The Fate of Complex Languages: Classical Arabic and Old Norse in the Age of Globalisation

Wouter Kusters
Leiden Centre for Linguistics (ULCL)
The Netherlands

1. Introduction

In this paper I discuss the effects of globalisation on language structure. I take globalisation in the broad sense of the word. With this term I do not only refer to most recent world history of global mutual dependency and international communication, but also to earlier expansions of empires, cultures and languages (cf. Sloterdijk 1999).

I discuss two cases of such expansion, which are, the spread of Islamic culture and Arabic language after the 7th century, and the expansion and history of the Scandinavian realm since the 9th century.

Within each of these two settings I compare earlier verbal inflection, that is, Classical Arabic and Old Norse inflection, with later verbal inflection in three different daughter languages. These daughter languages differ from each other with respect to their social and cultural history. In this way, we get insight into the influence of social-cultural factors, or, globalisation, on language structure, that is, here, verbal inflection.

Within the Arabic sphere I compare original Classical Arabic with modern Najdi Arabic spoken in Northern Saudi-Arabia, with Moroccan Arabic spoken in Morocco on the fringe of the former Arab Empire, and with Nubi Arabic from southern Sudan, spoken in Uganda today.

In Scandinavia I compare the verbal inflection of Old Norse with modern Icelandic, with Faroese, spoken on several isles in the Atlantic Ocean and with standard Bokmål Norwegian, as spoken in Norway.

My hypothesis is that factors of the historical social dimension influence variables of verbal inflection. That is, the more second language learning has taken place in a speech community, the more internal dialect contact and migrations occurred, and the less prestige a language has, the more *transparent* and *economic* the verbal inflection will become. With 'transparent' I mean that there is a one-to-one-correspondence between meaning and form. Deviations from optimal transparency are fusion, fission, allomorphy and homonymy (cf. Carstairs 1987). I consider an inflectional system to be 'economic' when few categories and category combinations are expressed.

I will now first describe the history of Arabic, with specific focus on these three social factors, and I will then compare the inflection of the

Nordlyd 31.2:275-289, © the author 2003
Proceedings of the 19th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics, vol. 31.2,
Edited by Anne Dahl, Kristine Bentzen, and Peter Svenonius

three Arabic varieties mentioned above with Classical Arabic inflection. Next I will describe Scandinavian history, and I will compare verbal inflection of modern Scandinavian with Old Norse inflection. Finally I will compare and discuss the findings from Arabic and Scandinavian.

2. Arabic

2.1 Arab history

For hundreds of years Arabic has mainly been spoken in the desert of the Arabian peninsula by nomads. In the early 7th century Islam emerged, several nomadic groups were united, and a large area of the Middle East and North Africa was conquered. This expansion brought the Islam and Arabic to new territories, where Arabic evolved into quite different varieties.

Meanwhile most nomadic groups in the Arabian desert remained isolated from the Imperial history of the Islam and Arab culture. One of these were the Shammar, living in the northern part of the Najd region, in the northern half of modern Saudi Arabia (cf. Ingham 1982). Contacts of the Shammar with Arabs from outside the desert were sparse, although there were occasional trading contacts in Mesopotamia, and visits to Mecca. Until the 20th century there were few new-comers to the Shammar community. The Najdi Arabs consider their language as the best way of speaking Arabic, and they have a long tradition of oral literature. Poetry and verbal art form the main cultural symbol in the Najd to express ethnic loyalties and identity.

Morocco has a more turbulent history (cf. Abun-Nasr 1987). The first wave of Arab expansion between the 7th and 11th century brought about 150.000 migrants to the region. These Arabs founded new cities, and absorbed Berbers to Islamic and Arab culture and language. In this period Arabic remained an urban language, spoken in the context of administration, trade, religion and military affairs. Between the 11th and 14th century a second wave of Arabs came to North Western Africa, consisting of about 1 million people, who also populated the countryside. Later Moroccan history is characterised by political, cultural and social influences from Spain, Western Africa, and Arabian lands to the East. Arabic in Morocco has been spoken by many non-native speakers, especially from Berber descent. Various Arabic varieties influenced each other in Morocco. Classical Arabic was considered to be the holy language, while Moroccan Arabic had low prestige.

