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FROM GLOSSES TO THE LINGUISTIC NATURE OF CANAANO-AKKADIAN¹

Abstract

The present paper elaborates on the linguistic status of Canaano-Akkadian. The authors demonstrate that the graphic variations of the glosses that are employed more than once by the same scribe reveal the attitude of the Canaanite scribes towards their mothers tongue: scribes considered the Canaanite language as a low-variety in contrast to the high status of Akkadian. The result of this empirical study makes it possible to design a model of the sociolinguistic diglossal situation from which Canaano-Akkadian emerged. Given this sociolinguistic origin of the idiom, the authors further analyse Canaano-Akkadian within the framework of language contact phenomenon, detecting in it possible traits typical of pidgins, creoles, koinés, mixed-languages and/or jargons. This review indicates that the scribal code is unable to be categorized by making use of one taxonomical class: rather, it displays properties that are located on the boundary of two categories and/or belong to more than one taxonomical class. As a result, a new – dynamic and partially fuzzy – definition of Canaano-Akkadian is proposed. Accordingly, the tongue is classified as a professional high-status jargon (written and also spoken “indoor”), two-source mixed-language, “soft” koiné of proximate but not mutually intelligibly underlying systems, idiom that, having emerged from diglossia, contributed to a triglossal situation at the scribal centres, and linguistic system with traces of tertiary hybridization typical of pidgins and tendencies present in post-pidgin continua.

Keywords: Canaano-Akkadian, Canaanite scribes, Bilingualism, Mixed languages, Cultural status of languages

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1. Introduction

1.1. Linguistic background of Canaano-Akkadian: *status quaestionis*

“Canaano-Akkadian” – a denomination used first by Shlomo Izre’el (1998a) – is the language of the letters that were sent on behalf of the kings of Canaan to the Egyptian capital city of Amarna in the 14th BCE. This Akkadian variant, besides typical Akkadian traits, also shows morphological, lexical and syntactical characteristics that implicitly reveal the nature of the mother tongue of the actual authors of the letters (i.e. scribes), undoubtedly a Northwest Semitic dialect.² Additionally, the documents contain explicit genuine Canaanite elements. Some of them are commonly referred to as “glosses”, being introduced by a special sign, a so-called “gloss-wedge” or “Glossenkeil”. Moreover, it is widely recognized that Canaanite features present in the letters reflect the oldest linguistic characteristics of the Canaanite family.³

There is no doubt that Canaano-Akkadian is a product of coexistence and interaction of different languages and is, therefore, typically analysed within the language-contact framework. However, as for its exact linguistic status – and, in particular, the issue of the oral character of the tongue – scholars have failed to reach a consensus. On the contrary, various positions have been proposed among which one may distinguish the following main tendencies:

a) Canaano-Akkadian is a hybrid language compound of three layers: typical Old Babylonian constructions, genuine Northwest Semitic elements and so-called “local modifications”, i.e. expressions that are neither Babylonian nor Canaanite, but reflect Canaano-Akkadian mixed forms. This hybridized language must have corresponded to a real dialect that existed alongside Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian. However, an exact determination of the extent to which it was a spoken tongue remains highly difficult if not impossible (cf. Rainey 1996a: 32, 2010 and Kossmann 1994: 171);

b) Canaano-Akkadian is a linguistic system that may not be treated as if it were a true and authentic language or dialect. Although it was a linguistic system on its own, instead of being a pidginized version of Akkadian or a natural Northwest Semitic tongue, it rather corresponded to a type of an institutionalized or stabilized interlanguage. It emerged as an imperfect intermediate stage in the

² This may be especially observed in letters from the Southern area. The verbal system experienced particular influences to the degree that frequently the information concerning tense, aspect or mood is conveyed by suffixes, prefixes and infixes characteristic for Canaanite, yielding hybrid Canaano-Akkadian verbal forms (Rainey 1996a, Izre’el 2005, von Dassow 2004: 645-647 and Tropper and Vita 2010). As a result, Canaano-Akkadian fails to appear as a homogenous linguistic system (Izre’el 2005: 3).

³ Cf. Izre’el 1995: 103, Steiner 1997: 146-147, Moran 2003: 343 and Edzard 2011: 481. Nevertheless, Canaano-Akkadian can already be observed in the middle of the 15th century BCE, in letters discovered in Tell Ta’anach (cf. Rainey 1996a: 31-32 and 2006: 75-76).

acquisition of Akkadian by scribes and was used as a vehicle for communication among speakers whose mother tongues were not mutually intelligible. Akkadian was the target language, while Canaanite dialects were underlying mother tongues (Gianto 2000: 126-127);⁴

c) Canaano-Akkadian constituted a mixed-language that was genuinely spoken (Izre'el 2012). As an exemplary mixed-language, it corresponds to a combination of properties of two different systems. To be exact, Canaano-Akkadian shows a typical split whereby its referential vocabulary developed from one source (i.e. from Akkadian) while the verbal inflection originated in another source in Canaanite (Izre'el 2012: 179; cf. also Matras 2009: 303-305);⁵

d) Canaano-Akkadian should be explained not as a simple contact of languages but as a sociological interaction of linguistic communities. Thus, it corresponds to an outcome of a complex and very specific social situation in which the communities of speakers entered into a contact. To be precise, Canaano-Akkadian arose from the coexistence of the Canaanite speaking community (Canaanite native speakers) with the Akkadian writing community (the Akkadian scribal culture). This Canaano-Akkadian scribal language, albeit essentially aimed at written communication, was also pronounced, at least in scribal training (Sanders 2009: 82, 88-89);

e) Canaano-Akkadian was an Akkadographic writing of Canaanite. That is to say, “the hybrid of Canaanite and Akkadian in which Canaanite scribes wrote was not a language of any kind, but an artefact of these scribes’ use of cuneiform” (von Dassow 2004: 642). Accordingly, “the language underlying their communication in cuneiform was not Akkadian but Canaanite” (ibid).⁶

1.2. The aim of the paper

The present article aims at contributing to the determination of the linguistic status of Canaano-Akkadian. To be exact, the authors will demonstrate that various theories and explanations proposed thus far may be harmonized and conciliated, if viewed not as mutually exclusive but as complementary. In order to reach this broad perspective, the empirical evidence related to one field of research will be presented and discussed. This field of study concerns the glosses and their relevance for the linguistic position of Canaano-Akkadian. In other words, the information offered by the glosses – and, more specifically, one of their

⁴ See also Gianto (1990: 10-11). Rainey (1996a: 32) accepts the label “interlanguage”.

