Plural formation in Nubi and in Arabic

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Nubi is an Arabic-related Creole. It evolved during the 19th century from an Arabic pidgin used among enslaved soldiers of the Egyptian army occupying Sudan, who later took refuge in Uganda and Kenya where they settled and where the language is now spoken (Heine 1982; Owens 1985; Wellens 2005). Untypically for a creole language, Nubi can be shown to be more complex than its lexifier Egyptian/Sudanese Arabic (E/SA) in the morphology of plural formation, as it includes opaque word classes not present in the lexifier.

The comparison will be carried out in the framework of Paradigm Function Morphology (PFM), a fully formalized and explicit theory particularly adequate to the purpose (Stump 2001).

In E/SA, plural formation proceeds through infixation ("broken" or "internal" plurals) or suffixation. Nouns belong to either one of two complementary sets: (i) an open set whose members are marked off by special properties: nominalized participles, nouns of profession, unassimilated borrowings, etc.; (ii) an open and *de facto* more numerous set of nouns without any special character. Set (i) has suffixal, set (ii) internal plurals. Infixation is thus the default, whereas suffixation applies to designated word classes. For instance, we write the following realization rules (RR's) for the plurals of *muᶜallem* 'teacher' (*muᶜallemiin*) and *kelb* 'dog' (*kelaab*):

(1) X_N σ: {FORM:ppl, VOICE:active, GDR:masc, NUM:pl} $\Rightarrow$ X⊕*iin*

(2) X_N σ: {NUM:pl} $\Rightarrow$ $X:C_1C_2GC_3$

In (1) and (2), X is a nominalized root. In (2) $C_1C_2GC_3$ means "Insert glide between root C2 and C3" of X (Kihm 2006). The relevant feature set comprises no more than {NUM:pl} in (2), whereas we need three more features in order to apply (1) properly. In accordance with the Paninian principle, (2) will therefore apply every time the conditions for (1) or an equivalent are not precisely met.

In Nubi, internal plural formation is extinct. The few surviving items – e.g. *binía* / *bána* 'girl(s)', *kebír* / *kubár* 'director(s)' – count as suppletive forms (cf. "repluralized" *kubárin* 'director(s)'). Actual plural formation is through suffixation involving 7 suffixes: (i) *-(y)á* : *malím* / *malimá* 'teacher(s)' ; (ii) *-iya* : *ásker* / *askeríya* 'soldier(s) ; (iii) *-ín* : *sókol* / *sokolín* 'thing(s) ; (iv) *-án* : *ter* / *terán* 'bird(s)'; (v) *-ná* : *sókol* / *sokolná* 'thing(s)'; (vi) *-ká* : *nyerekú* / *nyerekuká* 'child(ren)'; (vii) *-ú* : *bab* / *babú* 'door(s) – plus (viii) stress shift to the final syllable as in *gidída* / *gididá* 'chicken(s), where final stress can be analysed as a stress suffix. Of these suffixes, (i) and (viii) are the most frequent.

The demise of internal plurals in Nubi is due to the loss of awareness of Arabic consonantal roots and templates following pidginization (i.e. untutored second language acquisition). Whereas E/SA *kalb* has the morphological form in (3), its Nubi counterpart *kel* is like in (4) (W = word, St = stem, ℜ = root):

(3) ⟨_W ⟨_{St/ℜ} k.l.b⟩⟩

(4) ⟨_{W/St/ℜ} kel⟩

Without templates such as $C_1C_2C_3$ infixation cannot be localized. Only affixation to the margins remains as a feasible morphological device.

To the contrary of E/SA, what suffix attaches to what stem cannot be predicted in Nubi. This is due to the absence of inner morphological structure (so that Nubi *malím* 'teacher' is a simple word in contrast with E/SA *muᶜallem*) and of gender. Consequently, arbitrary word-class indices must be attached to lexemes and there is no default despite the

greater frequency of two suffixes. See below the RR for *malimá* 'teachers' in which Ná is the index for the opaque class of those nouns that take -*á* as a plural suffix :

(5) $X_{Ná}$ σ: {NUM:pl} $\Rightarrow$ X⊕*á*

 In other words, all Nubi plurals are like English *oxen*.

Consequences of this state of affairs will be further explored, as well as yet more complex cases such as suppletive and multiple plurals.

References

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