The Arabs expanded slower southwards in Africa. Only in the 19th century Sudan came under firmer Anglo-Egyptian control, and several military camps were established in South Sudan. The population of these camps consisted of the military rulers from Egypt and other North African

regions, who spoke various Arabic varieties, soldiers and slaves from local ethnic groups, who spoke different languages unrelated to Arabic, and traders who spoke regional Arabic varieties. In the 1880s these settlements were cut off from Egypt, and a large part of the camps' population moved southward. After several years, this group was employed by the British to serve in the Ugandese army. The native speakers of Arabic consisted of 20% of the population in the early days of the camps while later they only formed 4%. Arabic had become the lingua franca in the camps, and in Uganda it became the first language of the new ethnic group of Nubi. This Arabic variety emerged in a situation with mainly speakers of non-Arab languages. It served in its incipient period as a communication tool, although it later was associated to the status of the Nubi.

Summarily, since Nubi Arabic has had most second language learners, I expect that Nubi has become most economic and transparent. Moroccan Arabic has also a history of language contact, and has always had lower prestige than Classical Arabic. Moroccan Arabic will therefore be more transparent and economic than Classical Arabic. Najdi Arabic has most prestige and has had fewest second language learners. This variety will have remained most complex.

2.2 Classical and Najdi Arabic

A Classical Arabic verb consists of a root of usually three consonants (C)[1] Simple roots are filled with vocalic infixes, which express voice, aspect and transitivity, or, verb class. Voice is expressed by the first vowel (v_1), and aspect by the second vowel (v_2), cf. next table (cf. also Holes 1995):

Table 1 Classical Arabic vowel patterns

	active		passive	
	v_1	v_2	v_1	v_2
imperfect v_1CCv_2C	a	a i u	u	a
perfect Cv_1Cv_2C	a	a i u	u	i

In the active voice there are three different kinds of v_2. The choice between these vowels depends on the class of the verb, i.e. whether the verb is transitive, intransitive or stative.

The roots, dressed up with vocalic infixes, are prefixed and suffixed

[1] The root can be augmented by affixes and by consonant and vowel lengthening. In this paper I will restrict myself to unaugmented, simple roots.

by person, gender, number, and mood affixes, cf. table 2. For instance, the skeleton *SKN* means 'DWELL'; imperfect aspect and active voice infixations render *ASKUN*. Further affixation gives the complete form: *t-askun-i:-na* 'you (FEM.SING) taught'[2]. In table 2 I show the partial paradigm of the transitive verb, *SKN*, in the active voice and indicative mood.

Table 2 Comparison of Classical and Najdi Arabic inflection

'to dwell'	Perfect		Imperfect	
	Classical Arabic	Najdi Ar.	Classical Arabic	Najdi Ar.
1SING	sakan-tu	sikan-t	'-askun-u	'-askin
2MASC.SING	sakan-ta	sikan-t	t-askun-u	t-askin
2FEM.SING	sakan-ti	sikan-ti	t-askun-i:na	t-askn-i:n
3MASC.SING	sakan-a	sikan	y-askun-u	y-askin
3FEM.SING	sakan-at	skan-at	t-askun-u	t-askin
1PLUR	sakan-na:	sikan-na	n-askun-u	n-askin
2MASC.PLUR	sakan-tum	sikan-tu	t-askun-u:na	t-askn-u:n
2FEM.PLUR	sakan-tunna	sikan-tin	t-askun-na	t-askn-in
3MASC.PLUR	sakan-u:	skan-aw	y-askun-u:na	y-askn-u:n
3FEM.PLUR	sakan-na	skan-an	y-askun-na	y-askn-in
2MASC.DUAL	sakan-tuma:	-	t-askun-a:ni	-
2FEM.DUAL	sakan-tuma:	-	t-askun-a:ni	-
3MASC.DUAL	sakan-a:	-	y-askun-a:ni	-
3FEM.DUAL	sakan-ata:	-	t-askun-a:ni	-

When we compare Classical and Najdi Arabic we see the following differences (cf. Ingham 1994). Firstly, the categories of DUAL and MOOD have disappeared in Najdi Arabic. In Classical Arabic MOOD was expressed in the imperfect as a suffix, while in Najdi Arabic the suffixes only express person, gender and number. Secondly, the *u* and *i* phonemes have largely merged in Najdi Arabic, and the number of verb classes has decreased. In table 3 I show the 'v_1-v_2' combinations of the various verb class, aspect and voice combinations.

