

Gulf Pidgin Arabic: A Descriptive and Statistical Analysis of Stability

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Abstract

Pidgin languages across the world are characterized by a universal set of linguistic features that, therefore, can be utilized for their identification. Among these linguistic traits, two are found in Gulf Arabic Pidgin (GPA); an overt reduction of sophisticated linguistic items and an increased regularity of less complicated linguistic items used to fulfill other linguistic functions (Nass, 2008; Bakir, 2010; Avram, 2014). The purpose of the present study is twofold: 1) to descriptively analyze some essential morphological (inflectional affixation) and syntactic features within the nominal and verbal systems of GPA, and 2) to statistically measure the level of the consistency among GPA speakers in their use of inflections, sentence structures, and navigation markers. The study starts with reviewing and discussing the literature on pidgins and the main linguistic characteristics of well-studied pidgin languages with the reference to the sociolinguistic environment in which this language variety is typically evoked. This is followed by a review on the few studies conducted on GPA. It ends with a discussion on the current linguistic status of GPA in light of the results obtained.

Keywords: Pidgin, Gulf Arabic Pidgin (GPA), Linguistic analysis, Descriptive linguistic analysis, Statistical analysis

1. Introduction

Pidgin language has been an interesting topic for researchers from various disciplines (e.g., linguistics, sociolinguistics, and anthropology) and been the locus of many descriptive and theoretical linguistics studies conducted during the ninetieth century. Yet, unlike many pidgin languages in general and Arabic-based pidgins in particular, the Gulf Pidgin Arabic (henceforth referred to as GPA) is scarcely studied (Owens, 1997, Avram, 2014). GPA is a simplified variety of language that emerged in the Arabic Gulf region to serve as a medium of communication between the natives of the Gulf countries and the non-national labor force (mostly Asiatic from countries such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines) and among the foreign workers community when there is no common language. GPA is commonly spoken in various contexts in the society such as in factories between foreign workers and their bosses, in markets between shops' attendants and costumers and in homes between maids or drivers and members of the household.

The term GPA was first introduced by J. R. Smart, who, in 1990, conducted the first study of GPA. Smart described what he perceived as a simplified variety of the Gulf dialect of the Arabic language serving as a contact language between the people of Gulf countries and foreign workers from various linguistic backgrounds, mainly from the Indian subcontinent.

The early emergence of GPA is hard to define with a great confidence due to the poverty of documentations of the early stages of its development. Unsurprisingly, this is the common case with many pidgins and creoles languages around the world. Muhlhausler (1997) points out that the literature includes many studies that examined the verbal aspect of pidgin languages in great depth, yet only few studies looked at the early unstable stages of the development of pidgins. He attributes this to the fact that "neither the people involved in initial jargon contacts nor the situations in which communication took place lent themselves to systematic observation or recording" (p. bid). Although the early emergence of GPA is not documented, an educated guess can be made here. Bakir (2010) speculates that the formative stage of GPA can be probably traced back to the early 1950s, a period during which the Gulf region witnessed a huge economic growth owing to the discovery of the oil and its development in the region. As the economy in the region was booming, the demand for more labor force increased dramatically. Over the years, the size of the labor force community has increased and its existence in the region has become a permanent feature of the present life in the Gulf (Bakir, 2010; Avram, 2014). The continual flow of immigrant workers to the Gulf region has ensured the continuity of using GPA as a means of communication for many years now.

Beside the difficulty associated with any attempt to pin down the early emergence and the initial development of GPA, the linguistic status of GPA seems also to be an uneasy or daunting task. In the very few studies written and published on GPA, researchers were, by and large, inconclusive in their classification of the linguistic status of GPA. In his study, Smart (1990) descriptively analyzed some key linguistic elements in the phonological, morphological, syntax and lexical systems of GPA. His analysis showed that GPA has

perceptibly undergone a simplification process, a salient feature attested in the formative stage of well-known pidgin languages. According to Smart (1990), GPA has also met the criteria of pidginized variety proposed in the pidgin-creole literature. Accordingly, Smart was more inclined to call GPA a pidgin language, albeit he was not sure whether GPA constitutes a “true pidgin” or not and left this fundamental question to be answered by other researchers. Nass (2008) devoted a Master’s thesis to answer this question. After analyzing the phonological, syntactic, morphological and lexical systems of GPA, she came to the conclusion that “structurally, it [GPA] resembles an early interlanguage variety, but the factors surrounding it place it within the sociological definition of a pidgin. As such, it seems reasonable to call it an incipient pidgin variety” (p. 94). In his study, Bakir (2010) analyzed some essential linguistic constituents of the verbal system of GPA and found that “that GPA has not reached the stage of full stability and expansion yet” (p. 226).