⁵ It is also argued that a mixed-language is a combination of the grammatical system of one language and the vocabulary of the other (Bakker and Mous 1994: 4-5 and Izre'el 2012: 177-178).

⁶ For a criticisms of von Dassow (2004), see Sanders (2009:203) and Izre'el (2012, consult especially pages 197-203).

classes – will be employed as a foundation of a more adequate understanding of the linguistic nature of the “code” in which the letters were composed.⁷

Shlomo Izre’el (2003a, 2003b) has demonstrated that the variation of linguistic traits – including the glosses – offers a great potential in the study of the Canaano-Akkadian language. However, he was aware of the limits of this type of research – in various cases, it is difficult to determine whether certain linguistic features are representative of the underlying dialect (inter-personal variations) or, on the contrary, characterize the scribe who composed a given document (individual variations).⁸

For this reason, the empirical analysis offered in this paper takes as its starting point the study of one class of glosses only: *the Canaanite glosses that have been employed more than once by the same scribe*. Put differently, variations which might have been produced by a concrete scribe in the writing of the same gloss will be analysed (cf. section 2.1). Such glosses, i.e. glosses that are repeated twice, three or more times by the same scribe, are of a particular interest despite their reduced number (they amount to some thirty cases of approximately one hundred and ten of all the glosses).⁹ Namely, they will enable us to observe directly the attitude and awareness – in a written form – of a given scribe towards his own mother tongue. Additionally, the tendencies in writing of these glosses will cast some new light on orthographic variations employed by scribes in rendering Canaanite terms that are not glosses but appear in the very text of a letter.¹⁰ This empirical evidence will subsequently bestow us with the possibility of designing a plausible model of the sociolinguistic situation from which the Canaano-Akkadian language emerged (cf. section 2.2). After that, given the sociolinguistic origin underlying the tongue of the Amarna letters, we will further expand our study and analyse this scribal code in a detailed manner within the framework of language contact phenomenon. More precisely, the characteristics of Canaano-Akkadian will be “tested” as possibly representative of pidgins, creoles, koinés, mixed-languages and/or jargons, all of

⁷ Izre’el (2003b: 15) defines the Amarna glosses in the following manner: “The glosses are words that are inserted within the sequence of the text either to clarify or to replace an Akkadian word or a Sumerian logogram which might be wrongly interpreted when read in Egypt. The glosses are usually indigenous lexemes, mostly West Semitic, but also Hurrian or another local language, of unidentified origin. Glosses can sometimes be Egyptian, and Akkadian glosses (usually used for interpreting a Sumerogram) are not rare. One can even find glosses in Sumerian, serving as a reading aid for a logogram... Glosses were usually marked as such by a special cuneiform sign... which is called a *Glossenkeil* (‘a gloss-wedge’). However, as Izre’el (1995: 103) points out, “no comprehensive evaluation of the gloss phenomenon has been undertaken”.

⁸ Compare the discussion in Izre’el (2003b: 20-21).

⁹ The final number of the glosses is derived from Izre’el (1998b).

¹⁰ It should be noted that in the present study, entities whose genetic relation is uncertain shall be excluded. In other words, we will deal only with elements that are genuinely Canaanite. One such element is the lexeme *pū* ‘mouth’ for which it is impossible to determine whether in its usage as a gloss, it is an Akkadian or a Northwest Semitic term (cf. also Izre’el 2003b: 28).

them typical outcomes of situations where languages meet, interact and “blend” (cf. section 3.1 where these linguistic objects are thoroughly explained). In light of this examination, a novel – in our view, more plausible – definition of Canaano-Akkadian will be formulated (cf. section 3.2). Finally, in the last part of the paper, main conclusions will be drawn and the relation of our proposal to the other theories elucidated (cf. section 4).

2. Canaano-Akkadian glosses

2.1. Empirical evidence – stable and instable glosses

As mentioned above, it is possible to encounter some thirty glosses that are employed more than once by the same scribe. Their writing shows both stability (i.e. the examples where a single gloss is written in an identical and consistent fashion) and instability (i.e. the examples where one gloss displays dissimilar shapes).

In several cases, glosses appear in a sole variant only. For example, a scribe from Gezer glossed the Sumerian logogram SIG₄ “brick” by using the Canaanite term *labittu* “brick” in two different letters, in the so-called “Brick Proverb”.¹¹ In both cases, he accompanied the logogram by an entirely identical gloss *la-bi-tu*¹². As a part of another proverb, some scribes from Byblos used the Canaanite term *kilūbu* ‘cage, basket’ as a gloss of the Akkadian lexeme *ḥuḥaru* ‘bird trap’. The entity *kilūbu* is invariably written as *ki-lu-bi*¹³. However, the instances of graphical instability are more common. Sometimes, one deals with minor variations in the writing of a word. Such variations may involve an overt expression – or, on the contrary, the non-expression – of a pharyngeal or laryngeal consonant that must have existed in the lexeme¹⁴ or slight dissimilarities in a syllabogram employed

¹¹ For example, EA 296: 17-22: “A brick [SIG₄] : *la-bi-tu* may move from under its partner; still I will not move from under the feet of the king, my lord” (Moran 1992: 338). Cf. also Chicago Assyrian Dictionary (CAD) L, 176.

¹² EA 266:20; EA 296:17. Concerning this scribe see Vita (2010).

