

I'm loving you – and knowing it too: Aspect and so-called stative verbs

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Abstract

English verbs are generally classified as either stative or dynamic, where one of the main differences is said to be that stative verbs are inimical to the progressive aspect. Cases where such verbs do occur in the progressive are often explained away as involving a change in verb meaning. Another common approach to the progressive is to maintain that the progressive form as such can convey a range of meanings. Most commonly, a distinction is made between progressives with aspectual meaning and progressives with subjective meaning. In the present paper we take a functional-semantic approach and argue that all so-called stative verbs can potentially be used in the progressive. We further argue that the grammatical morpheme *-ing* has a synchronically invariant core meaning which can be pressed into service via the progressive construction to evoke a variety of messages – aspectual and expressive – depending on the context and the communicative needs of the speaker. The data used in the present paper are 132 tokens of *BE loving* and 66 tokens of *BE knowing* from the Corpus of Historical American English. Our results suggest that one reason verbs such as these are said to be inimical to the progressive is because this usage is primarily a feature of spoken language, and most grammatical descriptions up until recently have been based on written English.

Key words – Corpus linguistics, aspect, progressive, American English, stative verbs.

1. Introduction.

Several recent studies indicate that there has been a rise in the frequencies with which the progressive is used in English. This is most notable for the 19th century (see SMITTERBERG 2005), but studies confirm the trend from Late Modern English onwards (HUNDT 2004; NÚÑEZ-PERTEJO 2007) and it has been observed to continue in the second half of the 20th century (MAIR and HUNDT 1995). One reason for the increase which has been suggested is that «there is currently a greater readiness than before to use the progressive form with stative verbs such as *want* or *understand*» (MAIR 2006: 89). However, as MAIR (2006: 92) himself points out, corpus evidence does not unambiguously confirm that the progressive with stative verbs can help account for the increase in numbers overall. This conclusion, also drawn by LEECH ET AL. (2009: 130), has been confirmed in our own study from 2008, where 50 verbs, classified as stative in various grammars, were investigated for occurrences in the progressive. The database for this survey was the British newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Observer* on CD-ROM from 1990 to 2006. The results showed that overall, there was no statistically significant change, although for a small number of verbs, an increase in relative frequency could be observed. This was true of for instance *love*, *regret*, *want* and *wish*, i.e. verbs expressing

emotion and attitude.¹ What was more interesting, however, was that the majority of the 50 verbs in our 2008 study did in fact occur in the progressive. MAIR (2006: 93) refers to such occurrences as «occasional instances of contextually licenced rule-breaking». However, the fact that many of them do occur in the progressive with some regularity warrants a theoretical approach which does not explain them away in terms of «conventions which can be flouted» (MAIR 2006: 93) but which can instead account for how speakers make use of language to express novel and unexpected messages. This is what we propose to do in the present paper. Our object of study will be two verbs which turned out to be diametrically opposed as to frequency in our 2008 study: one, *love*, showed an increase in relative frequency with the progressive; the other, *know*, did not occur in the progressive at all in the two British newspapers on which that study was based. The present study uses as its material Mark Davies's diachronic *Corpus of Historical American English*, which contains 66 tokens of *know* and 132 tokens of *love* in the progressive.

2. Survey of previous descriptions

MILLER, in *A Critical Introduction to Syntax* (2011: 153), says that

[w]hile it is true that the most stative of stative verbs, KNOW, does exclude the progressive (...), at least at the time of writing, many stative verbs do allow it, as Quirk et al. (1985, pp. 199-208) make clear.

One of the problems with the way this description is phrased, and one that is found in many of the works describing the use of the progressive in English, is that *verbs* are said to be either stative or non-stative. However, QUIRK ET AL. (1985) are not consistent on this point. In some places they refer to «stative *verbs*»; but in other places they talk instead about «stative/dynamic *situation types*» and how the stative/dynamic binary relates to verb *meanings* or verb *senses* rather than to verbs as such (our emphasis). They even say that verbs that have all the characteristics of stative verbs can in fact «be used in dynamic senses» (QUIRK ET AL. 1985: 205). Still, from the way they label examples such as the ones in (1) as «normal nonprogressives» and «nonnormal progressives», it is clear that they basically ascribe the feature of stativity to individual verbs.

