

Veronika Ritt-Benmimoun (ed.)

Tunisian and Libyan Arabic Dialects
Common Trends – Recent Developments – Diachronic Aspects

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Fī ('in') as a Marker of the Progressive Aspect in Tunisian Arabic

Karen MCNEIL*

1. Introduction

In this work I will be discussing the preposition *fī* and its use as an aspectual marker in Tunisian Arabic. *Fī*, as a preposition, describes a containment relationship and is roughly equivalent to the English prepositions 'in' and 'into'. In addition to its use as a marker of spatial relationship, *fī* has developed an aspectual use in Tunisian Arabic as a marker of the progressive aspect, e.g. *nuṣrub fī al-tāy* 'I'm drinking tea'. This feature has been sparsely attested in other varieties of Arabic (see Woidich 2006), but only in Tunisian has it developed into an integral, obligatory part of the aspectual system. In spite of its importance in the verbal system of Tunisian, however, this feature has often been neglected in the literature: Gibson provides an excellent description in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* ('Tunis Arabic', 2006), but Singer ignores or misinterprets it in his 734-page *Grammatik der arabischen Mundart der Medina von Tunis* (1984). A comprehensive survey of available sources on Tunisian Arabic reveals that the progressive use of *fī* is not described in the majority of them.¹

There are three ways to form the progressive aspect in Tunisian Arabic: 1) with the active participle *qāʿid* (literally: 'sitting') preceding the prefixed (i.e. imperfective) verb; 2) with the construction *fī* + *direct object* following the prefixed verb; and 3) by use of the active participle (of the basic form *CāCiC*) in place of a finite verb. This study will give a brief overview of the progressive

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¹ See Ritt-Benmimoun (forthcoming) for an extensive literature review. Due to timing, I was not able to incorporate her work here, but the use of *fī* in the Bedouin dialect of Southern Tunisia that she studied appears significantly different than the system described here.

system as a whole (including the use of *qāʿid* and the active participle form), but will focus on *fī*, as it is a distinctive feature of Tunisian Arabic. This study has four goals:

1. to present a corpus-based description of the usages of *fī*, both in its prepositional and aspectual usages
2. to describe the use of *fī* as an aspectual marker, including constraints on its use, its interaction with the time reference of the situation, and its use with verbs which require a different preposition
3. to explore the position of *fī* within the aspectual system of Arabic
4. to explain the motivation for speakers' use of *fī* as an aspectual marker, as well as exploring the origins of this distinctive feature

1.1. Sources and Terminology

In this study, I will be discussing the variety of Arabic spoken in Tunisia. The emphasis will be on the prestige dialect spoken in the capital, Tunis, but the syntactic structures discussed here are, for the most part, the same throughout Tunisia (as well as in Libya, which speaks a very similar dialect). For the data in this study, I utilized the Tunisian Arabic Corpus (TAC), publicly accessible at <http://tunisiya.org>. Built by my collaborator Miled Faiza and I, this corpus mainly represents the dialect of Tunis and, as of May 2016, contains 860,000 words. As with most 'colloquial' varieties of Arabic, Tunisian is not generally a written language (see Ferguson 1959 for the classic description of the diatopic linguistic situation in the Arab world). Therefore, the sources available for TAC are different from those available for a written language like Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Forum posts, blog entries, and other online sources make up the majority (some 58%) of the corpus. Traditionally written sources like screenplays and folktales make up a further 36%, while transcribed audio comprises less than 10% (see McNeil 2016 for more information about the construction of the corpus). Unless otherwise noted, all examples cited are from TAC. When citing examples from other sources, I have substituted the author's transliteration and gloss with my own, for consistency and ease of reading.

When discussing verb tense and aspect in Arabic, there is an immediate issue of terminology: the two verb forms (*al-māḍī* 'the past', and *al-muḍāriʿ* 'that which resembles [a noun]') are often described in aspectual terms as the 'perfective' and 'imperfective' forms, respectively. However, in other sources (especially pedagogical ones), they are referred to as tenses: 'past' and either 'present/future' or 'non-past' (see Horesh 2011 for an overview of the debate). This study will take the view that the forms represent a combination of tense and aspect that is difficult to untangle, and so will refer to the verbs simply by

their morphological form: the ‘suffixed form’ for *al-māḍī* and the ‘prefixed form’ for *al-muḍāriḥ*.

Because phonological concerns do not enter into this topic, I have transcribed the Arabic in a manner that makes the morphology as transparent as possible, without reflecting context-based phonological changes. So, for example, *fi al-talviza* rather than *fi-t-talviza* (as it would actually be pronounced).

2. *Fī* as a Preposition

In Arabic, *fi* is a preposition which closely corresponds to the English prepositions *in* and *into*, and also overlaps somewhat with *at*. Prepositions can be described in terms of both spatial relationship (i.e., *where something is* in relation to something else) and function (*what something does* for or to something else). For example, we can say that a flower is *in* a vase, even though most of the flower is sticking out of it. This is explained by considering the function of the vase, which is as a *container* for the flower (Langacker 2009: 10). As with *in* in English, the primary meaning of *fi* is also one of containment. This is not the only meaning, however; *fi*, like all prepositions, is highly polysemous. These multiple meanings are described below, but the list is not comprehensive; rather it is intended as a brief overview of the five major prepositional senses of *fi*, in order to provide context for the aspectual discussion. These major senses are: Container, Location, Orientation, Time Period, and Activity.

2.1. Container

As with English *in*, the prototypical meaning of *fi* is that of containment: using the terminology proposed by Langacker (1987), containment is described as a focus item, the ‘trajector’, enclosed by a three-dimensional, bounded reference object (the ‘landmark’).

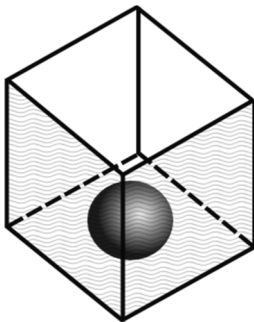


Figure 1. Containment sense of *fi*.

The prototypical relationship between trajector and landmark expressed by *fī* is illustrated in Figure 1, in which the trajector (the ball) is contained by the landmark (the cube). Some Tunisian examples from the corpus illustrating this most basic meaning:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(1) عندو صيوده ونموره في قفصات
 <i>ʕand-ū syūda wa-nmūra fī qfaṣāt</i>
 has-he lions and-tigers in cages
 ‘he has lions and tigers in cages’</p> | <p>(2) الطنجره في يدك
 <i>al-ṭanžara fī id-ik</i>
 the-pot in hand-your
 ‘the pot in your hand’</p> |
| <p>(3) حطو في الحمام
 <i>ḥuṭṭ-ū fī al-ḥammām</i>
 he_put-it in the-bathroom
 ‘he put it in the bathroom’</p> | |

Sentence (1) is the most prototypical, since the animals are completely enclosed inside their respective cages. Sentence (2) is only a slight extension of this; most of the pot would not actually be *in* one’s hand, but would be protruding from it, as most of the flowers actually protrude from the vase they’re *in*. The pot is partially enclosed by the hand, but more importantly is also contained and supported, like the flowers in the vase. In sentence (3), the landmark is a location (the bathroom), but one which could easily be envisioned as a bounded container.

