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Adjectival Inflection in Afrikaans Diachronics: An Argument against the Validity of Creolization Checklists

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The study of adjectival inflection in Afrikaans provides evidence against the supposition that deflection is a necessary consequence of creolization. In particular, the expected outcome did not materialize in Cape Vernacular Afrikaans, a nonstandard variety that was exposed to creolization conditions substantially more than the standard variety. The analysis presented here is a refutation of rather simplistic characterizations of language varieties by means of checklists of linguistic features.

1. Introduction.

The argument in this paper is structured as follows. In the first section I provide a perspective on the categorization of languages and language varieties, and in particular of those that have come about as a result of multilingual contact situations. In the second section I focus on a correlation between various processes and variety types that can be identified in the development of early Afrikaans. In the third section a formalized method for the categorization of creole-type languages, namely that of feature checklists, is briefly discussed and criticized. The emphasis falls on inflectional simplification—in particular gender loss—as one of the criteria employed in Markey's (1982) checklist. In the following section, the rules for adjectival declension in seventeenth-century Dutch are compared with those in Standard Afrikaans. Lastly, a brief interdialectal comparison between the system in Standard Afrikaans and that in Cape Vernacular Afrikaans is provided to show that varieties that were exposed to creolization influences more than the standard in fact incorporated the morphophonemic changes while retaining some of the aspects of the seventeenth-century Dutch inflectional system.

2. Categorization of Varieties.

At the outset I wish to make the observation that the categorization of any contact variety calls for an in-depth analysis of a wider range of

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variables than are normally considered in categorizing synchronic varieties of any single language. If *languages* have fuzzy boundaries, and the various levels of linguistic description likewise, then the definition of a descriptive label to cover all the variables that have interacted in the formation of a new *variety*, in which the lexis, morphology, phonology, and syntax have been realigned to various degrees, cannot be achieved in a simple way. Therefore, any description of varieties that have come about as a result of contact must be circumspect and provisional. This is particularly applicable if there is a paucity of primary linguistic data reflecting the various stages in the development of such a variety. In the case of Afrikaans, we are dealing with a label attached not only to a variety but to a diasystem or collection of varieties that have come about as a result of various contact situations. According to Suzanne Romaine (1988:62), "Afrikaans" is a loose label for a set of varieties ranging along a scale from highly European-like (i.e., similar to Dutch) to moderately creolelike (i.e., similar to Negerhollands). The scale used by Romaine is indicative of an assumption that varieties—and by implication languages—under the umbrella of creole studies are not all equally creole in nature and could be classified according to the degree of similarities to or differences from a European language. Researchers in creole studies have consequently created a multiplicity of typological labels in an attempt to indicate varying degrees of creoleness, labels such as *creoloid*, *semicreole*, *interlanguage*, *koine*, etc.

3. Processes of Change.

What is clear from this collection of labels is that not only do the various languages under the creole umbrella differ in terms of features, they have also been subjected to different processes of language change. In a paper read at the 1999 meeting of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics in Aix-en-Provence (Kotzé 1999), I indicated that in the case of Afrikaans, the three historical geolects, that is, Cape Afrikaans, Orange River Afrikaans, and Eastern Frontier Afrikaans, were characterized by a variety of processes reflecting different contact situations. What follows here is a short scenario description of the three situations in terms of processes of language change.

At the Cape of Good Hope, a socially stratified community was formed, consisting of Europeans, slaves, and some Khoekhoen and San. The Dutch spoken by the Europeans was characterized by: (i) *koineization*, the result of which was the gradual leveling out of Dutch and Low German dialect differences; (ii) accommodation to varying

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degrees of *L1 transfer* phenomena in the interlanguage used by the slaves, Khoekhoen, and San, as well as Europeans from non-Dutch language backgrounds; and (iii) lexical and structural *borrowing*, subconscious and otherwise, by speakers of Dutch, from the other languages with which Dutch was in contact. Because of the contact situation and on the basis of primary data, we could conclude that both pidginization and creolization will have taken place. The slaves spoke (depending on the stage of assimilation) either "Pidgin" or "Creole Dutch," in addition to the contact languages Creole Portuguese and Pasar Malay, and (insofar as language shift had not yet occurred) their respective mother tongues. The "Dutch Creole" spoken by the Khoekhoen formed the basis of that used by the slaves. In addition, the temporary representatives of the Dutch East India Company applied the linguistic norms laid down within the hierarchy of the company for official communication. This norm remained the target for written Dutch and all higher functions of usage at the Cape of Good Hope. All in all, then, a wide array of processes of language change operated simultaneously, leading to a comparable range of linguistic outcomes.

