Superdiversity in the Gulf: Gulf Pidgin Arabic and Arabic Foreigner Talk

Andrei A. AVRAM*

Keywords: *superdiversity*; *Gulf Pidgin Arabic*; *Arabic Foreigner Talk*

1. Introduction

The present paper[1] is an attempt at identifying several features of Gulf Pidgin Arabic (henceforth GPA) which might conceivably be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of the Foreigner Talk (henceforth FT) register of Arabic.

The GPA data are from general descriptions of GPA (Wiswall 2002, Avram 2014a, 2016a, 2016b) as well as from analyses of GPA as used in specific territories: Saudi Arabia (SA) – Hobrom (1996), Gomaa (2007), Almoaily (2008), Al-Azraqi (2010), Albakrawi (2012), Almoaily (2013), Alghamdi (2014), online sources; Kuwait (K) – Salem (2013); Qatar (Q) – Bakir (2010, 2014); UAE – (Smart 1990), online sources; Oman (O) – Næss (2008), Alshuaimi (2011), online sources. Similarly, the Arabic FT data are both from general descriptions of this register (Al-Sharkawi 2007, 2010) and from specific varieties reported to be used in countries of the Arabian Gulf: Saudi Arabic FT – Al-Ageel (2016); Kuwaiti Arabic FT – Wiswall (2002), Dashti (2013); Omani Arabic FT – Brockett (1985), Næss (2008), online sources.

For reasons of space the number of examples has been kept at a reasonable minimum. To facilitate their comparison, the GPA and Arabic FT examples are transliterated in a uniform system. All examples are glossed[2] and accompanied by their translation. Relevant items are in boldface.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines the linguistic superdiversity in the Arabian Gulf. Section 3 deals with a number of selected morphosyntactic features of GPA which are also found in Arabic FT. Section 4 focuses on lexical features shared by GPA and Arabic FT. Section 5 briefly discusses the findings.

* University of Bucharest, Romania.

[1] This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 3rd International Conference on Language, Linguistics, Literature and Translation "Connecting the Dots in a Glocalized World", 3–5 November 2016, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat. I thank the audience for feedback. The usual disclaimers apply. I also thank Dr Yasser A. Gomaa for providing me with a copy of Gomaa (2007).

[2] The glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules and abbreviations for category labels.

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

2. Superdiversity in the Gulf

The sociological concept of "superdiversity" (Vertovec 2007) offers valuable insights for the study of the linguistic effects of globalization in cities, a typical locus of linguistic superdiversity. As put by Vertovec (2007: 1025), "it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity". Vertovec (2007: 1025) argues for the inclusion of other variables, such as

> differential immigration statuses […], divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents.

Vertovec (2007: 1025) concludes that "the interplay of these factors is what is meant here, in summary fashion, by the notion of 'super-diversity'".

The concept of "superdiversity" has also been adopted in sociolinguistics (e.g. Blommaert 2010, Blommaert and Rampton 2011, Jørgensen et al. 2011, Arnaut & Spotti 2014, Parkin and Arnaut 2014, Blommaert 2015, Rampton et al. 2015). Its significance from the perspective of sociolinguistics is highlighted by Rampton et al. (2015: 6) who write that "super-diversity marks a shift of footing without disconnecting from what went on before" since "diversity has been a central concern in sociolinguistics". Rampton et al. (2015: 2) note that

> the demographic, socio-political, cultural and linguistic face of societies worldwide has been changing due to ever expanding mobility and migration" [leading to] "a dramatic increase in the demographic structure of the immigration centres of the world.

A region which exhibits considerable superdiversity, triggered by both rapid urbanization and a huge inflow of immigrant workers from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, is the Arabian Gulf (see e.g. Avram 2014a: 8–13). Immigrants account for e.g. 85% of the population of the UAE (Boyle 2012), of 195 nationalities in Dubai alone: 25% from India, 12% from Pakistan, 7% from Bangladesh, 5% from the Philippines, 3% from Nepal, 3% from Sri Lanka, 2% from China, etc. (Piller forthcoming). This superdiversity is also reflected in the complex intricacies of the language situation in the Arabian Gulf. As in most Arabic-speaking areas, there is diglossia involving Standard Arabic and the local dialects (Bassiouney 2009, Albirini 2016). Urbanization has also led to koinéization and the rise of Arabic urban vernaculars (Miller 2007). The expatriate labour force accounts for two other characteristics of the language situation. One is use of languages other than Arabic, which include a.o. Bengali, Hindi, Indonesian, Javanese, Kannada, Malayalam, Nepali, Pashto, Punjabi, Persian, Sinhalese, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, and Urdu (see e.g. Ahmad 2016, Buckingham, 2016Piller forthcoming), spoken by large numbers of migrant workers. The other is the use of English, in domains such as trade, commercial signage, banking, higher education (see e.g. Randall and Samini 2010, Boyle 2012, Buckingham 2016). In Dubai, for instance, "English is a second or third language for many of the expatriates" and is "used as an acrolectal lingua franca" (Boyle 2012). Buckingham (2016) also comments on the use in Oman of "English in lingua franca contexts in a region of pronounced ethnolinguistic diversity". Finally,

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

there is widespread use of GPA[3] (e.g. Smart 1990, Avram 2014a) as well as of Arabic FT (e.g. Brockett 1985, Wiswall 2002, Dashti 2013, Al-Ageel 2016).