The grammatical stability, the expansion in use along with the high degree of consistency among pidgin speakers in using the same linguistic items play an important role in indicating the level of development a pidgin variety has reached. Based on these indicators, it can be determined what linguistic status GPA occupies within the pidgin-creole developmental hierarchy.

In the present study, a qualitative and quantitative approach will be utilized in order to first descriptively analyze some essential morphological (inflectional affixation) and syntactic features within the nominal and verbal systems of GPA and secondly to statistically measure the level of the consistency among GPA speakers in their use of inflection, sentence structure and negation markers. The study starts with reviewing and discussing the literature on pidgins and the main linguistic characteristics of well-studied pidgin languages as well as the sociolinguistic environments in which these language varieties were more likely emerged. This is followed by a review on the few studies written on GPA. It ends with a discussion on the current linguistic status of GPA in light of the results obtained.

2. Pidgin Languages and their Origins

A pidgin language emerges in a situation where two groups of people who speak different languages need to find a way by which they can communicate with each other. According to Wardhaugh (2010), pidgin is “a language with no native speakers; it is no one’s first language but is a contact language” (p. 57). In literature, however, there is no broad agreement on a definition of what exactly constitutes a pidgin, but various definitions proposed by different authors. A useful definition is that of Holm who defines pidgin as:

A reduced language that result from extend contact between groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some means of verbal communication, perhaps for trade, but no group learns the native language of any other group for social reasons that may include lack of trust or of close contact. (p.4)

Besides what Holm indicates as predictors of pidgization process, a pidgin must be developed out of a situation where at least three languages are in constant contact and that situation must be imbalanced, that is, one of the three languages has a clear dominance over

the others (Wardhaugh, 2010). This asymmetrical distribution of power is essential for developing a new contact language serving as a means of communication among other groups of people whose languages do not have such power.

Linguists who studied pidgins have long been fascinated by the remarkable linguistic similarities found among pidgins spoken in different places around the world (Wardhaugh, 2010). Pidgins share a very similar set of linguistic characteristics regardless of what fully-fledged language they are based on or what time during which they were or are spoken. Such an intriguing fact has encouraged many linguists to seriously investigate genesis or origins of pidgin languages. Unsurprisingly though, these scholarly investigations have led to the formulation of various theories on the genesis of pidgin languages, among which the polygenesis, the monogenesis and the foreigner talk theories are quite popular. The former two theories pose a counter ratification. On the one hand, the monogenesis theory indicates that pidgins are developed from monogenetic ancestor, a Mediterranean lingua franca named Sabir (Wardhaugh, 2010). This language is believed to be the ancestor of other European-language pidgins. According to the relexification theory, Sabir was first relexified by Portuguese. That is, the lexicon of Sabir was replaced by that of Portuguese's while the grammar remained unchanged. The resultant linguistic variety is a Portuguese-based pidgin which, which in turn, was also relexified by other European languages, mainly French, English and Spanish. Although, the relexification theory has enjoyed much popularity, it is not without its problem. Pidgins, which are based on non-European languages, also exhibit a great degree of similarity with each other.

On the other hand, the polygenesis theory speculates, as the name indicates, that pidgins were formed from different origins. And the similarities that exist among pidgins are attributable to the similar social circumstances in which pidgins were developed and also to the 'simplification processes' that the fully-fledged languages on which pidgins are based had undergone. The simplification process usually involves a systematic reduction to all language aspects. Therefore, the ultimate results are quite similar irrespective to what standard language the pidgin was based on (Wardhaugh, 2010).

3. Foreigner Talk and the Formation of GPA

In the case of GPA, none of the two aforementioned theories provide a sound theory explaining the origin of GPA more than does the foreigner talk theory. In his 1971 article, Charles Ferguson coined the term foreigner talk to refer to a simplified variety of language used by native speakers when addressing non-native speakers or foreigners who have little or no knowledge of the language. According to the foreigner talk theory, foreigner talk serves as the main input based on which a pidgin language is formed (Winford, 2006). Ferguson (1971) believes that "the initial source of the grammatical structure of a pidgin is the more or less systematic simplification of the lexical source language which occurs in the foreigner talk register of its speakers rather than the grammatical structure of the language(s) of the other users of the pidgin" (p. 288).

With regard to GPA, the social gap between the native residents of the gulf countries and foreign workers and the use of foreigner talk seem to have played a major role in the

formation of GPA (Bakir, 2010, Avram, 2014). In the rich gulf countries, foreigners are kept socially distanced from the locals. And as such, the foreigners' acculturation into the new host community and their learning of the host language become practically impossible. In such a sociolinguistic situation, foreigners are left with no choice, but to mimic or learn the way that locals speak their language, the ungrammatical and impoverished version of Gulf Arabic.

