THE EXPRESSION OF DURATIVITY IN ARABIC[1]

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0. Abstract

In this paper I present a comparative study of preverbal aspect markers,[2] used with the 'imperfect' verb forms in four spoken dialects of Arabic. The discussion of the forms and functions of these preverbal markers (PMs) is put in a diachronical perspective, in order to explain the apparent similarities between the PMs in different dialects, as well as their - sometimes slight - divergence in meaning.

1. Introduction

1.1 The opposition between prefixed and suffixed verb forms

The verbal system of Classical and Modern Standard Arabic is characterized by the opposition between two sets of forms. In the first set, each form consists of a stem with a suffix indicating person, number and gender. The forms of the other set are built from verb stems with prefixes or circumfixes. This morphological opposition between a suffixed form (SF) and a prefixed form (PF) is also typical of almost all of the contemporary spoken dialects of Arabic.[3]

Many orientalists have tried to account for the different semantics of the SF and PF by claiming that the meaning of the opposition is to be interpreted either as primarily temporal, or as basically aspectual.[4] I will follow Comrie (1976:78) in his observation that the distinction is equally relevant to both categories. He summarizes his description of the 'combined tense/aspect opposition' by stating that the SF indicates both perfective meaning and relative past time reference, while the PF indicates everything else. Beeston (1986:48-49) mentions these two semantic levels, and recognizes a third one, the modal level, in which the SF points to a fact and the PF to a conceptual idea, not necessarily realized in fact.

It is important to notice that all verbs may be inflected according to the SF or PF, and that the interpretation of the two opposing forms is dependent on the lexical meaning of the verb and the context. The PF (i.e. the imperfective, non-past, non-factual) represents the 'default' category (see Dahl 1985:19), in the sense that this inflec-

[1] I am grateful to Simon Dik, Kees Hengeveld, and Manfred Woidich for their comments on the first version of this paper.

[2] In this paper I use the term 'preverbal marker' to be able to generalize over the various forms that may occur. Due to differences in the degree of grammaticalization, the more specific term 'prefix' may be adequate for some preverbal markers, while 'particle', or 'proclitic' is preferred for the description of others.

[3] Exceptions are found in Arabic creoles like Ki-Nubi (Heine 1982) and Juba Arabic (Miller 1986).

[4] See Aartun (1963), Kharma (1983) and Messaoudi (1985) for a survey of the different approaches.

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tion can also be used in the absence of a specific aspectual, temporal or modal value.

1.2 The subcategorization of the PF

The basic functional opposition between PFs and SFs can be refined by the use of auxiliaries, particles, and PMs. In Classical and Modern Standard Arabic a further subcategorization of the PF is achieved by different endings, thus yielding an indicative, a subjunctive, and a jussive form. There is an optional preverbal future marker *sawfa* or *sa-*, used with the indicative PF.

Almost all of the contemporary spoken dialects of Arabic have one or two PMs, which can be added to the PF to make finer aspectual and temporal distinctions. Most of them have one to mark prospective aspect, anticipation, or future tense, and another that is said to indicate durativity, continuation, progressive aspect, and sometimes also habituality. The different endings for indicative, subjunctive, and jussive forms are not used in any of the spoken dialects.

In both the written and spoken varieties of Arabic a form of the verb *kāna* 'to be' is used with auxiliary functions, mainly to indicate time reference in verbal complexes where the lexical verb shows some sort of aspectual marking.

1.3 The functions of the active participle

In addition to the PFs and SFs mentioned so far, yet another, morphologically nominal form plays a role in the verbal system. Although examples are cited from as early as the Qur'ānic period (Cohen 1989:186), the so-called active participle (AP) is not systematically used with verbal functions in Classical and Modern Standard Arabic.

In many of the spoken dialects, however, the AP forms of a certain group of verbs (most of them classified as 'verbs of motion and attitude') are used to express continuity. The PFs with preverbal durativity markers do occur with these verbs, but only to indicate non-continuous imperfectivity.

The AP forms of this group of verbs are considered to be firmly integrated in the aspectual system of the dialects discussed in this paper. The APs of verbs that do not belong to the special sub-group are most often reported to indicate (relative) present perfect.