It may be concluded that, in terms of the number of (varieties of) languages spoken and of the number of speakers, the Arabian Gulf is an example *par excellence* of "language: the great diversifier" (see Blommaert 2015). Not surprisingly, several authors have also mentioned the occurrence of language conflicts. With respect to Kuwait, Ahmad (2016) notes "tensions between public and private domains". Similarly, Piller (forthcoming) discusses "tensions between English […] and Arabic" in the United Arab Emirates, given "the complexities of lingua franca use and the use of Dubai's languages other than Arabic and English". Again not surprisingly, the interaction of various languages also leads to the occurrence of phenomena typical of contact situations (see e.g. Boyle 2012). One such example is the influence of Arabic FT on GPA, reflected in a number of morphosyntactic and lexical features.

3. Morphosyntax

3.1. 'Two' + singular noun

As illustrated below, GPA uses phrases consisting of 'two' and a noun in the singular instead of the dual marker of Arabic, which has not been retained:

(1) a. ***ʔitnēn sayyāra*** SA (Gomaa 2007: 102)
two car
'two cars'
b. ***tinēn ʔusbū*** Q (Avram 2014a: 17)
two week
'two weeks'
c. ***isnēn sana*** O (Avram 2014a: 17)
two year
'two years'

The same holds for Kuwaiti Arabic FT. According to Dashti (2013: 78), "Kuwaitis tend to start with the cardinal number […] followed by the singular noun […], even if a dual […] is required". Consider the following example:

(2) ***ṭalʔi aṯnēn diǧāǧa*** (Dashti 2013: 19)
get out two chicken
'prepare two chickens'

3.2. Plural marker 'all'

In GPA, as spoken in Saudi Arabia, for instance, the "different ways of indicating plurality [include] using the word *kullu*" (Albakrawi 2012: 129).

[3] Spoken in Saudi Arabia and the countries on the western coast of the Arab Gulf, i.e. Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar. According to Bakir (2014: 411, f.n. 2), GPA does not exhibit "wide differences" according to the territories in which it is used. However, Gomaa (p.c., April 2017) claims with respect to Bahrein that "pidgin here is totally different".

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

The use of a word meaning ‘all’ has been reported for at least one variety of Arabic FT. Dashti (2013: 77) writes that “Kuwaitis […] generally delete the plural morpheme and use the word /killə/, meaning ‘all of it’ to indicate the plural”

(3) *Wen hāḏa kitāb* ***killa*** (Dashti 2013: 83)
where DEM book all
‘Where are the books?’

3.3. Omission of the definite article

As noted by Gomaa (207: 102) with respect to GPA as spoken in Saudi Arabia, “the definite article is deleted in most cases”. This is also the case of GPA as used in other territories:

(4) a. ***Ø*** *kafīl fī sawwi ğinğāl* Q (Bakir 2010: 217)
sponsor FI make quarrel
‘The sponsor quarrels [with me]’
b. ***Ø*** *Muškil eš?* O (Alshuaimi 2011)
problem what
‘What’s the problem?’

The omission of the definite article is also attested in two varieties of Arabic FT. One such variety is Saudi Arabic FT:

(5) *kīs* ***Ø*** *ğīb* (Al-Ageel 2016: 167)
bag bring
‘Bring the bag’

An other one is Kuwaiti Arabic FT, in which “the Kuwaiti definite article /ʔil/ is […] deleted when Kuwaitis exchange conversation with their domestic servants” (Dashti 2013: 73):

(6) *ğībi* ***Ø*** *qamīṣ* ***Ø*** *aḥmɛr min dāri* (Dashti 2013: 73)
bring shirt red from room my
‘Bring the red shirt from my room.’

3.4. Masculine singular form of adjectives

Gomaa (2007: 103) states that in GPA as spoken in Saudi Arabia “adjectives retain the masculine singular form in most cases”. The use across the board of the masculine form of adjectives is documented in other territories as well:

(7) *mumkin hiya* ***tābān*** O (Næss 2008: 41)
maybe 3SG.F tired
‘Maybe she’s tired.’

For Saudi Arabic FT, Al-Ageel (2016: 176) mentions the “lack of agreement between adjectives and their nouns”. As seen in the following examples, speaker resort to the masculine singular as the default form of adjectives:

(8) ***aṣfar*** *ğubna wāḥid* (Al-Ageel 2016: 176)
yellow cheese one
‘one yellow cheese [sandwich]’

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide”
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

In the case of Kuwaiti Arabic FT, Dashti (2013: 80) is quite explicit: "Kuwaitis […] usually use the masculine singular […] only".

