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ASPECT IN PERFORMATIVE CONTEXTS ACROSS LANGUAGES

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1. *Introduction*
2. Hypothesis and research questions
3. Method
4. Results and discussion
5. Conclusion

1. Introduction: A first glance at the aspectual characteristics of performatives

- Performative utterances are special in that they involve illocutionary acts that can be performed simply "by uttering a sentence containing an expression that names the type of speech act" (Searle 1989: 536) (e.g. *I promise*, *I hereby cancel the meeting*).

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1. Introduction: A first glance at the aspectual characteristics of performatives

- Performative utterances are special in that they involve illocutionary acts that can be performed simply "by uttering a sentence containing an expression that names the type of speech act" (Searle 1989: 536) (e.g. *I promise*, *I hereby cancel the meeting*).

- Most work on performatives concentrates on English (e.g. Austin 1962; Searle 1989, among many others).

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1. Introduction: A first glance at the aspectual characteristics of performatives

→ Unlike most reports of events ongoing at the time of speaking in English, performative utterances make use of the simple present rather than the present progressive:

- Cf. *I **promise** to come*; *I **order** you to leave*; *I **beg** you for forgiveness.*

  versus **I **walk** home right now*; **Be quiet, I **sleep**.*

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1. Introduction: A first glance at the aspectual characteristics of performatives

- Performative utterances analyzed as involving **perfective** aspect marking in English (by, e.g., Brinton (1988), Smith (1997: 110-112, 185-186), Williams (2002: 128-166) and De Wit (2017)).

→ They involve events that can be viewed in their entirety at the time of speaking.

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→ They involve events that can be viewed in their entirety at the time of speaking.

→ Assuming that performatives have the same special status across languages, one might predict that, in other languages too, performative utterances systematically select perfective rather than imperfective (progressive) aspect.

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1. Introduction: A first glance at the aspectual characteristics of performatives

BUT: In Slavic languages, performatives most frequently select **imperfective** aspect (cf. e.g. Dickey 2000), and in this respect they behave just like any other present-tense utterance in Slavic.

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1. Introduction: A first glance at the aspectual characteristics of performatives

BUT: In Slavic languages, performatives most frequently select **imperfective** aspect (cf. e.g. Dickey 2000), and in this respect they behave just like any other present-tense utterance in Slavic.

→Starting point: What are the aspectual characteristics of performatives in a cross-linguistic sample of languages?

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- There's not one single type of aspect that is dedicated to being used in performative contexts across languages.

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- There's not one single type of aspect that is dedicated to being used in performative contexts across languages.
- Instead, assuming that aspectual constructions (also) have an epistemic meaning, we hypothesize the following generalization:

In performative contexts, languages prefer the aspectual construction that is generally used to report situations that are fully and instantly identifiable at the time of speaking as an instance of a certain situation type.

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- Most present-time situations are **not** fully and instantly identifiable

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- Most present-time situations are **not** fully and instantly identifiable

- More specifically, most present-time **events** are not fully and instantly identifiable: cf. Langacker (2001) on the epistemic and durational problems involved in present-time event reports

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- Most present-time situations are **not** fully and instantly identifiable

→ Exceptions:

- *Stative situations*
- *Habitual and generic events*
- *Live sports commentaries*
- *Demonstrations*
- *Narratives*
- *Instructions*
- AND *performatives*

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- Most present-time situations are **not** fully and instantly identifiable

→ Exceptions:

- *Stative situations*
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- *Live sports commentaries*
- *Demonstrations*
- *Narratives*
- *Instructions*
- AND *performatives*

→ Same aspectual cxn for each of these contexts.

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- If performatives systematically select the aspectual cxn used for fully and instantly identifiable events, this implies that they will not feature progressive aspect.

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

- If performatives systematically select the aspectual cxn used for fully and instantly identifiable events, this implies that they will not feature progressive aspect.