Cowell (1964:271) and Woidich (1975) propose to explain the obligatory use of the AP for the expression of the present continuous with certain verbs by postulating an inherent 'inceptive' meaning for these verbs. In this way, an analysis as present perfect could account for the apparent meaning of 'continuous action' too.

According to Caubet (1990), AP forms may express continuous action, future time reference, and present perfect. She found all three possible meanings for forms of the same verb, and cites examples from Urban Moroccan, Cairene, and Tunisian Arabic.[5] She concludes that the AP is obviously a dynamic element in the language, often combined with strong modal values. Following Caubet, it seems safe to maintain that the aspectual meaning, time reference, and modal value of APs are highly dependent on the context and intonation.

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[5] Caubet (1990) discusses also the dialects of Malta and Algiers.

1.4 The functions of aspectual markers

In this article I will focus on the functions of aspectual 'durativity' markers in the colloquial varieties of Arabic. The fact that many dialects have developed PMs to denote more or less similar aspectual and temporal categories, but that the form of these PMs is not the same for the different dialect groups, has puzzled orientalists. It led some of them to believe that this development must have been present in the spoken form of Arabic before the fast spreading of Islam, while others maintain on the contrary that it should have started later.

As the presumed development of the PMs plays only a relatively small role in the still ongoing discussion on the origin of the dialects and their relation to the Classical language, I will not address this complicated issue directly here. I refer to Versteegh (1984) for a survey of the different viewpoints and his own intriguing proposal based on the concepts of pidginization and creolization.

Concerning the changes in the verbal system, however, I think that the use of similar, but in form different PMs can be quite convincingly explained on the basis of a gradual, essentially independent development. The way in which the verbal system of the Arabic dialects apparently changed over more than a thousand years is not so different from the developments described in many other, unrelated languages, and is even claimed to be part of a universal tendency by linguists like for instance Bybee and Dahl (1989).

In section two I will first introduce the PMs of four dialects, and summarize what has been considered in relation to their possible origins. Then I will concentrate on the two questions that formed the basis for my present investigation:

(i) Do the preverbal markers of various Arabic dialects cover the same kind of durativity, or is their semantic range in fact different?
(ii) What are the consequences of the existence of these preverbal markers for the meaning and function(s) of the 'bare' prefixed form?

The results of the following study of the literature on four dialects provide an interesting case-study, that, although synchronical in nature, may deepen our insights in some of the mechanisms of language change.

2. Preverbal markers in four dialects of Arabic

2.1 Some methodological remarks

The forms and functions of PMs in Arabic dialects were already the subject of careful studies around the beginning of this century, as can be exemplified by the titles of the works of Glaser (1901: *La préformante* bâ-, be- *de l'imparfait arabe*), Kampffmeyer (1899: *Das marokkanische Präsenspräfix* ka), and others. Many publications have appeared since that were wholly or partly dedicated to a description of PMs in one or more dialects.

The reason that I decided to use only the material on four city dialects is a practical one: there are limits to the amount of information that can reasonably be included in one paper, and a rather detailed comparison of four more or less arbitrarily chosen dialects presents a coherent view of the diversity that may be encountered. They constitute, however, by no means a 'representative' sample, and I am quite confident that an investigation based on four other dialects will come up with

other nuances of meaning than the present one, although the general conclusions will remain the same.

A second remark concerns the reliance on the existing descriptive material. It is well known that especially in the area of tense, mood, and aspect, grammars do not always give as much information as is needed for a clear assessment of all the functions involved. As for the data on Cairene Arabic: I had access to many different sources, and I was also able to discuss contradictory assertions with an informant.

Of a number of studies of Moroccan city dialects (mostly of the dialect of Rabat), I used Caubet's description of the dialect in the region of Fes because it contains a large section on tense, mood, and aspect phenomena, with rich descriptions of the contexts and interpretations of the examples. Her observations on the use of the PM *ka-* were all confirmed by other informants.

For the city dialects of Damascus and Tunis, I consulted the grammars of Cowell (1964) and Singer (1984) respectively. I judged Cowell's treatment of tense, mood, and aspect in Syrian Arabic to be very insightful and conclusive, and I trust his numerous examples to be authentic. The information on the dialect of Tunis is rather straightforward, and has been confirmed by informants.

2.2 On the origin of the preverbal markers

Before relating what has been proposed about the possible origins of the PMs, I will first give the equivalents of the small sentence 'he is working' in the four dialects concerned.