(9) *šīli hāḏa ǧiwāti* ***qadīm*** (Dashti 2013: 80)
take DEM shoes old
'keep all these old shoes'

3.5. Exclusive use of independent pronouns

These pronominal suffixes of Arabic have not been retained in GPA, which exclusively uses independent pronouns (Avram 2014a: 17), to mark e.g. the direct object of verbs, as in (10a) or the possessor, as in (10b):

(10) a. *māmā yabi* ***ʔanā*** Q (Avram 2014a: 17)
madam want 1SG
'Madam wants me.'
b. *batn mal* ***ana*** O (Avram 2014: 26)
belly POSS 1SG
'my belly'

The same use of independent pronouns is documented in Saudi and Kuwaiti Arabic FT, as in (11) and (12) respectively:

(11) ***ʕana*** *maktab* (Al-Ageel 2016: 175)
1SG office
'my office'

(12) *hāḏa mū māl* ***āna*** (Dashti 2013: 75)
DEM NEG POSS 1SG
'These are not mine.'

3.6. Masculine singular form of demonstratives

Gomaa (2007: 103) writes that in GPA as spoken in Saudi Arabia "a singular masculine form /haːða/ or /haːda/ 'this' [occurs] as the usual form for all genders and numbers". This is also true of other territories where GPA is used:

(13) a. ***Haza*** *nafarat zen*. K (Salem 2013: 108)
DEM men good
'These men are good.'
b. *asān* ***hāda*** *mama kalām arabi* O (Avram 2014a: 29)
because DEM madam speak Arabic
'Because the madam [only] spoke Arabic'

Though not explicitly mentioned, the use of the masculine singular form of demonstratives is attested in Saudi Arabic FT:

(14) *Ana* ***hāḏa*** *ġurfa 147* (Al-Ageel 2016: 180)
1SG DEM room.SG.F 147
'I'm in room 147.'

Similarly, "Kuwaitis […] usually use *hāða* exclusively" (Dashti 2013: 83) in their version of Arabic FT:

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

(15) *ǧībi* ***hāḏa*** *ǧanṭə killə māl āna* (Dashti 2013: 77)
bring.IMP DEM bag.SG.F all of it POSS 1SG
'bring my bags'

3.7. Invariant form of verbs

The rich verbal of morphology of Arabic has been subject to drastic simplification in GPA, which makes use of invariant forms of verbs, mostly derived from Arabic imperfective and imperative forms (Gomaa 2007: 104, Bakir 2010: 206–209, Avram 2014a: 18, and Alshammari 2016):

(16) a. *ʔana fī* ***yiǧi*** SA (Gomaa 2007: 101)
1SG FI come
'I came.'
b. *ʔinti* ***šūf*** *filim?* Q (Bakir 2010: 207)
2SG see movie
'Have you seen the movie?'
c. *anta šu* ***yisawwi****?* UAE (Online 2014)
2SG what do
'what are you doing'

As noted by Al-Ageel (2016: 167), in Saudi Arabic FT, "two forms of a verb can be used alternatively within the same conversation by the same speaker". Moreover, such alternations are recorded even in the same sentence:

(17) *kīs* ***ǧīb*** *baʕdēn zabādī* ***yiǧīb*** (Al-Ageel 2016: 167)
bag bring.IMP.M then yogurt 3SG.M.bring.IPF
'Bring the bag, then bring the yogurt.'

Kuwaiti Arabic FT also uses e.g. 3rd person singular masculine forms:

(18) *wen inti* ***yiḥuṭ*** *ams āna* ***yaʔṭīč****?* (Dashti 2013: 71)
where 2SG 3SG.M.put.IPF yesterday 1SG 3SG.M.give.IPF.2SG.F
'Where did you put the bag I gave you yesterday?'

The same use of the 3rd person singular masculine imperfective form of the verb is attested in Omani Arabic FT:

(19) *mā fī* ***yaʕraf*** (Brockett 1985: 25)
NEG FI 3SG.M.know.IPF
'I don't know.'

3.8. Light verb 'make' + noun/adjective/verb constructions

GPA often uses light verb 'make' + noun/adjective constructions, as in (20a-b), and, less frequently, light verb 'make' + verb structures, as in (20c):

(20) a. *haza* ***sawi taftiš*** SA (Online 2017)
DEM make inspection
'He is searching [the house].'
b. *baʔaden hurma* ***yisawi zaʔlān*** O (Online 2012)
then wife make angry
'then [my] wife gets angry'

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

c. ***sawwi tiktib*** Q (Bakir 2010: 221)
make write
'write'

Such constructions with the light verb 'make' appear to be typical of Arabic FT as well. Consider the examples below from Kuwaiti Arabic FT:

(21) a. *āna* ***yisawwi talifūn*** *ams* (Dashti 2013: 72)
1SG make telephone yesterday
'I phoned yesterday'
b. *anta* ***sawwi fakkar*** (Wiswall 2002)
2SG make think.3SG.M
'you think'

Note that, according to Wiswall (2002), *sawwi* + verb constructions occur more frequently than in GPA.

