

“feš taqra?” What are you reading? Prepositional objects in Tunisian Arabic

In this talk I will discuss movement patterns, distribution and some selectional properties of the two inflected paradigms of Tunisian Arabic: perfective and imperfective. Perfective predicates are finite forms, always undergo movement to negation and are able to select any type of direct object, be it a bare noun or a definite description, see (1):

- 1) a. Səmi klɛ (əl)-kosksi
Semi eat.perf the-couscous
Semi ate (the) couscous
- b. Səmi ma-klɛ-š (əl)-kosksi
Semi eat.perf couscous
Semi ate couscous

Imperfective predicates acts less as a unified class: in some contexts they present the same movement pattern as the perfective ones (2), while in other cases they do not undergo movement to negation showing a behavior that reminds this of non-finite verb forms (3):

- 2) a. Səmi yəkl kosksi
Semi eat.imp couscous
Semi eats couscous
Intended meaning ‘*Semi usually eats couscous*’
 - b. Səmi, ma-yəkl-š kosksi
Semi neg.eat.imp.neg couscous
Semi does not eats couscous
Intended meaning ‘*Semi doesn’t usually eat couscous*’
- 3) a. Səmi yəkl **fi**-l-kosksi
Semi eat.imp fi-the-couscous
Semi eats fi the couscous
Intended meaning ‘*Semi is eating the couscous*’
 - b. Səmi ma-hu-š yəkl **fi**-l-kosksi
Semi eat.imp fi-the-couscous
Semi eats fi the couscous
Intended meaning ‘*Semi is not eating the couscous*’

The examples above illustrate that there are more pieces to the puzzle and that the absence/presence of verb movement to negation also correlates with both the presence/absence of an additional structural layer headed by the preposition “fi” above the direct object and the alternation between the episodic and the generic reading of the sentence.

In this presentation I will discuss the details of the paradigm illustrated above; I will explain how the verb form interacts with the selection of the direct object and put forward an account of the facts centered on the idea that this variety of Arabic allows for hidden periphrastic verbal

constructions.