

The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic: diachrony and synchrony

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Abstract:

This paper discusses how Arabic dialects disambiguate between the progressive and the habitual aspect, using grammaticalized participles of the verbs for ‘sit’ and/or ‘work’ to mark the progressive aspect. These grammaticalized aspect markers appear in full and truncated forms. Synchronic data from various Arabic dialects suggest that there is an ongoing grammaticalization process of the progressive aspect (Caubet 1991, Camilleri & Sandler 2017). A syntactic analysis is offered to explain the distribution of the full forms arguing that they are merged low in the structure and then undergo raising to Asp. The reduced form is directly merged as Aspect head. This difference in behavior follows from the directionality of the diachronic change and is motivated by principles of Economy (Roberts & Roussou 2003, van Gelderen 2011). The proclitics used with the imperfective verb in some dialects, such as *bi-* in Egyptian Arabic and Levantine Arabic dialects, and *ka-* in Moroccan Arabic, have received different treatments in the literature, including describing them as progressive aspect markers. The paper discusses the different

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

environments where *bi* and *ka* morphemes are found and suggests that even though they do not have a clear grammatical function, they started their existence as grammaticalized progressive aspect markers as evidenced by data from Makkan Arabic.

Keywords

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### **1. Introduction**

The imperfective verb form in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the default form (Benmamoun 2000, Aoun *et al.* 2010) and is used in finite and nonfinite clauses. Finite clauses with the imperfective verbs are in the present tense and are ambiguous regarding grammatical aspect between the habitual and the progressive aspect. It has been shown in the Generative syntax literature that the verb itself does not express grammatical aspect meaning on its own, and that the locus of grammatical aspect in MSA is a null Aspect head (Hallman 2015). Unlike MSA, spoken Arabic dialects disambiguate between the progressive and the habitual aspect using the active participle of the posture verb meaning ‘sit’ and of the activity verb meaning ‘work’ to mark progressive aspect. In some dialects we find full forms and reduced forms of these aspectual markers used interchangeable.

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

(1) Najafi Iraqi Arabic: *ga:ʕid* ‘sitting’  
*ga:ʕid / ga:ʕ / ga*

Syrian Arabic: *ʕammal* ‘working’  
*ʕammal / ʕamm(a) / ʕam*

As has been pointed out in the literature, synchronic facts from various Arabic dialects indicate that these dialects are grammaticalizing and some have grammaticalized an active participle to overtly mark the progressive aspect conforming to the well-established general grammaticalization cycle in (2), and that each dialect exemplifies a stage in Deo’s (2015) progressive-imperfective grammaticalization path in (3).

(2) phrase > word/head > clitic > affix > 0

(van Gelderen 2011: 6)

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| (3) a. $X_{\text{IMPF}}$                | zero-PROG        |
| b. $(Y_{\text{PROG}}), X_{\text{IMPF}}$ | emergent- PROG   |
| c. $Y_{\text{PROG}}, X_{\text{IMPF}}$   | categorical-PROG |
| d. $Y_{\text{IMPF}}$                    | generalized-PROG |

(Deo 2015: 20)

The main goal of this paper is to analyze the syntactic properties of the different progressive marker forms. The full form of the active participle behaves differently from the reduced form in terms of a. its position in the clause structure, b. its adjacency to the verb and the subject, c. its inflection for agreement, and d. its placement in relation to sentential

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

negation. Each of these forms represents a stage in the grammaticalization process. The driving force behind the change from a full form of the active participle to a reduced form of the functional progressive category could be attributed to economy principles especially Chomsky's (1995) Merge over Move (and its subsequent formulation External Merge vs. Internal Merge -Chomsky 2000), adopted in Roberts and Roussou's (2003) parametric account, and expressed as Late Merge Principle (LMP) in van Gelderen's (2011).

Some dialects use proclitics such as *bi-* e.g., Egyptian Arabic, and *ka-* e.g., Moroccan Arabic, with the imperfective verb, and these proclitics have received different treatments in the literature, including describing them as progressive aspect markers. The secondary goal of this paper is to discuss the different environments where *bi/ka* morphemes are found and argue that they do not mark grammatical aspect. The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the different grammaticalized progressive markers in various Arabic dialects, section 3 provides a syntactic analysis of the full active participle form of the progressive, section 4 analyzes the reduced forms of the progressive, section 5 is devoted to the imperfective verb and the proclitics *bi* and *ka*, and section 6 concludes.

### **2. The Progressive aspect: diachrony**

Several scholars in the Arabic syntax literature have argued that the imperfective form is the default form which occurs in a wide range of

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

environments, tense and untensed (Fassi-Fehri 1993, Benmamoun 2000, Aoun *et al.* 2010, Hallman 2015, among others). When the imperfective is used in present tense, the sentence may have two different aspectual readings: progressive and habitual as shown in (4).

- (4) ja-drus-u    ʕaliʒ fi l-maktab-ah  
3SM-study.IPRF-IND    Ali in the-library-F  
‘Ali is studying in the library/Ali studies in the library’

The imperfective verb stem itself is not morphologically marked for aspect and therefore does not express the progressive or the habitual meanings. It is after all the default form that is used in non-finite clauses, with the subjunctive marker, with the future marker, and with modals. It is akin in its form to the so-called inflected infinitives found in languages like Brazilian Portuguese (Hallman 2015).

Arabic dialects show some variation in how the progressive aspect is marked. Dialects like Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic use optional active participles of the verb ‘sit’, namely *galəs* (Moroccan), and *ʔa:ʕid* (Egyptian) ‘sitting’, and the verb *work*, namely *xdda:m* (Moroccan) and *ʕammal* (Egyptian), to mark the progressive.

- (5) a. ʕali ka-j-qra    f-l-maktab-a                      (Moroccan)  
ali ka-3SM-study.IPFV in-the-library-F  
‘Ali is studying in the library/Ali studies in the library.’  
b. ʕali galəs    ka-j-qra    f-l-maktab-a  
ali sit.PTCP ka-3SM-study.IPFV in-the-library-F

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

‘Ali is studying in the library.’

(6) a. b-ju-drus (Egyptian)

b-3SM-study.IPFV

‘He studies/is studying.’

b. ʔa:ʕid b-ju-drus

sit.PTCP b-3SM-study.IPFV

‘He is studying.’

The ambiguity between the habitual and the progressive is obtained in (5)a and (6)a, and disappears in (5)b and (6)b. This indicates that the imperfective stem and the proclitics *ka* in Moroccan Arabic and *bi* in Egyptian Arabic are not the source of the ambiguity in grammatical aspect. Examining the other Arabic dialects in how they mark the habitual and the progressive aspects reveals three major dialect types. The first type is exemplified by Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic where the progressive can either be null or lexicalized by the active participle of the verbs ‘sit’ or ‘work’. The second type is exemplified by Najdi Arabic where the progressive is obligatorily marked by the active participle of the verb ‘sit’, namely: *ga:ʕid*. The third type is like the second type in having an obligatory overt progressive aspect marker, but besides the full form of the participle of the verb ‘sit,’ namely *ga:ʕid* ‘sitting,’ these dialects, such as Najafi Iraqi Arabic, also have reduced forms like *ga:f* and *ga*. This is summarized below.