3.9. Tense and aspect indicated by time adverbials

Given the absence of inflections on verbs, GPA uses time adverbials to indicate tense and aspect (Gomaa 2007: 104, Hobrom 1992: 84, Almoaily 2008: 40, Næss 2008: 85, Bakir 2010: 211–213, Avram 2014a: 27):

(22) a. *tadrīb* ***awwal*** *šwayy* SA (Albakrawi 2012: 129)
practice before a little
'I practiced a little before.'
b. ***ʔamis*** *ʔanā yabi …* Q (Bakir 2010: 206)
yesterday 1SG want
'Yesterday, I wanted …'
c. ***Šuwaya*** *ǧay, ana fi kalām* O (Alshuaimi 2011)
a little come 1SG FI speak
'After a while I came and talked.'

This is also true of Kuwaiti Arabic FT:

(23) *āna yigūlič* ***misāʔ*** (Dashti 2013: 71)
1SG 3SG.M.say.2SG.F from hour
'I told you an hour ago'

3.10. *Fi* + adjective

On most analyses (Gomaa 2007: 98, Al-Azraqi 2010: 169–171, Bakir 2010: 216, Avram 2012, 2013, Al-Shurafa 2014: 18, Avram 2014a: 20–21, Bakir 2014: 420, Potsdam and Alanazi 2014: 16, Avram 2016a: 60), GPA has developed a predicative copula *fi*[4]:

(24) a. ***fi ahsan*** SA (Avram 2012: 20)
FI good
'it's alright'

[4] As shown in Avram (2012), *fi* used as a copula is in free variation with the Ø copula.

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

b. *ʔinta* ***fī*** ***maǧnūn*** Q (Bakir 2010: 216)
2SG FI crazy
'Are you crazy?'
c. *anta ma* ***fi*** ***zēn*** UAE (Online 2014)
2SG NEG FI good
'you are not good'

The use of *fī* as a copula is documented in at least two relevant varieties of Arabic FT. Consider first Saudi Arabic FT:

(25) ***kwayes*** *mā* ***fī*** *baʕdēn* (Al-Ageel 2016: 170)
good NEG FI then
'It won't be good then'

A second variety is Omani Arabic FT, with respect to which Brockett (1985: 24) specifies that *fī* used "with adjectives", i.e. predicatively:

(26) ***fī*** ***ḫalāṣ*** (Brockett 1985: 24)
FI ready
'[when] that's finished'

3.11. *Fi* + verb

A conspicuous feature of GPA is the occurrence of *fi* + verb structures[5] (Hobrom 1992: 63–65, Gomaa 2007: 98–99, Al-Azraqi 2010: 166, Bakir 2010: 217, Avram 2012, 2013, Al-Shurafa 2014: 19, Avram 2014a: 22–23, Bakir 2014: 422–424), Avram (2016a: 67):

(27) a. *ʔana* ***fī*** ***yinsa*** SA (Gomaa 2007: 98)
1SG FI forget
'I forgot.'
b. *ana* ***fi*** ***maʔlum*** K (Salem 2013: 109)
1SG FI know
'I know.'
'You keep quiet.'
c. *ana* ***fi*** ***sugul*** *hamstašar sana* O (Alshuaimi 2011)
1SG FI work fifteen year
'I've been working for fifteen years.'

Fi in such structures has been differently analyzed: it is considered to be a particle (Al-Azraqi 2010: 169), a predication marker (Bakir 2010: 215–219; Al-Shurafa 2014: 19; Bakir 2014: 433–434), a copula (Hobrom 1992: 62–66, Potsdam and Alanazi 2014: 28), and, most recently, a means of marking statements in basic communication (Versteegh 2017). Whatever the status of *fi* when followed by a verb, what is of interest here is the fact that these structures also occur in Arabic FT. Moreover, in one such variety, Kuwaiti Arabic FT, *fi* + verb structures are even more widely attested than in GPA (Wiswall 2002).

(28) *anta* ***fi*** *fakkar* (Wiswall 2002)
2SG FI think
'you think'

[5] The use of *fi* in such structures is not compulsory, as shown in Avram (2012).

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

Fī is also found in Omani Arabic FT, in which it is be used "with verbs and verbal nouns" (Brockett 1985: 24):

(29) *baʔdayn* ***fī šill*** *fir-rās* (Brockett 1985: 24)
then FI take in head
'then he takes it to the head'

3.12. Omission of prepositions

As already observed by Gomaa 2007: 103) in his analysis of GPA as used in Saudi Arabia, "prepositions are rarely used". What is typical of GPA, then, is the omission of prepositions, widely attested in all the territories where GPA is spoken. Two illustrative examples are given below:

(30) a. *habi* ***Ø*** *sarir* SA (Online 2017)
hide bed
'hide under the bed'
b. *ʔanā māfi rūh* ***Ø*** *sīnema* Q (Bakir 2010: 207)
1SG NEG FI go cinema
'I don't go to the cinema.'

The omission of prepositions is not discussed in the available literature on Arabic FT. However, examples can be found, as the following one from Saudi Arabic FT:

(31) *Ana* ***hāḏa*** *ġurfa 147* (Al-Ageel 2016: 180)
1SG DEM room 147
'I'm in room 147.'

