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The Use of Progressive Aspect in Two Varieties of Swiss German

Abstract The present study explores the use of the progressive *am*-periphrasis in Swiss High German and in the Bernese dialect, since the progressive form is considered particularly vital in both Swiss High German and Swiss German dialects. Based on a scene description task, data were collected at a Bernese high school, allowing to determine differences in the frequency of use of the *am*-periphrasis. Furthermore, it is analyzed which semantic attractors of the items used in the video affect the selection of the *am*-periphrasis. Another analysis concerns the verbal representation of the events (macro- or micro-event) in order to highlight connections between the selection of form and temporal conceptualization. The argument structure of the verbs used was also considered to identify differences with regard to the incorporation of direct objects.

Keywords progressive aspect; Swiss German; conceptualization of events.

Introduction

All natural languages can express that an event being referred to is "ongoing at a reference time" (Bybee et al., 1994, p. 126), regardless of whether they have grammatical or lexical means to convey a progressive view of the event.[1] German, as well as the Swiss German dialects, dispose of the verbal periphrasis *am* + infinitive + *sein* (henceforth *am*-periphrasis), which expresses if *sein* is anchored in present tense, that an event is anchored in the *here and now* and can be assumed to continue in the immediate future (Bertinetto, 1986).

Longstanding typological studies have shown (Dahl, 1985; Bybee et al., 1994) that the development of means to express progression can follow a

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1   The present study was planned and carried out in honor of Christiane von Stutterheim. When I moved to Bern, she inquired about the use of the *am*-periphrasis in German-speaking Switzerland. After many years of providing subjective information, this study may better satisfy her interest in this field.

number of paths. In this context, *obligatorization* proves to be an important parameter in the study of processes leading to the grammaticalization of the relevant forms of expression (Bybee & Dahl, 1989; Lehmann, 2015). This makes Swiss High German and Swiss German dialects, the languages in question, an interesting and relevant object of continued research[2] since the use of verbal periphrases to indicate progression is not yet mandatory and does not exclude, for example, a habitual or generic reading.[3]

In Standard German, as well as in Swiss German dialects, the verbal *am*-periphrasis expresses progressivity, but use is not obligatory. Since Swiss German dialects differ significantly from Standard German with respect to the frequency of use of progressive forms (Flick & Kuhmichel, 2013), a systematic comparison of the contexts of use for both varieties is relevant. In the present pilot study, which has been carried out in Bern/Switzerland, focus is placed on the specific forms that the study participants use spontaneously when describing ongoing events presented in short video scenes (see details in chapter 3). Given the specific range of events, the study participants' choice of expression provides information on relevant features of the progressive form compared to its counterpart (verb in the present indicative) which is underspecified in this respect. The first question that emerges is thus:

Are there differences with regard to both the frequency as well as the contexts of use for the *am*-periphrasis in the Swiss German dialect (here and henceforth Bernese) compared to Standard German (in this case, Swiss High German)?

Another question concerns semantic attractors that may influence the selection of the *am*-periphrasis. The semantics of progressive verbal periphrases can be determined in terms of their aspectual function, which can change in the course of grammaticalization (e.g., from locativity over durativity to progressivity, cf. Comrie, 1976; Bybee & Dahl, 1989; Bybee et al., 1994; Bertinetto et al., 2000; Killie, 2008). Functional development is closely connected to compatibility with different verb types. This can vary depending on the degree of grammaticalization. Thus, at the beginning of the grammaticalization process (Bybee et al., 1994), activity verbs increasingly occur in constructions that, in the sense of Vendler (1967), describe a dynamic, durative, or atelic situation. In the course of grammaticalization, the semantic radius expands and allows

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2   If use is not obligatory, a change in compatibility with verb classes (for example, the extension to static verbs) or shifting functions (for example, durative or focalizing, cf. Bertinetto, 2000) takes place.

3   This is the case in English, for example, where, with a few exceptions, use of progressive aspect is obligatory in certain contexts, cf. Mair, 2012).

for combination with telic verbs. At an advanced stage of grammaticalization, static verbs can also combine with progressive constructions, but this also marks the transition from progressivity to pure imperfection (Bybee et al., 1994). The property of progressive aspect in defocusing the boundaries of an event promotes its occurrence with activity verbs where the absence of an intrinsic boundary is a typical feature (Ramat, 1995, pp. 44–45; Sasse, 2002, p. 206). The semantic compatibility of activities with the *am*-periphrasis, or the existing affinity between the *am*-periphrasis and activity verbs, has been investigated in "corpus-linguistic" studies. Flick and Kuhmichel (2013), for example, could demonstrate for press language in German that the compatibility of the *am*-periphrasis and activity verbs is the highest. Kempf (2023) also found for Swiss German that the preference for activity verbs is most pronounced in the Swiss SMS corpus. The question that therefore arises is:

Are there potential differences regarding the event type that may affect the selection of the *am*-periphrasis?

Another question is linked to the verbal representation of the events. In the present study, dynamic events in progress were used in the form of video clips in order to quantify the choice of progressive constructions and to determine frequency of use with respect to specific situation types. In addition to these quantitative and semantic questions, the present framework can also be used to provide insights into language-specific patterns in event conceptualization. The way an event is conceptualized (cf. Levelt, 1989, 1999) reveals patterns with regard to the selection of information, its decomposition and linearization (cf. von Stutterheim & Nüse, 2003). Various comparative language studies have shown (cf. Carroll & von Stutterheim, 2010; von Stutterheim et al., 2017) that there is a link between language-specific categories which are grammaticalized and specific patterns in the conceptualization of events. One grammatical factor that has been shown to be crucial in this regard is the presence of the grammatical feature "progressive aspect" as encoded on the verb (Carroll & Lambert, 2003; 2006; von Stutterheim & Lambert, 2005; Carroll et al., 2008; Natale, 2018). Dynamic events can show different levels of granularity in their verbal representation, as expressed via verb semantic categories. An everyday scene shown in an experiment in which a child catches and throws a ball can be represented in its entirety, for example, by the utterance "A child is playing with a ball". A holistic mode of representation of this kind, which conceptualizes an event as a macro-event, can be contrasted with representations that relate to its micro-events, as in the example sentence "The child catches the ball and then throws it away again". A study by Carroll and von Stutterheim (2010) showed how German and English differ with respect to event representation. One relevant factor

can be attributed to the presence of the -ing form, which represents an event as ongoing, in contrast to the simple tense (*She is playing tennis* versus *She plays tennis*). The question that therefore arises is:

How do informants represent the events verbally?

