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Emergent Patterns in Gulf Pidgin Arabic: Interactional Strategies and Structural Regularization

Wafi Fhaid Alshammari
Department of English, University of Ha'il, Hail, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—**This study explores interactional strategies employed by Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) speakers to facilitate the negotiation of meaning and developing conventionalized linguistic patterns. Utilizing ethnographic recordings of exchanges between native Saudi Arabic speakers and non-native foreign workers who had varying degrees of familiarity with GPA, the study uncovers how GPA speakers co-construct conventionalized linguistic patterns despite limited linguistic exposure. Drawing upon theoretical insights from pidgin and creole linguistics, SLA, sociocultural theory, and conversation analysis, the study emphasizes the significance of interactional strategies in repairing communicative breakdown during meaning negotiation. Moreover, the study demonstrates how simplified verbal, pronominal, numeral forms, as well as patterns of negation reflect the process through which an emerging communal language develops and becomes structurally regularized and conventionalized over time. Overall, the study illustrates how mutual accommodation and functional simplification foster the evolution of a new linguistic system.**

Index Terms—**Gulf Pidgin Arabic, jargon, negotiation of meaning, regularization, conventionalization**

I. Introduction

Languages constantly evolve to permit communication in response to multilingual contact and practical needs among people without a common language. Scholars have shown that the early stages of both creole development and SLA involve simplification and restructuring (Schumann, 1978; Sprouse, 2006). Historical accounts illustrate how contact yields compromise structures that are mutually recognizable, and short-lived forms may vanish once communicative needs cease (Borges, 2015; Belyaev, 2020). Pidgins are characterized by a reduction in morphological complexity and syntactic structure relative to their lexifier languages. The morphological structure, when identified, appears to be in a state of fossilization (Mufwene, 1997; Siegel, 2008; Winford, 2006). Moreover, the phenomenon of variation is intrinsic to pidgins and they could develop into a stable pidgin, an extended pidgin, or a creole when certain circumstances are met (Bakker, 1994; Holm, 2004; Sebba, 1997; Siegel, 2008).

In the Arab Gulf countries[1], a newly-emerging contact variety known as Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) emerged as a linguistic phenomenon primarily due to the lack of a shared linguistic medium of communication among the heterogeneous speech community, comprising native Arabic speakers and foreign workers. The speech input provided by native speakers reflects a reduced repertoire of their spoken dialect, which undergoes restructuring through accommodation and negotiation of meaning. This paper focuses on the negotiation of meaning and regularization between native Saudi speakers (Ss) and foreign workers (FWs) in GPA.

This paper is structured as follows. Section II summarizes critical studies on GPA, examines early-stage jargon in the evolution of contact varieties and considers studies on meaning negotiation during initial contact, and further investigates negotiation strategies in GPA context. Section III introduces the methodology, research questions, and procedures employed in the data collection process. Section IV discusses the results and key findings. Section V discusses the findings. Finally, Section VI concludes the study.

II. Literature Review

A. Gulf Pidgin Arabic

Gulf Pidgin Arabic (GPA) is a simplified language spoken primarily by FWs in the Arab Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia. It serves as a lingua franca among laborers who come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Africa, and who often have limited proficiency in Arabic. The emergence of this contact variety is likely attributed to the mid-20th century, coinciding with a period marked by the significant influx of expatriate labor into the six-member states of the Arab-Gulf Cooperation Council during the 1960s (Alshammari, 2018). As the oil industry expanded in Arab-Gulf countries, it brought profound economic and social growth and modernization to the region. This consequently necessitated the recruitment of laborers in low- and

[1] The Arab-Gulf countries comprise Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain.

medium-skilled jobs from diverse countries with heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds to fill jobs in construction sites, oil companies, transportation, domestic service, manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and other sectors.

GPA is often viewed as a low-status language (Alghamdi, 2014; Almoaily, 2008, 2012). In contrast, native Ss generally occupy higher social and economic positions (Alshammari, 2018). This unbalanced demography leads to an asymmetric social gap between the two groups (Bakir, 2010; Avram, 2014, 2023), an ideal situation for the emergence of a pidginized contact variety. Native Ss, in trying to communicate with FWs, simplify their speech, using the Foreigner Talk register potentially to make it more accessible and to ensure mutual intelligibility, which limits FWs from access to native Saudi Arabic.

B. Jargon and Its Role in Language Development

Jargon denotes forms of specialized language, consisting of vocabulary or technical terms that are used by a specific group or community, typically related to a specific profession or field (Vause & Amberg, 2013; Oder, 2024). In contact situations, jargon may constitute the initial phase, antecedent to the development of a pidgin, as it is characterized by the absence of standardized forms and a lack of conventionalization within the speech community (Swann et al., 2004). Mühlhäusler's (1986) theoretical framework of the pidgin and creole life cycle highlights the dynamic and developing nature of these linguistic phenomena. It outlines the stages through which pidgin and creole languages evolve, from the initial formation of a pidgin to its transformation into a creole, and the eventual stabilization or possible change of the creole over time. Mühlhäusler's (1986) life-cycle model (see Figure 1) portrays how contact varieties can evolve from jargon to pidgin to creole, with later stabilization or change.

