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Kormakiti Maronite Arabic: prospect of documentation and community response

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kormakiti Maronite Arabic (KMA) is an endangered language spoken by a small community of speakers in Cyprus. It has been in contact with Cypriot-Greek (CG) for an extensive period of time. Changes due to this prolonged intensive contact are found in KMA. It has been argued that KMA is an Arabic-Greek mixed language. More specifically, Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 106) claim that KMA is a mixed language and that ‘the type of mixture it exhibits is an extreme version of ... borrowing of morphology (and phonology) along with lexicon’. Thomason (2001: 200) further stresses that this grammatical mixture arose from lexical mixture. There is also the opposing view which claims that KMA has never been a mixed language (Bakker 2003: 121). Bakker stresses that ‘other languages with heavy borrowing that have erroneously been called mixed, are Kormakiti Arabic of Cyprus, Chamorro, Maltese and some others in which also some of the basic vocabulary has been borrowed’ Hadjidemetriou (2007) also supports the view that KMA is not a mixed language, but rather an example of extensive structural contact-induced changes developed in a language-maintenance environment and that there is insufficient linguistic and sociolinguistic evidence to claim that it is a mixed language.

The second part of this paper outlines the prospect for documentation preparatory to a language revitalisation programme. The community response to this plan is considered important and thus evaluated in order to understand how it might affect documentation efforts.

2. THE MARONITES OF CYPRUS

The Maronites are recognized as a religious group/minority in Cyprus. In 2004 there were 4650 Maronites, which is an estimation offered by the Cypriot authorities. The exact number of KMA speakers is not known and there is no updated official record on their number.

The Cypriot Maronite community is a Catholic community whose arrival in Cyprus from Lebanon dates back to the 8th century AD (Cirilli 1898: 5). Though, the history of the Maronites of Cyprus has not been investigated thoroughly yet. The name Maronite does not designate the ethnic or national origin of the community, but rather its religious identity (Dau 1984: 9). Before the 1974 Turkish military invasion, the Maronites were located in four villages in the northern part of Cyprus, Kormakitis, Asomatos, Karpasia and Ayia Marina. In only one of these four villages, Kormakitis, were the Maronites bilingual in CG and KMA. In the other three Maronite villages, the speakers were monolingual in

Greek. There is no record of when the speakers shifted from Arabic to Greek or when they spoke Arabic. After the Turkish invasion, the majority of Maronites from all four villages were scattered around the free part of the island, abandoning their villages in the occupied north. Hadjidemetriou (forthcoming) holds the opinion that ‘the contact setting and fate of KMA were changed by a sudden ‘tip’ in the language’s history, which was the displacement of the population from the village after 1974’.

3. MIXED LANGUAGES

Bakker and Muysken (1995: 49) talk about mixed languages (MLs) as combining ‘the grammatical system of one language with the lexicon from another’. Matras and Bakker (2003: 1) point out that when mixed languages arise in situations of community bilingualism their structures show ‘an etymological split that is not marginal, but dominant, so that it is difficult to define the variety’s linguistic percentage as involving just one ancestor language’. According to Thomason (2003: 21), ‘all languages are mixed in a weak sense’ explaining that there are no natural human languages which are completely free from foreign elements. However, she also defines MLs as languages whose ‘grammatical and lexical subsystems cannot all be traced back primarily to a single source’. In this paper, the definition of MLs adopted refers to those languages that have emerged in situations of full bilingualism and which show a split in their ancestry.

3.1. Emergence of mixed languages

There are several theories that attempt to explain the development of MLs. The theory of LANGUAGE INTERWINING assumes that MLs emerge from a process involving mixed populations where the grammar of one language is combined with the lexicon of another (Bakker 1997, cited in Matras and Bakker 2003: 13). This rapid process regards the two languages as hierarchically equivalent and is basically connected to the formation of a new ethnic identity, i.e., ‘MLs in general are regarded in the intertwining model as markers of distinct identity’ (Matras and Bakker 2003: 13). Bakker (2003) claims that the creation of intertwined languages is ‘more or less’ conscious, an argument that is also put forward by Mous in relation to the deliberate creation of Ma’á. Thomason (2003: 34) also points out that the one mechanism which can be seen ‘as a universal contributor to the genesis of bilingual mixed languages’ is change by deliberate decision. Winford (2003: 207) argues that the processes involved in the genesis of mixed languages do not differ from those which operate in other types of bilingual mixture. Finally, Aikhenvald (2007: 10) stresses that MLs arise ‘as a result of a combination of special sociolinguistic circumstances with semi-conscious efforts to ‘create a language’, in which different parts of grammar and lexicon come from different languages’.

The claim put forward in Hadjidemetriou (2007a) is that in the development of KMA, deliberate decision, as a mechanism for contact-induced changes, has not been operative. The KMA speakers were already ‘different’ from residents of

neighbouring villages and so no conscious or deliberate decision was required on their part to intensify the changes. On the contrary, the changes that KMA has undergone have brought KMA closer to CG, thus, minimizing the differences rather than intensifying them.