The most basic ‘containment’ use of *fī* is slightly stretched by speakers when the ‘container’ and its boundaries are metaphorical, rather than physical:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(4) كتب في جريدة الصريح في الصفحة 21
 <i>ktab fī žarīdat al-ṣarīḥ fī al-ṣafḥa 21</i>
 he-wrote in newspaper al-Sarih
 in the-page 21
 ‘he wrote in al-Sarih newspaper on page 21’</p> | <p>(5) برامج في التلفزة
 <i>barāmiž fī al-talviza</i>
 programs in the-television
 ‘programs on TV’</p> |
|--|--|

In (5), the landmark is a virtual one: a television screen (and, by metonymy, the medium as a whole). In (4) we have two different uses of *fī*, each with a slightly different conceptualization. An article is written *fī* a newspaper, where all of the work of that newspaper is viewed as a bounded collection, utilizing the ‘text as a container’ metaphor that we also have in English. The article is also *fī* a specific page, which is apparently conceptualized in three dimensions, rather than as the flat surface we picture in English. (Or, this second instance could be considered an example of the locative usage, discussed next.)

2.2. Locative

From this basic meaning of containment come several logical extensions. A trajector that is within a bounded landmark (like a lion in a cage) is stably located, so one knows where it is even if one cannot see it. For this reason, Arabic (like English) has developed the use of *fī* to designate location. In addition to its uses that are very similar to English, it is also used for some instances where we would use *at* or *around* in English (as in example (7) below):

- | | |
|--|--|
| (6) أغلب لبنات في تونس
<i>aǧlib al-bnāt fī tūnis</i>
most the-girls in Tunisia
'most of the girls in
Tunisia' | (7) طاولة فيها مجموعة من الموظفين
<i>ṭāwla fī-ha maǧmūʿa min al-</i>
<i>muwaḍḍfin</i>
table in -it group from
employees
'a table at which was a group
of employees' |
|--|--|

While it is easy to picture a country (6) as a bounded container depicted in the proto-scene, sentence (7) diverges significantly from that. A table can be thought of as having bounds (formed by the edge), but the people sitting at the table would not necessarily be located inside of them. So the boundary, rather than the interior, of the landmark is being emphasized in this example. In fact, *fī* covers a wider semantic territory than *in*, as Arabic does not have a preposition that is equivalent to *at*.

2.3. Orientation

English makes a distinction between locative (*in*) and orientation (*into*) meanings that Arabic does not. So *fī* is also used with the meaning of being headed towards the inside of something, without yet being inside:

- (8) يرمي البيس في الحفرة
ya-rmī al-bīs fī al-ḥafra
he-throws the-marble **in** the-hole
'he throws the marble into the hole'

2.4. Activity

When someone is involved in an activity on a continual basis, they are often co-located with it. So *fī* is also used in the sense of 'being involved in an activity', as in the following example:

- (9) النساء اللي تخدم في الإدارت وقت كامل
al-nsā illi tixdim fī al-idārat [sic] *waqt kāmīl*
 the-women who she-works in the-administration time complete
 ‘the women who do office work full-time’

In the phrase *tixdim fī al-idārāt* ‘working in administration’, the *fī* ‘in’ is no longer locative. These women are not working in a particular administrative building; they are doing administrative work in whatever building they happen to be in. Location and activity are often so closely associated that the location can be used to suggest the activity, and over time comes to signify the activity rather than the location itself.

2.5. During a Time Period

In English, we use *in* in some time-periods constructions (‘in the Sixties’, ‘in a month’s time’), and Tunisian Arabic uses *fī* in the same kinds of constructions. Tunisian uses this sense much more widely, however, and uses *fī* in many instances where we would use ‘at’ or ‘per’ in English:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(10) اللي تسوى مليون في الشهر
 <i>illī t-sawwa milyūn fī al-šhar</i>
 which it-equals million in
 the-month
 ‘which is equal to a
 million per month’</p> | <p>(11) وأنا بيدي في وقت معين خمنت باش
 نشكي بيه
 <i>w-ānā bīdī fī waqt mšayyin
 xammim-t bāš ni-škī bī-h</i>
 and-I myself in time certain
 considered-I will I-complain
 in-him
 ‘I myself, at one point,
 considered raising a
 complaint against him’</p> |
| <p>(12) في الليل \ في النهار
 <i>fī al-līl / fī al-nhār</i>
 in the-night / in the-
 daytime
 at night / during the day</p> | |

As we see in (12), the preposition can have a durative value that we would translate as ‘during’ in English. This kind of usage may hint at the motivations of its usage as a marker of the progressive aspect (discussed further in §4).

3. The Tunisian Progressive

3.1. *Fī* as an Aspect Marker

Although all varieties of Arabic use *fī* as a preposition, with much the same meaning as described above, the use of *fī* as a progressive marker is a singularly distinctive feature of Tunisian Arabic. This is not to suggest that it is unique to Tunisian, though it may appear to be at first glance: if one examines the principal resources and descriptions for each major dialect, Tunisian is the only one where this feature will likely be described. Yet after further research it appears that an aspectual usage of *fī* is present in many colloquial varieties and is simply poorly attested. Woidich (2006) describes a similar use in Egyptian dialect, which he terms ‘intensifying *fī*’:

- (13) *bi-y-ballat-u fī al-raṣīf*
IMPERF-3P-pave-PL **in PROG** the-sidewalk
‘they are busy paving the sidewalk’ (479)

Woidich summarizes other sources which describe or mention a similar structure, including in Sudanese, Hassaniyya, Chadean, Syrian and Palestinian (473-475). Brustad (2000) also states that ‘the use of /fi/ as an aspectual ‘durative’ particle is common in Morocco, Egypt, and the Levant’ (174). The difference between Tunisian and these other varieties (as much as can be inferred from the limited descriptions, at least), is that only in Tunisian has *fī* developed into a major, obligatory part of the aspectual system. As we will see below, it is, in fact, the primary marker of the progressive aspect in Tunisian Arabic.

3.2. The Basic Construction: *Fī* and its Objects

The progressive verbal system in Tunisian is made up of *fī*, the intransitive progressive marker *qāʿid* (§3.8) and the active participle (§3.9). Unlike the other two elements, the *fī* progressive form can only be used with transitive verbs; it is structured: prefixed verb + *fī* + direct object. Consider the following example sentences:

A: Progressive form (with *fī*):

- (14) تكتب في الجوابات
tī-ktīb fī al-ǧwābāt
she-writes **in PROG** the-letters
‘she is writing letters’

B: Non-progressive form:

- (15) تكتب الجوابات
tī-ktīb al-ǧwābāt
she-writes the-letters
‘she writes letters’

(16) نستنتى فيك
ni-stanna fī-k
 I-wait in PROG-you
 ‘I’m waiting for you’

(17) نستنتاك
ni-stannā-k
 I-wait-you
 ‘I wait for you’

The sentences in column A are the progressive forms using *fī*, taken from the corpus. In column B are the neutral/non-progressive forms of the same sentences. The sentences in column B are still grammatical, but no longer carry a progressive meaning. As shown by these examples, the *fī* construction is only used with transitive verbs; the direct object introduced by *fī* may be a noun, a pronoun, or even a question particle. In the simplest construction (14/15), *fī* is simply inserted between the verb and direct object (14). When the direct object is a pronoun, the progressive aspect changes the point of attachment of the pronoun (underlined) to *fī* in the progressive construction (16), compared to directly attached to the verb in the non-progressive (17). With a question particle, *fī* will be fronted along with the particle:

A: Progressive form (*fī*):

B: Non-progressive form:

(18) فاش تعمل
fāš ta-šmil
in PROG-what you-do
 ‘what are you doing?’

(19) سوف أش يعمل كل شهر
šūf āš ya-šmil kull šhar
 see what he-does every month
 ‘see, what does he do every month?’

(20) في أشكون تستنى
fī škūn ti-stanna?
in PROG who you-wait
 ‘who are you waiting for?’

