AN OUTLINE OF ROMANIAN PIDGIN ARABIC

Andrei A. Avram
University of Bucharest

Abstract

This paper looks at Romanian Pidgin Arabic, a contact language formerly in use on Romanian well sites in various locations in Iraq. The phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon of the language are described on the basis of a corpus of data collected during fieldwork. The data are discussed in comparison to those from other pidgins, with various lexifier languages. Romanian Pidgin Arabic is shown to exhibit features typical of the so-called pre-pidgins. Also discussed are the implications of the findings for the study of pidgin and creole languages, in general, and of Arabic-based contact languages in particular.

1. Introduction

The present paper describes a short-lived pidginized variety of Arabic used by Romanian and Arab oil workers in Iraq. The description is based on fieldwork conducted by the author in two locations, Kut (Eastern Iraq) and Rashdiya (north of Baghdad), over a period of five months (May-September 1984) and respectively six months (January-June 1985). The method used for collecting most of the data was participant observation (field notes). Supplementary data, in particular lists of lexical items, were elicited through interviews on location with four informants, who had been working on Romanian well sites in Iraq for periods ranging from two to five years.

The sociolinguistic situation under which this Romanian Arabic Pidgin (henceforth RPA) emerged can be outlined as follows. The participants in the language-contact situation consisted of speakers of Romanian, Egyptian Arabic and Iraqi Arabic respectively. Only a very small minority spoke (some) English. None of the Romanians spoke any Arabic, while neither the Iraqis nor the Egyptian migrant workers had any knowledge of Romanian. Under the circumstances, there was no available common language. The speakers of Romanian constantly outnumbered those of Egyptian and Iraqi Arabic: at any given time, Romanians amounted to some two thirds of the crew,

* The assistance of Gunvor Mejdell (University of Oslo) and of an anonymous reviewer, who brought to my attention Naess (2008) and respectively Bakir (to appear), is gratefully acknowledged. I am also grateful for the insightful comments of the two anonymous reviewers. All errors, of course, remain mine.
technicians and supervisors. There was a significant turnover among the users of the contact language at issue, due to temporary leaves and replacements, with newcomers picking up the pidgin from “old hands”. RPA appears to have been used in the period between 1974 and 1990, on Romanian well sites, in locations such as Ammara, Basra, Kut, Nassiriya, Rashdiya and Rumaila. The first Gulf War and the subsequent withdrawal of the Romanian supervisors and technicians marked the end of the use of RPA.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, I sketch the main characteristics of the phonology of RPA. Section 3 focuses on its morphology and syntax. In section 4, I briefly discuss its lexicon. The findings and their implications are summarized in section 5.

All examples from RPA are rendered in the system of transliteration used for Arabic. Examples from other pidgins are transcribed as in the sources mentioned.

2. Phonology

The phonology of RPA is characterized by significant inter-speaker variation, due to the influence of the speakers’ first language, i.e. Romanian, Egyptian Arabic and Iraqi Arabic respectively. This type of inter-speaker phonological variation is attested in other pidgins as well, e.g. English Japanese Pidgin (Goodman 1967:51) or Chinook Jargon (Romaine 1988:120-121).

Consider first some characteristics typical of RPA speakers with Romanian as first language. Thus, vowel length is not distinctive in lexical items of Arabic origin or in those from English:

(1) a. lazim ‘must’ < Ar. lāzīm
    b. slip ‘to sleep’ < E. sleep

The loss of the distinction between short and long vowels is attested in other Arabic-lexified pidgins and creoles (Owens 1989:102; Avram 1995:77; Miller 2002:32; Næss 2008:42).

As in other Arabic-based contact languages (Nhial 1987:87; Versteegh 1984:121; Prokosch 1986:84, 92, 97; Pasch & Thelwall 1987:99-100; Owens 1989:102; Smart 1990:87-88; Avram 1993, 1995:76-77; Miller 2002:32), the marked consonantal phonemes of Arabic are either replaced or lost. In word-initial position the velar voiceless fricative/h/ and the pharyngeal voiceless fricative /h#/ are both replaced by /h/:

(2) a. hamsa ‘five’ < Ar. ḫamsa
    b. habīb ‘friend’ < Ar. ḫabīb

In word-final position the reflexes of /h/ or / ḫ/ are /h/, /a/ or ø:

(3) a. embarih ‘yesterday’ < Ir. Ar. mbērīh
    b. rua ‘to leave’ < Ar. rūh
    c. mufta ‘key’ < Ir. Ar. muftāh