- As shown in, a.o., Güldemann (2003), De Wit & Patard (2013), De Wit & Brisard (2014), Anthonissen et al. (2016; submitted), various languages use the progressive to express situations that have an epistemically *contingent* (i.e. non-structural) status within the speaker's conception of reality at a given reference time → cf. our talk *The Epistemic Meaning of the Progressive*

→ Situations reported by means of a progressive are situations that are perceived as random/non-predictable and thus not representative of the structure of the world.

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→ Situations reported by means of a progressive are situations that are perceived as random/non-predictable and thus not representative of the structure of the world.

<> (General) imperfective aspect, which can be used in stative contexts.

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2. Hypothesis and research questions

Two research questions:

- **RQ1:** Do we indeed find that, cross-linguistically, performative utterances feature the same aspectual construction as is used for the expression of other fully and instantly identifiable situations? → Epistemic clustering?

- **RQ2:** Is it true that performative utterances never feature progressive aspect?

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3. Methodology: Native speaker elicitations and multidimensional scaling

- Native speaker elicitations and consultation of existing analyses for 16 languages: Modern Standard Arabic, Kilivila, Japanese, Farsi, English, Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, Lingala, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Russian, Czech, Catalan, Icelandic, Kirundi, Hindi and Turkish.

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- Questionnaire - method Dahl (1985), e.g.:
  - Item 3: *My brother [TO KNOW]* (present) *that she [TO LOVE] him* (present).
  - Item 19: [soldier to general:] *I [TO BEG] you to let me go*.

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- Questionnaire consists of 3 parts:
  - *Part 1*: Identification of basic tense/aspect categories (e.g. present stative, present ongoing atelic, past perfective).
  - *Part 2*: Contexts involving all fully and instantly identifiable situations apart from performatives (e.g. sports commentaries, demonstrations etc).
  - *Part 3*: Performative events: different types of performative, according to classification Searle (1989).

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- Questionnaire data: a sample

B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Arabic	**Japanese**	**Kilivala**	**Lingala**	**Kirundi**	**Farsi**	**Hindi**
Current ongoing atelic (prog)	a1	j1	kil1	l1	k1	f1 or f2	h1
Current ongoing telic (prog)	a1	j1	kil1	l1	k1	f1 or f2	h1
Current ongoing atelic (prog)	a1/a3	j1	kil1	l1	k1	f1 or f2	h1
Present stative copula	no verb	no verb	no verb	l2	k2	f1	h2
Present stative	a1	j1 / j1	kil1/kil1	l2 / l2	k3/k8	f1 / f1	h2/h2 (but see questi
Past perfective (sequence)	a2 / a2	j4 / j2	kil2 / kil2	l3 / l3	k4/k3	f3 / f3	h3 / h3
Future perfective (sequence)	a1 or a4 / a1	j4 j3 / j3 (t5)	kil3	l4 / l4	k5/k6	f1 or f4 / f	h4 / h5
Recipes	a1/a6	j3	kil1	l2 / l2	k3	f1	h6
Stage directions atelic	a1	j3	kil3	l2	k3	f1	h6
Stage directions telic sequence	a1	j3	kil1	l2 / l2	k3/k3	f1	h6/h6
Demonstrations	a1	j3	kil1	l2/l2	k3/k7	f1	h6/h6
Instructions (specific right now)	a6	j3	kil1	l2/l2	k3/k7	f1	h6/h6
Instructions (more general)	a1/a6	j3	kil1	l4 / l1	k6/k3	f1/f1	h6
Sports commentaries single	a1	j2	kil1	l2	k9	f1	h3
Sports commentaries sequence	a1 / a1 /a1	j4 / j4 / j2	kil1/kil1/kil1	l2/l2/l2	k9/k9/k9	f1/f1/f1	h3 / h3 / h3
Generic	a1	j3	kil1 or (kil4)	l5	k3	f1	h8
Frequentative	a1	j3	kil1 or (kil4)	l5 / l5	k9b/k3/k9b	f1	h6 / h2
Habitual	a1	j3	kil1	l5	k3	f1	h8
Meta-comment presentation	a1	j3	kil3	l1 or l2	k9	f1	h6
Performative representative	a1/a1 a5	j3 (j5) / j3	non-verbal expression / k	l2/l4	k9/k5	f1/f1	h6
Non-performative representative	a1 / a4 a1 /a1 / a4 a	j1 / j3 / j1 / j3	kil1 / kil3 /kil1 / kil3	l1 or l2 / l4 / l2 / l4	k9/k5/k9/k5	f1/f1/f1/f	h1 / h1
Performative directive authority	a1	j3	kil1	l2	k9	f1	h6
Non-performative directive	a1	j1	kil1	l1 or l2	k1	f2	h6
Performative directive no authority	a1	j3	kil1	l1 or l2	k9	f1	h6
Performative commissive	a1	j3(do promise)	kil1	l2	k9	f1	h6
Non-performative commissive	a1	j1	kil1	l2 (progr onmogelijk)	k1	f2	h6
Performative expressive (thank)	a1	j3(do gratitude)	kil1 (noun)	l2	k9	f1	h6
Performative expressive (apologize)	a3	j3 (do apology)	kil1	l2	k9	f1	h6
Non-performative expressive		j1	kil1	l1 / l1 (maybe l2)	k1	f2	h1
Performative declaration (dedicate)	a1	j3	kil1 (no verb)	l2 or l1	k9	f1	h6
Performative declaration (resign)	a1	j3	kil1	l2	k9	f1	h6
Non-performative declaration	a1	j3	kil1	l1	k1	f1	h1
Performative declaration (declare)	a1 / non verbal	j3 / j3	kil1 /kil1	l1 or l2	k9/k9b	f1	h6