(21) تعرف اليوم أشكون سألني عليك
ta-šrif al-yūm škūn sʔal-nī šlē-k
 you-know the-day who he-asked-me about-you
 ‘you know who asked me about you today?’

In these sentences, we can see the fronting of the (underlined) interrogative particle to before the verb (19/21), as well as the corresponding fronting of *fī* (18/20). In (20), *fī* and the interrogative particle *škūn* remain separate, but in (18), where the particle begins with a vowel, *fī* is clipped to *f-* and attaches to the front of the question word *āš*.

The object can also be a clause, in which case *fī* may attach to the relative pronoun *illī*, as in these examples:

(22) هو أسهل وأهم حاجة فالي تعملو فيه الكل
huwwa ashil w-ahamm hāža f-illī ta-šmlū fī-h al-kull
 it_is easiest and-most_important thing in PROG-that you-do_PL in PROG-it the-all
 ‘it is the easiest and most important thing of all that you are doing’

- (23) يكذب فآلي يقولو فيه الناس الكل
yi-kaddib f-illi y-qūlu fī-h al-nās al-kull
 he-denies **in_PROG-what** they-say **in_PROG-it** the-people the-all
 ‘he is denying what all the people are saying’ (Belazi 1993: 24)

Note that the aspectual *fī* has been duplicated: there is one which attaches to the relative pronoun *illi*, and one which attaches to the mandatory referent pronoun *-h*. This construction with a duplicated progressive *fī* is actually quite rare; the more common structure contains only the second *fī*.

- (24) ها الشي اللي تعمل فيه
hā al-šē illi ta-šmil fī-h
 this the-thing **that** you-do
in_PROG-it
 ‘this thing that you are doing’
- (25) انا اللي نكلم فيك
ānā illi n-kallim fī-k
 I **who** I-speak **in_PROG-you**
 ‘I’m the one talking to you’

This difference is not merely one of stylistics: sentences (22/23) are judged to be correct, though rare, but *fī* could not be added to (24/25): it would be ungrammatical. There is some structural difference between these two pairs of sentences, though it’s difficult to tease out based on the small sample available for the former type. It may be due to the full independent clause preceding the relative pronoun *illi*: the equational sentence *huwwa ashil wa-ahamm ḥāža* in (22) and the verb *yi-kaddib* in (23).

3.3. Testing for Aspectual *fī*

An effective test to differentiate between prepositional *fī* and progressive *fī* is to change the verb to the suffixed form: if the *fī* is prepositional or part of a phrasal verb, it will remain; if it is progressive, it will be omitted. Note the contrast between the following progressive and non-progressive examples:

- | A: Progressive form (with <i>fī</i>): | B: Non-progressive form (past tense): |
|--|--|
| (26) توة تستنا في مكتوبها
<i>tawwa ti-stannā fī maktūb-hā</i> →
now she-waits in_PROG
destiny-her
‘now she is just waiting for her destiny’ | (27) إستنات مكتوبها
<i>stannā-t maktūb-hā</i>
[elicited]
she-waited destiny-her
‘she waited for her destiny’ |
| (28) بابا يبيع في التاي
<i>bābā y-bīʿ fī al-tāy</i> →
dad he-sells in_PROG the-tea
‘Dad is selling tea’ | (29) بابا باع التاي
<i>bābā bāʿ al-tāy</i> [elicited]
dad sold tea
‘Dad sold tea’ |

In these sentence pairs, we can see that the verbs, *stannā* ‘to wait’ and *bāf* ‘to sell’, are transitive in both sentences; the only differences between them are tense and aspect. The sentences in column B are in the past tense and are structured perfective verb + direct object, while those in column A are progressive, as indicated by *fī* appearing between the verb and the direct object. Comparing the interpretation of the simple past form with the *fī* form is an effective test of whether the *fī* in a given sentence is prepositional or aspectual.

Note that, in the above examples, *fī* is obligatory. Removing it is judged by native speakers to be either ungrammatical or to change the meaning of the sentence:

- (30) *توة تستنا مكتوبها
 **tawwa ti-stannā maktūb-hā*
 *now she-waits destiny-her
 *‘now she waits for her destiny’

The contexts in which *fī* can be used, and in which it must be used, will be discussed further below (§3.6).

3.4. With Compound Time Reference

The progressive *fī* is always used with the prefixed form, but not only with a present-tense time frame; it can be combined with other verbs or contextual cues to make a more complex time reference:

- (31) هاو باسط مشى يجيبلكم في الكسكروتات والتاي
hāw bāsīt mšā y-žīb-l-kum fī al-kaskrūtāt wa-al-tāy
 here-he Basit went he-brings-to-you_PL **in_PROG** the-sandwiches
 and the-tea
 ‘Basit went and is bringing you some sandwiches and tea.’
- (32) م الصباح نطلب فيك تاليفونك مسكّر
mi al-ṣbaḥ nu-ṭlub fī-k talifūn-ik msakkir
 from the-morning I-call **in_PROG**-you your-phone closed
 ‘I’ve been trying to call you since this morning and your phone was off.’

In Arabic, the prefixed form (which is often referred to as the ‘present tense’) can often be used with past tense meaning when either the context or another verb (acting as an auxiliary) establishes the past-time reference. This can translate as present or past progressive in English as in sentence (31), or as past perfect progressive, as in (32). However, the choice is dependent on the requirements of English structure, and does not reflect any structural difference in the Arabic.

3.5. *Fī* with Another Preposition

Since *fī* is originally a preposition, it is interesting to see what happens when a verb that has a mandatory preposition is made progressive with *fī*. For example, the verb *lawwiž* ‘to look/search [for]’, which is generally paired with the preposition *šlā*:

- (33) إمشي لوج على خدمة أخرى
imšī lawwiž šlā xidma uxra
 go search for job another
 ‘go and look for another job’

With few exceptions, Arabic does not permit two ‘true’ prepositions to appear next to each other: for example, in the 950-million-word Oxford Arabic Corpus, there are zero instances of either *fī šla* or *šla fī* (the presumed combination resulting from making (33) progressive). So how will *fī* interact with phrasal verbs like this? Has it been grammaticalized to the point that it can appear next to another preposition? From the corpus data, we can see that the answer is ‘no’; in none of the results do the two prepositions both appear. Instead, we see examples like the following:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(34) احنا نلوجو في شكون بحكم لبلاد
 <i>iħnā n-lawwiž-ū fī škūn yu-ħkum</i>
 <i>al-blād</i>
 we 1P-search-PL in_PROG someone
 he-rules the-country
 ‘we’re looking for someone to
 run the country’</p> | <p>(35) قاعد بلوج على بنت الحلال
 <i>qāšid y-lawwiž šlā bint</i>
 <i>al-ħalāl</i>
 sitting_AP he-searches
 for girl the-lawful
 ‘he’s looking for a good
 girl [to marry]’</p> |
| <p>(36) بديت نلوج على بلاصة جديدة
 <i>bdī-t n-lawwiž šlā blāša ždīda</i>
 began-I I-search for place new
 ‘I started searching for a new
 place’</p> | |

It appears from the data that there are three ways that speakers handle this issue:

1. *Fī* is still used to form the progressive and the aspectual *fī* takes precedence over the mandatory preposition (*šlā*), subsuming it (34).
2. *Fī* is *not* used to form the progressive. Rather, the intransitive progressive construction (with *qāšid* ‘sitting’, see §3.8) is used instead (35). (Note that, in native Arabic grammar, verbs are considered to be transitive even if a preposition is required between the verb and the object.)
3. The progressive aspect is not explicitly marked and *šlā* is retained (36).