1 George Grigore (personal communication) and the author’s own observations on the occasion of short visits to some of these locations.
2 Abbreviations: 1 = first person; 2 = second person; Ar. = Arabic; DEM = demonstrative; E. = English; Eg. Ar. = Egyptian Arabic; GAr. = Gulf Arabic; Ir. Ar. = Iraqi Arabic; lit. = literally; NEG = negator; NHJE = New Hebrides Jargon English; Norw. = Norwegian; PPE = Pacific Pidgin Englishes; PREP = preposition; Rom. = Romanian; Rus. = Russian; SG = singular; SPPE = Samoan Plantation Pidgin English.
The reflex of the voiceless glottal stop /ʔ/ and of the pharyngeal voiced fricative /ʕ/ is ə:

(4) 
   a. arba ‘four’ < Ar. 'arba’  
   b. dilwati ‘now’ < Eg. Ar. dilwa’ti  
   c. saa ‘watch; hour’ < Ar. sā’a  
   d. ašara ‘ten’ < Ar. ‘ašara

The voiced velar fricative /ġ/ is replaced by /g/:

(5)  šogol ‘work’ < Ir. Ar. šuġul

The so-called “emphatics” are replaced by plain consonants:

(6)  halas ‘ready’ < Ar. ḥalās

Finally, the geminate consonants of Arabic undergo degemination:

(7)  sīta ‘six’ < Ar. sīta

A typical feature of the speakers with Egyptian or Iraqi Arabic as their first language is the replacement of /p/ and /v/ by /b/ in words of English or Romanian origin:

(8)  bibul ‘people’ < E. people

3. Morphology and syntax

3.1 Noun phrase

Nouns are invariant in form, given the loss of gender and number distinctions:

(9)  Sadik la ani work la sonda.  
   friend PREP 1SG work PREP rig  
   ‘My friend works / my friends work on the rig.’

Unlike other Arabic-lexified pidgins, e.g. Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Smart 1990:93) or Juba Arabic (Miller 2002:33), which do have plural markers, in RPA the singular vs. plural interpretation usually relies on the context. However, plurality may be indicated by the occurrence of a cardinal numeral:

(10)  hamsa sadik  
      five friend  
      ‘five friends.’

Occasionally, tumać ‘much, many’ (< E. too much) or kulu-kulu (< Ar. kull) ‘all’ are used as markers of plurality:
(11) a. *Aku sadik tumač la ani.*  
be friend many PREP 1SG  
‘I have (many) friends.’  
b. *sayara kulu-kulu.*  
car all  
‘cars.’

The dual form of nouns is replaced by structures with the pre-posed cardinal numeral ‘two’, as in other Arabic-lexified pidgins (Smart 1990:107):

(12) *innen dinar.*  
two dinar  
‘two dinars.’

The definite article is not attested. RPA thus resembles Gulf Pidgin Arabic in which the definite article does not occur either (Smart 1990:92). Speakers with Romanian as their first language occasionally use the cardinal number *wahed* ‘one’ as an indefinite article:

(13) *Ani šuf wahed sayara.*  
1SG see one car  
‘I saw a car.’

Adjectives are invariant, as in Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Smart 1990:95). Adjectives can also be used adverbially, as illustrated by the examples below:

(14) a. *Hada zen.*  
DEM good  
‘This is good.’  
b. *Inte šogol zen.*  
2SG work good  
‘You work well.’

The only class of numerals attested is that of cardinal numerals. Since gender distinctions are lost, all of them are invariant in form. The dual form of cardinal numerals is replaced by structures with ‘two’:

(15) *innen miya.*  
two hundred  
‘two hundreds.’

The system of pronouns is extremely poorly developed. Only two personal pronouns are consistently used:
(16) a. ani ‘1SG’
   b. inte ‘2SG’

For plural referents, for all persons, the noun pipol ‘people’ is occasionally used:

(17) Pipol rumani drink mai tumač.
    people Romanian drink water much
    ‘We, Romanians, drink much water.’

The pronominal use of nouns is reported in the literature on pidgin languages. Mühlhäusler (1997:148) notes with respect to pidgins in their early stages that “proper nouns or nouns are used instead of pronouns”. Consider the following example from Queensland Pidgin English (Mühlhäusler 1997:148), in which the noun kanaka ‘people’ functions as a personal pronoun:

(18) Kanaka work plenty.
    ‘We work a lot.’

Similarly, Næss (2008:52) writes in the section on the pronominal system of Gulf Pidgin Arabic that “the common way of expressing non-specific ‘they’ is the noun nafarāt ‘people’”. The so-called suffix pronouns of Arabic are replaced by personal pronouns, as in other Arabic-lexified pidgins and creoles (Smart 1990:96; Avram 1994, 1995; Miller 2002:33). Illustrated below is the use of personal pronouns in structures with a direct object, with a prepositional object and expressing possession respectively:

(19) a. In ğiner šuf inte.
    engineer see 2SG
    ‘The engineer sees you.’
   b. Ani spik la inte.
    1SG speak PREP 2SG
    ‘I told you.’
   c. Inte sadik la ani.
    2SG friend PREP 1SG
    ‘You are my friend.’