This brings us to a third Najdi change: in Najdi Arabic the choice of v_1 and v_2 is, like in Classical Arabic, determined by aspect, voice and verb class. However, in Najdi Arabic these only determine the underlying vowel, because there are phonological rules that delete vowels, and change vowel quality. These effect that the relation between surface form and

[2] Finally object pronominal clitics may be attached verb-finally, from which I also refrain here.

underlying meaning becomes opaque, cf. the last column in table 3. In fact, this relation is so opaque that the structure easily breaks down, which is what happened in neighbouring dialects.

Table 3 Comparison of Classical and Najdi Arabic vowel patterns

			Class. Arabic v_1-v_2	Najdi Ar. v_1-v_2	Surface vowel forms
Trans.	Active	Perfect	a-a	a-a	(i-a, Ø-a)
Trans.	Active	Imperfect	a-i/u	a-i	(a-i, a-Ø)
Trans.	Passive	Perfect	u-i	i-i	(Ø-i, i-Ø)
Trans.	Passive	Imperfect	u-a	i-a	(a-a, i-a, i-i)
Intrans.	Active	Perfect	a-i	a-i	(i-i, a-Ø)
Intrans.	Active	Imperfect	a-a	a-a	(a-a, a-i)
Intrans.	Passive	Perfect	i-i	i-i	(Ø-i, i-Ø)
Intrans.	Passive	Imperfect	i-a	i-a	(a-a, i-a, i-i)
Stative	Active	Perfect	a-u		
Stative	Active	Imperfect	a-u		
Stative	Passive	Perfect	u-i		
Stative	Passive	Imperfect	u-a		

The further away from the Shammar speech community, the more the infixal vowel system loses its aspectual and voice meanings (cf. Ingham 1982). In a nearby dialect intransitive imperfect forms do not distinguish between passive and active. Instead, internal vowel choice is fully determined by phonology. Among tribes a little further towards Mesopotamia, passive and active voice is not distinguished, except in the third person. In some Mesopotamian dialects the four-way distinction between transitive/intransitive, and active/passive has collapsed into a twofold distinction. In other Mesopotamian dialects and in fact, in most modern Arabic varieties, root vocalism is not morphemic anymore. Aspect is only expressed in prefixes and suffixes, and voice is expressed otherwise.

The path of change apparent from Najdi Arabic and other varieties is led by both phonological and morphological considerations. The conflation of transitivity and voice categories became more likely when

the phonological rules had made the forms already rather similar. The actual occurrence of conflation, however, was led by morphological considerations. Reductions take place at first in more marked classes; they start with conflating voice distinctions in intransitives and in non-third person categories.

2.3 Moroccan Arabic and Nubi

This development towards loss of infixal meaning distinctions has been complete in Morocco. The Moroccan verb still consists of three consonants and vocalic infixation, but in the majority of verbs[3] the vowel pattern is either Ø-c or c-Ø, depending on the syllable structure (cf. Caubet 1993). That is, the vowels are no longer determined by semantic categories, cf. table 4. This effected that aspect in Moroccan Arabic is fully expressed in the affixes.