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3. Methodology: Native speaker elicitations and multidimensional scaling

- How do we measure semantic similarity of a large range of categories across a sample of languages?

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3. Methodology: Native speaker elicitations and multidimensional scaling

- How do we measure semantic similarity of a large range of categories across a sample of languages?

→ Multidimensional scaling (MDS; Croft & Poole 2008)

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3. Methodology: Native speaker elicitations and multidimensional scaling

- How do we measure semantic similarity of a large range of categories across a sample of languages?

→ Multidimensional scaling (MDS; Croft & Poole 2008)

- MDS has been developed to visualize the relationships between a large set of data (meanings) that are similar to each other along many dimensions, and represent them on a one- or two-dimensional map.

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- The closer two categories/meanings are to each other on the map, the more likely they are to receive the same formal expression (i.e. the more semantically related they are).

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- MDS has been developed to visualize the relationships between a large set of data (meanings) that are similar to each other along many dimensions, and represent them on a one- or two-dimensional map.
- The closer two categories/meanings are to each other on the map, the more likely they are to receive the same formal expression (i.e. the more semantically related they are).
- Ideal to visualize epistemic clustering.

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4. Results and discussion

A first observation…

- Languages resort to a variety of aspectual constructions in performative utterances (without significant differentiation between types of performative), e.g. imperfectives, present perfects, perfectives, aspectually ambiguous constructions…

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4. Results and discussion

A first observation…

- Languages resort to a variety of aspectual constructions in performative utterances (without significant differentiation between types of performative), e.g. imperfectives, present perfects, perfectives, aspectually ambiguous constructions…

→ No one preferred aspectual construction in the world's languages for performative contexts.

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RQ1: Do performatives and other contexts involving fully and instantly identifiable situations generally receive the same formal expression? Do we find ***epistemic clustering****?*

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- *RQ 1*: Epistemic clustering

- Measuring the semantic similarity of different categories via MDS
- For reasons of legibility: each category is labelled by means of a letter, e.g.

