

- h Max said when he's writing on paper with a pencil, and makes a mistake, his left hand twitches as if to hit cmd-Z. (The time reference is in an extended present.)

As was shown in Unit 18, these examples demonstrate that there is no one-to-one relationship between time and tense. Nor is there a one-to-one relationship between time and aspect. In fact, the choice of aspect provides little or no information about the time of the event: for that, we must look at the context. This, in turn, suggests that 'rules' of the type: *We use the present continuous to talk about events happening at the moment of speaking* are only accidentally true.

- 4 The -ing forms in the text, organized into word classes, are these:

Present participles: *heeding, doing, thinking, driving (x 2), raining (x 2), thinking (x 2), writing, going, talking, serving, teaching*

Adjectives: *reassuring, embarrassing, running*

Nouns: *creative-writing, playwriting*

The shared meaning is one of some activity being in progress. As Broughton (1990) puts it, 'Remember that the -ing form, whatever word class it is operating as, still carries a sense of ongoing activity.' This means that even for adjectives and nouns, this dynamic, progressive sense is implicit, and accounts for the difference between:

*I'd like a teaching job* (= focus on the activity)

*I'd like a job as a teacher* (= focus on the role)

*Her driving is terrible* (= focus on the activity)

*She's a terrible driver* (= focus on the person)

*I like teaching* (= I enjoy the activity of teaching)

*I like to teach* (= I think it is a good thing to do)

- 5 Perhaps the single common concept – and, hence, the primary meaning of the progressive – is that of 'a dynamic action in the process of happening', or, put more simply, something being *in progress*. Notions of temporariness and (limited) duration may be secondary meanings, a function of the context or of the lexical aspect of the particular verbs (see next task). There is certainly nothing temporary about sentence (e) *Spring has been gradually getting shorter for thousands of years*.

The concept of 'extending over time' is not very helpful either, since most verbs express duration of some kind: *She serves as the distinguished writer in residence*. Or *It rained for a week*.

The only example that fits least well into the notion of 'activity in progress' is (f) *They are meeting ...* which has future reference. Arguably, though, the arrangement to meet has been made already, hence it is 'in progress.'

- 6 The effect of adding progressive aspect to state verbs is to make the state dynamic, and to turn it into an action or behaviour.

Adding progressive aspect to activity verbs can have the effect of providing a 'perspective' to the activity, of making us see the activity unfolding in our mind's eye, as in (c), or as providing the time frame for an event, as in (d). It can also make the activity seem temporary, as in (e).

Adding progressive aspect to accomplishment verbs (i.e. verbs that have an end-point) implies the activity is incomplete.

Adding progressive aspect to punctual verbs suggests that the activity is repeated.

- 7 Activity (a) targets use 2, i.e. *To describe temporary situations in the present, though not necessarily at the moment of speaking*. Activity (b) targets use 5, i.e. *To describe a present arrangement for a future event*. Activity (c) targets use 1, i.e. *To describe events/situations in progress at the moment of speaking*.
- 8 The past progressive is often used in narrative to provide the background to the events that constitute the story itself. In this sense, the participle is used almost adjectivally – compare the difference between *It was rainy* and *It was raining*; or the difference between *I was asleep* and *I was sleeping*.

This is generally not a difficult use for learners to understand, especially if they are introduced to the term ‘background’. It is probably easier to introduce and practise the past progressive in this kind of narrative context, than to practise it in isolation as if it were a separate ‘tense’. Some EFL materials introduce the concept of ‘interrupted past’ to explain the past progressive, as in *I was having a bath when the phone rang*, but it should be clear that the background situation is not always interrupted (in the sense of unfinished): *I was having a bath when the phone rang, so I didn’t bother answering it*.

An activity that lends itself to the practising of past progressive (as well as the past simple) is the game ‘Alibis’, when two or more students are quizzed separately about a crime that they allegedly committed at a clearly established time. Any discrepancy in their story (which they have jointly prepared) proves them guilty.