4. Pidgins Developmental Stages

According to Bakir (2010), the pidgin-creole hierarchy begins with "pre-grammatical systems of early pidginization and ends with the fully stabilized and expanded creoles" (p. 226). After its formation, pidgins, if the sociolinguistic situation was appropriate, are believed to go through different developmental stages, in each of which pidgin varieties become more stabilized and their functions become more expanded. Although studies of the early developmental stages of pidgins are hard to come by in the literature, many scholars, however, have noted that the linguistic characteristics, especially syntactic characteristics, of early pidgin varieties are similar to those found in the impoverished language produced by second language learners in natural SLA settings (Winford, 2006). The term '*interlangaue*' (IL) is used commonly to refer to a linguistic system developed by a language learner when learning foreigner language. It represents the learners' imperfect learning of the target language and "is considered a separate linguistic system distinct from both the speaker's mother tongue and the target language in question" (Nass, 2008). And, for some scholars, pidgin language is also the result of imperfect language learning, but under less than ideal conditions (Sebba, 1997).

Winford (2006) believes that the early stages of pidginization and IL formation resemble the first two stages of Pienemann's (1999) five-stage-model, which maintains that second language learners go through five major developmental stages during the acquisition process. In the first stage, pidgin consists of very small repertoire of noun-like and verb-like words and some adjectives and adverbs, a few quantifiers and functions words, and a three-way pronominal system. The meaning in this stage is mainly interpreted by understanding the context. This stage resembles a pregrammatical stage, or individual jargons, and shows no consistency across speakers.

In the second stage, pidgins are "characterized by a clear though rudimentary grammatical organization, in other words, regular though simple rules of production" (Winford, 2006, p. 298). At this stage, inflections and bound derivational morphemes are rarely found. Nor are copulas and articles, complex structures of embedding and subordination found in pidgin at this stage of development. However, there is some degree of consistency among speakers.

6. Pidgin Linguistic Characteristics

Given the fact that pidgins are exceedingly similar to each other in their linguistic patterns, less controversy exists among pidginists who widely agree on the most common linguistic features of these pidgins. These shared features more likely resulted from the simplification or reduction process of the most complex phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical patterns of the lexifer language. An inclusive description of these common features of pidgins is that of Sebba. In his book *Contact Languages: pidgins and creoles*, Sebba (1997)

typifies the most common characteristics of pidgins:

6.1 Phonological Features

- a. Avoidance of difficult sounds.
- b. Tone is not used to distinguish words.

6.2 Morphological Features

- c. Very few or no inflections e.g. no morphologically marked number (singular-plural), case (subject-object), gender, tense or grammatical agreement.
- d. Analytic constructions used to mark possessive.

6.3 Syntactic Features

- e. No definite or indefinite articles.
- f. No copula to be (at least in present tense)
- g. Tense, aspect, modality and negation marked extremely to the verb- often by a content word like an adverb.
- h. No complex sentences (e.g. sentences involving relative clauses).
- i. No passive forms.

6.4 Lexical Features

- j. Small vocabulary.
- k. Preference of short words.
- l. Small number of compounds.

7. Previous Studies on GPA

As mentioned earlier, GPA is scarcely studied in the literature. J. R. Smart is credited for conducting, in 1990, the first scholarly work on GPA and reporting a descriptive analysis of the most essential constitutions of the phonological, orthographical, morphological, syntactical, and lexical systems of GPA.

However, one fundamental objection can be leveled against Smart's study. Smart based his analysis on his personal observation during his work as an Arabic teacher for foreign oil workers in the Gulf region and on a small linguistic corpus consisting of an array of *jugular cartoon captions* published in Emirate newspapers. These cartoons captions were written by Arabic- speaker journalists in an attempt to derisively imitate the way those immigrant workers speak. Such language should be interpreted as foreigner talk. According to Ferguson (1971), foreigner talks "may be used to report the speech of foreigners or to represent an aberrant variety of speech" (p. 10). Smart's data, then, may not necessarily reflect how GPA is spoken; rather it represents the way the native people of the Gulf speak when they are addressing foreigners.

Wiswall (2002) argues that there are significant differences between the language (foreigner talk) used by native speakers of Gulf Arabic when talking to non-natives and the language that is used by immigrant workers in the gulf countries. Accordingly, Smart's data should not be reasonably considered as an authentic data of GPA, hence raising a big question on the authenticity and the validity of his description of GPA.