¹³ The proverb has the following form: ‘Like a bird in a *ḥu-ḥa-ri* : *ki-lu-bi* trap : cage, so am I / so are they / so is (the city of) Šumur’. All attestations are found in five letters from Rib-Hadda of Byblos (EA 74:46, 79:36, 81:35, 105:9 and 116:18), written by at least four different scribes, as will be shown in a forthcoming study. The proverb shows some variations (cf. CAD Ḥ, 225), though gloss and the glossed term are identical in all five letters. Regarding this gloss, see Sivan (1984: 237) and Gianto (1995: 69, ‘individuating gloss’).

¹⁴ For instance, a scribe from Gimtu writes *ṣuḥrumma* “on the back” as *ṣú-uḥ-ru-[m]a* on two occasions (EA 282:7 and EA 284:5) and once as *ṣ[ú]-ru-[m]a* (EA 281:7). In the former case, he overtly expresses the consonant /h/ by means of a sign of the *ḥ*-series. In the latter case, however, he does not employ any explicit mark for this consonant. Also the scribe from Tyre fails to indicate the consonant /h/: *ṣú-ri-ia* “my back” (EA 147:39).

by the scribe.¹⁵ However, in other cases, the differences are more significant as documented by scribes from Beirut and Tyre.

The scribe of Ammunira, the ruler of Beirut, glossed the Sumerian logogram SAĤAR.(RA) ‘dust’ three times in different letters by means of three different glosses: *a-pa-ru*, *ḥa-pa-ru* and *e-pé-ri* ‘dust’¹⁶. The writing of these glosses reveals two levels of variation. On the one hand, a minor phonetic variation – similar to those mentioned in the previous paragraph – may be perceived. While in the first example the laryngeal consonant /ʿ/ is left unexpressed (viz. *a-pa-ru*), in the second, the glottal stop is overtly reflected in writing by a *ḥ*-sign (viz. *ḥa-pa-ru*)¹⁷. On the other hand, it is also possible to detect a more substantial discrepancy. Namely, in the two first examples, the scribe employed the Canaanite noun *‘aparu*, while in the third case, the Akkadian equivalent has been selected, viz. *eperu*. Additionally, it may be observed that in yet another letter, the same scribe left the logogram SAĤAR.RA un-glossed.¹⁸

Equally interesting examples are those offered by a scribe from Tyre in his manner of writing the Canaanite noun *mēma* ‘water’¹⁹. Namely, this scribe glossed the Sumerian logogram A.(MEŠ) ‘water’ several times and in different letters by using the following writings: *mé-ma*²⁰, *mi-ma*²¹ and *mé-e-ma*²². Even in a single text, he employed two variants: *mi-ma* and *mé-e-ma*.²³

¹⁵ One and the same scribe writes *li-me-ma* ‘peoples’ on one occasion (EA 195:13) and *li-mi-ma* on another (EA 205:6; cf. also Moran 1992: 273 n. 2). Consult some further examples from different places: *i-ša-ti* (EA 185:19.32) / *e-ša-te* (EA 189:12) ‘flames’; *ša-mu-ma* (EA 211:17) / *ša-me-ma* ‘sky’ (EA 264:16; cf. also Izre’el 2003a: 18 and 20-21).

¹⁶ EA 141:4, EA 143:11 and EA 136:3 respectively. The paleographic unity of letters EA 141-143 was already pointed out by Knudtzon (1907-1915: 1236, in a comment on letter EA 136). They have identical format and script and were written by one single scribe. Regarding the petrographic analyses of the three tablets see Goren, Finkelstein and Na’aman (2004: 162-163). Letter EA 136, sent by Rib-Haddi, king of Byblos, when he was exiled in Beirut, was written by this same scribe, as rightly pointed out by Knudtzon (1907-1915: 56 n. 2 and 1236; see also Moran 1992: 217 n. 6 and van der Toorn 2000: 103). The petrographic analysis of the tablet assures that it comes from Beirut (see Goren, Finkelstein and Na’aman 2004: 157 and 158).

¹⁷ Cf. Izre’el (2003b: 23). This would correspond to an example which Izre’el (*ibid.* 16) denominates “inherent variation” of the Canaanite-Akkadian texts that “may appear as idiosyncrasies of a particular scribe”.

¹⁸ Cf. EA 143:4. For a more detailed analysis of the glosses *‘aparu/eperu* see Vita (2012).

¹⁹ Letters from Tyre EA 146-155 were written by the same scribe, cf. Moran (2003: 249 n. 3).

²⁰ EA 146:20: A : *m[é-m]a*; EA 155:10: A.MEŠ : *mé-ma*.

²¹ EA 148:12: DUG : *a-ku-ni* : *mi-ma*.

²² EA 148:31: A.MEŠ [:] *mé-e-ma*; EA 150:21: ‘A.MEŠ’ [:?] *mé-e]-ma*. A lexical trilingual text (Sumerian, Akkadian and West-Semitic) found in Aphek (Aphek No 8151/1; Horowitz, Oshima and Sanders 2006: 31-32) and dated form 13th century BCE provides equivalent forms A].MEŠ : *ma-wu* : *mu-mi*. Concerning *mu-mi* (*mū/ōmi*) see Izre’el (2003b:77).

²³ EA 148:12.31.

2.2. Discussion of the evidence

The data demonstrate that an invariant mood of writing of Canaanite terms seems to appear especially in fixed environments such as concrete proverbs.²⁴ Besides these rigid contexts, it seems that scribes tend to employ variants of writing. This is evident in the case of the scribes from Beirut and Tyre analysed above and may also be true for other scribes that are thus far unknown. Thus, it may be hypothesized that the scribe from Beirut was not interested in reflecting with a high precision his mother tongue in the letters that he used to compose. This lack of interest was so profound that he glossed a Sumerian logogram by using a gloss in the Akkadian language instead of choosing an entry from his Canaanite vernacular, as he did on two other occasions for the same logogram. The scribe from Tyre shows an even greater instability in the manner of introducing a term belonging to his mother tongue.

The aforementioned observations related to the glosses from Beirut and Tyre bestow us with an additional possibility of a better understanding of graphic variants employed by other scribes in rendering Canaanite terms that did not function as glosses. The letters from Byblos offer various examples of this sort. For instance, the Canaanite form *'iḏirtu* “help” is written by different scribes of this locale by means of the variants *i-zi-ir-ta*₅²⁵, *i-zir-t[a]*²⁶ and *ḥi-zir-ta*.²⁷ Likewise, distinct scribes from Byblos used the Canaanite term *kazbūtu* “lie(s)”,²⁸ while another scribe, also from Byblos, employed the same term but in an Akkadian nominal pattern, viz. *kizibtu*²⁹.

