When people speaking different languages meet, they have to find a way to achieve communication. Since the average situation of contact does not provide for any kind of formal teaching in classrooms, with textbooks and language laboratories, linguistic communication has to be achieved in an improvised manner. Usually one language is chosen for this purpose, but it is used in a simplified way by its native speakers, while the other party makes its own adjustments. Such accommodation processes have taken place in all linguistic communities, and there is abundant evidence of the effects they have on the structure of the language that is being used: reduction of categories, restructuring, simplification.

When people using a simplified register as their principal means of communication intermarry, their children tend to receive an impoverished input from their parents. In the absence of a strong monitor, they start to restructure the language according to their native language learning abilities, in the process grammaticalizing the input and imposing fixed rules on the existing variation. They become, in effect, native speakers of a new language.

Of course, the native speakers of the original language continue to speak their language according to their native competence. In many cases they have a privileged social position, so that their way...
of speaking the language becomes socially desirable. As a result, the new speakers are tempted to modify their different realization of the language and will accommodate to this prestigious way of speaking.

In 1984 I suggested that the above scenario might be applicable not only to the history of such languages as Sanskrit, Latin or Greek, but also to that of Arabic. During the 7th century Arabic was introduced into the territories conquered by the Arab armies, and within a very short period of time the inhabitants of this immense area adopted it as their new language. I proposed that because of this language learning process a number of changes was triggered that resulted in the emergence of a new type of Arabic. Several authors have pointed out that there is a certain resemblance with Fück’s (1950) notion of an Arabic Verkehrssprache and with Ferguson’s (1959) military koine (Anghelescu 1986:168; Drozdik 2000), although it is doubtful that Ferguson himself would have agreed with this view (cf. Ferguson 1989).

According to the model I proposed, the inhabitants of the conquered territories in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and North Africa at first learned a make-shift variety of Arabic. In mixed marriages, the children started to nativize this variety. At a later stage, the new variety was affected by the standardized form of the target language, the language of the native speakers of Arabic. In the linguistic literature the second language learning process described here is called ‘pidginization’, the native acquisition of such a pidginized variety is called ‘creolization’, and the process of influence from the standard language is called ‘decreolization’. Such processes have taken place in all languages, they are a necessary and normal corollary of any second language learning that does not take place in the classroom, and of any first language learning that takes place without a fully competent monitor.

2. Status of the scenario

It is important to emphasize here that the model proposed is a scenario of what may have taken place, a possible explanation for known phenomena, or as Heath (1986) puts it, a “thought experiment”. For some reviewers (al-Tarouti 1987:121) this means that its explanatory value is minimal. Since the model maintains that many of the changes brought about by the language learning process were eventually can-