From the data on *lawwiž* in the corpus, it would appear that the most common of these scenarios is #3, where no explicit progressive marking is present and the original preposition is retained. There were 65 results of this form (out of 86 total transitive instances of *lawwiž*), compared to only 11 that were explicitly marked for progressive aspect with either *fī* (7) or *qāʕid* (4), as shown in Figure 2.

Construction ²	Frequency
Prefixed verb + <i>ʕlā</i>	65
No preposition	10
Prefixed verb + <i>fī</i>	7
<i>qāʕid</i> + prefixed verb + <i>ʕlā</i>	4
Total	86

Figure 2. Progressive constructions with *lawwiž* ‘to search’

However, choice of progressive construct in such situations appears to be lexically determined, at least to a certain extent. If we examine a very similar verb, *farkis* [*ʕlā*] ‘to search [for]’, we see a different pattern (Figure 3):

Construction ²	Frequency
Prefixed verb + <i>fī</i>	15
Prefixed verb + <i>ʕlā</i>	5
No preposition ³	1
Total	21

Figure 3. Progressive constructions with *farkis* ‘to search’

With this verb, replacing *ʕlā* with *fī* is the dominant method of forming the progressive. In fact, *fī* is such a strong collocate with *farkis*, one might wonder if *fī* is actually the mandatory preposition, perhaps along with *ʕlā*. However, the past tense conversion test described above belies this suspicion:

² Individual markers include associated variants: *ʕlā*, *ʕal-*, *ʕa-*, and *qāʕda*, *qʕad*, *yuqʕud*, etc.

³ There are many other transitive instances of *farkis* without a preposition, but with a different sense: *kān tʕarkis al-mḥall al-kull* ‘if you search the whole store’. These, along with intransitive usages, have been excluded from this data.

- (37) مازلت تفرّكس في صاحبك؟
mā-zil-t t-farkis fī ṣāḥb-ik?
 still-you you-look **in**_PROG
 friend-your
 ‘Are you still looking for
 your friend?’
- (38) فرّكست على صاحبك
farkis-t fīlā ṣāḥb-ik?
 [elicited]
 looked-you **for** friend-your
 ‘Did you look for your
 friend?’

When changing a sentence with *yfarkis fī* to the past tense, the *fī* becomes *fīlā*, thus confirming that *fīlā* is the true preposition required by *farkis*.

There is another curious phenomenon shown in the tables above: both verbs may appear without any preposition at all. Intransitive usages (i.e. *mā-zāl ylawwiž* ‘he’s still searching’) have been excluded from the data, so the 11 instances mentioned here are puzzling examples of transitive usage without a preposition (e.g. *nlawwiž xidma* ‘I’m looking for work’). In this data this was more common with *lawwiž* than with *farkis*, but in the suffixed form, *farkis* is also very likely to take an object with no intervening preposition. It would appear that phrasal verbs in Tunisian vary in how mandatory their ‘mandatory’ preposition is. This is an area that needs further research.

In any case, in none of variant constructions of the progressive aspect does *fī* appear *in addition* to the existing preposition. This would suggest that, even in its aspectual use, *fī* has not been fully grammaticalized and still retains some prepositional qualities in the minds of the speakers.

3.6. Restrictions on Use

There are several restrictions on where the *fī* construction can be used. Obviously, since *fī* appears between the verb and the direct object, it cannot be used with intransitive verbs. It also cannot be used with stative verbs (‘like’, ‘love’, ‘resemble’, ‘believe’, etc.), which, cross-linguistically, are generally incompatible with a progressive meaning (see Mair 2012: 812):

- (39) تعجبني
ti-ṣṣib-nī
 you-please-me
 ‘I like you’
- (40) *تعجب في*
 **ti-ṣṣib fī-ya*
 *you-please **in**_PROG-me
 *‘I am liking you’

Likewise, the progressive *fī* construction cannot be used with actions that are perceived as being instantaneous, and thus have no process. If used with these types of verbs, the progressive conveys repetition:

- (41) ويضرب في رأسه على الحيط
wa-ya-ḍrab fī rās-ū fīlā al-ḥiṭ
 and-he-hits **in**_PROG head-his on the-wall
 ‘he’s pounding his head against the wall’

Unlike in English, there is no future progressive construction in Tunisian Arabic: *fi* is disallowed after the future particles *bāš* and *taw*:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (42) باش نستناك
<i>bāš ni-stannā-k</i>
<u>will</u> I-wait-you
'I will wait for you' | (43) باش نستنى فيك*
<i>*bāš ni-stannā fi-k</i>
<u>*will</u> I-wait in_PROG -you
*'I will be waiting for you' |
| (44) تو تشوفو
<i>taw t-šūf-ū</i>
<u>will</u> you-see-him
'you will see him' | (45) تو تشوف فيه*
<i>*taw t-šūf fi-h</i>
<u>*will</u> you-see in_PROG -him
*'you will be seeing him' |

The progressive is not only prohibited from following *bāš* when functioning as a future tense particle (43), but also as a subordinating conjunction (47). It's perfectly allowable, however, after the subordinating conjunction *illi* (48):

- | | |
|--|---|
| (46) راني جيتك باش تعطيني خمسين ألف دينار
<i>rā-nī ži-t-ik bāš ta-ḥṭi-nī</i>
<i>xamsīn alf dīnār</i>
EMPH-I came-I-you so_that
you-give-me 50,000 dinar
'Hey I've come so that
you'll give me 50,000 dinar' | (47) جيتك باش تعطي فيا
<i>*ži-t-ik bāš ta-ḥṭi fi-ya</i>
*came-I-you so_that you-
give in_PROG -me
*'I've come so you will be
giving me' |
| (48) أشكون قالك اللي انا نجيبولو في النساء
<i>škūn qāl-li-k illi ānā n-žib-l-ū fi al-nsā</i>
who said-to-you <u>that</u> I I-bring-to-him in_PROG the-women
'the one who told you <u>that</u> I am bringing him women' | |

The progressive *fi* construction is also allowable with auxiliary verbs like *mā-zāl* 'still', *bdā* 'begin', *mā-dām* 'as long as':

- | | |
|--|--|
| (49) مادام ظهرو يوجع فيه ما حقوش مشى جملة
<i>mā-dām ḍahr-ū y-ūžaʕ fi-h mā</i>
<i>ḥuqq-ū-š mšā žumla</i>
what continues back-his it-hurts
in_PROG NEG should-him-NEG
he_walked at all
'as long as his back is hurting, he
shouldn't have been walking at all' | (50) مازال يتصيد فيك؟
<i>mā-zāl yi-tšyyid</i>
<i>fi-k?</i>
not-ceased he-hunts
in_PROG -you?
'is he still 'hunting'
you?' |
|--|--|

- (51) بدبت ندر في الدنيا
bdī-t n-dūr fī al-dunyā
 began-I I-wander **in**_PROG the-world
 ‘I began wandering the world’

Woidich (quoting Ali and Miller 1985-86) says that it appears that conscious agency is required for use of the *fī* construction in Sudanese, though not in Woidich’s own Egyptian data. In Tunisian, as well, agency is not required for the *fī* progressive to be used: we can see this in (49), *ḍahrū yūḏa’ fīh* ‘his back is hurting him’.

