Grammaticalization of the future marker in Palestinian Arabic: An internal or a contact-induced change?

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Introduction: Though more recent studies have shown that any part of language structure can be transferred from one linguistic system to another (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:14; Harris & Campbell 1995:149-50; Aikhenvald 2002:11-13, more evidence is still needed to support this claim in the domain of grammatical meaning and structural transfer. This paper aims to explore the phenomenon of grammatical change in the Tense/Aspect system in Palestinian Arabic (PA). It deals with the development of future marking in two urban PA dialects spoken in Gaza City which came into contact following the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 1948 and the influx of thousands of Palestinian refugees from Jaffa to Gaza. The paper examines the development of the future markers *ra:ḥ* and *ḥa-* in PA from the lexical verb *ra:ḥ* 'go'. The analysis is framed in the context of the code-copying approach to language change (Johanson 1999, 2002) and the principles of grammaticalization theory (Hopper & Traugott 2003; Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1994).

Research question: The paper attempts to answer the following research question: is change in PA future marking the outcome of internal changes and universal linguistic tendencies or does it (also) involve extra-linguistic factors?

Methodology: The data for this study come from twelve female speakers representing three different age groups with six speakers from each dialect background. The recordings were transcribed, and the verbs were patterned into paradigms according to their morphological form and grammatical function. A control group of four Jaffan speakers who still live in Jaffa, Israel were also interviewed using the same questions. Having a control group of Jaffan speakers who did not experience any contact with Gazan speakers is important for addressing the questions asked by Heine & Kuteva (2005: 22): "what evidence is there for transfer to have taken place? Could that change have taken place without involving language contact?"

Analysis & findings: The grammar of the Jaffan speakers living in Gaza exhibits Tense/Aspect properties found in Gaza dialect but absent in the Jaffa dialect still spoken in Jaffa. Here, I focus on one of these structures: future marking. Data show that the most frequent future marker among Jaffan and Gazan speakers living in Gaza is *ḥa-* which is prefixed to the imperfect form of the verb. For Jaffan speakers still living in Jaffa, while the *ḥa-* prefix is not part of the system, the particle *ra:ḥ* is the most frequent means of expressing 'future'. This data provides evidence that there is a change that has taken place in the grammar of Jaffans living in Gaza, but the question to be asked "is the development of the particle *ra:ḥ* in the speech of Jaffan speakers into the prefix *ḥa-* due to the influence of Gaza dialect or is it just an example of a universal process by which motion verbs develop into future markers? The possibility that Jaffa dialect has developed the future prefix *ha-* without the influence of Gaza dialect cannot be ruled out. However, if this is the case, why has not the Jaffa dialect spoken in Israel also developed the future marker *ra:ḥ* into an indivisible fused affix, that is, from an autonomous morpheme into a dependent morpheme following the cline of grammaticality "content item → grammatical word → clitic → inflectional affix" (Bybee, Pagliuca, and Perkins 1994; Hopper 1991; Hopper and Traugott 2003). This may be an additional piece of evidence to support the claim that grammatical change is likely to occur and that the distance travelled along the cline tends to be greater in a situation of intensive and extensive contact over time (Heine 2012). The discussion shows that language change is code-internal, but the change may be induced by code-external or extra-linguistic factors, namely "the results of contact with other codes in specific sociopolitical situations" (Johanson 2002: 285).

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