Current ongoing atelic *do*	A	Instructions (specific right now) 1	R
Current ongoing telic *write*	B	Instructions (specific right now) 2	S
Current ongoing atelic *speak*	C	Instructions (more general) 1	T
Present stative copula	D	Instructions (more general) 2	U
Present stative 1	E	Sports commentaries single	V
Present stative 2	F	Sports commentaries sequence 1	W
Past perfective (sequence) 1	G	Sports commentaries sequence 2	X
Past perfective (sequence) 2	H	Sports commentaries sequence 3	Y
Future perfective (sequence) 1	I	Generic	Z
Future perfective (sequence) 2	J	Frequentative 1	AA
Recipes 1	K	Frequentative 2	AB
Recipes 2	L	Habitual	AC
Stage directions atelic	M	Meta-comment presentation	AD
Stage directions telic sequence 1	N	Performative representative	AE
Stage directions telic sequence 2	O	embedded future 1	AG
Demonstrations 1	P	Non-performative representative 1	AH
Demonstrations 2	Q	embedded future 2	AI
		Non-performative representative 2	AJ

...

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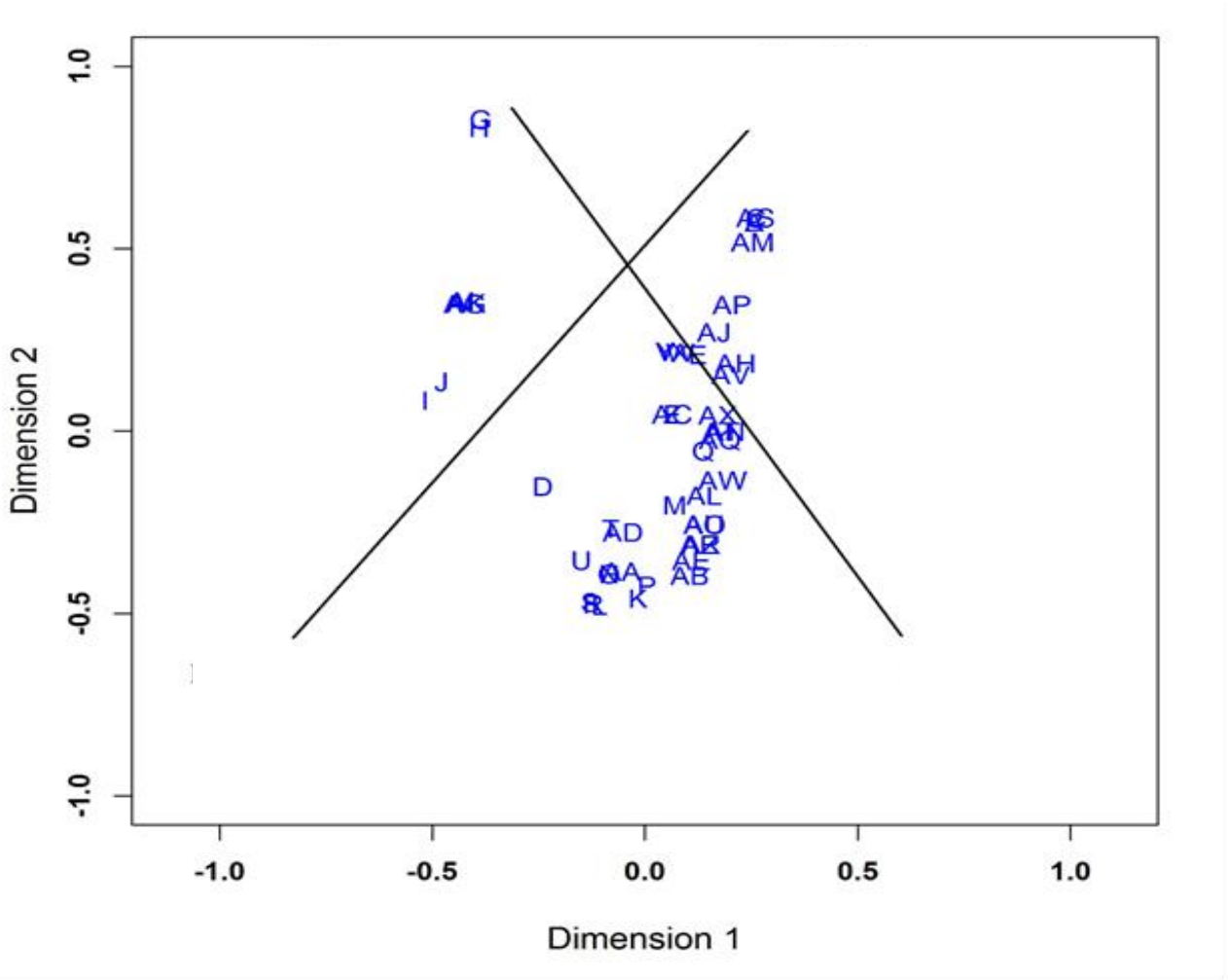
- *RQ 1*: Epistemic clustering