3.7. The Unmarked Progressive

In her study on the progressive aspect in Tunisian Arabic (which contains an excellent treatment of *fī*) Saddour (2009) describes an unmarked progressive, which consists simply of the prefixed verb (i.e., *yiktib*, ‘he writes/is writing’). Does this contradict the assertion above that *fī* is obligatory in the aspectual system of Tunisian? Native speakers rejected sentences in which progressive *fī* had been removed, yet affirmed the correctness of the unmarked sentences given by Saddour, like *yiktib*. To solve this mystery, I made use of the *Peace Corps English-Tunisian Arabic Dictionary* (Ben Abdelkader 1977), which contains approximately 6,000 entries with example sentences. I searched the dictionary for all example sentences that used ‘be-ing’ progressive in the English gloss, to see how the Arabic sentence was rendered. Although this makes for a very small parallel corpus, the search revealed a very interesting pattern: every unmarked progressive could be divided into two categories:

1. **Intransitive:** The normal marker of the intransitive progressive (*qāʿid*, discussed in §3.8) can apparently be omitted (or in the words of one native speaker, ‘assumed’), without the sentence becoming ill-formed or losing its progressive meaning.
2. **Containing another preposition:** In *all* other cases, where the progressive sentence was transitive and lacking the progressive marker *fī*, its absence could be attributed to the presence of another preposition:

- (52) يتعاركو علخدمة
yi-tʿārku-ū ʿa-al-xidma
 3P-argue-PL about-the-
 work
 ‘They are arguing
 about work’ (p. 28)

- (53) كنت نلعب بالكرة
kun-t na-lʿib bi-l-kura
 was-I I-play with-the-ball
 ‘I was playing with the ball’
 (p. 39)

Sentence (53) illustrates the very interesting way that *fī* and prepositions interact:

kunt na-lʕib bi-l-kura ‘I was playing with the ball’
kunt na-lʕib ʕi-l-kura ‘I was playing soccer’

As explained above (§3.5), when a phrasal verb that already governs a preposition is made progressive, *ʕi* may replace the original preposition, or the preposition may remain and the progressive aspect will not be explicitly marked. That is what appears to be happening here.

This data set is very small and more confirmation is needed, but the results are clear, as well as being consistent with native speaker judgements: **whenever a verb is transitive and does not already govern another preposition, *ʕi* is required for progressive sentences in Tunisian Arabic.**

3.8. The Intransitive Progressive: *qāʕid*

The *ʕi* progressive construction discussed above is only used with transitive verbs, since *ʕi* must be followed by a direct object. In order to make intransitive verbs progressive, Tunisian Arabic precedes the prefixed verb form with the active participle *qāʕid* ‘sitting’. *Qāʕid*, being a noun, is inflected for number and gender with an *-a* suffix for feminine agreement and an *-in* suffix for plural agreement.⁴

The following examples show the basic intransitive construction: the sentences in column A are intransitive progressive sentences with *qāʕid*, the sentences in column B are similar sentences from the corpus (using the same verb) that are not progressive:

A: Progressive form (with *qāʕid*):

B: Non-progressive form:

(54) قاعد تلعب وما دخلتش تقرا
qāʕid ta-lʕib wa mā dxał-t-iš
ta-qra
sitting **PROG** you-play and
 NEG you-started-NEG you-
 study
 ‘you’ve been playing and
 haven’t started your
 homework.’

(55) تحب تلعب معايا
t-ħabb ta-lʕib mʕā-yā
 you-want you-play with-me
 ‘do you want to play with
 me?’

⁴ Cuvalay (1991, as discussed in Saddour 2009 (276-278)) claimed that *qāʕid* is in the process of losing its inflection for gender and number, and Gibson (2006) states that *qāʕid* is ‘inflected for number but not normally for gender’ (569). However, a search of TAC returned hundreds of instances of *qāʕda* and *qāʕdīn* (each appeared about half as often as the masculine singular form), and I was unable to find any examples showing a lack of agreement between aspectual *qāʕid* and the verb.

- (56) ماكش قاعدة تمشي مستوية
māk-š qāʕid-a ti-mšī
mstawīya
 you-not **sitting_PROG-FEM**
 you-walk straight
 ‘you’re not walking the
 ‘straight and narrow.’”
- (57) و تولي تمشي ع الصراط المستقيم
wa t-wallī ti-mšī ʕa al-širāʕ
al-mistaqīm
 and you-become you-walk on
 the-road the-straight
 ‘you’ve started to walk the
 ‘straight and narrow.’”
- (58) هنا قاعدين نخدمو
hānā qāʕid-īn ni-xdm-ū
 here_we_are **sitting_PROG-PL**
 1P-work-PL
 ‘we’re working.’
- (59) ما إنجموش نخدمو مع بعضنا
mā n-nažžm-ū-š ni-xdm-ū
maʕ bʕaḍ-nā
 NEG we-can-PL-NEG 1P-work-
 PL with eachother-us
 ‘we can’t work together.’

As you can see from these examples, this construction is simpler: *qāʕid* simply occurs before the verb, and no other changes in the sentence are required. In addition to its use with intransitive verbs, *qāʕid* may also be used with transitive verbs, **but only in conjunction with *fī***. A transitive construction using *qāʕid* but lacking *fī* is ungrammatical:

- (60) *قاعد يشرب التاي
 **qāʕid yu-šrub al-tāy*
 ***sitting_PROG** he-drinks the-tea
 *‘he is drinking tea’

This construction would be allowed in many varieties of Arabic, but *qāʕid* without *fī* in transitive structures is not permitted in Tunisian. Yet, although *fī* is mandatory in transitive constructions, *qāʕid* is entirely optional. Here are some examples where both are used:

- (61) بربي فاش قاعدة تعمل؟
b-rubb-ī f-āš qāʕid-a ta-ʕmil?
 by-lord-my **in_PROG-what**
sitting_PROG-FEM you-do
 ‘what on earth are you
 doing?!’
- (62) إسأل إلي قاعدين يوصلوك في
 الأخبار
isʔal illī qāʕid-īn y-waṣṣl-ū-
l-ik fī al-axbār
 ask who **sitting_PROG-PL**
 3P-bring-PL-to- you
in_PROG the-news
 ‘go ask whoever is telling
 you this gossip’
- (63) أنا قاعد نلم في الفلوس
ana qāʕid n-limm fī al-flūs
 I **sitting_PROG** I-gather
in_PROG the-money
 ‘I’m saving money.’

The factors that govern the optional use of *qāʕid* are not entirely clear. In some cases, it may have an emphatic purpose (as sentence (61) above), but that does not always seem to be the case. Saddour (2009) presents tantalizing evidence that part of the difference may be related to the lexical aspect of the verb used. In her study of the Tunisian progressive, she discovered a statistically-significant correlation between lexical aspect and the progressive construction chosen, as shown in Figure 4.

	Stative	Activity	Achievement/ Accomplishment
prefixed-verb + <i>fī</i>	0 (0%)	59 (54%)	50 (46%)
prefixed-verb	0 (0%)	78 (96%)	3 (4%)
<i>qāʕid</i> + prefixed verb	0 (0%)	51 (75%)	17 (25%)
<i>qāʕid</i> + prefixed verb + <i>fī</i>	0 (0%)	18 (38%)	29 (62%)

Figure 4. Correlation between lexical aspect and progressive construction (adapted from Saddour 2009: 274)

While the lone *fī* is nearly evenly divided between activity (54%) and achievement/accomplishment verbs (46%), *qāʕid* and *fī* together are more likely to appear with achievement/accomplishment verbs (that is to say, with telic verbs — see Vendler 1957 for a detailed discussion of these terms). A limited analysis of these two constructions in TAC was inconclusive; the question requires a proper statistical analysis, which will be the subject of future research.