The Canaanite terms present in the Amarna letters – both glosses and elements that were not used in order to gloss Sumerian logograms or Akkadian terms – jointly demonstrate that the Canaanite scribes were able to use the

²⁴ It should be noted that a scribe from Megiddo glossed the Akkadian verbal form *er-ri-šu* “I am cultivating” by means of the Canaanite expression *aḥ-ri-šu* (i.e. WS **aḥriṭu*) with the same meaning (EA 365:11; cf. the analysis of the two verbal forms in Rainey 1996a: 67). *errišu* is a Canaano-Akkadian hybrid form (see also Sivan 1984: 155). A different scribe, probably from Gaza (cf. Goren, Finkelstein and Na’aman 2004: 306 and 308), employed the same Canaanite verbal form, written in the same manner, in order to gloss the Akkadian *'i-ri-šu* “I am cultivating” (EA 226:11; cf. Rainey 1996a: 67). The use of the same gloss, written with the same fashion by scribes from different places, could suggest a common lexicographic background in the way as has been posited by Vita (2012).

²⁵ EA 87:13. Cf. the orthography *i-zi-ir[-tu₄]* in Ugarit posited and discussed by Huehnergard (2008: 53-54).

²⁶ EA 89:18.

²⁷ See Huehnergard (1996: 101 and 112). Concerning *'iḏirtu*, see also Sivan (1984: 59) and Izre’el (2003b:23 and 28).

²⁸ EA 129:37 (cf. the discussion in Rainey 1996b: 139), EA 138:119, EA 362:53. See also Sivan (1984: 236).

²⁹ See Huehnergard (1996: 105) and his comment concerning *kizibtu*. See also the discussion in Izre’el (2003b: 29).

Mesopotamian logosyllabic writing system in order to render their mother tongue. Nevertheless, the instability of writing of Canaanite forms³⁰ also indicates that there was no standard orthography for rendering the Canaanite vocabulary extracted from underlying Northwest Semitic vernaculars. The characteristic irregularity – albeit, on the other hand, not exception-less – with which these Canaanite forms were noted as well as the lack of texts composed in a Canaanite language itself and written by means of the logosyllabic system suggest the following:³¹ the scribes were *de facto* uninterested in developing an orthographic convention, with which they could render their Northwest Semitic mother tongues by employing this type of writing system. Hence, the writing of the local West Semitic dialects had to be achieved via different manners, most probably by means of the alphabet. In this manner, Canaanite would offer a situation similar to what can be observed in Ugarit, where the Ugaritic scribes choose to develop an alphabetic cuneiform system in order to note their mother tongue, even though they were entirely proficient in the Mesopotamian logosyllabic writing and, hence, could use it to render the Ugaritic language.³²

This fact may point to a situation of diglossia whereby Akkadian constituted a high-variety, while Canaanite (or Canaanite vernaculars) corresponded to a low-variety. As posited for Emar by Ikeda (2010), the high-variety is typically written although it may also be spoken in very specific, most frequently official, situations. The low-variety, on the contrary, tends to remain a spoken phenomenon although sporadic intents of its codification in a written form may likewise be encountered. Nevertheless, the low-variety characteristically fails to possess a standardized norm so that one finds a great variation of writing.

Adopting Ikeda's scheme to Canaanite-Akkadian, the language of the Canaanite Amarna letters might have emerged as a type of linguistic blending developed from the high-variety (Akkadian) and the low-variety (Canaanite), at highly peculiar places (scribal centres) where Akkadian was written (and possibly spoken), and where the persons were native speakers of Canaanite substrates. As demonstrated by the few unstable glosses which can be identified with certainty

³⁰ Certainly the number of cases where it is possible to identify this instability (or stability) in a clear manner is highly reduced.

³¹ A possible exception may be the text RS 94.2615, edited by Arnaud (2006). See, however, the view presented by von Dassow (2010: 901 n. 13).

³² This is indicated by the syllabic text RS 20.163 (Nougayrol 1968: 257 n. 1: “le premier exemple d’un texte continu ougaritique écrit en cuneiformes babylonien”); Huehnergard 2008: 11: the text is “so badly broken...that it is also difficult to be certain that it is to be read as Ugaritic, although that seems the most likely possibility...the genre and context are quite unclear”), the column of the Polyglot S^a Vocabulary Texts, written in Ugaritic (Huehnergard 2008: 21-102) and a substantial number of Ugaritic terms encountered in Akkadian texts of Ugarit (Huehnergard 2008). Similarly, it should be noted that the majority of the Ugaritic administrative syllabic texts were most likely read in the Ugaritic language (cf. Malbran-Labat 1999: 96 and Roche 2010).

and which have been discussed above, as well as in section 2.1, the Canaanite low-variety remained principally a spoken phenomenon with variable manners of codification in contrast to the Akkadian high-variety (Figure 1).

Akkadian	High variety	Formal situations	Written – typically	Spoken – rare (scribal centres)
Canaanite	Low variety	Informal situations	Written – rare (e.g. glosses)	Spoken - typically

Figure 1: The original diglossia at the Canaanite scribal centres

The situation depicted in Figure 1 exemplifies how the language came into being: it was a product of an original diglossia at the scribal centres, where the prestigious Akkadian language entered into contact with the Canaanite mother tongues of the scribes. However, the real state of affairs at the scribal centres during the time of the Amarna letters differed from that presented above. Namely, at these working places, not two but three linguistic systems coexisted (Akkadian, Canaanite and Canaano-Akkadian), delivering a situation of triglossia instead of the original diglossia. In the subsequent sections, we will discuss in detail the sociolinguistic properties of this “blended” language, analysing it within the framework of language contact studies.

