Introduction

Dilworth B. Parkinson
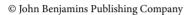
INTRODUCTION

Dilworth B. Parkinson

The papers in this volume are noteworthy for their diversity of approach, and for a noticeable broadening of the kinds of questions that are being asked and the kind of data being gathered about Arabic in various settings. The papers cover many aspects of Arabic linguistic research, from investigations of the acquisition of phonetic detail, to the borrowing of discourse patterns, the use of 'secret' languages, and models of language acquisition.

The paper by Ghada Khattab investigates the acquisition of a low-level phonetic feature (voice onset timing-VOT) by Arabic-English bilingual children, looking specifically at whether they acquire one system or two, and whether their production matches that of monolingual children for each language. This a particularly interesting problem because the VOT of voiced consonants in English are in the range of voiceless consonants in Arabic; the results will thus throw light on the relationship between the phonological level, where the voiced/voiceless distinction appears to play a similar role in English and Arabic, and the level of phonetic detail which are clearly quite distinct, and will specifically address the issue of whether bilingual children acquire one phonological system or two. The evidence clearly supports the notion that bilingual children do acquire separate systems for each language, but it also shows that the systems of bilingual children will match those of monolingual children in both languages only if the input in both languages is sufficient and comes at a young enough age. Khattab makes the distinction between features that are relatively easy to acquire and those that are more difficult, and shows that for the difficult ones, greater input at a younger age is necessary, indicating that there is a difference between the systems of 'perfectly balanced bilinguals' and those who are exposed to one language over the other. This echoes the results of a series of studies of short /a/ in Philadelphia, that indicate that children who move into the area even a little later than the critical age are unlikely to acquire the entire (rather complex) system (Julie Roberts, 'Hitting a Moving Target: Acquisition of sound change in progress by Philadelphia children', *Language Variation and Change* 9:2.249-266).

The paper by Bushra Zawaydeh et al. reports on an innovative experiment designed to reveal the natural rhythm of Arabic speech. Despite the fact that linguists have long been classifying languages as 'syllable-timed', 'mora-timed', and 'stress-timed', the experimental results to attempt to back up these categories have been disappointing, and some scholars were beginning to think that these categories were more impressionistic than insightful. The authors of this paper have developed a new task that involves repeating short set phrases several times to the beat of a metronome, a task not totally unfamiliar to subjects who might do similar things in reciting poetry or singing. In comparing English and Arabic on the one hand (both usually designated as stress-timed languages), with Japanese (designated as a mora-timed language) on the other, the authors were able to get good evidence that there is a major difference between the two groups, i.e., that English and Arabic pattern together against Japanese. Moreover, they were able to show that English is more strongly stress-timed than Arabic, indicating that perhaps the categories need to be understood a little less discretely than they have been in the past.

Adamantios Gafos's paper takes on the problem of accounting for the various forms of doubled verbs in Classical Arabic. Past accounts rely on, as he puts it, "a peculiar combination of phonological and morphological factors" requiring an arbitrary morphological stipulation. By taking the doubled form as the base form (/madd/ instead of /mad/ or /madad/), however, he shows that forms can be accounted for entirely in terms of phonotactic requirements. This proposal also solves the problem of the 'exceptional' forms which do not always undergo the expected alternation and has implications for a stem-based (rather than root-based) account of Arabic morphology.

The paper on Moroccan broken plurals by Robert Ratcliffe looks at the evidence of historical change in the plural system as it relates to current arguments in morphology regarding whether rule-based or analogical approaches are more appropriate. Ratcliffe breaks with the traditional listing of plural forms and concentrates instead on the relationship of the singular to the plural, and to what extent the plural can be predicted from the singular. Semi-productive, semi-predictable morphological systems like the Arabic plural pose special problems to rule-based accounts, and historical data is of vital importance in determining whether rule-extension is the major

process or whether statistically prominent patterns impose themselves no matter what the 'rule' is. He finds in the case of Moroccan that rule-extension does not appear to be happening, and that the patterns that appear to be imposing themselves are output patterns, using what he calls 'output-based analogy'. As we have seen so often in the past, Arabic morphology and its 'oddities' are often key to advances in a broader understanding of morphology in general.

Frederick Hoyt's paper looks at the problem of agreement variation in Rural Palestinian Arabic existential clauses. Speakers may either agree fully with a postposed existential subject, or simply use the masculine form of the verb or participle, no matter what the subject is. There is some evidence for semantic or pragmatic effects, although these are often only tendencies and not absolute. Arguing from a Minimalist position for a strongly modular grammar, he shows that although it appears that pragmatic and semantic features are influencing the choice of agreement in these clauses, these effects are actually an epiphenomenon that results from the fact that non-specific bare nouns in this dialect lack a determiner layer (the DP), and that since case is assigned solely to this layer, they need not check for case. Specific indefinite nouns have the DP layer, and thus are more likely to show full agreement.