The finite form of the verb *qʕad* is also used as a progressive marker, though less frequently than the active participle form *qāʕid*. Like the active participle, it can be used intransitively or transitively with *fī*:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(64) نقعد نستنى حتى نفلس كيف غيري؟
 <i>nu-qʕud ni-stanna ḥattā ni-flis</i>
 <i>kif ġīrī?</i>
 I_sit_PROG I-wait until I-go_bankrupt like others?
 ‘am I waiting until I’m bankrupt like the rest?’</p> | <p>(65) يقعد يستنى في الانتخابات
 <i>yu-qʕud yi-stanna fī al-intixābāt</i>
 He_sat_PROG he-waits in_PROG the-elections
 ‘he is waiting for the elections’</p> |
|--|---|

Interestingly, *qʕad* in the suffixed form can also be used aspectually, to supply a past progressive, and in fact is slightly more common in this form:

- (66) وبعد قعدت نلوج في دار
wa-baʕd qʕad-t n-lawwiž fī dār
 and-after **sat_PROG-I** I-search **in_PROG** house
 ‘then I was looking for a house’

We saw above (§3.5) that *fī*, even in its aspectual usage, cannot appear beside another preposition. If there is a preposition which is required by the verb, that preposition is subsumed by *fī*, or an alternate progressive construction is used. This suggests that *fī* has perhaps not been fully grammaticalized and may retain some of its identity as a preposition in the minds of the speakers. There is intriguing evidence, however, that the same is not true of *qāʿīd*. Active participles like *qāʿīd* are an important feature of all varieties of Arabic and, in all varieties, two active participles cannot appear in a row any more than two prepositions can. Yet the corpus contains a handful of examples like the following:

- (67) هـاك تشوف أش قاعد صاير في البلاد
hā-k t-šūf āš qāʿīd šāyir fī al-blād
 here-you you-see what **sitting PROG happening AP** in-the-country
 ‘hey, you see what’s going on in the country’

Here we have the aspectual AP *qāʿīd* followed by the AP *šāyir* ‘happening’, creating the (normally) interdicted structure of AP-AP. TAC contains a handful of examples of *qāʿīd šāyir*, along with a few others (e.g. *qāʿīd māšī* ‘going’), and Saddour (2009) reported two instances of *qāʿīd rāqid* ‘sleeping’ in her data (272). This suggests that *qāʿīd* may be undergoing grammaticalization to the point that it’s starting to not be perceived as an active participle by its speakers. That *qāʿīd* has undergone this level of semantic blanching suggests that, of the two progressive markers, *qāʿīd* is perhaps the older one.

3.9. The Active Participle

The third and final element in the Tunisian progressive system is the active participle. In all colloquial varieties of Arabic, the active participle has a highly evolved verbal function (see Holes 2004: 220) and in Tunisian it is often used to express the progressive aspect for stative and motion verbs:

- (68) انا خارج الصباح أنا و اختي ماشين للمكتب
ānā xāriž al-šbah ānā wa uxt-ī māš-īn l-al-maktab
 I **leave AP** the-morning I and sister-my **go AP-PL** to-the-school
 ‘I was leaving one morning, my sister and I were going to school’

The participle itself does not specify a time reference; it must be supplied by the context, as in (68) where the narrator is telling about something that happened to him as a child. Otherwise, though, this sentence shows a fully verbal usage of the active participle.

This is not to suggest that the AP is equivalent to the progressive form, however: even though they may often be translated the same, they are not interchangeable. For example, *kunt nuxruž* ‘I was leaving’ could not be substituted for *xāriž* in (68); it would be very unnatural. This is because there is a strong

relationship between the lexical aspect of the verb, and its preferred progressive construction. The verbs most likely to appear in active participle form are motion verbs (like *māšī* ‘going’, *xāriž* ‘leaving’, *žāy* ‘coming’) and stative verbs (like *lābis* ‘wearing’, *rāqid* ‘sleeping’, *nāsī* ‘having forgotten’). Verbs that are very common in one progressive construction are unlikely to appear in the other:

	Active Participle	Progressive with <i>fī</i> and/or <i>qāfīd</i>
<i>mšā</i> ‘to go’	215 <i>māšī</i>	2 <i>qāfīd yimšī</i>
<i>xraž</i> ‘to leave’	188 <i>xāriž</i>	2 <i>qāfīd yuxruž</i>
<i>žā</i> ‘to come’	165 <i>žāy</i>	1 <i>qāfīd yži</i>
<i>rqad</i> ‘to sleep’	67 <i>rāqid</i>	0 <i>qāfīd yurqud</i>
<i>stanna</i> ‘to wait’	0 <i>mstannī</i>	107 <i>(qāfīd) ystanna fī</i>
<i>nšūf</i> ‘to see’	1 <i>šāyif</i>	109 <i>(qāfīd) yšūf fī</i>
<i>smaʿ</i> ‘to hear’	4 <i>sāmiʿ</i>	55 <i>(qāfīd) yasmaʿ fī</i>

Figure 5. Frequency of common verbs in different progressive constructions

We see from the data in Figure 5 that being commonly used in active participle form is strongly predictive that a verb will not be used in the other (*qāfīd / fī*) progressive construction.

Different spoken varieties of Arabic differ slightly in the form of the active participle used. When adding a suffix to the feminine form, the *-a* may change to *-it* (Eastern Libyan), there may be an addition of an ‘intrusive *-in*’ (Omani), or in varieties like Cairene there may no change at all (Owens 2011). Tunisian in this respect is similar to Libyan Arabic in that a feminine active participle takes the construct form, i.e. the *tā marbūṭa* becomes a *tā*:

- (69) وهي لابسَة الحجاب (70) لقيتها لابستها
wa hiyya lābsa al-ḥižāb *lqī-t-hā lābs-it-hā*
while she was **wearing AP-FEM** the-hijab found-I-her **wearing AP-FEM-it**
‘while she was wearing a ‘I found that she was wearing
hijab’ it’

3.10. Negation of the Progressive

One of the most interesting things about the aspectual use of *fī* is the way it causes verbal sentences to take non-verbal negation.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>(71) نشرب في التاي
<i>nu-šrub fī al-tāy</i>
I-drink in_PROG
the-tea
'I am drinking tea'</p> | → | <p>(72) مانيش نشرب في التاي
<i>māniš nu-šrub fī al-tāy</i>
I_NEG I-drink in_PROG the-tea
'I am not drinking tea.'</p> |
|---|---|--|

Verbs in Tunisian are usually negated by placing the circumfix *ma-_ -š* around the verb:

- (73) ما تفهمش
mā ti-fhim-š
NEG you-understand-NEG
'you don't understand.'

Since the copula is not generally used in the present tense, sentences which would have 'is' in English are considered 'verbless' in Arabic and take a different kind of negation ('non-verbal' or 'nominal' negation). In Tunisian, this is done with either *muš/miš* (74) or with a negative form of the personal pronoun (74):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(74) موش باهي تقص عليهم الضو
<i>muš bāhī t-qaṣṣ ʔlē-hum al-ḍaw</i>
NEG good you-cut-off on-them
the-light
'it's not right to cut off their
electricity'</p> | <p>(75) مانيش كبير برشا
<i>māniš kbīr barša</i>
I_NEG old very
'I'm not very old.'</p> |
|--|--|

What's remarkable about the progressive construction with *fī*, however, is that nominal negation of verbal sentences is not only allowed, it's *required*: **verbal negation is ungrammatical**:

- (76) *ما نشرب في التاي
* *mā nu-šrub-š fī al-tāy*
*NEG I-drink-NEG **in_PROG** the-tea
*'I am not drinking tea.'

Rather, the progressive construction must take nominal negation. Compare the following examples; regular verbal sentences with verbal negation (column A), and progressive verbal sentences with nominal negation (B):

**A: Non-progressive
(verbal negation):**

(77) ما يضربوش البندير
mā ya-ḍrbū-š al-bindīr
NEG they-beat-NEG the-
drums
'they don't beat the
drums'

(79) علاش ما تشاورش الوالد
ʕlāš mā t-šāwir-š al-wālid
why NEG you-
seek_council-NEG the-
father
'why don't you ask your
father for advice?'