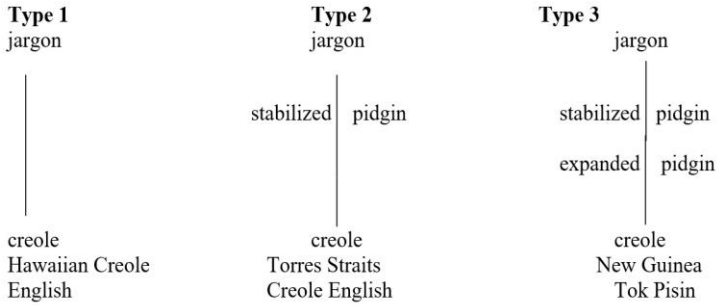

Figure 1. Pidgin and Creole Life-Cycle

Note. Adapted from "The study of pidgin and creole languages," by P. Muysken and N. Smith (1994), *Pidgins and Creoles: An Introduction* (p. 6).

C. Negotiation of Meaning in Early Stages

According to Grice, *communication* is recognizing the other's intentions. It is described as a joint effort, as its etymology entails, *commuñicare*, 'to make common'. Croft (2017), describing the evolutionary characteristics of the pre-language which develops prior to the emergence of full language, assumes that it involves gestures and sounds that directly represent meaning, either indexical or iconic. These early forms are multimodal—using both gestures and vocalizations—similar to systems like symbols or pictures. However, they lack duality of patterning, which requires a signal to be interpretable on both phonological and morphosyntactic levels—a complexity not present in such primitive communicative acts. Cognitive and sociocultural approaches to language development differ considerably. The former focuses on the cognitive abilities and mental processes of acquiring systems of linguistic knowledge, including brain processes, memory, stores, retrievals, etc. (see e.g., Robinson, 2001). Sociocultural approaches, in contrast, emphasize that language development is inextricably a social process where language learning and development cannot be acquired in isolation, but must occur inter-mentally between people in social interaction (Cordero & Leralta, 2020; Foster & Ohta, 2005; Poehner & Lantolf, 2024; Xu & Qin, 2024).

From a sociocultural perspective, input comprehension is achieved through adjustments in the interaction. The concept of *negotiation for meaning* is based partly on by Krashen's (1982, 1985) idea which posits that second language acquisition occurs through exposure to comprehensible input or what Krashen calls: the *'i + 1'* level. For Long (1996), the comprehensible input is gained from interactional adjustments. That is, when two interlocutors have comprehension difficulties, they use negotiation for meaning to check, clarify, or otherwise adjust those difficulties in their utterances. According to Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 264), the process of negotiation of meaning occurs "when interlocutors attempt to overcome problems in conveying their meaning, resulting in both additional input and useful feedback on the learner's own production." As identified by Long (1996), Oliver (2000), Pica (1994), and Nikolas and Fourtassi (2023) speakers employ some strategies for repairing communication breakdown, such as repetitions, clarification/elaboration requests, comprehension checks, confirmation check s, and reformulation.

In the initial phases of meaning negotiation, communication primarily relies on contextual signals and non-verbal communication to achieve common understanding. Given the constrained vocabulary for speakers in these initial stages of interaction, they mostly depend on situational contexts and physical gestures—such as pointing, miming, or repeating and rephrasing words—to clarify meaning. Clements (2009) explains that recurring linguistic patterns in discourse

provide the groundwork for linking sounds with meanings, forming pre-grammatical structures, which over time evolve into a grammatical system. Empirical studies demonstrate that simplification processes evident in the initial stages of SLA are also present in the initial stages of creole formation, leading to what are known as "pidgins" or "basic varieties" (as discussed in Klein & Perdue, 1997). The boundaries between these stages are fuzzy as they reflect a continuum (Velupillai, 2015). Thus, the concept of simplification pertains to the employment of a linguistically reduced grammatical system relative to the lexifier language. Research on language development, encompassing both child and SLA as well as contact languages, such as pidgins and creoles research reveals that simplification and regularization are employed to enhance mutual comprehensibility (Daana, 2012; Jourdan, 2009; Keesing, 1988; Newport, 1999; Winford, 2003). In native-non-native interactions, native speakers (NS) deliberately reduce their input in order to facilitate mutual intelligibility (Versteegh, 2008). Simplification or reduction in language use originates solely from NS, as non-native speakers (NNS) are unable to streamline linguistic elements they are unfamiliar with (Siegel, 2008).

Pattern regularization appears as a result of processes of simplification (Migge, 2003). Regularization is the process by which variable or irregular linguistic forms become standardized and consistent in structure, typically through frequent use in a contact setting (Sebba, 1997; Winford, 2003). One of the most prevalent regularization strategies is (over)generalization where application of linguistic rules is extended beyond their standard use. Nemser (1991) illustrates this with examples from German-speaking learners of English, who often apply the standard past tense suffix *–ed* to irregular verbs, e.g., *leaved* instead of *left*, *buyed* instead of *bought*.