- (1) a. *I hope you will come.* (NORMAL NONPROGRESSIVE)
 b. *I am hoping you will come.* (NONNORMAL PROGRESSIVE) (QUIRK ET AL. 1985: 202)

A corpus-based description of English such as BIBER ET AL.'s (1999), however, makes it clear that it is not really the type of verb (and whether they are stative in meaning or not) that explains their use in the progressive. For instance, in the category labelled «verbs referring to mental/attitudinal states and activities», there is a subgroup with the heading «frequently occurring with the progressive aspect (more than ten times per million words)» (BIBER ET AL. 1999: 472). In this group of verbs we find e.g. *hope*, *think*, and *wonder*. In another of BIBER ET AL.'s categories, «verbs referring to activities and physical events», the last group lists verbs «rarely occurring with the progressive

¹ HILBERT and KRUG (2012) comment on the increasing usage of the progressive «with stative verbs of liking, disliking and desire for emphatic purposes». However, they also stress that this is «not new to the progressive but an integral part of its origin» (HILBERT and KRUG 2012: 131).

aspect (less than 2% of the time)». Here the authors list verbs like *shrug*, *smash*, *suck* and *throw*; verbs which traditionally would belong in the dynamic verb category but which nevertheless are rare with the progressive (BIBER et al. 1999: 471). A final point, not mentioned in these two grammars, is that over time the frequency with which a certain verb occurs in the progressive can be attributed to conventionalization – the fact that many people today use the phrase *loving it* can certainly be at least partly ascribed to the slogan.

From the way descriptions of the progressive are phrased, it seems that grammars sometimes hold that the progressive and nonprogressive are occasionally in free variation, with no semantic (or pragmatic) difference. In a footnote on p. 204, QUIRK ET AL. (1985) give the examples *You look tired this evening/You are looking tired this evening*, followed by the comment that «[t]here is little discernible difference between the progressive and the nonprogressive variants here». Here one might fairly ask: if the two variants are indeed interchangeable, how come they both persist as speaker options in the language?

Yet another way of explaining the use of the progressive with stative verbs is to attribute a number of meanings to the progressive construction. One that is often found in grammars is what HUDDLESTON and PULLUM (2002: 167) refer to as «the waxing/waning» situation (*He is looking more like his father every day*). HUDDLESTON and PULLUM (2002: 170) categorise *know* as belonging to «verbs of cognition, emotion, and attitude», and according to them, none of the verbs in this group exclude the progressive. Nevertheless, they say about *know* that «it [i.e. its occurrence in the progressive] is just about restricted to the waxing/waning case». They cite an example to demonstrate this: *He claims fewer and fewer students are knowing how to write English when they come up to university* (HUDDLESTON and PULLUM, 2002: 170). HUDDLESTON and PULLUM (2002: 170) also make the claim that when stative verbs do occur in the progressive, they are reinterpreted, so that *They're loving every minute of it* is understood by the hearer as meaning “They are enjoying every minute of it”. In effect, their claim is that in a sentence pair like *I love it* and *I am loving it* we are dealing with two separate meanings of the verb *love*.

One issue that is often raised is that of grammaticality. QUIRK ET AL., for instance, claim that the progressive is often unacceptable with stative verbs, and many of their examples are starred to indicate this, like (2):

(2) *We own a house in the country.*

**We are owning a house in the country.* (QUIRK ET AL. 1985: 198)

They go on to say that the fact that *own* is incompatible with the progressive «can be explained, in part, by the observation that stative verb meanings are inimical to the idea that some phenomenon is “in progress”» (QUIRK ET AL. 1985: 198).

A recent textbook, *Understanding English Grammar* by Thomas Payne from 2011, perpetuates this idea. Payne starts out by saying that

[a] stative situation is one in which there is no movement or change. Therefore, putting a stative verb into the progressive construction sets up a logical contradiction – an action cannot be both dynamic and stative at the same time! (PAYNE 2011: 292)

Like Huddleston and Pullum, Payne explains the fact that we do find these verbs in the progressive by saying that there is a change in the meaning of the verb. In his example, here (3), *loving* is said to mean “enjoying participating”.

(3) *Football is a game of chance and I **am loving** every minute of it.*

Among the various approaches there is one which aims to find a ‘core meaning’ for the progressive, and another which basically takes the stance that the progressive has aspectual and non-aspectual functions which need to be dealt with separately. QUIRK ET AL. (1985: 197) can be cited as an example of the core meaning position. The core meaning according to them is «a happening IN PROGRESS at a certain time». This core meaning is then separated into three components (QUIRK ET AL. 1985: 198):

- (a) the happening has DURATION
- (b) the happening has LIMITED DURATION
- (c) the happening is NOT NECESSARILY COMPLETE

Quite a few of the attempts to explain the progressive reject the idea of a core meaning, however. SMITTERBERG (2005) distinguishes between the aspectual progressive and the «not-solely-aspectual progressive». In the latter category he includes three subclasses:

- (a) Progressives modified by adverbials of the ALWAYS type
- (b) Potentially experiential progressives
- (c) The interpretative progressive

