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Preface

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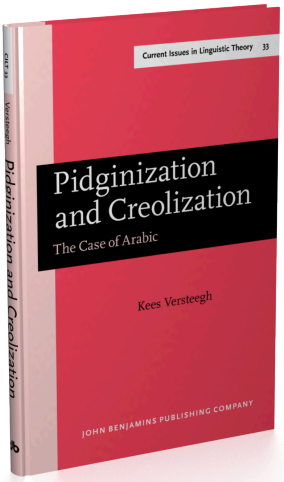

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Pidginization and Creolization: The Case of Arabic
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PREFACE

Let us assume that a scholar finds to his surprise that insular dialects of several unrelated languages differ from their continental counterparts in a significant and systematic way. He calls such dialects 'insulars' and suggests that a common process — let us call it 'insularization' — is responsible for this development. Others are attracted to the idea and start looking for parallels. One scholar asserts that all European 'insulars' have a common origin, since they all have preserved the same traces of the language of a Proto-European people that once inhabited all European islands. Clearly, this claim is invalidated by the fact that all African, Asian, and American 'insulars' are found to exhibit the same features as the European ones, and nobody seriously believes that the Proto-European people once inhabited all islands in the world. The next contribution comes from a sceptic who points out that we do not have a watertight definition of the notion 'island': does it apply to peninsulas, is England an island, what about islands in rivers? Consequently, he denies the value of the notion of 'insularization', and claims that there is no such thing as an 'insular'. But then someone argues that the individual features which are believed to be characteristic of 'insulars' are also found in some continental languages. He adds that, after all, every continent might be regarded as an island, so that we are justified in calling all languages 'insulars'.

Still, this does not explain the fact that the original instances of 'insularization' do seem intuitively to exhibit a very characteristic combination of features that is not found anywhere else. One scholar refuses to call any dialect an 'insular' until a complete classification of islands is made that takes into account not only the geographical position, but also the vegetation, the temperature of the water, and the presence or absence of certain animals. Still another scholar goes so far as to include mountain dialects, delta dialects, and beach dialects in the group of 'insulars', since, so he claims, these dialects are as isolated as the original 'insulars'. The discussion comes to a point where for some people 'insulars' constitute only a very small group of dialects ('real insulars'), whereas others feel that the term is so vacuous as to include

almost any language. Many debates are devoted to the question whether or not Australian English is an 'insular' (or perhaps a 'pseudo-insular'?), and many people vehemently oppose the suggestion that continentals who stay more than a few weeks on an island may be said to 'insularize' their speech.

Finally, a proposal is made that satisfies everyone. It is decided that a combined effort will be made to find out what happens when a group of people is left on an inhabited island. A group of volunteers is selected and dropped and, after fifty years, revisited. It turns out that ...

At this point, it is perhaps preferable to leave the matter to future scholars, who may one day be confronted by the problem of 'insularization'. In what follows I wish to occupy myself with a much less fictitious problem, that of 'pidgins' and 'pidginization', of 'creoles' and 'creolization'. I believe that what went wrong in the approaches sketched above was that they were all based on one implicit assumption, namely that the notion 'insular' corresponded to something in the real world. The discussion concentrated, therefore, on the question whether or not certain dialects or languages could be called 'insulars', instead of trying to determine the nature of the process involved, and the relation between that process and the changes in the languages involved. Thus, what ought to be proved first became the axiomatic point of departure for a very entangled discussion. I intend to look at the discussions about 'pidginization' and 'creolization' in the following chapters from various angles, and to find an approach that connects the nature of the process to the changes involved. Then, I shall try to apply this approach to a concrete example, the history of the Arabic language.

It is, perhaps, superfluous to add that the above considerations are in no way intended as an innovation, in the sense of something that has not been put forth by anyone else. The only reason I did present them was to be absolutely clear about the status of my discussion, which, after all, concerns a language to whose history the notion of 'pidginization' has hardly ever been applied. A further reason for starting at an elementary level is that it is imperative for an outsider to a certain field of research to show exactly where he stands, and to admit right from the beginning that his only attitude can be one of common sense, without any claim to inside knowledge based on personal research. This principle is particularly valid in the case of someone trained in philological methods within a discipline that is by and large still characterized by a certain aloofness from developments in general linguistics. I have tried to use the existing literature on 'pidgins' and 'creoles' as conscientiously as possible, and no statement about any phenomenon

linked with these languages should be taken as more than a faithful reproduction of the data collected by others, and interpreted by someone without specialist knowledge. In a somewhat less strict sense this also applies to data from the field of Arabic dialectology, which are not based on any fieldwork, but only on the perusal of the existing literature.