Table 4 Comparison of Classical and Moroccan Arabic inflection

to read	Perfect		Imperfect	
	Classical Arabic	Moroccan Arabic	Classical Arabic	Mor. Arabic
1SING	katab-tu	ktcb-t	‘-aktub-u	(ka)-n-ktcb
2MASC.SING	katab-ta	ktcb-ti	t-aktub-u	(ka)-t-ktcb
2FEM.SING	katab-ti	-	t-aktub-i:na	(ka)-t-kctb-i
3MASC.SING	katab-a	ktcb	y-aktub-u	(ka)-y-ktcb
3FEM.SING	katab-at	kctb -at	t-aktub-u	(ka)-t-ktcb
1PLUR	katab-na:	ktcb-na	n-aktub-u	(ka)-n-kctb-u
2MASC.PLUR	katab-tum	ktcb-tu	t-aktub-u:na	(ka)-t-kctb-u
2FEM.PLUR	katab-tunna	-	t-aktub-na	-
3MASC.PLUR	katab-u:	kctb -u	y-aktub-u:na	(ka)-y-kctb-u
3FEM.PLUR	katab-na	-	y-aktub-na	-
2MASC.DUAL	katab-tuma:	-	t-aktub-a:ni	-
2FEM.DUAL	katab-tuma:	-	t-aktub-a:ni	-
3MASC.DUAL	katab-a:	-	y-aktub-a:ni	-
3FEM.DUAL	katab-ata:	-	t-aktub-a:ni	-

In this table we see that in other respects Moroccan Arabic also has changed: firstly, the categories of the dual and mood disappeared, like in Najdi Arabic. Secondly, there are less gender distinctions. The result was

[3] I do not consider here the important class of weak verbs, which displayed allomorphy in Classical Arabic as well.

that while in the imperfect in Classical Arabic the combination of prefixes and suffixes determines the categories of person, gender and number, in Moroccan Arabic the prefix tends to be reserved for person, and the suffix for number. In some North African varieties (cf. Versteegh 1984: 89) this tendency has set through: gender is no longer expressed, person is expressed by the prefix, and number by the suffix.

In addition to loss of categories, we also see two new forms. In Classical Arabic there was a derivational process of prefixation, which changed the meaning of verb roots into passives, reflexives and reciprocals. This derivational device has extended its domain in Moroccan Arabic, and can now apply to any verb productively and predictably, which makes it an inflectional device. The other innovation in Moroccan Arabic is the grammaticalisation of an existential verb into prefix *ka,* used in the indicative in the imperfect.

The changes in Nubi Arabic have been more far-reaching. Not only mood and dual, but all Classical Arabic categories and affixations have been stripped off the Nubi verb. What remain are bare stem forms, and a few frozen expressions (cf. Musa-Wellens 1994). However, a new marker of progressivity, with two allomorphs, *bi,* and *gi,* has grammaticalised. In addition, probably through interference from substrate languages, Nubi has developed a tonal device to mark passive voice.

2.4 Discussion

When we now compare the social histories with what happened to verbal inflection, our predictions are strengthened. Najdi Arabic has changed little; its economy increased a little, while the transparency of aspect and voice has been diminished. Moroccan Arabic has lost more category combinations, and the remaining categories are expressed more transparently with pre- and suffixes instead of infixes and circumfixes. Nubi Arabic has the least opaqueness, and the fewest semantic categories. Apart from this corroboration of the hypothesis we have observed the following:

The Shammar variety of Najdi Arabic is one of the most conservative Arabic varieties. Nevertheless, like in all Arabic varieties, the categories of dual and mood have disappeared. This can not be explained by a common substrate language, or a common social context for modern Arabic varieties. We can rephrase, though not solve, this problem by suggesting that the tendency towards loss was inherently present in Classical Arabic. The loss of these categories may be called a *natural development* of any language, or it may belong to the 'genius' (cf. Sapir 1921) of Arabic.

In contrast with this category loss, Najdi has increased in complexity in other respects, like in the opaque coding of aspect, transitivity and

voice. When we move from the Shammar region towards Mesopotamia, where there has been more dialect and language contact, we see that this opaqueness was involved in the reduction of categories. It provided the context from where it was a small step to remove voice and transitivity distinctions, though the removal was not a sheer mechanical result of the phonological rules (cf. above). Except for the most isolated varieties, aspect, voice and transitivity are not expressed with infixes in modern Arabic varieties anymore. In contrast with e.g., the loss of gender distinctions, or, the loss of weak verbs, the loss of infixes takes place easily, after only a little contact.

Developments as in Najdi Arabic are more extensive in Moroccan Arabic; more categories have been lost, circumfixes tend to become pre- and suffixes, and phonological rules rigorously determine the quality of the stem vowels. In addition, Moroccan Arabic has a new prefixed grammaticalised auxiliary verb, expressing realis. To explain this development, we must assume either that the category of MOOD belongs to the *natural needs* of Arabic, or of language in general, or that in the history of Arabic in Morocco there has been a calmer period in which Moroccan Arabic could become less economic.