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

Dialect types in marking the progressive aspect:

(7) Type 1: e.g. Egyptian Arabic and Moroccan Arabic

- $\emptyset_{Hab/Prog}$  + Imperfective Verb
- $\text{ʔa:ʕid/ga:ləs}_{Prog}$  + Imperfective Verb

Type 2: e.g. Najdi Arabic

- $\emptyset_{Hab}$  + Imperfective Verb
- $\text{ga:ʕid}_{Prog}$  + Imperfective Verb

Type 3: e.g. Najafi Iraqi Arabic

- $\emptyset_{Hab}$  + Imperfective Verb
- $\text{ga:ʕid/ ga:ʕ/ga}_{Prog}$  + Imperfective Verb

The observation that the active participle of the posture verb is used to encode progressive aspect is not novel and has been made for various Arabic varieties. Caubet (1991) and Heath (2002) noted the active participle *ga:ləs* in Moroccan Arabic, Jarad (2015) noted the active participle *ja:lis* in Emirati Arabic, and Agius & Harrak (1987) noted the participle *ga:ʕid* for Iraqi Arabic dialects. In terms of analyses, Jarad (2015) analyzes the grammaticalization path of the progressive marker from a bodily posture description to an aspect marker. Camilleri & Sadler (2017) expand the description of the grammaticalization of the posture active participle *ga:ʕid* to a variety of dialects including, e.g. Kuwaiti and Maltese, and provide a detailed description of the grammaticalization process of the progressive from the active participle of the posture active *ga:ʕid*.

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

The posture active participle is not the only progressive marker attested in Arabic dialects and is not the only source of grammaticalization of the progressive. Levantine Arabic dialects, especially Syrian Arabic and some Jordanian Arabic dialects, use the Active participle of the activity verb ‘work’ *ʕamal*. Cowell (1962) noted that the active participle *ʕammal* is used in Syrian Arabic, Jordanian Arabic, and Lebanese Arabic, with the reduced form *ʕamma*, and the clitic form *ʕam* also attested in some of these dialects.

In their analysis of the progressive grammaticalized from the posture active participle *ga:ʕid* ‘sitting’, Camilleri & Sadler (2017) argue that the grammaticalization path starts with the active participle being used as a predicate, which in some cases takes a circumstantial adjunct, then it goes through a semantic bleaching where it loses its inherent meaning and its argument structure and acquires a grammatical function as a marker of the progressive aspect. The third stage in the reanalysis is the stage where it loses agreement morphology, then becomes a phonologically reduced form. They propose the following grammaticalization path:

(8) *gaʕid /galis* + Circumstantial ADJ clause > *gaʕid /galis* + XCOMP >  
PROG + lexical main verb

Putting this in the large crosslinguistic context, the grammaticalization of the progressive follows the general familiar path sketched in (2) and (3).

When the change reaches the extreme right, a new word is used to start the



## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

process of grammaticalization all over again, which is the reason why this process of change has been described as a “cycle”.

It appears that dialects such as Moroccan Arabic and Egyptian Arabic are at the initial stages in this cycle exemplifying Deo’s (2015) stage (b) in (3). The active participle *ga:lās* in Moroccan Arabic, is reanalyzed as a progressive marker and is still optional. In fact, *ga:lās*, is not the only participle we find in Moroccan Arabic. Caubet (1991) points out other participles which are recruited in other subdialects of Moroccan Arabic to express progressive aspect, and these are: *xdda:m* (working), *barək* (sitting) used in Casablanca and the west, *xajəd* (taking) used in the Fes region. All the Moroccan Arabic dialects use the fully inflected participle form and the uninflected, bare, form but none of them have a clitic form. In the dialects of the Gulf region such as Najdi Arabic, a Saudi dialect, and Emirati Arabic, the use of the active participle, e.g. *ga:ʕid* (Najdi) and *ja:lis* (Emirati), is obligatory and this participle does not have a reduced form. The overt lexical progressive marker is also obligatory in Levantine Arabic dialects and Iraqi Arabic dialects, and in these clusters of dialects, the progressive has three coexisting forms reflecting all the different grammaticalization stages. These forms are: 1) the Active participle of the verb ‘work’ in Levantine Arabic and the verb ‘sit’ in Iraqi Arabic, 2) a reduced form of the active participle, and 3) a clitic form as illustrated in (9):

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

(9) forms of the progressive markers:

a. Levantine Arabic : *ʕammal / ʕamm(a) / ʕam*

b. Iraqi Arabic: *ga:ʕid / ga:ʕ / ga*

The following examples from Najafi Iraqi Arabic (Spoken in Najaf) show these coexisting different forms of the progressive. The active participle *ga:ʕid* is the full form and is inflected for subject agreement as shown (10) and(11).<sup>1</sup>

(10) at<sup>f</sup>-t<sup>f</sup>ul<sup>f</sup>ʕa:b ga:ʕdi:n/g:aʕ/ga jaqrū:n

The-students.M ACT.PTCP/PROG 3PM-read.IPRF

‘The students are reading.’

(11) at<sup>f</sup>-t<sup>f</sup>a:l<sup>f</sup>ibaat ga:ʕdaat/ga:ʕ/ga jaqrən

The-student-PF ACT.PTCP/ PROG 3-read.IPRF-PF

‘The female students are reading.’

(Albuarabi p.c.)

Table 1 below lists some progressive aspect maker attested in various Arabic dialects. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but rather a list of examples mentioned in the literature. In some cases, we see all the different forms of the progressive, in others we see only one form. In the dialects for which only the clitic form or the affix form are listed, it is unclear if the other forms are attested; this still needs to be verified.