D. Conventionalization of Forms

Convention is a powerful coordination device for communication. Clark (1996) posits that for a convention to be established to mediate in a communal language, it has to have some common ground which is the need for a shared basis for cognition. Schmid (2020) defines conventionalization as "the continual process of establishing and readapting regularities of communicative behavior among the members of a speech community" (p. 2). Conventionalization in pidgin formation is a process that includes the development of forms and structures which were commonly used in the communicative discourse by jargonizers but also has now become standardized and socially accepted by the speech community collaboratively with an accompanying reductionist shift over time. At first, pidgins are very variable: speakers in one little group may employ quite different ways of saying the same thing. Over time, pidginized forms used in regular communication are conventionalized as certain linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation that have developed among the speakers to be predictable or uniform in structure based on institutional competence. Mufwene (2009), from an evolutionary perspective, argues that communal language does not evolve uniformly; rather, the conventionalized structures that do emerge are triggered mostly by successful collective negotiation among members (see also Wang et al., 2004).

III. Methodology

The current study is motivated by an interest in exploring the linguistic features and communicative strategies that drive the negotiation of meaning and conventionalization in the early stages of pidgin formation. Does it imply conventionalized linguistic forms? To explore these details, the research questions are as follows.

RQ1: What interactional practices interlocutors do exploit during negotiation of meaning?

RQ2: How do speakers develop and reinforce shared, regularized, and conventionalized patterns in GPA?

Data and Methods

(a). Participants

The study involves two groups of FWs differentiated by their duration of residence in Saudi Arabia and their familiarity with GPA: (a) FWs with only 5 to 7 months of work experience in the country, limited familiarity with GPA, and diverse linguistic backgrounds, yet frequent interaction with native Ss—and (b) those who spent 3 to 5 years of experience working in Saudi Arabia who spoke one of four native languages—Urdu, Pashto, Bengali, or Malayalam. The first group helps illustrate how meaning is negotiated and what repair strategies are employed during the initial stages of pidgin use between native Ss and FWs. It illustrates types of miscommunications and their associated repair strategies, including clarification, repetitions, or reformulations, utilized to overcome them. The second group exhibits higher proficiency in GPA and facilitates examining the processes through which linguistic patterns gradually regularize and conventionalize. An examination of communicative behavior reveals that highly frequent interaction fosters the development of more regularized structural patterns, lexical items, and pragmatic conventions, leading to a more conventionalized contact variety.

The recruitment of FW participants followed a judgment sampling, wherein all participants lived in Hail, Saudi Arabia, and ranged in age from 29 to 34. All shared similar educational level, having attained only primary schooling and occupied low-income manual labor occupations, including sanitation work, plumbing, tailoring, baking, or taxi driving. The interviews were only conducted with males. The study sought to minimize possible linguistic variation across gender and age by recruiting a demographically homogeneous sample. Some illustrative examples analyzed in this study were taken from Alshammari (2018).

(b). Data Collection

Interviews were video-recorded to analyze interaction between FWs and Ss. After obtaining informed consent, all participants took part in the interviews voluntarily. Six native Ss were recruited as interviewers; they visited the FWs in their workplaces and conducted the interviews. Each interview lasted from 17 to 40 minutes. The corpus comprises approximately three and half hours of recorded interviews. The participating Ss were middle-aged who speak Northern Najdi Arabic dialect. Three of them worked in the military, two worked as educators, and one was unemployed.

IV. Results

The analysis attempts to reveal the structuring of interaction, specifically the behavioral patterns that operate in social exchanges by identifying the stages individuals use that in order to produce meaningful, logical, and structured speech. That is, these features are examined in an interactional analysis model to illustrate the characteristics of early stages of pidginization and negotiating strategies that FWs and Ss adopt in such situations. Such extracts likely represent repeated strategies for negotiating meaning, at least when interlocutors overcome difficulties with communication. In the context of conversation analysis, *repair* denotes how interlocutors resolve misunderstanding related to production and perception (Schegloff, 2007). Such strategies are diverse in relation to both who initiates and who completes the move (Schegloff et al., 1977). We offer a close description of these features with respect to repairs carried out by native Ss, and initiated and performed by FWs as self-repair. Investigating these patterns reveals the interactive processes speakers rely on to adjust shared knowledge and construct conventionalized forms.

A. Negotiation of Meaning in GPA

A range of interactional strategies contributes to the gradual evolution of conventionalized linguistic forms in GPA. Central to this is self-repair strategy, through which both FWs and Ss monitor and adjust their utterances as they gradually learn to continually adhere to the shared knowledge among the speech community. This process is supported by interactional scaffolding, provided by more competent interlocutors to shape conversational flow and offer more comprehensible input for newcomers to process and reproduce recurring linguistic patterns.

Paraphrasing, clarification and reformulation are commonly used to rectify misunderstandings ensuring that speakers can collaboratively construct meaning on-the-fly, rehearsing the forms of syntax and lexis that would later become stabilized. The association of the joint attention to breakdowns in communication—either repair sequences or mutual orienting to some obvious misunderstanding—allows participants to co-construct versions of forms that make sense across their differences.

In the initial stages of language development, verbal communication between native Ss and FWs is largely supported by nonverbal cues; this occurs particularly when some linguistic comprehension exists. Extract 1 illustrates a discussion by focusing on how gestures make up for lack of understanding.

Extract 1:

(1) S3: dʒeeb kabi:r
bring big
- Please, bring the big one.

(2) FW3: e:ʃ kala:m
what speech
- What do you mean?