**B: Progressive form
(nominal negation):**

(78) مهواش يضرب فيها
mā-hu-wāš ya-ḍrab fī-ha
NEG-he-NEG he-beats in_PROG-
her
'he's not beating her'

(80) مانيش نشاور فيك
māniš n-šāwir fī-k
I_NEG I-see_council in_PROG-
you
'I'm not asking for your advice'

In sentence (76), we see that a transitive verb with *fī* marking the progressive aspect cannot be made negative with the standard verbal negation; this structure is ungrammatical in Tunisian Arabic. Instead, the nominal negation in (78) and (80) are the only permitted ways to make a progressive verb phrase negative. Comparing (78/80) with the non-progressive negated sentences (77/79), you can see that the verbal negation (with the *ma_š* circumfix around the verb) changes in the progressive sentences to nominal negation, with a negated personal pronoun.

Although it's a normally-stated grammatical 'rule' in Arabic that nominal negation cannot occur with verbs and vice versa, my data shows nominal negation occurring quite often with verbal sentences. For example, looking just at the instances of the negative pronoun *māniš* 'I [am] not', we see that it often negates a verb rather than a non-verb phrase:

	<i>māniš</i>
Noun, Adj., etc.	171
Verb:	43
Intransitive	12
Transitive <i>w/ fī</i>	15
Transitive: other prep	15
Transitive: no prep	1
Total	214

Figure 6. Frequency of verbal and non-verbal clauses following *māniš*

Out of 214 total occurrences of *mānīš*, 43 of them preceded verbs (in place of the expected verbal negation). A third of these (15) can be explained by the presence of *fi* and the nominal negation it requires, and almost all the rest by either intransitivity (12) or the presence of another preposition (15), precluding the presence of the normal progressive marker *fi*. There is only one instance which cannot be explained by the system elucidated above (§3.6).

The use of the nominal negation with all these examples that do not contain an overt progressive marker, though, bears some explanation. Belazi (1993: 61) states that these kinds of examples are also progressive, even without *qāšid* or *fi* — the nominal negation form itself marks the progressive:

“When negated, the Px.v [prefixed verb] takes a different negation marker, depending on its aspectual meaning, as illustrated below:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(81) <i>mā yi-šāwin-š ḥattā ṭarf</i>
 <u>NEG he-helps-NEG</u> even
 a_bit
 ‘He <u>doesn’t help</u> a bit’</p> | <p>(82) <i>muš/māhūš yi-šāwin ḥattā ṭarf</i>
 <u>NEG/he_NEG he-helps</u> even bit
 ‘He <u>is not helping</u> at all’”
 (Belazi 1993: 61)</p> |
|--|--|

As Belazi’s translation of these two sentences makes clear, changing the negation form from verbal (*mā* + verb + *-š*) to nominal (*muš/māhūš* + verb) changes the aspect of the sentence from habitual to progressive. In this way, nominal negation with verbal sentences can itself be considered a marker of the progressive aspect.

4. Analysis

This unusual negation structure described in the previous section is readily explainable, if we assume that *qāšid* predates *fi* as an aspectual marker in Tunisian. This is a very reasonable assumption, for two reasons. The first is the fact that *qāšid* is well-established as a progressive marker in a wide range of geographically separated varieties of spoken Arabic, which makes it likely that this is a very old feature, possible dating back to the pre-Islamic dialects. The second is the fact that *qāšid* is more grammaticalized than *fi*, as evidenced by the fact that *qāšid* can appear in an AP-AP construction (contrary to norms), whereas *fi* cannot appear in a preposition-preposition construction. This implies that *qāšid* has undergone grammaticalization for longer, and is farther away from its AP origins in the speakers’ perceptions (since they do not perceive *qāšid*-AP as ungrammatical).

Because it is a noun, *qāšid* takes nominal negation, both in its normal AP use and in its aspectual use. As *fi* became established as an additional aspectual marker, *qāšid* would still be the primary, obligatory marker, so any negated progressive sentence would be marked with the nominal negation required by

qāʿīd. At some point, however, *fi* came to be interpreted as the primary progressive marker in transitive sentences and the *qāʿīd* became optional; it could be dropped from the sentence but the nominal negation it required remained. The development could be envisioned like this:

#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
نَشْرَبُ التَّاي	قَاعِدُ نَشْرَبُ → التَّاي →	قَاعِدُ نَشْرَبُ فِي التَّاي →	مَانِيشُ قَاعِدُ نَشْرَبُ فِي التَّاي →	مَانِيشُ نَشْرَبُ فِي التَّاي
<i>nušrub</i>	<i>qāʿīd</i>	<i>qāʿīd</i> <i>nušrub</i>	<i>māniš</i> <i>qāʿīd</i>	<i>māniš</i> <i>nušrub</i>
<i>al-tāy</i>	<i>nušrub al-</i>	<i>fi al-tāy</i>	<i>nušrub fi al-tāy</i>	<i>fi al-tāy</i>
I-drink	<i>tāy</i>	sitting PROG	not-I-NEG	not-I-NEG I-
the-tea	sitting	I-drink	sitting PROG I-	drink
	PROG I-	in PROG the-	drink in PROG	in PROG the
	drink the-	tea	the-tea	tea
	tea			

We begin with the base declarative sentence, ‘I drink tea’ (#1). Before the development of progressive aspectual markers, this sentence could have meant either the habitual ‘I drink tea’ or the progressive ‘I am drinking tea’, as in Classical Arabic. Over time, the active participle *qāʿīd* came to be used as an aspectual marker. Thus the two senses of ‘I drink tea’ and ‘I’m drinking tea’ became grammatically distinguished (#2). At some point, the prepositional *fi* in transitive, progressive sentences in Tunisian Arabic came to be reanalyzed as a marker of the progressive (discussed below), and its use expanded to sentences like this, where the preposition *fi* would previously have been inappropriate. However, *qāʿīd* was still the primary marker of the progressive and was still required (#3). Because *qāʿīd* was still required, when a progressive construction was made negative (#4), it required nominal negation, as here with the negative 1st-person pronoun *māniš*. In the final stage of development, *fi* has been reanalyzed as the primary marker of progressive for transitive verbs, and *qāʿīd* has become optional. Speakers can choose to drop *qāʿīd*, but the nominal negation which it required remains (#5).

But we must ask why the nominal negation should remain, even when *qāʿīd* is not expressed. It’s common in Arabic grammatical tradition to attribute irregularities in agreement as being the result of ‘short forms’, where an element is being left out yet still affects the syntax of the sentence. This is not to say that speakers construct a complete ‘long form’ sentence in their heads and then delete optional elements. Rather, it can be looked at as a kind of irregularity or idiom which arises from usage and custom. The progressive form is so strongly associated with *qāʿīd*, that the nominal negation structure required by *qāʿīd* became itself associated with the progressive aspect, even in

the absence of an overt progressive marker. Or even in the presence of a different progressive marker, *fī*.