1   The *am*-periphrasis in German and Swiss German

The relevant means to express progression in both Standard German and Swiss German dialects is the *am*-periphrasis. The *am*-periphrasis in Standard and Swiss is structured as follows: *am* + infinitive + *sein* (*Er ist am Arbeiten*).

The *am*-periphrasis represents an event as "in progress" or as "not completed" (Flick & Kuhmichel, 2013). The aspectual distinction underlying this function is considered a special category of the imperfective aspect. In Klein's (1994) terminology, the progressive aspect is characterized by the fact that the assertion time, or topic time (TT), i.e., the period of time about which an assertion is made in the predication, is contained within the situation time (TSit), the period of time for which a situation holds. The often-cited viewpoint that the imperfective aspect presents an event partially, or from the "inside" (cf. Comrie, 1976; Bertinetto, 1986), is plausible with the inclusion of TT in TSit.

In the research literature on German, the *am*-periphrasis has received increasing attention in recent years (cf. Ebert, 1996; Krause, 1997 and 2002; Glück, 2001; Flick & Kumichel, 2013; Gárgyán, 2014; Ferraresi, 2017). A detailed description of the increasing grammaticalization of the form as mentioned in the literature (as on its way to becoming "a grammatical sign", cf. Kempf, 2023, p. 3) will be omitted here. Reference is made to Kempf (2023), who traces the status of the progressive *am*-periphrasis in Swiss German diachronically and analyses its status in the Swiss German verbal system on the basis of various data sets. The relevant features in the context of the present study are as follows:

The *am*-periphrasis is not obligatory and is, therefore, (still) optional with regard to the parameter of obligatoriness, which is relevant for grammaticalization (cf. Lehmann, 1995 and 2005). The *am*-periphrasis has two regional core areas, which are located both in the Rhineland-Westphalia region (Brons-Albert, 1984; Ramelli, 2015a and 2015b) as well as in German-speaking Switzerland (cf. van Pottelberge, 2004; Ebert, 2000; Flick & Kuhmichel, 2013). The descriptions of the *am*-periphrasis available so far mainly refer to newspaper texts (cf. Flick, 2016), corpora of written (van Pottelberge, 2004) as well as spoken language (cf. Krause, 2002) or questionnaires (Reimann, 1997; Kempf, 2023).

2   Method

2.1   General remarks

In order to provide an answer to the research questions in section 1, we will draw on a well-established empirical method that originated in Christiane von Stutterheim's DFG-project "Konzeptualisierung und einzelsprachliches Wissen in der Sprachproduktion"[4]. This has been applied in a number of cross-linguistic studies on the use of forms to express viewpoint aspect (cf. von Stutterheim & Nüse, 2003; Carroll et al., 2008; Natale, 2009; Flecken, 2011).

The experiment is based on 30 short video clips that depict a range of situations with different properties (see 2.2 for a detailed description of the items). Given this experimental approach, control variables can be determined that can reveal the role of semantic properties depicted in the video clips with the selection of a viewpoint "event is in progression" and the corresponding verbal periphrases. It is thus possible to isolate the properties that promote the use of progressive verbal periphrases. The contrastive study also benefits from this procedure, as the comparability of the data is guaranteed, and the use of the means to express the viewpoint "event in progression" in the two varieties studied can be compared on a systematic basis.

The use of this experimental design in comparing progressive verbal periphrases in Swiss High German and Bernese presents an additional approach to studies based on the analysis of corpora as well as questionnaires in translation tasks or acceptability assessments.

2.2   Design of the scene description task

The scene description task consists of 30 video clips with durations of 5 and 8 seconds in which all events are depicted as ongoing (e.g., *a person swimming in a lake* or *two men playing chess*). All the videos shown in the current study can, therefore, potentially trigger the selection of the *am*-periphrasis.

Table 1 lists the situations shown in the video and indicates to which semantic category they belong. A blank screen was shown in between each video clip. Figure 1 shows an example of a video clip.

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4   The project with the number 5381325 was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) from 1997 to 2004.

Table 1. Overview of the stimuli used

No.	Content of the scene
1.	Sandcastle: Two girls are building a sandcastle on the beach and are decorating it.
2.	Engine: A man is working on the engine of a car.
3.	Studying: A woman is sitting at a desk. She is reading and underlining something in a text.
4.	Shower: A man is standing under the shower shampooing his hair.
5.	Toothpaste: A man is applying toothpaste to his toothbrush.
6.	Playing ball: A child is in a living room and is catching a ball.
7.	Coffee: A person is standing at a coffee machine and is filling a filter with coffee.
8.	Baking: Ingredients such as butter and sugar are shown being stirred together to make a dough.
9.	Planting: Two people are planting a plant.
10.	Hairdresser: A hairdresser is applying color to someone's hair with a brush.
11.	Sprint: A person is getting ready for a sprint at the starting block.
12.	Typewriter: A man is sitting at a desk and is putting a sheet of paper into a typewriter.
13.	Formula One: A man is walking to a Formula One car and sits in the car.
14.	Watch: A woman is adjusting her fitness watch.
15.	Plane: An aircraft is landing on a runway.
16.	Pizza: A woman is eating a piece of pizza.
17.	Ironing: A man is ironing a shirt together with his son.
18.	Chess: Two men are playing chess.
19.	Key: Someone is opening a door with a key.
20.	Wine: A man is drinking a glass of wine.
21.	Bike: A man is riding a bike.
22.	Swimming: A person is swimming in the open sea.
23.	Reading: A woman is sitting in an armchair reading a book.
24.	Guitar: Hands are shown playing the guitar.
25.	Tennis: A man is playing tennis in a hall.
26.	Crocheting: Someone is crocheting.
27.	Drawing: Someone is drawing a face.
28.	Cup: Someone is making a cup out of clay.
29.	Snowman: Two children are building a snowman.
30.	Tailor: A man is pinning a dress on a bust.