Motivated by the defects of Smart's data collection (1990) and the need for an authentic scholarly work describing and ascertaining the linguistic status of GPA, Nass, in 2006, devoted a MA thesis to this endeavor. Nass (2008) descriptively analyzed the phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical systems of GPA. She was more concerned with the linguistic status of GPA. And as such, she formed her thesis question as follows "Can Gulf Pidgin Arabic be considered a separate variety with its own grammatical norms, different from the lexifier Gulf Arabic and with its own structural unity?" (Nass, 2008, p. 9). In order to answer this question, Nass (2008) put the most essential linguistic features of GPA and those of the lexifier language into a systematic comparison. The comparison revealed that GPA is analytically a simplified version of the Gulf dialect of the Arabic language, and yet it has a distinctive grammatical system making it a separate linguistic variety of its own.

As is the common case with the majority of pidgin language varieties around the world, the linguistic features of GPA were characterized with great simplicity and a fewer grammatical and syntactic functions. Throughout the formation process of GPA, GA has apparently undergone a simplification process resulting in a reduction of the most complicated linguistic features of GA. The simplicity and reduction can be seen in all language aspects of the GPA system, yet it is manifested most clearly in the phonological system of GPA as there are only 18 phonemes representing the core phonological inventory of GPA as opposed to 29 phonemes of the Gulf Arabic (Nass, 2008).

Nass (2008) also found in her data a reduction and increased regularity in the morphological and lexical systems of GPA. In morphology, for instance, she noticed that the GPA's pronominal and possessive systems lack inflections to reflect, say, gender (masculinity or femininity) or number (singular, dual and plural), a distinction made in the Gulf Arabic (52). And, in cases where possessive pronouns were inflected, they are arbitrary inflected. For instance, plural pronouns, especially the first person, can be expressed by juxtaposing two singular pronouns, such as *ana huwa* (literally "I he").

Moreover, Nass (2008) noticed that GPA speakers tend to extend the functional usage of some independent and possessive pronouns to refer to other pronouns. In addition, there is no dependable verbal declension for person and number cases nor is there a declension for verbal tenses. Instead, certain adverbials are used to indicate the tenses, aspect, and modality of verbs (85). For example, the Gulf Arabic adverb 'awawl' (before) can be used to indicate a past tense verb in a sentence. The following example is taken from Nass' study (2008):

awwal	ana	yistegel	wāhid	bēt
Before	I	work	one	house

"Before, I was working [only] in one house."

Nass (2008) also noted a reduction and increased regularity in the negation system of GPA: only one negator “*mafi*” is in use in GPA, where there are different negators used in the lexifier language to negate nouns, finite verbs or imperatives (p. 71-7). The reduction and increased regularity of grammatical functions are two salient features of pidgin languages. They are used along with others features as an identification tool to identify pidgin languages. Accordingly, Nass (2008) believes that GPA is “a variety on the way to becoming conventionalized” and offers the term “an incipient pidgin variety” as the best description of its current linguistic status (p. 94).

In 2010, Bakir conducted an analysis of the verbal system of GPA. His description involved a descriptive analysis of the morphological characteristics of the verbs used in GPA and other essential grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, mood, modality and negation. Like the case with the previous pidgin studies, a reduction of the most complicated grammatical functions was observed in the GPA verbal system. Simplicity seems to be the prevalent property of the GPA verbal system, particularly in inflections. That is, verbs in GPA tend to have no inflections to specify a tense, an aspect, or an agreement in gender, number and person in the verb.

Moreover, Bakir (2010) found that GPA speakers tend to overuse one form of the verb to convey various grammatical functions. For instance, Bakir (2010) argues, a verb like (*y*)*iktib* (write) in GPA stands for more than 21 derivational forms of the same form in the lexifier language, the Arabic language. Bakir (2010) noticed a tendency among the subjects to use “the morphologically simplest form of the verb,” here the third person masculine singular form, to correspond to the use of other more sophisticated forms of the verb. The reliance on a simpler form of the verb was the prevalent case with GPA verbs found in Bakir’s data (2010), notwithstanding a few exceptions in which some subjects used the correct forms of the verb. Bakir (2010) speculates that the extent of the exposure to the standard or lexifier language and the high degree of awareness of the correct form in the lexifier language might account for the subjects’ correct use of verb forms.

Yet, perhaps the most remarkable and interesting aspect that the previous studies (Bakir, 2010; Al-Moaily, 2008; Nass, 2008; Online, 2010) have drawn an attention to is the use of the Gulf Arabic preposition *fii* (in) as a copulative verb in GPA. The occurrence of the copulative verb *fii* in the GPA is a fundamental contradiction to the hypothesis first proposed by Ferguson (1971) and others that considers the absence of copulative verbs as a prominent feature characterizing pidgin languages. In GPA, in addition to its use as copulative verb, the element *fii* fulfills a wide range of other grammatical functions such as being a prediction marker, assuming a modality tone, expressing ability or possibility (Avram, 2014; Bakir, 2010), expressing continuous or progressive aspect, and indicating hypothetical condition (Nass, 2008). However, Bakir (2010) and Nass’ (2008) data contained some instances in which the element *fii* was absent where it was supposed to be present. To fully ascertain the precise linguistic functions of the element *fii* in GPA, further studies are still needed.

