

# AM-PROGRESSIVES IN SWABIAN: SOME EVIDENCE FOR NOUN INCORPORATION

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## 1. Introduction

This paper summarizes the initial findings of an investigation into the syntactic and semantic properties of progressive constructions in Swabian, an Alemannic dialect of German. It is spoken in the Southwest of Germany in the state of Baden Württemberg and in parts of Bavaria. The data is elicited from speakers of a variant of Swabian spoken in Upper Swabia, an area surrounding the city of Ravensburg, located north of Lake Constance. Data was elicited from three female speakers of different ages (48, 69, 75) with low mobility. There is very little in-depth work on the syntactic properties of Swabian and, to my knowledge, no work on this particular variant.

The construction that is being investigated is found in various dialects and registers of German but tends to be relegated to footnotes or assumed to be restricted to dialects in the Rhineland area, especially Cologne (Duden 2005). It is thus often named the *Rhenish Progressive* ‘*Rheinische Verlaufsform*’ in some of the descriptive and theoretical literature (Thieroff 1992, Vater 1994).

However, the construction may be found in various variants of German including written German (Gárgyán 2014) despite many descriptive grammars insisting that it is restricted to one or two dialect areas or to the vernacular (Fagan 2009, Duden 2005). It thus deserves a closer look. The construction I am particularly interested in is the *AM*-progressive that seems to share some properties with the *BEIM*-progressive. Some work addressing the construction has been done for individual dialects such as Colognean (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993), Standard, Ruhr, and Low German (Andersson 1989), and Hessian (Flick and Kuhmichel 2013). Some work on Alemannic has addressed infinitival complements in Alemannic in general which share some syntactic properties of the progressive (Brandner 2006). Therefore, this research is the first attempt at an analysis of this construction in Swabian. As some of findings described in this paper will show, there are considerable morphosyntactic and possibly semantic differences to other German variants to be found.

### 1.1 *AM- and BEIM-progressives*

The progressive construction I am investigating is traditionally described as a combination of the finite form of *sein* ‘*be*’ followed by a preposition (Krause 2002):<sup>56</sup> *am* ‘*at*’ or *beim* ‘*near, at, beside*’, and the infinitival form of the verb with its infinitive suffix *-en*.

- (1) a. er ist am schwimm-en [SG]<sup>1</sup>  
he is AM swim-inf  
‘he is swimming’

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<sup>1</sup> SW: Swabian, SG: Standard German

- b. er ist beim schwimm-en  
 he is BEIM swim-inf<sup>2</sup>  
 ‘he is gone swimming’
- (2) a. r’isch am schwemm-a [SW]  
 he’s AM swim-inf  
 ‘he is swimming’
- b. r’isch beim schwemm-a  
 he’s BEIM swim-inf  
 ‘he is gone swimming’

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, I will discuss the syntactic differences between *AM*- and *BEIM*-progressives with focus on the syntactic and semantic properties of *AM*. I will be able to show that the traditional preposition description may only apply to *BEIM*-progressives but not to *AM*-progressives in Swabian. Section 3 will address the properties of direct objects in transitive *AM*-progressives in Swabian, and section 4 will summarize and provide some initial conclusions about the status of internal arguments in the Swabian *AM*-progressive. Section 5 closes with a research outlook based on the current findings.

## 2. Are *AM* and *BEIM* prepositions?

Most descriptions take *AM* and *BEIM* to be cliticised versions of a preposition and a neuter dative definite determiner as in *a + dem* and ‘*bei*’ + ‘*dem*’ (Krause 2002, Delisle 1986, Donaldson 2007, Ebert 2000, Fagan 2009). This requires the following infinitive verb to be nominalised to function as complement of this preposition. The structure for Swabian would thus be something akin to (4).

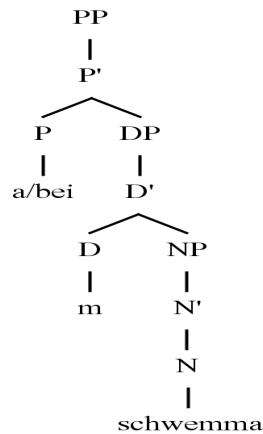
- (3) a. r’isch am schwemm-a [SW]  
 he’s [AT-[THE swim-inf]<sub>DP</sub>]<sub>PP</sub>  
 ‘he is swimming’<sup>3</sup>
- b. r’isch beim schwemm-a  
 he’s [AT-[THE swim-inf]<sub>DP</sub>]<sub>PP</sub>  
 ‘he is gone swimming’(at the swimming place)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations in glosses: inf=infinitive suffix, part: participial affix, dat= dative case; nom=nominative case; neutr=neuter gender; pl/sg=singular/plural, 3=3<sup>rd</sup> person, pres: present tense

<sup>3</sup> Translations of *an* are most commonly ‘*at*’, ‘*on*’, ‘*about*’. In this context, none seem to apply (see sections 2.1 and 2.2).