→ Measuring the semantic similarity of different categories via MDS



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- *RQ 1*: Epistemic clustering

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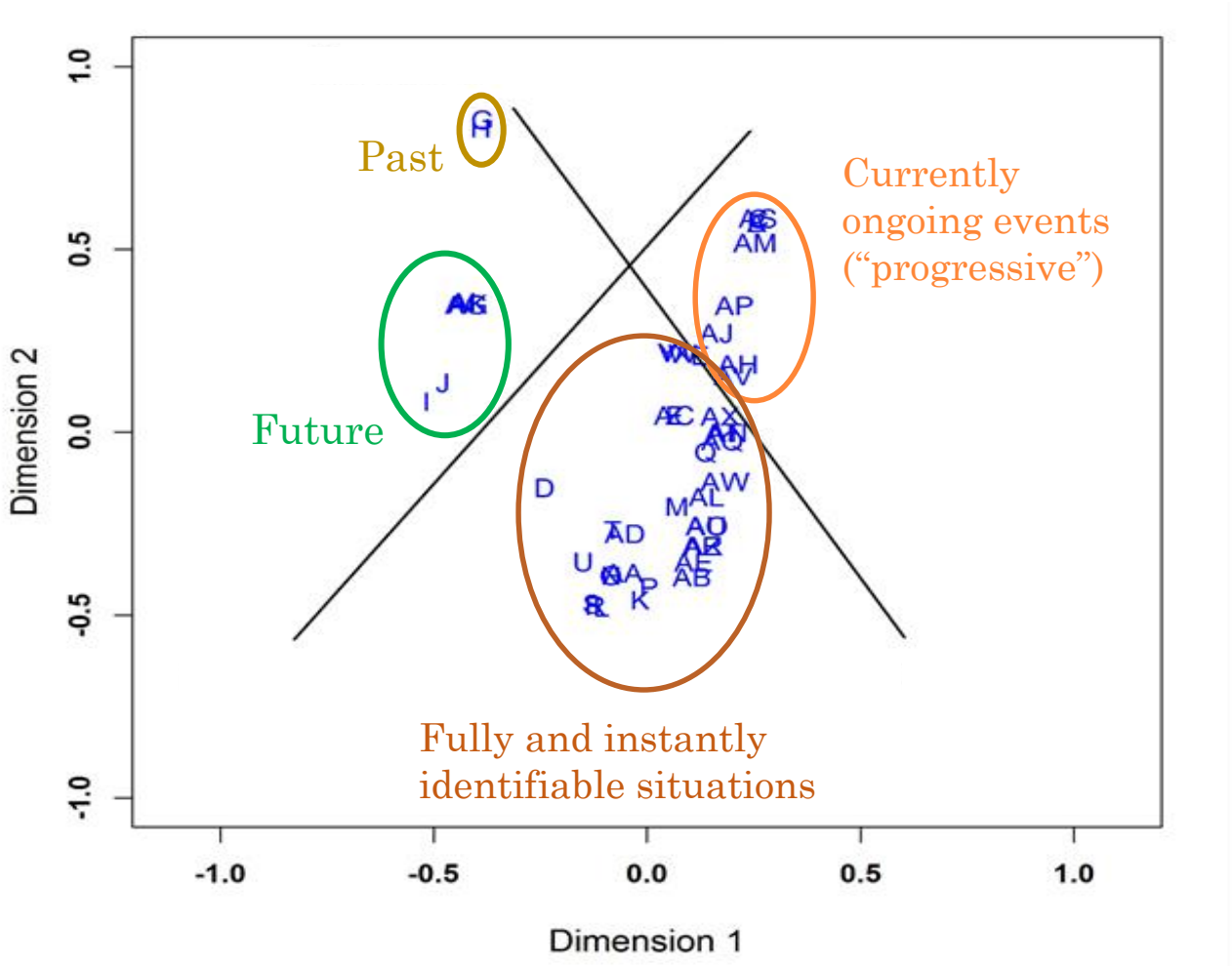