The first type, (a), is often described in the literature and said to «express a negative evaluation of the situation», usually conveying irritation on the part of the speaker. In the second type, (b), – distinguished from the first in that there are no adverbials of the ALWAYS-type – «the progressive is felt to have connotations of subjectivity, emphasis, intensity, emotion» (SMITTERBERG 2005: 217). In the third subclass, the interpretative progressive, the progressive is said to provide a subjective interpretation of the situation; often there is no overt mention of the situation that is interpreted (SMITTERBERG 2005: 228). An example would be for instance *You are being a nuisance*. This subclass is discussed at length in LJUNG (1980), who says that the covert predicate in examples such as this one express «the speaker’s explanation for somebody’s behaviour» (LJUNG 1980: 43). There is an excellent summary of all the functions that have been attributed to the progressive in KRANICH (2010); Kranich herself, like Smitterberg, ends up rejecting the idea of a core meaning and suggests that the basic function of the progressive is as a marker of imperfective or progressive aspect, and that this function must be distinguished from the subjective use, which in her account falls into three subcategories which are roughly the same as Smitterberg’s (KRANICH 2010: Ch. 7). One major problem with this approach is that it is very difficult to find criteria which can be applied consistently and non-arbitrarily to authentic material, as LEECH ET AL. (2009: 135) point out. About their own investigation of the interpretative progressive in LOB and F-LOB, LEECH ET AL. (2009: 136) say that «the number of cases in each that defied clear classification was extremely high». The fact that there do not seem to be any objective criteria for distinguishing between aspectual and interpretative uses of the progressive is certainly as good a reason as any to reject the multiple meaning approach seen in so

many contemporary analyses of the progressive. In the following section we propose an alternative analysis of the progressive construction. Our focus will, as indicated above, be on stative verbs.

3. Theoretical approach

The analysis we propose is in part based on sign-based theory as represented by the Columbia School of linguistics. Three basic assumptions of this approach are:

1. Language is a communicative instrument.
2. In the act of communicating, speakers make goal-directed choices.
3. Grammatical morphemes are monosemous, i.e., they have one basic meaning rather than several.

Accordingly, we will argue that rather than mentally storing a whole host of separate meanings and senses for grammatical forms, speakers work with basic core meanings which they press into service to communicate a variety of messages in differing contexts. Four key concepts are the following:

Linguistic Sign: Consists of a signal and a basic meaning (signal-meaning pair)

Signal: The phonetic (or graphic) representation of a basic meaning; the phonetic pole of the sign.

Basic meaning: The semantic pole of the sign. Basic meanings are the synchronically invariant semantic components of the sign which remain operative in all communicative contexts. They are necessarily highly imprecise and underdetermined since they are constantly being recycled by speakers to perform numerous functions. Basic meanings serve as prompts or cues which guide hearers in the construction of messages. In the following analysis we will ascribe a basic meaning of PROCESS to the *-ing* signal of the progressive.

Message: What a speaker wishes to express. Whereas meanings are basic linguistic units, messages are not considered to be part of language *per se*. Rather, messages can be regarded as inferences made by the hearer as to the communicative intention of the speaker, i.e., as to what motivates the speaker's choice of a particular linguistic sign in a given context. For example, owing to the speaker's choice of the *Ving* complement in (4) the hearer is able to infer the messages that the activity is currently unfolding in time and is most likely of limited duration.

(4) *I'm living in Sweden.*

That the conventionalized message of 'limited duration' cannot, however, be attributed to the progressive construction itself can be seen from example (5), where a message of 'unlimited duration' is understood.

(5) *Inflationary cosmology holds that space is constantly expanding.*

Since, as we see here, there is no invariant relation of message to grammatical sign, no 'one message to one linguistic form' correspondence, speakers must choose, other things being equal, those meanings which are least inappropriate to what they wish to express and which can best serve to guide the hearer in the construction of the intended message in a given context. In short, speakers press basic meanings, i.e., the core

semantic component of signs, into the service of the message. Bridging the inferential gap between meaning and message is a creative interpretive act involving a degree of pragmatic modulation on the part of the hearer in the light of the immediate linguistic context as well as the larger context of the hearer's general world, or 'encyclopedic' knowledge. Important to note is that pragmatic modulation applies not only to the relationship between utterances, the focus of traditional pragmatics, but also to relationships among the linguistic components within the utterance itself. In effect, this analysis brings pragmatic inference closer to the spare semantic marrow than most analyses.

3.1 *The progressive: basic meanings*

i) *-ing*: PROCESS

The basic aspectual meaning of the *-ing* signal, PROCESS, presents the activity of the verb as ongoing, unbounded and non-telic. For example, in the sentence *The motor is running*, the activity is presented as ongoing, unbounded in time, and not necessarily approaching a final completed state.²

ii) *BE + Ving*: The semantically 'near empty' copula functions in the progressive construction to ground the verb + *-ing*, i.e., PROCESS, in time. This being the case, we will here suggest a basic meaning of PROCESS IN TIME for the construction as a whole. This highly schematic representation of the meaning of *BE + Ving* is intended to account for all uses of the progressive construction. Ultimately, all messages are answerable via an inferential chain to this basic meaning, i.e., there must be a recognizable conceptual connection between the basic meaning of the sign and its many communicative functions.