3. Canaano-Akkadian as language-contact phenomenon

3.1. Language contact phenomenon

As argued above, Canaano-Akkadian is an example of the situation where two different linguistic systems interacted, producing a novel grammatical organization. This situation is referred to as a language contact phenomenon and typically involves linguistic objects such as pidgins, creoles, koinés and mixed-languages. In order to determine the status of Canaano-Akkadian and interpret the presented evidence within the framework of language contact phenomenon, it is, hence, necessary to correctly understand these terms. Additionally, given the particular sociological setting, in which Canaano-Akkadian was regularly employed (i.e. scribal centres), the concept of a professional jargon is also highly relevant and will be explained.

First of all, one should note that instead of a *prototypical* pidgin, linguists rather talk about a pidgin-continuum. To be exact, pidgin is a dynamic term spanning linguistic organizations that gradually develop from pre-pidgins to stabilized pidgins and next to extended or expanded pidgins. Each one of them has its own properties and displays a dissimilar range of stability and complexity. Additionally, both stabilized and expanded pidgins may display stages of so-

called post-pidgin continuum that emerge from the pressure of the standard lexifier language. Despite the dynamics and gradualness of pidgins, all varieties of pidgins display three main features. Two of them are sociological, while one is evolutionary: i) pidgins are partially targeted or non-targeted second-language learning; ii) have no native speakers; iii) develop from simpler (i.e. more regular) to more complex (less regular) systems (Mühlhäusler 1986: 5-11). This means that there are *no* purely grammatical traits that could infallibly define all possible pidgins (see also Thomason 2001: 167-174).

Pre-pidgins constitute ad-hoc individual solutions to the problem of cross-linguistic, normally bi-lingual, communication. They are secondary hybrids where the superstrate component is dominant but substrate features transcend strongly, albeit indirectly. Pre-pidgins are characterized by individual strategies, lexicalization, holophrastic talking, extremely basic grammar (two-word utterances), pragmatic structuring, contextual dependency, iconic rules and universal (natural) strategies. They present a great reduction or even total lack of morphology. Syntactic rules are absent and the syntax is governed by pragmatic principles and transfer from the substratum grammar. The lexicon is reduced which leads to a very general meaning of most lexical items (the sense is governed by pragmatic rules) and categorial multifunctionality. New concepts are composed out of the basic vocabulary by rudimentary circumlocutions, which are unstable. It should be observed that the lexical, morphological, and syntactic reduction may be very different, depending on specific sociolinguistic factors (for instant, proximity of languages or range of contact between the members of the two groups). Pre-pidgins typically lack a shared code, offer a great number of ambiguities and are not transmitted from speaker to speaker or from generation to generation (Mühlhäusler 1986: 135-137, 142, 145-147 and Holm 1988: 4-5).

Stabilized pidgins are tertiary hybrids that emerge not from a simple bilingual situation but from a pre-pidgin (a secondary hybrid) that is used as a medium of communication by speakers who are not speakers of the lexifier language – thus, the stabilization occurs in highly heterogeneous linguistic environments. This tertiary hybridization signifies that traits specific of a substrate – which to an extent determined the shape of a secondary hybrid or a pre-pidgin – are reduced or replaced by more universal features. This type of pidgin appears when none of the underlying languages (components of the secondary hybrid) are viewed as a target, and the lexifier language becomes socially remote. Stabilized pidgins are social rather than individual solutions and possess established, to an extent, norms of acceptability. The stabilization principally involves: i) gradual substitution of free variations by more constant syntactic and lexical structures; ii) replacement of the pragmatic talking by the grammatical one – establishment of relatively firm lexical and grammatical conventions; and iii) introduction of universal strategies and structural developments that are independent from source languages. Stabilized pidgins tend to be unintelligible

to speakers of the lexifier language and have certain autonomy. They constitute restrictive systems (inadequate for the needs of first and second-language users) and seem to be reduced and simplified versions of their lexifiers. Nevertheless, in their social context, they tend to be institutionalized as highly efficient means of communication (Mühlhäusler 1986: 147-176 and Holm 1988: 5-6). Stabilized pidgins are commonly viewed as prototypical pidgins. They arise in situations where more than two linguistic groups need to communicate. While its lexicon is typically based upon one linguistic system (i.e. the lexifier language), the grammar is a cross-linguistic compromise of the languages in contact – it fails to derive from one language (Thomason 2001: 159-160).

Expanded pidgins correspond to linguistic systems which are transformed into languages with potential to grow and spread. More importantly, the grammar is restructured and syntactic innovations are language-internal, being derived from universal principles of language evolution. Expanded pidgins become grammatically more complex: more abstract patterns of word formation emerge and a greater derivational depth is observed. However, variation of (inter-individual) forms may still be great (Mühlhäusler 1986: 176-204).

A post-pidgin continuum refers to (stabilized and expanded) pidgins (basilects) that suffered a renewed influence from its original lexifier language (acrolect). They restructure and/or replace earlier lexicon and grammar in favour of the target language, yielding various intermediate systems (mesolects). Such post-pidgin – towards the lexifier – characteristics may be (and often are) individual solutions (Mühlhäusler 1986: 237-238).³³

While pidgins arise from mingling of languages that can be highly dissimilar (either genetically or typologically), koinés emerge from the mixing of systems that are either mutually intelligible or similar. In other words, languages that enter into contact are genetically and typologically proximate. Moreover, koineization is a gradual and slow process in contrast with pidginization, which is normally sudden and catastrophic. Koinés also fail to involve a drastic reduction of morphology so typical for early pidgins. However, certain linguistic results of koineization and pidginization – such as the regularization of the inflectional morphology – are similar and koinés may be classified as a particular subtype of pidgins (Mühlhäusler 1986: 11-12 and Holm 1988: 5). In general, the output of a situation where two or more languages interact (and, thus, the form of a pidgin or a koiné) depends on the grammatical properties of the mixing languages, on

³³ In respect to the entire pidgin continuum, it must be noted that the simplification of grammar does not equal impoverishment – it means great grammatical regularity. Incipient pre-pidgins are minimally simple and maximally impoverished while more developed pidgins are non-impoverished (fully expanded) and maximally simple or regular (Mühlhäusler 1986: 4). It is also important to emphasize that the structural changes of pidgins can but need not be linear – they may be discontinuous or catastrophic (drastic and sudden) (Mühlhäusler 1986: 249).

the unrepeatable – and constantly changing – sociological settings and on the position of the dynamic *lect* on the pidgin continuum scale.