Personal pronouns also function as reflexives. The only demonstrative is hada ‘this; that’, which functions either as a pronoun or as a pronominal adjective:

(20) a. Hada čakuš.
    DEM hammer
    ‘This is a hammer.’
   b. Hada čakuš muzen.
    DEM hammer bad
    ‘This hammer is bad.’

The existence of a single demonstrative is characteristic of other Arabic-lexified pidgins and creoles such as Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Smart 1990:108) and Juba Arabic (Miller 2002:34). Finally, no relative
pronouns have been recorded. The absence of relative pronouns is a feature shared by RPA with at least one other Arabic contact language, but which distinguishes it from other varieties. Thus, while Gulf Pidgin Arabic appears to have no relative pronoun (Smart 1990:112), other Arabic pidgins and creoles, such as Ki Nubi, have several relativizers (Khamis & Owens 2007:207, 214).

3.2 Verb phrase

Verbs are invariant in form:

(21)

a. Ani šogol.
   1SG work
   ‘I work.’

b. Inte šogol.
   2SG work
   ‘You work.’

c. Pipol šogol.
   people work
   ‘They work.’

No overt copula occurs in RPA. Consequently, equative and locative structures as well as adjective predicates exhibit zero copula:

(22)

a. Inte duktur.
   2SG doctor
   ‘You are a doctor.’

b. Ani la karavan.
   1SG PREP caravan
   ‘I am in the caravan.’

c. Ani šabab.
   1SG young
   ‘I am young.’

The absence of copula distinguishes RPA from other Arabic-based contact languages, e.g. Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Smart 1990:100-102; Naess 2008:80-83), Juba Arabic (Miller 2002:34) and Ki Nubi (Khamis & Owens 2007:209), which, besides the zero copula, use copulas etymologically derived from Arabic, e.g. from Ar. fi ‘in’.

Existence and possession are both expressed by means of aku, from Ir. Ar. aku ‘be (existential)’:

3 A reviewer pointed out that the copula used in Juba Arabic and Ki Nubi is rather yau. Etymologically, this derives from Ar. yā hā ‘vocative particle + 3SG.M’ (Wellens 2003:260), and functions as a copula in Juba Arabic. However, ya / yaw is analyzed as a focus marker by Wellens (2003:171, 259), and as a highlighter by Khamis & Owens (2007:210).
There are no tense and aspect markers. In the absence of tense and aspect marking, the temporal and aspectual interpretation of sentences mainly relies on the context. Also recorded is the unsystematic use of time adverbials and of pre-posed halas (< Ar. ḥalāš) ‘to finish’. Consider the following examples:

(24)  
a. Leš rua dilwati?
   why go now
   ‘Why are you leaving?’
b. Baaden spik la mudir.
   then speak PREP boss
   ‘[Afterwards] I’ll tell the boss.’
c. Inte halas it?
   2SG finish eat
   ‘Have you eaten [everything]?’

The general picture that emerges resembles to some extent the situation in Gulf Pidgin Arabic. Thus, Næss (2008:85) writes that sentences “can be marked for the past tense by the [...] adverb awwal ‘before’, whereas [the] future tense may be marked by bādēn ‘then, later’”. However, according to Næss (2008:88-91), Gulf Pidgin Arabic appears to be in the process of developing a marker fi of the continuous aspect. Note that Smart (1990:104) also reports the use of pre-posed ḥalāš “as an emphatic past marker” in Gulf Pidgin Arabic, while a similar perfect marker kala(s), in post-verbal position, is used in Juba Arabic and Ki Nubi (Versteegh 1984:123; Prokosch 1986:88; Pasch & Thelwall 1987:125-126; Miller 2002:34).

Negation is expressed by means of an invariant negator, occurring in pre-verbal position:

(25)  
Ani no aref.
   1SG NEG know
   ‘I don’t know.’

The use of a negator which is etymologically derived from English differentiates RPA from other Arabic-based contact languages. For instance, the negators mā / ma, māfi, mū and mub in Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Smart 1990:108; Næss 2008:71) or ma and mafi in Juba Arabic (Nhial 1987:85-86) and Ki Nubi (Nhial 1975:85; Khamis & Owens 2007:207) are all of Arabic origin.