3.2 *Messages and the progressive*

In our research we have observed a general tendency in the literature to build in or encode what we consider to be too many meanings into the progressive construction; MINDT (2000: 248), for example, gives nine. Arguing against this tendency, we suggest that many of these meanings or senses can best be regarded as messages. These include both *aspectual* messages such as ongoingness, progressivity, temporary state, change of state, duration, and incompleteness, as well as *subjective* messages such as annoyance, approval/disapproval, irritation, and disbelief etc. where the speaker invokes 'process in time' to increase the vividness and immediacy of the utterance and thereby signal his/her attitude towards or emotional involvement in an event. For example, in (6), an example of Smitherberg's ALWAYS type, the vivid rendering of the event as ongoing and unbounded, in conjunction with the adverb *forever*, emphatically conveys a message of speaker irritation and disapproval:

(6) *He was forever talking about the same things: working conditions, the workers' demands, strikes, negotiations, collective bargaining, and all the rest of it.* (COCA; magazine article, Oct. 1993)

² *Process*, as understood here, does *not* include the notion of 'progress', i.e., movement in the direction of an end-point or resultant state. Nor is it used in the same sense as in LANGACKER (1987), where it refers to «temporal relational predications», roughly, verbs in general.

In this case the subjective message is salient, though it builds on and is simultaneous with less salient aspectual messages such as ongoingness. That this ALWAYS type of progressive construction is not, as described in the literature, necessarily associated with a negative evaluation of a situation, but rather, is dependent on context and the nature of the event, can be seen in the following example where the narrator's stance towards her subject is positive and approving:

(7) *Although he takes particular delight in the beauty of native plants, he is **forever expanding** his knowledge and interests.* (COCA, magazine article, Oct. 1990)

Note also that in both (6) and (7) the 'forever' hyperbole would not have worked if "limited duration" were indeed encoded in the progressive construction.

3.3 *Stative verbs and the progressive*

A notion frequently associated with the progressive is what we will refer to as *directionality*, a cover term for a variety of situations where the event of the verb is in some way considered to be 'progressing' towards a final state or end-point. Because of this directionality, the progressive is often said to be incompatible with statives which can have no direction. As against this notion, we argue that neither in the case of dynamic nor stative verbs is directionality signalled by the construction which, for all intents and purposes, remains neutral in this regard. For example, with many so-called 'telic' dynamic verbs, such as *decay*, and 'accomplishment' verbs like *write*, the notion of movement in the direction of an end-point is implicit in the lexical meaning of the verb or inferable from conventionalized contexts:

(8) *The leaf is **decaying**.*

(9) *She is **writing** a book.*

In (8), the leaf is represented as passing through a sequence of stages which will inevitably end in a final state of dissolution (entailed in the lexical meaning of the verb). In (9), the writing is 'in progress' and expected to be brought to a final state of completion (a conventionalized implicature). With statives on the other hand, messages of directionality must be evoked by other elements than the verb in the utterance, usually adverbials:

(10) *I'm **loving** it more and more every day.*

Without such elements (here, *more and more*) there is no suggestion that there is an end-point and that the event is incomplete and still 'waxing' at the time of the utterance. Thus, in (11) the event is simply rendered as ongoing, non-sequential, and non-directional.

(11) *I'm **loving** it.*

Here it is also to be observed that while there is an aspectual change, suggesting heightened agentivity and greater vividness, the stative verb *love* undergoes no perceptible shift of meaning when used in the progressive.

Another argument against the use of the progressive with statives (cited above in section 2) is that progressive aspect is incompatible with stativity, i.e., something cannot be both in progress and in a steady state simultaneously. This argument of “logical contradiction” (PAYNE 2011: 292) is based on the assumption that stativity is encoded in the lexical meaning of the verb. As against this we maintain that if such were the case, statives occurring in the progressive would always be sending the incoherent message of the verb’s event being viewed simultaneously as a static state and in progress. Since actual usage shows that this is not the case, stativity cannot be considered to be encoded and consequently virtually any verb can be viewed as ‘in process’ if the communicative need exists. Accordingly, the lexical meaning of stative verbs does not have to undergo change (as Payne maintains) in order to avoid a logical contradiction. Moreover, that some verbs occur infrequently in the progressive is not ultimately due to any inherent incompatibility, but rather to the infrequency of message types which would motivate a speaker to regard such verbs as in process.

Next, we will first give an overview of the material used, after which will follow a survey of the quantitative results. Each of the subsections in the latter part will end with a qualitative analysis of two corpus examples, one of *love* and one of *know* in the progressive, where we demonstrate how the sign-based approach can be applied to account for such usage.