(3) S3: dʒeeb kabi:r
bring big
- Please, bring the big one.

(4) FW3: (looks towards S3 and shrugs his shoulders)

(5) S3: (stands looks towards FW3 and makes "big" gesture)

Two actions are performed in Extract 1: directive and request for clarification. The native Ss repeats the same utterance while the FW responds nonverbally through body movement. This interaction reveals the supportive role which nonverbal signals have in promoting communication. Example (2) indicates that FW3 appears to encounter some difficulties interpreting the statement in (1), likely due to limited lexical command. To bridge this lexical gap, S3 in Example (5) reinforces the spoken word *kabi:r* ("big") by simultaneously using a gesture to visually represent its meaning. By doing so, the native S3 assumes a quasi-instructional function (Auer, 1984; Gumperz, 1982), and so engages in what can be described as *situated scaffolding*, that is, one interlocutor leads the other through sequenced

linguistic and pragmatic cues. The extract illustrates various typical characteristics of early pidginization: repetition, lexical simplification, and metalinguistic framing.

Repetition and simplified lexical items are used to negotiate meaning in contexts of limited shared vocabulary. In Extract 2, the native Ss attempts to verify the FW's previous experience with Saudi employers, and then explains the importance of understanding local speech patterns.

Extract 2:

(6) S5: ma:fi ʃuɣul sawa sawa saʕu:di awwal
Neg. work. with with Saudi first
- Did you work with Saudis before?

(7) FW5: la:
no

(8) S5: ʕaʃa:n *kala:m maʕlu:m kala:m* hu: baʕde:n *maʕlu:m*
on concern speech. known speech he after known
- So that you know how to speak their language (Saudis)

(9) FW5: la: la: la ma:fi ʃuɣul
no no. no Neg. work
- No, I didn't work with them.

In (6), S5 uses the reduplicated *sawa sawa* (< Arabic "together" or "with") to emphasize relational meaning and promote mutual intelligibility. The sentence not only simplifies and makes the Ss's intended message understandable. Furthermore, in 8, *kala:m* (< Arabic "speech") and *maʕlu:m* (< Arabic "known"), respectively, clarify the intended meaning of the phrase. Through repetition, FW5 engages with both lexical meaning and pragmatic use.

Naturalistic learning can be conceptualized as embedded within conversation whereby language form and use are simultaneously co-constructed. FW5's repetition of "la: la: la" in (9) accomplishes several objectives at once: it communicates that FW5 has comprehended S5's previous question, that it articulates an epistemic stance, and that I know precisely what the answer is, and it is no. S5's utterances illustrate an instance of an asymmetric power dynamic, however it is also an instance of cooperation neutralizing it. Instead of relying on established power, S5 cooperatively scaffolds FW5's communication capacity by simplification, repetition, comprehension, and linguistic accommodation (Giles & Powesland, 1997).

Repetition and simplification are communicative strategies that reinforce meaning and comprehension, especially when linguistic limitations are present. In early contact situations, these linguistic strategies pave the way to regularized pidgin formation through meaning co-construction. Interlocutors negotiate meaning, initially through trial and error, by making adjustments or reforms in the dialogue. This can be shown in Extract 3.

Extract 3:

(10) S1: ʔanta ke:f *tawa:sˁul*, ke:f *kallam* ʔahal
you how connection how call.3rdMascSgPas family
- How do you make calls?

(11) FW1: *kallam*..?
call.3rdMascSgPas
- Do you call your family?

(12) S1: ai:, bass e:ʃ dʒawwa:l … ysawwi *əttisˁa:l* walla ke:f
yes, just what phone … do.3rdMascSgPres calling or how
- Yes, do you call by phone or how do you call?

(13) FW1: ʔana *kallam* dʒawwa:l mawdʒu:d
I speak.3rdMascSgPas phone available
- I call them. I have a phone.

Extract 3 showcases how repetition and synonymous expressions are used by speakers of GPA to facilitate mutual understanding. The italicized words in the examples in (10) through (13) highlight various forms of repetition that GPA speakers use to negotiate meaning. In (10), S1 uses two similar words— *tawa:sˁul* (< Arabic "communication")

meaning "call" and *kallam* ("call") or "connection," and *kallam* (< Arabic "he called") also meaning "call," to ask how FW1 communicates with his family, likely expecting that at least one of the terms would be familiar. FW1 signals partial understanding by repeating one of the words, *kallam*, with rising intonation, indicating a clarification request: *kallam..?*. In response, S1 affirms and reformulates the question in (12), using simpler or more familiar vocabulary like *dʒawwa:l* "phone" and introducing *ətti*ˁ*a:l* (< Arabic "communication") meaning "call," a related word that may be new to FW1. This clarification enables FW1 to understand the intended meaning, as demonstrated in his response in line (13), in which he confirms that he uses a phone to contact his family. The exchanges reveal how GPA speakers use vocabulary overlap and interactional strategies to bridge comprehension gaps and develop mutual understanding. Another example of reformulation can be seen in Extract 4.

Extract 4:

(14) S4: ʔanta *kallam* ʔahal, ke:f *kala:m* ʔənta ʔahal
you call family, how call you family
- Do you call your family? How do you call your family?

(15) FW4: ʔana kala:m ala tu:l kala:m
I call on length call
- I always call my family.

