

***I'M LOVIN' IT***

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**Abstract:** *The paper presents the special meanings and many-sided implications that can be conjectured from the use of a stative verb in the progressive, and the linguistic difficulties encountered in analysing McDonald's slogan. It reviews the behaviour of **to love** when tested for stativeness and concludes that as a “progressive stative” verb it can be cleverly exploited for fresh emotional implications.*

**Keywords:** *emotional implications, progressive aspect, progressive stative, stative verb.*

## **1. Introduction**

The paper is an answer to the puzzlement of the EFL student who, after being taught that English state verbs cannot be used in the progressive aspect, goes to McDonald's and reads their slogan (which has not been translated into Romanian): *I'm lovin' it*. This has been the slogan of McDonald's Corporation's international branding campaign since 2003, and is meant to stress, according to McDonald's Canada's corporate website, that the campaign is focused on the “overall McDonald's experience”.

In order to see how innovative and consequently, impactful, the slogan may be, the paper investigates similar uses of *to love* in the following corpora: Lancaster – Oslo/Bergen Corpus, Freiburg Lancaster – Oslo/Bergen Corpus, London – Lund Corpus of Spoken English, The Brown University Standard Corpus of Present-Day American English, International Corpus of English and The Freiburg – Brown Corpus of American English, using AntConc 3.2.1 from Washeda University. The results of the corpora search were limited to five returns:

1. *He obviously is loving every minute of it.* [WhiteH4.txt]
2. *She was loving it to bits.* [Rock bands.txt]
3. *She is doing chemistry and loving it.* [Present.txt]
4. *I'd get sick of spicy food all the time but I 'm loving it more and more.* [W1B-011 India letters.txt]
5. *I'm loving it, so I don't know about that part.* [FacCM1.txt]

To explain why the number of examples found is limited and in order to understand fully the meaning and the impact of the slogan, the paper looks first at what a stative verb is, at how

states can be distinguished from non-states, and at how *to love* is classified in a few well-known grammars of English. It also looks at the features of the progressive aspect and at the special meanings that the combination stative verb in the progressive aspect may yield. The conclusion is that *to love* may be considered a “progressive stative” whose fresh and many-sided implications are cleverly exploited in McDonald’s slogan.

## 2. Situations and Verb Classification

Verbs are difficult to classify as they represent situations (or events) and the latter are not always clearly individuated in space or time. Linguists are not consistent in making or maintaining a distinction between situations and their linguistic encodings; these can be rendered either by verbs, by more complex constituents or by sentences. Binnik (1991) explains that the individuation of situations is the cognitive process of isolating a fragment of the chain and naming it with a verb.

According to Davidson (1980), situations (which he calls “events”) are essentially associated with change by either changing themselves or bringing about changes in the entities involved in the situation. Change in its turn is associated with time as it becomes evident over time, and this makes both temporality and change influence the classification of situations. Time is then essential in defining situations and in accounting for the semantic motivation of verbs and their syntactic behaviour. However, many linguists and philosophers (Aristotle 1970, 1976, Kenny 1963, Ryle 1949, Vendler 1967) make the remark that actions and states characterise a broad and clear distinction between situations, and that other important characteristics of actions must be recognised according to their internal structure.

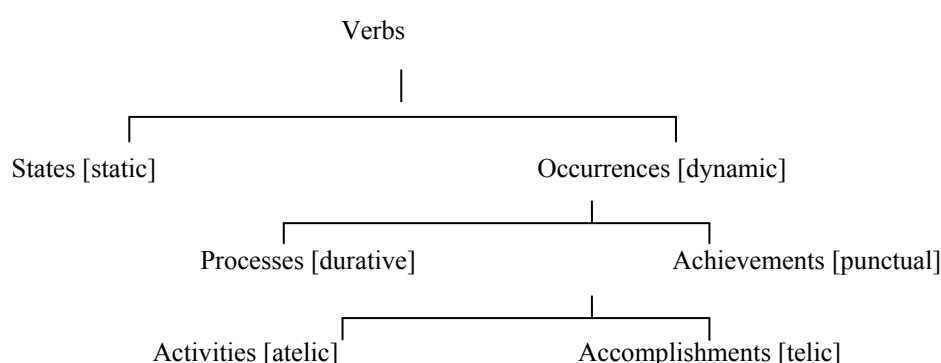
Vendler (1967) distinguishes four categories of verbs: activities, accomplishments, achievements and states. The linguistic criteria by which Vendler distinguishes these four classes consist of: co-occurrence with progressive aspect; appropriateness of various kinds of temporal questions; appropriateness of various kinds of temporal adverbials; and implications between sentences. According to Vendler, the occurrence or non-occurrence of the progressive aspect with a verb separates accomplishments and activity verbs from state and achievement verbs. States, which may endure or persist over stretches of time, do not combine with the progressive aspect or adverbials such as *deliberately* or *carefully*.