At the Eastern Frontier, the *koineized* form of Dutch spoken by the settlers and the *creolized* form of the Khoekhoen who accompanied them coexisted for an extended time, with the social predominance of the settlers probably determining the norms for the form of Dutch that prevailed. The relatively lower intensity of language contact than at the Cape would have resulted in a more conservative variety of Cape Dutch being spoken.

In the Orange River region, the Khoekhoen predominated, and inasmuch as language shift toward a form of a "Creole Dutch" had not yet occurred, they spoke one or more Khoekhoe dialects. Transferred characteristics of Khoekhoe in Creole Dutch as a result of *interlanguage stabilization* would either have persisted because there was no corrective by Cape Dutch speakers, or would even have been reinforced because of maintained contact with Khoekhoe dialects still spoken in the region.

To conclude this argument, then: A multiplicity of processes seem to have been operative in all the discernible varieties of Afrikaans, which include *borrowing, language shift, koineization, pidginization*, and *creolization*. The variety which seems to have undergone (or retained) the least change *as a result of* sustained contact with either creole speakers or speakers of other languages, is Eastern Frontier Afrikaans, which in time formed the basis of Standard Afrikaans as it is known today.

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I will not digress upon the further history of the codification and standardization of the language, save to remark that for the higher social functions, it was always linked to Continental Dutch, albeit in an artificial way, and even subjected to an intensive process of adlexification from Dutch after being legally recognized as an official language together with English in 1925. However, it is against this background that the development of a new system of adjectival inflection should be seen, which came about after grammatical gender distinction disappeared from the nominal system. What is remarkable is that a process of grammatical simplification, characteristic of a creole language, was followed by the development of a system of adjectival declension arguably far more complex than that of the seventeenth-century matrilect.

4. Feature Checklists.

In order to arrive at an objective classification framework, various researchers have attempted to draw up lists of features by means of which contact languages that have become creoles could be identified. Bickerton (1981: ch. 2), for example, identifies the following twelve categories of features that he believes characterize creole grammars:

1. movement rules
2. articles
3. tense-modality-aspect (TMA) systems
4. realized and unrealized complements
5. relativization and subject copying
6. negation
7. existential and possessive
8. copula
9. adjectives as verbs
10. question forms
11. question words
12. passive equivalents

Markey's list (1982:201), which I focus on more closely, basically consists of the following features:

1. lack of nominal gender
2. nominal number by anaphora
3. SVO order
4. anaphoric unity

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5. lack of nominal case
6. lack of nonindigenous comparatives
7. three tense-aspect markers
8. lack of nonfinite verb forms
9. lack of inflectional passives
10. semantic repartition
11. negation (pre-verb, NEG-spread)

Gilbert and Makhudu (1984) extend Markey's list to thirteen features by splitting feature 2 into associative (e.g., *Jan-hulle* 'Jan-they', i.e., 'Jan and his kin/friends/etc.') and nonassociative noun plurals, and likewise by splitting feature 4 into lack of subject/oblique case distinctions in personal pronouns, on the one hand, and lack of "natural" gender distinctions in third person singular personal pronouns, on the other.

Although I recognize the value of such checklists for the expression of certain common characteristics of languages that have undergone comparable processes of change, it is my submission that they have limited predictive value and tend to be overly simplistic in their range of variables. I demonstrate these two shortcomings with reference to the diachronics of Afrikaans in general and adnominal adjectival inflection in particular.

It has been noted above that creolized forms of Dutch most likely played a role to varying degrees during the formative years of all three geolectal varieties of incipient Afrikaans. This topic has been extensively dealt with by den Besten (e.g., 1989:214–229), who, however, also mentions the inherent tendency of the Germanic languages to simplify their morphologies (1989:214–229). Since creolization as a corollary of language contact (with or without prior pidginization) is equated on the grammatical level with various forms of simplification, it would seem that both internal and external factors undeniably favored at least some kind of regularization in Afrikaans.

The importance of maintaining a distinction between the varieties within the diasystem of Afrikaans has been underscored by Gilbert and Makhudu, who, when attempting to apply Markey's checklist, discovered that the number of hits varied between two and nine out of thirteen, depending on the variety under scrutiny. Some varieties spoken today would therefore be more creolelike than others in terms of the checklist. A discussion of all the synchronic varieties within the diasystem is obviously outside the scope of this paper, but I would like to focus on one creole feature that occurs in all varieties, both standard and

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nonstandard, namely, the loss of grammatical gender and the concomitant change in adjectival declension.