The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

Table 1<sup>2</sup>

Dialects	Sub-dialects	Agreeing Form	Non-agreeing form	Reduced form
Egyptian		<i>ʔa:ʕid</i> <i>ʕamma:l</i>		
Emirati		<i>ʔa:lis</i>	<i>ʔa:lis</i>	
Iraqi	Jewish Christian Baghdadi			<i>qad</i> <i>qat</i> <i>qa</i>
	Muslim Baghdadi			<i>da</i>
	Bahzani			<i>ku, ki, kə</i>
	Najafi	<i>ga:ʕid</i>	<i>ga:ʕid</i>	<i>ga:ʕ</i> <i>ga</i>
Levantine	Lebanese Syrian Jordanian Palestinian	<i>ʕamma:l</i>	<i>ʕamma:l</i>	<i>ʕam</i>
Moroccan		<i>ga:ləs</i>	<i>ga:ləs</i>	
		<i>xdda:m</i>	<i>xdda:m</i>	
		<i>barək</i>	<i>barək</i>	
Maltese			<i>ʔeda</i>	<i>ʔed</i>
Saudi	Najdi	<i>ga:ʕid</i>		
	Ghamdi	<i>ga:ʕid</i>		<i>ga:ʕ</i>
Sudanese		<i>ga:ʕid</i>		
Tunisian	Bedouin	<i>ʕammal</i>		
	Jewish	<i>qa:ʕd</i>	<i>qa:ʕd</i>	<i>qa</i> <i>da</i>
	Muslim	<i>qa:ʕd</i>	<i>qa:ʕd</i>	

Camilleri & Sadler (2017) conjecture that a possible source or ‘precursor’ of the posture active participle functioning as a progressive aspect marker, is a structure with a participle used as a main predicate taking a circumstantial adjunct clause. They argue that this adjunct eventually got reanalyzed as a clausal argument of *ga:ʕid*. This claim is unsubstantiated and seems to put the focus of the reanalysis on the adjunct. Note that the active participle of the verb ‘work’ is another source of

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

grammaticalization of the progressive, and this participle when used as a predicate cannot be modified by a circumstantial adjunct. This is a categorial change of the participle from a lexical category to a functional category and its selection requirements follow from its category. As a lexical category it has an argument structure, and as a semantically bleached functional category it merges in the functional domain of the clause structure and scopes over the verb phrase. The question is why is the active participle (of the posture verb ‘sit’ and activity verb ‘work’) recruited and its use extended to mark progressive aspect? There is a semantic reason for this, which is to disambiguate the habitual from the progressive (Deo 2015); and this is an internal factor. Data from some Arabic dialects suggest that there might be external factors namely pragmatic pressures driving this change. In Moroccan Arabic, the use of the active participle *xdda:m* ‘working’ usually conveys the speaker’s attitude of displeasure with some individual’s action and disapproval of a situation.

(12) *dra:ri xdda:min ka-j-lʕbuu f-znqa*

kids work.PTCP ka-3-play.IPFV-P in the-street-F

‘the kids are playing outside (and they’re not supposed to).’

The use of *ʔa:ʕid* conveys the same attitude in some contexts in Lebanese Arabic, and so does *ʕammal* in Egyptian Arabic as shown by (13) and (14) respectively.

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

- (13) *ʔa:ʕid*      *ʕam-jihdʕar-(li:)*    *televizjo:n* (Haddad p.c.)  
sit.PTCP      *ʕam-watch -(to-me)* television  
'He's watching television' (and he's not supposed to)
- (14) *ʕammal*      *bi-jilʕab* (Mitchell & Al-Hassan 1994:92)  
work.PTCP    *bi-work*  
'he is going on playing (and he should stop).'

These examples clearly show that the active participles *xdda:m*, *ʔa:ʕid*, and *ʕammal* in Moroccan, Lebanese, and Egyptian Arabic respectively can have pragmatic interpretive effects.<sup>3</sup>

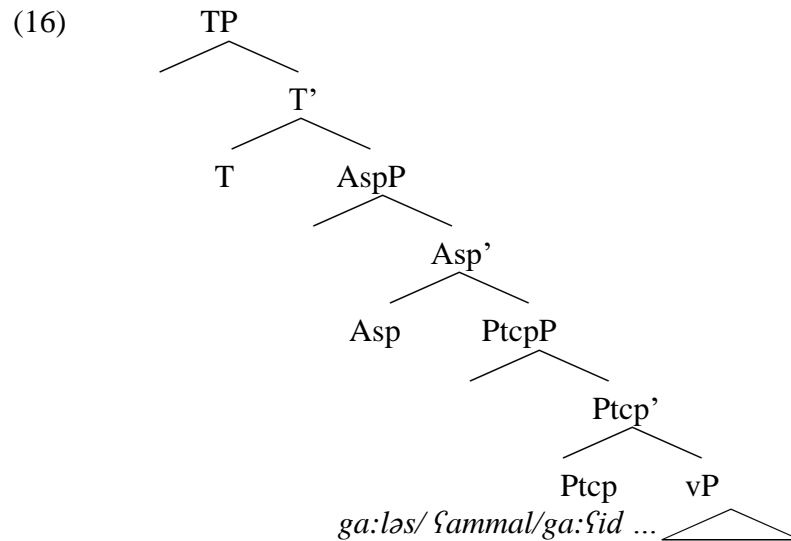
The various stages in the grammaticalization process of the progressive from a full form to a reduced form are driven by internal factors, namely economy. The principle of economy that is relevant here is Chomsky's (1995) "Merge over Move", which states that merging a lexical item directly in its surface position is preferred and more economical than merging it in one position prior to raising it to its final surface position. This principle is adopted by Roberts and Roussou (2003) and by van Gelderen (2011) who expresses it as the Late Merge Principle (LMP).

- (15) LMP  
Merge as late as possible.  
(Van Gelderen 2011: 14)

The change of the active participle from a functional category in its full form to a reduced form should have syntactic effects. I will argue that as a

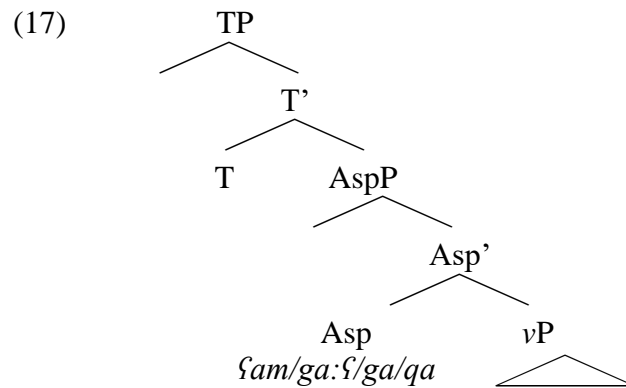
## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

functional category the participle is merged in the functional spine of the structure taking the constituent containing the imperfective verb, namely the *vP*, as a complement as shown in (16). In the next section, I will provide detailed arguments for this clause structure and the structural position of the progressive aspect marker.



The participle in (16) is inflected for subject agreement which it gets, as I will argue in detail in the next section, by moving to *Asp*. As it gets reanalyzed further and becomes morphologically reduced (loss of agreement), and phonologically truncated, it becomes an aspectual clitic which gets directly merged as *Asp* (LMP). This is the case in all the dialects that have a clitic or an affix form of the progressive marker.