According to Comrie (1976), an event is an occurrence of some kind, a situation in which something happens, that is, some change takes place. Therefore, events involve change: they have internal temporal structure, beginnings and endings and something going on in between. States, on the other hand, are homogeneous, stable situations which lack internal

structure and consist of undifferentiated moments. Neither beginnings nor endings are integral to states.

Langacker (1987) points out other conceptual differences between states and non-states. He shows that states are internally uniform, in contrast to activities which appear to be heterogeneous and internally structured. Activities are associated with temporal change and dynamism, while states typically do not unfold over time and have no internal dynamics. Thus, states and non-states differ in degree of temporal sensitivity. Consequently, certain features of tense and aspect are associated with each type.

Reminding one of Vendler's categories, Huddleston and Pullum's (2002:118 - 25) verb classification presented in *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (CGEL) is based on the results of all these discussions:



They establish the fundamental contrast between states and occurrences based on the absence or presence of change. As states do not show change, they have no internal temporal structure or distinguishable phases. The distinction between states and occurrences is reflected linguistically in a number of ways, including the use of the progressive aspect. However, Huddleston and Pullum (2002:118) warn that “the categories apply in the first instance to meanings and then derivatively to the forms that express them – but it must be emphasized that a single expression can often be interpreted as applying to situations of different types.”

### 3. Diagnostic Tests for States and Non-States

A variety of semantic and syntactic features that can be used in the examination of the structure of the states/statives and non-states/active verbs are discussed by Gruber (1976), Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976), Dowty (1979), Mourelatos (1981) such as: internal structure, homogeneity, continuousness, sub-processes and sub-states, distribution over a time interval, extension, and incrementation. Together with the clarification of various semantic categories and features, a number of diagnostic tests for the difference between states and non-states were formulated.

### a) The Progressive Test

The most important test which distinguishes between states and non-states is occurrence with the progressive: while actives generally allow the progressive, states disallow it. As the progressive marks extension in time, a verb can represent a large time interval into which smaller time intervals can be inserted (e.g. *I was running when it started raining*). States are generally inherently extended and homogeneous (*He believes in universal coverage* – [WhiteH1.txt]).

However, verbs like *love* and *like* can be found in the progressive:

*They're liking the charge.* [FacCM2.txt]

*He's not liking the way this contest is going in terms of...* [S2A-005Boxing Las Vegas.txt]

*You've got so involved and are liking it all.* [LLC.TXT]

### b) The Pseudo-Cleft Constructions Test

Only non-states appear in pseudo-cleft constructions: *What he's doing is simply repeating what his wife said* [CGEL, 1422] vs. *\*What he's doing is loving it*.

### c) The “What Happened?” Test

Another structural reflex of the stative vs. active distinction is the verbs' sensitivity to the question “What happened?”. States always fail this test: *What happened?* *\*He was loving it*.

### d) The Imperative Test

The same verbs that fail the “What happened?” test also fail the imperative test: *Run a mile!* vs. *\*Like the story!*

However, *Love me!* is not an uncommon request and *Love the Lord!* is a common commandment.

### e) The Force and Persuade Test

Named by Quirk *et al.* (1972:94) the “causative construction” test, this test shows that only non-states can appear as object complements of the causative verbs *force* and *persuade*: *John persuaded/forced Harry to run* vs. *\*John persuaded/forced Harry to love it*.

### f) The Carefully and Deliberately Test

Quirk *et al.* (1972:94) name this the “manner adverb requiring an animate subject” test. It shows that states cannot co-occur with *carefully* and *deliberately* as they are not executed by an agent: *John walked carefully* vs. *\*John was loving it carefully*.

#### **g) The *for ... sake* Construction Test**

Quirk *et al.* (1972:94) introduce this seventh test that stative verbs fail while dynamic verbs can easily co-occur with *for ... sake* (e.g. *act for action's sake...* [FROWN\_N.TXT]). As far as loving is concerned, we find it hard (but not impossible!) to imagine somebody loving for love's sake.

To conclude, when run through tests, not all the non-states meet all the active tests and not all the states meet all the stative tests. Some verbs are more consistently stative while others are more consistently active, and there are many cases of verbs that satisfy only some of the diagnostic tests and fail others. What kind of verb is *to love*? Can we consider it stative?