(16) S4: dʒawwa:l ʔanta *kala:m* ?
phone you call
- Do you use cell phone to call?

In Extract 4, S4, a native speaker, modifies his language to ease understanding in interactions with non-native FW4. In (14), S4 utilizes two related terms— *kallam* (< Arabic "he called") and *kala:m* (< Arabic "speech") to mean *call*—to ask whether FW4 contacts his family and how FW4 responds using the second word, i.e., *kala:m*, suggesting that this term was more familiar or more readily understood. In (16), participant S4 replicates the lexical selection by reusing the word *kala:m* in a follow-up inquiry, thereby acknowledging FW4's preference for this term. Such linguistic accommodation can be understood as strategic maneuver aimed at enhancing mutual intelligibility through aligning vocabulary selection in accordance with the interlocutor's demonstrated understanding.

Various forms of support require that each participant make a contribution to the emergent collaborative process of negotiation; as a result, these efforts are bound to succeed. Finally, these kinds of activities rely on a shared understanding that emerges when shared experiences knowledge occurs in a social context. Consequently, as this shared practice is integrated and shared with newcomers, this communal language continues to grow and evolve.

B. Pattern Regularization and Conventionalization in GPA

What this exemplifies is that in GPA, the continued use of fixed linguistic forms in diverse interactional contexts represents a process of structural regularization that leads to a speech community converging toward a simpler yet invariant form. Initially, GPA patterns were distinguished by variability and speaker-dependent general uses as they underwent regularization; then, certain grammatical forms previously resorted to sporadically in varying degrees become dominant across the board. Repetition serves as a model of conventionalized discourse. Patterns like *ma:fi* + noun/verb, *kala:m*, *maʕlu:m*, la: la: la: evolve into formulaic expressions in GPA—used to negotiate understanding or emphasize knowledge. This is an instance of what Hopper (1987) terms *emergent grammar*, a process where frequent interactional sequences crystallize into grammatical and pragmatic conventions.

The analysis concentrates on the patterns of structural regularization and the subsequent conventionalization evident in certain morphological areas of GPA. In particular, we will investigate verbal morphology: the occurrence of invariable verb forms, pronominal use, numeral forms, and negation strategies. This regular usage marks a developmental shift toward greater conventionalization, where speakers develop not only a more common but also self-reinforcing set of norms for language use, which reflect a growing grammatical system influenced by interactional motivations and social convergence among speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

(a). Verbal Morphology in GPA

Loss of morphological complexity is a defining feature of contact languages. This endeavor is an attempt to regularize structural complexity as to enhance mutual intelligibility among interlocutors from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Siegel, 2008; Voort, 1994; Winford, 2006). Pidgins are characterized by a high degree of analytic structure and an absence of or reduction in morphology, especially in comparison with their lexifier and substrate languages. Where morphological marking does occur, they frequently comprise fossilized affixes (Holm, 1989; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988; Voort, 1994).

Studies on GPA offer diverse perspectives on how verb forms are used and interpreted. While researchers generally agree that the most prominent feature of verbal morphology in GPA is the widespread use of invariant (i.e.,

fixed/fossilized) verb forms, Bakir (2010) suggests that the 3rd MascSg verb form is the dominant invariant form in GPA, likely because of its frequent occurrence in everyday communication, other scholars propose alternative explanations. For example, Versteegh (2014) posits that the source of many invariant forms is the imperative verb form, while Alshammari (2018) identifies both verbal nouns and the imperative as the two dominant and competing verb forms, followed by the imperfective verb form.

Examples:

(17) FW5: ʔana *yidʒi* ams
I come.3rd MascSg yesterday
- I came yesterday.

(18) S1: ʔanta sadi:g la:zim *yidʒi* bukra
You friend should come.3rd MascSg tomorrow
- Your friend should come tomorrow.

(19) FW6: ʔana mafi: *ru:h* ta:ni maka:n
I Neg. go.imper second place
- I did not go to any other place.

In all of these examples, italicized verbs mostly remain unchanged, serving as a fixed form for past, present, and future contexts. TMA is contextually inferred through the use of adverbials (e.g., *yesterday*). In (17), the verbal notion is expressed through the 3rd MascSg verb *yidʒi* (< Arabic "he comes") meaning "came" where *ams* (< Arabic "yesterday") indexes the past tense. The same verb form, *yidʒi* is used, but with a temporal adverb *bukra* (< Arabic "tomorrow") to express futurity.

This pattern is consistent with the features of early pidgins and creoles, where inflection is minimized and regularized forms are prioritized. Such invariant forms offer ease of use, allowing speakers with limited linguistic proficiency to communicate effectively without needing to master complex verb conjugation paradigms. Second, cross-linguistic convergence plays a role; many of the substrate languages involved in GPA, such as Hindi, Urdu, and Tagalog, do not exhibit the same degree of verbal complexity found in the verbal systems of Arabic. As a result, distinctions in person, number, and tense tend to be neutralized. Lastly, communicative efficiency is paramount in multilingual, high-contact environments. In such contexts, ensuring mutual understanding often outweighs the need for strict grammatical accuracy, reinforcing the preference for simplified, but conventionalized verb usage.