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic



### 3. The progressive: a syntactic analysis of the full form

The active participle of the posture verb ‘sit’ and the activity verb ‘work’ are still used as lexical categories to express their inherent meanings, besides their functional use to convey progressive aspect. In MA, a sentence such as (18) is ambiguous:

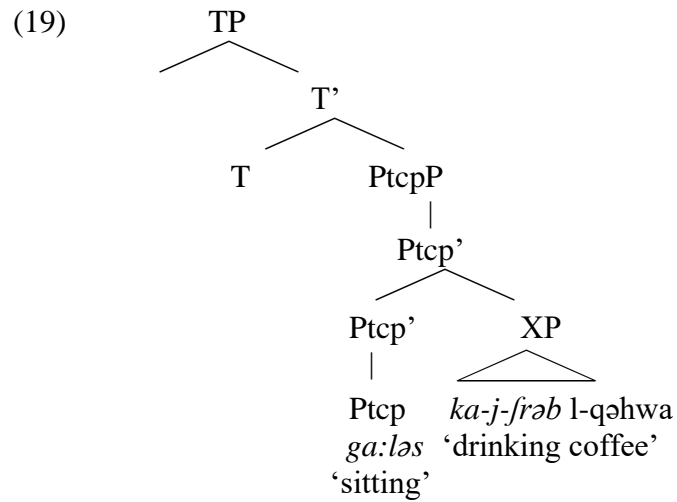
(18) *ga:ləs*      *ka-j-ʃrəb*      *l-qəhwa* (MA)  
 sit.ACT.PTCP    ka-3SM-drink    the-coffee

Meaning 1: ‘he is sitting and/while drinking coffee.’

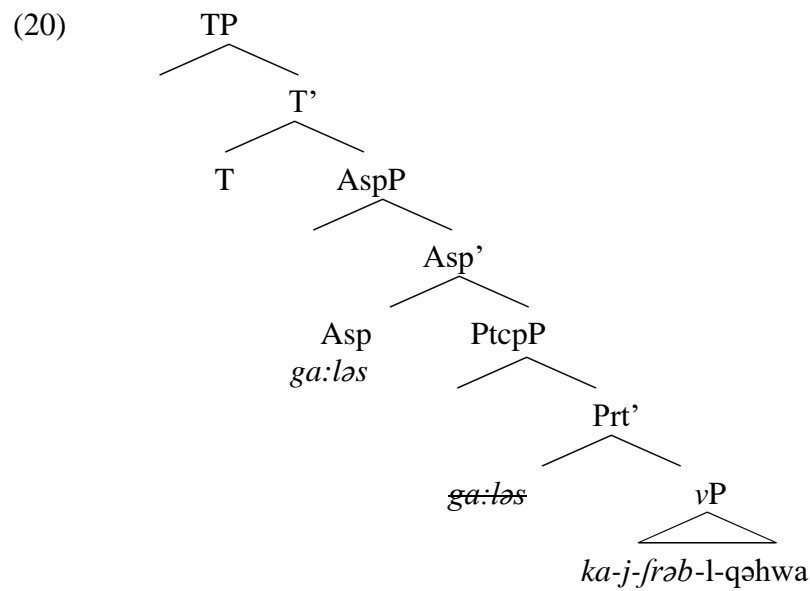
Meaning 2: ‘he is drinking coffee.’

The structure associated with meaning one has the constituent containing the imperfective verb and the direct object serving as an adjunct to the main predicate namely the active participle meaning ‘sit’.<sup>4</sup>

The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic



The syntactic structure that yields meaning two, has the active participle functioning as a progressive marker taking *vP* as complement.



Evidence for this structure comes from island effects (Ross 1967).

Fronting the direct object in (21) disambiguates the sentence with only



## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

meaning one available, while meaning two is not because of the adjunct-island constraint.

- (21)  $\int$ nu ga:ləs ka-j- $\int$ rəb ? (Moroccan)  
what sit.ACT.PTCP ka-3SM-drink?  
'what is he drinking?'  
'# what is he drinking while sitting?'

The analysis I will argue for here is that the progressive participle first merges with  $\nu$ P, and then raises to Asp as shown in (20). This is different from the reduced forms of the progressive found in some dialects which, I will argue, merge directly as Aspectual heads. Support for this analysis comes from: subject position, agreement, and negation as detailed next.

### 3.1. Subject position

Arabic is a verb raising language. All the modern spoken Arabic dialects allow for VSO order in addition to SVO, which is the unmarked order.

The standard analysis of VSO order, in the Arabic syntax literature, derives it by moving the imperfective verb to Asp (Soltan 2007) and the perfective verb to T (Benmamoun 2000, Aoun, Benmamoun, & Chouieri 2010, & Soltan 2007), whereas the subject remains in Spec,  $\nu$ P.

Assuming this analysis, we notice that several dialects allow the subject to occur between the verb and progressive active participle. The subject is

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

allowed either before the active participle or after it, but not after the verb as illustrated by (22), (23), (24), (25), and (26).<sup>5</sup>

### Ghamdi Arabic

- (22) (il-banat) ʒals-i:n/gaʕd-i:n (il-banat) yu-grun (\*il-banat) l-ktab  
(The-girls) sit.ACT.PTCP.3P (the-girls) 3P-read.IMPF (\*the-girl) the-book  
'The female students are reading.'

### Najafi Arabic

- (23) (?əl-tʕalīb) gaʕid (?əl-tʕalīb) j-drus (\*?əl-tʕalīb)  
(the student) sit.ACT.PTCP.3MS (the-student) 3M-study.S-IMP (\*the student)  
bi-?əl-maktabəh  
in-the-library  
'The student is studying in the library.'

### Moroccan Arabic

- (24) (dra:ri) ga:lsi:n (dra:ri) ka-j-lʕbuu (\*dra:ri) f-znqa  
(the-kids) sit.PTCP (the-kids) ka-3-play.IPFV-P (\*the-kids) in the-street-F  
'The kids are playing outside.'

### Jordanian Arabic

- (25) (l-?awlaad) gaaʕdiin (l-?awlaad) bi- yilʕab-u (\*l-?awlaad)  
(the-boys) sit.ACT.PTCP-3PM (the boys) bi-play.IMPERF-3MP (\*the-boys)  
'The boys are playing.'

### Egyptian Arabic

- (26) (l-?awlaad) ?aaʕdiin (? l-?awlaad) bi- yilʕab-u (\*l-?awlaad)

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

(the-boys) sit.ACT.PTCP-3PM the boys bi-play.IMPERF-3mp

‘The boys are playing.’

I take this to mean that verb movement is blocked when the full form of the progressive participle is used, and the subject can either occur in Spec, vP or higher in Spec, TP. These facts suggest that there is no strict adjacency between the progressive participle and the verb, and the subject can intervene between the two when it remains in its thematic position (Spec, vP).