Mixed-languages are contact languages that cannot be traced back to a single linguistic input. On the contrary, their grammar and lexicon derive directly, and fairly equally, from two distinct sources. Mixed-languages emerge in situations where only two languages meet (secondary hybrid) and especially in cases of widespread bilingualism (at least in a part of the society). Mixed-languages are not concerned with imperfect second language learning or with necessity for a new linguistic system for communication between groups that interact. They usually arise within a single group of speakers due to the wish for “an in-group language”. The members of this group already know a language that would assure the communication with the other groups. For this reason, mixed-languages typically serve two functions: they enable the members of the group to keep their conversation secret and/or constitute a symbol of identity of this group (Thomason 2001: 196-198).

Jargons correspond to linguistic varieties that are developed in specific social environments, being usually restricted to concrete groups of people. One of the most exemplary classes of jargons includes jargons that emerge at working places. These are idioms of special activity groups, occupational jargons or professional in-house tongues. These specialized languages of professional groups fail to be egalitarian, being, on the contrary, characteristic of a particular “cast”, clearly differentiated from the remaining portion of the society. In an analogical vein to mixed-languages, jargons are indoor professional para-codes, often unintelligible to others, which contribute to the group’s solidarity and distinctiveness. This means that jargons principally arise not because of a need for communication – they are rather spontaneous or deliberated compositions whose properties are dictated by the characteristics of the group (in particular, its profession) among which it is being developed. However, they are used as a very effective communication mode among the members of the group. Jargons that emerge in groups whose activity is related to another language (translators, linguists, advanced university students, etc.) can display features typical for pidgins. Such “linguistic” jargons also constitute a subtype of mixed-languages (Trefil, Kett and Hirsch 2002: 155, Gläser 2000: 89, Mazrui 1995: 171-172 and Green 1987: ix-xii; cf. also Seger, Dungworth and McDonald 1980).

If a linguistic system emerging from a contact between languages is nativized, it is converted into a creole. The creolization is typically associated with the nativization of pidgins at any moment of their development. However, the definition may also include all organizations that appear in situations of language contact (koinés, mixed-languages and jargons) given that the only invariant and necessary feature of creoles is the fact that they possess native speakers (Mühlhäusler 1986: 205-236, cf. especially pages 205 and 210-212, Holm 1988: 6-9 and Thomason 2001: 159-160).

3.2. The linguistic classification of Canaano-Akkadian

The above-presented review of the principal types of linguistic organizations that emerge from an inter-linguistic interaction demonstrates that pidgins, koinés, mixed-languages, jargons and creoles are phenomena that are fuzzy (both dynamic and gradual) and overlapping, on the one hand, and determined by sociological and extra-linguistic conditions, on the other.

Grammatical properties and structures of concrete pidgins can greatly differ. The same may be said about koinés, mixed-languages, jargons or creoles. As a result, in order to define a system as a specific type of language contact phenomenon, its grammatical features are not sufficient. As already mentioned, there is no straightforward grammatical “test” for determining whether a system is a pidgin, koiné, mixed-language, jargon or creole. From a purely grammatical perspective, all of these linguistic objects may display similar grammatical systems. For example, all of them can be highly reduced and impoverished or, on the contrary, complex and grammatically developed. This fuzziness leads to the situation that each organization shares grammatical features with the other (for instance, pidgins may grammatically coincide with koinés, creoles, mixed-languages and jargons).

A necessary component in order to determine the exact sort of language contact is the knowledge of the sociological situation that underlies the resulting language or, simply speaking, the history of the emerging system. Which and how many languages took part in mixing? Where, how and why did it happen? Who spoke the language that emerged from this contact? Which were the groups that spoke the underlying languages? Was the resulting idiom nativized? It should also be noted that sociological features of pidgins, koinés, mixed-languages and jargons may overlap or be gradual and evolving. For instance, a mixture of languages that are similar and belong to the same family but are not mutually intelligible corresponds to a situation on the boundary between circumstances prototypical of pidgins (distant systems) and koinés (proximate systems). The situation of jargon can likewise be concomitant with the formation of mixed-languages in the case where a jargon is based on two previously existing input systems (cf. linguistic jargons of translators).

To sum up, given that each situation of a linguistic interaction is unique, resulting from multiple and unrepeatably sociological and grammatical factors, each emerging system is also exceptional and somehow different from the others. Linguistic labels (pidgin, koiné, mixed-language, jargon and creole) tend to differentiate among all such situations categorizing reality into a few concepts or “boxes”. This is of course artificial to reality itself. As a result, various outputs of a linguistic contact cannot be classified as prototypical members of the class of pidgin, koiné, mixed-language etc., but display grammatical and sociological features that locate them on the boundary between various taxonomical prototypes. This is evident in the case of Canaano-Akkadian.

Canaano-Akkadian offers several traits that are typical of a jargon. It was a linguistic system, confined to a particular place (scribal centres) and to a unique community (scribes). It did not constitute an egalitarian idiom employed by a vast portion of the society. On the contrary, it was used by one group characterized by its relatively high education and status. It was a particular jargon – a jargon that was aimed at being written. However, as any outcome of linguistic contact – jargons included – it must have been a spoken phenomenon, at least among the members of this specific group during their professional activities at the working place. *De facto*, at the scribal centres, the oral use of Canaano-Akkadian might have been exempt of any unnaturalness or artificiality, constituting a jargon, fully adequate to the place of its usage and commonly employed by the members of the community of scribes. Nevertheless, from its very beginning, this code was closely tied to the profession of this group, i.e. to writing; the written character is, hence, inherent to the language. Another peculiar trait of this jargon was the fact that the profession of the group by which it was employed was linguistic in nature – their users were scholars of the Akkadian language.