Figure 1. Screenshot of video number 29 (*snowman*)

With regard to possible differences in the area of attractor effects, the clips belong to different situation types[5] which vary with regard to their semantic and temporal properties. Amongst others (which are not relevant here as they were used as fillers), causative events (such as "making a mug" or "knitting a scarf") and activities (such as *riding a bicycle* or *playing the guitar)* were distinguished.

Activities are dynamic and durative situations and are characterized by the homogeneity of their sub-events (such as the regular swimming strokes in swimming). Each individual event in the process can be representative of the whole event. Situations of this kind are also termed *atelic* in the literature (cf. Ryle, 1949; Vendler, 1967; Comrie, 1976; Smith, 1991; Sasse, 2002) because they do not have an inherent endpoint. As stated above, in the present study, activities are contrasted with causative events (for example, *building a snowman* or *pottering a mug*). Causative events, unlike activities, are characterized by having a potential intrinsic endpoint (when the mug is finished being potted), which implies a change of state. According to the terminology in Klein (1994), this provides a contrast between an initial state and a final state. Given the relationship between progressive marking and activities as established in the research literature, the following analysis investigates to what extent activities trigger higher frequencies in the use of progressive verbal periphrases.

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5   By situation types we do not mean here the temporal properties of verbs or of idealized situations associated with verbs (cf. Smith, 1991), but rather the temporal semantic properties of an extra-linguistic situation contained in the videos.

A further question deals with the semantic features of events which are closely related to aspect marking. The question arises as to which observations can be made with regard to the level of granularity in the linguistic representation of the events (cf. Carroll, Rossdeutscher, et al., 2008). Events can be represented as a whole or as a sub-event of a superordinate event. In order to investigate whether the speakers represent an event as a macro-event (as a whole) or as a micro-event (as a sub-event of a higher-level event), some situations that potentially allow both perspectives on the event have been inserted in the design for a preliminary analysis. They include *making coffee* (micro event: *someone is filling a filter with ground coffee*; macro event: *someone is making coffee*) or *learning* (micro event: *someone is reading and underlining something in a text*; macro event: *someone learning/working*).

With regard to the question of their syntactic realization, situations were chosen that allow for different representations in this respect. In scenes in which "a woman is eating a slice of pizza", different utterances such as *she eats/is eating* (unbounded event) or *she eats* (a slice) *of pizza/she is eating pizza* are conceivable. Other scenes used for the analysis of the argument structure are, for example, baking a cake (*she is baking* vs. *she is baking a cake*) or crocheting a scarf (*she is crocheting* vs. *she is crocheting a scarf*).

2.3   Overview of the informants

The scene description task was carried out with 40 native speakers of Swiss German who were randomly assigned to two groups. One carried out the scene description task in Swiss High German and one in Bernese dialect. The informants are students at a high school in Bern (Gymnasium) and were aged between 15 and 18 (28 male and 12 female).

2.4   Experimental procedure and data processing

The participants took part in the scene description task individually and were given the following instruction: "You will now see 30 short videos on the computer in which different people perform an action. This will take 5 minutes. We will now watch the video for each scene and you will be asked 'Was passiert hier?'. You do not have to mention details, like the clothes people are wearing, etc. Just say 'what happens'."

The responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the MAX QDA programme.

3   Results[6]

3.1   Quantitative analysis

3.1.1 Overview

The data analysis showed that there is a wide spectrum in the variety of forms in both Swiss High German and Bernese. An overview of the selected verb forms is listed in table 2, with an example in each case from the corpus. Differences with regard to the explicit use of the relevant forms became apparent in both data sets and are listed in the following chapter.

Table 2. Text examples from the corpus

Verbal form	Swiss High German	Bernese dialect
Present Indicative	Ein junger Mann trinkt ein Glas Weisswein (D_Vp21_Juri, Pos. 9)	E Mah trinkt Wii. (CH_Vp13_Giovanna, Pos. 9)
am-periphrasis	Jemand ist sich am Haare waschen (D_Vp31_Amina, Pos. 18)	Es isch e Person am Bache (CH_Vp16_Jan, Pos. 32)
tun + infinitive	Ein Vater mit dem Kind und die tun das Hemd bügeln (D_Vp36_Maria, Pos. 24)	E Vater tuet mit sim Sohn es Hemdli bügle (CH_Vp1_Anna, Pos. 27)
Reduplication with *gang/go*; *chum/cho*	–	Öpe- e Frou, wo im Waud geit go Jogge. (CH_Vp9_Yann, Pos. 74) öper wo gad mitemne Heum chunnt cho z loufe (CH_Vp9_Yann, Pos. 43)
Dabei sein	Man sieht eine Person beim Kraulen im See, Meer, irgendetwas (D_Vp27_Valentina, Pos. 53)	E Frou i Sportchleider isch äuä derbii z go jogge (CH_Vp1_Anna, Pos. 67)

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6   With 40 participants and 30 items, the sample does not allow a statistically relevant analysis. The following results should therefore be treated as trends.