Further evidence for the subject occurring either in its thematic position (Spec, vP) following the progressive participle or higher (Spec, TP) preceding the participle, comes from the distribution of subject Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in Moroccan Arabic. Subject NPIs in Moroccan Arabic must be licensed by a negation through c-command (Benmamoun 1997), when the NPI subject is in its thematic position, whether it stays *in situ* as in (27) or moves higher as in (28):

(27) ma galəs                      hətta wahed      ka-jfrub              lqhwa  
Neg sit.ACT.PTCP-3SM No-even-one ka-drink.IMPF the-coffee  
‘No one is drinking coffee.’

(28) hətta wahed ma      galəs                      ka-jfrub              lqhwa  
No-even-one Neg sit.ACT.PTCP-3SM ka-drink.IMPF the-coffee  
‘No one is drinking coffee.’

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

Another piece of evidence comes from interrogative clauses such as (29) below:

(29) *afno galsi:n kul-kum ka-tdiro hna ?*

what sit.ACT.PTCP all-you ka-2P-do.IMPV here

‘what are you all doing here?’

‘#what are you all doing while sitting here?’

Recall that the only possible meaning in such examples is with the participle having a grammatical function as progressive aspect marker. Its interpretation as a predicate is impossible due to the island violation effects induced by fronting the *wh*-word *fnu*. What is more important in such cases is the position of the subject *kul-kum* ‘all of you’ which intervenes between the progressive participle and the main verb. Having motivated and argued for the clause structure and the structural position of the progressive active participle, I will now provide arguments for raising based on agreement and negation.

### 3.2. Agreement

The full form of progressive participle is inflected for subject agreement in all dialects which requires a syntactic analysis similar in this respect to the subject verb agreement. All theories of agreement within Generative syntax make similar assumptions about how agreement is obtained, and

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

what differs is the technical implementation. They all assume that agreement results from a structural relation between an argument, e.g. the subject, and a functional head, e.g. T. The verb or the auxiliary eventually moves to this functional head to bear the agreement morphology.

Agreement, in Minimalism, under an Agree approach (Chomsky 2000 & 2001) results from a functional head, called a Probe, specified for uninterpretable phi-features establishing an Agree relation with a DP Goal (in this case the Subject) in its c-command domain. The verb or the auxiliary eventually moves to this functional head and ends up bearing the agreement affix.

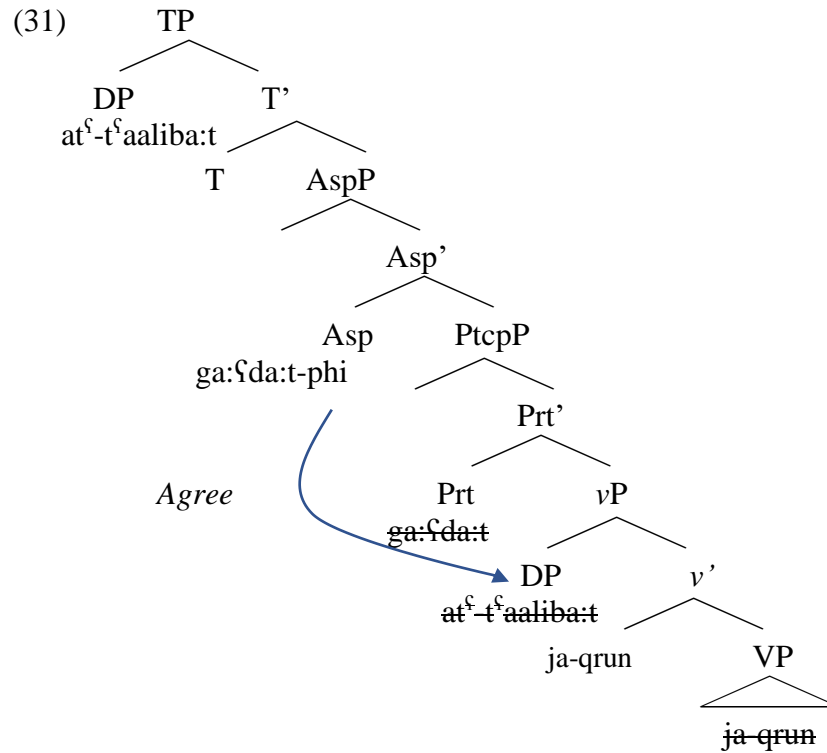
Assuming this analysis, I argue that the progressive participle merges higher than  $\nu$ P, as motivated in the previous section by the subject position, taking this constituent as a complement. The Participle Phrase (PctpP) is selected by an Asp head. Note that the participle is inherently specified for durativity and progressivity, and so does the progressive head Asp. The Asp head bears uninterpretable phi-features, and therefore serves as a Probe, which establishes an Agree relation with the Subject in Spec,  $\nu$ P before the latter moves to Spec, TP in SVO sentences. This is exemplified by the derivation of the Najafi example in (30) schematized (31).<sup>6</sup>

(30) at<sup>ʕ</sup>-t<sup>ʕ</sup>aaliba:t ga:ʕda:t ja-qrun

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

The-student-PFsit.PTCP-PLF 3-read.IPRF-PF

‘The female students are reading.’



Another argument for raising is the distribution of negation which is discussed next.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2. Negation

Arabic dialects vary in terms of their negative markers. Some use a single negation: *ma*, others use a bipartite negation: *ma-f*. Despite this variation, all the dialects show a strict adjacency between the verb and negation in

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

simple present and simple past sentences: Neg+V, as shown in (32), (33), (34), and (35).

### Jordanian

(32) jazan ma-bilʕab football. (Alsarayreh 2012)

Yazan Neg-play.3SM soccer

‘Yazan does not play soccer.’

### Najafi Iraqi Arabic

(33) ʔəli ma ju-drus.

Ali Neg 3SM-study.

‘Ali will not study.’

### Baghdadi

(34) ʕəli ma ju-drus kul yum. (Albuarabi 2021)

Ali Neg ASP-study every day

‘Ali does not study every day.’

### Moroccan

(35) ʔəl-wəld ma-ka-j-qrə-ʃ.

The-boy Neg-read.IPFV.3MS-Neg

‘The boy doesn’t read/is not reading.’

Regarding the syntax of negation, there is a consensus among Arabic syntacticians that negation projects its own phrase NegP in the clause structure, but there have been different views regarding its structural

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

position. Benmamoun (2000) and Aoun *et al.* (2010) argue that NegP is lower than TP, Soltan (2017) argues that NegP is higher than TP, and Alqassas (2019, 2020) argues that there two are possible positions for negation, one higher than TP and one lower. However, all the accounts agree that NegP is higher than AspP and the adjacency between the verb and negation is explained by verb raising as schematized in (36):

$$(36) \dots [ \text{NegP} \text{ Neg} \quad [ \text{AspP} \text{ Asp} \quad [ \text{vP} \nu \quad [ \text{VP} \text{ V} ] ] ] ] ]$$

|-----|-----|-----|

The progressive participle also shows strict adjacency with negation as shown by the examples in (37), (38), and (39) below.