In the first chapter I discuss the linguistic situation in the period before the coming of Islam on the Arabian peninsula, and I conclude that during that period there was essentially one Arabic language, more or less identical with the later standardized form of Classical Arabic. In chapter II I discuss the various theories that have been put forward to explain the emergence of a new type of Arabic, and the use they make of both the common and the divergent features of the modern dialects of Arabic. Chapter III summarizes the current opinions about 'pidginization' and 'creolization', and tries to determine the best vantage point from which to apply these notions to the history of Arabic. Briefly put, my conclusion is that 'pidginization' is a useful label for an incomplete process of second language acquisition in an untutored context of language learning, whereas 'creolization' is a useful label for the construction of a first language from an unnatural input. In the next chapter I study the sociolinguistic context of the early period of Islam in order to analyze the conditions of language learning in the territories conquered by the Arabs. In chapter V I apply my conclusions to the changes between the old and the new type of Arabic, and I compare these changes with those occurring in other languages that have undergone the same process. In chapter VI I present some material concerning some recent 'pidginized' and 'creolized' varieties of Arabic. Finally, chapter VII reformulates my ideas and tentatively connects them with other language areas.

I have alluded above to the feeling of trespassing one has in crossing into an unfamiliar field of research. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to make one's self as inconspicuous as one might wish to, and it is impossible not only to avoid all pitfalls, but also to mask one's unawareness of them. Obviously, the help of others, both in exploring the field, and in helping one on one's way, is indispensable in such an enterprise.

In the first place, I wish to thank all of my colleagues, who probably never wish to hear the word 'pidgin' again. Henk Maier provided interesting material on Indonesian, and Jan Peters read an early version of my ideas. But the brunt of my communicativeness was borne by Erik-Jan Zürcher, whose wish to preserve me from the more daring conjectures I advanced in the course of my research was fairly matched by his willingness to listen to

them at all hours.

I take this opportunity to settle a long-standing debt towards Hans Bertens (University of Utrecht), who guided my first efforts in English composition. Whatever merits my English prose possesses are due to him; whatever defects still remain are entirely my own fault. Phil Hyams (University of Nijmegen) very kindly agreed to check the final draft and to correct the most blatant offenses against English grammar.

An early version of my ideas was presented at the 5th Congress of Historical Linguistics at Galway (1981). Elizabeth Traugott (Stanford University) and David Lightfoot (then University of Utrecht) took the trouble of reading my paper, which has been published in the proceedings of the conference.

Several people assisted in obtaining for me materials on Arabic dialects. Bernd Heine (University of Cologne) allowed me to consult the pre-publication version of his manuscript on the Arabic creole Nubi, and let me have a copy of the published book. Robin Thelwall (University of Ulster), Ushari Mahmud (Khartoum International Institute of Arabic) and as-Sayyid Ḥāmid Ḥurreiz (University of Khartoum) sent me material concerning Arabic in the Sudan. Alexander Borg (University of Erlangen) allowed me to use his unpublished habilitation on Cypriot Arabic. Alan Kaye (California State University) kindly sent me a copy of his dictionary of Nigerian Arabic, and corrected some errors. Ernő Csiszár (Várpalota) provided me with information about the phenomenon of Esperanto as a first language and invited me to give a lecture at the 5th *Renkonto de Esperantistaj Familioj* (Sümeg, August 11th, 1983). Ernst Håkon Jahr (Tromsø) sent me his manuscript on Russenorsk.

At the 11th congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et des Islamisants at Évora (1982) I was given the opportunity to discuss the analogy between the history of Arabic and the history of the Romance languages in a paper in which I presented the main outlines of my ideas. I wish to thank all those who engaged in this discussion. On the basis of this paper Roger Wright (University of Liverpool) sent me his comments on my theories in a very generous way, and started a most stimulating discussion.

I am particularly grateful to Hartmut Bobzin (University of Erlangen) for having invited me to Erlangen for a visit as a guest-lecturer (December 18th, 1982), and I wish to thank the participants in the ensuing discussion, in particular Wolfdietrich Fischer, Otto Jastrow, Hartmut Bobzin, and Alexander Borg, for their benevolent scepticism, which forced me to reconsider my position in some points.

At the final stage of preparation Pieter Seuren (University of Nijmegen) was kind enough to read the entire manuscript and to give me the much-needed support of a professional linguist, as well as the even more needed advice concerning the presentation of my ideas. At this stage I received a number of general, but very penetrating questions from Georgine Ayoub (Paris), which helped me to reformulate some essential points. After the completion of the manuscript I had a chance to present my ideas as a guest lecturer at the University of Bochum (July 14th, 1983), to which I had been invited by Gerhard Endreß.

Finally, I wish to thank those of my students who took the trouble of following my frequent digressions about those subjects that happened to occupy me, and who had a knack of putting to me precisely those questions to which I had not yet invented an answer.

In a very literal sense this book would not have appeared without the help of the editor of this series, Konrad Koerner (Ottawa), and the publishers, Claire and John Benjamins. I am grateful to them and to Hans Hospers (Groningen) for their warm support.

Nijmegen, December 1983