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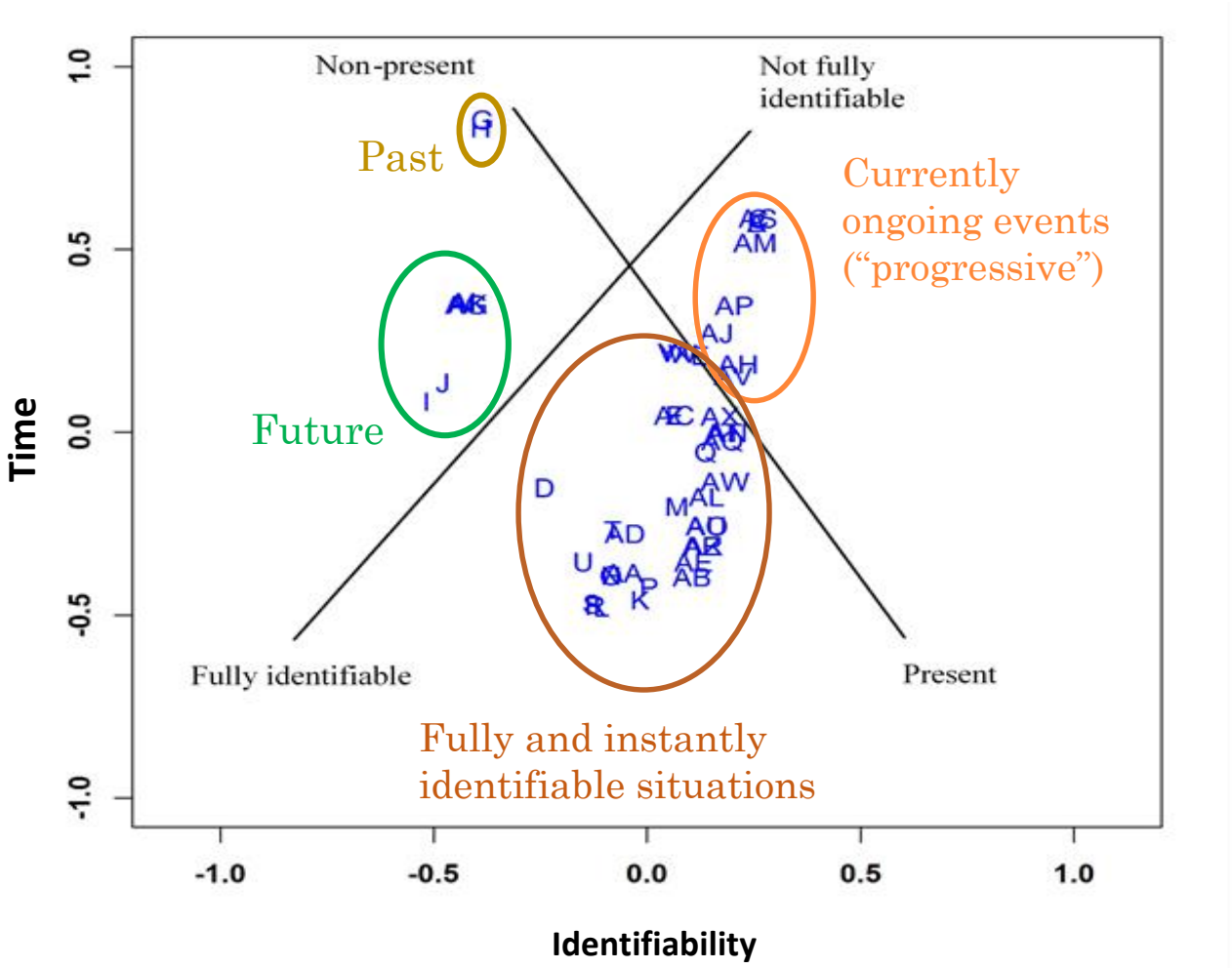