Canaano-Akkadian displays properties characteristic of secondary hybrids, i.e. mixed-languages. Namely, the jargon emerged in a situation of bilingualism, i.e. from the interaction of two underlying systems: Canaanite and Akkadian (cf. section 2.2 and Figure 1). Both shaped the resulting language in an equal manner, albeit in different aspects. Namely, Canaano-Akkadian uses the lexicon that can principally be traced back to Akkadian and the morphology and syntax that are mainly related to Canaanite.³⁴ This separation is typical of mixed-languages. Nevertheless, certain exceptions to this ideal picture may be found: Canaanite lexeme appears and morphosyntactic Akkadian features are present. Furthermore, as a mixed-language, Canaano-Akkadian arose within a single group whose members most likely knew a language that could guarantee the communication with the other groups, i.e. Akkadian or even a type of “pan-Canaanite”. It was in principle an “in-group-language” and might have constituted a trace of identity of this group: only scribes employed this idiom. This last aspect is also typical of jargons.

Although Canaano-Akkadian emerged from the situation of diglossia and had its roots in two linguistic systems (Akkadian and Canaanite; cf. Figure 1), the real state of affairs at the time of composing the Amarna letters corresponded rather to triglossia. That is to say, three languages coexisted at the scribal centres: Akkadian, Canaanite and the outcome of their “blending”, Canaano-Akkadian. These three tongues match the three layers of the language of the

³⁴ Moran (1992: xxii) viewed the Canaano-Akkadian language as “entirely new code, only vaguely intelligible (if at all) to the West Semite because of the lexicon, and to the Babylonian because of the grammar”. Thus, it was a linguistic system distinct both from the Northwest Semitic local languages (or substrates) and from Akkadian (or a superstrate).

letters as posited by Rainey (cf. section 1.1). Akkadian was a high variety and superstrate: it was employed by a very limited part of the society; it was typically written but possibly also spoken, although very infrequently for instance during the Akkadian lessons. Canaanite was a low variety and substrate: it was used by the vast part of the society; it was typically spoken and only infrequently written,³⁵ e.g. glosses. Canaano-Akkadian was a high variety “mixture” of the superstrate and substrate: it was typically written, although also commonly spoken under very specific circumstances, i.e. at the scribal centres. It is possible that conforming to the typical behaviour of jargons, scribes may have been using Canaano-Akkadian as their in-group code for all types of conversations, not only the formal ones. Thus, to an extent, Canaano-Akkadian would be a middle stage between its two sources, having emerged from the previously mentioned diglossal circumstances, as presented in Figure 1. It slightly surpasses the rigid limits of formal situations: besides being employed in official letters, it may have been typical for scribal circles in general, being suitable for all varieties of circumstances. Moreover, at these scribal centres, it was probably a common and natural means of communication (cf. Figure 2).

Akkadian	High variety	Formal situations	Written – typical	Spoken – rare (scribal centres)
Canaano-Akkadian	High variety	<i>Specific</i> ³⁶ (formal and non-formal) situations	Written – typical	Spoken – <i>common</i> at scribal centres
Canaanite	Low variety	Informal situations	Written – rare (e.g. glosses)	Spoken - typical

Figure 2: Triglossia at the Canaanite scribal centres³⁷

³⁵ At least by means of the Mesopotamian logosyllabic writing.

³⁶ The term “specific” makes reference to a concrete place where the idiom was used, i.e. the scribal centers.

³⁷ Figure 2, in fact, accounts both for the diachronic origin of the Canaano-Akkadian and for its synchronic properties and, especially, variability of forms. The diachronic rationale has been presented above. As for the synchronic view, we have already explained that Canaano-Akkadian offered Akkadian elements, Canaanite elements and elements that were independent or genuinely Canaano-Akkadian. The intensity of each of these components was distinct in different letters. The language of a given letter could be closer to Akkadian (which acted as an acrolect) or to a Canaanite dialect (the influence of the substrate was intensified). It could also offer more proper Canaano-Akkadian traits (properties of the basilect).

The fact that Canaano-Akkadian emerged from languages which although not mutually intelligible were proximate and similar signifies that it may be understood as corresponding to a “towards-koiné” situation. Canaanite vernaculars and Akkadian are clearly distinct tongues which most likely were not reciprocally understandable. However, their grammatical structure is still close enough so that there would not be a need for a drastic reduction of the morphology or inflection in case of a blending. Similar morphological and inflectional structures existed in the two underlying languages.

Canaano-Akkadian fails to provide typical properties of pre-pidgins. It is highly implausible that the language would have arisen as an early pidgin and then developed more complex grammar due to the stabilization and expansion (complex Canaano-Akkadian features would correspond to the stage of stabilized and expanded pidgins), and through the relexification (Akkadian features would reflect acrolectic tendencies of post-pidgin continua). Additionally – and in a straight contrast with prototypical pidgins – Canaano-Akkadian did not emerge as imperfect second-language learning. Scribes may have been proficient in Akkadian so that we would rather witness a spontaneous jargon creation of users who were skilled in both languages. However, scribal centres were places where not only texts were elaborated by already educated specialists, but also where future scholars were trained. Accordingly, the learning component might in fact be somehow relevant to the idiom.³⁸ On the other hand, although Canaano-Akkadian was prompted by a bilingual situation (a mixture of Akkadian and Canaanite), it was used by scribes whose mother tongues may have been different. In this manner, as pidgins, it could have corresponded to a situation of tertiary hybridization where the original secondary hybrid was employed in multilingual circles (i.e. in scribal centres where different Canaanite vernaculars were spoken). Nevertheless, this tertiary hybridization was very peculiar. It was born due to an exchange of written texts and the mother tongues are closely related and, thus, similar. Additionally, the tertiary hybridization could have been prompted by the fact that scribes of different Canaanite origin and belonging to distinct scribal centres travelled and met (cf. Goren, Finkelstein and Na’aman 2004: 129, 224, 279 and 291). During these meetings they might have been using their own secondary hybrids to communicate contributing to the creation of a tertiary hybrid – a pan-Canaanite scribal code based on Akkadian and various Canaanite dialects.