#### **4. Is *to Love* a Stative Verb?**

*To love* fails the pseudo-cleft construction test, the “What happened?” test and barely passes the imperative test with *Love the Lord!* It also fails the “*force* and *persuade*” test and cannot stand the “*carefully* and *deliberately*” one. It doesn't stand the “*for ... sake* construction” test either, although *loving for love's sake* is not completely impossible. After applying these tests, we can conclude that *to love* is a stative verb, with a few peculiarities of behaviour. Downing and Locke (2006:139-43), include *to love* in the category of “mental processes” with an experiencer or conscious but non-volitional participant.

Quirk *et al.* (1972:96) classify *to love* among “verbs of inert perception and cognition”, which is a sub-category of stative verbs.

Marianne Celce-Murcia and Diane Larsen Freeman (1999:120 - 22) include it among “verbs of emotions, attitudes, and opinions”. They go on to say that it has been observed that the progressive can occur with stative verbs to achieve certain effects, and that the progressive turns states into events.

Downing and Locke (2006:139-43) include *loving* in the general category of “mental processes of experiencing or sensing: affective and desiderative”. They explain that such affective mental processes as *liking*, *loving*, *admiring*, *missing* and *hating* always involve a conscious participant, the experiencer, and usually a second participant, the phenomenon – that which is perceived, liked, loved, admired, etc. The experiencer, they explain, is not doing anything and the phenomenon is not affected in any way. They add that mental processes are typically stative and non-volitional, that in the present they “typically take the simple, rather than the progressive form” and that they do not easily occur in the imperative, and offer the following examples: *\*Jill is liking the present.* and *\*Like the present, Jill!* The phenomenon is the object of the verb and can be expressed as a nominal

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clause representing an event or situation. An *-ing* clause represents the situation as actual or habitual, where a *to*-infinitive clause represents it as potential:

- phenomenon expressed by an *-ing* clause:

*I know Matthew just loves getting homework* [ReadCM6A.txt]

*She gets lyrical about this place and she loves being in the theatrical environment.* [FLOB\_P.TXT]

*The Szolds, like the Marches, enjoyed and loved living together*

[. . .] [BROWN1\_G.TXT]

- phenomenon expressed by a *to*-infinitive clause:

*Matty loves to collect stories about these people.* [FLOB\_P.TXT]

*Dad loves to fish.* [FROWN\_E.TXT]

- phenomenon expressed by an NP:

[... ] *no one any longer loves him.* [BROWN1\_C.TXT]

*Mrs Coolidge so obviously loved dogs* [. . .] [BROWN1\_G.TXT]

*They too loved their families,* [. . .] [BROWN1\_G.TXT]

*Both loved the out-of-doors...* [BROWN1\_F.TXT]

*He loved the stage and all those unseen people out there.*

[BROWN1\_K.TXT]

*The audience, as usual, loved it.* [BROWN1\_K.TXT]

A remark concerning syntax that we can make at this point is that the NPs that follow the simple tense forms of *to love* can often be extended, but the NP which typically follows the progressive *loving* is the pronoun *it*. As the five corpora examples and McDonald's slogan show, *it* does not refer to an entity but to a process that extends over a period of time: 1 (*every minute of it*), 2 (*it to bits*), 3 (*loving doing chemistry*), 4 (*loving it more and more*) and 5 (*that part of it*).

Huddleston and Pullum (2002:170) include *to love* among “verbs of cognition, emotion, and attitude” and warn that none of these verbs excludes completely the progressive and give the example *They're loving every minute of it* and explain that *to love* in such examples is the equivalent of the dynamic *to enjoy*. This kind of approach helps us interpret sentences like *I'm loving it* and *Love the Lord!* or *Love thy neighbour (as thyself)*. A first appreciation of such examples would be that they do not indicate a purely stative verb since the verb allows forms with non-stative meanings. If we apply the tests *a*) to *f*) to the verb *to love*, we can see that it qualifies as a stative verb only according to the criteria: *b*) (*\*What he's doing is loving it*); *c*)

(“What happened? \*He loved it), e) (\*John persuaded/forced Harry to love it), and f) (\*John was loving it carefully).

Why does the progressive combine with *to love*? What meaning features of the verb make this combination possible?

## 5. To Love and the Progressive

While Comrie (1976), Leech (1971), Richards (1981), Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) focus on the notion of “incompleteness” and its manifestations as the semantic contribution of the progressive, Huddleston and Pullum (2002:163) consider that the progressive aspect expresses basically progressive aspectuality (with two of the features being implicatures rather than pertaining to meaning proper):

- i. Situation in progress at/throughout a time referred to
- ii. Imperfectivity
- iii. The mid-interval (within time of situation) implicature
- iv. Duration
- v. Waxing
- vi. Dynamicity
- vii. The limited duration implicature

In this section we look at the features of the progressive as described by Huddleston and Pullum in *CGEL*, both in relation to the examples found in the corpora analysed and in relation to the progressive uses suggested by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman’s *Grammar Book*.