This provides a plausible explanation for the negation structure used in the progressive aspect, but what about the development of the *fī* construct itself? It seems very strange in the context of Arabic, since the formation of a progressive aspect with preverbal particles is so well established (Figure 7):

Language	Particle	Example
Syrian (Damascus)	عَمَ - <i>ʕam</i>	<i>ʕam b-e-dros b-el-žāmʕa</i> PROG INDIC-I-study in-the-university (‘I’m studying at the university’)
Palestinian	عَمَال - <i>ʕammāl</i>	<i>ʕammālīn b-i-ktub-ū</i> PROG INDIC-3P-write-PL (‘They are writing’)
Southern Iraqi	گَاعَد - <i>gāʕid</i>	<i>gāʕid e-šrab</i> staying PROG I-drink (‘I am drinking’)
Jewish Baghdadi	قَدَ - <i>qa(d)</i>	<i>qa ye-mšī</i> PROG you-walk (‘you are walking’)
Turkey (Arabic dialect of Azeh)	كُو - <i>kū</i>	<i>kū ne-kteb</i> PROG you-say (‘you are saying’)
Sudanese	گَاعَد - <i>gāʕid</i>	<i>huwa gāʕid y-aṭbux</i> he sitting PROG he cooks (‘he is cooking’)
Maltese	<i>ʔiyed</i>	<i>ʔiyed yo-ʔtol</i> remaining he-kills (‘he is killing’)

Figure 7. Pre-verbal progressive particles in Arabic (Agius and Harrak 1987: 165-174)

Many very widely separated varieties of Arabic have strikingly similar pre-verbal particles marking the progressive aspect, usually derived from either *qāʕid* ‘sitting’ or *ʕamal* ‘to do’. These are grammaticalized to different extents (some still show agreement for gender and number, while others are invariable and morphologically reduced), but they are largely similar in origin and use. Cross-linguistically, this development is quite typical: Bybee and Dahl (1989) show that, by far, the most common source of progressive markers is locative phrases that could be paraphrased as ‘to be located in or at an activity’ (77). They include postural verbs like *qāʕid* in this category because these verbs themselves ‘involve a notion of location’—if someone is sitting or standing somewhere, you know where they are.

Bybee and Dahl describe the most typical form of ‘explicitly’ locative phrases as ‘a copula plus a locative adposition and a nominalized form of the verb’, for example in Irish:

- (83) *Tá sé ag dūnadh an dorais*
 he is **at** shutting the door
 ‘He is shutting the door’ (Bybee and Dahl 1989: 78)

It is clear that this has implications not only for the development of *qāšid* but also of *fī*. Although historical data on its evolution is unavailable to us, we can trace its path on this development by looking at the myriad different—but related—ways that it is still used. The primary function of *fī* as a preposition is to express a notion of containment, and this leads naturally to a use describing location, since something that is contained is stably located, e.g. *al-bnāt fī Tūnis*, ‘the girls in Tunisia’ (6). As explained in §2.3, the locative usage developed an activity reading, as in *tixdim fī al-idārāt* ‘working in administration’ (9). ‘Gradually the locative meaning weakens while the temporal implications stabilize, giving rise eventually to the aspectual meaning of progressive’ (Bybee and Dahl 1989: 81).

To see how this aspectual meaning could have arisen in Tunisian, we need only to postulate a situation where *fī* was used non-aspectually, but could also have acquired a durative meaning. For example, in the sentence:

- (84) نفكر فيك
n-fakkar fī-k
 I-think **in**-you
 ‘I think of you’ or ‘I’m thinking of you’

Fī is the preposition that is generally used with *fakkar*, equivalent to ‘of’ in the English ‘to think of’. For this reason, this sentence has two readings in modern Tunisian: it could either be ‘I think of you’ or ‘I am thinking of you’ (which could be made unambiguous by the addition of *qāšid* before the verb). Because of the natural tendency of locatives to be viewed aspectually, as described above, the *fī* in sentences like this came to be viewed as having two readings, one as the mandatory preposition of *fakkar*, and one as an aspectual marker. That secondary reading then became entrenched enough to be extended to sentences where *fī* as a preposition would be inappropriate, such as:

- (85) نشرب في التاي
nušrub fī al-tāy
 I-drink **in**_PROG the-tea
 ‘I am drinking tea.’

It’s likely that this process is still happening. Perhaps the inconsistent behavior of *fī* with another preposition is a sign of continuing development: in the future, it may be standard for *fī* to always replace the original preposition.

5. Conclusions

Here we have seen an extensive overview of the particle *fī*, both in its use as a preposition and as a marker of the progressive aspect. Although a few unanswered questions remain, we can state with some confidence several important conclusions regarding the aspectual system in Tunisian:

Fī and qāʿīd are only partially grammaticalized. Even when functioning as an aspectual particle or as part of a phrasal verb, *fī* cannot appear alongside another preposition, suggesting that even the ‘progressive *fī*’ retains some prepositional qualities in the minds of the speakers. When such a situation arises, *fī* either replaces the original preposition, the original preposition replaces *fī* (leaving no overt progressive marking), or the intransitive progressive marker *qāʿīd* is used. Although *fī* cannot appear next to another preposition, *qāʿīd* sometimes appears alongside another active participle, suggesting that it has been grammaticalized to a larger extent than *fī* and is no longer analyzed as an active participle by speakers. In the TAC data, however, *qāʿīd* still retains its inflection for number and gender.

Fī is the primary, obligatory marker of the progressive aspect in Tunisian Arabic and qāʿīd is secondary to it. Unlike the intransitive progressive marker *qāʿīd*, the transitive progressive marker *fī* is an obligatory part of the aspectual system in Tunisian Arabic. All transitive verbs with progressive meaning must be followed by *fī*, unless the verb is already governing another preposition (in which case *fī* may be used but may also be omitted.) The intransitive marker *qāʿīd* may be omitted, but the use of *qāʿīd* without *fī* for transitive verbs is ungrammatical.

Lexical aspect affects the form the progressive takes. The active participle is frequently used with progressive meaning as well, but in complementary distribution with the other progressive constructions. That is, verbs that commonly appear in AP form (generally stative and motion verbs) are unlikely to appear in other progressive forms, and vice versa. The form the progressive aspect takes (including the extent to which *qāʿīd* is optionally expressed) is likely related to the lexical aspect of the verb phrase.

Nominal negation in verbal sentences also serves as a marker for the progressive aspect. The presence of aspectual *fī* causes the verb to take nominal negation, rather than the expected verbal negation. Nominal negation is also used with progressive sentences that are *not* explicitly marked (i.e., because they are intransitive and *qāʿīd* is not being expressed, or because the verb governs another preposition that discourages the addition of *fī*). In this way, the use of nominal negation with verbal sentences is itself a marker of the progressive aspect.

We have also covered several topics that hint at the origins of the *fī* construction:

Locative prepositions like *fī* are common sources for progressive grammatical markers cross-linguistically. The use of a locative element (like *fī* and *qāʿīd*) is almost universal among languages that mark the progressive aspect, and many languages specifically use prepositions meaning *in* or *at* as progressive markers. This means that the prepositional usages of *fī* as a designator of location and activity (with the concomitant temporal implications) provide a natural explanation for its development into a progressive marker. So, although this structure is unusual among Arabic varieties, it is not at all unusual among human languages.

Qāʿīd likely predates *fī* as an aspectual marker. The strange negative construction that progressive *fī* requires suggests that the use of *fī* as a progressive marker developed after the use of *qāʿīd*. The fact that *qāʿīd* has undergone grammaticalization to a greater extent, and may no longer be perceived as an active participle, also supports this theory of *qāʿīd* as the older progressive marker, with *fī* as a later development.

Many important questions on this topic remain, particularly as relates to lexical aspect and its effect on the progressive in Tunisian. The biggest remaining question, however, is how this feature compares and relates to the sparsely documented aspectual uses of *fī* in other varieties of Arabic. I very much hope that the other dialects' use of *fī* will be more fully described, so that this current work may form part of a complete picture of the aspectual function of *fī* in spoken Arabic.

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