3.13. Multi-purpose preposition *māl*

While prepositions generally tend to be omitted, *māl* is used as a multi-purpose preposition (Avram 2014a: 23–24):

(32) a. *Ana yirid wahad sarir* ***mal*** *wahad nafar* SA (Online 2006)
1SG want one bed PREP one person
'I want a single bed'
b. *sawwi* ***māl*** *ʔāna muškil* Q (Bakir 2010: 212)
make PREP 1SG problem
'[she] makes a problem for me'
c. *binti fi āti* ***māl*** *walad* O (Næss 2008: 66)
daughter TAM give PREP son
'[My] daughter gives [it] to my son'

A similar example, from Omani Arabic FT, is provided below:

(33) *hāḏa abūy ġawāzīk u-l-maʕāš* ***māl***
DEM father-1SG.POSS money -2SG.POSS and-DEF-salary PREP
ẖamsa šuhūr (Simone Bettega, p.c. February 2016)
five month.PL
'this, my dear, is your money, the salary for five months'

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

3.14. Variable word order

Direct objects, which normally occur post-verbally, are sometimes found in pre-verbal position:

(34) a. ***zēt*** *awwal fī* ***šūf*** SA (Gomaa 2007: 100)
oil first FI see
'Check the oil first.'
b. *ana* ***čiko*** ***sūp*** O (Avram 2014a: 24)
1SG child see
'I [will] see [my] children'

Pre-verbal direct objects frequently occur in Saudi Arabic FT as well:

(35) ***el*** ***haleeb*** *tisakhneen mumkin?* (Al-Ageel 2016: 169)
DEF milk heat.2SG.F possible
'Could you heat up the milk?'

In attributive possession structures the possessor may precede the possessee:

(36) ***ana*** *mama w aku* SA (Alghamdi 2014: 15)
1SG mother and brother
'my mother and my brother'

The same pattern is attested in Saudi Arabic FT:

(37) ***ʔana*** *maktab* (Al-Ageel 2016: 175)
1SG office
'my office'

Finally, in GPA the modal verb may occur after the lexical verb.

(38) *inte šāra šūf* ***yigdar*** O (Avram 2014a: 25)
2SG street see can
'you can see [them] on the street'

Similar examples are found in Saudi Arabic FT:

(39) *šāhī ana lī yiǧīb* ***yigdar****?* (Al-Ageel 2016: 169)
tea 1SG for.1SG bring can
'Can you bring me some tea?'

4. Vocabulary

4.1. English lexical items

A number of English lexical items are found in GPA. Some of them, such as the one in (43), are widely attested:

(40) ***sem- sem*** K (Salem 2013: 109)
same same
'same'

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

Rather frequently, speakers use alternately words etymologically derived from Arabic and respectively English. In (41a) the speaker uses the Arabic-derived ***zawwiǧ***, whereas in (41a') the English-derived ***marid*** occurs:

(41) a. *hazband māl ʔintii rūh* ***zawwiǧ*** Q (Avram 2014a: 31)
husband POSS 2SG go marry
'your husband gets married?'
a'. *māfii kōf husband sawwī* ***marid*** Q (Avram 2014a: 31)
NEG FI fear husband make married
'Aren't you afraid your husband gets married?'

Less frequently, Arabic-derived words and English lexical items may even co-occur in the same sentence, as shown below:

(42) ***tanēn second*** *čiko* O (Avram 2014a: 32)
two second child
'[my] second child'

Note that it is not always possible to ascertain the status of the lexical items from English. While some of them, e.g. *sem-sem* are well established in the vocabulary of GPA, others may well be nonce borrowings.

The occasional use of English lexical items is also a feature of Arabic FT in general. According to Al-Sharkawi (2007: 120), native speakers of Arabic "do not use synonyms and antonyms in explaining words" and "foreign words are used to solve the problem". Al-Ageel (2016: 175) writes that in Saudi Arabic FT "the use of English words […] is common". Consider the following examples:

(43) a. ***same same*** *ma fī yōm kull* (Al-Ageel 2016: 173)
same NEG FI day every
'Isn't the same [food] available every day?'
b. ***chicken*** *waḥid abġa* (Al-Ageel 2016: 175)
chicken one 1SG-want
'I want one chicken'

Note, incidentally, the occurrence of *same-same* in (46a), widely used in GPA as well.

To sum up, English-derived lexical items are found both in GPA and in Arabic FT. Since neither the users of GPA nor the users of Arabic FT are necessarily (fluent) speakers of English, this is also illustrative of polylanguaging, as defined by Jørgensen et al. (2011: 34): "language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal […] regardless of how well they know the involved languages".

4.2 Lexical items from languages other than English

The vocabulary of GPA also contains several words from languages other than English, primarily from Persian and Hindi/Urdu. As shown by Næss (2008: 27), most of these "largely appear to be borrowed through Gulf Arabic". However, this is not always the case. Consider one such example:

(44) *bečā* O (Næss 2008: 27)
'child'

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

The word *bečā* is ultimately from Hindi/Urdu *baččā* 'child'. However, Næss (2008: 27) observes that the word is also "used by a Javanese and a Tagalog" user of GPA. Næss (2008: 27) concludes that, since these speakers "are stay-at-home maids, who one must assume [they] had minimal contact with native Urdu speakers", this suggests that "foreigner talk to non-Arabs […] is quite common". In other words *bečā* 'child' also occurs in Omani Arabic FT.