---

4 For a discussion of the verbal system of Gulf Pidgin Arabic, see also Bakir (to appear).
3.3 Function words

In contrast to pronouns, the system of question words is relatively rich. The following question words are attested in the corpus:

(26)  
- a. min / minu ‘who’
- b. eš / šimu / šu ‘what’
- c. fen / wen ‘where’
- d. šwakit / ešwakit ‘when’
- e. šlon ‘how’
- f. leš / lieš ‘why’
- g. šged ‘how many’
- h. kam / čam ‘how much.’

As can be seen, there are two and even three variants of one and the same question word. Some of these variants are merely alternative pronunciations, e.g. leš and lieš. Other variants can be traced back to different etyma: fen < Eg. Ar. fēn vs. wen < Ir. Ar. wēn; kam < Eg. Ar. kam vs. čam < Ir. Ar. čam. Forms such as šwakit (< Ir. Ar. š + wakit lit. ‘what time’) or lieš (< Ir. Ar. li + eš lit. ‘for what’) are not perceived as bi-morphemic by RPA speakers with Romanian as their first language, for whom the system of question words is therefore opaque.

Only a small number of adverbs are attested. These include the following:

(27)  
- a. baaden ‘then’
- b. hon ‘here’
- c. šuwaya ‘a little; slowly.’

On the other hand, as already mentioned, most adjectives may be used as adverbs as well.

RPA has a one-preposition system. The only preposition is la, which occurs in a variety of structures, e.g. with an indirect object, in those expressing location, direction and possession, etc.:

(28)  
- a. Gib sigara la ani.
  bring cigarette PREP 1 SG
  ‘Give me a cigarette.’
- b. Ani slip la karavan.
  1SG sleep PREP caravan
  ‘I sleep in a caravan.’
- c. Inte rua la suk?
  2SG go PREP market
  ‘Are you going to the market?’
- d. Fulus la ani.
  money PREP 1 SG
  ‘my money.’

5 Cf. Khamis & Owens (2007:214) who note that in Ki Nubi “the interrogatives derive from Arabic and are bimorphemic only to the extent that their Sudanese Arabic etyma are.”

6 For a survey of the systems of question words in pidgins and creoles see Muysken & Smith (1990).
While other Arabic-lexified pidgins such as Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Smart 1990:109-110) have at least several prepositions, the use of a single “all-purpose” preposition is mentioned in the literature on pidgin languages (Mühlhäusler 1997:149-150). In Russenorsk, for instance, the preposition po occurs in structures expressing e.g. location, direction or possession (Broch & Jahr 1984:45):

(29) a. Principal po lan.
    ‘The captain is ashore.’
b. Moja po vater kastom.
    ‘I’ll throw you in the water.’
c. klokka po ju
    ‘your watch.’

RPA does not have any complementizers and conjunctions. Their non-occurrence differentiates RPA from other Arabic-based pidgins. Thus, Smart (1990:111) notes the existence in Gulf Pidgin Arabic of inna ‘that’, although he adds that it “is usually omitted” and that it “appears only rarely”. He also lists several conjunctions introducing purpose and conditional clauses (Smart 1990:112).

3.4 Categorial multifunctionality

The survey of the lexical categories attested in RPA must include a discussion of categorial multifunctionality. This is a direct consequence of the lack of inflections as well as of the small size of the vocabulary. Many words can be assigned to more than one lexical category and can therefore be analyzed as lexically underspecified.

(30) a. halas ‘ready’ and ‘to finish’
    b. šogol ‘work’ and ‘to work.’

Categorial multifunctionality is attested in other pidgins, with various lexifier languages. Consider the following examples from Butler English (Mehrotra 1999):

(31) a. fire ‘fire’ and ‘to burn’
    b. wet ‘wet’ and ‘to bathe.’

3.5 Reduplication

The only morphological operation attested is total reduplication, which applies to adjectival and adverbial bases and expresses an intensifying meaning:

(32) a. kulu ‘each’ → kulu-kulu ‘all; completely’
    b. šuwaya ‘a little; slowly’ → šuwaya-šuwaya ‘very little; very slowly’
    c. zen ‘good; well’ → zen-zen ‘very good; very well.’

RPA differs from other Arabic-based contact languages in which reduplication applies to more bases. In Gulf Pidgin Arabic, for instance, reduplication also applies to nouns (Smart 1990:96). The examples provided by Miller (1993:161-162, 2002:34, 2003:290-294) show that in Juba Arabic numerals, verbs and quantifiers can also function as bases for reduplication. From the point of view

---

7 See Voorhoeve (1981) and Mühlhäusler (1997:137) for a theoretical discussion of this concept.
8 In the sense of Silverstein (1972a, 1972b).
of the semantics of reduplication RPA resembles other Arabic-lexified pidgins. Smart (1990:95) mentions “intensification” in his discussion of reduplication in Gulf Pidgin Arabic and “intensity” or “intensive meaning” is also one of the meanings of reduplication in Juba Arabic (Nhial 1975:85; Miller 1993:161, 2002:34). Reduplication is not productive in RPA and it appears to represent a discourse-based means of enhancing expressiveness rather than a morphological process. This is demonstrated by the occasional occurrence of triplication⁹, as in the following dialogue:

(33)   a. A: Ṣłenek, zen?
       how you well
       ‘How are you, are you alright?’
   b. B: Ani zen.
       1SG well
       ‘I’m fine.’
   c. A: Inte zen-zen-zen?
       2SG well
       ‘Are you really alright?’