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4. Results and discussion

- In a large majority of the items in our questionnaires, the form used for performatives is also the one used for the expression of present states, instructions, stage directions (narratives), demonstrations, generic situations and habitual situations → the construction indicating full and exact identifiability → 'epistemic clustering'. [Note: live sports broadcasting does not seem to be part of this cluster]

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- In a large majority of the items in our questionnaires, the form used for performatives is also the one used for the expression of present states, instructions, stage directions (narratives), demonstrations, generic situations and habitual situations → the construction indicating full and exact identifiability → 'epistemic clustering'.

- Which particular aspect/tense construction this is depends on language-internal factors.

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- In a large majority of the items in our questionnaires, the form used for performatives is also the one used for the expression of present states, instructions, stage directions (narratives), demonstrations, generic situations and habitual situations → the construction indicating full and exact identifiability → 'epistemic clustering'.

- Which particular aspect/tense construction this is depends on language-internal factors.

- No *complete* correspondence between the form used for performatives and the form used for the expression of other structural events, due to the characteristics of individual languages (e.g. Lingala has a dedicated habitual marker; the Japanese *–te iru* construction can be used with present states, but *also* for the expression of progressivity).

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4. Results and discussion

- *RQ 2: Is progressive aspect never used in performative contexts?*

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- *RQ 2: Is progressive aspect never used in performative contexts?*

→ None of the languages that has a progressive construction (Japanese, Lingala, Kirundi, Farsi, Hindi, Chinese, Icelandic, Spanish, Catalan, and English) makes use of this construction in performative contexts.

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- *RQ 2*: *Is progressive aspect never used in performative contexts?*

→ None of the languages that has a progressive construction (Japanese, Lingala, Kirundi, Farsi, Hindi, Chinese, Icelandic, Spanish, Catalan, and English) makes use of this construction in performative contexts.

→ Languages that have general imperfectives *can* use them for the expression of performativity: Slavic, Arabic, Turkish.

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- But what about the following English examples (adopted from the COCA corpus)?
  - *I'm **warning** you, Rosie, don't fool around with this one.*
  - *I've done something wrong. I **am asking** for your forgiveness.*
  - *I'm **dedicating** this fight to all the African people who are fighting for their freedom and independence!*

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→ True performatives

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  - ***I'm dedicating*** *this fight to all the African people who are fighting for their freedom and independence!*

→ True performatives

→ Apparent counterexamples to the general restriction on progressive performatives?