One source, then, of lexical items from languages other than English is Arabic FT. Given that Arab employers do not normally speak the L1s of their employees, this is further evidence of polylanguaging (in the sense of Jørgensen et al. 2011).

4.3. Lexical polysemy

GPA has to make do with an extremely reduced vocabulary. As shown by e.g. Almoaily (2013: 175) and Avram (2014a: 30, 2016a: 71, 2016b: 93), a consequence of the small size of the lexicon of GPA is polysemy, i.e. words undergo semantic extension and become polysemous:

(45) a. *rijāl yātik mišān* ***hurma*** O (Næss 2008: 56)
man give to woman
'the man gives to the woman'
a'. ***hurma*** *māl ana mōt* O (Næss 2008: 63)
wife POSS 1SG dead
'My wife is dead.'
b. ***māmā*** *māfī malūm* Q (Bakir 2010: 218)
mother NEG FI know
'your mother wouldn't know'
b'. ***māmā*** *yabi ʔana* Q (Bakir 2010: 211)
madam want 1SG
'Madam wants me.'

No such cases of lexical polysemy have been reported in the available literature on the varieties of Arabic FT used in the Arabian Gulf. However, it may be assumed that lexical polysemy of this type does exist, since it is documented in other varieties of Arabic FT (Avram 2014b).

4.4. Circumlocutions

Another consequence of the small size of the vocabulary of GPA is the use of circumlocutions. Gomaa (2007: 97) writes that in GPA, as spoken in Saudi Arabia, "there is a lot of paraphrasing and circumlocutions". As seen in (46b), examples of circumlocutions are also found in GPA as spoken in Oman:

(46) a. ***omur kabīr*** SA (Almoaily 2013: 174)
age big
'elderly'
b. ***āti halīb*** O (Avram 2014a: 32)
give milk
'breastfeeds'

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

Arabic FT as used in the countries of the Arabian Gulf presumably also resorts to circumlocutions, given that these are attested in other varieties (Avram 2014b).

5. Conclusions

The potential role played by Arabic FT in the emergence of GPA has been previously mentioned in literature. With respect to GPA in Saudi Arabia, for instance, Gomaa (2007: 110) writes that "it is possible that […] foreigner talk forms […] have become so much common" that Saudi Arabians generally use "that register when addressing" immigrant workers. More recently, Tosco and Manfredi (2013: 510) state that "certainly the influence of foreigner talk was important in the genesis of GPA". Previous works, however, give no indication which features of GPA may be attributed to influence exerted by the Arabic FT register. This is precisely what this paper has attempted to do.

To account for the influence of Arabic FT on GPA, reflected in the morphosyntactic and lexical features discussed, a starting point is Ferguson's (1971/1996: 121) claim that "the foreigner talk of a speech community may serve as an incipient pidgin". Ferguson (1971/1996: 121) writes 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.

An important proviso, however, is formulated by Mühlhäusler (1997: 102), who specifies that "the importance of foreigner talk […] appears to be restricted to relatively early stages of development" of pidgins. In terms of the classification proposed by Mühlhäusler (1997: 6), GPA is a pre-pidgin, i.e. in the earliest stage of development (Avram 2014a, 2016b). Hence, Arabic FT influence is to be expected, given the developmental stage of GPA.

It must be stressed, however, that Arabic FT influence does not account for all the features of GPA. Its phonology cannot be traced to Arabic FT, but rather to the L1s of the speakers of GPA (Gomaa 2007: 105–108, Avram 2014a, in press). As for the morphosyntactic and lexical features of GPA, Arabic FT is only one of the sources; as shown in Avram (in press), other factors include substratal/adstratal influence, incipient grammaticalization, and simplificatory processes typical of untutored, short term, adult L2 acquisition.

References

Ahmad 2016: Rizwan Ahmad, "Expatriate languages in Kuwait: Tension between public and private domains", in *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 6: 29–52.

Al-Ageel 2016: Hessah Al-Ageel, *Requesting Behaviour of Saudi Arabian Women in Contemporary Arabic-Speaking Situations*, PhD dissertation, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

Al-Azraqi 2010: Munira Al-Azraqi, "Pidginization in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia: Media presentation", in Reem Bassiouney (ed.), *Arabic and the Media. Linguistic Analyses and Applications*, Leiden, Brill, 159–174.

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

Albakrawi 2012: Hussien Albakrawi, "The linguistic effect of foreign Asian workers on the Arabic Pidgin in Saudi Arabia", in *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2 (9): 127–133.

Albirini 2016: Abdulkafi Albirini, *Modern Arabic Sociolinguistics. Diglossia, Codeswitching, Attitudes and Identity*, London and New York, Routledge.