5. The Afrikaans Adjectival Declension.

One of the salient aspects of Afrikaans adjectival declension is allomorphic variation on the phonological level. This, incidentally, highlights a further weakness of the creolization checklists compiled by Bickerton, Markey, and Gilbert and Makhudu, which make no provision for phonological features.

In Afrikaans, adjectival declension in adnominal position consists basically of the addition of *-e* [ə] as a formant, which often triggers phonological processes such as syncope, voicing, glide formation, and the like. A second characteristic is that declension is determined by both the morphological and the phonological structure of the adjective itself, and not, as in the case of Dutch, by the gender opposition utrum versus neuter. This represents a major change on the morphological level, since the morphosyntactic criterion for categorization (declension based on gender and position within the noun phrase) has been exchanged for a morphophonemic one, as I will shortly indicate.

In seventeenth-century Dutch, adjectives were generally *not* declined in the following environments (see Raidt 1994:73): (i) after indefinite determiners (such as *een*, *geen*, etc.), or with no determiner, and before a masculine personal noun (in the nominative case); (ii) after indefinite determiners, or with no determiner, before a neuter noun; (iii) in most cases of the comparative form and often when the adjective ended in *-er*. The default was the declined form, that is, ADJ + *-e* (or *-en*) after the definite article and before all nouns of the utrum (i.e., the *de* class, masculine and feminine) in the singular and all plural forms.[1] As in Modern Dutch, the adnominal adjectival declension was dependent on the preceding determiner and the following noun. Only in the case of adjectives ending in *-er* did phonological considerations play a role, a

[1] Undeclined forms that deviated from the basic pattern did occur in the following cases: (i) after indefinite determiners (such as *een* 'a', *geen* 'no, none', etc.) and before nonpersonal masculine nouns in the objective case, for example, *een* ***swaer*** *storm wint* 'a heavy storm wind', *met* ***groot*** *blyckxem* 'with great lightning'; (ii) before feminine nouns, regardless of the preceding determiner, for example, *een* ***stijff*** *topseijlcoelte* 'a stiff topsail wind', *een* ***schoon*** *fontein en gras* 'a beautiful fountain and grass', *een* ***clein*** *revier* 'a small river' (including texts in which *rivier* is a *de*-word); (iii) before substantive nouns in the plural.

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factor that continued to operate in Afrikaans.

The evolution of the pattern that became characteristic of the Afrikaans diasystem is documented in some detail in Raidt 1994:74–87, and I simply provide here an exemplary and reinterpreted summary of the various categories.

The attributive formant *-e* is added to all plurimorphemic and, in fact, all plurisyllabic adjectives (with the exception of those ending in *-er,* as well as adjectival compounds based on an undeclinable monosyllabic root, e.g., intensive forms such as *'n spierwit landskap* 'a snow-white landscape'). Examples are: *'n verstaanbare vraag* 'an understandable question', *heerlike kos* 'delicious food' beside *'n groter stuk* 'a larger piece', *skrander studente* 'intelligent students'.[2]

Monosyllabic roots, however, only receive the attributive formant in the following instances:

i. The root ends in a consonant cluster consisting of sonorant plus /d/:
/-md/: *vreemd* 'strange' (*'n vreemde geluid* 'a strange noise')
/-nd/: *rond* 'round' (*'n ronde figuur* 'a round figure')
/-ld/: *wild* 'wild' (*'n wilde dier* 'a wild animal')
/-rd/: *hard* 'hard' (*'n harde slag* 'a hard bang')

ii. The root ends in a vowel (or diphthong) plus /d/: *wyd* → *wye* 'wide', *koud* → *koue* 'cold', *goud* → *goue* 'golden', *dood* → *dooie* 'dead', *goed* → *goeie* 'good', *breed* → *breë* 'broad'. (Intervocalic syncope deletes root-final /d/. Exceptions: *wreed* → *wrede* 'cruel', *glad* → *gladde* 'smooth'.)

iii. The root ends in long or high vowel plus /x/: *vaag* → *vae* 'vague', *laag* → *lae* 'low', *droog* → *droë* 'dry', *moeg* → *moeë* 'tired', *vroeg* → *vroeë* 'early', *ruig* → *ruie* 'bushy'. (Intervocalic syncope deletes root-final /x/. *Log* → *logge* 'heavy', as in 'a heavy gait', is not really an exception because of the vowel class.)

iv. The root ends in a vowel plus /f/: *dof* → *dowwe* 'dim', *doof* → *dowe* 'deaf', *gaaf* → *gawe* 'fine', *styf* → *stywe* 'stiff'. (Intervocalic voicing affects root-final /f/.)

v. The root ends in a voiceless obstruent plus underlying /t/: *sag(t)* → *sagte* 'soft', *vas(t)* → *vaste* 'fast, firm', *stip(t)* → *stipte* 'punctual'.