(1) a. Tunis: *qāʿed yeḫdem*[6]
b. Fes: *ka-yeḫdem*
c. Cairo: *bi-yištaġal*
d. Damascus: *ʿam-(b-)yeštegel*

The preverbal progressive marker *qāʿed* in the spoken dialect of Tunis is the masculine singular AP form of the verb *qaʿad* 'to sit'. The form is no longer inflected for number and gender, but its origin remains transparent. A more reduced form of the same marker, *qa-*, is used as a prefix to the PF in the Jewish Arabic dialect of Tunis.

The Moroccan PM *ka-* is generally believed to stem from the participle or perfective form of the auxiliary and copular verb *kān* 'to be' (Cohen 1924:67), although this analysis cannot account for variants like *ta-*, and *'a* that are also common in certain regions of Morocco.[7]

The origin of the PM *bi-* in Egyptian Arabic is sometimes attributed to a verbal form, but it is more often identified with the preposition *bi-* 'with, in, at, by', which is usually prefixed to a (pro)noun or the definite article *l-* (Cohen 1924:63, Versteegh 1984:88).

The PM *ʿam-* in Syria is probably derived from *ʿammāl*, an AP form of the verb *ʿamal* 'to do'. It is interesting that the full form of this participle is currently also

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[6] The examples are all given in the transcriptions used by the cited sources for the individual dialects.

[7] In view of the frequent occurrence of (derived) forms of the verb *qaʿad* 'to sit', to indicate the ongoing or beginning of an action (apart from Tunis, Cohen (1924) mentions Palestine, the Bedouins of Syria and Mesopotamia, Lake Tchad, Malta, Tripoli and Baghdad), I think that an etymology based on this verb should be considered too.

used in Cairene Arabic to emphasize progressive aspect. The etymology of the Syrian PM *b-* is not very clear, but its form suggests a derivation from the same source as the Egyptian Arabic PM *bi-*.

2.3 Universal tendencies

Now that I have given an impression of the presumed origins of the PMs in the four Arabic dialects that I investigated, I want to turn briefly to some conclusions based on studies of other languages. As part of their description of major paths of development for TMA-categories in 'the languages of the world', Bybee and Dahl (1989:57-8) stated that expressions with a copula, locational/postural, or movement verb develop into progressives, which in turn develop into imperfectives.

Verb phrases with a copula, motional or postural verb as auxiliary are also mentioned as frequent signals of progressive aspect in Blansitt's (1975) comparative study of more than 50 languages.

On the basis of these universal tendencies we would expect that the Arabic 'durativity' markers with a presumed verbal source originated as progressive markers. The ones that currently have a wider function may have expanded their meaning gradually in a process that has been described for many other not related languages, too.

As there is not enough historical material on the spoken dialects of Arabic to support such a hypothesis directly, we may try to gain insight in the semantics of this process by comparing different dialects synchronically. It is well known that the social circumstances favored language change in some dialects more than others. Without getting into the specific socio-historical details for the individual dialects, we can assume that the influence of these varying circumstances may be reflected in different developmental stages.

In this paper I present the results of a first investigation based on a comparative approach. As such, the interpretations and general conclusion are preliminary in the sense that they still have to be tested against further data from the same and other dialects.

3. An investigation of the functions of preverbal markers

3.1 The comparison of four dialects

The outcome of the investigation is represented in Table 1. For each of the four dialects I have indicated which form (the PF with or without a PM) is used to express a certain semantic value. When two or more possibilities coexist, they are separated by slashes (/). If one of two coexisting forms is more frequently used than the other, the less preferred form is put between brackets.

Table 1: The functions of PMs in four dialects of Arabic

	Tunis	Cairo	Fes	Damascus
progressive	*qāʿed* PF/PF	*bi*-PF	*ka*-PF	*ʿam(b)*-PF
habitual	PF	*bi*-PF	*ka*-PF	*ʿam(b)-/b*-PF
neutral	PF	PF-/(*bi*-PF)	*ka*-PF/(PF)	*b*-PF
suppositive	PF	PF	PF	*b*-PF
non-actual	PF	PF	PF	PF
'future'	*bāš*-/PF *māš*-PF	*ḥa-/ha*-/PF *raḥ*-PF	*ġadi* PF/ *ġa*-PF	*raḥ*-PF/ *laḥa-/ḥa*-PF

A bottom row with preverbal future markers (most of them etymologically derivable from verbs meaning 'to go') is added, as these PMs play a role in the semantic shifts discussed in the remainder of this article. I put the term 'future' in Table 1 between quotes, because it is here meant to cover a whole range of meanings, from prospective aspect to the expression of high probability, and the different PMs do not necessarily express exactly the same.