(b). Pronominal System in GPA

Pidgin research has shown that pidgins tend to favor analytic structures and less grammatical complexity (Foley, 1988; Holm, 1989; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988). In comparison with their lexifiers, pidgins exhibit a tendency generally to rely more on free pronoun forms than bound pronouns (Mühlhausler & Harré, 1990; Sebba, 1997; Voort, 1994). Siegel (2000) observes that pidgins, in cases where their lexifier has free and bound pronouns, tend to use the free forms and extend this to both sets of forms. The pronominal system in GPA, in comparison, is marked by considerable simplification and structural reduction—features commonly associated with contact languages. These pronouns are, for the most part, fixed forms used as such in all constructions with no inflection.

TABLE 1
SIMPLIFIED AND REGULARIZED PRONOUNS IN GPA

Function	Standard Arabic	Typical GPA Equivalent
1st Masc & FemSg	*ʔana* 'I'	*ana/ana* (*kullu*), contextual "we all"
1st Masc & FemPl	*naḥnu* 'we'	
2nd MascSg	*ʔanta* 'you'	*inta* "you. Masc. & Fem."
2nd FemSg	*ʔanti 'you'*	
2nd MascPl	*ʔantum* 'you'	
2nd FemPl	*ʔantun 'you'*	
3rd MascSg	*huwa* 'he'	*hu* "h*e,* she, they masc., they fem."
3rd FemSg	*hiya* 'he'	
3rd MascPl	*hum* 'they'	
3rd FemPl	*hun 'they'*	

While forms such as *ʔana* "I", *ʔinta "you" and huwa "he"* are commonly used among GPA speakers, differences may still occur based on speakers' native language backgrounds and their level of contact with Arabic. Alshammari (2018) shows that both native Ss and FWs exhibit a preference for morphologically independent pronoun forms. The prevailing trend indicates a movement toward structural simplification and functional adequacy, with an emphasis on communicative efficiency rather than adherence to Arabic morphological rules. The following examples from GPA demonstrate how pronominal forms operate in contact-driven settings.

(20) FW1: ʔana fiː salla akil
I Cop. prepare food
- I prepare the food.

(21) FW3: huwa attisa:l ʔana
He calling I
- She calls me.

(22) S3: ʔanta luɣah eːʃ
you language what
- What language do you speak?

The notion that GPA emphasizes communicative efficiency over fine-grained morphological inflection is supported by the examples (20) to (22). Despite Arabic being a pro-drop language in the 1st person, example (20) illustrates that the 1st person singular *ʔana* "I" appears consistently as the subject. Verbs likewise lack TMA marking. Gender mismatch is typical of GPA due to the lack of gender inflection. The same sentence also employs *huwa* "he, MascSg", but this time for the feminine "she." *ʔana* "you, MascSg" is used in the same example, but this time for object "me", though it has the same subject-like form. In (22), the 2nd MascSg pronoun *ʔanta* functions an invariant subject, but also the possessive sense, *luɣatak* "your language", is induced contextually.

(c). Numeral Forms in GPA

The use of numerals in GPA exemplifies a simplification process whereby some structural patterns undergo regularization and conventionalization within the speech community. This tendency is especially prevalent when compared to the morphologically enriched numeral system found in the lexifier, dialectal Arabic. GPA fuses numerals in their most basic, often phonologically reduced and devoid of gender and number agreement. Such tendencies fit within the typical GPA pattern of analytic morphology, minimal or no morphological marking, and communicative efficiency within multilingual contact settings. According to Alshammari (2022), numerals such as *tala:ta* "three, Fem.", *arbaa* "four, Fem,", or *wa:hid* "one, Masc." are almost always realized in the same form, meaning that they appear gender-neutral in use regardless of the noun they modify. The subsequent examples show how numerals behave in GPA discourse.

(23) FW2: wa:hid san-a kalaːs
one-MascSg year-FemSg Finishing
- I finished one year.

(24) S3: θala:θ-ah san-ah
three-FemSg year-FemSg
- Three years.

(25) FW1: sabb-a nafar
seven-FemSg person-MascSg
- Seven people.

As previously mentioned, the examples in (23) to (25) illustrate patterns in how GPA speakers use numerals, revealing significant simplification in agreement and reliance on fixed forms. In (23), the numeral *wa:hid* "one, Masc." appears in its masculine form, while the noun san-a "year, Fem." is feminine. This reflects a process of regularization in which GPA speakers abandon the intricate reverse-agreement system reflected in these fossilized numeral forms.

(d). Negation Strategies in GPA

Negation in GPA reflects the general tendency toward grammatical reduction typical of many contact varieties. The particle *maafi*, comes from the dialectal Arabic *ma: fiːh*, which means "there is not", is the most widely used and serves as an all-purpose negator across both nominal and verbal constructions. This can be shown in the following.

(26) *maafi maalum* "I don't know"

(27) *maafi muskil* "No problem"

The negation particle *la* is occasionally used for direct prohibitions or negative command, following its Arabic function.

(28) *la! maafi ruh!* "No, don't go!"

The examples (26) to (28) demonstrate the use of simplified, invariant negation markers in GPA, consistent with its overall tendency toward grammatical reduction and functional adequacy in contact settings.

