Chapter 22

Aspect Marking in Juba Arabic and Ki-Nubi*

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1 Introduction

The development of tense/aspect markers in pidgin and creole languages has been one of the central issues in creole linguistics ever since Bickerton (1974) proposed that all creole languages develop three aspect markers, called by him past, non-punctual, and irrealis. The exact distribution of all aspectual nuances, such as continuous (progressive), iterative, habitual, and generic, among these markers differs from creole to creole. We shall see below that the main overlap occurs between the non-punctual and the irrealis marker in the marking of habituality, which may be interpreted as real, but also as irreal. On the one hand, habitual aspect refers to events that have actually taken place or are taking place and should therefore be regarded as realis. On the other hand, it does not refer to an individual event that actually takes place, and has therefore something in common with irrealis as well. A similar ambiguity applies to conditional sentences, which represent either a real condition, or an irreality that may never be realized (Bickerton 1981: 256–260; Tosco 1995: 429–431).

The total number of Arabic-based pidgins and creoles is not very high, but since they developed fairly recently, they allow us to follow the development of tense/aspect markers in various stages. In this paper, I propose to analyze the expression of aspect in two different varieties of Arabic: Juba Arabic as an example of a stable pidgin (Tosco, 1995); and (Ki-) Nubi as an example of an Arabic creole (Wellens 2005; Luffin 2005). For Juba Arabic, a corpus assembled by

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* This paper is the revised version of (part of) my presentation at the Time and Space conference, organized by Peter Bakker and Aymeric Daval-Markussen, which took place at the University of Århus, Denmark, from January 15–16, 2014. I thank the organizers and the participants to the conference for their critical remarks. In examples taken from the literature I have retained as much as possible the transcription of the original. In the glosses accompanying the examples the following abbreviations have been used: art article; cond conditional; conj conjunction; dem demonstrative; interrog interrogative; pass passive; pl plural; poss possessive; rel relative; 1, 2, 3 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; m, f masculine, feminine; s, p singular, plural.
Manfredi is available in a text repository with sound archives maintained by the CNRS (http://corpafras.tge-adonis.fr/Archives/ListeFichiersELAN.php). Sufficiently large text samples for Ki-Nubi may be found in Luffin (2004) and Wellens (2005).

Juba Arabic is treated here as an example of a stable pidgin. In earlier stages of pidginization, preceding stabilization, rudimentary forms of communication are used, which are sometimes referred to as pre-pidgins or jargons.1 Such rudimentary communication takes place almost exclusively in a limited context between native speakers and individual learners. At this stage, no tense/aspect markers are used (see Versteegh, forthcoming). Temporal reference is achieved by the pragmatic context or with the help of temporal adverbials, as in (1), an example from Pidgin Madame, a pre-pidgin used in Lebanon between Sri Lankan domestics and Lebanese housewives (Bizri 2010):

\begin{align*}
(1) & \quad \text{badēm} \quad \text{rūh} \quad \text{badēm} \quad \text{ma} \quad \text{īji} \\
& \text{afterwards} \quad \text{go} \quad \text{afterwards} \quad \text{NEG} \quad \text{come} \\
& \text{‘Then I’ll go and I won’t come back’ (Bizri 2010: 162)}
\end{align*}

It is only through the context that we know that the verbal forms rūh and īji in (1)—which derive from Lebanese Arabic imperatives—refer to the future: in the preceding utterance the speaker has made clear that she would like to work in Lebanon for one more year. Without this knowledge, the sentence could also be interpreted as meaning ‘Then I went and I didn’t come back.’

In addition to temporal adverbials such as awwāl ‘at first, in the past’ and hālla ‘now,’ Pidgin Madame uses adverbials such as kilyōm ‘always, everyday,’ which indicate habituality. Reference to the future is usually linked with the expression of intentions, desires, or obligations, and may be accompanied by forms like baddi ~ baddek ‘want’ or rūh ~ rūhi ‘go.’

In the present paper, pre-pidgins or jargons, like Pidgin Madame, will not be dealt with. Instead, I shall focus on the marking of tense and aspect in stable pidgins, with special attention to the marking of habituality. In these pidgins, tense/aspect markers have become grammaticalized, so that the pragmatic context plays a less important role in interpreting utterances.

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1 For the classification of pidgins see Mühlhäusler (1997) and, with a different terminology, Winford (2006). Note that the classification of Juba Arabic as a stable pidgin depends not so much on the variety itself, but rather on which speakers we are dealing with: for some of them it is a native language, for others a secondary means of communication in daily life, and for yet others a lingua franca that is only used in a limited set of circumstances.