The less familiar terms used for the more refined description of the 'durativity' markers will be explained in the following sections.

3.2 Progressive and habitual aspect

The use of the preverbal progressive aspect marker *qāʿed* in the dialect of Tunis is not obligatory, in the sense that its use is required only in the absence of time adverbials or a specific context to indicate unambiguously that reference is made to an ongoing action (Singer 1984:301). With verbs belonging to the special group discussed in 1.3, progressive aspect is designated by the AP. For all values that are not expressed by the SF, the AP, or the PF with the future marker, the PF is used in its 'bare' form, i.e. without additional PM.

In the dialect of Cairo, the function of the PM *bi-* is not limited to the expression of progressive aspect. The PM is obligatorily used for the expression of habitual aspect, even when the context makes it explicitly clear that habituality is intended. The same holds for the Moroccan PM *ka-* in the dialect of Fes: its range is much wider than we would expect on the basis of mere progressivity, and it has in fact been described as a marker of present tense, or as an indicative prefix.

In both dialects, the same PM can be used twice in a verbal complex consisting of the auxiliary verb *kān* 'to be' and a full verb. In this case, the complex form expresses the habitually repeated occurrence of a progressive action, as in the following sentences:

(2) a. Cairo, Salib (1981):
'is-sāʿa waḥda bi-nkūn bi-nitġadda
the-hour one PM-be:PF.1p PM-eat lunch:PF.1p
At one o'clock we are usually eating lunch.

b. Fes, Caubet (1989):
nās-el-ġīwān u el-mšāheb, melli ka-ykūnu
Nas-El-Ghiwane and El-Mchaheb, when PM-be:PF.3p
ka-yheḍru wella ka-yġennīw, ḥetta āna, ma ka-...
PM-speak:PF.3p or PM-sing:PF.3p even I NEG PM-...
Nas El-Ghiwane and El-Mchaheb, when they are speaking or singing, even I don't ...

3.3 The expression of general facts in Cairo

In Cairene Arabic, generic statements like those concerning physical facts are sometimes expressed with the PM *bi-*, but the use of the bare PF seems to be a more common way of designating a universal truth. Examples of generic statements without and with the PM are:

(3) a. Cairo, Badawi and Hinds (1986):
'il-'azhār tifattaḥ fi-r-rabīʿ
the-flowers bloom:PF.3fs in-the-spring
Flowers bloom in spring.

b. Cairo, Wise (1975):
'is-sukkar bi-ydūb fi-l-mayya
the-sugar PM-dissolve:PF.3ms in-the-water
Sugar dissolves in water.

In most languages, generic sentences are expressed with the most 'neutral' or unmarked verb form (Dahl 1985:100, Ultan 1972:58), usually a simple present, like in English. Comrie (1976:40) rejects the existence of a specific 'universal' tense, and states that the distinction has more to do with aspect and mood. He also suggests that pragmatic factors play an important role.

I think it is worthwhile to stress the conceptual difference between claiming that a statement is true for a specific, localized time interval and making a general comment, supposed to be valid for all possible time intervals, which is essentially a modal value.

For Cairene Arabic, the difference in the expression of habitually and generally valid statements is described by Davies (1981:211), who made the observation that more informants favored the form with *bi-* when the context was made more specific. As his work involved a comparative analysis of contemporary and 17th century Egyptian Arabic, Davies also comments on the diachronical development (1981:226-230):

> ...the *bi-*imperfect occurs in HQ [the 17th century text, MC] with its main function of marking actuality in association with continuative and habitual action. However, there are no examples of it being used in HQ with its secondary MEA (Modern Egyptian Arabic) function of indicating the more 'factual' generalities, or physical state. The most important difference between HQ and MEA, however, is that in the HQ text both categories [continuative and habitual action, MC] can also be expressed with the unmarked imperfect....