The Moroccan stem vowel is *schwa*[4], and its position is determined by syllable structure. This implies that meaning distinctions are not made in Moroccan Arabic verb stems. However, the verb stem is still 'open' for phonological modifications, cf. kctb versus ktcb. Such stem alternation is most resistent to change in Arabic. Only in Nubi this variation disappears.

In Nubi all other developments reach their climax; all categories of Classical Arabic have disappeared. However, also in Nubi an aspectual and a voice category have reappeared, because of universal needs of language, or because of substrate influence, in combination with a period of calm in the Nubi speech community.

We conclude that there is a direct path towards more economy and transparency, by directly removing categories, like dual and mood, and by replacing infixes and circumfixes with prefixes and suffixes. The indirect path towards simplification leads through phonological complications, like in Najdi Arabic, which create a situation from where it is a small step to carry out far-reaching changes.

[4] Again, I refrain from weak verbs, and also from the few verbs in some Moroccan dialects that distinguish vowel quality.

3. Scandinavian

3.1 Scandinavian history

In the 9th century the Vikings brought Scandinavian -a branch of Germanic- abroad and it settled on the Faroe Isles and Iceland. Between 1300 and 1550 the insular Scandinavian varieties became more isolated from the developments on the continent, where intensive trade contacts emerged due to the German Hansean league. Next, Norway, the Faroe Isles and Iceland came under the Danish crown, though the influence of Danish differed on each of these three regions.

Until the 13th century Iceland was independent, and in that period a vast body of literature has been written. Icelandic had, through its association with this cultural heritage, high prestige in Icelandic society. Only Icelandic has been spoken on Iceland, and Icelandic society was close-knit. The few traders and governors that visited Iceland had little influence on Icelandic culture or language. Because of the lack of towns, and social classes, geographical and social variation in Icelandic has been minimal (cf. Haugen 1976: 32-33).

The Faroe Isles and their language knew a more intense domination by Denmark and Danish. Especially after the Reformation Danish came in use in most official domains, while Faroese was restricted to the private and agricultural sphere. On the Faroe Isles there has been and still is, much dialect variation, because the population lived in villages on different isles, each developing their own norms of Faroese. Finally, modern Faroese has no cultural literary heritage to look back to (cf. Nauerby 1996).

Norwegian has no literary heritage to whose norms it could stick, and there has been much dialect variation. In the late Medieval Ages many Germanic speaking traders of the Hanseatic league visited Bergen and Oslo, and many found permanent residence there. In the contacts between Norwegians and these traders neither German, Danish or Norwegian was used, but instead, a kind of 'semi-communication' took place (cf. Braunmüller 1995). That is, the Germanic languages at that time were still similar enough to make learning each other's language unnecessary. The continuous adaptation and assimilation of the various Germanic varieties, and the consequent prestige that this cosmopolitan way of speech had, deeply influenced Norwegian.

The situation of Icelandic is with respect to the social factors rather similar to Najdi Arabic; isolation, hardly any second language learners, internal homogeneity, and a high respect for the own language. We predict therefore, that Icelandic has remained most non-transparent and non-economic. Since Faroese has had more internal diversity, more language

contact and no ancient literary heritage[5], Faroese will have changed towards more transparency and economy. Norwegian will have changed most towards transparency and economy, since it has known an intensive history of language contact and assimilation. In addition, Norwegian has had little prestige in the Union with Denmark, and was used as a practical communication tool, not as an official language.

3.2 Old Norse and modern Scandinavian

Old Norse has two tenses, present and past, and two moods, indicative and subjunctive. There are several verb classes, which have no semantic meaning by themselves. In the so-called strong classes, of which there are about seven kinds, past tense is expressed by modification of the stem vowel. There are three forms of the strong stem; one for the present tense, one for the past indicative singular, and one for the rest of the past tense. In the weak verb classes of which there are four, past tense is expressed by a dental suffix (cf. Noreen 1970).

