Verb Form Selection as a Function of Accommodation in Gulf Pidgin Arabic

When people of diversified cultural and linguistic backgrounds come into contact, they utilize facilitative means such as simplified linguistic forms, pidginized varieties and accommodation to make their communication mutually intelligible. In Native non-native interactions, native speakers of the language being adopted adhere to simplified forms and accommodation strategies in order to accelerate communication; on the other hand, non-native speakers absorb these simplified, and sometimes ungrammatical, forms as their inputs. Bresnan (2000) suggests that pidgins are formed "through a process of mutual accommodation, eliminating marked features" (165). Broch (1927) states that Russian Pidgin Russenorsk has an alternative name *moja pa tvoja* "I speak your way" where it represents a prototypical accommodation situation (cited in Niedzielski, 1996, 338). Winford (2006) suggests that inflectional morphology in the lexifier is "frozen" in the pidgin (287).

This study considers instances of accommodation between native Saudi Arabic speakers (Ss) and non-natives foreign workers (FWs) when interacting in Gulf Pidgin Arabic in Saudi Arabia. It hinges on Communication Accommodation Theory, proposed by Coupland, Giles and Henwood in 1988, that speakers move towards their interlocutors by means of linguistic accommodation, approximation and attuning strategies to understand the utterance, the conversational needs and the existing relationships between them.

The corpus for this study contains transcribed interviews among 3 Ss and 9 FWs who come from India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. A total number of 1313 verb forms was collected. Given the context of the interviews, the correct verb forms were elicited, too; 4 coding schemes were developed; the first is to categorize the actually-produced verb forms by both Ss and FWs; the second, contrariwise, is to categorize the should-be-selected verb forms. Third, the length of stay in Saudi Arabia for FWs was coded for *5-9* years and *10-15* years. Finally, the mother tongues for FWs were divided into: *Pashto*, *Bengali* and *Malayalam*.

The results show that both groups appeal to verbal nouns (VNs) such as *ʃuʁul* 'work', the 3rd person masculine singular present tense (3rd PresMascSg verb), such as *yidʒlis* 'sit down', and the unprefixed 3rd person masculine singular present verb form (unpref. 3^{rd}PresMascSg) such as *ruːh* 'go' in relatively similar direction, whereas the tense is indexed through adverbials or inferred contextually. I propose that there are strong tendencies of accommodation and conventionalization in verb form selection between the two groups. Using Chi-square and P-value tests to testify the significance of the differences in verb form selection among Ss and FWs, the results of VNs and 3rd PresMascSg verb form are not statistically significant. Comparing the should-be-selected verb forms to the actually selected verb forms, we find that the two groups diverge from the correct forms and converge to VNs, the 3rd PresMascSg and unpref. 3^{rd}PresMascSg verb forms. Unlike Versteegh (2014) who views forms like *ruh* 'go' to be in the imperative, I consider such examples to be unpref. 3rd PresMascSg verb forms since the imperative form in Najdi Arabic, the local dialect for the participants, has a different form, i.e. *rih* 'go-imperative'. For *the length of stay* in Saudi Arabia, the results of the frequencies of verb forms for each group show that there are statistically significant differences among FWs; the longer they stay in Saudi Arabia, the more they appeal to the 3rd PresMascSg verb form. Delving into language-by-language comparison, we find that the differences between Pashto and Bengali speakers are not statistically significant, whereas the differences between Pashto and Malayalam speakers and between Bengali and Malayalam speakers are significant. These differences are explained via the typological similarities and differences between these languages.

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