Table 2. (*continued*)

Verbal form	Swiss High German	Bernese dialect
Periphrasis with *gehen*	Ich sehe eine Person, die jetzt dann wahrscheinlich Sprinten oder Joggen geht (D_Vp22_Luana, Pos. 14–15)	–
Present participles	Startendes Flugzüg (CH_Vp2_Livia, Pos. 63)	–
Infinitive	Wahrscheinlich in einer Autowerkstatt, den Motor ausbauen, Oder reparieren (D_Vp28_Emma, Pos. 9–10)	Schribmaschine schribe… äuä amne Text (CH_Vp2_Livia, Pos. 19)
Noun	Ich sehe ein Formel Eins Auto (D_Vp24_Carmen, Pos. 42)	Wahrschinlech es Usdur- oder Sprinttraining ufem rote Platz. (CH_Vp19_Timo, Pos. 13)
Future	Jemand, der sich die Zähne putzen wird (D_Vp36_Maria, Pos. 19)	–
Passive	Es wird eine Sandburg gebaut (D_Vp25_Anouk, Pos. 5)	Es wird es Gsicht zeichnet, mit Orange (CH_Vp12_Fabiana, Pos. 42)

3.1.2 Quantitative analysis in Swiss High German and Bernese

In Swiss High German the preferred form is the simple form in the present indicative (73.7 percent), as table 3 shows. This is followed at a considerably lower frequency of the *am*-periphrasis (at) 16.0 percent. The passive was used in 31 cases (5.2 percent). The remaining forms occur at low values over a broad spectrum but do not show any significant frequencies. In another study by Flecken (2011, p. 206) in which data were collected in Germany on the basis of a comparable framework, the frequency for the *am*-periphrasis in High German amounts to 1.41 percent (22/1556), showing a marked quantitative contrast to the data recorded in Switzerland.

Table 3. Overview of the chosen verb forms and their frequency
            in Swiss High German and Bernese

Verbal form	Swiss High German (n= 600)	Bernese Dialect (n= 600)
Present indicative	73.7	49.5
am-progressive	16.0	28.2
tun + infinitive	0.2	11.3
Reduplication of the type *gang/go*, *chum/cho*	0	0.8
Dabei sein	0.5	0.2
Periphrasis with *gehen*	0.3	0
Present participle	0	0.2
Infinitive	0.3	4.8
Noun	1.5	1.5
Future tense	0.7	0
Passive	5.2	1.3

As in Swiss High German, the present indicative is the preferred form in Bernese. However, there is a considerably higher value for the *am*-periphrasis, which at 28.2 percent is almost twice as high as the data for Swiss High German (16.0 percent). This was to be expected given the higher occurrences of the *am*-periphrasis in the research literature for Swiss German dialects. Likewise, the relatively frequent use of *tun*-periphrasis in Bernese is consistent with the descriptions in the literature (cf. Krause 2002; van Pottelberge, 2004). As in Swiss High German, the other forms show a low frequency. The relatively high value for infinitive constructions (4.8 percent), however, is due to the fact that one speaker produced 19 of the 26 utterances in the infinitive.

3.1.3 Temporal adverbs

The frequency of occurrence for temporal adverbs such as *jetzt* or *gerade* was evaluated for both varieties. Table 4 shows that the simple form of the present indicative is frequently combined with temporal adverbs (in 73 percent of the cases in Bernese and 86 percent in Swiss High German). This high value acts in favor of the spreading progressive verb forms as temporal adverbs produce the aspectual reading lacking in the simple form.

Table 4. Overview of the use of temporal adverbs in Swiss German
and High German in connection with chosen verb forms

	am-periphrasis	Present	*tun*-periphrasis
Bernese	24 % (27)	73 % (82)	4 % (4)
Swiss High German	14 % (8)	86 % (49)	0 % (0)

We can state that in the present scene description task in which the partici-
pants could spontaneously and freely select the verb form, the simple form
of the present indicative is preferred in both varieties. The more advanced
grammaticalization of the *am*-periphrasis in Swiss German dialects, as dis-
cussed in the research literature (cf. Kempf, 2023), is reflected in a percent-
age that is twice as high in Bernese compared to the data for Swiss High
German (28.2 percent vs. 16.0 percent). In comparison to English, however,
which is considered a prime example of a fully grammaticalized progressive,
these values show that in contexts where use would be obligatory, Bernese
is still far from a stage of grammaticalization that correlates with very high
frequencies of use. A comparison with Italian, in which the use of the pro-
gressive verbal periphrasis *stare + gerundio* is steadily increasing, shows that
the progressive verbal periphrasis *stare + gerundio* in Italian is used more
frequently.[7]

3.1.4 Individual differences

A more detailed analysis of the frequency of use shows that in both the Swiss
High German and the Bernese data, the choice of the *am*-periphrasis varies
from person to person (see table 5). Figure 2 (absolute values per participant,
potential maximum value = 30) depicts this heterogeneity by means of the
oscillating curve.

Table 5. Swiss High German group

Subjects and frequency of the *am*-periphrasis																			
01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
5	2	0	2	0	1	3	7	0	0	2	9	5	19	0	5	0	14	7	8

7   In an analogous experiment, a value of just under 42 percent is achieved in Italian
for the verbal periphrasis *stare + gerundio* (cf. Natale, 2019; Natale, 2009), showing
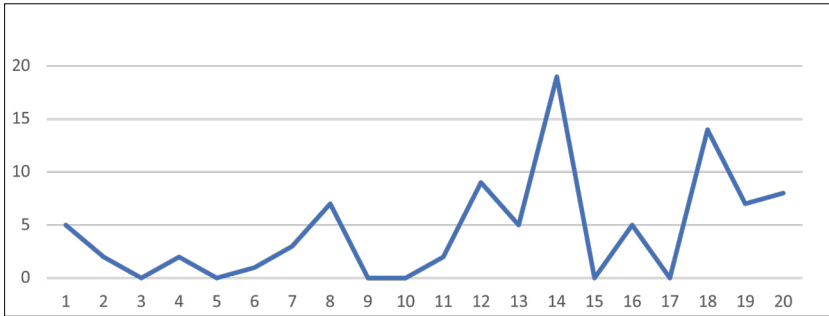a more frequent use of *stare + gerundio*.