Recently, Al-Moaily (2014) investigated the impact of first language and the length of stay on GPA speakers’ the language variation. His analyses covered ten morpho-syntactic phenomena:

free or bound object or possessive pronoun, presence or absence of the Arabic definiteness marker, presence or absence of Arabic conjunction markers, presence or absence of the GPA copula, and presence or absence of agreement in the verb phrase and the noun phrase. The results showed the two factors have little effect on GPA speakers' choices as regards the studied morpho-syntactic features. A significant relation between GPA speakers' first languages and their GPA speech was only found in one feature, conjunction.

8. The Study

The main impetus of the present study was twofold: (1) to descriptively analyze some salient linguistic features within the morphological (inflection on verbs, nouns, pronouns, and numbers), syntactical (basic sentence structure), and lexical (basic words) systems of GPA and (2) to measure statistically the degree of stability or regularity of the following GPA linguistics aspects: A) morphological inflections on nouns and verbs, and B) pronominal systems, C) negation markers, D) sentence structures. This study is based on the hypothesis that high degree of consistency and regularity in the use of GPA linguistic features by pidgin speakers can be a good measurement tool of the stability pidgin languages. According to Mühlhäusler (1997), "stabilization implies the gradual replacement of free variation and inconsistencies by more regular syntactic lexical structure" (p. 138).

The use of statistic measurements to gauge the stability of particular linguistic features or patterns in pidgin and creole varieties can provide a good indicator on the linguistic status of pidgin languages or the level of complicity these varieties have reached. To my knowledge, there is only one study (Almoaily, 2014) in which quantitative measurement was used to gauge the stability of linguistic features or patterns within the GPA. There is a still a need for more quantitative studies to measure the stability or regularity of different linguistics items in GPA.

8.1 Participants

Prior to selecting the participants of the present study, the researcher hypothesized that the participants' various linguistic backgrounds and their varied length of residence would certainly have an effect on their GPA language competence. At the early stage of learning GPA, participants would probably draw heavily on their mother languages in order to speak the target language. As a consequence, participants who are speakers of the same first language would have some shared linguistic features that are not necessarily used by other linguistic groups. The second factor is length of stay: participants who have stayed for a quite long time in the linguistic environment where the GPA is spoken would probably speak GPA more fluently than those who have just arrived.

In order to test these two hypotheses, the researcher conducted a pilot study in which two GPA speakers were interviewed and recorded. The two GPA participants were speakers of two different languages, Urdu and Indonesian, and they had lived in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, for 8 years and 3 year, respectively. The recording was transcribed and then was analyzed. The results of this pilot study confirmed the researcher's hypothesis. The influence of participants' mother language was overtly noticeable, especially on the participants' pronunciation of some

GPA words. The two participants, for instance, pronounced the Arabic number *Thalath* (three) differently (*Talath* vs. *Salash*). On the other hand, the participant whose length of stay was longer seemed to be more competent and showed a greater control over his GPA.

In the light of these results, the researcher selected 10 participants, all of whom are foreign workers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. As it shown in table 1 below, the participants differ in their occupations, their first languages and the length of residence.

Table 1. Participants

Code	Gender	Age	First language	Residency	Occupation
P 1	M	47	Bengali	21 years	Builder
P 2	M	32	Urdu	12 years	Storekeeper
P 3	M	44	Bengali	11 years	Driver
P 4	M	35	Bengali	10 years	Storekeeper
P 5	F	25	Indonesian	8 years	Housemaid
P 6	F	34	Indonesian	5 years	Housemaid
P 7	M	26	Urdu	3.6 years	Driver
P 8	M	31	Indi	2 years	Cook
P 9	F	37	Sinhala	2 years	Housemaid
P10	M	29	Urdu	1.6 year	Builder

Before interviewing the participants, the researcher provided the participants with a general background about the study and made sure that they were aware of their roles in the study. However, the specific purpose of the study remained unrevealed given the possibility that had the participants known that their speech is the focus of the study they would become more self-conscious about their speech. Consequently, they might manipulate their language, hence distorting the authenticity of natural spoken language.

8.2 Data Collection

The data used in the present study is approximately one hour of recorded conversation between the researcher, who is a native speaker of the Gulf Dialect of the Arabic language, and 10 GPA speakers. The interviewees were at the time of the study foreign workers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The time and locations of the interviews varied. Five male participants were interviewed collectively at the same location while the other two male and three female participants were interviewed individually in two different locations. The conversations were primarily about some topics (e.g., their homeland, family, food, culture, music...etc.) thought to keep the participants interested in pursuing the talks.

