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Introduction

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Introduction

Stefano Manfredi and Mauro Tosco

In his seminal article ‘Pidgins versus Creoles and Pidgincreoles’, Peter Bakker claims that, a few exceptions apart, the categories of creole and pidgincreole may be identified on the basis of a stable SVO word order, and notwithstanding the different basic word order of their lexifiers. As proof, Bakker (2008: 131) points out that ‘Arabic is a verb-initial language, but Nubi Creole Arabic of Kenya and Juba Creole of Sudan have SVO as their basic word order’. Now, it is a fact that ‘Old’ Arabic has both VSO and SVO, depending largely on pragmatic and stylistic factors; still, modern Arabic dialects have a basic SVO word order, and this applies in particular to Sudanese Arabic, the main lexifier of both (Ki-)Nubi and Juba Arabic.

While all this does not detract from Bakker’s argumentation, it reveals two remarkable things: until now Arabic-based pidgins and creoles have been largely disregarded by creolists and this testifies to the urgent need to include these and other non-European-based contact languages in any theory on pidginization and creolization. Second, it shows that lack of familiarity with the lexifier language may foster misinterpretations and false beliefs about the historical development of creoles.

Arabic-based pidgins and creoles have also engendered little attention among Arabicists. Besides, little awareness for the socio-historical implications of pidginization and creolization has often led to define different varieties of Arabic as ‘pidgins’ or ‘creoles’ with little if any sociolinguistic or linguistic evidence (Tosco & Manfredi 2013).

All these reasons lie behind this JPCL special issue, which is the first collective effort entirely devoted to the Arabic-derived contact languages.

Two main groups of different Arabic-based varieties which from time to time have been variously labelled ‘pidgins’ or ‘creoles’, may be identified on the basis of socio-historical and structural factors.

On the one hand, we have ‘Sudanic’ historical pidgins in sub-Saharan Africa; from them, stabilized pidgins and creoles developed out of the core of the Arabophone world. This group includes four varieties: Turku, Bongor Arabic, (Ki-)Nubi, and Juba Arabic. On structural grounds, they can be divided into an eastern (Juba Arabic and (Ki-)Nubi) and a western branch (Turku and Bongor Arabic).

On the other hand, we find several varieties spoken by immigrants in the Middle East, ranging from Arabic foreigner speech to incipient pidgins. While the Sudanic contact varieties adhere to the canonical conditions for the emergence of pidgins and creoles, this is not the case for the Arabic-derived contact varieties in the Middle East.

Each article of this special issue is written by a leading specialist in the field. In ‘Speaking of the past: The development of past tense reference in foreigner speech and pidgins’, Kees Versteegh investigates how past events are encoded in communication between native speakers and foreigners/children, and how the different encoding strategies may further develop in pidgins. Data from Sudanic as well as from Middle Eastern Arabic-derived contact varieties show that the development of obligatory tense markers can be situated at the early stages of pidginization of Arabic.

‘The morphologization of an Arabic creole’ explores the development of morphology in (Ki-)Nubi, the only Arabic-based radical creole. Jonathan Owens shows that (Ki-)Nubi possesses a fairly robust morphology as a result of the restructuring of superstratum features coupled with discourse embeddedness. Against this background, Owens also claims that the Nilotic substratum played a marginal role in the morphologization of (Ki-)Nubi.

Otherwise, being spoken by minority communities scattered in a largely Bantuphone environment, (Ki-)Nubi has been historically affected by a strong adstratal influence. Xavier Luffin’s article explores the linguistic outcomes of this contact situation in terms of phonological interference, morphological integration and lexical borrowing. The article illustrates how the adstratal influence on (Ki-)Nubi is far from uniform, since it largely depends on the contextual dynamics of language contact in Uganda and Kenya.

Juba Arabic is relatively well-known; yet, we do not have any in-depth descriptive data about its information structure. Our article aims at partially filling this gap by analysing the different morphosyntactic and prosodic configurations of topic and focus. After describing the configurations associated with discourse-unmarked utterances, we analyse the expression of topic and focus, and we draw a grammaticalization chain in order to explain the rise of a number of innovative pragmatic markers.

Even if Juba Arabic is still largely an oral language, it has a relatively long written history. Catherine Miller’s article proposes a fascinating socio-historical

account of written Juba Arabic, both in Latin or Arabic script. Early documents recorded by European soldiers and missionaries are analysed before proceeding to a survey of the characteristics of written Juba Arabic in religious literature, theatrical production and social networks. By describing the different orthographic choices, the article brings to light the heterogeneity of the actors involved in the writing of a non-standard language.

The last two articles discuss the grammatical properties of Arabic-based contact varieties spoken by Asian migrants in the Middle East. Fida Bizri's article represents the first attempt to compare different Arabic-based contact varieties developed as a consequence of wage-labour migration. Basing her comparison on both phonological and morphosyntactic parameters, Bizri shows that in spite of a high degree of individual variation, a certain degree of conventionalization is noticeable. Murtadha Bakir describes instead the different grammatical values expressed by the multifunctional particles *fii/maafii* in Gulf Pidgin Arabic. The paper investigates the diachronic factors that motivated the functional expansion of these morphemes, arguing for both language-internal motivations and universal tendencies.

Arabic is among the most important non-European sources of pidgins and creoles. The present work cannot do justice to the richness and complexity of Arabic-based pidgins and creoles; still, we dare hope that it will stimulate the everlasting debate on what counts as a pidgin and a creole, and serve as a prelude to the long-awaited acceptance of these languages in the historical linguistics of Arabic.

References

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Appendix



Arabic-based pidgins and creoles (from Tosco & Manfredi 2013: 496).