

A Grammaticalization Approach to the Progressive Marker in Palestinian Arabic

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Introduction: This study is concerned with the linguistic constructions available to Palestinian Arabic (PA) speakers in Gaza City for referring to a state or event taking place at the moment of speech. This study of PA will contribute to our understanding of the aspectual nature of the Arabic verbal system and what role, if any, the progressive aspect plays. The Arabic verb has mostly been treated in terms of perfective and imperfective aspect (Goldenberg 2013, p. 203), with most earlier studies focusing on Standard Arabic (SA). The study also examines whether the sources and paths of development of the progressive marker in PA can provide support for Bybee et al.'s (1994) claim that the use and meaning of grammatical markers of tense, aspect, and modality constitute a universal set of grammatical categories whose semantic content evolves gradually along certain well-travelled paths of development that are strikingly similar in diverse genetic and areal groups of language (p. 15). This is significant in light of the fact that Arabic was not one of the seventy-six languages that were randomly selected and cross-linguistically studied by Bybee et al. (1994).

The study: The study attempts to answer the following research question: What grammatical means are available to PA speakers to mark 'progressive' and what are the paths of development for these sources? To answer this question, I interviewed 48 speakers of PA spoken in Gaza City. Participants were presented with a set of pictures, and for each picture, I asked them to describe and report on what people in the pictures are doing.

Findings: The data show that PA speakers use varied means to refer to situations going on at the moment of speech: non-past form of the verb, which is also used by some speakers to express the present and the future as in example (1), and the construction *ʔa:ʕid-* 'sit.ACT.PART' + the non-past form of the verb, as in example (2), and the particles *ʕammal* and *ʕamm-* originally derived from a lexical verb meaning 'work' + the non-past form of the verb, as in example (3).

- 1) *li wlaad b-yilʕab-u:*
the-boy. PL INDIC- 3-play.NON-PAST-PL
'The boys are playing.'
- 2) *ʔa:ʕd-ah b-a-ɖabɖib bilɖurfah tabaʕti*
sit.ACT.PART-FEM INDIC-1SG-tidy up.NON-PAST in the room POSS-1SG
'I am cleaning up my room.'
- 3) *ʕamma:l b-y-ʕatb-u: fi ŕʕaʔah*
work INDIC-3-finish.NON-PAST-PL in apartment
'They are finishing a new apartment [to move to].'

Discussion: PA has different options for expressing events in progress, including (i) the strategy used in SA- the imperfective/prefix form, (ii) the positional verb *sit-* a second strategy that is well-attested in the world's languages, according to Bybee et al., and (iii) the verb *work*, which is not attested in Bybee et al.'s study. While most progressive forms in the languages examined by Bybee et al. come from expressions that involve locative elements/expressions (1994: 127-132), a finding for which PA provides evidence, the verb 'work' underlying the particles *ʕam* and *ʕammal* in PA, is not listed in the database examined by Bybee et al. among the lexical sources for grammatical markers that designate situations in progress. However, this lexical source fits with the general meaning of elements that go into the formation of the progressive constructions, i.e. an agent is in the midst of doing something (Bybee et al. 1994:133). To conclude, similar to the languages

examined by Bybee et al. and through the same universal paths of change, PA has developed complex structures to mark ongoing activities through a grammaticalization process by which lexical substance evolves into grammatical substance.

References

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