<sup>4</sup> Translations of *BEIM*-progressives are somewhat difficult. Their semantics do not always coincide with actual progressives. The closest literal translation of *bei* in this context is *at*, *by*, or *near*.

## (4) Structure for PP cliticised analysis

2.1 Cliticised *an/bei* + *dem*

In SG, cliticisation of preposition and the following determiner is the default occurrence. They can be separated for emphasis or to eliminate misunderstandings but this is done only under those special circumstances, both in vernacular and written German.

- (5) a. Ich bin **am** Fenster → a.' Ich bin **an dem** Fenster [SG]  
 b. Ich bin **beim** Fenster → b.' Ich bin **bei dem** Fenster  
 I am at/near **the** window.

In Swabian, this separation is not possible in the same way. When preposition and article are separated, the article functions as a demonstrative (6). In contrast to SG, which has a different class of demonstrative determiners (7b), Swabian does not and instead uses the non-cliticised version of the definite article to indicate demonstratives (8b). Regular definite articles are either cliticised to a preceding preposition (6a) or to a following word (8a).

- (6) a. I be **am** Fenschtr → a.' ?I be **a dem** Fenschtr [SW]  
 b. I be **beim** Fenschtr → b.' ?I be **bei dem** Fenschtr  
 'I'm at/near **the** window.' → 'I'm at/near **this** window.'

- (7) a. Ich habe **das** Fenster aufgemacht [SG]  
 I have **the** window opened  
 'I have opened the window.'  
 b. Ich habe **dieses** Fenster aufgemacht  
 I have **this** window opened  
 'I have opened this window.'



## 2.2 Nominalised infinitives

The patterns described in section 2.1 indicate strongly that AM/BEIM are not separable from the verb. However, that does not conclusively support the idea that they do not contain prepositions. One further piece of evidence requires that if AM/BEIM contain a preposition, the following phrase should be a DP; hence the infinitival verb would be nominalised. Nominalised infinitives are common occurrences in German, similar to gerunds in English. Agreement inflection on preceding modifying adjectives (12), (13) demonstrates that these infinitives are treated as nouns in both SG and SW.

- (12) a. Schnell-es Schwimm-en gefäll-t mir. [SG]  
 fast-neutr.sg.nom swim-inf like-1sg.pres. me(dat)  
 ‘I like fast swimming’
- b. Schnell-s schwemm-a gfallt’mr [SW]  
 fast-neutr.sg.nom swim-inf like-1sg.pres’me(dat)  
 ‘I like fast swimming’
- (13) a. Das kalt-e Ess-en steh-t im Ofen [SG]  
 the cold-nom.sg.neutr eat-inf stand-3sg in.the oven  
 ‘the cold meal is in the oven’
- b. s’kalt-e essa schto-t em ofe [SW]  
 the’cold-nom.sg.neutr. eat-inf stand-3sg. in.the oven  
 ‘the cold meal is in the oven’

Here, we find the first sufficient evidence that *BEIM*- and *AM*-progressives are not structurally identical. Adjectival modification is only possible with *BEIM*-progressives, as shown in the adjectival agreement inflection (14a). but it is ungrammatical with *AM*-progressives (15a). On the other hand, when the modifier does not show agreement inflection, it is an adverb. As shown in (14b), adverbial modification is ungrammatical with *BEIM*-progressives, but acceptable with *AM*-progressives (15b).

- (14) a. r’isch **beim** langsam-a vorles-a [SW]  
 he’s **BEIM** slow-**neutr.sg.dat** read.to-inf  
 ‘he is at the slow reading’ (somewhere where reading is slow)
- b. \*r’isch **beim** langsam vorles-a  
 he’s **BEIM** slow read.to-inf  
 ‘he is slowly reading’ (somewhere where one might read slowly)
- (15) a. \*r’isch **am** langsam-a vorles-a [SW]  
 r’isch **AM** slow-**neutr.sg.dat** read.to-inf  
 ‘he is reading slowly’



(18) Asking on the phone: What are you doing? Can you talk?