Single Neg dialects: e.g. Najafi Iraqi Arabic

- (37) at<sup>ʕ</sup>-t<sup>ʕ</sup>aaliba:t    ma ga:ʕda:t            ja-qran  
 The-student-PF Neg sit.PTCP-PLF    3-read.IPFV-PF  
 ‘The female students are not reading.’

Bipartite negation dialects: e.g., Basrawi Iraqi (38) and Moroccan (39)

- (38) ʔəl-t<sup>ʕ</sup>alīb    ma-gaʕidi-ʃ            j-drus                            bɪ-ʔəl-maktabəh  
 the-student Neg-sit.PTCP    3MS-Neg 3M-study.S-IMP    in-the-library  
 ‘The student is not studying in the library.’

Moroccan

- (39) ʔəl-wəld    ma-gales-ʃ            ka-j-qra (MA)  
 The-boy Neg-sit.PTCP.3S-Neg    ka-3M-read.IMP  
 ‘The boy is not reading.’



## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

These facts can only be explained by raising the progressive participle to Neg, which in addition to the agreement facts, provide further arguments for the raising-to-Asp analysis proposed here.

Having argued that the full form of the progressive participle is merged lower and undergoes raising to Asp, next I will argue that the reduced forms are merged directly as Aspectual heads which explains their different distribution in relation to the subject, the verb, and negation.

### **4. The progressive: the reduced form**

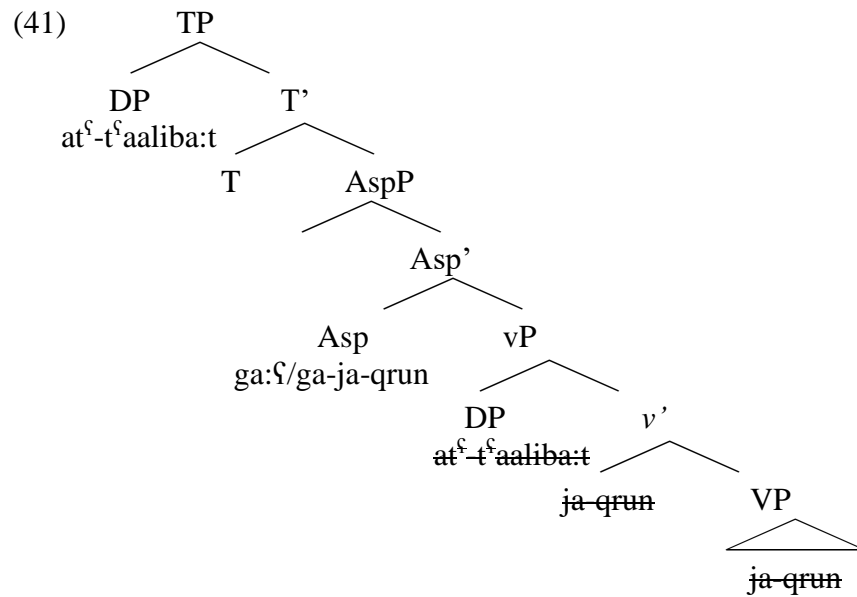
I argue that the reduced forms of the progressive markers are merged directly as Aspectual heads, since they are not categorially participles. As aspectual heads, they are not specified for phi-features and agreement shows only on the verb. Being clitic in form requires that they be hosted by the verb, which forces verb movement to Asp as shown by the Najafi Iraqi example in (40) and its derivation in (41).

(40) at<sup>f</sup>-t<sup>f</sup>aaliba:t ga:ʕ/ga-ja-qrun

The-student-PF PROG-3-read.IPFV-PF

‘The female students are reading.’

The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic



Dialects that have reduced forms of the progressive marker exhibit a strict adjacency between the progressive marker, the verb, and negation. The Ghamdi and Najafi examples illustrate that subject cannot intervene between the verb and the reduced forms of the aspect marker unlike what we have seen with the full forms. The adjacency results from raising the verb to Asp.

Ghamdi Saudi

- (42) (il-banat ) gaʕ ( \*il-banat ) yu-grun l-ktab  
 (The-girls) PROG ( \*the-girls) 3P-read.IMPF the-book  
 ‘the girls are reading the book.’

Najafi Iraqi

- (43) (at-taaliba:t ) ga:ʕ/ga- ( \*at-taaliba:t ) ja-qran  
 (the-students ) PROG The-student-PF 3-read.IPRF-PF

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

‘The female students are reading.’

In negative sentences, the verb raises all the way to Neg, which would explain the adjacency between negation, the aspect marker, and the verb as shown by the Moslawi example in (41):

Moslawi Iraqi

(44) t<sup>ʕ</sup>alīb wiħīd ma-qa-j-dros. (Moslawi)

student.<sub>3SM</sub> one Neg-PROG-3M-study.S-IMP

‘A student is not studying.’ (Albuarabi 2021: )

The reduced forms are directly merged in Asp, unlike the active participle forms which undergo raising-to-Asp. LMP can be employed to explain this difference in behavior between these progressive markers. This in turn explains the tendency for the unidirectional change from a full form that inflects for agreement and undergoes raising to a clitic form which does not bear agreement and is directly merged as Asp.

In Moroccan Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, and Levantine Arabic dialects the imperfective verb in finite simple declarative clauses, is always preceded by a proclitic. In Moroccan Arabic this proclitic is *ka* or *ta*, in Egyptian Arabic and Levantine Arabic, this proclitic is *b(i)*. These proclitic which are obligatory, except in certain contexts which will be listed in the next section, have received different treatments including being described as

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

progressive aspect markers. I will argue they do not mark progressive aspect but must have had this function before.

### 5. The Imperfective verb and the *bi/ka* proclitics

The *bi-ka* proclitics which cooccur with the imperfective verbs have been described differently by different scholars. Harrel (1965) and Brustad (2000) treat *ka* in Moroccan Arabic as a mood marker, Heath (2002) treats it as an aspectual marker, and Ouhalla (2014) treats it as a finiteness marker. Brustad (2000) and Holes (2004) treat both *bi* as an indicative mood marker.

#### 5.1. *bi/ka* as mood markers

Holes (2004) describes mood as the inflectional marking on the verb, usually labeled indicative or subjective. Holes (2004: 223) writes “Mood inflection is always marked in the p-stem [imperfective stem (the author)] and is frequently a morphological correlate of modal meaning ... expressed lexically elsewhere in the sentence.”. Holes (2004: 226) also write that: ‘In main clauses, the *b(i)*- prefix most often equates to the MSA u-set (“indicative”) of the p-stem- that is, it marks factual statements containing verbs of varied aspect and is also used in predictions about the future’.

The examples (45), (46), and (47), adapted from Holes (2004: 226-227) illustrate this.