Additionally, the language has been, at least partially, stabilized – it has its own (although sometimes varying) rules. Its status was high (in contrast with pre-pidgins) so that the emerging Canaano-Akkadian would not been regarded as an imperfect form of (targeted or not) Akkadian. Such properties are typically

³⁸ Regarding cuneiform instruction in Canaan see von Dassow (2004: 666-673) and Horowitz, Oshima and Sanders (2006: 15-19).

found in stabilized and especially expanded pidgins, although are likewise characteristic of stabilized koinés and mixed-languages.

All of this suggests that, rather than a single static definition, one may understand Canaano-Akkadian as a dynamic fuzzy (yet synchronic) object where properties and situations typical for pidgins, koinés, mixed-languages, and jargons intervene. On the contrary, the idiom does not fulfil the necessary condition of a creole – it was never nativized. Canaano-Akkadian is a professional high-status jargon that although spoken, was principally aimed at written communication. Due to its sociological particularity (it was employed by a group of bilingual scribes), it also constitutes a two-source mixed-language, which – given the proximity but not mutual intelligibility of the input systems – can be viewed as a type of a “soft” koiné. Additionally, it offers certain degree of tertiary hybridization (typical of pidgins) and traces of tendencies present in the post-pidgin continuum (approximation or dissociation from the acrolect and basilect, related to a specific scribe). On the whole, it is a unique linguistic organization shaped by its exceptional sociolinguistic environment.

It must be noted that our solution – according to which a linguistic system is classified as a dynamic and, partially, fuzzy object that shares features typical of numerous taxonomical types – is not isolated in research related to languages in contact. For instance, as proposed by King’ei (1987: 22) and Mazrui (1995: 171), the Sheng language³⁹ in Kenya offers properties representative of a jargon, slang, pidgin, creole and code-switching phenomena. This signifies that, in an analogical manner to Canaano-Akkadian, Sheng cannot be encapsulated within the chains of a single and rigid category. Given that contact between languages involves a great variety of sociolinguistic styles, outcomes of such situations may resist a straightforward categorization: they can display properties that are located on the boundary of two traditionally distinguished categories or that belong to more than one taxonomical class.

4. Final observations

The “dynamic” classification of Canaano-Akkadian formulated above, albeit distinct from the other views, should not be understood as invalidating the linguistic tradition of the Canaano-Akkadian studies. Quite the reverse, our proposal is profoundly inclusive. Various statements in our definition concord with propositions found in four main theories that treated the question of the linguistic status of Canaano-Akkadian (cf. hypotheses a-d in section 1.1). To be exact, the model developed in this paper indicates that the views proposed by Kossmann (1994), Rainey (1996 and 2000), Gianto (2000), Sanders (2009)

³⁹ Sheng is principally based on Swahili and English code-switching and “serves as a para-code of mainly lower class urban youth” (Mazrui 1995: 171).

and Izre'el (2012) constitute highly important achievements towards a complete understanding of the nature of Canaano-Akkadian. All of them, namely, reveal certain important properties of the tongue.

As posited by Rainey (1996 and 2010) and Kossmann (1994), our classification of Canaano-Akkadian implies that the language was a realistic (i.e. non-artificial) hybrid dialect composed of three layers: Akkadian, Canaanite and genuine Canaano-Akkadian. In accordance with Gianto (2000), the definition posited in the previous section shows that the language corresponded to a stabilized institutional (i.e. scribal) code that facilitated communication among speakers of (to a degree) mutually unintelligible mother tongues. Even though, in contrast to Gianto, we do not understand it as a prototypical interlanguage, we are aware of the fact that the learning component was clearly present at the scribal centres and might have contributed to the formation of Canaano-Akkadian. In agreement with Izre'el (2012), our view suggests that Canaano-Akkadian was a type of a mixed-language that was genuinely spoken. Additionally, following the ideas of Sanders (2009), the new categorization of the language of the letters emphasizes the importance of the sociological context of the scribal centres for a correct understanding of the linguistic nature of this tongue. We have suggested that although Canaano-Akkadian was primarily aimed at written communication, at these scribal centres, it was also commonly spoken, constituting a professional jargon.

While our definition preserves the main findings of the four aforementioned theories, it also enables us to “reconcile” them. That is to say, the dynamic classification demonstrates that the major hypotheses formulated thus far may, to a degree, be viewed as complementary and not as colliding. When understood as parts of a larger – dynamic and, partially, fuzzy – picture, they remain accurate and harmonizing. Each one of them analyses a certain facet of Canaano-Akkadian: it stresses a given set of properties and constructs an explanation that accounts for the chosen portion of the linguistic and sociological data.

By confirming and assuming the validity of most of the research traditions, by developing a frame within which these previous views become complementary and harmonized, and by providing a dynamic, more flexible and, in our view, more realistic classification of Canaano-Akkadian, which is additionally based on novel empirical facts, our proposal may contribute to a more accurate comprehension of the linguistic nature of Canaano-Akkadian.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Of course, our paper does not respond all the questions related to the typological status of Canaano-Akkadian. On the contrary, the results of our article suggest that further studies are needed. Namely, we are convinced that in order to design a thorough model of the classification of Canaano-Akkadian, one should develop a complete list of linguistic and sociological characteristics of this language, which could be identified with a particular taxonomical type (pre-pidgin, stabilized/expanded pidgin, post-pidgin, koiné, mixed-language, jargon, code-switching, etc.). In other words, each trait of Canaano-Akkadian is expected to be ascribed to one or more linguistic

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types, in case they [i.e. these types] share certain grammatical and/or extra-grammatical properties. In this manner, a “map” of the relations between all the characteristics and taxonomical classes will be established. As a result, it will be possible to determine how many properties of pidgins, koinés, mixed-languages and other types, Canaanite-Akkadian possesses and to which class the language could be related more closely. Put it differently, taxonomical approximate prototypicality would be revealed. This meticulous examination – which relies both on the analyses accomplished thus far by other linguists and on new empirical studies that are being carried out by the authors of this paper – will constitute one of the research activities undergone by A. Andrason and J.P. Vita in near future.

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