

## **Inflectional scarcity in pidgins and creoles: what it tells us about the inner structure of words and more (Abstract)**

Alain Kihm (CNRS, Paris)

One Frequently Asked Question about pidgins and creoles (p/cs) is ‘Why do they have so little morphology?’ meaning ‘Why are their inflectional and derivational processes so limited?’ Although recent research has shown that these processes actually are not *so* limited as previously thought, the question remains meaningful and in need of an answer. Youth in itself (the fact that p/cs are recent languages) cannot be the answer (see McWhorter 2005), as we know of old languages that have even less morphology than p/cs do.

The present paper aims to show that inflectional scarcity in p/cs – nothing will be said about derivation – is revelatory of the origin of inflection provided morphology is viewed as an autonomous subcomponent of grammar rather than as head-manipulating syntax (see Ackema & Neeleman 2004). I will argue that roots-stems, as proper units of morphology, are characterized by *basic templaticity*, namely a universal set of constraints on their possible forms. As such, basic templaticity (BT) comes with natural language. Most languages grammaticalize BT in the sense that internal or edge segments of the root-stem are singled out as attachment loci for affixes, i.e. morphosyntactic (ms) features exponents. Non-grammaticalization of BT excludes affixation as a device for expressing ms feature values.

A detailed comparison of plural formation in Nubi and its lexifier, Egyptian-Sudanese Arabic, illustrates the effect of pidginization on templaticity (see Wellens 2005; Kihm 2008). Most roots-stems in Egyptian-Sudanese Arabic consist in strongly templatic (ST) three-consonant sequences with constraints on possible associations, allowing for infixation (broken plurals as the unmarked plural type). Nubi roots-stems are unbounded basically templatic Cv strings. Due to the particular history of Nubi, BT grammaticalized, hence a fair amount of suffixation in the language. Notice that the resulting system actually turns out to be more complex than that of the lexifier, so that simplification in itself cannot be considered the leading force in the creole formation process, just a frequent by-product of it.

The analysis of Nubi is then extended to Germanic and Romance-related Creoles, most of which do not grammaticalize BT at all. Inflectional affixation is therefore not an option in them. A built-in property of the parallel model of grammar put forward in Ackema & Neeleman (2004) (also see Jackendoff 1997) is that (phrase) syntax and morphology (word syntax) are in competition for the expression of ms features. It follows that syntax must win in ungrammaticalized BT Creoles, as indeed it does: the exponents of number and TMA values, for instance, are lexical items inserted in phrasal positions (Spec or head of VP expansion). Most of them are affected with a clitic hood diacritic active in the morphosyntactic and morphophonological interfaces.

P/cs are thus crucially characterized by ungrammaticalized BT (with some exceptions). Words in them are self-contained, affix-repellent form-meaning units (as far as inflection is concerned). Given this, the fact that they all ultimately proceed from untutored L2 acquisition seems to be more relevant to explain their formal characters than any other factor such as recent origin or substrate.

Ackema, Peter & Ad Neeleman (2004). *Beyond Morphology: Interface Conditions on Word Formation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jackendoff, Ray (1997). *The Architecture of the Language Faculty*. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press.

Kihm, Alain (2008). Nubi plural formation: how a Creole may become more complex than its lexifier and what it implies for creolization theory. Paper presented at the Berkeley Linguistic Meeting, Berkeley, February 2008.

McWhorter, John H. (2005). *Defining Creole*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wellens, Inneke (2005). *The Nubi Language of Uganda: An Arabic Creole in Africa*. Leiden: Brill.