The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

(45) b-jiʔra (Egyptian)

b-3MS-read.IPFV

‘He reads/can reads’ (= ability)

(46) b-jiʔra ktiir

b-3MS-read.IPFV much

‘He reads a lot.’ (= habit)

(47) b-jiʔra kta:b

b-3MS-read.IPFV book

‘He is reading a book.’ (= continuous)

The *ka-* marker in Moroccan Arabic is licensed in the same contexts with the same meanings as shown in (48), (49), and (50):

(48) ka-j-qa

ka-3MS-read.IPFV

‘He reads/can reads’ (= ability)

(49) ka-j-qa bzzaf

b-3MS-read.IPFV much

‘He reads a lot.’ (= habit)

(50) ka-j-qa kta:b

b-3MS-read.IPFV book

‘He is reading a book.’ (= continuous)

In syntactic and semantic terms, *bi* and *ka* are indicative mood markers in factual statements expressed by different Modals or Modal operators. Such

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

Modals can be covert as the ability Modal in (47) and (50). Holes (2004) contrasts contexts where *bi* is licensed against contexts where it is not licensed, and the difference is that *bi* is licensed where the statement in question is factual.

- (51) b-jiʔra                      l-kita:b      bukra  
   b-3MS-read.IPFV    the-book    tomorrow  
   ‘He will read the book tomorrow.’ (= “factual prediction”)
- (52) jiʔra                              l-kita:b      bukra  
   b-3MS-read.IPFV    the-book    tomorrow  
   ‘He is to read the book tomorrow.’ (= “instruction”)

The *bi-* is licensed in questions which are inquiries about facts as in (53).

Questions which are about non-facts do not license the *bi-* affix as in (54).

- (53) b-jiʔra                              e:h  
   b-3MS-read.IPFV    what  
   ‘What is he reading?’
- (54) jiʔra                                      e:h  
   b-3MS-read.IPFV    what  
   ‘What is he t read?’

There are other contexts where the *bi* and *ka* morpheme cannot be licensed and these are: nonfinite embedded clauses with future interpretation (*irrealis*), nonfinite embedded clauses with dependent temporal tense

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

interpretation, under the scope of deontic modals, with optatives, and under the scope of aspectual verbs in the imperative form. What all these contexts have in common is that they are not statement about factual events, which lends more support to treating these markers as indicative mood markers. However, there are problems with analysis. The first problem is: Why does the indicative mood marker not appear with perfective verbs in the past tense? Similarly, why is it barred with the future marker to express a factual prediction as an answer to question (51) for example? Examining all the contexts where the *bi-/ka-* morphemes are licensed and not licensed reveals that these are exactly the contexts where grammatical aspect is licensed and not licensed, respectively. The second problem is serious and unexpected. The *ka* in Moroccan Arabic can occur in counterfactuals as in (55).

- (55) kun kont ana kun ra-ni **ka**-nʕuum daba  
if was-1S I then there-me ka-1S-swim now  
'if that was me, I would be swimming right now.'

The proclitic *ka* can also occur with verbs in sentences expressing irrealis as in (56):

- (56) ma-krəht-ʃ j-xrəʒ wəld-i wlla bənt-i  
neg-1s-hate-neg 3s-become son-my or daughter-my  
**ka** j-ləʕb-u korat l-mid<sup>ʕ</sup>rab...  
ka 3-play-P ball the-racket...  
'I wouldn't hate to see my son or daughter play tennis...'





## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

They are also used with stative verbs, which typically never take progressive aspect, as illustrated by the question-answer pair in (59) from MA:

(59) Q: **ka**-tə-ʕrəf                    had        r-razəl?  
          ka-2S-know.IPFV        this        the-man  
          ‘do you know this man?’

A: ajjeh asid-i,                    **ka**-nʕarf-u  
      yes    master-my        ka-1S-know.IPFV-him  
      ‘yes sir, I know him.’

These examples can easily be duplicated in Egyptian Arabic and in Levantine Arabic dialects, which shows that the *bi* and *ka* morphemes do not mark progressive aspect, at least in their current use. Has that always been the case? It has been pointed out in the literature that they are clitic or affixal forms of grammaticalized lexical items, and this suggests that they started their lives in the initial stages of grammaticalization, as markers of one grammatical function, which I suspect is the progressive aspect.

### 5.3. *bi/ka* as grammaticalized forms

A number of scholars have argued that the proclitics *bi* and *ka* have grammaticalized from different expressions and they have speculated about what these expressions are. Starting with Moroccan Arabic, Heath

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

(2002) argues that *ka* is a variant of *ta* and that *ta* is a grammaticalized form from “an archaic form of “what” /*waf̣ta*”, which exists frozen as a preverbal interrogative only, as in (60):

(60) *waf̣ta* d-dir  
‘what are you doing?’

*ta* is indeed a variant of *ka* in some Moroccan Arabic dialects, but Heath’s (2002) description of (60) is completely inaccurate. It is unclear why *ta* is analyzed as part of the interrogative word *waf̣*, and I find Heath’s claim to be farfetched. There is no evidence that *waf̣ta* ever existed as an archaic form and the accurate transcription of the example in (60) is provided in (61) with *ta* and its variant *ka*.

(61) *waf̣*    **ka/ta**- ddir  
what    ka/ta -do.2S  
‘what are you doing?’

A more plausible source of the grammaticalization path of *ka*, as pointed out in Rubin (2005) and Stewart (1998), is the copula *kan*. Considering the grammaticalization of the future marker, and the progressive, it is possible that *ka* is a grammaticalized form of the active participle *kajn* ‘being’, which is used as an existential marker.

(62) *kajn*    ʃali    f-d-dar  
being    ali    in-the-house  
‘Ali is at the house.’

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

As for *bi*, different claims have also been made about its diachronic source. According to Stewart (1998), the debate of its origin has been controversial since the 1900s and much ink has been spilled regarding what expressions it originated from in the different dialects that have this proclitic (see e.g. Stewart 1998 and Rubin (2005) and the references therein).

We do not have a clear picture of how *ka* and *bi* started out their lives as. Whatever their older forms are, there are some indications that suggest that they started as progressive markers. The first indication is that there is no exclusively habitual aspect marker, and no Arabic dialect has grammaticalized the habitual marker, but all have grammaticalized the progressive. The second indication comes from Levantine Arabic dialects that use *ʕamma:l* and its truncated form *ʕam* to expressive progressive aspect. Mitchell and El-Hassan (1994: 99) report that *ʕam* has lost its function to exclusively mark the progressive as shown by (63):

- (63) samiir ʕam-b-jruuħ Levantine Arabic l-madrasa maʕj  
Samir ʕam-b-3s-go to the-school walking  
'Samir is going to school (regularly) on foot.'