After the stem, or the dental suffix, a subjunctive mood suffix, *-i-,* can be placed. In many forms of the paradigms this *-i-* triggers allomorphy in the stem, or in the person-number suffixes. In some forms the *i*-suffix itself is not visible, cf. table 5.

Person-number suffixes follow the tense and mood suffixes. Person-number affixes have different allomorphs, depending on the tense and mood of the verb. Allomorphy in the stem vowel can be triggered by round vowels of the person-number suffixes. The inflection in Old Norse is synthetic. Person-number categories are completely fused, while other categories have extensive allomorphic effects on each other.

In table 5 we see that Icelandic inflection has largely remained the same, except for a few small changes. In the past tense and in the subjunctive mood, there is no distinct 1.SING.suffix anymore. Furthermore, in the present tense the 1.PLUR.SUBJ. has become similar to the 1.PLUR.IND, while in the past tense all plural suffixes are insensitive to mood.

Apart from these category reductions, some strong verbs changed from verb class. While in Old Norse there were about 205 strong verbs, in Icelandic there are 191 strong verbs. For the rest, all phonological rules of backward assimilation, also called *umlaut*, are still operative in Icelandic today.

When we turn to Faroese we see that mood has disappeared, which, apart from a few frozen expressions is no longer used in modern Faroese (cf., Barnes and Weyhe 1994: 205).

[5] Although Faroese has prestige, this prestige is not based on an old stage of the language.

Other categories have also disappeared. Person is not distinguished in the plural or in the past. The only person distinguished is 1.SING.PRES. The only consistent distinctions are number and tense in Faroese. Furthermore, some regularisation has taken place; that is, there is no more stem allomorphy conditioned by round vowels in suffixes. In addition, the number of strong verbs decreased, from 205 in Old Norse to 130 in modern Faroese.

Table 5 Old Norse and Insular Scandinavian inflection

to awake	Old Norse	Icelandic	Faroese	Tórshavn
PRESENT INDICATIVE				
1SG.	vakn-a	vakn-a	vakn-i	(-´)
2SG	vakn-ar	vakn-ar	vakn-ar	(-´r)
3SG	vakn-ar	vakn-ar	vakn-ar	(-´r)
1PL	vçkn-um	vökn-um	vakn-a	(-´)
2PL	vakn-i_	vakn-ið	vakn-a	(-´)
3PL	vakn-a	vakn-a	vakn-a	(-´)
PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE				
1SG.	vakn-a	vakn-i	(vakn-i)	-
2SG.	vakn-ir	vakn-ir		
3SG.	vakn-i	vakn-i		
1PL.	vakn-im	vökn-um		
2PL.	vakn-i_	vakn-ið		
3PL.	vakn-i	vakn-i		
PAST INDICATIVE				
1SG.	vakn-a-_-a	vakn-a-ð-i	vakn-a-D-i	(´-D-´)
2SG.	vakn-a-_-ir	vakn-a-ð-ir	vakn-a-D-i	(´-D-´)
3SG.	vakn-a-_-i	vakn-a-ð-i	vakn-a-D-i	(´-D-´)
1PL.	vçkn-u-_-um	vökn-u-ð-um	vakn-a-D-u	(´-D-´)
2PL.	vçkn-u-_-u_	vökn-u-ð-uð	vakn-a-D-u	(´-D-´)
3PL.	vçkn-u-_-u	vökn-u-ð-u	vakn-a-D-u	(´-D-´)
PAST SUBJUNCTIVE				
1SG	vakn-a-_-a	vakn-a-ð-i	-	
2SG	vakn-a-_-ir	vakn-a-ð-ir	-	
3SG	vakn-a-_-i	vakn-a-ð-i	-	
1PL	vakn-a-_-im	vökn-u-ð-um	-	
2PL	vakn-a-_-i_	vökn-u-ð-uð	-	
3PL	vakn-a-_-i	vökn-u-ð-u	-	

In the capital of the Faroe Isles, Tórshavn, a koineised and danicised variety of Faroese is spoken. This variety differs in reducing all vowel

quality distinctions in verbal inflectional suffixes to schwa. This has led to further conflations of categories. There is only one form for all person-number combinations in the past. In the present tense, there are two forms, one for the 2nd and 3rd singular, and one form for the other categories.