I would venture the very tentative statistical comment, that examples of the unmarked imperfect in HQ are less frequent in association with habitual than with continuative action. This may imply that the association of the *bi*-imperfect with habitual action was not as yet firmly established.

So these data suggest that the PM *bi*-, which at first was only used to mark progressive aspect, gradually expanded to cover habituality, too. Now that the use of this PM to indicate habitual aspect is firmly established for most speakers, yet another function can be detected. Some speakers currently use the PM in expressions with general truth validity.

I believe that this more recent shift can be explained by the association of the bare PF with non-actuality, and the - still incomplete - interpretation of the bi-PF as the most neutral form in Cairene Arabic. To fully understand this association, we have to look at the emergence of the future marker *ḥa*- too.

3.4 The emergence of future markers

The Egyptian future marker *ḥa*- (or *ha*-) is believed to be a reduced form of *rāyiḥ*, the AP of the verb *rāḥ* 'to go'. A similar derivation is proposed for the Moroccan PM *ġadi* 'going', and the Tunesian *bāš*, a variation of *māš*, which can also be traced to a verb meaning 'to go'. The Syrian 'particle of anticipation' with the forms *raḥ*-, *raḥa*-, *laḥ*-, *laḥa*-, *ḥa*-, and *rāyeḥ* resembles the Cairene future PM *ḥa*-, and seems to be derived form the AP of the verb meaning 'to go' too.

In the light of universal tendencies, these findings are not very surprising. Dahl and Bybee (1989:57) stated that expressions with a verb meaning 'desire', 'movement towards a goal' or 'obligation' may develop into 'grams' (i.e. grammatical morphemes like affixes, clitics, auxiliaries, etc.) expressing intention and future. In addition to future time reference, the PMs derived from a verb meaning 'to go' may express a relatively high degree of probability, at least in some dialects of Arabic.[8] The difference in degree of certainty (speaker's commitment to the truth of the propositional content of the utterance) between the PF without preverbal future marker, and the PF with this marker is exemplified by the following sentences from Moroccan Arabic:

(4) Morocco, Harrell (1962):

a. *ġedda* *iži*
tomorrow come:PF.3ms
He's supposed to come tomorrow.

b. *ġadi* *iži* *ġedda*
PM come:PF.3ms tomorrow
He'll come tomorrow.

With the emergence of an assertive future marker, and a PM to indicate progressive and habitual aspect, the bare PF started to lose a considerable part of its range of meaning. The bare PF remained to be used for the expression of future time reference in combination with a relatively low degree of probability, in the rare sentences

[8] In the case of Cairene Arabic, this 'high probability' meaning of the prefix *ḥa*- may also be used in expressions that refer to the present or past, as in *ḥaykūn ḫallaṣ iššuġl ḍa imbārih* 'he will have finished that job yesterday' (Wise 1975).

with verbal predicates that are neutral with respect to tense and aspect, and in the far more common dependent context, that is to say in a subordinate syntactic position, as the complement of verbs meaning to want, to hope, etc.

As a result of the frequent association of the PF with subjunctivity, this form may have been felt to convey a non-actual meaning in itself. I assume that the loss of two important parts of its meaning, i.e. strongly asserted future time reference and 'real' imperfectivity (as designated by a new marker that does not encompass the default cases too) led to a reinterpretation of the older imperfective form, the PF. As a result of this reinterpretation as the non-actual form, the PF began to be used independently to express wishes, curses, and not very strongly asserted facts (suppositions).

It is such a development that can explain the incidental use of the Egyptian bi-PF for the expression of general facts: the PM is now sometimes used to stress the assertion, because the bare form can be interpreted as less certain. In this way, the PF with PM may gradually become the most 'neutral' verb form.

I believe that the same tendency may have led to the greater degree of neutrality for the PF with *ka-* in Fes, and to the complete acceptance of the PF with *b-* as the neutral (or default) form in Damascus, that will be discussed in the next sections.

3.5 The expression of general facts in Fes

According to Caubet (1989:644), general facts are always expressed with *ka-* in the dialect of Fes, as in sentence (5):

(5) Fes, Caubet (1989):

el-ma	*ka-yǧli*	*f-myāt*	*dārāža*
the-water	PM-boil:PF.3ms	in-hundred	degree

Water boils at 100 degrees.