If *ʕam* can occur in habitual contexts for some speakers then, one would predict *gaʕid* to combine with it to express or reinforce the progressive, for perhaps, pragmatic reasons. This prediction is borne out and there are actual examples attested on the web illustrating this. The first example is

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

from a Lebanese pop song on youtube, and the second example is from a Jordanian rap song also on youtube.

- (64) ʔaʕid ʕam b-a-fakkir hadak l-juum...  
Sitting.1s PROG b-1s-think that the-day  
'I was thinking the other day...'

Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rabLxeC\\_rQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rabLxeC_rQ)

- (65) ʔaʕid ʕam b-t<sup>ʕ</sup>aʕʕam ʕal-t-tilifon ...  
Sitting.1s PROG b-3SM-feed on-the-phone

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMi0cDN8TUg>

The third indication that *ka* and *bi* marked progressive aspect comes from Makkan Arabic, one of the very few Arabic dialects, if not the only one that uses the clitic *bi* exclusively to express progressive.

- (66) al-bent ʕadatan te-lʕab fi al-ʕadeega  
the-girl.sg.f usually 3.sg.f-play.imperf in the-garden-sg.f  
'The girl usually plays in the garden.' (Makkawi 2021 : 168)

- (67) al-bent bi-te-lʕab fi al-ʕadeega daʕeen  
the-girl.sg.f 3.sg.f-play.imperf in the-garden-sg.f now  
'The girl is playing in the garden now.' (Makkawi 2021: 168)

- (68) Sami yiʕri yawmyan

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

Sami 3.SG.M.run.IMPFV every.day

‘Sami runs every day.’ (Abusulaiman 2019: 11)

(69) Sami biyiʒri daʔeen

Sami PROG.3.SG.M.run.IMPFV right.now

‘Sami is running right now.’ (Abusulaiman 2019: 11)

Abusulaiman (2019) and Makkawi (2021) both report that the prefix *bi-* in Makkan Arabic marks the progressive aspect. Examples (66) and (68) have a habitual reading only without the prefix *bi*, whereas examples (67) and (69) must have a progressive reading. This progressive prefix is also obligatory in past progressive sentences as shown by (70) as opposed to (71) which has a past habitual meaning.

(70) Sami kaan biyiʒri kilometre ʔams

Sami kaan.3SG.PFV PROG.3SG.M.run.IMPFV one.kilometre yesterday

‘Sami was running one kilometer yesterday.’

(Abusulaiman 2019: 14)

(71) Sami kaan yiʒri kilometre

Sami kaan.3SG.PFV 3SG.M.run.IMPFV one.kilometre

‘Sami used to run one kilometer (he no longer runs one kilometer now).’

(Abusulaiman 2019: 15)

Since the prefix *bi* only expresses progressive aspect, it cannot occur with stative verbs as shown by (72) versus (73).

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

(72) Sami yifub 3.SG.M ayskreem l-vanilla.

Sami love.IMPFV ice-cream the-vanilla

‘Sami loves vanilla ice-cream.’

(73) \*Sami bi-yifub 3.SG.M ayskreem l-vanilla.

Sami PROG-love.IMPFV ice-cream the-vanilla

‘#Sami is loving vanilla ice-cream.’

(Abusulaiman 2019: 14)

### 6. Conclusion

Unlike Standard Arabic, spoken Arabic dialects disambiguate between the progressive and the habitual aspect by an overtly grammaticalized progressive marker. The grammaticalization path of this marker starts with the participle form of the verb for ‘sit’ or ‘the verb for ‘work’, which in the first stage bears subject agreement, then loses this agreement, and then is truncated as a clitic form and subsequently as an affix. Syntactically, the change also involves structural reduction, which is explained by appealing to the economy principle of Late Merge Principle. Some Arabic dialects have proclitics that must cooccur with the imperfective verb in tensed declarative clauses. These proclitics received different treatments including being described as aspect markers. It was shown that these proclitics do not mark progressive aspect nor do they mark mood. Given the fact that these proclitics themselves grammaticalized from different expressions, it was hypothesized that they marked progressive aspect in

## The imperfective verb and the progressive aspect in Arabic

the initial grammaticalization stages and have lost this function in their current forms in some dialects.

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<sup>1</sup> The progressive auxiliary is not the only functional category that grammaticalized from the active participle of a lexical category. The future marker also grammaticalized from the active participle of the motion verb ‘go’. The future marker *gha-* in Moroccan Arabic and *ha-* in Egyptian and Levantine dialects grammaticalized from the active participle *ghaadi* and *rayih* respectively (Ouhalla 2015).

<sup>2</sup> The sources from which this data was collected are: Agius & Harrak (1987) for Tunisian and Sudanese dialects, Caubet (1991) for Maltese, Moroccan, and Tunisian dialects.

<sup>3</sup> Heine & Kuteva (2007) argue for four parameters of grammaticalization, and ‘extension’ is the first of these parameters. They describe extension as ‘the rise of new grammatical meanings when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts (context-induced reinterpretation).’

<sup>4</sup> I abstract away from the exact phrasal category of the adjunct phrase. There are good arguments against treating it as a clausal adjunct i.e., full CP. It cannot have independent Tense and Aspect and cannot be negated.

<sup>5</sup> I thank Rozan Alghamdi for the Ghamdi examples, Saja Albuarabi for the Najafi examples, Ahmad Alqassas for the Jordanian examples, and Usama Soltan for the Egyptian examples.

<sup>6</sup> I put aside the agreement on the main verb here since it is also inflected for agreement. Note that in past tense clauses, it has been argued that T is specified for phi-feature (Benmamoun 2000, Soltan 2007, among others). The past progressive is expressed by using the auxiliary *kwn* and the progressive marker with a main verb as in (i):

- |     |  |           |                  |                 |                     |
|-----|--|-----------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| i.  | at <sup>ʕ</sup> -t <sup>ʕ</sup> aaliba:t | dʒanan    | ga:ʕda:t         | ja-qran         | (Najafi)            |
|     | The-student-PF                           | be.PFV-PF | sit.PTCP-PF      | 3-read.IPFV-PF  |                     |
|     | ‘The female students were reading.’      |           |                  |                 |                     |
| ii. | dra:ri                                   | ka;nu     | ga:lsiin         | ka-j-lʕbuu      | f-z-znqa (Moroccan) |
|     | the-kids                                 | sit.PTCP  | ka-3-play.IPFV-P | in-the-street-F |                     |
|     | ‘The kids are playing outside.’          |           |                  |                 |                     |

In such sentences the auxiliary occupies T and the progressive participle occupies Asp. To account for the agreement on the verb, one could argue that *v* is specified for phi-features which get spelled out on the verb as a result to V-to-v. See Wurmbrand & Haddad (2016) for a similar proposal for raising constructions in Standard Arabic.

<sup>7</sup> The other obvious diagnostic for raising is adverb placement. I found the use of manner adverbs rather unreliable when soliciting data with the progressive. I leave this as open question for future research.