The recorded conversations were transcribed into 40 pages. The participants' use of their native languages was not included in the transcriptions. In analyzing the data of this study, the commonly recognized Leipzig glossing rules were used to label the morphological, syntactic, and semantic elements of words used in data. In particular, the following abbreviations are used in the glosses where applicable: 1 = 1st person; 2= 2nd person; 3 = 3rd 14 person; COP = copula; COMPL = completive aspect marker; DEM = demonstrative; FI = multifunctional item; LV = light verb; M = masculine; NEG = negator; PART = particle;

POSS = possession marker; PREP = preposition; TAM = tense, aspect or modality marker.

8.3 Data Analysis

The Arabic language is a highly inflectional language; it belongs to an inflective type of world languages. These languages extensively utilize a wide range of affixes in order to form different word categories or forms. Affixations can be added to nouns, for instance, to classify grammatical cases (nominative, accusative, and genitive), number (singular, dual and plural) and gender (masculine and feminine). As with regard to GPA, affixation is rarely applied in GPA. Only less complicated inflectional morphemes are utilized and their grammatical functions, in most cases, are extended to replace the use of more complicated grammatical functions.

8.3.1 Morphological Inflections on Nouns

Nouns are predominately used without affixation added to the base-form. As the statistical analysis shows only 56 (22.13%) of the nouns used are inflected in the data. In most cases, the affixation, however, is added arbitrarily as one speaker might add a correct affix in one instance but not in the other. It was also noticed that in some instances, the correct use of affixation might be due to the acquisition of words in inflected forms (e.g., ‘ithnien’, ‘two’ and ‘omal’, ‘workers’) rather than an understanding of the morphological system of the lexifier language.

Table 2. Morphological inflection on nouns

+/- Inflection	Frequency	Percent
+ Inflection	56	22.13%
- Inflection	197	77.86%
Total	253 (100%)	

In the following two examples, GPA speakers did not add affixes when they were needed to distinguish singular nouns from plural nouns (1) or masculine nouns from feminine nouns (2):

- 1) ana rūh Makkah tanēn **marah-Ø**
 1SG went Makkah two **time**
 (I went to Makah twice)

- 2) hāda siyāra **hagg- Ø** baba mafi hagg anta
 this car-F POSS father NEG POSS 2SG
 (This car is my boss' car, it is not yours)

8.3.2 Pronominal System

The Gulf Arabic pronominal system differentiates between cases, number, and gender in both independent and possessive pronouns. The two GA systems are categorized in the following tables as indicated in Holes' book Gulf Arabic (159-71).

Table 3. Independent pronouns

	Gender	Singular	Plural
1 st		-i	-na
2 nd	M	-ik	-kum
	F	-ič	
3 rd	M	-ah	-hum
	F	-ha	

Table 4. Possessive Pronouns

	Gender	Singular	Plural
1 st		ana	ihna
2 nd	M	inta	intu
	F	inti	
3 rd	M	huwa	hum
	F	hiya	

In comparison to pronominal system of the lexifier language, GPA speakers use predominately three independent pronouns (ana ‘I’, inta ‘you’, and huwa ‘he’) and one possessive pronoun (the singular possessive pronoun ‘-i’). The second singular masculine pronoun ‘-ik’ and the third singular masculine pronoun ‘-ah’ are rarely used.

Table 5. Frequency of pronouns

Independent Pronouns		Possessive Pronouns	
ana	36	-i	28
inta	24	-ik	4
huwa	30	-ah	2

The grammatical functions of GPA pronouns are usually extended. For instance, the use of masculine second person singular pronoun ‘inta’ is extended to refer to either male or female. One subject uttered the following sentence when talking to a young girl:

- 3) **inta** less? saker
 2SG-M still young
 (You are still a young girl)

Along with its use as an independent pronoun, the first person singular pronoun ‘ana’ is also used as a possessive pronoun in GPA. The extension of the grammatical functions is a common feature in Pidgin languages. In the following examples, the pronoun ‘ana’ preceded the possessor in one occasion and in another followed the possessor by the same subject.