4. Material

The material in the present investigation was culled from the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA). This corpus goes back to the decade beginning in 1810 and continues up until the present time (DAVIES 2010-). In Mark Davies’s interface, statistics are given per decade. Corpus size per decade varies greatly, from just over one million words for the first decade up to almost 30 million words for the decade beginning in 2000. Average size per decade is 20 million words. In this presentation, we have chosen to present quantitative results in 50-year periods, to make the statistics easier to follow. In order to make the figures comparable, we have also calculated occurrences per million words.

COHA is a tagged corpus, which means that it is possible to search for all instances of the two verbs in the *-ing* form preceded by a form of *be*. There is no way of distinguishing automatically between progressives and other uses of the *-ing* form, which means that the concordances resulting from the searches have to be postedited manually. For the search string *[be] knowing*, only 57 out of 278 concordance lines turned out to contain *know* in the progressive. The majority of the hits were of the equative type, e.g. *Part of feeling safe is knowing there are no surprises* (COHA, 2003). In addition, the string *'s knowing* (as well as *'s loving*) for the most part consists of a genitive *-s* rather than the contracted form of the third person present tense of *be*. Interestingly, the search string *[be] loving* yielded exactly the same number of total hits as *[be] knowing*, i.e. 278. Of these, 123 were progressives, i.e., slightly less than half. Many of the false hits were adjectival uses of *loving*, as in *Whenever she spoke, she said words that were loving* (COHA, 1993). In addition to the searches just accounted for, wild card searches were also made, to retrieve tokens that had one or two words between the auxiliary and the main verb, as in *The journalists were all loving this* (COHA 1997). For each of the verbs, this added nine hits to the total. As a result, this study is based on 66 occurrences of *know* and 132 occurrences of *love* in the progressive.

5. Results and analysis

In the following, we will present the quantitative results from the study and an analysis of the progressive use of each verb in an extended context. Interesting to compare for the two verbs is: frequency over time; the genre in which the construction occurs; whether the structure occurs in a quote or in the running text: and to what extent it represents standard or non-standard English.

5.1 Know

The figures in Table 1 show that there is no discernable difference in the use of *know* in the progressive over time. A chi-square test verifies that the differences over time are not significant ($p < 0.25$). However, the figures for the third period – the first half of the 20th century – are slightly higher than the rest. A closer examination of the tokens reveals that the numbers in the second and third period can partly be attributed to the writings of Gertrude Stein. Altogether, eight tokens are from her texts, six in a book from 1909 and two additional ones from books published in 1933 and 1940 respectively. It is also noteworthy that several other writers contributed more than one token in the same work. Hence, there are two tokens from 1856, three from 1908, six from 1922, two from 1937, two from 1942 and three from 1986 (all of these are by different authors). The frequency of *know* in the progressive can thus be said partly to be due to the idiosyncrasies of a small number of writers, as 26 of the 66 tokens – roughly 40% – were produced by altogether seven authors who used the construction more than once.

Table 1. *BE knowing*: frequencies over time; $X^2 = 4.007$, d.f. = 3, $p < 0.25$

Time period	N	Per million
1810-1859	6	0.11
1860-1909	14	0.14
1910-1959	27	0.27
1960-2009	19	0.15
Totals	66	

Table 2 displays the genres in which progressive *know* was found. Overwhelmingly, the progressive occurs in fiction. A closer examination of the tokens in fiction texts shows that four of them are from plays (1905, 1941, 1958, 1979) and two from movie scripts (1931, 1939).³

³ COHA contains material from four genres: fiction, popular magazines, newspapers and non-fiction books. The samples differ in size; roughly 50% of the corpus is made up of fiction text. Overall, about 10% is made up of newspaper text (although there is no such text before the 1860s), 25% is magazines and 15% non-fiction books. It is also important to note that in the period 1860-1910, only about 5% of the corpus is made up of newspaper text, which of course contributes to the low figures for *BE loving* in this genre up until the early 20th century (see Table 6).

Table 2. Genre in which BE *knowing* occurs.

Time period	Fiction	Popular magazines
1810-1859	5	1
1860-1909	12	1
1910-1959	26	2
1960-2009	16	3
Totals	59	7

The indication overall is that the structure is typical of spoken language. This is in line with previous research, which generally shows that there is a higher incidence of progressives in spoken than in written genres (see e.g. LEECH ET AL. 2009: 125).⁴ Of our 66 tokens of *know* in the progressive, 90% occurred in quotations, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequencies with which BE *knowing* occurs in dialogue/quoted speech vs. in the running text.

Time period	Quoted speech	Text
1810-1859	5	1
1860-1909	13	0
1910-1959	25	3
1960-2009	16	3
Totals	59	7

There are very few instances outside quotations. One is example (12). Typically, when *BE knowing* is used in the running text, it is in the perfect or the past perfect.