Alghamdi 2014: Emad A. Alghamdi, "Gulf Arabic Pidgin: A descriptive and statistical analysis of stability", *International Journal of Linguistics*, 6 (6): 110–127.

Almoaily 2008: Mohammad Almoaily, *A Data-based Description of Urdu Pidgin Arabic*, MA dissertation, Newcastle University.

Almoaily 2013: Mohammad Almoaily, *Language Variation in Gulf Pidgin Arabic*, PhD dissertation, Newcastle University.

Alshammari 2016: Wafi Alshammari, *Verb form selection as a function of accommodation in Gulf Pidgin Arabic*, paper presented at Annual Symposium on Arabic Linguistics (ASAL 30), 31 March–3 April 2016, Stony Brook University.

Al-Sharkawi 2007: Muhammad Al-Sharkawi, "Arabic Foreigner Talk", in Kees Versteegh, Mushira Eid, Alaa Elgibali, Manfred Woidich, Andrzej Zaborski (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, vol. 2, Leiden, Brill, 116–122.

Al-Sharkawi 2010: Muhammad Al-Sharkawi, 2010, *The Ecology of Arabic. A Study of Arabicization*, Leiden, Brill.

Alshuaimi 2011: Suad Alshuaimi, "Why call it broken Arabic?". http://suad47.blogspot.com/2011/07/why-call-it-broken-arabic.html.

Al-Shurafa 2014: Nuha S. Al-Shurafa, "Linguistic functions of *fii*/*maafii*, in Hejaz Gulf Pidgin Arabic", in *King Khalid University Journal for Humanities*, 21 (1): 1–27.

Arnaut and Spotti 2014: Karel Arnaut and Massimiliano Spotti, "Super-diversity discourse", in *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, 122: 2–11.

Avram 2012: Andrei A. Avram, "On the functions of *fi* in the verbal system of Arabic pidgins", in *Romano-Arabica*, XII: 35–58.

Avram 2013: Andrei A. Avram, *Multifunctionality in Gulf Pidgin Arabic: The case of "fi"*, paper presented at "Linguistics in the Gulf 4", Qatar University, 17–18 March 2013, Doha.

Avram 2014a: Andrei A. Avram, "Immigrant workers and language formation: Gulf Pidgin Arabic", in *Lengua y Migración*, 6 (2): 7–40.

Avram 2014b: Andrei A. Avram, *On the relationship between Arabic Foreigner Talk and Pidgin Arabic*, paper presented at ArCo 2014 – 'Arabic in Contact: Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Perspectives', 15–17 December 2014, Università degli Studi "L'Orientale", Naples.

Avram 2016a: Andrei A. Avram, "On the periphery of the periphery: Gulf Pidgin Arabic", in Muntasir F. Al Hamad, Rizwan Ahmad, Hamid I. Alaoui (eds.), *Lisān al-Arab: Studies in Contemporary Arabic Dialects. Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of AIDA, Qatar University, 2013*, Vienna, LIT Verlag, 61–74.

Avram 2016b: Andrei A. Avram, "On the developmental stage of Gulf Pidgin Arabic", George Grigore and Gabriel Biţună (eds.), *Arabic Varieties: Far and Wide. Proceedings of the 11th International Conference of AIDA, Bucharest, 2015*, Bucharest, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 87–97.

Avram in press: Andrei A. Avram, "Sources of Gulf Pidgin Arabic features", in Simone Bettega and Fabio Gasparini (eds.), *Linguistic Studies in the Arabian Gulf*, Torino, Università degli Studi di Torino.

Bakir 2010: Murtadha J. Bakir, "Notes on the verbal system of Gulf Pidgin Arabic", in *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 25 (2): 201–228.

Bakir 2014: Murtadha J. Bakir, "The multifunctionality of *fii* in Gulf Pidgin Arabic", in *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*, 29 (2): 416–442.

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

Bassiouney 2009: Reem Bassiouney, *Arabic Sociolinguistics. Topics in Diglossia, Gender, Identity, and Politics*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Blommaert 2010: Jan Blomaert, *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Blommaert 2015: Jan Blommaert, "Language: The great diversifier", in Steven Vertovec (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Diversity Studies*. London and New York: Routledge. 83–90.

Blommaert & Rampton 2011: Jan Blomaert and Ben Rampton, "Language and superdiversity", in *Diversities* 13 (2): 1–21.

Boyle 2012: Ronald Boyle, "Language contact in the United Arab Emirates", in *World Englishes*, 31 (3): 312–330.

Brockett 1985: A. A. Brockett, *The Spoken Arabic of Khabūra on the Batina of Oman*, Manchester, University of Manchester.

Buckingham 2016: Louisa Buckingham, "Commercial signage and the linguistic landscape of Oman", in *World Englishes*, 34 (3): 411–435.

Dashti 2013: Abdulmohsen A. Dashti, "Interacting with domestic workers in Kuwait: Grammatical features of Foreigner Talk. A case study, in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 224: 63–84.