I be BEIM bredla bach-a aber I ka scho schwetz-a. [SW]  
 I am BEIM cookies bake-inf but I can already talk-inf  
 ‘I am baking cookies but I can talk nevertheless.’<sup>6</sup>

In fact, with first person present tense, it is her preferred construction in the above situation. When asked about another person, the absentive reading re-emerges.

(19) Asking on the phone: What is your husband doing?

- a. r’isch BEIM gias-a [SW]  
 he’s BEIM water-inf  
 ‘He is watering plants’ (outside in the yard)
- b. r’isch AM gias-a  
 he’s AM water-inf  
 ‘he is watering’ (she is watching)
- c. r’isch am staubsauga  
 he’s AM vacuum.clean-inf  
 ‘he is vacuum cleaning’ (right there where she is standing)

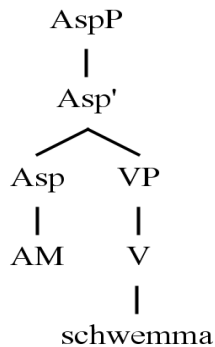
At the moment, I cannot draw any clear conclusions as to the exact semantic differences between the constructions. While it seems clear that there are structural differences, how they translate to the semantic differences is not entirely obvious. There are also slight differences in speaker preferences, so at this point, I am assuming that this may be a particular pattern of one speaker.

#### 2.4 *AM*: A preliminary structure

Concluding for now that the *AM*-progressive is structurally different from the *BEIM*-progressive, I suggest, following an analysis proposed by (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993) for Colognian and SG that *AM* is an aspectual head heading an AspP, taking a VP as complement. This structure stands in contrast with the PP structure for *BEIM*, which was outlined for both constructions in (4).

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<sup>6</sup> One of the speakers suggested that it is already cancelled once you answer the phone, so that is why *BEIM* might be possible here as true progressive instead of its absentive reading. Initial tests suggested that *BEIM* is preferred for past tense which might indicate that not only spatial but also temporal absence or distance is relevant for the use of *BEIM*.

(20) *AM*-progressive3. Transitive *AM*-progressives

Assuming that the *AM*-progressive is in fact a verbal construction with an aspectual head merging with a VP, the next question is to determine what exactly merges with the verb as internal argument. (Barrie and Spreng 2009) proposed a noun-incorporation analysis for one variant of SG based on the properties the verb-preceding noun phrase. Noun incorporation requires that the construction has an unincorporated alternate construction with somewhat different semantics from the incorporated noun (Barrie and Mathieu 2016, Johns 2007). I will discuss the following options for Swabian.

**A) N+V compounding** (Kind-er+garten = child-ren+garden) predicts that the internal argument cannot be moved, can show plural inflection (Clahsen et al. 1995), no adjectival modification, no D, no case on the N in the compound, no preverbal pronouns since pronouns cannot form compounds in German.

**B) NP + V: pseudo-incorporation** (Massam 2001) predicts that the preverbal NP should have obligatory narrow scope, cannot be moved to another unincorporated position, is number-neutral, lacks referentiality, cannot support pronominal discourse anaphora, and the sentence expresses an institutionalised activity or state.

**C) DP+V: no incorporation** predicts that we should see case inflection, plural-singular contrasts, adjectival modifiers, any determiner, and flexible order due to the possibility of VP-internal scrambling and focus movement (Haider 2006).

**D) DP+V: noun incorporation** predicts similar patterns to option C). The semantics of the noun should be different depending on their position. Mainly, those differences would show up in scope readings. The problem is that regular DP+V and incorporation DP+V would not differ with respect to the scope readings in German in this case.



### 3.1 OV order

Both in SG and SW, direct objects occur before the non-finite verb by default, but can also be put in focus position to indicate contrastive focus. This applies to periphrastic tenses as well as modal constructions. There is no change in verb semantics.

- (21) a. r'hot **bredla bach-a**                      b. r'will **bredla bach-a** [SW]  
 he'has cookies bake-part                      he'wants.to cookies bake-inf  
 'he (has) baked cookies'                      'he wants to bake cookies'
- (22) a. **breadla** hot'r **bacha**                      b. **bredla** will'r **bach-a**  
 cookies has'he bake-inf                      cookies want'he bake-inf  
 'he (has)<sup>7</sup> baked COOKIES'                      'he wants to bake COOKIES'

For *AM*-progressives, SG and other dialects allow or even prefer the direct object in in pre-*AM*/BEIM position (Slater 1997, Glück 2001, Gárgyán 2014, Ramelli 2015, Ebert 1996, Ebert 2000) as illustrated in (23b) for SG, and (24) for Colognian.