- 4) **ana** **mama** w aku hina fi saudiah
 1SG mom and brother here in Saudi
 (My mom and brother [live] here in Saudi Arabia)

- 5) **siyāra ana mafi ġadīd**
 car 1SG NEG new
 (My car is not brand new)

The neutral pronoun ‘kol nafer’, meaning ‘everybody’, replaced plural pronouns. The subjects of this pronoun are context-related, as in the following example:

- 6) **kol nafer ruuh madrash**
 Everbody goes to school
 (Everybody goes to school)

Gulf Arabic speakers express possession by using either synthetic or analytic possessive. The synthetic possessive can be expressed by one of the following ways: affixing possessed nouns by one of possessive pronouns (e.g. *kitab-i* ‘my book’), or ‘juxtaposing’ the possessed with the possessor (e.g. *kitab Ali*, ‘Ali’s book’) whereas the analytic possessive is expressed by using the following particles *māl* or *hagg* (nass 47-8). The synthetic possessive is more frequently used in Gulf Arabic (Harning 158). Unsurprisingly though, in an attempt to avoid using complicated morphological inflections, the subjects prefer the use of the analytic possessive by using the particle *hagg* as a connection between the possessed and the possessor as in the following example:

- 7) **byt hagg ana fi war? zabl**
 House POSS 1SG TAM behind mountain
 (My house is located behind the mountain)

As far as the stability in the use of morphological inflections on GPA nominal and pronominal systems, there is an overt consistency among GPA speakers to use the base form of nouns without adding affixation. There is also an increased regularity in the use of a few particular pronouns, which are frequently used to compensate for more complicated ones.

8.3.3 Sentence Structure

Pidgin systems are universally characterized by few sentence patterns and lack of complex sentence structures (e.g., subordination and embedding sentence structures) found in fully-fledged languages.

Table 6. GPA sentence structures

Sentence Structure	Frequency
SVO	87 (69%)
SOV	23 (18%)
Phrases	15 (12)
Total	125 (100%)

In the case of GPA, there is a clear preference for the use of SVO over other sentence structures as shown in *Table 6*. As many pidgin studies show, the SVO sentence structure is the most common sentence order found in pidgin languages, regardless of the various

sentence structures the lexifier language utilized (Muhlhausler, 1997).

8.3.4 Tense, Aspect, and Modality

The Gulf Arabic verbs are not only constructed depending on verbal tenses, but also depending on gender-specific (masculine, feminine and neutral) and numeric aspects (singular, dual, and plural), of the main subject. Thus, a single Gulf Arabic verb can be constructed in a wide variety of forms. A GA verb like '(y)iktib' (write) can have more than 20 forms (Bakir 205-6). The complexity of Gulf Arabic verbal system is less expected to be wholly comprehended, further to be used by GPA speakers. What forms of verbs are expected to be used, though, are the less complicated ones.

A close look into the data indicated that the mostly common used forms of GPA verbs are imperative verbs and the imperfect 3rd person singular masculine verbs. The choice of using these forms is the simplicity of both forms, as the former takes no affixation and the latter is only preceded by the 3SG.M prefix /y-/. However, the affixation here, as Bakir (2010) noticed, "should not be taken as an inflectional marking. The verbal form is frozen, in that it is used with all subjects regardless of their person, gender, or number" (p. 206).

Tense, aspect, and modality (TAM) are mostly indicated by using an array of Gulf Arabic adverbials such as 'ams' (yesterday), 'awal' (before), 'bādēn' (then), 'alhēn' (now), and 'bukrah' (tomorrow) as shown in the examples below:

8) huwa **?amis** mafi **yakul** gadā
 3SG yesterday NGT 2SG.M.IPF-eat lunch
 (He did not eat his lunch, yesterday)

9) lazmi ana **bukrah ruuh** bank jib fuluus
 should 1SG tomorrow IMP-go bank IMP-get money
 (Tomorrow, I should go to the bank to get some money)

8.3.5 Negation

Unlike the case in the lexifier language, negation in GPA is reflected predominately by the use of one GA negation marker, 'maafii'. Other negation markers, e.g., 'ma' and 'mu' are also used, but rarely.

Table 7. GPA negation markers

Negation marker	Frequency
Mafi	44 (81%)
ma	7 (12%)
mu	3 (5%)
Total	54 (100%)

8.3.6 Lexicon

It is a well-known fact that the range of lexicon in a pidgin is relatively smaller than that of

the lexifier language, a fully-fledged language. For instance, the entire lexicon of Tok Pisin, one of oldest and most developed pidgins, is estimated to consist of a few thousand words (Sebba 51). Such shortage of words is not surprising since the communication functions that pidgins offer are minimal. And, in order to compensate for this shortage in word sources, pidgins are more likely to assign a wide variety of meanings or functions to an existing word. For instance, GPA speakers in my material used the Gulf Arabic verb *šel* which means ‘carry or lift something up’ to refer to the following meanings: to withdraw an amount of money, to take something, to get paid, and to steal something.