Figure 2. Variability progressive by subject (absolute values)

When verbalizing the events shown in the video (expressed in figure 3 as a percentage), we see that one participant selects the *am*-periphrasis at a rate of 63 percent, while 6 participants do not select it at all, however. The rate for 5 participants is below 10 percent and for a further 7 it varied between 10 percent and 30 percent. One participant, however, used the *am*-periphrasis in almost half of the cases (47 percent).
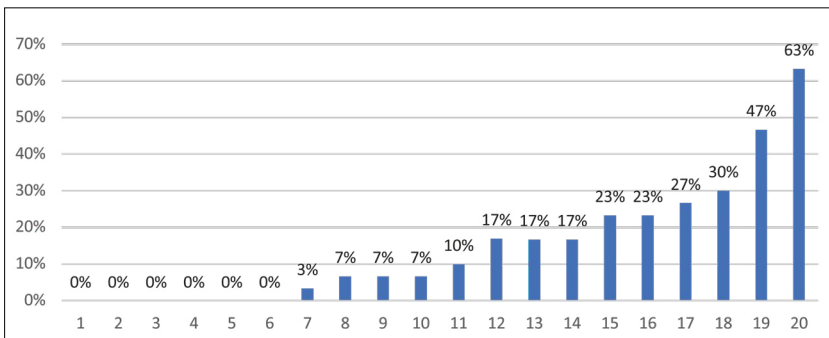

Figure 3. Individual variation group High German (%) ordered by frequency

In the Bernese data, an individual variation can also be observed (see table 6), which is also expressed in the oscillating curve of figure 4 and the ordered frequencies in figure 5.

Table 6. Test person group Bernese.

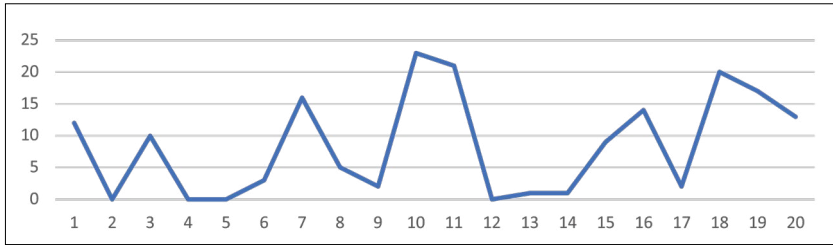| Subjects and frequency of the *am*-periphrasis																			
01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
12	0	10	0	0	3	16	5	2	23	21	0	1	1	9	14	2	20	17	13

Figure 4. Swiss German: progressive choice by subject

Corresponding to the higher frequency of the *am*-periphrasis in Bernese, the values are higher overall. However, 4 participants in this group do not use the *am*-periphrasis at all, while 3 test subjects use it relatively frequently with over 60 percent.
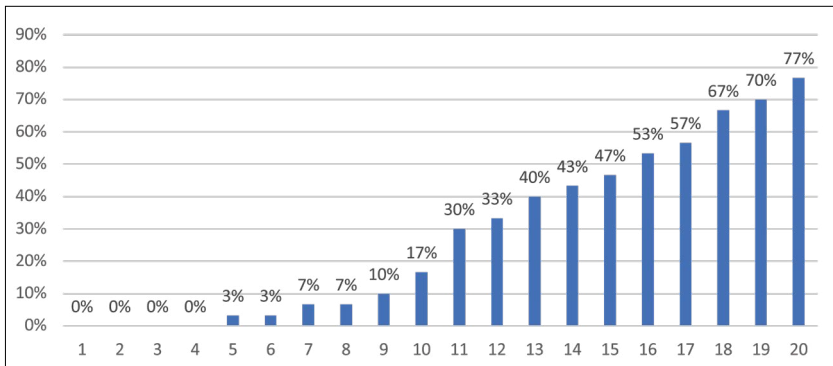

Figure 5. Swiss German: progressive choice by frequency

3.2   Semantic attractors

3.2.1 Cross-linguistic studies on factors determining use of the progressive

The use of the progressive when describing ongoing situations presented in video clips (cf. von Stutterheim & Nüse, 2003; Gerwien & von Stutterheim, 2022a; 2022b) revealed the interplay between specific semantic properties of situation types and their relevance for aspect marking. In the following, we refer to three studies which, based on this form of stimulus material, set out to investigate the factors that lead to the use of constructions that mark an event as ongoing / in progression in French (cf. Leclercq, 2008), Italian (cf. Natale, 2009; 2019) as well as Dutch and Standard German (cf. Flecken, 2011).

The languages in question, Italian, French, and Dutch, as well as Swiss High German and Bernese all have constructions which can mark an event as ongoing / in progression construction.[8] It should be stated, however, that use is not obligatory in these languages. In this sense, the constructions in question are described as emergent in the literature (cf. for Italian Bertinetto, 1990; Berretta, 1993; Strudsholm, 2004; Berruto, 2017; for French Pusch, 2003; 2005; for Dutch Flecken, 2011).

Studies by Leclercq (2008), Natale (2009), and Flecken (2011) examine, among other factors, the relationship between activities and causative events, in addition to further situation types (motion events, static situations) which are not discussed here. However, before discussing the role of the situation types in the selection of a form that expresses the meaning "*event is ongoing / in progression*", differences in the frequency of the relevant verbal periphrases should be considered, as illustrated in figure 6.

