contrast, has considerably decreased in frequency in real time and in apparent time, while BE *sitting* remains stable. Despite this trend, BE *sat* is still more frequent in the 2014 data than BE *stood* (13 vs. 8 occ. pmw). Furthermore, pseudo-passives with SIT and STAND are newly attested in Eastern England dialects in the BNC2014 data, which indicates that this structure has now spread across the whole island. Pseudo-passives are thus apparently a feature that is maintained rather than effaced in the process of dialect levelling.

References

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