4. LANGUAGE CONTACT AND ITS OUTCOMES: KMA IN CONTACT WITH CG

KMA is an Arabic variety that has undergone unconscious and non-deliberate structural changes due to its contact with CG (Hadjidemetriou 2007a). According to Thomason and Kaufman's (1998) borrowing scale, KMA falls within category five of heavy structural borrowing, based on available KMA data.

The results of contact between KMA and CG are evident at several different levels of the language and are the outcome of strong cultural pressure which exhibits extensive structural borrowing. Newton (1964: 43) argued that KMA shows 'unmistakable signs of centuries-long Greek influence'. The examples which follow demonstrate CG elements that have been introduced and internalised into KMA. These features are not sufficient to prove that KMA is a mixed language.

4.1. *Lexicon and inflection*

Newton found that 38% of the vocabulary in KMA came from Greek (1964: 44).¹ The lexical items usually borrowed from CG describe general, newspaper-learned themes of current affairs and politics (Versteegh 1997: 212). Vocabulary for ordinary household matters is in KMA. Greek loans in KMA cover the official and everyday vocabulary, for example (Versteegh 1997: 212):

CG loans in KMA

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----------|-------------|
| (1) | (a) | ciriací | 'Sunday' |
| | (b) | tiléfono | 'telephone' |
| | (c) | pólemo | 'war' |
| | (d) | đískolo | 'difficult' |
| | (e) | airóplana | 'airplanes' |
| | (f) | záxari | 'sugar' |
| | (g) | maθités | 'students' |
| | (h) | ístera | 'later' |

However, we can also identify lexical items in KMA that have originated from CG and which have not kept their original form (Borg 1985), for example:

¹ Based on a list of 630 common words.

- (2) **KMA** **CG**
 paθpún² <*patmún <potamón ‘river’

We also find lexical items originating from CG that have been nativised and use the KMA plural (Borg 1985: 121-122). According to Borg, this is not a common phenomenon in KMA. However, here are some examples:

Table 1

CG lexical items nativized in KMA and employing the KMA plural marking.

	PLURAL	SINGULAR	CG	GLOSS
(a)	xman	xmin	<*xmil < xamilós	‘short’
(b)	kmemin	kammin	< kammíni	‘charcoal furnaces’
(c)	ftamin	paθpun	< potamón	‘river’
(d)	kšenír	kišnar	< ksinari	‘pick-axes’

The morphological system of KMA has for the most part resisted intrusion of foreign elements (Borg 1985: 153). This is mainly due to the fact that the KMA inflectional and derivational system lacks congruity with the CG inflectional and derivational system. The only element of CG that has entered the KMA morphological system is diminutive suffixes (Borg 1985: 125).

In KMA, masculine nominals take the CG diminutive suffix –úi in singular and –úkka in plural; feminine nominals take the CG suffix –úa in singular and –úes in plural. For instance:

Table 2

Examples of KMA masculine and feminine nominals with CG diminutive suffixes.

	UNINFLECTED KMA FORM	DIMINUTIVE SINGULAR	DIMINUTIVE PLURAL	GLOSS
(a)	payt SING MASC	paytui	paytukka	‘house’
(b)	kilp SING MASC	kilpui	kilpukka	‘dog’
(c)	forn SING MASC	fornui	fornukka	‘oven’
(d)	žezže SING FEM	žezžua	žezžues	‘hen’
(e)	malaka SING FEM	malakua	malakues	‘table spoon’
(f)	mišle SING FEM	mišlua	mišlues	‘ladle’

² The examples taken from Borg (1985) maintain the transcription system as it appears in his text.

Borg (1985: 127) offered another example of CG influence on KMA, which is the inflection of the number ‘one’ in the KMA numerical system. In Old Arabic, the numbers ‘one’ and ‘two’ are both inflected for gender, whereas KMA has retained the gender inflection only for ‘one’ (Borg 1985: 126). Tzermias argued that this feature has entered KMA from CG, in which gender inflection of numerals is restricted to the number ‘one’ (Tzermias 1969, cited in Borg 1985: 127).

Finally, Borg (1985: 91) cites one example of verb class that originates from CG but exhibits KMA inflection. This refers to the imperative form of the verb ‘come’, which is as follows:

	KMA	CG
(3) (a)	éla come-2.SG MASC	éla come-2.SG
(b)	éli come-2.SG FEM	
(c)	élu come-2.PL	eláte come-2.PL

4.2. Phonology

New phonological features have entered KMA through the process of lexical borrowing. According to Borg (1985: 152), the KMA phonemic inventory underwent a drastic reduction and now consists of 26 sound segments, whereas the Old Arabic sound system consists of 36 sounds. Whether KMA resulted from Old Arabic or not is an issue that is not addressed in this paper. However, Versteegh classifies KMA under the Lebanese/Central Syrian dialects which consists of Lebanese (the dialect of Beirut), Central Syrian (the dialect of Damascus) and KMA. Certain structural innovations found in KMA are ascribable to the interaction with CG (Borg 1985: 151). Borg (1985: 3) compared KMA to Old Arabic in an attempt to clarify the genetic links and typological affinities of KMA with contemporary Arabic vernaculars. Certain innovations which constitute paradigmatic shifts in the KMA sound system can be detected as a result of this comparison between KMA and Old Arabic. However, the examples which follow are ascribed to contact with CG.