In the two Romance languages, Italian and French, there is a clear quantitative difference given the fact that in Italian the frequency of the verbal periphrasis *stare + gerundio* is almost twice as high (41.95 percent) as in French (22.10 percent). In the two Germanic languages, there is a clear difference since the frequency of use in Dutch of the relevant form *aan het + infinitive at* 27.52 percent is significantly higher compared to the *am*-periphrasis in the standard German data (1.41 percent).[9]
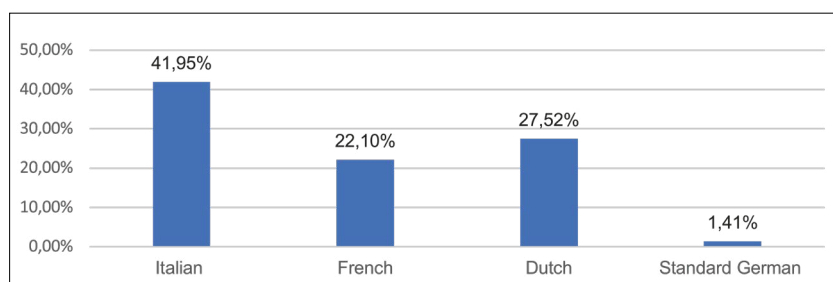

Figure 6. Use of the progressive verbal periphrasis in comparable situations

Given the contrasts in the "attraction" effect of the stimuli used (e.g., activities or causative events) it could be shown in Natale (2009; 2018) that, as in French (cf. Leclercq, 2008), compared to activities, causative events are more likely to be verbalized using progressive verbal periphrases. In Natale (2009), it is argued that the temporal contrast between the different states of an event, as

8   In Italian the verbal periphrasis is *stare + gerundio*; in French *aller + infinitive* and in Dutch *aan het + infinitive*.
9   On the data recorded in Germany (Heidelberg) see chapter 3.1.2.

expressed by causatives, forms a core concept of progression and therefore evokes a higher use of progressive constructions in the initial stages of development. The lack of substantial results in activities, which, on the other hand, is inherent to causative events, correlates with a lower use of *stare + gerundio*. In Dutch, on the other hand, both activities (event is ongoing), as well as causative events, attract the use of the periphrasis *aan het* + infinitive *to the* same extent, thus indicating no preference in this respect.

3.2.2 Attractors in Swiss High German and Bernese

In the present stimulus material, the affinity between progressivity and activity verbs was tested via semantic attractors by varying a set of different situation types. Now we come back to the results.
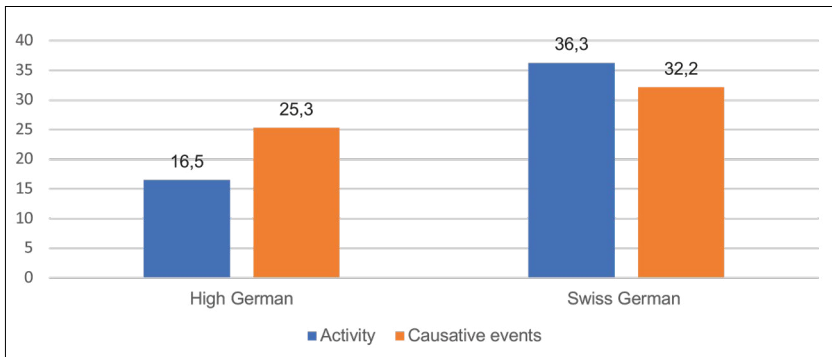

Figure 7. Activities and causative events in Swiss High German and Bernese

Figure 7 shows that the Swiss High German data differ from the Bernese data with regard to the rate of attraction of the situation types. While the Swiss High German data show higher use of the *am*-periphrasis with causative events compared to activities (25.3 percent in contrast to 16.5 percent for activities), the Bernese data does not show a clear preference. The difference in the use of the *am*-periphrasis between activities at 36.3 percent compared to 32.2 percent for causative events is minimal. The preference observed in Swiss High German and the two Romance languages is not evident in Bernese. The data for Bernese reflect a tendency that has also been observed in Dutch, as mentioned above (Flecken, 2011; Behrens et al., 2013). The fact that situations with a change in state (causative events) as well as situations without a change in state change (activities) both trigger a high use of progressive constructions was attributed for Dutch to the role of homogeneity for the represented events. This factor was present in both situation types. Whether this affinity is also present in Bernese would have to be re-examined

in a subsequent study with a more refined design. It should be noted at this point that the Swiss High German and Bernese data differ with regard to the effect of the situation types and may therefore have taken different paths in the process of grammaticalization.

The question of why Swiss High German shows, like Romance languages, a preference for causative events while Bernese does not may be answered with a sensitivity to homogeneity that goes hand in hand with a different level of grammaticalization.

3.3   Verbal representation of the events

In the present study, six items were examined in a first step in the analysis with regard to their verbal representation. The items were chosen as they allow for either a representation as macro- or as micro-event. Are there preferences with regard to the representation of an event as a macro- or micro-event? The overview in table 7 illustrates the depicted scenes in more detail and, using examples from the corpus, the linguistic means that were selected in response to the specific scene.

Table 7. Examples of event representation in Swiss High German

Item	Description	Macro-event	Micro-event
Studying	A woman is sitting at a desk. Reads a text, underlines and turns the page.	Ich sehe eine Frau, welche am Lernen ist (D_Vp24_Carmen, Pos. 20)	Eine Frau beugt sich über einen Ordner Und schreibt etwas auf auf ein Blatt. (D_Vp37_Miriam, Pos. 15–16)
Shower	A man in the shower and shampooing his hair.	Ein Mann ist am Duschen, (D_Vp33_Laura, Pos. 20)	Ein Mann, der sich die Haare wäscht, Oder einschamponiert, unter der Dusche. (D_Vp32_Janina, Pos. 18–19)
Playing ball	A child stands in the living room, catches a ball and throws it away.	Ein kleiner Junge, der Torwart spielt. (D_Vp28_Emma, Pos. 29)	Ein Kind versucht, einen Ball zu fangen. (D_Vp27_Valentina, Pos. 30)
Making coffee	A man stands at a coffee machine and fills the hand sieve with ground coffee.	Ich sehe eine Person, die Kaffee macht. (D_Vp30_Angela, Pos. 35–36)	Kaffeepulver wird zusammengedrückt und dann in die Kaffeemaschine … (D_Vp35_Hanna, Pos. 38)