In Norwegian standard Bokmål even more reductions have taken place: all person, number and mood distinctions have disappeared (cf. Askedal 1994). The only category that is still expressed is tense. Only 112 of the original 205 strong verbs of Old Norse have survived in modern Norwegian. However, there are also 37 strong verbs in Bokmål, which do not originate from Old Norse, but which are loans from other German languages, new verbs, and weak verbs that have become strong. The weak classes have been redivided; the distinction on the basis of meaningless *theme vowels* has been replaced by a partly phonological, partly lexical division into four classes.

3.3 Discussion

Like in the Arabic case, the three social factors of language contact, language prestige, and internal variation in Scandinavia correlate quite neatly with the measure of simplification of inflectional morphology. On Iceland there has been minimal language contact, minimal internal variation, and Icelandic has had high prestige for centuries. This corresponds to the maintenance of the high level of opaqueness of Old Norse. The lack of old norms in Faroese and the higher influence from Danish, in combination with higher dialect variation between the isles correlates with the more far-reaching reduction of categories and allomorphy. The higher measure of dialect contact and contact with Danish in the capital Tórshavn also correlates with this tendency towards more transparency and economy. Finally, the intense language contact in Hanse cities as Bergen and Oslo in the 13th and 14th century, in combination with the high degree of dialect variation and migration in Norway corresponds with the period that most inflection was lost from the Norwegian verb.

So far my hypothesis about the relation between reduction in inflection and social and cultural factors holds. Within this broad hypothesis we can make several observations of *how* the reduction exactly took place.

We have seen that Icelandic has become a little more economic and transparent than Old Norse. This could be due to internal variation and foreign influence, which may have been larger than is traditionally

thought[6]. As for Najdi Arabic, we could also explain this by proposing a kind of *natural development* or *genius* for Scandinavian. 'Natural development' suggests that Old Norse, after having been an analytic and agglutinative language once, has come in a synthetic stage, which all by itself would turn into an analytic stage again (cf. Hodge 1970). Without any additional explanation why other language families do not pass these subsequent stages (cf. below), this explanation remains vacuous. A better explanation is that the change towards more economy and transparency is part of the 'genius' of Scandinavian in the following non-mystical way. Early in Germanic a prosodic shift took place, which effected that the first syllable in the word received more attention than later syllables. Since then, in most Germanic languages a wide range of vowel qualities is distinguished in stressed syllables, while unstressed syllables often reduce to schwa. Again, like in Najdi Arabic, it is the phonology which creates an opaque situation, which is morphologically reduced when some small societal changes occur.

The phonology has made it easier in Faroese, especially in Tórshavn, to reduce the number of semantic distinctions without any abrupt break in the phonological form. In Norwegian, in exactly the period in which the contacts with Hanse traders increased, the person distinctions came under pressure. Next, number distinctions conflated, and the category of mood was less used. Again, the change was not only phonological. On the contrary, Seip (1971: 175ff.) shows that in the 13th and 14th century the past tense suffix -_- became unstable and disappeared between vowels. This would have led to the disappearance of the past tense marker, were it not that a new dental marker was introduced, in precisely the forms under threat of loss. Therefore, it is the tense category itself that has resisted erosion in Norwegian.

In Scandinavian the convergence of suffixal expression of inflection and prosodic changes led to a setting where inflectional forms easily conflated. However, this process was firmly directed, both in the acceleration as well as in the prevention of changes, by semantic-morphological considerations. Moreover, the order of category loss follows from an hierarchy of categories, i.e., person and mood distinctions are more easily lost than number and tense distinctions. Other Scandinavian phenomena are less easily explained; e.g., the subsistence of verb classes in Norwegian; while Norwegian inflection is less complex

[6] Indications for this view on Icelandic is that in the 18th and 19th century Icelandic was considered to be 'threatened' by Danish, and that without measures Icelandic as a separate language would disappear.

than Faroese, the number of strong verbs in Norwegian is higher than in Faroese.

4. Conclusion

I have discussed the interplay of extra- and intralinguistic factors with respect to the promotion and prevention of inflectional change (cf. Kusters 2003). I found that tight small communities with strong language traditions and few second language learners are the best environment for inflectional complexities, like a wealth of obligatory categories, and opaque relations between meaning and form. In Old Norse, Icelandic, and in Classical and Najdi Arabic I found such complexities.