4.2.1. Loss of the distinctive role of voicing in stops

After being influenced by CG, KMA has lost the functional role of voicing in its stop series, which refers to the sounds, /p/, /t/ and /k/ (Borg 1985: 12). For example, the following two words begin with the voiceless sounds /p/ and /t/ (whereas in other Arabic dialects these words begin with [b] and [d], and the /t/ in pitel is also [d] in other dialects):

- | | | |
|---------|-------|--------------|
| (4) (a) | pitel | ‘he changed’ |
| (b) | tilef | ‘it leaked’ |

Voiced realisations of the three sounds above occur in intervocalic positions and when in contact with voiced segments or the voiced alveolar fricative /z/ (Borg 1985: 12-13). For example:

- (5) (a) [kílbe] ← /kilpe/ ‘bitch’
 (b) [índi] ← /inti/ ‘when’
 (c) [várde] ← /varte/ ‘flower’
 (d) [págar] ← /pakar/ ‘cows’
 (e) [mgas] ← /mkass/ ‘scissors’
 (f) [nágza] ← /nakza/ ‘sharp pain’

4.2.2. *Consonant gemination*

As in other Arabic dialects, KMA maintains the distinction between single and geminate consonants in word-initial and intervocalic contexts (Borg 1985). However, the strong aspirated release of the following KMA geminates /pp/, /tt/ and /kk/ contrasting with the quality of their single counterparts is probably a phonic interference from CG (Newton 1972, cited in Borg 1985: 16). Consider the following examples (Borg 1985: 17):

- (6) (a) pir ‘well’
 (b) ppir ← l-pir ‘the well’
 (c) tipn ‘straw’
 (d) ttipn ← l-tipn ‘the straw’

The words ppir and ttipn derive from the sequence /l-pir/ and /l-tipn/, where l is a definite article. In this case, the article becomes fully assimilated to the word-initial consonant it accompanies. According to Borg (1985: 17) ‘there is no reason to doubt that the overall systematic treatment of segmental length in KMA (i.e. loss of functional length in vowels, and its retention in consonants) has been determined by the internal evolution of the CG sound system’.

4.2.3. *Manner dissimilation*

The phonological treatment of dyadic obstruent clusters in KMA somewhat reflects the phonotactics of CG (Borg 1985: 18). In CG and in other Greek dialects, obstruent clusters are limited sequences of fricative-stop (Newton 1972a, cited in Borg 1985: 18). For instance, the manner dissimilation rule in KMA produced the following sequences, /ft/, /θk/, /xt/ and /fk/, which come from underlying and historical sequences /pt/, /tk/, /kt/ and /pk/ respectively. For instance:

- (7) (a) xtuft ← ktupt ‘I wrote’
 (b) θkura ← tkura ‘male (plural)’
 (c) xtilt ← ktilt ‘I killed’
 (d) fkum ← pkum ‘I get up’

4.2.4. *Vowel system: loss of phonemic length occasioning extensive fusion of long vowels with short counterparts*

In KMA, vowels do not participate in phonological length contrasts (Borg 1985: 45). This is also a characteristic of the CG sound system, where there is no phonemic distinction between long and short vowels. For instance, the Old Arabic words tu:tah ('mulberry tree') and du:dah ('silkworm') are pronounced in KMA as tute and tute respectively (Borg 1985: 28).

5. PROSPECT OF DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The section outlines a plan-in-progress for documenting KMA with the aim of revitalizing the language by applying the European charter for regional or minority languages. The community response to this plan is considered important and thus evaluated in order to understand how it might affect documentation efforts.

In Hadjidemetriou (2007b) the need for the documentation of KMA is stressed as a way of recording the language since the fear of death is imminent unless revitalisation efforts intervene. Reservations as to whether the documentation of KMA will offer what some Kormakiti Maronites wish, i.e. the survival of their language, are also expressed. Hadjidemetriou (2007b) believes that Kormakiti Maronites who are interested in maintaining their language rely heavily on the prospect of documentation of the language with the aim of producing educational materials for teaching it. They hold the view that teaching KMA once or twice a week to primary school children will help their language survive. Towards this end, they have already begun to teach KMA; however, they lack a formal script, educational materials, or training for teaching their language.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The need for documentation of KMA is necessary not only for its survival but also for further investigation of the language. New data will facilitate the investigation of the extent of the outcomes of contact between KMA and CG. The documentation will also satisfy the expectations of the Kormakiti Maronites in their wishes for the language to be recorded for future generations.

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