- (23) a. er ist **am Plätzchen** back-en                      b. er ist **Plätzchen am** back-en [SG]  
 he is **AM cookies** bake-INF                      he is **cookies AM** bake-INF  
 'he is baking cookies.'<sup>8</sup>                      'he is baking cookies.'<sup>8</sup>
- (24) d'r Pitter is **Näl am** erinklopp-e                      [CO]<sup>9</sup>  
 the Peter is **nails AM** in.beat-INF  
 'Peter is hammering nails in'                      (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993:71)

In contrast, Swabian *AM*-progressives do not allow the pre-*AM* position for direct objects (25) unless they are pronouns. They cannot be moved anywhere else (26).

- (25) a. r'isch **se am** bach-a                      b. \*r'isch **bredla am** bach-a [SW]  
 he's **them AM** bake-INF                      he's **cookies AM** bake-INF  
 'he is baking cookies'                      'he is baking cookies'
- c. \*I be grad **AM se** zahl-a  
 I am currently **AM them** pay-inf  
 'I am paying for them at the moment'
- (26) a. \***bredla** isch'r **AM** bacha                      [SW]  
**cookies** is'he **AM** bake-inf  
 'he is baking 'cookies''

<sup>7</sup> SW has no simple present tense form, the present perfect form covers past reference.

<sup>8</sup> (23b) is the preferred order in the Cologne dialect (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993).

<sup>9</sup> CO: Colognian.

- b. \***an rot-a huat** be i **AM** eikauf-a  
 a red-acc. hat am I AM buy-inf  
 ‘I am buying a a red hat’
- c. \***en** be I **AM** eikauf-a  
**him**<sup>10</sup> am I **AM** buy-inf  
 ‘I am buying it’

The fact that the direct object cannot be moved away from the preverbal position strongly suggests incorporation. At the moment, I have no satisfying explanation for the fact that pronouns are preferred in pre-*AM* position in Swabian, assuming they moved away from their initial merge position. There is a tendency for pronouns to scramble more freely than other arguments in German but I do not have sufficient data to support this yet for Swabian. Scrambling is optional and generally available to all types of arguments (Haider 2006), and the pronoun position seems to be fixed in progressives.<sup>11</sup>

The fixed position of the direct object between *AM* and the verb suggests that it is not a regular merge. The next section discusses what other kinds of object merges with the verb in these constructions.

### 3.2 Definiteness

As shown in (Barrie and Spreng 2009) and (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993), SG and Colognian allow the direct object in *AM-progressives* with definite determiners.

- (27) a. Noch ist **das Bild am** häng-en, aber gleich fäll-t es herunter [SG]  
 still is **the picture AM** hang-inf, but soon fall-3.sg it down  
 ‘the picture is still hanging but it will soon fall down’  
 (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993:73)
- b. mer sin **de Pänz am** spill-e loß-e [CO]  
 we are **the children AM** play-inf let-inf  
 ‘we are letting the children play’ (Bhatt and Schmidt 1993:76)

Swabian on the other hand only allows an indefinite determiner in this position.

- (28) a. \*I be **am de rote huat** eikauf-a [SW]  
 I am AM the red hat buy-inf  
 ‘I am buying the red hat’
- b. I be **AM an rota huat** eikauf-a  
 I am AM a red hat buy-inf  
 ‘I am buying a red hat’

<sup>10</sup> *huat* ‘hat’ is masculine in German, thus the pronoun referring to it is also.

<sup>11</sup> Note that scrambling has as of yet not been investigated for these types of progressive constructions.

This suggests that there is a difference in definiteness for these DPs compared to other constructions with non-finite verbs where there is no such restriction (29).

- (29) a. r'hot d'rot-e huat eikauf [SW]  
 he'has the'red-acc hat bought  
 'he has bought the red hat.'  
 b. r'will de'rot-e huat kauf-a<sup>12</sup>  
 he wants.to the'red-acc hat buy-inf  
 'he wants to buy the red hat.'