When such a small community expands over wider areas, and when the earlier 'ethnic' language becomes a tool for smoother communication, restructuring takes place. This restructuring is often sensitive to phonological changes, while it is directed morphologically and semantically. Moreover, the speed and extent of such changes depends on the social factors mentioned above.

Classical Arabic and especially Old Norse were already highly opaque, and their speech communities only needed small 'disturbances' to incite inflectional change. These changes appear almost 'natural', and an explanation in terms of *natural development* is tempting. However, changes towards more economy and more transparency take only place under clear social circumstances in Quechua and Swahili. Moreover, phonological aspects play a much smaller role in these latter cases (cf. Kusters 2003).

The features resistant to such changes differ between languages; in Scandinavian the verb classes are strikingly tenacious, while in Arabic varieties stem-internal variation is persistent. Only in extreme circumstances, like in creoles like Nubi, we see that typical features like verb class distinctions and variable stems disappear.

The way languages simplify, therefore, has some universal characteristics, like the tendency towards more economy and transparency. The exact path towards more economy and transparency, however, and the amount of social pressure that is needed may differ and is dependent on the original morphological structure.

Finally, globalisation equals more intense communication and mobilisation of information, language, and people over wider areas. In the past, globalising trends resulted that in the peak zones of communication and interaction, inflectional complexities disappeared. When we look into the future, and take the prospect of one-sided mono-cultural globalisation into account (cf. Negri & Hardt 2000), we can expect that complex inflectional systems will disappear, except, perhaps, when there are

conscious efforts to maintain language complexity, like in Standard Arabic and official Icelandic.

References:

Abun-Nasr, Jamil. 1987. *A history of the Maghrib in the Islamic period,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Askedal, John. 1994. 'Norwegian,' in E. König & J. van de Auwera (eds.), *The Germanic languages,* Routledge, London, pp. 219-270.

Barnes, Michael & Eivind Weyhe. 1994. 'Faroese,' in E. König & J. van de Auwera (eds.), *The Germanic languages,* Routledge, London, pp. 190-218.

Braunmüller, Kurt. 1995. 'Semikommunikation und semiotische Strategien,' in K. Braunmüller (ed.), *Niederdeutsch und die skandinavischen Sprachen 2*, C.Winter, Heidelberg, pp. 35-70.

Carstairs, Andrew. 1987. *Allomorphy in inflexion,* Croom Helm, London.

Caubet, Dominique. 1993. *L'Arabe marocain* 2 vols., Éditions Peeters, Paris-Louvain.

Haugen, Einar. 1976. *The Scandinavian languages,* Faber & Faber, London.

Hodge, C.T. 1970. 'The linguistic cycle,' *Language sciences* 13, 1-7.

Holes, Clive. 1995. *Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions and Varieties,* Longman, London.

Ingham, Bruce. 1982. *North East Arabian Dialects,* Kegan Paul International, London.

Ingham, Bruce. 1994. *Najdi Arabic: Central Arabian,* John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Kusters, Wouter. 2003. *Linguistic Complexity: The Influence of Social Change on Verbal Inflection,* Doctoral dissertation, University of Leiden.

Musa-Wellens, Ineke. 1994. *A descriptive sketch of the verbal system of the Nubi language, spoken in Bombo, Uganda,* MA thesis, Nijmegen.

Nauerby, Tom. 1996. *No Nation is an Island; Language, Culture and Identity in the Faroe Islands,* Aarhus University Press, Aarhus.

Antonio Negri & Hardt, Michael. 2000. *Empire,* Harvard University Press, Harvard.

Noreen, Adolf. 1970/1884. *Altnordische Grammatik,* Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen.

Sapir, Edward. 1921. *Language,* Harcourt, Brace & World, London.

Seip, D.A. 1971. *Norwegische Sprachgeschichte,* Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

Sloterdijk, Peter. 1999. *Sphären: Globen,* Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main.

Versteegh, Kees. 1984. *Pidginization and creolization: the case of Arabic,* John Benjamins, Amsterdam.