### a) To Love and the CGEL Features of the Progressive

When we apply Huddleston and Pullum’s features of the progressive to the specific examples containing *to love* used in the progressive, we can notice a few more peculiarities:

- i. With the exception of example 1: [...] *he obviously is loving every minute of it*, the examples analysed contain no time specification apart from the time suggested by the use of the present or past tense. The absence of temporal specifications confers such situations an atemporal quality which is ideal for the commercial slogan whose implication is “You will always love it.” *Loving every minute of it*, far from suggesting a gapped, non-homogeneous state with an internal temporal structure can be seen rather as a sequence of continuous moments with the implications that “it” is a “consumable”, a product that needs to be ordered again and again after consumption and which offers omnipresent pleasure and satisfaction.
- ii. The examples analysed present the situation as seen from within, without focus on the internal temporal structure. Their deictic times are included in a permanent (atemporal) time of

situation. That is why a possible implication for McDonald's slogan can be that the company provides an occurrence in progress that lasts for ever.

iii. The “mid-interval” implicature refers mainly to accomplishments and is not relevant for our purposes.

iv. *To love* is stative and consequently shows duration.

v. *To love* can combine with incremental change – waxing, to show dynamicity as in example 4: *I'd get sick of spicy food all the time but I'm loving it more and more.*

vi. The dynamicity of *to love* in the examples analysed does not suggest state temporariness but its opposite.

vii. The implicature of limited duration or temporariness is not relevant for our analysis.

### **b) *To Love* as a Progressive Stative**

*To love* qualifies as a “progressive stative” as it appears in six of the eight uses presented by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman.

a. It can show an intensification of the emotion expressed by the verb: *he obviously is loving every minute of it* (example 1); *I'm loving it more and more* (example 4). Such progressive statives are often found with various kinds of modifiers to further emphasize the immediacy and intensity of the situation: *I'm really/just loving it* (Kesner Bland, 1988:60). This use makes *I'm lovin' it* an excellent choice for a commercial slogan.

b. It can indicate current behaviour as opposed to general description: *I love it* would miss the thrill and excitement of a (permanently) new experience suggested by example 2: *She was loving it to bits* or *I'm lovin' it*. Moreover, as an expression of emotion, desire, and attitude, it is probably no coincidence that the slogan uses the first person singular subject as the first person is more conducive to expressive feelings.

c. It can introduce change in the state by focusing on differences in degree across time, as in example 4: *I'd get sick of spicy food all the time but I'm loving it more and more* even if the slogan lacks the “more and more” phrase, an incremental evolution (in other words, Huddleston and Pullum's “waxing”) is not excluded.

d. It can show vividness: *I'm lovin' it* must have been perceived as being very fresh and vivid when the slogan was launched. It is still a cause of puzzlement for foreign learners of English.

e. *I'm loving it* sounds like a natural answer to the polite question *Are you liking it?*

f. It can be used to mitigate criticism as in the example 5: *I'm loving it, so I don't know about that part.*



## 6. Conclusions

Together with Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) and Susan Kesner Bland (1988), we consider *to love* a “progressive stative”. As a verb, *to love* satisfies most of the stative verb tests, although it shows peculiarities of behaviour in the imperative and in the “for ... sake” test. On the other hand, most of the features of the progressive found in Huddleston and Pullum are applicable to instances of use of *to love* in the progressive. Generally speaking, what happens in the case of a progressive stative such as *to love* is that speakers endow a state with features of event verbs. The state is presented as an event in the sense that its progressive forms convey the dynamism of actions or processes. It conveys change by suggesting that something is going on. Thus, interesting shades of meaning can be conjectured from the combination state and progressive that appears in McDonald’s slogan:

- It may suggest a constantly renewed state of satisfaction or enjoyment;
- While still homogeneous, the state suggested can also be seen as a sequence of continuous moments which imply that the process rendered by *it* ensures permanent enjoyment. Therefore, eating at McDonald’s can be seen as an occurrence in progress that lasts for ever;
- The slogan suggests incremental change – increasing pleasure and satisfaction;
- It suggests an intensification of the emotion expressed by the verb;
- It suggests an exceptional state which combines with the thrill and excitement of a (permanently) new experience.

All these implications make *I’m lovin’ it* a successful slogan, which has managed to remain fresh over the last seven years.

The progressive gives more strength to the predication: the sentence is intense, emotional, and vivid.

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