[2] Exceptions include: *'n verdere vraag* 'a further question', *tot nadere kennisgewing* 'until further notice'.

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vi. The root ends in the rounded high front vowel /y/: *ru* → *ruwe* 'rough', *kru* → *kruwe* 'uncouth, crude', *slu* → *sluwe* 'sly'. (Probably because of the low incidence of this pattern, the undeclined form occurs just as frequently.)

vii. The root ends in a consonant cluster with final /s/: *slaafs* → *slaafse* 'slavish', *wulps* → *wulpse* 'lascivious', *rats* → *ratse* 'swift', *hups* → *hupse* 'lively', *mals* → *malse* 'lush', *stuurs* → *stuurse* 'sullen'.

viii. The root ends in a vowel plus /s/, in some cases: *wys* → *wyse* 'wise', *boos* → *bose* 'evil', *los* → *losse* 'loose'. (Various exceptions occur, often correlating with semantic nuances, such as *grys hare* 'gray hair', but *gryse ouderdom* 'gray old age', *los buie* 'loose showers', but *losse sedes* 'loose morals'. These variants also occur in the case of roots ending in a single sonorant; e.g., *'n vol beker* 'a full mug', but *die volle tydperk* 'the full period'.)

6. Interdialectal Comparison.

The Standard Afrikaans patterns of adjective declension that I have described here are not representative of the whole Afrikaans diasystem. Some interesting insights can be inferred from a comparison with primary data collected some twenty years ago (and also recent examples) from speakers of Cape Vernacular Afrikaans (CVA), more particularly within the Malay community. The sociolinguistic conditions influencing the development of Cape Afrikaans during its formative years, as discussed earlier, strongly favored the retention of features that resulted from the contact situation, including possible creolization. Consequently, present-day CVA would form an excellent testing ground for the validity of the creolization checklist, particularly to see whether the expected effects of grammatical gender loss did at least materialize in a variety that was exposed to creolization conditions substantially more than the standard variety.

A comparative diachronic study undertaken on the basis of the data mentioned above (Kotzé 1984:41–73) points to some important differences between the varieties in terms of adjectival inflection. In certain respects, CVA remained a more conservative dialect in that monomorphemic adjectives fairly consistently retain an attributive formant. The following examples indicate that regularization of the rule did in fact occur in this variety:

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(1) Saoedi-Arabië was ’n **arme** land.
‘Saudi Arabia was a poor country.’

(2) ’n **ryke** man
‘a rich man’

(3) jou **oue** lesse
‘your old lessons’

(4) ’n **kleine** bietjie
‘a little bit’

(5) ’n **orraite** geaardheid
‘an OK temperament’

(6) die **korte** distansie
‘the short distance’

(7) **spierewitte** klere
‘snow-white clothes’

(8) lekker **varse** snoek
‘delicious fresh snoek’

This regularization is a reflection of the general situation in late eighteenth-century Cape Afrikaans. The same tendency is also noticeable in the attributive form of the possessive pronoun, first person plural, as in:

(9) a. baie manne van **onse** mense
‘many of our people’
b. Ons het **onse** dokters gehad.
‘We had our doctors.’
c. according na **onse** prys
‘according to our price’
d. Hy sal nooit in **onse** pad staan nie.
‘He will never stand in our way.’

Again, these forms reflect an earlier situation, namely, that of the nineteenth century, by and large. Comparatively, then, one could conclude that the declined form of monomorphemic attributive adjectives in present-day CVA forms a larger category than in Standard Afrikaans, in which the process of generalization was somehow reversed before the present pattern became fixed. On the other hand, in CVA, the

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phonological processes concomitant with the declension patterns are quite similar, and the default categories for which declension in Standard Afrikaans is mandatory are identical in CVA. Examples are:

(10) a. 'n mens wat doen **goeie** ietse
'a person who does good things'
b. 'n Mens moet **volle** vertroue het.
'One has to have full trust.'
c. die **geestige** gemeenskap met Sy hoë baas
'the spiritual communion with his High Lord'

7. Conclusion.

To return to my initial criticism of the validity of creolization checklists: Without having to attempt any categorization or labeling of the varieties of the Afrikaans diasystem and restricting oneself to a feature representative of such a list, namely, gender loss and its assumed results of simplification, one may plausibly conclude that features can at most have descriptive value and must be judged in conjunction with and in the context of a wider configuration of other features. These would include phonological features, as I have indicated above, but also the dynamics of change, which in turn are closely interrelated with the social context of language usage.

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