(12) “Coon,” said Little, looking over the bench at his friend. Others thought White’s street name had something to do with his color, dark as he was. But Little knew where the name had come from. He’d **been knowing** Coon since they were both kids in the Section Eights, back in the early nineties, when White used to wear a coonskin hat, trying to look like that fool rapper from Digital Underground, that group that was popular then. (Pelecanos, George P. 2002. *Hell to pay: a novel*)

HILBERT and KRUG (2012: 120), in their comparison of the use of the progressive in Maltese and British English, show how the perfect progressive is rare in both varieties, ranging between 5% (Maltese English) and 9% (British English). Our figures (Table 4) show that *love* is fairly close to those figures, but when it comes to *know*, almost half of the occurrences are in the present perfect. This appears to be the case also for a number of the other verbs in our 2008 study, and something which deserves further study. The contrast between the present simple and the present perfect progressive with *know* is brought out very nicely in our signed-based analysis of example (15) below.

⁴ Interestingly, GUT and FUCHS (2013, in press), demonstrate that Nigerian speakers use progressives more frequently than British speakers in what the authors refer to as «opinion-expressing» or «persuasive» text categories such as parliamentary debates, unscripted speeches, broadcast interviews etc. Although the present approach does not aim to work as an explanatory model for usage in new varieties of English, it is interesting to note that this usage can easily be accommodated within the present model.

Table 4. Progressive aspect and tense for *know* and *love* in COHA.

	<i>know</i>		<i>love</i>	
	N	%	N	%
Present and past simple	23	56	104	85
Present and past perfect	18	44	19	15
Totals	41	100	123	100

To what extent are the tokens of *know* in the progressive marked as non-standard or foreigner talk? When identifying such features, our criteria were that the speaker would either be identified as a foreigner (by name or nationality) or that the quote contained additional markers of non-standard speech. Table 5 shows that in the most recent period, three fourths of the tokens – twelve out of sixteen - are spoken by dialect speakers or foreigners, one of the latter being Björn Borg:

(13) “*The difference this time?*” Borg said. “*This time I **was knowing** I can beat him.*” (*Sports Illustrated*: January 31, 1977)

Of the dialect speakers, a number of them are speakers of African-American Vernacular English, as in (14):

(14) “*You a real white man?*” she asked, turning back, as the thought struck her. “*For true? You don’t talk like one. Sometime, I don’t even **be knowing** what you be saying. You don’t talk like Masa and he a real uppity-up white man, but not like no po buckra, neither. Kaine say it be’s white men what don’t talk white man talk. You one like that, huh?*” (Sherley Anne Williams. 1986. *Dessa Rose*.)

Table 5. Frequencies with which BE *knowing* occurs in dialect and the speech of foreigners in quotes (N=59)

Time period	Non-dialectal speech	Dialect	Foreigner talk
1810-1859	1	4	0
1860-1909	10	3	0
1910-1959	19	5	1
1960-2009	4	6	6
Totals	34	18	7

That different varieties of English differ in the uses of the progressive has been the topic of a number of recent studies, and we are not claiming that our present approach will be able to accommodate all of these. For instance, some studies show that what is referred to as ‘non-standard’ (HILBERT and KRUG 2012) or ‘extended’ (GUT and FUCHS 2013, in press) uses of the progressive in ESL varieties can at least partly be attributed to the structure of the speakers’ first language (Maltese in Hilbert and Krug’s study; Igbo in Gut and Fuch’s investigation).

5.1.1 *A sign-based analysis of know in the progressive.* Our signed-based approach, as delineated in section 4, can be applied to explain occurrences of *know* in the progressive:

(15) “*On the other hand,*” said Joseph, “*Wash’s veteran activities have been a constant embarrassment to me. Wash never fired a shot in the war, and neither did I.*”

Joseph breathed deeply, as though he had suddenly dropped a heavy load from his shoulder. “I know that,” said Richard. “I’ve been knowing that since you first came here. (...)” (Roark Bradford. 1937. *The Three-Headed Angel*.)

Here, the narrator sets up a contrast between *know* in the present perfect progressive and *know* in the simple present. When Richard says *I know that*, he uses the simple present to make a comment on his present state of knowledge regarding Wash’s and Joseph’s war records, i.e., to state a fact. Here the event of the verb is viewed as a complete undifferentiated whole, appropriate for announcing established facts, especially of the either/or type where a state either exists or does not exist. Richard goes on, however to follow up the statement of fact with *I’ve been knowing that since you first came here*. In this instance, he employs the perfect progressive to communicate additional aspectual and subjective messages. By establishing a point of time at which the event begins, Richard is able to suggest a state of ‘active ongoing awareness’ of the fact that Wash and Joseph saw no action in the war. Moreover, by presenting the verb’s event as ongoing, starting with Joseph’s arrival and continuing into the present, he renders it more vivid and consequently, more emphatic. Accordingly, he is able to evoke the strong reassuring message that what happened previously was ‘all right’ and that all along there was no cause for worry. Note that here there is no indication that the ‘knowing’ event is ‘waxing or waning’.