Ferguson 1971/1996: Charles A. Ferguson, "Absence of copula and the notion of simplicity: A study of normal speech, Baby Talk, Foreigner Talk and pidgins", in T. Huebner (ed.), *Charles A. Ferguson, Sociolinguistic Perspectives. Papers on Language in Society, 1959–1994*, New York, Oxford University Press, 115–123.

Gomaa 2007: Yasser A. Gomaa, "Arabic pidginization: The case of pidgin in Saudi Arabia", in *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Assiut University Egypt*, 19: 85–120.

Hobrom 1992: Anwar Hobrom, *An Analysis of the Arabic Pidgin Spoken by Indian Workers in Saudi Arabia*, MA dissertation, Kansas University.

Jørgensen et al. 2011: J. Normann Jørgensen, Martha S. Karrebæk, Lian M. Madsen and Janus Møller, "Polylanguaging in super-diversity", in *Diversities*, 13 (2): 23–37.

Miller 2007: Catherine Miller, "Arabic urban vernaculars. Development and change", in Catherine Miller, Enam Al-Wer, Dominique Caubet and Janet C. E. Watson (eds.), *Arabic in the City. Issues in Dialect Contact and Language Variation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1–31.

Mühlhäusler 1997: Peter Mühlhäusler, *Pidgin and Creole Linguistics*, expanded and revised edition, London, University of Westminster Press.

Næss 2008: Unn G. Næss, *"Gulf Pidgin Arabic": Individual Strategies or a Structured Variety? A Study of Some Features of the Linguistic Behaviour of Asian Migrants in the Gulf Countries*, MA dissertation, University of Oslo.

Parkin and Arnaut 2014: David Parkin and Karel Arnaut, "Super-diversity & sociolinguistics – A digest", in *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies*, 95: 1–6.

Piller forthcoming: Ingrid Piller, "Dubai: Language in the ethnocratic, corporate and mobile city", in Dick Smakman and Patrick Heinrich (eds.), *Urban Sociolinguistics. The City as a Linguistic Process and Experience*, London and New York, Routledge.

Potsdam and Alanazi 2014: Eric Potsdam and Mohammad Alanazi, "*Fi* in Gulf Pidgin Arabic", in *Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics*, 35: 9–29.

Rampton et al. 2015: Ben Rampton, Jan Blommaert, Karel Arnaut and Massimiliano Spotti, "Super-diversity and sociolinguistics", in *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, 152: 2–13.

Randall and Samini 2010: Mick Randall and Mohammad A. Samini, "The status of English in Dubai. A transition from Arabic to English as a lingua franca", in *English Today*, 26 (1): 43–50.

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)

Salem 2013: Ashraf Atta M. S. Salem, "Linguistic features of Pidgin Arabic in Kuwait", in *English Language Teaching*, 6 (5): 105–110.
Smart 1990: Jack Smart, "Pidginization in Gulf Arabic: A first report", *Anthropological* in *Linguistics*, 32 (1-2): 83–119.
Tosco and Manfredi 2013: Mauro Tosco and Stefano Manfredi, "Pidgins and creoles", Jonathan Owens (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 495–519.
Versteegh 2017: Kees Versteegh, "How to make a statement in basic communication", paper presented at Structure et Dynamique des Langues-CELIA, CNRS campus of Villejuif, 31 March 2017, http:// www.radboud.academia.edu/chmversteegh.
Vertovec 2007: Steven Vertovec, "Super-diversity and its implications", in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (6): 1024–1054.
Wiswall 2002: Abdul-Qadir Wiswall, "Gulf Pidgin: An expanded analysis", http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~aw 321500.

Abstract

The sociological concept of superdiversity (Vertovec 2007) has proved to be conducive to novel insights in the sociolinguistic study of the effects of globalization (see e.g. Blommaert 2010, Blommaert and Rampton 2011) in cities, which are a typical locus of linguistic superdiversity (Calvet 2011). A region exhibiting considerable superdiversity, triggered by both rapid urbanization and a huge inflow of immigrant workers from a variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, is the Arabian Gulf (Bassiouney 2009). The language situation is characterized, in addition to diglossia (Standard Arabic – local dialects), by processes such as koinéization and the rise of Arabic urban vernaculars (Miller 2007), the use of English, the emergence of Gulf Pidgin Arabic within the context of untutored adult second language acquisition, and the extensive use of the Foreigner Talk register of Arabic.
This paper examines one manifestation of this linguistic superdiversity: the influence of the Foreigner Talk register of Arabic on Gulf Pidgin Arabic. The following structural features of Gulf Pidgin Arabic are considered: 'two' + singular noun; the omission of the definite article; the invariant masculine singular form of adjectives; the independent pronouns; the invariant masculine singular form of the demonstrative; the invariant forms of verbs; the light verb constructions with 'make'; time adverbials to express tense and aspect; *fi* + adjective; *fi* + verb; variable word order; lexical items from English and from other languages; lexical polysemy; circumlocutions. It is shown that all these features are also attested in Arabic Foreigner Talk. This suggests that Arabic Foreigner Talk might be one of the sources of Gulf Pidgin Arabic structures.

BDD-A27670 © 2017 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 13:00:15 UTC)