

Abstract - AFRAR 2011

**In defense of universalism: evidence from Arabic-based pidgins and creoles**

**Mauro Tosco**

*Università degli Studi di Torino*

The contribution addresses the question of possible universal features of pidginization and creolization on the basis of evidence from Arabic-based pidgins and creoles.

Universal features of pidginization involve the simplification of both phonological and morphological features of the lexifier (Arabic). At the phonological level, such tendencies are witnessed in Arabic-based p/c.s in the well-known loss of vowel length, pharyngealization, gemination, and “back” consonants. While all these features may be subsumed under the general rubric of loss of markedness, it must be noted that for a few of these processes (such as vowel length and gemination) the markedness value is rather low at the typological level.

At the morphological level, the usual tendency to morphological simplification (e.g., through reduction of allomorphy) or even total loss are well-evidenced in Arabic p/c.s. It is interesting to note that reduction of allomorphy is short of complete and uniform: a modicum of morphology (such as Arabic *-ât* in the plural) is retained.

These “irregularities in simplification” are not detrimental to universal explanations, as they are widely shared in unrelated p/c.s and are amenable to universal tendencies.

Universal features of creolization will be invoked *inter alia* in the case of the verbal system. It will be shown that both here and in simplification processes substratist hypotheses cannot account for the data at hand.