5.2 Love

The statistics for *love* present a radically different picture from those for *know*. Table 5 shows that although the construction is rare overall (one occurrence per two million words in the most recent period), the frequencies were roughly the same in the second and third period, and then there was a notable increase in the most recent period. A chi-square test reveals that the difference is significant at the five percent level.⁵

Table 5. *BE loving*: frequencies over time; $X^2 = 6.921$, d.f. = 2, $p < 0.05$

Time period	N	Per million
1810-1859	4	0.07
1860-1909	31	0.31
1910-1959	35	0.28
1960-2009	62	0.46
Totals	132	

Table 6 shows in what genres *BE loving* occurs. It is notable that up until 1909, it only occurs in fiction. In the next period, it also shows up in magazines and news, although very sparingly. Finally, in the last period, as many as 40 per cent of the tokens occur in magazines and in the news. Unlike *BE knowing*, there is no indication that the figures in any period are due to the idiosyncracies of particular writers.

⁵ Chi-square has been calculated from the 1860s onwards, as there were too few tokens in the first period.

Table 6. Genre in which BE *loving* occurs.⁶

Time period	Fiction	Popular magazines	News
1810-1859	4	0	-
1860-1909	31	0	0
1910-1959	30	4	1
1960-2009	36	17	9
Totals	101	21	10

A typical example from a news article is (16), from the sports section:

(16) *Creamer is loving her life right now. She's in the process of searching for a college that will allow her to take some classes in the offseason and let her do some of the course work on the Internet, though golf clearly remains her top priority. (The Washington Post, May 5, 2006/ SPORTS)*

One thing that may actually keep the number of such occurrences down is the automatic grammar checkers: in example (16), the grammar checker suggested that *loves* be used instead of *is loving*. That indicates that there is indeed a strong prescriptive tradition which proclaims that *love* should not be used in the progressive.

Next, if we look at the statistics for how often *BE loving* occurs in a quotation compared to how often the structure is used in the running text, we also get a different picture from *BE knowing*. Whereas 90% of the tokens of *BE knowing* occurred in quotations, only slightly over half of the tokens of *BE loving* were in quotes. Table 7 shows that there is some variation over time, with the third period showing a higher ratio of instances in quotations, but in the most recent period, as many as 60% of the tokens actually occur in the running text. This could be attributed to a tendency that has been noted in many studies of on-going changes in English, namely colloquialization, i.e., «a tendency for written norms to become more informal and move closer to speech» (LEECH ET AL. 2009: 20).

Table 7. Frequencies with which *BE loving* occurs in dialogue/quoted speech vs. in the running text.

Time period	Quoted speech	Text
1810-1859	1	3
1860-1909	17	14
1910-1959	27	8
1960-2009	25	37
Totals	70	62

The statistics for the number of tokens in passages written in dialect or uttered by foreigners confirms what the previous table shows, namely that *BE loving* is not a dialectal or nonstandard form. There is not a single occurrence of a dialect speaker using the construction, as Table 8 shows, and only one instance where the construction is used by a foreigner.

⁶ As was pointed out in footnote 3, there are no news in COHA texts prior to 1860.

Table 8. Frequencies with which *BE loving* occurs in dialect and the speech of foreigners in quotes.

Time period	Non-dialectal speech	Dialect	Foreigner talk
1810-1859	4	0	0
1860-1909	31	0	0
1910-1959	34	0	1
1960-2009	62	0	0
Totals	131	0	1

One aspect of the use of *BE loving* that has changed over the period studied is what type of complementation it occurs with. In particular, it is interesting to see how the direct object has changed from being primarily animate (and human) to being inanimate. Table 9 includes the figures for all types of complement, not just direct objects, but it is the first two columns that are interesting to compare.

Table 9. Complementation of *BE loving* (DO = direct object).

Time period	DO animate	DO inanimate	Clause	Intransitive	to V
1810-1859	2	2	0	0	0
1860-1909	21	3	1	6	0
1910-1959	27	4	0	4	0
1960-2009	24	36	1	0	1
Totals	74	45	2	10	1

Here, we see a huge change between the third and the fourth period, with only 10% being inanimate in the period ending in 1959, compared to 60% in the last period. And unlike what might be expected, this is not the result of the advertising of the big hamburger chain, as the majority of instances predate the launching of the slogan *i'm loving it* in 2003. Our earliest example of 'loving it' goes back to 1823:

(17) *We love the marvellous; and, while we ridicule our neighbours, for the same folly, we **are loving** it, more heartily than they.* (Neal, John. 1823. *Errata; or, The Works of Will. Adams*, Volume 1)