There is no alternation between the form with PM and the bare PF, as attested in Cairene Arabic. Proverbs, however, are found with both forms:

(6) Fes, Caubet (1989):

a. *lli ḍerbāt-u yidd-u ma ybki !*
who hit:SF.3fs-him hand-his NEG cry:PF.3ms
He who has been hit by his own hand doesn't cry.

b. *yidd waḥda ma ka-tštaḥ !*
hand one NEG PM-dance:PF.3fs
One hand alone doesn't dance.

Proverbs can usually be identified as general facts with presumed universal validity. Thus, in the absence of a special generic tense, we would expect them to have verbs in the most neutral form, like the expressions concerning physical facts. In Cairene Arabic, the verb forms in proverbs are most often in the bare PF, confirming Davies' observation that this form is preferred in a non-specific context. In Fes, where the PF with the PM *ka-* is always used for generic expressions, the proverbs with the bare PF may be reflecting a more archaic stage of the language (Caubet 1989:646).

After a short discussion of the use of PMs in Damascus (3.6) I will give some more examples of verb forms in a 'neutral' context for all three dialects (3.7 and 3.8).

3.6 The expression of imperfectivity in Damascus

In the dialect spoken in Damascus, the PM *ʿam-* may also be realized as *ʿamma_*, *ʿamm-*, or *ʾam-*. All the forms can be followed by the verb either with or without *b-*: *ʿam-byākol* or *ʿam-yākol* both mean 'he is eating'. *ʿam-* + *-b-* is most common in the first person singular (*ʿam-bākol* 'I am eating', more common than *ʿam-ʾākol*); otherwise the forms without *b-* are predominant. Cowell (1964:320) calls *ʿam* "the particle of actuality, that is used to designate a state or an activity actually going on at the moment", and its prototypical use is as in (7):

(7) Damascus, Cowell (1964):
le-m'adden *ʿam-i'adden* *el-'adān*
the-muezzin PM1-call to prayer:PF.3ms the-call to prayer
The muezzin is (right now) giving the call to prayer.

According to Cowell (1964:321), the same particle "may denote interrupted, off-and-on activities, as long as they are viewed as constituting a time-limited state of affairs, as opposed to a mere disposition or generality." So here we have the same distinction between habituality and genericity, that has been discussed in relation to the PM *bi-* in Cairene Arabic.

A difference between the two dialects is, however, that the form with *bi-* in Cairene Arabic is obligatory with habitual aspect, and optional in generic statements, whereas the form with *ʿam-* in the dialect of Damascus is optional with habitual aspect, and never used to indicate general facts. Sentence (8) gives an example of *ʿam-* for the expression of habituality:

(8) Damascus, Cowell (1964):
ʿam-b-edros *be-ž-žāmʿa*
PM1-PM2-study:PF.1s at-the-university
I'm studying at the university.

In Damascus, all general facts are invariably expressed by the form with *b-* (but without *ʿam-*):

(9) Damascus, Cowell (1964):
ž-žāžat *b-ibīḍu* *bēḍ*
the-hens PM2-lay:PF.3p eggs
Hens lay eggs.

3.7 Verb forms in a 'neutral' context

Most linguists agree on the restriction of progressive aspect to dynamic situations. According to Comrie (1976:35), stative verbs do not have progressive forms, since this would involve an internal contradiction between the stativity of the verb and the non-stativity essential to the progressive (see also Dahl 1985:93, and Chung and Timberlake 1985:215).

As predicted by the definition of progressive aspect, Dahl's sample of more than 60 languages shows the absence of progressive markers with verbs expressing intellectual or emotive states, such as *think, believe, hope,* and *feel*, even when the context specifies 'right now'.

I assume that the bare PF, which may express present states with some of these verbs in the dialects of Cairo and Fes (see (10a) and (10b)), is in this sense the neutral or 'default' form associated with non-past and non-perfectivity.[9]

(10)

a. Cairo, Davies (1981):
'aẓunn-u *gayy*
think:PF.1s-him come:AP.ms
I think he's coming.

b. Fes, Caubet (1989):
tfehmi-ha *hādīk?*
understand:PF.2fs-it that
Do you understand that?

c. Damascus, Cowell (1964):
b-ẓenn *b-aʿerf-o*
PM2-think:PF.1s PM2-know:PF.1s-him
I think I know him.