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- Some observations about the use of the progressive in English performatives (De Wit & Michaelis ms.):

1. Simple present still much more frequently used in performative contexts than the progressive

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2. Progressive aspect primarily found with performative verbs from the exercitive class (e.g. *warn*, *order*, *beg*…)

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- Some observations about the use of the progressive in English performatives (De Wit & Michaelis ms.):

1. Simple present still much more frequently used in performative contexts than the progressive
2. Progressive aspect primarily found with performative verbs from the exercitive class (e.g. *warn*, *order*, *beg*…)
3. Progressive aspect hardly ever found with performative verbs from the commissive, behabitive or verdictive classes (e.g. *promise*, *swear*, *apologize*, *denounce*…)

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→ Central claim: progressive only used to generate a special (again, epistemic) meaning effect: the performative is exceptionally construed as having a contingent status within current reality (De Wit & Michaelis ms).

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→ Central claim: progressive only used to generate a special (again, epistemic) meaning effect: the performative is exceptionally construed as having a contingent status within current reality (De Wit & Michaelis ms).

- Contingent performatives & the data:
  - Inter-class differences: More natural to present relatively face-threatening acts like orders or warnings as something transient; commitments, verdictives and behabitives are preferably *not* presented as contingent

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- Contingent performatives & the data:
  - Inter-class differences: More natural to present relatively face-threatening acts like orders or warnings as something transient; commitments, verdictives and behabitives are preferably *not* presented as contingent
  - Within classes that allow progressive aspect: specific reasons to present a performative act as contingent:

    - Tentativeness

    *As she walks, she mutters to herself... Jo: "I'**m requesting**... I'm... Captain, I'd like to request that I be the attorney assigned to rep -- I 'd like to request that it be myself who is assigned to represent"-- (she stops) -- "That it be myself who is assigned to represent?"*

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- Contingent performatives & the data:
  - More natural to present relatively face-threatening acts like orders or warnings as something transient; commitments, verdictives and behabitives are preferably *not* presented as contingent
  - Within classes that allow progressive aspect: specific reasons to present a performative act as contingent:

    - Emphasis

      *I'**m dedicating** this fight to all the African people who are fighting for their freedom and independence!*

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4. Results and discussion

→ Central claim: progressive only used to generate a special (again, epistemic) meaning effect: the performative is exceptionally construed as having a contingent status within current reality (De Wit & Michaelis ms).

- Contingent performatives & the data:
  - More natural to present relatively face-threatening acts like orders or warnings as something transient; commitments, verdictives and behabitives are preferably *not* presented as contingent
  - Within classes that allow progressive aspect: specific reasons to present a performative act as contingent:
    - Temporarily assumed authority

*Dorothy: "Marvelous! How do I get there?" Officer: "I **warn** you, Miss Simple, once you go that way you can't come back to Primanproper, Massachusetts!"*

versus

*He wags a finger in his sister's face. "I '**m warning** you, Rosie, don't fool around with this one."*

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4. Results and discussion

→ Progressive performatives in English are exceptions that prove the rule: performatives normally select that construction that is used to express full and instant identifiability (in English, the simple present); if they do not (i.e. if they receive progressive marking in English), then the performative is presented as in a way not fully and instantly identifiable.

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- Note: other in-depth language-individual studies might reveal further intricate variation:
  - Arabic: with ritualistic performatives (of the type *I pronounce you President*), perfective aspect is used → remnant from Classical Arabic?
  - Slavic: exceptional occurrences of perfective performatives (Dickey 2000; forthcoming; Israeli 2001; Wiemer 2014)

→ epistemic basis for variation?

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5. Conclusion

- There are, cross-linguistically, no reasons to believe that performatives constitute a class that deserves "special" aspectotemporal marking (unlike what is suggested by English).
- The unique characteristics of performatives need to be situated at the level of their epistemic features, in the sense that the events that they refer to are fully and instantly identifiable at the time of speaking.
- Cross-linguistically, performatives therefore generally behave grammatically (i.e., aspectotemporally) in the same way as utterances in other contexts with which they share these epistemic features, i.e. other contexts that involve structural events.

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