Moreover, in at least some cases, there seems to be no demonstrable difference in meaning between the simplex and the reduplicated forms. Thus, both šuwaya and šuwaya-šuwaya may mean ‘a little; slowly’. Such examples confirm the observation made by Bakker (2003:43) that in pidgins “reduplicated and unreduplicated forms coexist, but there appears to be no meaning differences between the two forms⁶. Finally, several pseudo-reduplicated forms have been recorded¹⁰:

(34)   a. fikifiki ‘sexual intercourse’
   b. sawasawa ‘together’
   c. semsem ‘similar, identical.’

These are lexicalized forms derived etymologically from Arabic and English, for which there are no corresponding simplex forms, i.e. *fiki, *sawa and *sem. Interestingly, the last two pseudo-reduplicated forms are reported to occur in Gulf Pidgin Arabic as well (Smart 1990: 96):

(35)   a. sawa sawa ‘together’
   b. seem seem ‘same.’

Pseudo-reduplicated forms are found in other pidgins. Consider the examples below from Sino-Russian and English-Japanese Pidgin respectively (Bakker 2003:40-41):

(36)   a. igrá-igrá ‘to bargain, to argue’
   b. saymo-saymo ‘same.’

That reduplication is not productive in RPA is hardly surprising. First, in both colloquial Arabic and Romanian reduplication is mainly used for rhetorical or stylistic purposes. Second, as shown by

⁹ Cf. Miller (2003:295) for a similar argument in her discussion of reduplication in Juba Arabic.
¹⁰ Also called quasi-reduplicated (Bakker 2003:40).
Miller (2003:298), productive reduplication is not attested in Arabic-lexified pidgins. Thus, Tosco & Owens (1993) do not mention reduplication at all in their description of Turku. Smart (1990:95-96) notes several instances of reduplication in Gulf Pidgin Arabic. However, these are not numerous and include reduplicated forms used for what he calls “onomatopoeic effect” and “words [which] are always used reduplicatively” (Smart 1990:96), i.e. pseudo-reduplicated forms. Third, while reduplication does occur in Arabic-lexified creoles such as Nubi and Juba Arabic, “its morphological status remains debatable” (Miller 2003:298). Finally, Bakker (1995:33) writes that reduplication “is rare in pidgins as a productive process”. According to Bakker (2003:43), its absence in pidgin languages is “one of the most striking structural differences between Pidgins and Creoles”. Bakker (2003:44) further notes that “most Pidgins do have some unproductive, lexical reduplication”, possibly originating “in a “jargon” phase”, and that reduplicated forms “may derive from a discourse strategy which almost never develops into a productive process of reduplication.”

3.6 Word order, compound sentences and complex sentences

Like most pidgins, RPA has SVO word order, including in questions:

(37) Inte šuf hada?
2SG see DEM
‘Did you see this?’

However, sentences with aku ‘to be’ or maku ‘not to be’ may display VSO or OVS word order:

(38) a. Maku saa la ani.
not be watch PREP 1SG
‘I don’t have a watch.’
b. La ani maku sigara.
PREP 1SG not be cigarette
‘I don’t have cigarettes.’

Sentence coordination is achieved mainly by juxtaposition of sentences. Less frequently, the adverb baaden is used, as illustrated by the following example:

(39) Tal hon baaden giv hada sikina la ani.
come here then give DEM knife PREP 1SG
‘He came here and gave me this knife.’

A similar use of adverbs for sentence coordination is reported for other pidgins. Consider the use of so (< Norw. så ‘then’) in Russenorsk (Romaine 1988:128):

(40) Moja po annner skip nakka vin drikkom, so moja nakka lite pjan.
‘I drank some wine on another ship and I got a little drunk.’

A consequence of the absence of relative pronouns, conjunctions and overt complementizers is the fact that subordinate clauses occur very rarely. The main strategy is the use of iconic, paratactic

structures. In these structures “sequencing rules are iconic of the sequence of real events reported” (Mühlhäusler 1997:130) and are therefore instances of the so-called “natural” syntax:\footnote{In the sense of Haiman (1985). Cf. also Mühlhäusler (1997:130), who states that “this is the most natural strategy and is therefore favoured.”}

(41) \[\text{Inte no work, maku fulus la inte.}\]
\[2SG\neg \text{work not be money PREP 2SG}\]
‘If you don’t work, you have no money.’