V. Discussion

This study set out to (RQ1) identify the interactional practices interlocutors exploit during negotiation of meaning in early GPA encounters and (RQ2) explain how speakers develop and reinforce shared, regularized, and conventionalized patterns. Utilizing ethnographic analysis of contact exchanges among native Ss and FWs, we show that GPA emerges through a combination of micro-interactional work (repair, alignment, scaffolding) and macro-structural pressures (simplification—including reduction and regularization on the one hand, frequency-driven entrenchment on the other). Below, we address these research questions and discuss the findings in relation to pidgin and creole studies, pidginization, SLA, and broader sociocultural approaches to language development.

RQ1: What interactional practices do interactants use when negotiating meaning?

Our findings indicate that in the initial stages of GPA development, speakers employ strategies of interaction to handle (mis)understanding and negotiate meaning. These belong to various types of communication modes. Repetition of key vocabulary items and clarification requests to help with understanding are necessary to ensure comprehension, especially when speakers struggle to express themselves due to their limited vocabulary. Native speakers often give multiple lexical options in succession (e.g., Extracts 2 and 3), so that there is a higher probability of the FW understanding at least one of them. Secondly, reformulation and adjustment help speakers to express their thoughts in a simple manner, especially if confusion or uncertainty is being indicated by the listeners. Doing this not only fixes misunderstanding, but also spells out to future reference what preferred forms are. Third, FWs self-correct themselves in conversation from time to time. This vocabulary repairs lay the foundation for stepwise transitions toward recognizable emerging forms. Extract 1 exemplifies gestural behavior, which is most closely related to communication, particularly where verbal language is not accessible. Physical gestures combined with speaking help to ensure clarity and understanding in cases where linguistic resources are less. The more advanced speaker also enhances this scaffolding-driven interaction by providing scaffold-like discourse for imitation over time, so that the less proficient, novice speaker can shape new language forms. These practices thus reinforce the co-acted nature of communication, showing that understanding is not simply a question of language use, but is also contingent upon mutual and dynamic adjustments while participating in talk.

A. Repetition, Paraphrasing and Lexical Layering

Repetitions of different items, e.g., *kalam/kala:m, ittisa:l, jawwa:l* and the systematic use of near-synonyms can function as a (temporary) online "test" for complete meaning access. The native speaker presents several candidate expressions some of which the FW confirms, where foreign words signal understanding by employing the confirmatory candidate with completion prosody. This is congruent with studies that suggest that repetitive discourse creates form-function mappings and structures (Clements, 2009). Also, the onset of "i+1" triggers the potential for negotiation of meaning and modified input (Krashen, 1982, 1985; Long, 1996).

B. Multimodality as a Compensatory Channel

Gestures, eye contact, and the use of body language to demonstrate meaning enhance the minimal lexical resources available in earliest contact. This is in line with the notion that indexical and iconic signals work together with speech in constructing reference (Croft, 2017) and also validates the sociocultural view, according to which learning is distributed across participants, modalities, and the situated context of collaborative interactions (Foster & Ohta, 2005; Cordero & Leralta, 2020).

C. Accommodation and Scaffolding

Ss come to converge on FW-preferred lexical items when learned, thus simplifying turn construction and providing a model for stable strings that FWs can acquire. This "Foreigner Talk" register reduces processing load and support involvement, reinforcing the claim that simplifications in native-non-native discourse predominantly stem from native speaker input (Siegel, 2008). Interlocutors draw on repair organization's practices, such as repetition/paraphrase, multimodal demonstrations, and accommodation-based scaffolding, in order to sustain the talk and mutually work out shared understanding. These practices also serve as frequent, salient exemplars that can help to drive later structural conventionalization.

RQ2: How do speakers develop and reinforce shared regularized and conventionalized patterns in GPA?

The study shows that regularized patterns emerge through recurrent exposure to discourse and that certain features regularize over time. Invariable verb forms are used to express lexical meaning whereas temporal meaning is usually expressed in context, or indicated by adverbs such as *ams* 'yesterday' or *bukra* 'tomorrow' and rather than by verb conjugation. The dominance of one verb form demonstrates structural economy and functional sufficiency (examples 17-19). GPA speakers opt for a restricted set of stable pronouns (e.g., *ʔana, ʔinta, huwa*), which are frequent in all subject-, object-, and possessive functions. These forms are not marked for gender or number or their marking is fossilized and their meaning is often dependent on the context and word order (examples 20-22). This simplification

reflects the preference for efficiency over grammatical agreement. Numerals are used in invariant form with the noun they modify (examples 23-25). This pattern of conventionalized use suggests that, like verbs and pronouns, numeral forms become regularized through repetition and common usage. In addition, the study found that GPA speakers use two negation particles *maafi* and *la*, which are invariant, regardless of sentence type. This contributes to grammatical reanalysis and reinforces GPA's focus on communicative ease (examples 26-28). Our results support the notion that these sources of meaning present functional competition, to the benefit of communicative transparency (Sankoff & Laberge, 1980). GPA speakers' use of free-standing pronouns rather than bound forms aligns with general pidgin tendencies in that independent morphemes are favored and there are few morphological distinctions (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990; Sebba, 1997; Siegel, 2000) Numerals are typically realized in reduced, agreement-neutral forms. This reflects a classic case of regularization through the elimination of marked allomorphic variation (Winford, 2003; Sebba, 1997).

