ICHL Workshop: Arabic and contact-induced change

Organizers
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Abstract
This workshop starts from the position that the Arabic language (arguably a language family), with its lengthy written history, wide and well-studied dialectal variation, and involvement in numerous heterogeneous contact situations, constitutes an invaluable laboratory for understanding processes of contact-induced change in general.

Until recently, however (e.g. Lucas and Lash 2010, Manfredi forthcoming), diachronic work on Arabic has shown limited interest in contributing to models of contact-induced change. Moreover, even within Arabic studies, there have been very few attempts to synthesize what is known about the outcomes of the many well-documented historical contacts between Arabic and other languages (Thomason 2006, Versteegh 2001, 2010). It is therefore hardly surprising that approaches to contact-induced change that are crosslinguistic in scope have tended to neglect the data that Arabic and its contact languages have to offer (though see Matras 2009, Trudgill 2011 for partial exceptions). This neglect is perhaps most striking when it comes to the area of creolistics. Despite their historical and typological significance, Arabic-based pidgins and creoles have received surprisingly little attention either from creolists or indeed Arabists (Owens 2001) and, despite recent moves to rectify this state of affairs (e.g. Almoaily 2013, Bizri 2010, Manfredi and Tosco 2014, Wellens 2005), there is still little wider awareness or understanding of the socio-historical implications of pidginization and creolization in Arabic.

At the same time, there has recently been a flurry of interest in producing and elaborating general theories of contact-induced change that go beyond the sociocultural paradigm of language maintenance and shift proposed by Thomason and Kaufman (1988). Relevant work here includes Van Coetsem (1988, 2000), Heine and Kuteva (2005), Winford (2005), Aikhenvald (2007), Ross (2007), Chamoreau and Léglise (2012), Bakker et al. (2013), and Aboh (2015). It is clearly crucial for continued progress in this area that further detailed, theoretically informed descriptions of individual contact-induced changes are made available, and that they are drawn from as many typologically and sociologically distinct contact situations as possible. Data from the history of Arabic and its contact languages have a great deal to offer in this regard.

Against this background, the overarching goal of the workshop is to pool the resources of Arabists and historical linguists for the benefit of both fields – to emphasize both the centrality of language contact for Arabic historical linguistics, and the importance of the Arabic language for a typological understanding of contact-induced change. In particular, we seek to address questions such as the following:

- How can current models of contact-induced change improve our understanding of attested changes involving Arabic as a contact language?
- Are there data from changes involving Arabic which challenge one or more of these models?
- To what extent does the current state of knowledge regarding Arabic-based pidgins and creoles support – or challenge – theories of creole genesis and the typology of pidgins and creoles?
- Is there a bias in favour of (or against) seeing changes in the history of Arabic as being contact-induced? What about changes in Berber varieties, Neo-Aramaic varieties, Swahili, and other languages that have undergone intensive contact with Arabic?
- More generally, what new metrics can be developed to improve our ability to reliably distinguish between external and purely internal change?
- To what extent do differences in the socio-historical circumstances of contact situations involving Arabic correlate with distinct outcomes in terms of contact-induced change?

Presentations at this workshop are invited that address any of the above questions, drawing on diachronic data from Arabic and one or more of the languages with which it has been in contact.

References