Iconic paratactic structures occur in other pidgins, with different lexifiers, as illustrated by the following example from Samoan Plantation Pidgin English (Mühlhäusler 1997:130):

(42) \[\text{No mani, no kam.}\]
‘If I don’t have money, I won’t come.’

It is less clear whether RPA has a zero complementizer. An extremely small number of examples might be interpreted as an instance of either direct speech or of indirect speech with a zero-
complementizer:

(43) \[\text{Inte spik la ani hada muzen.}\]
\[2SG\text{ speak PREP 1SG DEM bad}\]
‘You told me: This is not good.’ / ‘You told me this was not good.’

Romaine (1988:128-129) suggests such an interpretation for similar cases in Russenorsk:

(44) \[\text{Moja ska si ju grot ligom.}\]
‘I’ll say: You lie a lot.’ / ‘I’ll say that you lie a lot.’

However, the scarcity of ambiguous examples as well as the rarity of subordinate clauses favours the more cautious conclusion according to which RPA does not have any complementizers (overt or zero).

4. The lexicon

The size of the core vocabulary of RPA amounts to approximately 150 words. This is comparable with the figures reported for some pidgins: 50-100 for New Hebrides Jargon English (Mühlhäusler 1997:137); 150-200 for Russenorsk (Romaine 1988:126); 300 for Samoan Plantation Pidgin English (Mühlhäusler 1997:137). Inter-speaker variation is also attested, with the occasional occurrence of more lexical items in the speech of some individuals. Such items, however, do not appear to be part of the permanent lexicon of RPA. Similar observations have been made in the literature. Thus, Mühlhäusler (1997:130) mentions “the dominance of individual strategies and the non-permanence of a jargon’s lexicon outside its small core”. In his comments on the vocabulary of English-Japanese Pidgin, Goodman (1967:54) notes that its speakers “time and again stipulated new vocabulary items according to the needs of very specific situations”, but “these items did not remain in the permanent lexicon”.\footnote{In the sense of Haiman (1985). Cf. also Mühlhäusler (1997:130), who states that “this is the most natural strategy and is therefore favoured.”}
As far as the origin of the vocabulary is concerned, approximately 75% of the words are derived from Egyptian and Iraqi Arabic etyma, while the remaining 25% can be traced back to English and Romanian. The proportion of Arabic-derived words is smaller than, but still comparable with that estimated for Gulf Pidgin Arabic: according to Næss (2008:27), more than 95% of the Gulf Pidgin Arabic lexicon consists of words of Gulf Arabic origin.

Worth mentioning is the existence of a number of lexical hybrids, some of which are listed below:\(^{13}\):

(45) a. gib ‘to give; to bring’, cf. E. give and Eg. Ar. gib ‘bring!’
b. la ‘PREP’, cf. Rom. la ‘at, to, in’ and Ar. li ‘for’
c. no ‘NEG’, cf. E. no and Rom. nu ‘no, not’

The form in (45a) is a consequence of the absence of /v/ in Arabic. Note the conflation of the meanings of the etyma. The “all-purpose” preposition in (45b) owes, in part, its existence to the coincidental similarity of two frequent prepositions of Romanian and Arabic. The similarity of the English and Romanian words for ‘no’ accounts for the shape of the negator in (45c). The form in (45d), while very similar to English, has the stress pattern of its Romanian counterpart. Finally, the form in (45e) is phonetically close to Arabic, but semantically to English or Romanian. Lexical hybrids, facilitated by phonetic similarity, are attested in other pidgins as well. Consider the following examples from Russenorsk:

(46) po ‘on’, cf. Rus. po, Norw. pâ

In spite of the extremely small size of the vocabulary, several lexical doublets and even synonymic series have been recorded. In all such cases, doublets and/or synonyms are etymologically derived from different source languages:

(47) a. maŝina < Rom. mašină and sayara < Ar. sayyāra ‘car’
b. zen < Ir. Ar. zēn, kuwais < Eg. Ar. kuwayyis, and gud < E. good

The existence of similar cases is reported in the literature on other pidgins, such as Russenorsk (Broch & Jahr 1984:47):

(48) bra < Norw. bra, god < Norw. god, dobro < Rus. dobro, and korosjo < Rus. xorošo

Some lexical items exhibit the effect of reanalysis of morphemic boundaries. This reinterpretation of the morphemic make-up of words depends on the first language of the speakers of RPA. Thus, for RPA speakers with Romanian as their first language the form in (49a) is reanalyzed as mono-morphemic. Occasionally, the morphemic boundaries of forms, e.g. in (49b), are reinterpreted by all speakers, regardless of their first language.