Fatima Sadiqi, in her paper on small clauses in Moroccan Arabic, investigates the word order restrictions on small clauses that do not exist in root clauses or other embedded clauses. She considers accounting for this on the basis of agreement-checking, as suggested by a Minimalist perspective. She finds, however, that agreement-checking fails to account for the data, and that case theory itself does a better job. She suggests, therefore, that case theory may be part of the core grammar.

The paper on discourse patterns in legal texts, by Ahmed Fakhri, looks at the development of legal discourse as Moroccan society moves from traditional to modern. By comparing traditional and modern court documents with French court documents, he is able to show that, above and beyond the borrowing of specific words and phrases, Moroccan secular courts have "adopted a discourse organization based on the French model." He makes several interesting points about the nature and context of this borrowing, among which is the suggestion that the association between rhetorical styles and particular languages is not as rigid as it may seem, and the idea that although in many settings cross-linguistic

discourse borrowing is denigrated, in contexts like this it can be highly valued, and is thus dependent on the context of the borrowing and the nature of the community doing the borrowing.

Muhammad Bakalla describes a 'secret' language that was common in Mecca during the middle part of the twentieth century. Like 'pig latin', this language, called Misf, involved the addition of a long vowel followed by the consonants /rb/ in the middle of the original word. Interestingly, for a period Misf became more than simply a children's play language, and became something of a fad, commonly used among both children and adults as a major means of communication on the streets, in coffee houses, etc. For a time it became prestigious to know and use it. Like most fads, this one also passed, and now the form is almost extinct. Bakalla investigates Misf from the point of view of phonology, morphology, and syntax, and shows that it is a clear subset of regular Meccan Arabic. He also looks at the phenomenon of using the form to mimic other dialects, and even other languages. He speculates about whether the popularity of the form may have resulted from the particular social situation of Mecca, which accepts a large number of pilgrims from around the world each year, many of them Arabic-speaking. Fluency in this form could have been a way to support local identity and keep information private from the throngs of outsiders.

In his paper on sentence processing strategies, Adel Abu Radwan applies the Competition Model to problems of the acquisition of Arabic as a second language. In contrast to prevailing 'nativist' theories of acquisition, the Competition model is a more functional approach to language acquisition that relies on general cognitive processes and does not assume a specific language learning mechanism. It differs from purely functional approaches in that it does not posit a one-to-one relationship between form and function. Language processing is conceived of as the 'competition among various cues' that point to and away from the most appropriate interpretation of a sentence. In the case of conflict, the strength of the various cues determines which one ends up selecting the interpretation. The mechanism for this can be modeled computationally as a connectionist network with back-propagation that increases or decreases the strength of cues depending on how well they work to predict the correct interpretation of sentences in real time. Cross-linguistically, cues that are strong in one language may be less strong in another (compare word order in Arabic and

English). The author designed an experiment to test whether in fact native speakers of Arabic give more weight to specific cues (like word order, subject animacy, gender, case) than English learners of Arabic do. Interestingly, English learners, who are known to rely heavily on word order in their interpretation of English sentences, are not statistically different from Arabic native speakers in the weight they give to non-word-order cues in interpreting Arabic sentences. The author points to the efficacy of overt language teaching as a possible explanation for this unexpected result.

In a similar vein Mohammad Alhawary, in his paper on the role of L1 transfer in the acquisition of L2 inflectional morphology, investigates the transfer of subject-verb and noun-adjective agreement in light of the Full Access/Full Transfer model. He shows that despite the opposite order of introduction in the teaching materials, students he tested acquired subject-verb agreement before noun-adjective agreement, and he claims that this is best accounted for by the Full Access/Full Transfer model. The idea is that since native speakers of English 'know' about subject-verb agreement, the adjustment to the richer paradigm of Arabic verb-subject agreement is not a major one, but since English does not have noun-adjective agreement, the adjustment to a whole system of agreement checking in that part of the derivation is more difficult. This supports the claim of the model that students start out with L2 parameters set like L1 and with full access to UG through L1, and that the more salient the disconfirming evidence that students encounter from L2, the more likely and the earlier they are to reset the parameters for L2.

Naomi Bolotin, in a study of binding in L1 acquisition, shows that as with studies of Principle A and B in other languages, Principle A is acquired earlier and more strongly than B in Saudi children. Interestingly, in Arabic it appears to be acquired quite a bit later than is the case with children in other studies, since even children who were ten and eleven had not acquired it yet. Bolotin speculates on several possible causes for this anamoly (a parameter reshifting account, the fact that there are a few cases where pronouns do not obey Principle B, the diglossic nature of Arabic), and ends with a call for further research into the timing of the acquisition of Principle B in Arabic.