A typical example from the 19th century would, on the other hand, be the following, with a human object:

(18) *Instantly her thoughts reverted to Zell, and she was deeply moved. Could she be forgiven? Could she be saved? Was the God of the Bible -- stern, afar off, as she had once imagined -- more tender toward the erring than even their own human kindred? Could it be possible that, while she had been condemning, and almost hating Zell, Jesus **had been loving** her? The feeling overpowered her.* (Roe, Edward Payson. 1873. *What Can She Do?*)

In more recent times, examples like (19), with an inanimate object, predominate:

(19) *CARLO sang most of the way to Bergamo. His repertoire was an idiotic mixture of love songs old and new, arias, American and Italian jazz, and a string of dirty little*

*ditties whose words Harriet suspected he improvised. He knew he was acting like a boy and he **was loving** it.* (Davenport, Marcia. 1960. *Constant Image*)

In conclusion, the statistics show that overall, neither of these verbs occurs very often in the progressive in the corpus we used, and the structure must be said to be marked, in comparison with the so-called dynamic verbs which lend themselves much more readily to the expression of process. Still, the fact that these verbs occur in the progressive at all calls for an approach which has explanatory potential.

5.2.1 A signed-based analysis of love in the progressive. Below we demonstrate how the sign-based approach can be applied to an example in context. This particular example is from a novel from 1941.

(20) *The audience sounded like a rooting section just after its team scored the winning touchdown. Sammy stood there at the mike longer than he had to, taking the bows. Suddenly everybody **was loving** everybody else.* (Budd Schulberg. 1941. *What Makes Sammy Run?*)

In (20), an audience of screen writers has just heard the good news that the screen writer's guild has reconciled all differences with the board and is prepared to support two motions currently on the floor. As a result there has been a sudden change of mood in the membership from one of suspense and mutual hostility to one of universal affection where 'everybody is "loving" everybody else'. Here the progressive, in conjunction with the adverb *suddenly*, effectively sharpens the spontaneous, dramatic shift of mood or 'change of state'. By presenting the event of the verb as ongoing, dynamic and 'in process', the narrator is able to present a video clip of the membership suddenly coming alive and erupting in a show of relief at the spokesman's announcement. Here the subjective message of vividness is clearly inferable from the aspectual message of ongoingness. The vividness of the image is further enhanced by the heightened agentivity suggested by the progressive: the members are seen less as passively experiencing an emotional state than as generating and actively participating in it. This is traceable to the basic meaning of PROCESS which conventionally suggests an active agent, especially when the subject is animate. If instead the narrator had chosen to write *Suddenly everybody loved one another*, the ongoing excitement of this wild show of emotion would have been considerably watered down, since the simple past would present the verb's event as a completed state, i.e., a lustreless fact or piece of information rather than as a vibrant image. Another point to be noted is that in this example, there is no suggestion that the *loving* which is going on is progressing towards a final end point; it is neither 'waxing' nor 'waning'. Rather, to use a metaphor, the event of the verb might be compared to jumping up and down in one spot or, perhaps, to water just brought to a boil. One final point: in this example it is clear that if the progressive had changed the lexical meaning of the verb *love* to "enjoy", the message evoked would have been quite different indeed!

6. Conclusion

In summary, we have proposed that: 1) speakers will use the progressive with stative verbs when motivated by a message which requires it (unless of course prescriptive considerations intervene); 2) messages evoked by the progressive construction are

ultimately answerable to the basic meaning of the construction; 3) the use of progressives with statives does not result in a meaning shift of the verb; 4) the simple and progressive forms of the verb are not interchangeable; 5) directionality is not part of the basic meaning of the progressive construction; 6) aspectual and subjective messages are not mutually exclusive; both occur simultaneously in utterances; and 7) most meanings ascribed to the progressive in the literature are pragmatically modulated and not encoded in the basic meaning of the construction.

In conclusion, whether or not the progressive can occur with statives cannot be predicted from their semantic structure – though admittedly the likelihood of such occurrences can – nor from the semantics of the progressive construction itself. In effect, we cannot predict the non-occurrence of a form based on the traditional classification of verbs as either stative or dynamic. As we have seen, most statives can freely occur in the progressive when a communicative need particular to a specific situation arises. The low frequency of occurrence and limited distribution of some statives with the progressive reflects the fact that the messages which motivate them are fewer and less conventional. Simply put, there are just fewer life situations which might call forth such messages. Moreover, although their frequencies may not be statistically significant, what is important here is that such messages (unless written off as performance errors) occur at all. Finally, and more generally, the ‘acceptability’ of a given form does not depend on how closely it adheres to the rules of prescriptive grammar, in this case rules based on a questionable classification of verbs into stative and dynamic, but rather, on its communicative efficacy i.e., how well it succeeds in communicating a coherent message which accords with the intentions of the speaker.

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