- 10) ana fi **šel** kamsah mi?h min bank
1SG TAM carry five hundred from bank
(I withdraw five hundred from my account)

Pidgins also compensate for the shortage in grammatical functions by giving a lexical item more than one function in a process called ‘*Multifunctionality*’. That is, one word can be interpreted, for instance, as a noun, verb, adjective or, perhaps, a proposition. The data of this study provides good examples of this process, as the GPA noun ‘*kalam*’ which means ‘speech’ is also used as a verb (both imperfect and perfect) as shown in the following example:

- 11) huwa mafi **kalam** ana fi **kalam**
3SG NEG speech 1SG TAM speech
(He [did, do, will not] speak [when] I talked to him)

In the above sentence, the verb did not show grammatical marker, as such the tense of the main verb is not easy to identify without a complete understanding of the surrounding context.

9. The Sociolinguistic Environment

The situation in which GPA was developed is a textbook example of the situations that breed pidginization. Wardhaugh (2010) states that “the process of pidginization probably requires a situation that involves at least three languages (Whinnom, 1971), one of which is clearly dominant over the others” (p. 54). In the case of GPA, these two conditions are met. A wide linguistic diversity exists within the labor force community: members of this community are speakers of different languages, including but not limited to, the following languages: Punjabi, Malayalam, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Thai, Tagalog, Indonesian, Nepalese, Tamil, and Sinhalese. The linguistic diversity within this community has ruled out the choice of adopting one of these languages as a linguistic norm by which all members of the community should communicate.

The second condition is also met. The natives of the Gulf countries, apparently, constitute the dominant community owing to the large number of its members and the high social status that this community maintains. This asymmetrical social situation, or to use Owens’s term “unbalanced demography” is essential for developing a new contact language serving as a

means of communication among other groups of people whose languages do not have such a power. In this case, members of the non-dominant community will draw on the language of the dominant community to form their basic contact language, a simplified or a reduced version of the dominant language. The formation of the new emerged language might also include some element from the different languages of the members of the non-dominant community.

Equally important is the role that social stigmatization has played in developing GPA. In the Gulf region, there is a clear social segregation between the two communities (Smart, 1990 & Bakir, 2010). The non-dominant community of the migrant workers is usually kept at great social distance and is not encouraged to integrate into the culture of the Gulf inhabitants. This social divide minimizes the contact between the two communities. Such situation has been argued by many linguists to be an ideal situation that breeds pidginized variety. In this case, newcomers are not encouraged to learn the native language of the Gulf residents (Bakir, 2010).

10. Conclusion

Pidgin languages across the world are characterized by a universal set of linguistic features that are, therefore, utilized as tools for their identification. Among these linguistic traits, two are found in GPA; an overt reduction of sophisticated linguistic items and an increased regularity of less complicated linguistic items used to fulfill other linguistic functions.

In the nominal and pronominal systems of GPA, morphological inflection, as the statistical analysis shows, is rarely applied to GPA nouns and pronouns in order to distinguish grammatical cases, numbers and genders. In the verbal system, there is no dependable verbal declension for person and number nor is there a declension for verbal tenses. Instead, the masculine imperative and imperfect forms of verbs are only used to refer to all verbal forms. And, certain adverbials are used to indicate the tenses, aspect, and modality of verbs. Negation in GPA is predominately reflected by the use of one negation marker '*mafi*'.

GPA syntactic structures are simple and lack complex sentence structure, e.g., subordination and embedded sentences. Statistically, there is a clear preference for the use of SVO sentence structure over other sentence structures and patterns. Finally, the GPA lexicon consists of small vocabularies, most of which are used recurrently to refer to a wide variety of meanings or functions.

The sociolinguistic environment in which GPA emerged is a textbook example of a situation that breeds pidginization. The wide social divide between the Gulf natives and the foreign workers and the short-term work contracts make the learning of the hosting country language an undesired goal for many foreign workers. A basic and simplified version of the standard language seems to be sufficient to fulfill most of the foreign workers' communication needs. Another factor that led to the emerging of GPA is the wide linguistic diversity among the labor force in the Gulf countries. Migrant workers who have different linguistic backgrounds need a contact language that is neutral or no one's language to communicate with each other on work sites.

The simple linguistic features of GPA and its sociolinguistic environment place it among the group of pidgin and creole linguistic varieties. However, when comparing GPA with other Arabic-based Pidgin languages, GPA seems to be at the way to becoming a stabilized pidgin language or to use Nass' (2008) term 'an incipient pidgin variety.'

11. Limitations and Direction for Future Studies

Given that GPA is understudied language variety, there is still a need for more research studies that analyze in great details the different linguistics components or systems of this variety based on a corpus compiled from natural settings. This study attempted to gauge the degree of consistency among GPA speakers in GPA morphological inflections on nouns and verbs, and pronominal systems, negation markers, and sentence structure. In this study, the quantitative analyses were run on small corpus of spoken GPA based on one geographical location, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Future studies should consider running quantitative analyses on large, diverse, and inclusive corpus in order to yield better understanding of the stability of GPA and the degree of regularity among GPA speakers on different GPA features.

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