---

\(^{13}\) Lexical items identified across languages (Mühlhäusler 1997:135).
An outline of Romanian Pidgin Arabic

(49) a. muzen ‘bad’ < Ir. Ar. mūzēn ‘not good’
    b. tumač ‘much, many’ < E. too much.

Reanalysis of morphemic boundaries is found in other pidginized or creolized varieties of Arabic (Versteegh 1984:121). Consider the example below from Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Næss 2008:26):

(50) šismik ‘name’ < GAr. š-ism-ik ‘what is your name?’.

Reanalysis of morphemic boundaries is also attested in pidgins with other lexifier languages, as in following example from Pacific Pidgin English (Mühlhäusler 1997:129):

(51) aidono ‘I don’t know’ < E. I don’t know.

5. Conclusions

Pidgin languages have been assigned to various developmental stages, on the basis of linguistic criteria. This well-known typology (Mühlhäusler 1997:5-6; Siegel 2008:2-4) distinguishes accordingly three types of pidgins: (i) pre-pidgins (also called jargons or minimal pidgins); (ii) stable pidgins; (iii) expanded (or extended) pidgins. Each of these types is characterized by a specific set of phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical diagnostic features. Throughout this paper I have noted similarities between RPA and other pidgins, either Arabic-based or with another lexifier language. In the table below I compare RPA with three other languages which may be considered as illustrative of the pre-pidgin stage: Russenorsk14 and two English-lexified varieties, Butler English and Pacific Pidgin Englishes15. The diagnostic features set out in the table are based on data from the following sources: Broch & Jahr (1981, 1984) for Russenorsk; Hosali & Aitchison (1986), Mehrrota (1999), and Hosalì (2005) for Butler English; Mühlhäusler (1997), and Tryon & Charpentier (2004) for Pacific Pidgin Englishes. The diagnostic features are those discussed by Mühlhäusler (1997:128-138) to which I have added “non-productive reduplication”, in line with Bakker’s (1995, 2003) suggestions. The sign “+” shows that a feature is found and “−” that it is not attested. A blank space indicates the absence of relevant information. RPA shares its characteristics with at least one of the other pre-pidgins. Therefore, from the point of view of its developmental stage, RPA is a pre-pidgin.

As is well known, pidgins have also been classified on the basis of social criteria. One such typology is proposed by Bakker (1995:27-28), in terms of the social situation in which pidgins are used. Four types are distinguished: (i) maritime pidgins: Lingua Franca, Russenorsk; (ii) trade pidgins: Pidgin Eskimo, Chinese Pidgin English; (iii) interethnic contact languages: Chinook Jargon, Mobilian Jargon; (iv) work force pidgins: Butler English, Fanagalo, Hawaiian Pidgin English. Obviously, RPA can be assigned to the category of work force pidgins.


15 Pacific Pidgin Englishes is a cover term for unspecified varieties of Pidgin English spoken in the Pacific in the 19th century (Mühlhäusler 1997:19; Siegel 2008:46).
Sebba (1997:26-33) suggests a typology according to the social context of the language’s origins and identifies the following types: (i) military and police pidgins: Lingua Franca, Hiri Motu; (ii) seafaring and trade pidgins: Russenorsk, Chinook Jargon, Chinese Pidgin English; (iii) plantation pidgins: Tok Pisin; (iv) mine and construction pidgins: Fanagalo, Ewondo populaire; (v) immigrants’ pidgins: Gastarbeiterdeutsch; (vi) tourist pidgins: Tarzanca (= Turkish tourist pidgin); (vii) urban contact vernaculars: Fly Taal. Sebba’s (1997) typology needs to be supplemented with a class consisting of oil industry pidgins. This would include not only RPA, but also Gulf Pidgin Arabic, which Smart (1990:83) defines as a “reduced variety of Arabic, already current [...] on the rigs” and “used between the indigenous Arab crews and foreign [...] supervisors and technicians.”

Twelve years ago, commenting on the development of pidgin and creole linguistics, Mühlhäusler (1997:20) wrote that “new Pidgins and Creoles are discovered” and listed 18 languages “that have been added to the list of Pidgins and Creoles over the last twenty years”. RPA is one more addition to the list of recently discovered pidgins.