This fact suggests an explanation for the pre-*AM* position of pronouns. The pronouns that have been tested are definite pronouns. If the preverbal post-*AM* incorporation position is reserved for indefinite DPs, then those pronouns might have to move away from it to the position that is by default reserved for all internal arguments in progressives in SG or Colognian.

### 3.3 Adjectival modifiers

As shown above, the preverbal noun can be modified by an adjective. Note that it is only the noun that is modified. If the verb were the head of a N+V compound, the modifier would not show agreement inflection like an adjective but would lack it like an adverb. Thus, we can conclusively rule out A) N+V compounding.

- (30) I be am **rot-e** **hiat** eikauf-a [SW]  
 I am AM **red-dat.pl hat.pl** buy-inf  
 'I am buying red hats.'

### 3.4 Number contrasts

Swabian allows all types of plural inflection within compounds, even the –s plural which is disallowed for compounds in SG (Clahsen et al. 1995). This also rules out N+V compounding, supporting the conclusion in section 3.3. Other than with regular compounding in SG, the presence of plural inflection also reflects plural semantics. With some SG dialects, plural inflection is preferred but does not necessarily indicate plural semantics (Barrie and Spreng 2009). This is not the case in Swabian.

- (31) a. I be am (a) haus bau-a [SW]  
 I am AM (a) house.sg build-inf  
 'I am building a house'

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<sup>12</sup> Note that in this example, the prefix *ei-* is not allowed. I suspect this is because *ei-* indicates completion which is still in the future in this sentence. Some speakers however allow it.

- b. I be am heis-r bau-a  
I am AM house-pl build-inf  
'I am building houses.'
- (32) a. r'isch am (a) auto klau-a                      b. r'isch am auto-s klaua                      [SW]  
he's AM (a) car steal-inf                      he's AM car-pl steal-inf  
'he is stealing a car'                      'he is stealing cars'

Note that with singular indefinite objects, the indefinite determiner may be dropped in this construction, which is not acceptable for indefinite objects in other constructions. Thus, there might be an additional factor restricting the semantics of preverbal objects in progressives in Swabian besides definiteness. This may indicate a pseudo-incorporation analysis (option B).

The presence and absence of plural inflection also reflects plural semantics, indicating a number contrast. This on the other hand points to options C or D, i.e. a merger or incorporation of a full DP and appears to rule out option B), incorporation of an NP.

### 3.5 Scope readings

To distinguish between regular merging of indefinite DPs and noun incorporation, we need to see if there are any scope differences between progressives and other non-finite constructions. As shown in (Barrie and Spreng 2009), incorporated DPs show frozen scope compared to non-incorporated DPs. Just like SG, SW also has frozen scope as opposed to ambiguous scope in other constructions with the object preceding a non-finite verb.

- (33) a. r'isch oft am hiat eikauf-a  
he's often AM hats buy-inf  
= 'He often buys hats.'                      oft>hiat  
≠ 'When he buys something it's often hats (but sometimes scarves)' hiat>oft<sup>13</sup>
- b. r'kauft oft hiat  
he buys often hats  
= 'He often buys hats.'                      oft>hiat  
= 'When he buys something it's often hats (but sometimes scarves)' hiat >oft

The fixed position and the frozen scope readings thus strongly suggest an incorporation analysis.

### 3.6 Passives

One more canonical construction may be discussed that requires the object to move away from its default position, the passive. While English progressives can easily be converted

<sup>13</sup> With some verbs such as *bacha* 'bake', it seems to be a lot more ambiguous. It is possible that the problem might lie with the prefix *ei-* or just the verb.

into passives, Swabian progressives do not allow their object to move into subject position to form a passive.

- (34) a. I be am bredla bach-a [SW]  
 I am AM cookies bake-inf  
 ‘I am baking cookies’
- b. \*bredla send am bach-a wora  
 cookies are AM bake-inf become.part  
 ‘cookies are being baked’

Note that this is entirely acceptable with other constructions with infinitival verbs.

- (35) a. I muas bredla bach-a [SW]  
 I must.1.sg.pres cookies bake-inf  
 ‘I must bake cookies’
- b. bredla messat bacha wera  
 cookies must.3.pl.pres bake-part become.inf  
 ‘cookies must be baked’

#### 4. Speculative discussion of findings and very preliminary analysis

The patterns discussed in sections 2 and 3 of this paper can be summarised as follows:

*AM*-progressives in Swabian are constructions with non-finite verbs while BEIM progressives show more properties consistent with the traditional PP analysis where the infinitive is considered nominal as shown in (4).

