

Christiane v. Stutterheim, Abbassia Bouhaous , Mary Carroll, Monique Flecken & Johannes Gerwien

*Psycholinguistic insights on aspect: the case of Tunisian and Modern Standard Arabic*

In many languages aspectual markers are specifically constrained when it comes to the description of motion events. Looking at the use of aspectual markers in the context of motion events is particularly revealing for the language specific semantic properties of different aspectual markers. The present study investigates the aspectual systems of two Arabic varieties, Modern Standard Arabic and Tunisian Arabic, a variety which has hardly been described. The goals of the study are twofold: a) we want to contribute to our understanding of the different aspectual forms of these languages by investigating how these forms are put to use, by which factors they are attracted, by which they are constrained. b) by looking at aspectual forms in the context of motion event construal we want to show how these temporal concepts are intricately interrelated, sometimes in a complementary way, with other conceptual categories.

The experiment reported involves the description of motion events presented in short real-world video clips in which selected components were varied systematically (short versus long trajectories, boundary crossings (video clips N=70)). Speakers produced unscripted speech, elicited online (N=20 per language). A further variable was introduced by shortening the time between the stimuli (time pressure condition). Based on earlier studies using the method of time pressure we wanted to test the stability of aspectual markers in the respective systems. Furthermore, eye movements were registered during verbalization for both groups to see whether the selection of a specific temporal perspective leads to specific patterns of visual attention. The analyses of the data focus on the following aspects: a) the types of aspectual forms used by the speakers of the Arabic varieties and their distribution across the different types of motion events; b) the types of spatial concepts selected and the formal constituents in which they are encoded (verbs, particles, prepositional phrases); c) the interrelation between spatial and temporal concepts in the context of event construal.