In his comprehensive list of pidgins, creoles and mixed languages, Smith (1995:356) mentions seven varieties under the heading “K. Arabic-lexifier Creoles and Pidgins”: Maridi Pidgin Arabic, Galgaliya, Turku, Juba Arabic, Kì Nubi, Ethiopian Pidgin Arabic and Gulf Pidgin Arabic. These are also the only varieties discussed by e.g. Owens (1997) and Miller (2002). The list of the Arabic-lexified pidgins and creoles should also include RPA.
The relevance of Arabic-based contact languages has been discussed from several perspectives: the formation of Arabic dialects (Versteegh 1984; Holes 1995:19-24), the spread of Arabic (Owens 1997), the historical process of language shift to Arabic (Miller 2002), and the study of pidgin and creole languages (Owens 2001; Avram 2003). One question of theoretical interest is whether Arabic pidgins are or not varieties of Arabic. Owens (2001:352) states that “within “Arabic” entities can be identified that are distinct enough to warrant separate designations” and includes under the name of the “Arabic complex” the following: Arabic dialects, what he calls “Central Asian Mixed Arabic”\(^\text{16}\), and Arabic creoles. According to Owens (2001:352), “a language that belongs to the Arabic complex is an “Araboid” language” and “members of the Arabic complex may be forms of Arabic, though they need not be”. On his analysis, Central Asian Mixed Arabic is not “a form of Arabic, since it has undergone too many changes, both quantitative and qualitative, to be regarded as a form of Arabic”, and Creole Arabic is “genetically related to Arabic in some sense, though itself not a form of Arabic—that is, it is a different language” (Owens 2001:352). By the same token, Arabic pidgins also qualify for the status of “Araboid” languages which are not forms of Arabic. Consequently, Owens’s “Arabic complex” could be extended so as to cover Arabic-based pidgins as well\(^\text{17}\).

As discussed by Prokosch (1986:75-76) and Miller (2002:19), the exact status of some Arabic-based contact varieties is debatable, mainly because of poor documentation. These include Maridi Arabic, Galgaliya/Shuwa Arabic and Ethiopian Pidgin Arabic. Maridi Arabic is reported to have been spoken in the 11\(^\text{th}\) century, but it is only attested in a ten-sentence text (Thomason & Elgibali 1986). The pidgin status of Galgaliya/Shuwa Arabic is denied by both Prokosch (1986:75), for whom “it has nothing to do with a pidgin”, and by Miller (2002:18), who writes that “some lists of P/C wrongly categorize the Nigerian (Shuwa) Arabic dialect as a P/C”\(^\text{18}\). Little is known about Ethiopian Pidgin Arabic, except that it is a rudimentary pidginized form of Arabic, reportedly used as a trade jargon between Arab traders and the local, non-Arabic speaking population (Ferguson 1972). On the other hand, Gulf Pidgin Arabic appears to be a legitimate pidgin. Miller (2002:19) wrote with respect to Gulf Pidgin Arabic that its “status is questionable until we get more data”. However, while the first description of Gulf Pidgin Arabic mostly relied “on printed material that appeared in certain Gulf newspapers” (Smart 1990:83), a number of later analyses are based on \textit{in situ} observation (Wiswall 2002; Næss 2008; Bakir to appear). Similarly, the description of RPA outlined in this paper also has the advantage of being based on data collected exclusively during fieldwork.

The Arabic-based contact languages described in some detail in the literature are stable pidgins, expanded pidgins or creoles. Thus, Turku is said to have been a stable pidgin (Miller 2002:26-27). According to Smart (1990:83), Gulf Pidgin Arabic is “sufficiently developed and systematized”, although he refrains from deciding “whether or not this language constitutes a true pidgin”. In more recent work, Gulf Pidgin Arabic is characterized as “a variety on the way to becoming conventionalized” (Næss 2008:94), but “in comparison with other Arabic-based pidgins and creoles […] much less standardized” (Næss 2008:101). Juba Arabic is an expanded pidgin and/or a creole (Miller 2002:29), while Ki Nubi is a creole (Miller 2002:25; Owens 2001; Khamis & Owens 2007:199). Arabic-lexified pre-pidgins are far less documented in the literature. The present paper,

\(^{16}\) A cover term for varieties spoken “in eastern Iran, Afghanistan […], Uzbekistan, and, perhaps, Tajikistan” (Owens 2001:352).

\(^{17}\) Obviously, this would run counter to a long-established tradition of excluding Arabic creoles and a \textit{fortiori} Arabic pidgins from Arabic studies. In a relatively recent work, Holes (1995:24) disparagingly equates “pidgin Arabic” with “kitchen Arabic”.

\(^{18}\) Where P/C stands for pidgin/creole. As suggested by a reviewer, Galgaliya Arabic should be removed from any association with Arabic pidgins and creoles.
then, contributes to a better knowledge of the wide range of outcomes of the contact between Arabic and other languages.

References


An outline of Romanian Pidgin Arabic