Table 7. (*continued*)

Item	Description	Macro-event	Micro-event
Baking	Ingredients such as butter, sugar and flour are shown being mixed together.	Hier ist jemand am Backen (D_Vp26_Angela, Pos. 35)	Jemand, der gerade Zutaten zusammen-mischt. (D_Vp36_Maria, Pos. 30)
Tailor	A man stands in front of a dress bust and pins a dress.	Ein Designer, der seine Kleidung näht. (D_Vp28_ Emma, Pos. 69)	Jemand steckt Nadeln in eine Puppe, ja. (D_ Vp29_Saphira, Pos. 68)

The second step in the analysis asked to what extent the degree of granularity (macro-event vs. micro-event), as expressed in the verb, goes hand in hand with the presence of an aspectual distinction.

3.3.1 Representation as macro-events or as micro-events

Both Swiss High German and Bernese show a preference for representing the selected items as macro-events (67 percent for macro-events compared to 33 percent for micro-events in Bernese; in Swiss High German the preference for macro-events is more pronounced with 74 percent compared to 26 percent micro-events [see table 8]).

Table 8. Overview of macro and micro events in Swiss High German and Bernese

	Macro-event	Micro-event
Bernese (n= 86)	67 % (58)	33 % (28)
Swiss High German (n= 105)	74 % (78)	26 % (27)

While at first sight there is no marked difference between the two varieties with respect to macro- and micro-events, figure 8 shows that in Bernese macro-events are coded more often with the simple form of the present indicative (53.4 percent) than with the *am*-periphrasis, although it nevertheless shows a relatively high value at 46.6 percent. In Swiss High German, on the other hand, there is a clear preference to code macro-events using the simple form of the present indicative.
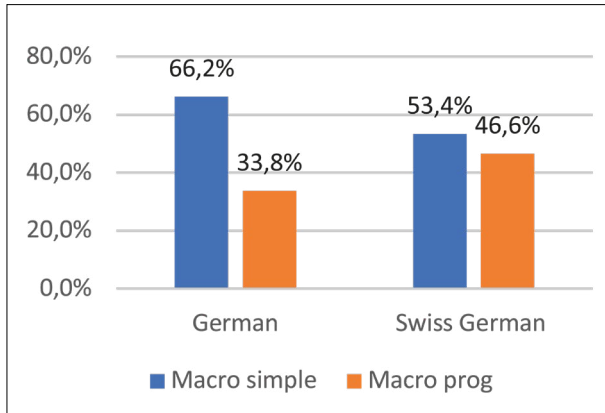
Figure 8. Macro-event and *am*-periphrasis in Bernese
and Swiss High German

Given the representation of the event at a low level of detail (see figure 9), the *am*-periphrasis is used less frequently in both varieties, although in Swiss High German the contrast between the simple form (89.2 percent) and the *am*-periphrasis (10.8 percent) is more marked than in Bernese (67.9 percent simple form present indicative versus 32.1 percent *am*-periphrasis). The fact that the affinity toward the *am*-periphrasis is higher for macro-events than micro-events in both varieties may be explained by its property in defocusing (Langacker, 2000) or fading out (Ebert, 1996) event boundaries.
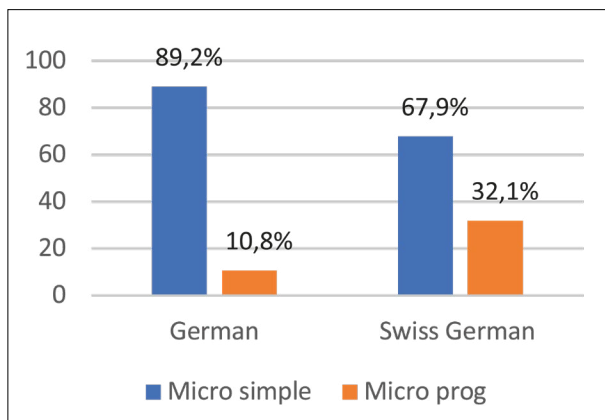

Figure 9. Event representation in Swiss High German

The analysis of the chosen levels of representation represents only one factor in the field of temporal conceptualization. In the next step, we will examine whether the preference for the macro-level of representation with the defocusing of boundaries is also reflected in the syntactic realization.

3.3.2 Syntactic realization

In the analysis of the syntactic realization five items (*crocheting, baking, dressmaking, painting, making a mug*) were selected. These items allow the naming of an object, but the naming of the object is not indispensable, as for example in the case of the item *crochet*. The statement *someone is crocheting* could be just as acceptable as *someone is crocheting a scarf.* The present analysis looks (i) at the frequency with which direct objects are mentioned and (ii) how the objects are syntactically embedded. In both German and Swiss German dialects the syntactic embedding allows conclusions to be drawn on the degree of grammaticalization for the use, for example, of the *am*-periphrasis with direct objects (cf. also Kempf, 2023, and Ramelli, 2015b). In three of the five items, the effected object must be inferred because it is not visible in the scene. This may affect the mention of the syntactic object with use of a definite article or not.

1) To crochet (x)
2) To bake (x)
3) To dressmake (x)

The effected object is clearly visible in two items:

1) Painting a picture
2) Making a mug

The evaluation was confined to the statements in which the verb occurs and thus allows mention of a direct object (bivalent verbs). This means that the first statement of the informant was evaluated in each case but not the subsequent utterances. For example, if a speaker responds to the scene with *Someone is baking. Maybe a cake is being made*, the unit analyzed was confined to the first utterance as this can be considered more relevant with respect to the overall conceptualization of the event.