D. Frequency, Overgeneralization, and Accommodation

In domains of linguistic evolution, so widely used linguistic forms become more entrenched, marked forms usually tend to fall out of use, gaps in grammar are often filled and generalized beyond their limit (Nemser, 1991; Lieberman et al., 2007; Bybee, 2006; Migge, 2003). These mechanisms, however, are strongly linked to sociolinguistic accommodation. That is, linguistic "conventions" emerge through repeated communicative contexts, which stabilize through shared knowledge, allowing communities of individuals to manage recurring coordination challenges. In language use, if a conventionalized item is brought forward, "common knowledge" guarantees its adoption and diffusion, thus rendering it efficient in practice (Lewis, 1996; Clark, 1996; Croft, 2017; Schmid, 2020). Our results further suggest that there are more patterns becoming crystallized into community-level norms over time, such as selectional preferences or fixed forms.

VI. Conclusion

The developmental processes seen above parallel what is known to happen in the life-cycle model of pidgin and creole development, whereby a rudimentary jargon performs unstably before it gradually stabilizes to a more regularized pidgin as its use becomes restricted to circumscribed communicative domains (Mühlhäusler, 1986; Bakker, 1994; Holm, 2004; Velupillai, 2015). The initial phases of interaction are quite variable and gesturally based— typical of a jargon stage. More gradually, interactional exchanges show increasing structural simplification and morphosyntactic regularization, suggesting a trajectory toward the stabilizing of linguistic conventionalization. This developmental course is consistent with the hypothesis that contact between native and non-native speakers and exposure to “foreigner talk” forms create conditions hospitable to pidginization (Niedzielski, 1996; Siegel, 1987). Moreover, the degrees of simplification and grammatical restructuration observed in such contexts are very similar to what has been attested in SLA research, also often assimilated with creolization (Klein & Perdue, 1997; Winford, 2003).

Even if earlier research characterized GPA as a low social standing shaped by asymmetric power relations (Almoaily, 2008, 2012; Alghamdi, 2014; Bakir, 2010), our data indicate that speakers often engage in mutual scaffolding practices that accelerate the process of linguistic conventionalization. This finding suggests that asymmetrical power relations do not necessarily prevent collaborative alignment within the speech community.

The findings support the predictions of usage-based frameworks, which posit that a replication-based account of grammatical patterning arises from repeated attempts to solve interactional coordination problems. From this perspective, the frequency of occurrence and repair strategies provide distributional evidence from which grammatical constructions are abstracted (Clements, 2009; Schmid, 2020). Moreover, the paths of SLA and pidginization both appear to be intertwined because they are subject to the same forces—processing limitation, requirement for transparency, frequency-based patterns, reduction of marked forms—that promote simplification (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988; Daana, 2012; Jourdan, 2009; Keesing, 1988; Newport, 1999). The significance of social ecology is also emphasized as well. Restricted residential and occupational environments, coupled with limited communicative domain lead to functional load which feeds into and maintains the development of highly reduced linguistic systems (Mufwene, 2004, 2009).

In sum, GPA greases that market and fosters communication between people of multilingual backgrounds residing in Saudi Arabic and Arab Gulf countries, even if it may have low prestige. This study investigated how GPA is constructed through interactional practice—in particular how participants facilitate meaning negotiation and the gradual regularization and stabilization of grammatical structures. Results indicate that in the initial stages of interactions, interlocutors employ interactional strategies (e.g., repetition, clarification, self-repair, gesture) to manage the linguistic divergences and engage in negotiated meaning making. These tactics are necessary to ensure communication is possible when the shared language is not fully organized.

As these interactions occur over a period of time, they become recognizable and increasingly stabilized forms. The findings suggest that there are apparently clear signs of pattern regularization and conventionalization of GPA, for such elements as verbs, pronouns, numerals and negation. Rather than random or unstable, the forms of focus used by GPA speakers are predictable and communicatively effective among GPA speakers, precisely because they have been shaped by the social impetus to achieve intelligibility within multilingual settings.

Ultimately, GPA evolution reflects how language changes in answer to creative and adaptive human activity. In processes like these, language appears as a more or less simplified means of communication that has developed from speakers through speakers' repeated interaction-specific behavior. In sum, this study highlights the social-interactional origin of GPA and its joint realization, a devolution that speakers collaboratively develop through action. It demonstrates how social context underlies structural change and it manifests itself in communicative needs that imply simplification, regularization, and finally, the stabilization of forms across a multilingual setting. Such results are consistent with well-attested models of pidgin and creole genesis and interactionist SLA theories. They also highlight GPA-specific mechanisms as the ways in which everyday coordination practices sediment into linguistic conventions of a communally-shared code.

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Wafi Fhaid Alshammari is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at the Department of English, University of Hail, Saudi Arabia. He holds a PhD in Linguistics from Indiana University-Bloomington. He specializes in sociolinguistics, language contact, Arabic morphology and phonology, with particular emphasis on Gulf Pidgin Arabic, and usage-based and interactional approaches to language. His research integrates ethnographic data, conversation analysis, and contact linguistics to examine processes of simplification, restructuring, and conventionalization in multilingual settings.