In Damascus the PM *b-* is always used with the same verbs (see (10c). With respect to the PF with *b-*, Cowell (1964:326) states in a footnote:

> The simple imperfect indicative [the PF with *b-*, MC] is functionally the base, or residual (or neutral) tense-mode, i.e. we are dealing with the non-past non-subjunctive non-actual non-anticipatory inflection, whose uses, structurally speaking, are exactly that.

3.8 The 'historical present'

Another context which is typical for the occurrence of neutral verb forms is a succession of events in a narrative. According to Dahl (1985:113), quite a considerable number of languages use unmarked verb forms in narrative contexts. I think that the neutrality of the form explains the use of the bare PF in sentence (11) from Cairene Arabic (the sentence is reported to be part of a vivid story):

(11) Cairo, Wise (1975):
yirūḥ *hināk* *wi* *ma-yla'i-hā-š !*
go:PF.3ms there and NEG-find:PF.3ms-her-NEG
(... and then) he goes there and doesn't find her !

In the Arabic dialect of Fes, we may find the PF with the PM *ka-* in a succession of events in a narrative context, even when the verb denotes a momentaneous action, as in (12):

(12) Fes, Caubet (1989):
therrset *dīk-ez-zlāfa* *ka-ṭṭēr* *l-ha*
break:SF.3fs that-the-bowl PM-fly:PF.3fs to-her
wāḥed-es-seqfa *u* *ka-ṭṭi-ha* *f-ʿīnī-ha...*
one-the-piece and PM-come:PF.3fs-her in-eye-her
The bowl broke and one of the pieces flies towards her and hits her in the eye.

[9] In both Egyptian and Moroccan Arabic, the PFs with PM are also common for these verbs.

Caubet (1989:652) suggests that this unexpected use of *ka-* could be ascribed to 'wear and tear' of the PM, which, according to her, originally must have been created to express simultaneity. I think that this expansion of the range of meaning covered by the PM can be explained by the reanalysis of the bare PF as less certain. Especially in a vivid passage (and hence related in the historical present), the story-teller wants to stress the actuality of the events described by the verb forms, and the ambiguity arising from the use of a bare PF is avoided.

In Damascus, the PF with *b-* (but without *ʿam-*) is used as a historical present in narrative contexts:

(13) Damascus, Grotzfeld (1965):
la'u l-war'a, malfūf fī-ha l-bandan, b-ižīb-ū,
find:SF.3p the-paper wrapped in-it the-pendant PM2-bring:PF.3p-it
b-yaʿmlu farḥa tānye menšāno
PM2-make:PF.3p party second for it
They found the piece of paper, the pendant wrapped in it, they brougt it, and made another party because of it.

3.9 The expression of non-actuality

The change of meaning from an aspectual category (imperfective) to a modal one (non-actual) has already been described by Colin (1935:133) for the bare PF in Moroccan Arabic:

> Les parlers marocains sus-indiqués ont, au moyen d'une préfixation, tiré de cet aoriste [the PF, MC] un *réel*, à valeur d'indicatif présent, tandis que l'aoriste nu n'y fonctionne que comme un *éventuel* ayant à la fois la valeur d'un futur vague, d'un subjonctif final et d'un optatif.

In all four dialects, a bare PF is obligatorily used in the sentential complements of modal verbs:[10]

(14)

a. Cairo, Badawi and Hinds (1986):
'il-mudīr ʿāyiz yikallim-ak
the-director want:AP.ms talk:PF.3ms-you
The director wants to speak with you.

b. Fes, Caubet (1989):
bġēt-u yżi !
want:SF.1s-him come:PF.3ms
I want him to come !

c. Damascus, Cowell (1964):
kān marra malek smīn ktīr
be:SF.3ms once king fat very
w-rād yenḥaf
and-want:SF.3ms reduce:PF.3ms
There was once a very fat king, and he wanted to reduce.

[10] As most values are expressed by the bare PF in Tunisian, there are no examples of this dialect included.

The opposition between PFs with and without PM accounts for the different interpretations (epistemic versus deontic)[11] in (15) and (16):

(15) Cairo, Jelinek (1975):

a. *lāzim* *bi-yištaġal* *kitīr*
necessary PM-work:PF.3ms much
He must work a lot (I infer he works a lot).

b. *lāzim* *yištaġal* *kitīr*
necessary work:PF.3ms much
He must work a lot (he is obliged to work a lot).