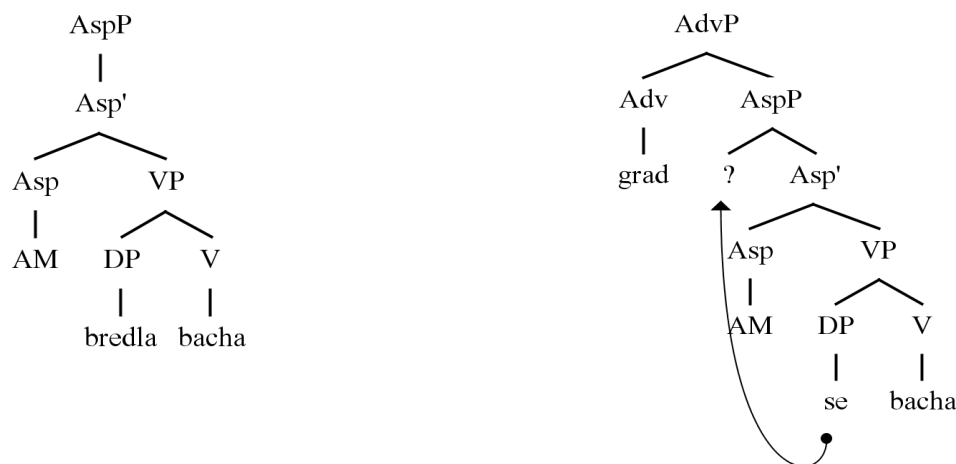
Swabian allows only direct indefinite objects between *AM* and the non-finite verb. Definite pronoun objects on the other hand are preferred in pre-*AM* position, aligning with the pattern shown in other dialects where all internal arguments are preferred in pre-*AM* position and may be definite or indefinite. No internal argument can be scrambled out of that position nor put in a focus position in the left periphery of the clause in Swabian. Counter to other constructions with non-finite verbs where scrambling or focus movement is possible, this immobile position distinguishes direct objects in progressive constructions from others and suggests an incorporation analysis as opposed to a regular merge analysis. One possible explanation for the pre-*AM* position of pronouns in Swabian could be that since these are definite pronouns, they are not available for the verb-adjacent position anymore. Since the pronouns that were tested are definite pronouns, it is however not clear whether their properties as pronouns or their definiteness require them to be in the pre-*AM* position in Swabian.

Direct objects also have frozen scope in their preverbal position. This property suggests an analysis along the lines of (Barrie and Spreng 2009) as regular noun incorporation. However, counter to the findings in the aforementioned where plural marked indefinites were strongly preferred but did not show strong number contrasts, Swabian allows plural referentiality and has little preference for plural marked direct objects.

Imperfectives tend to correlate with backgrounded, less referential internal objects. Languages may indicate these properties with non-structural case, lack of agreement, lack of number contrasts, indefiniteness, or non-specificity (Spreng 2012). Swabian expresses this crosslinguistic pattern partially in the lack of definiteness, lack of agreement. Case inflection does not show in Swabian and can therefore not yet be determined.

The fixed position, frozen scope readings, and plural referentiality of direct objects suggest a noun incorporation analysis. thus I tentatively propose the structures for *AM*-progressives in Swabian (36).

(36)



## 5. Further outlook

Obviously, this is research very much in its beginning stages and the above suggestions or even data patterns may reveal themselves less stable once more sentence types and verb types are taken into account. What is certain at the moment is that there is a structural difference between *AM*- and *BEIM*-progressives that seems to correspond to a semantic contrast. Most speakers I have worked with agree with Krause's (2002) assertion that there is a notion of absence in the readings of *BEIM*-progressives that refers less to the event but more to the place where that event is happening except when it is used in the first person.

The next steps in the investigation will focus on testing indefinite pronouns to see whether they pattern with definite pronouns or other internal arguments. A major step in the investigation will be to distinguish durative verbs from non-durative verbs used in progressives. This might also help in determining whether the *BEIM*-progressives are in fact progressives in the same way as *AM*-progressives are.

In order to determine any other possible word orders, dependent clauses need to be tested to see if the word order is the same as with dependent clauses with non-finite verb forms. Since dependent clauses are by default verb-final in German, it will be interesting to see if the fixed OV word order parallels the one found in finite and non-finite dependent clauses.

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