Even though the data set is limited, we can nevertheless observe a relevant tendency as indicated in table 9: Objects are mentioned, albeit with a slightly higher frequency in the data for Swiss High German compared to the Bernese data (57 percent in High German versus 42 percent in Swiss High German).

Table 9. Frequency of direct objects in comparison

	Object mentioned	Object not named
Swiss High German	51/89 = 57 %	38/89 = 43 %
Bernese	37/88 = 42 %	51/88 = 58 %

Use of the progressive is accompanied by a lower frequency in the mention of direct objects. The relevant feature of progressive in the present context (event is encoded as *ongoing*), which may also defocus the boundaries of an event, is accompanied by a lower frequency in the mention of direct objects as shown by the following results: In both varieties, the *am*-periphrasis is more likely to be used when the direct object is not mentioned.

When a direct object is mentioned in the data for High German, the frequency of use of the *am*-periphrasis is 22.2 percent. If the direct object is not mentioned, the frequency of the *am*-periphrasis increases to 77.8 percent. This corresponds to the situation in Swiss German. If a direct object is mentioned the occurrence of the *am*-periphrasis is 21.6 percent. If it is not mentioned, the frequency increases to 78.4 percent. In both varieties, there is therefore a very clear tendency for the naming of the direct object to be accompanied by a reduction in the use of progressive constructions.

With regard to the syntactic embedding, we see for the scene description task that reference to the direct object varied as shown in table 10 with examples from the corpus.

Table 10. Overview of the realization of the direct objects

|	Swiss High German	Bernese
"something / etwas"	Eine Frau, die etwas strickt, etwas Graues. (D_Vp23_Luana, Pos. 47)	Me gseht Häng wo öpis töpfere (CH_Vp12_Fabiana, Pos. 61)
Indefinit Sg.	Ich sehe eine Schüssel und eine Person, die einen Kuchen oder so etwas ähnliches backt. (D_Vp24_Carmen, Pos. 39–40)	Es wird es Gsicht zeichnet, mit Orange, (CH_Vp12_Fabiana, Pos. 42)
Plural without articles	Ich sehe einen Mann, der Kleider näht. (D_Vp30_Angela, Pos. 89)	E Person backt Güezi (CH_Vp13_Giovanna, Pos. 27)
Possessive	Ein Designer, der seine Kleidung näht. (D_Vp28_Angela, Pos. 65)	–
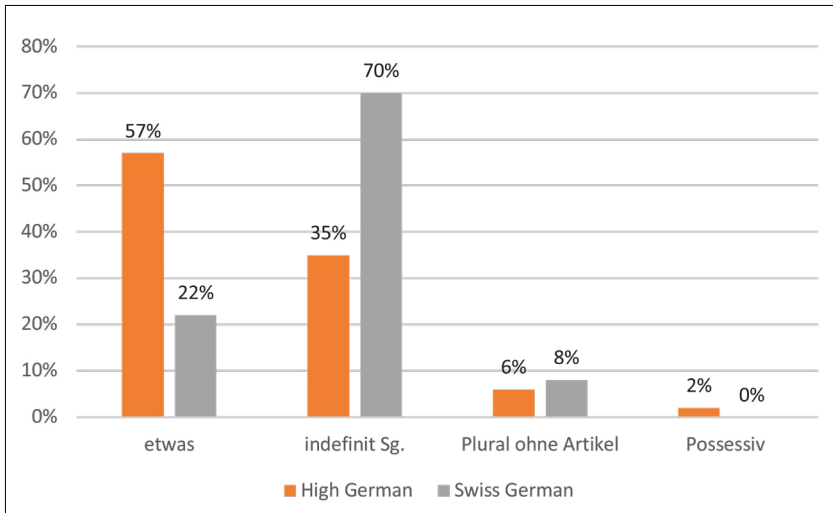
Figure 10. Syntactic embedding of the direct object in language comparison

Figure 10 shows that in the two varieties, integration via "etwas / something" and an indefinite nominal phrase are the preferred options, but other means can also be observed. In the data for Swiss High German, the expression of the direct object via "something" predominates (in 57 percent), while in Bernese the indefinite nominal phrase occurs at a rate of 70 percent.

4   Summary and outlook

The results obtained in this pilot study indicate the following trends that need to be followed up: Swiss High German and Bernese differ with respect to the frequency of the *am*-periphrasis, which is higher in the Bernese dialect than in the standard variety. An individual variation emerges in both varieties, showing that the use of the *am*-periphrasis is not evenly distributed. It is the preferred form for some speakers, while others hardly ever choose it. In the case of semantic attractor effects, it was found that Swiss High German, like the Romance languages used for comparison, shows a preference to explicitly mark progression for causative events, while Bernese, like Dutch, shows no differences between activities and causative events. With respect to verbal representation, it became clear that both varieties prefer to represent events as macro-events. In Bernese, micro-events can be realized significantly more often with the *am*-periphrasis. In both varieties, the absence of an expressed object correlates with a higher use of the *am*-periphrasis which may indicate that the progressive is more often used with an activity interpretation. This

small study has illustrated that the two varieties used by the students, Swiss High German and Bernese, produce differences in form choice to some extent (more progressive in dialect), which at the same time entails differences in the representation of events (more progressive in micro-events in Bernese).

In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the *am*-periphrasis in German, it is planned to record data in Germany with the same stimulus material in order to explore the fine-grained differences between High German and Swiss High German on the morphosyntactic level, which have hardly been investigated so far. Recordings in Austria would also be useful to contribute to the question of the pluricentricity of German (cf. Auer, 2014) starting from progressive aspect marking. In the field of areal variation, we plan to investigate the choice of the *am*-periphrasis on the basis of the 125 survey localities of the new German language atlas SDATS (Swiss German Dialects across Time and Space) (cf. Leemann et al., in prep.). Should areal condensations in the use of the *am*-periphrasis come to light, targeted investigations would be profitable.

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