(16) Damascus, Cowell (1964):

a. *'āl* *'enn-ak* *b-teži*
say:SF.3ms that-you PM2-come:PF.3ms
He said that you would come.

b. *'āl* *'enn-ak* *teži*
say:SF.3ms that-you come:PF.3ms
He said that you should come.

The meaning of non-actuality is not restricted to the occurrence of the bare PF in complements. The form is used independently for the expression of wishes, exhortations, and obligations:

(17)

a. Cairo, Wise (1975):
yirūḥ *fi dahya !*
go:PF.3ms in hell
Let him go to hell !

b. Fes, Caubet (1989):
yaḷḷah, *nemšiw* *l-ed-dāṛ !*
come on, go:PF.3p to-the-house
Come on, let's go home !

c. Damascus, Grotzfeld (1965):
yeži *lahōn !*
come:PF.3ms here
He must come here !

The PF without PM is also used (in all varieties of Arabic) for the negation of the imperative. So while *šteġel* means 'work' in Syrian Arabic, 'don't work' can only be expressed by *la tešteġel*. The second person forms of the bare PF can express a positive imperative too.

The independent use of the bare PF is furthermore attested in 'deontic questions', i.e. questions that ask for the permission, instructions, or the moral judgement of the addressee:

(18)

a. Cairo, Wise (1975):
'aˁud *hina ?*
sit:PF.1s here
Can I sit here?

[11] I refer to Palmer (1986) for a discussion of the terms 'epistemic' and 'deontic'.

b. Fes, Caubet (1989):
gālet *l-ha* *'mmwi !* *'mmwi !* *šnu* *nžīb* *?*
say:SF.3fs to-her mamma mamma what bring:PF.1s
She said to her: Mama! Mama! What do I have to bring?

c. Damascus, Cowell (1964):
'aᶜmel *'ahwe,* *wella* *šay* *?*
make:PF.1s coffee or tea
Shall I make coffee, or tea?

3.10 Suppositions

In Damascus, suppositions are expressed by the PF with *b-*:

(19) Damascus, Cowell (1964):
r-reẓẓāl *b-yeᶜežb-ak*
the-man PM2-please:PF.3ms-you
You'd like the man.

The same form occurs in weakly asserted sentences with future time reference, like in (20a). For strong assertions with future time reference, the preverbal 'future' marker must be used, as in (20b).

(20) Damascus, Cowell (1964):
a. *baᶜd* *bekra* *b-irūḥ* *ᶜa-l-madrase*
after tomorrow PM2-go:PF.3ms to-the-school
The day after tomorrow he's going to school.

b. *l-beᵏa* *mā* *laḥa-ṭeṭlaᶜ*
the-stain NEG FM-come out:PF.3fs
The stain won't come out.

In the dialects of Cairo and Fes, suppositions and weakly asserted propositions with future time reference are expressed with the bare PF, which is used for non-actuality too. Although the conceptual difference between 'supposedness' and non-actuality is rather subtle, I interpret this more extended use of the PM *b-* in Damascus as a sign of its complete reinterpretation as an indicative. The bare PF in this dialect became so strongly associated with non-actuality, that even relatively weak assertions like suppositions eventually had to be expressed with the PM.

4. Conclusions

In this paper I hope to have shown that it is interesting to try to 'refine' some general observations about diachronical developments, even by making an essentially synchronical comparative analysis. The differences in the ranges of meanings covered by the PMs in the four dialects studied support the general observation that progressive forms may develop into imperfectives. The imperfective forms may subsequently be reanalysed as indicative moods. At this stage, a new progressive marker can be introduced, which in turn may acquire additional imperfective meaning.

I especially highlighted the shift of an aspect/tense category to a modal level, by a reinterpretation mechanism that tries to make sense out of the 'left-over' functions.

At this point I have to emphasize once more that there is very little direct historical evidence for the developments suggested in this paper. The description of the findings in four different dialects of Arabic as if they represent different stages

in a more or less advanced, but essentially similar development remains as yet unconfirmed. I think, however, that the data as presented here provide an interesting viewpoint, that may serve as a hypothesis for further research.

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